



WEEKLY MEDIA AVAILABILITY WITH

**ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2000
9:29 A.M. EST**

Q Ms. Reno, the congressman from your home turf, Representative Deutsch, has filed a complaint with, I understand, Bill Lann Lee, alleging that there was intimidation of the Miami-Dade canvassing board when it made its decision not to manually recount the ballots in that county.

Can you tell us where that request is, whether the department has begun an investigation, or is it still at the inquiry stage?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I have said previously, what we're trying to do is look at anything that people bring us and see whether there is a basis for federal jurisdiction. And we will continue to do that, remembering that the conduct of state -- of elections at all levels is primarily a matter of state law.

Q Have you yet found anything that makes you think there's a reason for federal action?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment one way or the other.

Q The issue that they've been pressing is under the Voter Rights Act or the Voting Rights Act. That's a federal concern. Has that persuaded you yet?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, we're reviewing all the information that is brought to us, to determine whether there is a basis for pursuing it.

Q How many complaints do you figure that your office has reviewed at this point, either civil or criminal --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not counted them.

Q Would they be in the hundreds or --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I --

Q -- many hundreds?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I've not counted.

Q Would you say there are a whole bunch, or -- (laughter)
--

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it better just to say we're reviewing them.

Q Ms. Reno, I understand the issue of a timing is a difficult one, regarding this election, for the Justice Department, because it's about this week, normally, once the election is over, that the department would go in and begin to investigate some of these allegations of voter problems and voter intimidation or vote fraud. But I understand, since the election is not yet completely over, that department officials are wondering when to go in, especially into a state like Florida. If you went in now, Republicans might say this is a political act.

If you don't go in now, you might miss that window of opportunity, and Democrats might want to know why you are not in there.

At what point will you decide to send your team into states like Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, Missouri, where I understand the department is interested in looking at some of these allegations, if this election keeps on going on?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think you've defined the issues very clearly.

And what the Justice Department wants to do is to make sure that it looks at everything, that it take only action that is appropriate, and that we don't do anything that will interfere with the appropriate resolution of this matter in any way that would be described as partisan.

Q So at what point do you make that decision to go in, if you haven't already gone into some of these states?

ATTY GEN. RENO: If the time becomes right, then we make that decision.

Q And how would you define that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'll do it --

Q (Inaudible.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'll do it based on the law and based on any information that is brought to us.

Q Ms. Reno, what unfinished business do you (still ?) have that you would regard as your top priorities in the time that you have remaining as attorney general?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have asked the staff to let me know if there are action items that need to be pursued, that can be effective.

One of the issues we want to do everything we can to address in the last days is the issue of DNA testing, to make sure that the process creates a system that is fair, that the public has confidence in, that eliminates backlogs and that addresses an issue that is very important. DNA testing has been used to free innocent people. And it is important in these last days that we do everything we can to make sure that that tool is available, because one person who remains in jail who's innocent is a tragedy.

At the same time, DNA can identify somebody who may be a serial criminal, and there may be somebody out there who will be a victim unless we can take steps through appropriate DNA testing to identify somebody early on.

I spoke last week at the Kennedy School, and I was impressed with the efforts of the commission on DNA and the use of DNA.

I want to follow up with their draft report and see what we can do.

There are other issues. As I have explained in the past, we'll have 4- to 500,00 people coming out of prison each year for the next four or five years.

Unless we take positive steps, these people will be -- many of these people will be back in prison in three or four years after committing further crime.

I want to do everything I can to press forward and develop a system of reentry courts and reentry partnerships that will give people a carrot and stick approach: If you work with us, we will work with you in getting you into job training and placement and alternative housing sites, if possible.

But you face more serious sanctions down the road if you mess up.

I want to do everything I can to see that we leave the computer crime and intellectual property section in good shape.

They have done absolutely magnificent work in these last years, preparing the Department of Justice and the FBI to be able to handle cybercrime in a way consistent with our Constitution.

Other issues include doing everything we can to leave the partnerships that we have created with state and local

officials in good shape.

