



**NEWS BRIEFING WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON, D.C.
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Q Here we go.

Q Good morning.

Q Two false alarms.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Two false alarms?

Q Yes. (Chuckles.)

Q Ms. Reno, the head of the Texas Rangers has made some statements, which suggest there may be evidence that the

FBI had some responsibility for the fire at Waco. Is he being irresponsible? Is there any evidence that you have seen that would suggest that the FBI had any role in starting the fire, which killed those people?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have gone over everything, and I know of no such evidence.

Q Are you planning on reviewing the material that he has or in sending somebody down there?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What I have always said is we will always review anything and everything to make sure that we exhaust every lead. But we have reviewed it and reviewed it, reviewed other reports, and find no evidence of it.

Q Are you aware of the specifics of what he is talking about?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. I just heard about it.

Q One of the points he raises is that there is a sort of endless loop of bureaucratic handing-off. If somebody wants to look at this material; if you go to the Texas Rangers, they say, according to him, people are sent to Justice, and then they send them back down to him. Is anyone allowed to see this material now? And if so, under whose authority?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I understand it, the FBI is addressing that now with the Texas Rangers. I just heard about that, and we'll follow through to make sure that there is an appropriate process.

Q Should there be any access to it now at all by anyone, given that this federal civil lawsuit is still going on?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's important that we set up a process that is appropriate, that meets the needs of the litigation that is ongoing, that protects the rights of all involved.

Q There is also a film-maker who has seen the evidence and

claims that there are incendiary devices that he found in the Evidence Room. Do you know anything about that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know of any statements made that somebody found incendiary devices in the Evidence Room. I am aware that there is a film-maker who has reached some conclusions. But we reviewed those initially; I don't know of any additional information that he has provided.

Q Why was he allowed to look at that evidence?

ATTY GEN. RENO: My understanding is that, with respect to the earlier evidence, he looked at films that were available. I'm not aware of any additional information that he has.

Q Ms. Reno, in the congressional hearings, the members of the panel were allowed to listen, I believe, or see transcripts of surveillance material which seemed to indicate that people inside the compound were setting those fires.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, I think the information is clear that there were overhears in which they were planning to do this and then fires were set throughout the complex.

Q Well, what's going on here? We have a Dallas businessman who is now directing the Texas Rangers, and he makes these statements that there are flash bang devices apparently used by the FBI tipped up as evidence around Waco. What's going on here?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm not sure how the Texas Rangers are structured or who is saying what. What I have learned a long time ago is, find out exactly who is saying what and pursue it and try to get to what the real facts are. And we'll continue to do that.

Q Is it accurate to say that these -- you've heard these allegations before? You mentioned you'd looked into them before.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I've not heard of any allegations that there were incendiary devices in the evidence room. And I, again, will review everything, but our practice has been up to date to review all reports, to consider all allegations, and to date I have found no basis for concluding that the FBI was in any way responsible.

Q Is it possible that people are mistaking tear gas -- spent tear gas canisters for incendiary devices?

ATTY GEN. RENO: One of the things that one should never do is speculate on what it is; we should find out what exactly the situation is, what someone saw or didn't see, and then reach the facts. It is the speculation that causes sometimes the misinformation.

Q On another topic, Congressman Dan Burton plans to subpoena all Justice Department documents related to Charlie Trie and John Huang. He was reacting to a Fox news report on campaign fundraising, particularly --

ATTY GEN. RENO: He was reacting to what?

Q To a Fox news report on campaign fundraising, particularly that the department quashed a subpoena by prosecutors in California in 1996 in the investigation of the Buddhist temple fundraising and the money trail to China.

Why were prosecutors in California directed not to pursue the Buddhist temple fundraising?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm not sure what Chairman Burton is referring to, but when I get word from him, I'll be happy to check it out and say what I can.

Q Are you aware of any effort by the department to stall or delay in an investigation of the Buddhist fundraising temple by the U.S. attorney's office in California?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know what Chairman Burton is referring to, so I need to first understand what he's

saying and then pursue it.

Q Okay. If I can ask a quick follow-up, there's been a lot of criticism about whether the task force has been aggressive enough in its investigations. Now there are complaints, even from within the Justice Department, that some aspects of the campaign fund-raising investigation are being shut down too soon, with the guilty pleas and sentencing -- upcoming sentencing of Charlie Trie and John Huang. Some people within the department say there's political pressure being applied to close these investigations.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm not aware of any such statements from anyone, but we'll again be happy to check anything out. As far as I'm concerned, I'm the person responsible, and I'm going to pursue everything until the last lead is pursued.

Q Can I ask what happens to the campaign fund-raising investigation overall once Trie and Huang are sentenced, and whether there's been any talk within the department of revisiting the issue of an independent counsel or a special counsel in the campaign fundraising for 1996?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What happens is that the investigation continues and that we pursue every lead and leave no stone unturned. I'm the one responsible, and I'm going to try to do everything I can to see that that happens.

