



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

**9:30 A.M. EST  
THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 2001**

ATTY GEN. RENO: First of all, I would like to begin by paying tribute to a very dedicated public servant and a great man. William Rogers was a man who served this nation with honor and with dignity. He was deputy attorney general in the first Eisenhower administration. Second term, he was attorney general. And he subsequently served as secretary of State.

In this building I think he will be long remembered for creating the Civil Rights Division and for helping to draft the Civil Rights Act of 1957. He understood the importance of civil rights at a time when the entire nation was not quite ready to embrace it. He was very proud of the fact that during his time as deputy attorney general and as attorney general, that some very distinguished judges were appointed to the bench. John Miner Wisdom (sp), one of the great judges of the South, one of the people who really defined civil rights for this nation, was appointed during his time here in the Justice Building. Also Henry Friendly, Edward Janou (sp), Potter Stewart, Harry Blackmun were appointed to their first judicial posts.

He was important too for me for another reason. At Cornell, his daughter was a year ahead of me. He was appointed while I was at Cornell, and it was at that time that people were telling me I shouldn't or couldn't become a lawyer because I was a woman. The attorney general's wife was a lawyer, and I always thought that if the attorney general thought that well of women lawyers, that yes, indeed, I could be a lawyer. When I came to Washington, he was extremely gracious and very thoughtful and very encouraging.

William Rogers represented to me what government should be about: respectful partisanship when it was appropriate, good efforts at bipartisan and nonpartisan initiatives that made a difference for this country, and the civility, courtesy and gallantry that should be an example for us all.

(Pause.) That's the -- (laughter) -- I think Mr. Rogers would be surprised and pleased that he made you more silent than you've been. (Laughs.)

Q Ms. Reno, is the shooting up in Massachusetts last week, in which seven people were killed -- are any lessons to be learned from that case? Have you paid much attention to it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I've asked for a review of it, and I don't know where that stands at this point. What I try to do in tragedies like this is look to make sure that we don't jump to conclusions, that we analyze it thoughtfully. And I will try to ask Myron to get back to you. I will ask Myron to get back to you with whatever we can say.

Q Ms. Reno, it's been almost two months since the election. The Justice Department has reviewed a number of allegations arising out of Florida. Is that review still continuing, and has any issue risen to the level of a federal investigation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's important that I not comment on how matters are proceeding, other than to say that we're pursuing everything that we can, doing it the right way.

Q In the past, you have let us know that up to certain points nothing had yet risen to the level of an actual federal investigation. Is that still the case?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think some people characterize it as an investigation and some people don't yet. All I'm saying is that we're reviewing everything that we can.

Q Ms. Reno, let me go just a little further with this train

of questioning and ask you if you personally think or if you professionally, as AG, believe that the popular election issue has been legally settled and that Mr. Bush should in fact indeed be president of the United States. Do you have anything you can say on that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think the matter has been settled, and I think President-elect Bush is the president-elect.

Q You have accepted, then, the Supreme Court ruling on the matter?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have.

Q Oh.

Q Ms. Reno, just to clarify, when you said some people characterize it as an investigation, are you talking about some people in-house characterize it that way?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Some people in-house characterize it as an investigation. Others don't. I'm not getting into the name game; I'm just pursuing it as vigorously as I can.

Q But those who do characterize the investigation -- what -- can you tell us the basis for that characterization?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Do you have any opinions you'd like to share with us about the nomination of John Ashcroft to be the next attorney general? And do you have any concerns about specific programs that you have championed which might end with the coming administration?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think that any time you spend the time and care as deeply as I have about our initiatives, I hope they will continue. I realize that everyone has to make their own decisions with respect to the Department of Justice and their responsibility towards it. And what I want to try to do is make sure that in whatever transition takes place, we are as supportive of a proper transition, a

professional transition, one done to encourage professionalism at every step of the way. And I'm dedicated to trying to do that.

Q Have you yet spoken to Mr. Ashcroft?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes, I have.

Q And can you characterize the discussion, what he asked, what you told him?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I called him, and I told him that -- I congratulated him on his nomination. I told him that I wanted to make sure that the transition, whenever was appropriate, was done as smoothly as possible; if there were any problems from his perspective, to let me know. And he was very gracious.

Q And has there been any decision made yet on who would serve as acting AG after the 20th?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't believe so.

Q Okay.

Q Ms. Reno, given the fact that Senator Ashcroft is going to be the target of considerable opposition in his Senate confirmation process, aren't you jumping the gun a little bit with the --

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I explained to him that he -- I understood confirmation had to come first. But I wanted to make sure that he knew that I was dedicated to a smooth, professional transition when the time was appropriate.

Q Ms. Reno, when did you call him?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Saturday after his -- the announcement.