The message should be loud and clear: Crime has come down, but we cannot become complacent.

With offenders coming back we -- some police chiefs have indicated that their crime is starting up.

And we've got to be prepared to continue our efforts and to eliminate the culture of violence in this country.

One issue that is, I think, going to be front and center for us for a long time now is to be prepared and recognize that crime is becoming international in its consequences and its origins.

Through cybertechnology, people can steal from each other around the world.

And we will have to be prepared to make sure that criminals know that there is no safe place to hide and that the nations of this world can work together to bring people to justice, no matter where we find them. Those are some of the ideas.

Q Ms. Reno, going back to the report of 500,000 inmates being released over the next three-to-five years.

Is that number

-- how does that compare to previous years? Is it a higher percentage?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm told it's a higher figure, but I will ask Kara (sp) to develop information for you and see what we can do to provide that information.

Q Then just a quick follow-up on the election issue.

The NAACP yesterday made claim that the Justice Department has been silent on the issue of what happened down in Florida.

Have you been in contact with Mr. Mfume, and can you give us a

sense of what assurances you're giving the African American community that the Justice Department is not ignoring the situation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have talked to Mr. Mfume when he called originally.

We have received two letters from him.

I have talked to other people.

As we do in all cases, we try to pursue each matter, do it not in press but in the proper way, and we will continue to try to do that and try to be as accountable as we can as the matter unfolds.

Q Ms. Reno, in two weeks you have the execution of Juan Raul Garza coming up. Could you discuss where in the process the clemency proceedings are, and whether or not there has been a recommendation from the Justice Department to the White House on how the president should handle the issue?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't discuss the process except to say we received the request for clemency.

Q His lawyer says that it would be inappropriate to execute Mr. Garza at a time that the Justice Department still has requests outstanding to the U.S. attorneys for information to follow up on the death penalty statistics report.

Can you comment on that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment on our process of reviewing his petition, but we are in the process of it.

Q (Off mike) -- ask the U.S. attorneys to provide

supplemental information, is my understanding, to your earlier --

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I mentioned, I am reviewing the petition and I don't think it would be appropriate to comment on the process of the review.

Q At the time that you released the statistical report, you and Mr. Holder made a kind of open invitation for people to send in proposals to study the statistical base you've created.

Has anybody followed up on that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Not to my knowledge, but I'll ask Cara (sp) to confirm that one way or the other.

Q Have you released more information since that statistical report, in terms of the evaluation forms or the list of cases?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't believe we have.

Q On the disparity thing also, wasn't that U.S. attorney that you requested --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Can you speak just a little bit louder?

Q On the disparity information, wasn't your request for the U.S. attorneys contemplating that they would return the information, their views on these disparities, within something like two months, or some sort of time frame like that? Is that near being completed?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think we have most of the information.

Q And what is your judgment of the disparities, based on that extra information?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm reviewing it.

Q Ms. Reno -- (off mike) -- call last week from a prominent group of people on the death penalty -- (off mike) -- calling --

a renewed call for a federal moratorium on executions.

What is your view on that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm reviewing that.

Q Has your view changed in any way on the need for -- (off mike)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't tell you until I've finished the review.

Q Pardon?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't tell you till I finish the review.

Q With all the -- (off mike) -- on the election, what impact do you think that's going to have on the FBI in the background check process?

Is there a point at which you would say it's now okay for the FBI to begin background checks at the request of, say, Governor Bush?

And do you think this is going to hurt and slow down their process?

ATTY GEN. RENO: With respect to either candidate, I want to try to make sure -- and I know Director Freeh does, and I believe that we can make sure -- that the process will move forward and that we will be as responsive as possible.

Q When will that process be triggered? Is there anything -- I mean, can you see a scenario when you will be doing it on behalf on two, of both of them? Or --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't do "what ifs," but I want to try to

make sure that we are fair and that we are responsive to transition needs.

Q Well, Governor Bush has obviously already named people who he intends to appoint to key offices.