With respect to a special counsel, if there is information developed that would justify it, we will certainly consider it.

Q Ms. Reno, if Chairman Burton proceeds to grant immunity to Messrs Trie and Huang, could that interfere with their cooperation and pleas with the Justice Department?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, we want to try to work with the chairman and do everything possible to avoid immunizing them before the pleas are taken and before sentences are imposed, so that we ensure that the criminal process goes forward and that -- in light of that, we have -- are

hopeful that the chairman will furnish us his concerns, so that we may make whatever inquiry is appropriate prior to doing anything that would interfere with the criminal investigation.

Q You keep saying you want to see what he's doing, you want to see what he's talking about. Is anybody in the Department actually discussing these matters with Mr. Burton?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Well, I haven't heard about this matter that was just referred to. We have received a number of letters from him and we follow up on each letter and try to do everything we can to furnish information that will permit them to pursue their oversight function, while at the same time ensuring an appropriate investigation and handling of the matters now pending in litigation.

Q With respect to the possibility of a federal tobacco lawsuit, I was just hoping to ask you, Raum Emanuel, a former senior aide to the president, has been quoted in the Wall Street Journal saying that without the White House lobbying, this was not something that the Justice Department would have chosen to pursue. Is there any truth to that statement?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: We have -- the role of the Justice Department has been to determine whether there is a federal cause of action, and that's what we've done, and we've done it based on the law as it exists and the evidence that is presently available. The White House has always expressed its concern about what the federal response should be, but I would not call it political pressure.

Q Well, and I didn't say that either, and nor did Raum Emanuel. But the question simply is, Would the Justice Department have taken this matter up had the White House not expressed interest in you doing so?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: From the very beginning I have tried to consider what we could do to pursue it. Issues were raised and legislation was proposed to address the issues that

would permit us to go forward. As we have reviewed the information, as we have pursued other theories, we believe we can proceed.

Q And just one last follow-up. There's been some speculation that the selection of David Ogden to be made the head of the -- the acting head of the Civil Division was based on his support for proceeding with the tobacco lawsuit and that perhaps some of the other individuals under consideration were more skeptical of a federal tobacco lawsuit. Can you comment on that?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: No, I think the White House would have to comment on the reasons for the selection of Mr. Ogden; but Mr. Ogden, having served as my chief of staff and having been a lawyer in the Justice Department now in the number of roles in which I've seen him operate, I think he is wonderfully qualified for the job, and I think he would make a splendid Civil Division chief.

Q Ms. Reno, are you satisfied with the FBI's handling of the Yosemite murders, specifically that they had told the public that the likely killers were in custody and that the public was safe?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I understand that the SAC in Sacramento indicated on Sunday that they are reevaluating the circumstances that led to the conclusion that others already in jail on other charges might be responsible. And as in all cases, we look to see what needs to be done to ensure that the person responsible is brought to justice and to see if there are any issues that should be pursued.

Q Outside of what the SAC may be doing out there, have you ordered any kind of review, or are you troubled by the turn of events out there?

ATTY GEN. RENO: One of the most difficult issues one faces in an investigation is, "Which road do you take?" And it is important that we try to pursue every lead possible and that we learn, in every way that we can, how we can improve efforts for the future, if necessary.

Q Mr. Reno, one of the specific concerns in the Yosemite case was the handling by the Crime Lab of acrylic fiber evidence. And there was some suggestion or question as to whether a mis-analysis of some of the fibers led investigators to target the wrong suspects, for months and months, prior to the killing of the latest victim.

Do you have any concern about whether the reforms a few years ago have put the Crime Lab back on track or whether their handling of that case should be reviewed?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know of any information at this point to support that, but again all of these issues would be addressed.

Q Ms. Reno, there was a report in the Washingtonian recently that you are moving closer to stepping down in order to take a position at Florida State University. And I was just wondering if there is any truth to that, or if you have any sense of where that report came from?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q There is no truth at all to it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Do you have any idea where that came from? (Chuckles.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Lord knows. (Laughter.)

Q (Inaudible) -- by the idea of you being dean at the law school at Florida State University. Is that an option for you after 2001?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have never wanted to be dean of a law school. (Laughter.)

Q Do you want to take your 16-chapter legacy they said you were preparing?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am trying to figure that one out. Yesterday, a number of you were asking me about that. And I don't know where that comes from.

What we are trying to do, in the 15 or so months remaining, is make sure that we don't lose momentum, that we continue to address the issues that are of concern to the American people: How can we build partnerships between communities and the federal government in law enforcement, in crime prevention, in making sure that our youth have a chance to get started in a >fresh and positive way?

What we can do to address the issues of technology in law enforcement and technology in the hands of the bad guys. How we can be prepared to deal with the globalization of crime. What can we do to build trust between law enforcement and communities? There are so many issues that I want to continue to pursue in every way possible, but I'll let you-all decide what the legacy is. Me, I'm just going to try my best.

