



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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PRESS CONFERENCE WITH THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

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Held at the Meeting of the

National Federation of Press Women

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Salon B

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:00 a.m.)

VOICE: Attorney General Reno, the National Federation of Press Women is deeply honored to have you here this morning for your weekly press conference. We know that you have a longstanding good, healthy working relationship with the media and we're happy again to have you. Thank you.

GENERAL RENO: Well, it's a real privilege to be here because it's not just a longstanding working relationship with the media, it's a personal relationship. My grandfather was the chief photographer for the Herald. My father was a reporter for the Herald for 43 years. My aunt was the music critic for the Herald. My brother got started and is now a columnist with Newsday, and my mother was a reporter for the Miami News. So I feel a little bit at home.

And so far the Thursday morning group have not made me think any the less of the press. As a matter of fact, I think they have given me a renewed regard for the First Amendment and what it does to properly illuminate government.

So it's good to be here, and I think they problem appreciate the variation.

VOICE: Thank you. For the benefit of our members, I would just tell them that we expect this to last about 45 minutes.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, when last we met the OPR review of complaints against Judge Starr was awaiting rulings from Judge Johnson, specifically on a Rule 6(e) motion. Are we still at that point as the OPR review began?

GENERAL RENO: My understanding is that we are still at that point.

QUESTION: Attorney General Reno, can you give us an update on the Justice Department's investigation or review of the Jasper, Texas, situation?

QUESTION: The FBI is investigating. The U.S. Attorney is working closely with the Civil Rights Division. The Civil Rights Division is communicating with them, and we are going to leave no stone unturned in this investigation. This is a terrible tragedy.

I spoke yesterday with Reverend Jackson, who was going to visit the family. What is so touching is how he describes the community pulling together, everybody coming together to speak out against this outrage. And we will leave truly no stone unturned in bringing the people responsible to justice.

QUESTION: What are you doing in this investigation that you may not have done? What is new and different about the Justice Department's involvement, if anything, in this investigation?

GENERAL RENO: I'm not sure that I understand your question, but one of the things that I've learned is that each investigation is different, so you take different steps and pursue different leads.

QUESTION: Has the district attorney called you about whether this should be a Federal

case or a State case?

GENERAL RENO: No, but the local U.S. Attorney will work closely with the district attorney and it will be my hope that we do it based on what is in the best interest of the case, what is in the best interest of the community.

QUESTION: Do you have any initial thoughts on who should handle it?

GENERAL RENO: No.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, quite apart from the evidence or the specifics of this case, it has shed some new light on the Federal hate crime law and it has many people wondering whether the law is strong enough. Has the Department over the years lobbied Congress to change the Federal hate crime law to remove the requirement that a capital case requires a violation of someone's civil rights, that enumerated list of things that are Federally protected?

GENERAL RENO: We are proposing legislation that addresses the issue of what is Federally protected, so that what we seek to do is to vindicate the civil rights of people, regardless of where they might be when the crime itself is committed. And we're trying to clarify that, and Bert can give you an update on exactly where we're at.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the bill that's in Congress to try to come up with a tobacco settlement has some restrictions on advertising, which has many press organizations concerned. It would be one of the most broad-reaching bans on advertising a product that's legal to sell.

Do you have constitutional concerns about the bill?

GENERAL RENO: We are reviewing all the provisions of the bill and there are a large number of amendments which we are reviewing as well. I will ask Bert to give you our up to date opinions, because they have been coming in rather rapidly and I wouldn't want to misstate it.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno --

GENERAL RENO: Where?

QUESTION: Over here, over here.

I live near the Mexican border and I am concerned. A large reason why illegal persons cross the border is to get jobs and I'm wondering what you're doing to ferret out and crack down on the employers. If they didn't get jobs, they wouldn't be coming. There are a lot of

people in this country hiring illegal aliens and I'm wondering what you're doing to find those people and prevent that.

