



**WEEKLY MEDIA BRIEFING WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO**

**THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2000**

**9:31 A.M. EST**

Q Ms. Reno, can we touch briefly on the Elian Gonzalez case? When last we heard, you were preparing to meet with Elian's Miami relatives. Has that meeting taken place, or is it scheduled?

ATTY GEN. RENO: They cancelled the meeting, and then they asked for another meeting. And we are waiting to hear from them. I told them that I'd be happy to schedule it. They had hoped that it would be in Miami, but Commissioner Meissner couldn't be there. So we're trying. We told them we would be available this week.

Q Here in Washington?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Mm-hmm. (Affirmative.)

Q Ms. Reno, in the matter of the LAPD corruption scandal, the FBI was announcing yesterday that they're going to take a more active role in this. They had at first indicated that they were going to begin investigating this back in August, but apparently nothing has been done since then. Why has the Justice Department and the FBI been so slow to get involved in a scandal that's involving hundreds of cases in LA?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The local authorities were handling the case. There is -- the chief of police indicated that there might be situations

where we could be helpful. We are going to continue to review it from an independent point of view, try to provide whatever assistance we can, and at the same time determine whether there is any basis for a federal investigation, and make an independent judgment in that regard.

Q When would you expect a determination on that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It's hard to say, because you never want to put deadlines on it, because you don't know what you're going to find.

Q Shouldn't people there -- should the folks in the U.S. attorney's office and FBI have been working more quickly in the past months to see whether there was a federal case to begin with, rather than waiting six months?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think in all instances you want to try to see what state and local authorities are able to do. And if we can be of any assistance, as I indicated, we want to try to be. And as the case unfolds, if there is action that the federal government should take, then we will take it.

Q What is that these -- I think the assigner said six FBI agents are going on it full-time now. What is it they're going to be doing if it's not yet a full federal investigation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Now one of the things that I wouldn't tell is what we were going to be doing in the course of an investigation, because that might tip what we're going to be doing -- what we're doing to the wrong people.

Q (Chuckles.)

Q Let me try to rephrase. This is not yet an investigation. What is it? How do you describe what it is?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I understand it -- and I may be wrong, and I'll ask Myron to confirm it, because I want to make sure that we get you whatever information we can, consistent with not commenting on a pending matter -- the Los Angeles Police Department and the district attorney have been conducting an investigation.

There may be instances where we can be of assistance to them in providing additional support; and we are going to try to do that but, at the same time, remain independent so that we can take whatever action is appropriate based on the evidence as it's uncovered.

Q Ms. Reno, are you confident that the chief of police there is capable of handling this crisis within his own department?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think the chief has asked for assistance, and so we want to try to give whatever assistance we can while, at the same time, remaining independent.

Q But based on the level of troubles there, does it create any concern in your mind that he is able to continue handling this on his own?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I indicated, what we are going to do is review the matter, see what develops, and see what action is appropriate in terms of federal action.

Q Just to follow on that -- I mean, this is a scandal that's now risen to the level of accusations against sergeants and captains in the LAPD. There have been other situations where Justice has seen fit to go into local police departments and say, "You can no longer police yourselves" -- in effect -- "when it comes to an investigation."

Is that the ultimate goal here, to see whether the LAPD is capable of investigating itself?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The ultimate goal here is to see that people who have done wrong are brought to justice and that there is an appropriate response. And we are going to be working with the Los Angeles Police Department and the district attorney to see just what needs to be done to ensure that goal.

Q (Inaudible) -- a pattern and practice investigation there?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know that I can comment on that. But what I will do is ask Myron to give you any information that we can that's consistent with the best interests of the investigation.

Q Ms. Reno, the Cuban government has indicated that they may not recall the diplomat who was implicated in the INS investigation.

Can you give us a sense of what the U.S. government's position is beyond what the State Department said earlier this week?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think I should defer to the State Department in that regard.

Q But if he continues to refuse to leave by the deadline that State has imposed, wouldn't it be up to you to take action against him?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We will be working with the State Department as the matter unfolds, to see what the appropriate response would be.

Q Is there any law against -- that would come into play that -- just for a diplomat who refuses to leave when "PNG'd"? Or would you have to charge him with some other crime?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We are in conversation with the State Department. And as you know, I don't do what-ifs because I don't know what I will find, but we will be working with the State Department to address the issue.