Q There's obviously been a lot of talk about areas that the Bush Justice Department might de-emphasize, such as civil rights, areas that have been priorities under your

administration. Do you share any of those concerns? And did you express any of those to Mr. Ashcroft?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I didn't express any matters of -- opinions on any matter of substance. I think it's obvious that we disagree on a number of issues. I just want to, in terms of process, make sure that we do everything we can to ensure a proper, smooth, professional process.

Q Did you discuss any of the matters that would carry over from your administration into his, such as the Microsoft lawsuit, tobacco lawsuit, the future of any of those things?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I did not.

Q Do you have any -- do you plan to talk with him about these things, whether or not -- ?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't have any plans with respect to the matter until it is appropriate to do so.

Q Ms. Reno, is there any piece of unfinished business that you are most concerned about with the changeover of power?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't like to think of it as changeover in power. I don't like to think of a job as a job relating to power; I like to think of it in terms of how do we do it to achieve the goals that are best for the American people.

All of government is unfinished business. One of the points that I will always remember shortly after I became state attorney in Miami, a judge who had been on the bench for some time sent another judge, who then sent it to me, clippings of newspaper stories that my mother had written about 25 years before concerning the operation of the juvenile courts in Dade County. Some of those issues were on the burner right then and there. And I think that reminds me, and I see so much evidence of it here, that business is never completed. You can never rest on the fact that you've accomplished a certain thing. You've got to constantly look at the operation of government and be

vigilant and never become complacent.

Q Ms. Reno, separate and apart from criminal matters, any policy issues, though, that you really are concerned about as you leave office?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think you're trying to set me up against --

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes. And I would not like to talk in terms of comparisons. I would like to talk in terms of where I hope this nation will go as a unified, thoughtful nation. Yesterday I was in Boston because the police commissioner, as you know, I think, and the mayor and others have done a wonderful job of working with academics to identify information, intelligence, data that indicates what can be done in a common-sense, nonpartisan way to affect crime in Boston.

And it's interesting to see the pattern. In the early '90s, there was a tremendous increase in youth violence.

They worked with all concerned, focused on it, and diminished it, so that there were no youth homicides for some period of time. But now they have seen the beginnings of an increase in crime. They have gone back to their usual efforts of let's see what causing it. And as I cautioned everybody over a year ago, some of it appears to be crime committed by recidivists who are returning from prison.

We had a conference yesterday morning with representatives of business from different parts of Boston. And what we were trying to focus on is what can we do about the 600,000 offenders who are coming back from prison this year all across the country, and the 500(,000) to 600,000 people that will come back from prison in the next three or four years. There is bipartisan support at the local level for the fact that we need to develop reentry programs that can truly make a difference. And jobs are key to that effort.

It goes without saying that if you come back from prison, can't get a job, don't have any way of feeding yourself and taking care of yourself, you're going to be more likely to commit another crime than if you can get a job and have a productive, positive life.

It was interesting to hear representatives of various employers talk about how helpful programs had been that provide training, that help people identify their problems and solve them so that these employees, many of whom have mentors, are oftentimes as effective as others who come off the streets in regular employment opportunities.

It was so encouraging to hear everyone talking together -- the sheriff, the mayor, the head of the probation service, businesspeople from throughout Boston. The district attorney, who's a Republican, sent someone from his office. It was bipartisan. And my hope is that what we've started, which is a careful analysis of the crime problem; careful strategies designed to solve the crime problem, including enforcement, stiff punishment for those who commit serious crimes, prevention programs, aftercare, drug testing and treatment -- all of these programs can be specifically designed to get at the problem causing the increase in crime, and that we can, together, continue to see a reduction in crime across this country. That will be one goal.

I want to make sure that we do everything we can to see that the civil rights laws are enforced in the tradition of William Rogers and the tradition of so many Republicans and Democrats; in the tradition of those federal judges in the South in the 50s and 60s.

Last Saturday, I went to the Holocaust Museum. It wasn't too crowded and I had a chance for more reflection than usual.

I saw the film, which begins the program; it's about -- only 13 minutes, but it's how Hitler came to power, and it makes you realize all over again that every American must be involved; that we've seen how one vote can count; that

we must realize that everyone must participate and speak up and not stand on the sidelines.

This government is a remarkable institution. To see the transition to the president-elect is to again inspire us with how remarkable it is, but we cannot take it for granted; we cannot take processes for granted, and it requires a respectful courtesy amongst us all.

Q Ms. Reno, back to the review of voting in Florida; are you among the people who characterizes this as an investigation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I just heard about the -- some people think it's an investigation, some people think it's not an investigation, so I haven't had a chance to decide what label I would put on it because I'm only interested in one thing; not the label, but that we pursue everything as vigorously as we possibly can.

Q Ms. Reno, aside from labels, is this changing the way the department is approaching the case? Are you devoting more resources and more personnel to it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No; I have said all along that I will devote whatever resources are necessary.