GENERAL RENO: We are trying to identify employers that might be in the category that you describe and to take effective action against them. We're trying to make sure that employers that want to cooperate have a system whereby they can verify the employment status of a person that they are seeking to hire. It is part of a comprehensive initiative in which we look both at the border, at the workplace, at criminal aliens, in an attempt to have a comprehensive effort aimed at stopping illegal immigration while at the same time promoting legal immigration according to principles of due process.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, yesterday you and FBI Director Freeh met with representatives of the software industry on encryption, and I was wondering if you have any thoughts on how that went.

GENERAL RENO: Yesterday?

QUESTION: Was it yesterday?

GENERAL RENO: The day before yesterday.

QUESTION: The day before yesterday. Time flies.

GENERAL RENO: I thought it was a very good, open, frank exchange. I found it very useful and I look forward to continuing these efforts.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, one of the people in town for that frank and open exchange was Bill Gates. Did you have any contact with him or did he have any contact with Joel Klein as to the filing of the antitrust legal action?

GENERAL RENO: With respect to Mr. Gates and Mr. Klein, you would have to ask them. With respect to me, Mr. Gates was there.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Did you wave from across the room?

(Laughter.)

GENERAL RENO: The representatives of the industry, including Mr. Gates, who were there I thought engaged in very thoughtful, constructive discussions, and I found it very

beneficial.

QUESTION: Was anything resolved?

GENERAL RENO: I think when you say "resolved" that connotes a permanence. I think we resolved some issues of process.

QUESTION: Like -- can you list what kinds of issues of process?

GENERAL RENO: One of the worst things to do is to get a discussion into the newspapers, and so I think the best thing to do is just continue to work through these issues.

QUESTION: When you say discussed issues of process, do you mean in regards to the encryption issues or the Microsoft case?

GENERAL RENO: We did not discuss the Microsoft case.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, what is the state of relations, according to your observations, between Mexico and the United States, specifically with regard to the conference, the binational conference today and yesterday? And specifically, have you talked to the Attorney General Madrazo specifically about any of the details of Operation Casablanca?

GENERAL RENO: We had excellent meetings yesterday at the law enforcement and drug trafficking portion of the binational meetings. I found it really exciting to see the progress that has been made with the two nations working together. We addressed the issues of Casablanca. We talked about how we could enhance our cooperation. We talked about how we could avoid actions that had a negative impact on it.

We'll be meeting today. Attorney General Madrazo and I were at dinner together at the dinner hosted by Secretary Albright. We continued that discussion along with a number of his colleagues. I think it's -- I believe the Mexican Foreign Secretary said these two nations have so much of mutual concern, so many mutual concerns, so many issues that we must address together to protect both nations against drug traffickers, against other issues. And when you have people who are close, when you have friends that are close, sometimes there are tensions, but the strength of a friendship is that you work through those tensions.

I had the sense that there were two strong nations working through these issues because of their genuine mutual regard.

QUESTION: Is Mr. Madrazo going to be able to follow up on the evidence gathered against the banks in Mexico accused of money laundering? Are they going forward with that?

GENERAL RENO: I think Attorney General Madrazo will take every step that he can consistent with the evidence and the law in Mexico. He has already responded in a very thoughtful way. It is going to be very important for us to work with him in making sure that we exchange information and making sure that we keep each other informed, and that we build on the successes that we have seen to date.

I congratulated him on the arrest of the Amesco brothers, another important step forward and again an example of the two nations working together, exchanging information, and really proving that if we can exchange information and work together we can get a lot done.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Were you dismayed by the dismissal of the money laundering charges against Velasquez?

GENERAL RENO: I won't comment. I shouldn't make any comment in a court situation.

QUESTION: Good morning. I'm from Alaska and we had five Chinese fishing boats with nine-mile nets dragging the bottom of the ocean, with our Coast Guard boats chasing them for hundreds of miles back to China. What kind of rights do we have as a State and also as a Nation to stop this kind of violation, which is against international fishing treaties?

GENERAL RENO: What I will do, since I have learned long ago not to comment on something until I am more fully advised of all the details, is ask Bert Brandenburg, the head of my Office of Public Affairs -- he's right over there -- to get back to you. If you will give him your phone number, we will follow up and get back to you with whatever we can say about that particular incident.

