

CNN'S LARRY KING LIVE: SPECIAL EDITION

Guests: Attorney General Janet Reno, Office of Management and Budget Director Leon Panetta, Labor Secretary Robert Reich, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros, and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol Browner

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The editor of the report is Steve Ginsburg. Tim Ahmann, Eric Beech, Melissa Bland, Will Nash, Peter Ramjug and Paul Schomer assisted in editing this report.

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LARRY KING: Good evening. This is a rare occasion: five Cabinet members appearing together to talk about the start President Clinton has gotten and where he goes from here.

Great expectations were inevitable for a president who promised a tidal wave of action in his first 100 days. But while his budget package sailed through Congress, a plan to create jobs stalled and died, welfare and health care reform still seem a long way away. And the public gives Mr. Clinton mixed reviews. In the latest Times-CNN poll just 48 percent approved of the way Clinton is handling his job; 39 percent did not. And in answer to a question asked just for this program tonight, only 37 percent ~~thought~~ the president has the right priorities so far; 56 percent said he should pay attention to our more pressing problems.

Last week Mr. Clinton seemed to side with the majority.  
(Tape shown.)

KING: No one can accuse this president and his team of not working hard, but they've found that change is a lot easier to plan than implement. How will the administration fare in the next 100 days and beyond?

With us tonight is the president's domestic policy aid team. They will make the difference. The Budget Director Leon Panetta, who made a lot of headlines last week by telling reporters much of the Clinton agenda was in trouble. The Attorney General Janet Reno, who has drawn praise for taking the heat on the Waco cult disaster. Labor Secretary Robert Reich, who helped craft the jobs bill torpedoed by Congress. He is in Boston. Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros, trying to expand aid programs in tight times. And Carol Browner, Environmental Protection Agency administrator, inheritor of a policy she herself called mismanaged, undisciplined and wasteful. We will be taking your calls at 202/408-1666. If you live outside the United States, 202/408-4821. We'll start with a question of each and we'll do it round robin and we'll take your calls.

On the most pressing thing, we'll start with Janet Reno. The news tonight that David Koresh's remains were found and identified.

Apparently a gunshot wound to the head is the preliminary cause of death, not known if self-inflicted. Comment?

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO: I understand that that has been confirmed.

KING: There was a gun wound?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I understand that that has been confirmed. I don't know any more than that. I have not seen the official report.

KING: How have you felt about all this?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, like I told you that night two weeks ago, I made the best judgment I could based on all the information available. The one thing that's different two weeks since--the American people have been remarkable to me--the letters, the calls, the people coming up to me on the street. I think they understand what a difficult decision it was and I think they understand that we tried our best.

KING: So even though you said on that program it was a mistake, people did die, maybe we shouldn't have done what we did, your popularity has grown immensely. How do you explain it to yourself?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think people understand that you make the best judgment you can, but you can't forecast the future and you certainly can't forecast a David Koresh. And what they appreciate are people who are accountable who tell them what the issues were, what it's like and know that they've tried to do the right thing.

KING: And one other thing on this, were you upset at Congressman Conyers' questioning the other day? You seemed cool.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't think I was upset, I mean, at Congressman Conyers. I think he perhaps didn't quite understand where I was coming from and I tried to let him know exactly where I was coming from, and the next morning, when he came to see me, I told him I'd be happy to try to work with him to address issues of mutual concern.

KING: You sat down together the next day?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: He came over to see me.

KING: Did you regard the questioning as rude?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't think people are rude. I think they just don't understand where I'm coming from sometimes and they may get a little carried away if they don't understand and I want to be quick to let them know exactly where I stand and just what I tried to do.

(unrelated exchanges with other guests follow) ...

(Announcements.)

KING: We're back on this Sunday night special with the Cabinet. We've been checking around--we think it is the first, and we hope to do lots more in the way of concepts like this.

Our guests are Leon Panetta, the director of OMB, Janet Reno, the attorney general, in Boston Robert Reich, the labor secretary, Henry Cisneros, secretary of HUD, and Carol Browner, EPA administrator, a position that Mr. Clinton regards as Cabinet status.

Janet, does the attorney general get involved, as you see it, with things like budgets, things like whether the Senate filibustered, or is that out of your purview?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I want to do everything I can to help on the issue because all of us are concerned with the issue of jobs. When representatives of police associations from across the country join together and say we need this stimulus package because we're going to have kids on the streets without jobs and guess what they're going to be doing if they don't have the jobs, all of us have got to work together to address the problem of summer jobs for kids, summer jobs that can lead to work experience, programs in the schools, that can lead to skills that will enable them to earn a living wage when they graduate from high school.

