



JUSTICE DEPARTMENT WEEKLY MEDIA AVAILABILITY

WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

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ATTY GEN. RENO: Just over an hour ago, I was informed that another school
shooting has occurred, this time at a high school in Conyers, Georgia, just outside
of Atlanta. Our thoughts and prayers go to the victims, to their families, and our
hearts go out with wishes for a quick recovery.

We don't have all the details yet, but clearly, America must come together as one
nation, without political division, to address the problem of violence in the schools
and on our streets involving young people. We have got to make this nation safe
for our young people by prevention programs that avoid these tragedies from

ever happening, by programs that provide for proper enforcement, for proper security, and that do something about guns.

This morning I was planning to talk about the gun debate going on in the Senate. We don't have the details on the Conyers shooting yet. We don't know what might have prevented it. But I have stated many times that no one law will help us eliminate the culture of violence. That does not mean that we should let the opportunity to improve the laws we have slip by.

Today the Senate has another opportunity to close the gun show loophole. Over the last few days, the Senate has been moving in the right direction, but it must not stop until it finishes the job.

That's because the law is only as strong as the loophole it is riddled with, and right now the law that's on the table has far too many loopholes.

I hope that the Senate will act in a thoughtful and bipartisan way and pass a bill that moves us one step forward without taking us three steps back. I hope they don't let this opportunity slip by, and I hope America will come together talk about how we truly and effectively prevent these tragedies from happening.

Q Ms. Reno, before we ask about the gun legislation, do you happen to know who -- whether the person who fired the shots in the Atlanta high school was a student or not?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not -- I've heard that that has not been confirmed yet.

Q Ms. Reno, can you tell us specifically what the loopholes are in the present law?

ATTY GEN. RENO: First -- and it's not the present law, but the present proposal --

Q I mean the present legislation.

ATTY GEN. RENO: -- would allow thousands of guns to be sold without any background

checks. That's because it would use a definition of gun shows so narrow that many events, like some flea markets where hundreds of guns are sold, would not be covered.

Secondly, it would create a new loophole by weakening the Brady background

checks that already do take place at gun shows. People should understand that federally licensed firearms dealers, who sell approximately 60 percent of the guns at the gun shows, are covered. It would do this by cutting down the amount of time the FBI or state has to do a background check, from three business days to just 24 hours. Most gun shows are held on weekends, and that means that a criminal who shops for his gun on Saturday would be able to get the gun at a gun show, even though he could not get it at a gun store.

Thirdly, it would turn back the clock 30 years by letting gun dealers sell weapons across state lines for the first time since 1968.

These are some of the loopholes that we hope we can get closed.

Q Ms. Reno, going back to the shooting in Georgia for a second, there have been a rash of

so-called copycat crimes or potential for crimes in the last few weeks at schools. Do you have any sense of what might be fueling this among young people?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, it is too early to tell, and it would be presumptuous and wrong

to comment about Conyers and what has happened there. But I think so often when we see some of these copycat events, it is because people want attention and they want to have a focus on them. I think this is indicative of, again, the need to reach out to young people and to try to address what causes them to do this, try to come together -- if we -- we do so much; certainly we can do far more than we have in terms of reaching out to young people. Again, though, we don't know what the circumstances are here, whether it is a student. It's been reported to be a student. We're just going to have to see.

Q The early reports out of Georgia suggested that the injuries didn't appear life-threatening.

Is that your understanding?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's my understanding.

Q How many victims, injuries?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have heard that -- and my information is probably no better than yours

on that score, but I've heard that five are in the hospital. And again, I think the heart of all America goes out with wishes for a very speedy recovery.

Q The information you received on this, was that from the FBI?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Who is it from?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The media.

Q Ms. Reno, on the legislation, would it reduce the Brady -- or rather, the background check

time for all purchases, or just purchases at gun shows?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Just gun shows. And so it would be easier for a criminal to get a gun

at a gun show because of the three hour -- the three days transposed to 24 hours. But it would apply only to gun shows.

Q And would some sales at gun shows be altogether exempt from background checks? I

guess at one time there was a concern that if you were just a small collector selling to somebody and you weren't a licensed dealer, there may not have to be a check.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think they've tried to close that loophole, and we want to work with

them to ensure that that's closed. But what it would do, as I understand it, as it's presently drafted, it would allow a large number of amateur sellers who were special licensees as it is described under the bill to conduct background checks on citizens.