Q Ms. Reno, there was a lot of activity on Capitol Hill yesterday that was in response to the distributed denial-of-service attacks against top e-commerce and news websites a couple weeks ago. Senators Thompson and Lieberman announced hearings to look at a bill that they've introduced that would beef up cybersecurity on federal systems, federal computer systems, websites and so forth by centralizing the authority governing that security at the Office of Management and Budget.

A two-part question. Do you think that that's a good idea, to give this authority to OMB, given the fact that we have a National Infrastructure Protection Center at the FBI? And second of all, do you think that they are right in their assumption that we are incredibly vulnerable at the moment from cyber-attack in terms of our government systems?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I have indicated in testimony, this is something that has got to be addressed both in terms of systems and personnel

with the expertise necessary to address the issue of security, and this is something that the government is doing. I think you all asked me the question last week, should it be centralized or should each agency continue to look at its own security. I think we are all working together to ensure that these security issues are addressed. And what I'd like to do is see the legislation before I comment.

Q Well, one thing that they have said is that it's much like the physical security problems, that there are no uniform policies or practices government-wide for government buildings. And obviously, their idea is that you centralize the authority for -- make standard uniform practices and policies for cybersecurity, then everybody's got the same system government-wide. Does that seem like, on the surface, at least, a logical thing to do?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, I haven't seen the legislation, so it is difficult to comment, but in terms of physical security, there are going to be different standards for different functions, and I'd just like to look at the legislation before I commented.

Q Senator Gregg asked you for specific recommendations on statutory changes when you appeared before his committee. I think you said you'd get back to him in the near future with those. What is the status of that? And I believe Deputy Holder is going to testify on this subject next week. Might they be ready by then?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We shall see. What we're trying to do is continue to keep Senator Gregg's staff and Senator Gregg advised of the progress that we're making. It is helpful, as you proceed, to let people know what steps you're taking.

We're also committed to advising them, so that we make sure that we keep attuned to the issues that are of concern to them, of our progress on the five-year plan that we're developing. And all of this will go together. It won't be presented as a finished package, but I think we will continue to try to advise them of where we are.

Q Ms. Reno, a CIA manager named John Sarabian (sp) witnessed before Congress, testified before Congress that Russia and China are both readying cyberattacks on the U.S. What role would the Justice Department have in defending the United States against these kinds of attacks? And do you agree that this is a -- we're at risk from Russia

and China?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment on any particular country, but I think it is important that we realize that we must be prepared to protect the information infrastructure of this nation and the industries and the key assets of this nation that are dependent upon the information infrastructure, whether it be the government, the government in all its forms, or key private-sector functions. And I testified last week and believe very strongly that this is one of the most important issues that we face.

Q Do you feel like the United States is vulnerable from foreign countries, foreign governmental entities in this regard?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think, as I've talked about it, you can't tell where the attack is coming from. It is going to require that we work together to solve these problems, and rather than addressing the issues of who, I think we've got to all understand that we are vulnerable and that if we're going to use this new technology so that it really achieves the dream that we have for it, that it -- that cybertools can do so much to increase learning, so much to better communication, so much to improve commerce, to sustain an economy, if those dreams are going to come true, this world is going to have to work together to ensure protection of that system.

Q Senator Lieberman said yesterday that according to the NSA, tactical-level attacks, as he described them, cyberattacks, are committed against government systems on a daily basis. But, he said, so far those attacks have not been damaging, or very damaging, or seriously damaging. Is it a case of, in your opinion, our defenses are working incredibly well, or so far we've just been lucky that none of those attacks have been damaging so far?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment one way or the other in terms of attacks, except to say we've got more to do.

We need the equipment; we need the expertise. We need cooperation from foreign governments to be able to trace these attacks. We need to cooperate with foreign governments to protect their infrastructure.

We have got to design a system for this world that, in order for us

to use it around the world, is secure. That is going to be one of the great challenges. And that's what we're about in terms of trying to design a five-year plan to address the issue of cybercrime, generally.

Q Ms. Reno, the U.S. response still has an amorphous quality to it, at least when looking from the outside. FIDNET, if and when it's implemented, will be administered by GSA. (Beeper goes off.) The Thompson-Lieberman proposal mentions OMB.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Modern technology. (Laughter.)

Q (Inaudible.) (Laughter.)