Would the FBI be willing to begin background checks on those people at this point, as of today?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think that -- the process involves filling out a rather extensive application. Those forms have been made available, as I understand it. And we've received none of them back from either candidate's side, and I don't know whether -- who has taken them. But we want to do what we can to make sure that that process is not -- does not slow down the ultimate process when we receive it.

Q Has OLC yet decided or given you an opinion whether it's okay for the FBI to proceed with checks on people for both candidates at the same time?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think we will try to be in a posture, when we receive requests, to be able to deal with it.

Now we're getting into the "what ifs," and the only -- the principles that I'm operating under are, we want to be fair, and we want to make sure that we are responsive to the needs of whoever, or whether it is both, in terms of preparing for a new administration.

Q Have you submitted your resignation letter yet?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. I just started writing it.

Q (Off mike) -- briefings? For example, if the Bush team wants briefings on Justice Department issues, would you begin --

would you be willing to begin that process?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What we want to do is to work with everybody to make sure that we do it fairly, that we do it

appropriately.

And I have instructed everybody to try to be prepared on all these issues to have a very orderly transition.

I will remember Mr. Stuart Gerson, who was the assistant attorney general for the civil division, who served as the acting attorney general before I came into office while that delay took place.

And his thoughtfulness and his preparation were very helpful to me.

And I'd like to try to extend the same.

Q So (would you do that for ?) the Bush team now and for the Gore team? I mean, would you be willing to start that process?

ATTY GEN. RENO: When the time is appropriate.

Q Is the time -- is the appropriate time when you begin receiving these applications from the office of --

ATTY GEN. RENO: It will depend on everything. We've not received any request yet, so I don't --

Q Ms. Reno, just to make sure that I understand it at least, you sent out these forms to both campaigns?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We've made them available to both campaigns.

Q Can you tell us who in the campaigns you sent them to?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think we've sent them to anybody. We've made them available.

Q In other words, you said, "Here they are."

ATTY GEN. RENO: But I will ask -- I will ask Cara (sp) to

give you the specific information on what we've done.

Q Would you ordinarily have made them available to both campaigns?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think they're available on the Internet.

Q Had there been any contact then with either campaign? In other words, saying, "Here's where they are --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Not to my knowledge.

Q Ms. Reno, as you've seen the election saga unfold and the rhetoric's been hot on each side, what thoughts would you have for the American public on how to respond and think about this?

ATTY GEN. RENO: First thing is that the attorney general should stay out of partisan politics, and I've tried to do that and will continue to try to do that.

The second thing is, I've had a chance to spend some remarkable moments with some really incredible people: border patrol agents on the border in San Diego; police chiefs; people who are involved in a community court setting and Red Hook; a corrections officer who is fighting as hard as he can to recover from a stabbing; youth in West Palm Beach, the day before yesterday, who discussed the problem of teen suicide in eloquent, thoughtful, compassionate terms.

I have never -- and I've said this before to you, but I think as each day goes by I feel more strongly about it -- I have never been so confident of this country's future as I have watching America respond in these last couple of days.

The American people are very wise.

All of us make mistakes sometimes but they are very wise.

You remember what's on the east wall of this building: "The

common law is the will of mankind, issuing from the life of the people, framed by mutual confidences and sanctioned by the light of reason." And it will be important that the people respond.

And I think they are responding in a way that appreciates the fact that if we work together, we can make it work.

Q Do you plan to attend the Supreme Court hearing tomorrow and --

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Ms. Reno, it's quite possible that the Supreme Court hearing tomorrow may not be as important as some Supreme Court action down the road in a week or so, once the Florida action resolves itself -- the ongoing Florida action resolves itself.

The

SG's office and the Department have not been invited to file briefs in any of this stuff, but I'm assuming that you're prepared to file a brief if you are asked to do so by the Supreme Court?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We will --

Q Cross that bridge when you come to it?

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

Q But you have directed the staff to at least consider some of the constitutional issues that the Justice Department, as the nation's attorney, may have to consider?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're trying to be prepared for anything.