And again, I think we can fashion a bill, if we work together, that will close the loopholes, that will maintain the law as it is now on the books, and it is so important that we do this.

Q Ms. Reno, let's do another subject. Is the department near a settlement on price fixing with

some of the vitamin producers?

ATTY GEN. RENO: An announcement should be made later this morning.

Q Ms. Reno, the department and the Education Department have produced a really excellent

booklet on looking for early warning signs of trouble in schools. I know you've sent this to every school district in the United States. Do you have any sign that people are actually using this material or constructing programs?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I've received -- when we first sent it out some time ago, I received good

comments from educators. What we are trying to do now is to make sure that law enforcement coordinators and U.S. attorneys are trying to work together to make sure that the message is -- and in book is called to the attention of school authorities in each of the districts.

Q Ms. Reno, you've talked about coming together on the gun issue and school violence.

There have been White House conferences. You've done MTV. What's the forum here? How can you get everybody's attention to focus on this issue?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think they are beginning to focus, and I think this -- again, we've got

to look at this situation and understand the best we can what happened.

But I think the message is clear, from the tragedies that we have seen, that we have got to provide stronger safety nets for young people. We've been told again and again that the young people of America are more alone and at risk than at any time in history, with so much unsupervised time and so exposed to risk in the community.

What can we do? One of the things clearly is to provide good programs after school, during the summertime, in the non-school hours, in a comprehensive way

that provides real opportunity for people, young people, to express themselves, to be themselves.

Secondly, I think it is clear that some children and young people feel alienated, bullied, put down, isolated, and we've got to do everything we can to reach out and make sure that all young people are included and that none feel alone or isolated.

We have got to look for the early-warning signs, as indicated in the booklet that we have just discussed, and make sure that we identify those signs and that, without labeling a young person so that they have to be labeled as one category of teenager, that we have a situation where the school, the police and the parents can talk in a reasoned way about what is the best thing to

do to deal with the young person's problems.

In some instances, we are going to have to have far more mental- health and school counseling available to deal with these situations. We have got to let young people know that they will be accountable if they commit crimes and that they will face a firm fair punishment that fits the crime.

For those that go into detention facilities, we have got to make sure that they come out with a reentry program that gives them the support and the supervision they need to make it in the world, as they start to grow up. And a lot of it just requires a common-sense approach, and I think it is time to pursue it.

Q Is there a danger that there will be an overreaction to some of the so-called warning signs?

Is there a danger now that parents, schools will react to kids just making jokes, as kids do?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think this is -- the important point is not to react. And that is a delicate

balance that we have to walk; make sure that we don't label a youngster, that we don't say, "Aha, you have got a problem, and we are going to do something about it."

One of the things that you have heard me say before though, and I think it is important to say again, the young people of America are for the most part such wonderful young people. They want so to contribute, they want to make a

difference; they want to be heard because they have got some really good ideas about what needs to be done to address the problems that we face with youth violence.

And the more we listen to them, the more we can learn. At the White House Conference, one young person said: "I want my parents looking at what I am doing. I want them to care. I want them to find out what I am doing and track me down and keep an eye on me." And it was very interesting to see the reaction of the other students. I think they agreed.

It is time for us to address this problem in a common-sense way and in a bipartisan way.

And I think the spirit is there now, and I hope we can move ahead to do it.

Q Ms. Reno, do you think that we're seeing a fundamental change in the way Americans look

at guns? Or do you -- are you concerned that as the memories of Littleton fade, the NRA and some of the people on the other side will be able to reassert themselves, and less attention will be paid to the matter?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think what has happened is that America, as a whole, has looked at

guns for what they are -- handguns as tools for killing. And I think that what has happened is that people now feel that they can express themselves, they are not dissuaded by the overreaction of some, and so that we have a far more legitimate discussion and dialogue going about guns and what should be done about them.

But in addition to guns, I think America -- it's an exciting moment, because I think America finally realizes that if it operates from a common-sense point of view, if it develops good programs that balance prevention, punishment, and treatment, America realizes that it can do something about violence, that we do not have to tolerate this culture of violence that we have lived in, that if Toronto in a five-year period can have a hundred gun homicides and Chicago in the same period of time have over 3,000 gun homicides, something is wrong, and this nation can do something about it.