Q NIPC is a big part of this effort. But there still doesn't seem to be any centralized idea or a centralized plan for responding to what could be the threat of the next decade. It doesn't seem as if there is any strategic thinking. It's a lot of practical thinking but no strategic thinking to centralize or to understand it properly.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, as I indicated, you have got different issues. And to centralize it, in terms of protection, ignores the different functions of the different parts of government and the different situations that are involved.

As I testified last week, we have a new tool. You talk about it being amorphous or unclear. This new tool is a tool for good that we are just beginning to appreciate, appreciate in its full form.

We are at one of the most exciting times in history, where this new tool is developing, where what we do with respect to it and how we handle it, and how we ensure security, will make a tremendous difference. But it is not just a matter of centralizing a function in a particular office; it is a matter of developing the technology to protect the technology but to do so consistent with our constitutional rights.

And then there is an additional challenge, and that is that we can't do this by ourselves.

If this system is to operate around the world and to provide e-commerce and the opportunities around the world, then we're going to

have to work with our colleagues around the world. And so there's no easy answer, and anybody that suggests that there is is missing the amorphous nature of it.

But the other challenge is that as the issues are sometimes unclear, the knowledge of the American people needs to be enhanced, and we need to develop the expertise amongst -- in this nation to be able to handle it, and we need to develop the equipment that corresponds to it, and we've got to figure out how we can afford the equipment. It's rapidly changing, some equipment becoming obsolete before it's installed. These are the issues that we face. And to suggest that I can give you a clear answer, I try to be very candid with you and I wouldn't want to mislead you.

Q Ms. Reno, if I can go back --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Let me -- this gentleman.

Q Ms. Reno, the question is that -- this question is in the Indian Parliament now and President Clinton is going to India next month. It may come during their meeting that over 40 Indian ITs or computer professionals were arrested in Austin, Texas, but they were mistreated and handcuffed and -- (inaudible). And over a dozen of Indian Asians met with your staff about two weeks ago here, and India Globe carried reports and other newspapers around the country. What action has been taken or are you going to take if any U.S. laws are being violated, because they have legal visas and they are professionals in this country.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I will ask Myron to give you whatever we can publicly say with regards to the matter.

Q And another question --

ATTY GEN. RENO: She -- it's her turn now. Then we can --

Q I'm sorry.

Q I wanted to go back, if I could, to Cuba and Elian. First of all, the New York businessman who was the intermediary with the INS-accused spy says he hasn't been contacted at all by government officials; nobody's talked to him at all. Is this a continuing

investigation, or can you explain why Pedro Font (ph) has not been spoken to?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I could not comment.

Q All right. Let me try another one. (Laughter.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Now it's his turn. (Laughter.)

Q Thanks very much. I -- (laughter).

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm trying -- Beverly just said I'm being awfully cute. And I try not to be. I try to give everybody a shot because if I don't, everybody kind of -- I'm just trying to be fair.

Q I saw you in the White House. You're doing a great job. I must tell you that, Attorney General -- of very few in the last, what, 50 years or so in this country. The question is here that -- two questions. One, there are a lot of --

ATTY GEN. RENO: You only get one question. Then she gets hers.

Q (Laughs.)

Q (Chuckles.) (Off mike) -- have called that all the illegal immigrants in this country should be given amnesty, so they -- their rights can be protected, they can pay taxes, and also they should -- they are being exploited by the employers at this time because they have no legal status. So is your position here, from the department? Do you support this, their call, or -- so no more -- nobody in this country in the future will be exploited?

ATTY GEN. RENO: First of all, with respect to exploitation, we have been working other agencies to ensure that steps are taken to identify any instances in which workers have been exploited because of their status or any other reason, and that steps are taken to hold people accountable if the law provides for it.

With respect to the amnesty issue, our whole policy has been that this nation has a tradition of immigration. It's a nation of immigrants. And we want to continue that tradition of lawful immigration and take steps to deter unlawful immigration. We will

continue those efforts.

Yes, ma'am?

(Soft laughter.)

Q (Laughing.) No continuity here at all, right?

The attorneys for the Miami relatives are now complaining that whereas they have been told there was no connection whatsoever between the Elian situation and the INS spy situation, they're saying to the contrary; Mr. Imperatore (sp), who is refusing to leave, was involved in both situations. And they think that that is very suspicious. Can you say anything to allay their concerns?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have asked that we look at every aspect of it, and I do not see that the situation to which you refer had anything to do with the decision made by Commissioner Meissner. But we will continue to review the matter in detail.