QUESTION: Thank you, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, to get back to Jasper, Texas, this crime has garnered a considerable amount of publicity. Are you worried at all that the publicity may affect the prosecution or an eventual trial in this case?

GENERAL RENO: I think a terrible act like this just focuses the attention of all caring people, just as for example Oklahoma City did. You cannot repress the outrage that a crime like this evokes. You cannot suppress the feelings. And I think that it will be important for us to proceed carefully, based on the evidence and the law.

The case should be tried in the court and that's what -- if the decision is made that it is in the best interest of the case and the best interest of the community to go to Federal court,

that's the way it will be done. And we will work with the local district attorney if it's determined that it should be handled in state court.

What we are interested in is not who gets it, but that the case be handled in the way that is in the best interest of the community, the best interest of justice. In all instances it will be to try the case in the courtroom.

QUESTION: (Inaudible).

GENERAL RENO: What we try to do is in all cases, whether it be just a case of street violence or otherwise, is work with the local district attorney, to consider all the equities, and to make a common decision and a mutual decision: This would be in the best interest of the case, this would be in the best interest of the community, this would be in the best interest of justice, and so let it be done that way.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, yesterday the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that vouchers to religious schools were constitutional, and there's talk of appealing that to the U.S. Supreme Court. Do you see the Federal Government getting involved in that case?

GENERAL RENO: I have just read the newspaper article this morning. Before I made any comment on it, I'd really need to read the decision and have a better understanding of it and talk with the Solicitor General.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ms. Reno. Thank you for coming.

I am from Dover, Delaware, and as a journalism teacher I'm very interested in the recent shootings in various States. In 1995 we had a suicide 500 feet from my room in a high school of approximately 1450 students, so I understand living through the tragedies of what Kentucky and other places have experienced.

What policies or preventive safety measures would you concern in addressing for what you would like to do in the future to prevent things like this?

GENERAL RENO: First of all, I think it's something that goes beyond the school, though the school violence has attracted the attention of so many different people. But when I came to Washington five years ago, I told the Senate Judiciary Committee at my confirmation hearing that youth violence was one of the single greatest crime problems that we faced.

I have long said that it requires a comprehensive approach. No one thing will make a difference. It requires early childhood support and care and education. It requires afternoon supervision. It requires people who can see the danger signals, see a kid who's in trouble, see a kid who's got emotional problems, and refer them to counselors. It requires that we have

those counselors. It requires truancy prevention, mentoring, family intervention, and appropriate family support efforts.

There are so many pieces of the puzzle. But when you think about it, raising children is the most difficult thing I know to do. We've got to make sure that for the children of America who have significant pieces missing in their life through no fault of their own, that we fill in those pieces.

Key to this is getting guns out of the hands of children who don't know how to use them and who are not supervised. Community after community is making steps in this regard. But it is one big piece.

At the same time, the child has got to understand that there is a consequence for their act. I think with television there has been a sense that it won't happen and there's shock sometimes on the part of the child after they see what actually happened. They've got to know that there is a consequence in terms of human life and there is a consequence in terms of their accountability.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, has the Justice Department resolved whether it will get involved with the prosecution of the 13 year old in the Jonesboro case?

GENERAL RENO: We are continuing discussions and watching and reviewing the pending State case and will make appropriate decision as the matter proceeds.

QUESTION: We've been talking among ourselves and exchanging stories about the Internet and some of the predators that are on the Internet going after different people. I'm wondering, how can you deal with the Internet, police the Internet, and yet let it be freewheeling like it is and freedom of the press?

GENERAL RENO: Well, how do you police the press, as freewheeling as it sometimes is?

QUESTION: Is there anybody watching, anybody helping, on some of these people that are taking advantage of the younger, more naive people?

GENERAL RENO: You have raised an important issue that goes beyond, I think, just speech. Whether it be the predator stalking a child whom he's come to know in a chat room, whether it's child pornography, whether it's efforts and inappropriate information reaching children during the time they're home unsupervised after school, it may be a scam, a boiler room scam aimed at senior citizens in which their life savings are dissipated by con games played on the Internet. It may be gambling. It may be a long distance fraud against some

type of business.

