



**WEEKLY MEDIA AVAILABILITY WITH U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET  
RENO**

**THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

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0520.

Q Ms. Reno, with the funeral this morning of the three  
young people who died in a plane crash last Friday, there  
doesn't seem to be much room for any other news in this  
town. But I would like to ask you about the Bill Lann Lee  
nomination. The president issued a statement yesterday

saying that the holdup on his nomination was actually a disagreement with the civil rights laws rather an objection to Bill Lann Lee personally. Can you follow-up on the president's statement?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Bill Lee is, as Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, doing such a wonderful job. He is a very fair, firm supporter and enforcer of the civil rights laws. He has a wonderful way of being able to defuse confrontation and let people get to the heart of what the issue is.

And I think almost by far the greatest majority of Americans believe in the enforcement of our civil rights laws, believe it's wrong to discriminate, wrong to treat people differently because of the color of their skin or where they came from. I think and hope that we can work with Congress to move ahead and get him confirmed. He is a distinguished public servant, he is so dedicated, he cares so much, and he's doing such a good job.

Q Is there some danger that Asian Americans may feel somehow slighted in this political process because the first Asian American -- or the highest-ranking Asian American in the Justice Department can't seem to be confirmed for what seems to be a natural post?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, I think there are concerns in a number of different positions about the length of time it takes to get people confirmed. But I -- he is -- he is such an excellent candidate for the job, and when you have someone who's willing to commit himself to public service like this, it's just wrong not to get him confirmed.

Q On the matter of the federal tobacco lawsuit, the Congress is soon expected to take up the question of the \$20 million appropriation you've requested for the suit. If the Congress rejects that appropriation, do you anticipate you will still proceed with the suit?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't do "what ifs" and I think we can work with Congress to make sure that we can still proceed.

Q Let me just ask a follow-up. With respect to the suit, you had declared in April 1997 that we need to work with the states; the federal government does not an independent cause of action. What caused you to change your mind about that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I didn't change my mind, it was a different issue with respect to state cost, and these are federal cost for federal Medicare and other recoveries.

Q So they raise a cause of action?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes.

Q Ms. Reno, I guess it's a lawyer question. I guess I don't see it quite as a hypothetical. I mean, you have attorneys in this --

ATTY GEN. RENO: On the what?

Q Of whether you need extra money to be able to sue the industry. I mean, certainly you have enough attorneys in the Justice Department to file suit against the tobacco industry; is that right?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's correct.

Q Would they come from the Civil Division?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think in a matter like this, an investigation like this, and any cause of action that is pursued, will require additional resources, and I think we can work together to make sure we have those.

Q How did the Antitrust Division handle suing such a giant like Microsoft? How did they pay for the litigation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'll ask Myron to give you the details so that you can have them.

Q And just one last question on that. There's a Minnesota

attorney by the name of Mike Ciresi who was hired on contract to start a preliminary investigation on this. Has his contract been renewed?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'll ask Myron to give you the status of it.

Q Ms. Reno, as we approach the beginning of a new century, the -- (chuckles) -- it's one of those breaking-news type questions! -- (laughter) -- how has the nature of one of your challenges changed? And I'm thinking specifically about organized crime. As you look toward the new century, has organized crime changed its approach? Are they more high tech now? Are they more into complex financial schemes? Is that a continuing challenge to the department?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it is very much a continuing and critical challenge for the department because we can no longer focus just on traditional organized crime as we have known it in this country; it has now become international in its consequence, international in its origin, and very sophisticated in terms of the use of technology and in understanding -- international interests understanding our system and taking steps to manipulate our system.

So we have spent some considerable time in developing a capacity with the intelligence community, as is appropriate under the law, to focus on the international consequences as well, and to address the issue of technology.

Q Thank you.

(Pause.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you. (Laughter.)

Q May I ask a quick question? There is a -- just getting back to the thing that --

ATTY GEN. RENO: These painful silences, I -- (laughter) --

Q -- Mike mentioned earlier -- (cross talk) -- or rather

getting back to the reference to the Kennedys -- there is a picture, of course, of Robert Kennedy in your office. And you have said many times you have admired him as one of your predecessors in office.

What are your thoughts today, as the memorial service and the burial at sea approach? And why do you think the country is so grief-stricken with the death of John Kennedy Jr.?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think all three young people represent this time so vividly, represent the excellence of this time and the grace of this time.

John Kennedy Jr., bracketed this half of the century for us. People felt like they knew him. And whenever people are as graceful, as thoughtful, as considerate of others as he was, I think people mourn him longer and to a greater extent.

(Pause.)

Q Thank you, Ms. Reno.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you all.

Q Thank you very much.

END.