KING: Are you happy with the money Leon gives you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I wasn't here when Leon gave me the budget.

KING: You inherited the money. Are you happy with it anyway?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: So Leon told me he'd be a little bit flexible.

KING: Did he?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We're working on it.

KING: I love that--we're working on it.  
Mr. Reich, does Labor get enough from Mr. Panetta?

(unrelated exchanges with other guests and call-ins follow) ...

KING: We're back with our Cabinet members and we go to Olm (phonetic), I believe it's Olm, Switzerland. Hello.

CALLER: Hello.

KING: Hello.

CALLER: Why do you allow the American press to let your criminals into Howard Stern?

KING: I didn't the end of it. Do you think there's too much press attention on crime, criminals, tabloids, David Koresh, stories like that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: My general feeling is that there's never too much press attention because you need a free press to have a free society. But I think that there should be a balanced attention on all of the problems that we deal with, to understand what are the causes, what are the most realistic solutions.

KING: Do you don't mind the press?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: How can I mind the press? My father was a reporter. My mother was a reporter. My grandfather was the chief photographer for the Herald. I've lived with them all my life. I understand them.

(unrelated exchanges with other guests follow) ...

KING: Terre Haute, Indiana, hello. Terre Haute, hello. Is Terre Haute there? I guess Terre Haute is not there.  
What surprises you the most so far, Janet?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think that one of the most heart-warming things that have happened to me is to find out how incredible the people are in the Department of Justice. They're dedicated. They care. They care a great deal about what happens.

KING: Bureaucrats.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, they're not bureaucrats. They're public servants who have put tremendous effort into what they do. They care. They want the law to be just. They want it to be right.

And somehow or another, I think the great challenge we face is something that Henry is doing day in and day out. That is to bring community issues to Washington and Washington to the community.

For too long Washington has said we'll tell you how to do it.

There are communities throughout America who are doing wonderful things day in and day out. They're taking the pieces they have and trying to make them work. And I think that what we've got to do is to make sure that we understand what's happening in the communities, we get the benefit of the best minds there and we work together in forming true partnerships with them.

KING: Well, everyone here seems so optimistic. You seem to believe what polls are showing.

BROWNER: You have to be optimistic.

KING: (Inaudible) perception reality here?

BROWNER: No, I don't think so. I think that there are literally tens of thousands of people in the government who are committed to working with us to making a difference. One of the saddest things of the last 12 years is that government got a bad name.

Government is not bad. We're here to help people. We're here to make a difference. As Janet just said, we have to go back out there and we have to reconnect with the people of this country so we can do the work.

KING: You've got to admit something like Waco, when the government does something that's being questioned, that throws people a little, right?

BROWNER: Well, I think that the public has a right to ask questions and we have to give them answers. That was a very tough decision but I think it was the right decision.

SECRETARY CISNEROS: Larry, I'm optimistic because we work for a person, President Clinton, who really wants to make a difference in the country, but I have no illusions about the size of the problem. What I see--

KING: Nor does he?

SECRETARY CISNEROS: Nor does he. But he is a person who is committed to making a difference in his time.

KING: We have another call. Springfield, Virginia. Hello.

CALLER: Hi. It's been said that the president stays in D.C. too much and he didn't go out enough. Why didn't he go out more instead of--

KING: Leon?

PANETTA: Well actually, this president, more than other presidents, went out and really went to bat on the economic plan. He really did not only work on the plan and develop it over a period of four weeks but then he actually took the plan to the country with a major address to the Congress and he went out to the country with a number of town hall meetings, number of speeches. He's been meeting with members of the House, members of the Senate. He meets with businessmen and governors and mayors. He meets with a number of people throughout the country, as well as here in Washington.

So I have to tell you, from a budget director's point of view, we've got a president who really does go to bat for the economic plan, and that helps.

KING: So you've felt that criticism is unwarranted?

PANETTA: I have to tell you, this is one president who really does go to bat when he wants to sell the program.

SECRETARY CISNEROS: On the economic plan, I'm not sure all of the selling in the world that the president would have done would have changed anything, when you had 43 Republican senators who wanted to make a stand for tactical reasons for the future, and no amount of persuasion or reminding them of how important these

programs were in their areas was going to make a difference.