What is critical for us in these next years is to form a network around the world of law enforcement that has the capability to understand the net and its consequences. The FBI is doing some wonderful work in child pornography in terms of understanding how it operates and effecting the jurisdictional basis for prosecution in these cases.

But it goes beyond the Internet, too. It goes just to cybertools generally. When a man can sit in a kitchen in St. Petersburg, Russia, and steal from a bank in New York, we see that the boundaries of the world sometimes are nonexistent when it comes to crime. Crime is going to become more and more international in its consequence.

That will mean that there must be some common understandings about what law applies, who has jurisdiction, who will be responsible for arresting the person, does it get tried where the transmission was sent, does it get tried -- how is it tried? Do you use closed circuit TV, how do you extradite? There are just so many issues, and we are grappling with all of those at the Department of Justice and the FBI.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: I have a question about the proposed merger of Ameritech and SBC. These are two of the largest Baby Bells. Does that raise antitrust questions?

GENERAL RENO: Let me ask Bert to give you exactly what we can say in terms of that particular case. I am loath to comment without checking to see just exactly where we're at. If you'll give him your telephone number, we'll follow through for you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: While we're on the subject of families and violence, would you tell us what you've learned through the Office of Domestic Violence, Prevention of Domestic Violence, and what progress has been made on that?

GENERAL RENO: Let me go back just a step before that. In 1978 I had just become the chief prosecutor in Miami. The medical examiner said: Why don't you come look at who's been killed in Dade County in the last 20 years and see if you can find any patterns. We found that 40 percent of the homicides in Dade County in the previous 20 years were related to domestic violence -- husband-wife, ex-spouse, boyfriend-girlfriend.

We got an LEAA grant focused on domestic violence. It was rated one of the best in the country, but the State wouldn't take it over at the end of the grant because they said that really wasn't a prosecutor's function. The county took it over and we continued to operate it.

What I became convinced of is that unless we interrupted the cycle of violence, unless we said that this violence will not be tolerated, unless we persuaded the victim to go ahead and prosecute, unless we provided the shelters for that victim that would give her the chance to prosecute and the support and the counseling, we were just going to see a repeat of the violence until the ultimate crime was committed, the crime of homicide.

It also became clear to me that the child who watched his father beat his mother became convinced that violence was a way of life and that that perpetuated violence from one generation to another.

So I was delighted just before I came to Washington to find more and more acceptance of these principles. Courts which 15 years before had said "That's a domestic" and wouldn't have anything to do with it, or police officers that just shrugged at the case, were taking them far more seriously.

I think that through the Violence Against Women Act and the office and our working relationship with the Department of Health and Human Services, we are getting grants out to every State in the country that enable them to use it for innovative and creative plans that they are developing, or for a shelter or for a one stop shopping center really at court where you can file all your papers and get all your information.

I think -- and this may be too optimistic, but I think if we keep the focus on domestic violence while we have the money now in the Violence Against Women Act and while that I think will be, that funding will be continued, we have a rare moment in history where, if we keep the pressure up, we can change the culture in this Nation so that for once and for all violence, domestic violence, family violence, will not be tolerated.

QUESTION: Are there any statistics to show that there's been any progress?

GENERAL RENO: Yes, we're seeing some progress for the first time. Interestingly enough, crimes in which the man is the victim are going down. They've gone down somewhat significantly. There looks like there's a downward trend -- I want to make sure that it's not a blip -- with respect to women who are victims.

We've not had the data, and that's one of the things that we've been involved in, collecting the data, because in the Uniform Crime Reports it's really not identified as a crime of domestic violence or violence against women. So we're trying to break out the figures to make sure that we have solid data that will give us an indication as to whether we're on the right road.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS. BERILLI: Ms. Reno, I'm Suzy Berilli, the president of the affiliate in North Carolina, and I also thank you for being here today.

I want to return to the comments on violence in the schools for a minute and ask if there's any program on the Federal level that can be taken down to the State and local levels to address the issues with the students themselves on how they can deal with this?