Q (Off mike) -- give us a sense of the parameters of the issues?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Ms. Reno, also under "old business", if I may; there was a -- the FBI looking into how a tape of the preparation of the debate got into the hands of somebody who wasn't supposed to have it. Is it fair to conclude now -- I realize hypothetically all investigations are open unless you take definitive action -- prosecution or something else. But is it fair to conclude that there's going to be no prosecution out of that case? Is that pretty well wrapped up?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment.

Q Ms. Reno, when did you talk to Senator Ashcroft? When did you give him a call?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The Saturday after he was nominated.

Q What was your relationship with the senator in his role as a member of the Oversight Committee for the Justice Department?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I recall him asking some questions. I don't recall what the subject matter was. But as I have told Senator Hatch on a number of occasions, his general oversight hearings, I always thought, were wonderful examples of what government by check and balance should be about. They were sometimes fiercely partisan, but done in a courteous way. And I enjoyed them and thought they were useful.

Q So you don't remember anything that he asked about?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Ms. Reno, do you have any concern that if there's a protracted battle over the nomination, that it could impair the everyday operation of the department if it takes a long time and there's no confirmed attorney general?

ATTY GEN. RENO: One of the things that I can tell you is, having come in on the heels of no confirmed attorney general for a month and a half, this department is a great institution. The people who work here do one heck of a job for the American people.

And think about it for a moment, if you have to have an attorney general on -- new attorney general on the average of every three or four years, and parties change, what it must be like to be a career person in the Department of Justice, not quite knowing what the new attorney general's going to be like, what changes are going to have to be made. And I developed such a respect for the way they

handled that transition, true to the prior administration, absolutely excellent with respect to me.

One of the people I give credit for -- I did so, I think, before Christmas -- was Stuart Gerson, who was the acting attorney general after the new administration came into office. And he served from January 20th till March the 11th. He was just superb in terms of making sure that I was appropriately briefed, that I was cautioned about problem areas. And I would hope that we could we do the same.

Q Ms. Reno, what are the powers of the attorney general that require that there be somebody who's been confirmed to be acting at all times? What is it -- I know FISA is one of the things that you have to have somebody who's been confirmed in charge of. What else is there that requires a Stuart Gerson or somebody like him, in case there's any gap?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I haven't done an assessment of that, but I think -- have to sign civil subpoenas in certain situations. I'll ask Myron to see if he can give you an accurate description of it.

Q Okay.

Q Ms. Reno, can you tell us whether you advised President Clinton on the subject of the International Crime Court and what your position is on that, where there's been some back-and-forth on that the last few days?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We've advised generally, over time, but I did not advise him specifically with respect to the latest step.

Q Is that an idea that you think is supportable in its current form, or do you think it is flawed as the Bush administration seems to be suggesting?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think these are all issues that are important to address, but I think that in a world that is becoming international in terms of crime, and crime

becoming international in its origins and its consequences, it is very important that we are a player in designing the structures of the world and the processes of the world that will deal with this.

Q Have you firmed up any of your personal plans since we saw you last -- it's been a few weeks --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I bought my truck. (Laughter.)

Q Yeah, I heard that you bought a truck.

Q Tell us about the truck.

Q Tell us about the truck.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I haven't seen it yet.

Q What kind of truck -- what did you get?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't tell you that. That would be advertising something.

Q Well, what are you going to do with it?

Q Okay, what color is it?

Q Generically --

ATTY GEN. RENO: It's a dark red.

Q Is it a pick-up?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes.

Q Dark red Ford.

Q Is it red?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes.

Q Automatic or a stick? (Laughter.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Don't know.

Q No Firestone tires, right? (Scattered laughter.)

Q Ms. Reno, going back to the civil rights for a second, can you talk about, to the degree there is discretion in terms of enforcing laws like the Freedom to Access to Clinics and, you know, when to launch a civil rights investigation -- investigations of racial bias and those kinds of things, how much discretion does the attorney general have, or is the law pretty clear and you have to follow the law?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, one of the things that you learn if you watch the Supreme Court in action, and one of the things that I learn when I watch Justice Department lawyers in action around this table, is that the law certainly gives everyone a wide range of space to determine issues in.

What is at issue here is, what is the threshold for commencing an investigation?

There are guidelines established by the attorney general over time to make sure that people didn't engage in fishing expeditions. There are guidelines with respect to protections to make sure that, just because somebody says something and exercises their right to free speech, that they are not immediately investigated because of something they say.

So there are limitations, but each person has to look at it and make their judgment based on the facts and the law as to what they think the conclusion should be.

Q Ms. Reno, one of the speculations about whoever succeeds you is that that person will not be as accessible to the press as you have been. Did you give any advice to Senator Ashcroft, or will you give him any advice about being open with the press or accessible to the press?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't want to give people advice unless they ask for it. And they should be the ones that ask for it. I do want to make sure that I've done everything I can to ensure a smooth transition as appropriate.