Q Ms. Reno, there's a report today on Deutch matter that the former general counsel of the CIA had withheld evidence from Justice Department investigations. I think it was computer storage cards. Is this something -- are these allegations that you're concerned about, and do you plan to reopen the criminal inquiry into that whole matter, in light of these obstruction charges?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We are reviewing the matter at this time to see what appropriate action should be addressed or whether there is any basis for it.

Q But you're reviewing that specific allegation involving --

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, just the whole matter.

Q The entire Deutch matter?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Mm-hmm. (In agreement.)

Q Who is reviewing it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know the specific person.

Q I mean, is it in Public Integrity or --

ATTY GEN. RENO: No; actually, let me do this. Let me ask Myron whether I can give you the name of the specific person that is reviewing it. And if not, we will identify the section.

Q Well, what's the purpose of that review? (Inaudible.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: To determine whether there is any action that the Department of Justice should take.

Q Against Deutch or against other people involved?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, in terms of opening an investigation.

Q Is it possible that action could be taken against Deutch?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't do "what ifs." I am trying to figure out what the right thing is.

(Cross talk.)

Q (Inaudible) -- we are inclined to --

ATTY GEN. RENO: We are just reviewing everything to see whether there is any basis for further action.

Q Have you ruled out the possibility of reopening the investigation of Deutch?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What I have indicated is that we are reviewing the matter to see whether there's any further steps that should be taken.

Q And you're suggesting, or at least implying, that there is new information that you are looking at. Is that correct?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am just reviewing it to -- we are reviewing it to see whether there is any basis for further action.

Q But are you looking at -- any additional allegations, and not only Deutch people, or obstruction charges --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am looking at -- the department is looking at the whole matter, reviewing the whole matter, to see whether there is any basis for further action.

Q Ms. Reno?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes?

Q I would like to ask you, is the FBI or Department of Justice going to release any more information with regards with the files of John Lennon?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am sorry, sir. I didn't hear the last --

Q Is the FBI or the Department of Justice going to release any more information about the files of John Lennon that shows a possible involvement contributing to the Irish Republican Army?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I will let Myron comment based on whatever can be done under Justice Department regulations.

Q We know recently the FBI had released some information about it. Can you tell us something?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Whatever -- I don't know the boundaries of what can be said under the law. And so what I would like to do on this issue is ask Myron Marlin to give you, afterwards, whatever information we can provide under the law and under the department regulations.

Q Ms. Reno, can you tell us something about these issues that were -- the property that was seized to Colombian traffickers here in the U. S.?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't comment on any matter that's pending.

Q On the death penalty issue, ma'am, do you believe that there will be any federal execution while you're still attorney general?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know.

Q Is it the case that until this current review is complete, that there will not be any federal execution date set?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think any decision has been made. We have continually tried to review, and will continue for as long as I'm attorney general, to review the cases to make sure that justice is done the right way and that there is no unwarranted disparity.

Q But is the review preventing the setting of the first federal execution date?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Another question. Another topic, I should say. There are reports that Ahmed Rasam (sp) has been linked to Osama bin Laden; I believe also Mr. Abdel Moskini (sp), who is held in New York State, also linked to bin Laden. Can you make any comment about that? And would you say that this means that there is progress that this has been released, or what can you say, if anything?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Now, you know that I wouldn't comment on something like that, and neither if you are a taxpayer would you want me to comment on something like that.

Q Mr. Sliyah (sp) was released, if I'm pronouncing his name right, and I'm probably not, in Mauritania, and that seemed to have caused some concern amongst U.S. law enforcement. Are you concerned about his release by the Mauritanian officials?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment.

Q Could you even say if the case is progressing at pace, or could you make any comment on how the investigation is going?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q No? Okay.

Q Ms. Reno, do you now understand what Sister Jeanne O'Laughlin's concerns are regarding the Elian case?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have seen the latest comments, and I would have to let her make any statement because it's very difficult to determine just what the position is from the newspaper articles.

Q Given the confusion that she seems to have unleashed, do you now regret having brought her into the matter?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. One of the things that you-all try to do is, when somebody disagrees with you, you say, "Oh, do you regret this?" (Audio break.)

Q (In progress following audio break) -- she told you that she had to do?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I've indicated, I think she should speak with -- for it. I want to make sure that I don't comment on matters as they are pending.

Q Thank you, Ms. Reno.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you.

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