Lots of times the students are afraid to report children who they've heard talking about hurting people, and how are we from the national level going down to work on the local level?

GENERAL RENO: One of the things that we're trying to do is to develop an exchange, a system whereby we can exchange information of what works and what doesn't work. We have, for example, put together a small booklet of some success stories in Boston, where the Federal, State, and local governments have worked together with the private sector in some innovative programs that have made a difference.

In Washington, I have been participating in conflict resolution in the public schools, and I think this has helped students understand that they can make a difference, that you can resolve conflicts without knives and guns and fists, and it makes them more alert to children who are in trouble or who are upset or confused.

I think one of the clear results that I have seen of evaluations that we have done at the Federal level is with respect to mentoring. One of the problems that clearly stands out as you look at these issues of school violence and violence in the streets involving children and youth is that children today in America are more unsupervised and alone after school and during the summer time than perhaps at any time in history.

The Carnegie Foundation has found that not only are they unsupervised, but they face more risk than probably most children at any time in history, in the history of this Nation.

It is important that there be adults who can listen, who can understand, who can sense the trouble. When I go to a community, I try to talk to young people who are in trouble or who have been in trouble. I ask them, what could have been done to have prevented the trouble in the first place. And again and again they tell me: somebody to talk to, somebody who understands how hard it is to grow up in this country.

You can't just be a mentor if you don't know how to talk to kids, if you don't know how to relate to them. But you can teach people how to do that. The studies that we have seen indicate good mentoring programs with people who know how to talk to children and who are well trained in the issues can have a tremendous impact in just the area that you're talking about.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I'm Grace Buell from Iowa.

In recent years we've seen lots of public outrage and penalties increase for providing tobacco and alcohol to our young people. But I don't see the idea of crack and meth and all the illegal drugs being addressed in the public outrage, and I wonder why.

GENERAL RENO: You don't see any outrage at crack and meth?

MS. BUELL: I don't see it happening, and in some States the penalties for possession or selling tobacco or alcohol to youngsters is higher than that of selling illegal drugs.

GENERAL RENO: Well, again I have to go back to my perspective, because with respect to crack, the crack epidemic hit Miami in about 1984 and we focused intensely on the whole problem of crack. We developed in 1989 a drug court that has become a model for the Nation for nonviolent first offenders charged with possession of small amounts, providing a carrot and stick approach that got them into treatment or made them understand that they were going to face a more serious punishment.

A great deal of time and effort and public concern went into the development of that program, and it is very gratifying to see now how it has spread across the country.

For those who are dealing in crack, the Congress, focusing on crack, created a ratio that I think is in fact too high of 100 to one of crack cocaine versus powder cocaine, thus increasing the sentences. So I think there has been great public concern.

In Miami a coalition of citizens came together in a very effective group that spoke with not just outrage, but with constructive suggestions as to what could be done. More recently, as methamphetamine has become a matter of concern, it is again exciting to see how communities are speaking out, how people are responding.

So I'm not sure that I would agree with you that there has been no concern expressed. But I think what is vital is that we make sure that we do everything possible to focus on the people, the major traffickers, and see them put away and kept away, that we break up their organizations, that we do everything possible to secure treatment for people who are asking for it so that they don't commit further crime, and that we make sure that people who are coming out of prison who have a substance abuse problem, that we did something about it before they got out so they don't repeat it.

I think we can make a real dent in drug usage in America if we approach it from a

common sense balance point of view that combines punishment and prevention and treatment and not great numbers, because some people say, well, we've provided treatment. In too many instances what we've done is give somebody a caseload with 400 probationers and say, here, handle it. That will never work.

But if we approach it in a common sense, businesslike way, I think we can really make a difference.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, will the Justice Department file an amicus brief in the Supreme Court in the case of the governmental attorney-client privilege between the President and Starr?

GENERAL RENO: We will let the events speak for themselves.

QUESTION: Well, you filed an amicus brief in the lower court. Do you plan to do that again in the Supreme Court?