Q Ms. Reno --

ATTY GEN. RENO: And with respect to the press, since you'll only have me one more time -- (laughter).

Q One more time?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think Eric may do it the next time. And then I get the final opportunity.

Since -- you all really are something, because you don't snarl at me; you keep asking me the hard questions; you do it in an objective, thoughtful way. You make me prepare, so that every Thursday morning from now on, I'm going to think, "Oh, isn't it wonderful, I don't have to prepare for a press availability." (Laughter.)

But I have seen the media in action for all of my life. I've seen reporters in the old City Desk area of the Miami Herald when I was a kid. I've seen reporters in courthouses. I've then been the subject of their reports as state attorney in Miami. I've had them yell at me, cuss at me, slam down the phone. I think I've only slammed down the phone once. I've seen so many different forms of reporting. And you-all set an example for doing it with grace, and you don't pull any punches. And when people think about the First Amendment and freedom of speech and of the press, I think they're thinking about a responsible press, such as you.

Now, I don't want to pick up the paper tomorrow morning and find "Reno Says" -- da-da-da-da-da.

(Laughter.)

Q Who did you slam the phone down on?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It should remain nameless. He's a good friend. (Laughter.)

Q Ms. Reno, I'm assuming that there's not going to be any release of the death penalty data, final data on that before the end of this administration. Is there any sense of frustration that the department wasn't able to get a firmer hand on some of the questions surrounding the death penalty prosecutions?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We are continuing that effort. I'm going to be having a meeting on it shortly.

One of the points I think we have got to remember is that all of punishment -- when you punish, when you don't, how you punish, how you don't -- is one of the great issues that human beings have dealt with over all of time. The debates between parents as to how you punish. The debate between governments as to how you punish makes you realize that the answers we seek are difficult to find. What effect does punishment have? How do you exclude other variables to ensure that it's punishment that you're measuring, or a particular type of punishment?

I think what we now have the capacity to do in this country, with technology and automation as it is, is to develop data and to organize it in such fashion that it can be more useful to us in determining what works and what doesn't work.

I hope that the material that has been collected, and that will be analyzed, I'm sure, in various fashions, will be useful in the debate over the death penalty. I think that the debate that is now ongoing is probably at the healthiest stage of debate that I have seen in my lifetime, and I think it's important, because for too long there was a knee-jerk reaction that supported the death penalty. And if we are going to have it in this country, it should be imposed, both by statute and by court order, in a thoughtful way, based on sound study and thorough analysis.

Q Ms. Reno, before you leave office, to continue the

debate, would you consider releasing a list of all the death penalty cases to the public so it can be discussed and debated?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What do you mean?

Q When I requested a list of all the cases in which there was a death penalty charge, I was told that it was not available. And I would like to get a list --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Let me have Myron check and see just what it was that you wanted and what the situation is.

Q I just want a list of the cases; that's all.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Let me see what would be appropriate and --

Q Okay.

Q Ms. Reno, to clarify the Florida situation, do you hope to be able to make a report or some recommendations before you leave office, or is time pressure just going to push this over to your successor? And are you concerned about continuity there; that the resources you devoted will continue to be devoted to look into the situation in the Florida voting?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Leave aside a transition from one to another; I just hope that we will always have and will commit the resources necessary to enforce the law.

Q Are you pleased that Louis Freeh is going to continue on working as director of FBI for the Bush administration?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not heard any formal announcement to that effect.

I know that they've asked him to stay.

I think the world of Louis Freeh. As you know, he and I have discussions and disagreements and arguments.

But Louis Freeh did something that was very special. He has six boys -- he had four at the time -- and he is a man who has his priorities right: his loyalty to his government and to the rule of law, and his loyalty to his family.

He wanted to make sure that he could honor his commitment to his family, and I told him that that was a priority for me. I think he has done both.

And whatever he does in the future, I will always be grateful to him for his willingness to serve. I will be grateful to him for his candor.

There are people that sometimes sugarcoat disagreements. Louis Freeh is a person I could count on to tell me what he thought and that I could count on to try to do everything he could to enforce the law the right way.

America's fortunate when they have people like that.

Q When we get together with you again -- to change the subject ever so slightly -- will there be any opportunity for us to question you on this -- on the 18th, the last meeting of this forum?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm looking forward to it. (Laughter.) I figure you're going to have the hardest questions of all.

Q The hardest questions?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes.

Q Oh, but in other words, there will be time for us to do the routine thing?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I never think your questions are routine. (Laughter.) My answers may be routine, in terms of "no comment." (Laughter.)

Thank you.

Q Take care.

Q Thank you.

Q And where are you going?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Home!

Q Are you going back to Florida?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Home!

Q Home in your red truck?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes. (Laughter.)

END.