KING: In other words, you were in a no-win.

SECRETARY CISNEROS: I think it was a tactical battle with the line drawn in the sand, and there was no selling that was going to penetrate people's minds.

PANETTA: There were a lot of messages that were being sent there. I mean, you had presidential politics involved. Don't forget that both Senators Dole and Gramm went up to New Hampshire. They were talking from New Hampshire. They're already started a presidential campaign. Some of that was involved. I think Republicans were sending Democrats a message that they'd have to start working with the. There were a lot of other messages.

But the American people sat back and said what about a jobs bill? Don't let it get caught up in this kind of stuff.

KING: Do you think Dole was doing this because he's running?

PANETTA: Part of the problem here is that presidential ambitions have entered into the ability to try to work some of these issues out.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think what we've got to do is to go back to people--people on the streets who have an extraordinary optimism. They are doing some things on the streets of America in individual programs that have been established. They can do so much more if we get a good jobs package out there that can give kids hope for the future, let them know that they will have job training, that they can learn a skill that can enable them to earn a living wage when they graduate from high school.

You see it again and again on the streets of Miami and from what Henry tells me it's happening around the nation. There is optimism throughout this nation and they want to see the gridlock broken here and that optimism translated into real--

SECRETARY REICH: Larry, we're asking these kids, and particularly what Janet brings up, we're asking the kids all over America and a lot of the people who have been less fortunate, to take responsibility. The president's come up with a welfare plan and says look, it's only going to be two years of welfare, then you have to move off of welfare. He says to the kids look, you have to take responsibility for yourselves, but we have to, as a nation, give those kids something to say yes to. That jobs plan is still, it seems to me, terribly, terribly important. 700,000 jobs for kids, to give them responsibility and give them--

KING: Can you resurrect it?

SECRETARY REICH: I think we can resurrect it. Not only the public sector jobs, but I have been amazed and delighted the extent to which the private sector has been willing to rally and provide jobs for the summer, as well.

KING: If what Leon says, though, is true, if Robert Dole is running for president and that's part of this, then are you in a continual no-win here, as long as he holds 43 people together?

SECRETARY REICH: I don't think we're in a no-win situation at all, Larry, and I'll tell you why. Because again, the American people want to be hopeful, they want solutions. They don't want politics as usual. And they're not going to stand for it. Those Republicans, some of the moderate Republicans are going to join us. We're going to join them. The whole theme of the campaign and the entire theme of this administration is to come together and solve--

KING: Do you know which moderate Republicans are going to join you?

SECRETARY REICH: Well, I have some ideas. I'd be interested in my colleagues' ideas.

KING: Who's yours? What Republicans should come over to you? Who do you feel should be there, really?

SECRETARY REICH: I'll tell you, I had discussions, during the debate a couple of weeks ago I had discussions with Senator Hatfield. I had discussions and I've had discussions with Senator Jeffords. I've had a number of conversations, very constructive conversations with actually about a dozen Republicans who I've known through the years and they want to be constructive. I think they will be constructive.

KING: We'll be right back with more. We're zipping along on this 100 days and counting, Larry King and the Clinton Cabinet, this special Sunday night presentation on CNN. Don't go away.

(unrelated exchanges with guests and call-ins follow) ...

KING: ... Charlotte, North Carolina, hello.

CALLER: I would like to direct this to Janet Reno. First of all, like to say that I think it's heinous that you sit up there



and say that the Justice Department is great when you've asked for the resignations of 93 U.S. attorneys.

Also I'd like to ask you if, when you said after the David Koresh and Waco incident that you wanted to prevent this from happening again, does it mean gun control and is that including the Schumer-DeConcini-Metzenbaum Assault Weapons Limitations Act?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: First of all, the people that I was referring to in the Justice Department are the career people, the nonpolitical people. U.S. attorneys in the past have been political appointments. I want to get the best U.S. attorneys I can in there that are based on excellence and represent all of America, and that's exactly what I'm trying to do.

With respect to what can be done to prevent the situation in Waco in the future, we want to consult with experts in terms of cult behavior, to see what can be done there. The president has supported a ban on assault weapons that are not used for sporting purposes. And we want to explore with the experts in every way possible to see what can be done to prevent the problem in the future.

KING: Are you saying, Janet, you may be appointing Republican U.S. attorneys?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I never know who I'll be appointing until first of all, I won't be appointing them. The president of the United States does.