GENERAL RENO: I will ask Bert to clarify it for you.

MS. FEW: Ms. Reno, I'm Sarah Few from Mississippi and I'm president of the affiliate there, and we are so happy to have you speak to us today.

In view of the recent questions from several of the press women relative to school and domestic violence and the possible solution of family and moral values, do you have any thinking on the resolution that was passed by the Southern Baptists in Salt Lake City, Utah, relative to family?

GENERAL RENO: My great-grandfather was a Baptist minister.

MS. FEW: I'm Southern Baptist, too.

GENERAL RENO: His daughter-in-law was one of the most gracious, wonderful, lovely ladies that I have ever met. His wife was a tiny little woman who did the farming while he did the preaching. She milked the cows, she made the butter, she hoed the garden patch, she went to the well, she carried the water.

His daughter-in-law very quietly got everybody to do just what she wanted done, and she had a daughter, my mother, who wouldn't take anything from anybody, but revered her grandfather and revered his stories and his stories from the Bible.

So I think I follow in the tradition of my great-grandfather.

MS. FEW: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, what's the prognosis for the juvenile justice bill in Congress?

GENERAL RENO: If you just take the questions that have been asked here, if you take the questions that I get asked when I go to a community, I think everyone in America should understand that people expect the private sector, the family, and government at every level to do everything it can to avoid the tragedies that we have seen in the school, to avoid children being shot on their front porch, to avoid children being shot by children in the streets of this Nation.

We are making progress with respect to youth violence, but we are making it because dedicated people have come together. As I have indicated on a number of occasions in the past, we can't be complacent. The number of young people will increase over these next several years. The problem is not going to go away. We cannot think, okay, well, we've started a downturn in youth violence, we can relax and go home.

Just listen to the questions here and I think that answers the question. The American people want and expect all of us to do everything we can to put an end to this violence. So I think there will be some legislation that addresses this issue, and I hope that it will be such that it's done in a constructive way.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, what about trigger locks? It's become apparent that Congress is not going to require the sale of trigger locks with firearms. Isn't that something a parent could do today, go out, if they have firearms in the home, go out and buy some trigger locks and put them on those weapons?

GENERAL RENO: There is so much that can be done: just getting weapons out of the hands of kids, putting locks on the triggers. I have just seen too many instances where a gun was left just there for a moment, oh, I was just going to lay it down for a moment, and the gun disappeared.

You can't have guns and not know how to safely and lawfully store them, use them, and control them so that they don't get into the hands of people who don't belong to have them.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that? There have been a fair amount of studies that show that unintentional shootings go way down in States that have imposed trigger locks or gun cabinet requirements, punishment for parents whose children get guns. But is there any evidence to show that imposing things like trigger locks or penalties for parents whose children get guns reduce the number of intentional shootings?

In other words, if a child is determined to shoot somebody, do these laws make any difference?

GENERAL RENO: I have not seen any study one way or the other, Pete, on that. I will ask Bert to check with our people and see if there's anything that would indicate one way or the other.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I'm Jean Vorman, the NFPW president of the Iowa affiliate, and I'd like to on a personal note ask: You've been in your position for six years. What's your greatest surprise that you've encountered?

GENERAL RENO: I think there's no one surprise. It has been an extraordinary opportunity. I think problem the biggest surprise is, or the most unknown thing that it's really difficult to prepare for, is all the issues regarding intelligence and foreign counterintelligence information that you don't go to law school to learn. It's a whole new world. That's I think what would be the greatest surprise.

Otherwise, there are so many instances in which you pick up a biography of Lincoln or pick up a biography of Roosevelt or Truman or Eisenhower and you find that history repeats itself and that we can learn an awful lot by looking at history. Somebody said to me: Well, Congress, the relations with Congress seem more tense. And I said: Well, I picked up a biography of Lincoln and in his first term as a congressman he got mad at the president and propounded interrogatories to the president about just where a certain action had taken place and was it in the United States or was it in Mexico, and he kept asking those questions and wasn't satisfied.