Q Do you think that the public should look to tomorrow's hearing as some sign of finality, or should people set themselves up for a lesser -- less conclusive ruling from the Supreme Court?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, anybody that's looked at what's happened since November the seventh should be prepared for anything. (Scattered laughter.)

Q When you were in West Palm Beach, did you meet with any of the principles, like Judge Burton, or any --

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I didn't.

Q You didn't.

ATTY GEN. RENO: It was just an -- it was a conference focused on children exposed to violence and youth exposed to violence.

And there were just some remarkable young people who spoke out and spoke eloquently. I was so impressed with their diversity, with their ability to understand each other and to help -- one of the things I suggest to America is its young people have an awful lot to offer, and sometimes we don't listen to them enough. They are very wise.

They are cynical in a good way because they don't take any of the adult's guff, but they don't have the overlays of cynicism that we develop.

And you all should go out and interview some young people.

(Scattered laughter.)

Q Ms. Reno, I saw the -- read the Washington Post yesterday, you probably did too, about the young man who was deported to Brazil who was an adopted American -- or adopted by an American couple when he was very young.

I know Congress had passed some legislation which I guess doesn't technically apply in a lot of those cases.

It's designed to stop those INS deportations of adopted -- of children adopted by American families.

Do you want to do anything to try to stop future deportations of children who are adopted by American families?

Is there anything you can do, even?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I try to read the Washington Post carefully, but I didn't read that article. And so let me check on it and have Kara (sp) get back to you.

Q But in general are you --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Let me -- before I talk in general about a specific case, let me get back to you.

Q Ms. Reno, why are FBI agents picking through a landfill right now in New Mexico?

And can you describe how the Wen Ho Lee briefings are coming along, whether you're pleased with the progress?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As you know, I don't comment on pending matters.

Q Ms. Reno, you come from Florida; we had the Elian Gonzales case in Florida earlier this year, we have an election of a president hanging on the balance based on what's going on in Florida.

Why does everything seem to go back to your home state?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It is in many respects a young state. It is a -- some people describe it as the last frontier.

Miami became a city in 1896.

Its first newspaper was published May 15th, 1896, and its first editorial said, "We now have 1,500 people.

We should incorporate." I don't know of any other city that has grown so dramatically in a little over a hundred years;

that has grown with such diversity and with one group after another coming to seek freedom and opportunity on its shores.

I flew out of Miami yesterday -- or day before yesterday.

It is also one of the most beautiful places at this time of year.

It has its growing pains as does all of South Florida.

But I can't wait to get home.

Q Ms. Reno, do you think you can go home again, given the Elian controversy and how angry so many Cuban-Americans are towards you?

Will you be able to go back home again?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I was standing in the airport and one lady came over to me and she said -- took me by the hand and she said, "We want you to come home."

Q One other question. When will we -- any update on the timing of LaBella's report, when the public version of that will be available?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, and I'm trying to push it.

Q What do you say to the people -- I was in West Palm Beach, and there's a lot of people standing on the side of the road outside of the building where they were doing the counting, and they were yelling that this was an illegal election, that people were trying to steal it, and that this was a disgrace to democracy.

What do you say to those people?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think what you say is that there is a process in place that is being worked through now, and that it is important for all of us to be able to express ourselves and to let people know what we think, but it is

important for the process to take its course.

Q So you're saying it's not an illegal election?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I didn't say one way or the other.

Thank you.

Q Are you troubled by the fact that elections, which generally are in the hands of the American people and the electors, that this election has now ended up primarily in the hands of the courts and lawyers and the legal system, as opposed to the electoral process?

That seems to bother a lot of American people. How you feel about it personally?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't inject my personal feelings into things. I try to look at this from the vantage point of my position as attorney general.

One thing is clear, the nation is pretty evenly divided in the Senate in its votes. It is going to be vital that America work together and come together when this matter is finally resolved, to address the future, to address the issues and the challenges that we have, and I think we can do it together.

Q Thank you.

END.