Q Are you going to do your pickup tour of the states?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. It has a different order. First of all, I'm going to go sailing with my brother, so people will forget what I look like. (Laughter.) And then I'm going to get in the truck and go across the country and stay at the places that I've always wanted to explore and walk through, and visit with the people that I wished I'd had another day to talk with, and just appreciate and experience this country, because if you've lived all your life in one place, I can tell you that the opportunity to see so many different people doing so many different things is really inspiring.

Q But you don't intend on leaving before the 15 months are up?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, as I've told you before, I always take it a day at a time, but I know of no reason why I would change. But it's up to others.

Q Ms. Reno, speaking of law enforcement, the inspector general report on the COPS program says there never were 100,000 policemen hired, it's a lower figure and that sort of thing. What is your view about the audit, and about that number specifically?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think the audit has some very helpful suggestions. Let me explain what the situation is with respect to the 100,000. As I understand the inspector general's report, what he says is that there was a promise made to get 100,000 people, police officers, on the streets by the year 2000. That's not possible because you have hiring delays, so that an officer who is funded in year one may not get to the streets till year two or possibly year three, because of recruiting, hiring, and training times necessary for the local police.

In addition, Congress authorized what we call COPS More (sp), which was a recognition that many police departments, if they were properly automated or utilized technology in a more effective manner, could release police officers' time and return them to the streets. So there was a system developed that would permit the redeployment after the automation of various >processes or after the hiring of civilian employees to replace officers at tasks that they were as equally well suited for.

When you automate something and when a large department develops a complicated system of technology, it takes time to do it right. And so in some instances, there has not been -- these projects have not been completed to permit the redeployment.

We're following it very closely, monitoring it very closely. And we have funded over 100,000 cops now. But we want to make sure that that is real funding and the monitoring process continues to make sure that the cities are using the money, that they are pursuing it, that it has been properly obligated, and that they are using it consistent with the principles of the grant. That is our aim, and I think we're on target for that.

But I think the inspector general's report points out some factors that we have got to consider with increased intensity, and I plan to continue to do that.

Q But doesn't the fact that remain that initially we were told there would be 100,000 new police officers deployed on the streets by the year 2000 and now we are hearing no, that means they'll only be funded by then?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think that there has been language used that would give that impression, and I think we have tried to clarify it, to make sure that there is no misapprehension and that people understand that funding does not mean "on the streets," because of the time that's necessary to recruit and hire and train the person.

Q Ms. Reno, concerning global crime, specifically, Colombia and other source countries -- narcotics source countries in South America, Barry McCaffrey, in his visit to Colombia, said that there has been inadequate U.S. attention to what he called a serious and growing emergency -- I think he's talking specifically about Colombia and the increased plantings and apparently increased supply there.

Do you see it that way? Do you see it the way that Barry McCaffrey sees it?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I don't know. I haven't heard from General McCaffrey, so I don't know precisely how he sees it, but I'm sure that when he has a chance, he will share his views with me as he usually does.

Q All right then, let me ask another, somewhat related question. The U.S. and Cuba are attempting to coordinate counter-drug actions, especially with regard to the island of Cuba. Is that a good thing? Is that something you favor, to have the U.S. working with Cuba?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think it's important that the National Security Council address those issues and comment as may be appropriate.

Q All right. Well, while I've got you, let me go one more. (Chuckles.) Do you -- can you tell us anything at all about the -- what caused the shutdown of FBI tours? Is there a bin Laden-type -- bin Laden threat against the federal facilities here, especially the FBI building?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I don't think it would be appropriate for me to comment. The Bureau can comment in such detail as it thinks appropriate, but I think it is important that they pursue the concerns they have about security and take all appropriate precautions.

Q Thank you.

Q Ms. Reno, the last couple of weeks there's been discussion around the country about whether it's appropriate for industries that face criminal problems to help subsidize or underwrite the police department efforts to investigate crimes against those industries. For example, a lot of high-tech firms on the West Coast help their local police departments by subsidizing the cost of equipment that may be used to investigate the crimes, and so forth.

There are apparently federal standards that prevent that kind of thing, but are there cases -- do you know of cases where federal investigators get extra equipment or money from the industries that they help investigate?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I don't know of any, but let me point out to you in terms of equipment, there may be situations -- and I'd like to address this and perhaps come back to you next week on it, because if you look at how the cyberworld is organized -- and I'm no expert on it -- but there is an interrelationship and an interweaving of the public and private sector.

The information that is being developed is being developed, the technology is being developed, at a pace that staggers the imagination, as far as I am concerned.

When industry in the private sector and the public sector

merge, it is going to require a new capacity on the part of both the public and sector to work together and, in some instances, to share together the very complex technology that is too expensive to duplicate, in a sufficient number of instances, to permit everyone to have the best gizmo.

And so one of the issues that we are trying to address is how we can share with state and locals. But I think we are going to have to address, on a continuing basis, the question you raise. And if -- I can't remember whether I am here next Thursday, but I will try to address it next Thursday.

Q Thank you.

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

Q Thanks, Ms. Reno.

Q Thanks.

END.