KING: But it's your recommendation, isn't it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I want to do is to urge the president to appoint the very best people possible, based on excellence and diversity, and he has made the statement that he's going to do the same. There are currently U.S. attorneys whose resignations were not accepted, who are Republicans, who are continuing. And again, it just underlies what we're trying to do is not play politics with justice, but get the very best we can.

(unrelated exchanges with other guests follow) ...

KING: We'll be back with our remaining moments right after this. (Announcements.)

KING: We're back on this special called "100 Days and Counting: Larry King and the Clinton Cabinet". We expect to do more in this venue. "Larry King Live" returns tomorrow night at its regular time, 9:00 p.m. Eastern.

Carol was saying an interesting thing during the break. In the make-up of this Cabinet, a lot of state and local people, right?

BROWNER: I think almost half of the people come out of state and local government in this Cabinet and it's a very different experience. You have people with hands-on knowledge of the jobs that they do, and that goes back to what Bob was talking about-- the collegiality. At the state and local level, you have to work with your partners in the other agencies, and that has brought us together at the federal level. I think it's great for the country.

KING: What's negative? What don't you like about this job? Henry?

SECRETARY CISNEROS: I guess the toughest thing for me is getting the people in the department to think daily about what the impact of what we're doing is out in communities across the country, and not just thinking about well, what's the impact on a piece of legislation on the Hill, or what's the impact on the budget or those kinds of questions, which are important, but what we're really supposed to be doing is reaching people out in the country and it's so easy in Washington lose sight of the impact on the people on the streets and neighborhoods and communities out there.

KING: What's been bad for you, Bob, or what turns you off?

SECRETARY REICH: I think the hours aren't great. You know, we at the Department of Labor, among many other things, we enforce the minimum wage laws, and I think that on an hourly basis I'm making about 15 cents an hour. It's not good, Larry. I would not recommend it.

KING: What don't you like, Carol?

BROWNER: It's hard on your family. I have a five-year-old son and that's hard. But there's an opportunity to leave something behind.

Henry made a good point. You have to work with the people in the agency not just about what we're going to do today but to recognize that we will do many things the full effect of which will be seen long after we're gone, and that's okay because it'll be about making the world a different place for our children and grandchildren.

KING: (Inaudible.)

BROWNER: Oh, absolutely. We have to be willing to--

KING: What don't you like, Janet?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: At home I could keep my home telephone number listed, return all my calls, talk to people, and somehow or another I want to try to--can't return all the telephone calls but try to develop a rapport with the people of America in the same way we had a rapport with the people of Dade County, because it's the people that count.

KING: You will not have a listed phone number?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'm thinking about it. I won't make too much difference because I haven't been home anyway.

KING: And this is always dangerous to ask Leon. What do you like the least?

PANETTA: Obviously I do miss my family because your work--

KING: It's Sunday night.

PANETTA: It's the constant work, and also the number of decisions and the number of different issues that you're dealing with.

KING: And you're the bad a lot, aren't you?

PANETTA: Well, the budget director is part of--the name of the game is being the bad guy and the guy who says no to people.

KING: When we gather at 200 days, will this be a much better picture, Henry?

SECRETARY CISNEROS: I think it's going to be a picture of accomplishment because you're going to see movement on health care, you're going to see the start of a discussion on welfare reform, you're going to see enterprise zones and community development banks and an urban or community strategy unfolding. You're going to see a lot of movement on a lot of fronts.

Whether or not the polls are any better--again, the president is going to make change. Change comes hard. It doesn't always make

you popular in the conventional sense.

KING: What are we going to be like at 200 days, Robert?

SECRETARY REICH: I think that, Larry, there's going to be a continuous movement forward. I don't think there are any magic bullets. There are no wonder cures. I don't think there's going to be a moment where everybody throws up their hands and says suddenly ah, the solution, we're all cured.

No, it would be a gradual, hard, incremental set of changes over a period of years, and we're going to be working on everything from reemployment and getting the jobs back all the way through improving the quality of those jobs.

Again, this goes back to a point I made before, Larry. It is very, very hard going. After 12 years in which the--you know, the country went to sleep. There's a lot of waking up to do and everybody's got to come together--the communities. This is a--

KING: We've run out of time. Thank you very much, Bob, from Boston. Thank you very much, all of you, very much, Carol and Leon and Robert and Henry and Janet.

This has been "100 Days and Counting: Larry King and the Clinton Cabinet." We hope you've found it informative and we thank you very much for joining us and participating, as well, by phone.

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