With the reduction in gun homicides -- I think gun homicides are down 27 percent over the last several years -- I think America is realizing that it can do

something about it and that we don't have to tolerate it and that we can eliminate this culture of violence.

Q In the wake of Littleton, what are parents telling you when you've had conversations since the shooting?

ATTY GEN. RENO: They are searching for answers. They are looking at their own children

and wondering what they can do to be better parents. They are renewing their commitment to their children, in terms of spending more time with them, of making sure they listen to them. They, in so many instances that I have seen, are reaching out into the community to see what they can do, not just to be better parents, but to be better citizens in terms of developing programs that can give children positive supervision, that can avoid these tragedies.

Q Ms. Reno, as appalling as what happened in Georgia is today, do you think that a number

of episodes potentially like this have been headed off in the past month, have been prevented?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not quantified it. From just anecdotal information, I suspect that

they have. And I suspect that caring counselors, dedicated teachers, principals, parents, police officers have reached out to young people in ways that have kept them from getting into trouble.

Q Ms. Reno, on another subject, last week at this time you told us that you anticipated

announcing your FISA review panel the next day. It's been a whole week.

Have you got anything for us on that? And why do things take so long around here?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We like to do things right. (Laughter.)

Q And doing things right takes forever?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. It shouldn't. I sometimes jokingly refer to it as "Justice Department

time." And then I stop the joking and say that we need to really address the issue of correspondence, of announcements and things like that. But really, the basic reason is to try to fashion something by working with all the components involved to come up with a credible process that people can have confidence in.

And I have chosen Randy Bellows to head up the review team. He is a senior litigation counsel in the U.S. Attorney's Office in Alexandria. He has worked as a federal prosecutor for 15 years, and he has handled such high-profile cases as the Earl Pitts spy case, the Squillacote spy case and the United Way fraud case.

He served in the Fraud Section for four years, the Office of the Independent Counsel for one year, under Lawrence Walsh, and the Alexandria U.S. Attorney's Office for 10 years.

Q And who else will be working with him?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think he is putting together his team.

Q How many people do you anticipate?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have said that whatever he needs to get the job done, so I don't think he has a specified number yet.

Q You apparently were pilloried yet again in the Senate yesterday, and for whatever reasons,

have been unable to persuade members of Congress that this department did anything right

in the matter of the allegations against Wen Ho Lee. Is Randy Bellows report going to help that at all?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Oh, I didn't feel like I was pilloried; I felt like I had just a good exchange in an oversight hearing. I sometimes find it difficult to convince Congress that I am right. But what I try to say is -- I try to give them the reasons

I have done things, the principles I have operated on; and, if I have made mistakes, what I am trying to do to correct them. And I am going to continue to do that.

What the review team will do is review everything with constant regard to make sure that it doesn't do anything that interferes with any pending criminal investigation and make recommendations to Director Freeh and myself as to what, if anything, we can do to ensure the most efficient and effective process possible.

Q But it's mainly focused on the procedures between the Department and FBI when it comes

to seeking FISA warrants, is that correct?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: It's focused on every aspect of this matter, both with respect to FISA

issues and otherwise.

Q So you're going to go back and re-examine how the entire case, or allegations about Wen

Ho Lee have been handled since 1982?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: That's correct.

Q Will you be looking at any other allegations of Chinese espionage, or only Wen Ho Lee?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: We'll be looking at anything that's relevant to Wen Ho Lee.

Q But has the investigation been compromised beyond repair, as some have suggested, by missteps along the way?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I don't think I can comment. And to go back and answer Beverly's

question, again, this is classified information. That's the reason that I have not commented with respect to any specifics.

Q Just so I can clarify here, this review panel, would it be looking specifically at procedures

and making recommendations or would it be investigating the possibility of disciplinary actions in the Wen Ho Lee case?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I don't know of any allegation that anybody's done anything wrong. It

will be reviewing the whole process and the conduct to determine just what the circumstances were and what, if anything, can be done to ensure that any mistakes are corrected for the future.

Thank you very much.

Q Thank you.

END.