So in many instances, if you read history, something that I love doing, there are no great surprises and certainly a great variety of very interesting situations.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, what can you tell us regarding your perspective on the Starr investigation, especially your initial involvement in approving the expansion of that investigation? Do you think it's going well? Is it fair? Is it just?

GENERAL RENO: As you know, I have said on any number of occasions in the past that the reason you appoint an independent counsel is so that he can be independent, and I shouldn't be commenting on a matter that the independent counsel is handling.

(Applause.)

MR. BARNETT: Jim Barnett with The Oregonian newspaper.

On Friday you sent your reply back to Henry Hyde regarding the Oregon assisted suicide

law, and shortly after he proposed an amendment to the Controlled Substances Act that would give you the authority to prevent doctors from prescribing lethal doses of medicine. Would that amendment be constitutional? Would it usurp States' rights to regulate the medical profession? And I have a follow-up question.

GENERAL RENO: The answer to the first question is we've just gotten the legislation and we're looking at it now.

MR. BARNETT: In your letter, at the very end you say you'd be open to working with members of Congress regarding this issue. Could you elaborate, please, what that means?

GENERAL RENO: We would be interested in any -- if they have concerns or suggestions that they want to follow up on, we'll be happy to look at it.

MR. BARNETT: Would the administration support that bill or a bill like that?

GENERAL RENO: Well, I have to look at the bill. I mean, as I indicated, I can't comment until we really look at it. One of the things -- when I first got started as State Attorney in Miami, I'd make a comment and then I would find it back hitting me the next day after I'd more thoroughly gotten to understand the whole issue and thought: Oh, why did I say that?

So I have tried to make sure that I knew what I was talking about before I opined.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, may I follow that up for a moment? By the way, as journalists we'd like to encourage you to say whatever you want without consideration --

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: But back on the Oregon assisted suicide question, regardless of the specifics of the legislation, isn't what's at the core of this a public policy question about whether the Federal Government wants to allow States to, if you will, experiment with laws, local laws that would permit assisted suicide, which is certainly what the Supreme Court seemed to envision would happen when it declined to find assisted suicide per se unconstitutional?

And if that's what's to happen, then why would the Federal Government in any form want to in essence preempt the States from trying this?

GENERAL RENO: There may be situations that exist where basic rights are involved. Again, I think what the Court was doing was encouraging the States to look at the issue. I think the Federal Government has got to continue to make sure that it is not used in a way that would deprive somebody of their civil rights or create situations such as that.

The important thing is that law as it has been written in Oregon doesn't create a problem of that nature. But I think the important thing is that we let the States proceed. If Congress has other suggestions, we'll certainly look at it. We've indicated we would be happy to work with them.

But I think you put your finger on it: Let the States proceed, see how it works, see what the problems, are, but that there is the remainder of a Federal interest in making sure that civil rights are not affected.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, many professionals in the field of bankruptcy law have been arguing over the last several months that Congress is moving too swiftly to make wholesale changes in the personal bankruptcy law. The House yesterday passed a bill. Do you share the concern that Congress is tampering with a very complicated code in a too swift fashion?

GENERAL RENO: Well, I don't know whether it's too swift, but I have concerns about the legislation, and the Senate will be considering it later on this summer. I think it's going to be important that we identify what's in both bills and through, if and when it gets to conference.

QUESTION: What concerns do you have?

GENERAL RENO: I think I'll let Bert provide them for you, but I think it best at this point to try to just focus now on the Senate legislation and see just what we can come up with. Speed is not the issue. The issue is thoroughness and doing it the right way, and we'll be working with the Congress to try to do that.

MR. BRANDENBURG: Is there a final question?

(No response.)

GENERAL RENO: I would just tell all the group that's assembled here, it really is something. I sometimes dread coming out for a Thursday morning press availability. I don't know what's going to happen. I think, oh, I'm going to get zinged. But they're pretty great, because I come back in and I say: So-and-so asked this question; let's find out more about it; it really raises an interesting issue. Or somebody said why is that committee that you've formed, why don't you give their names out? We should know who's doing that. Let's look at that, let's see.

Your colleagues who are regulars at the Thursday morning press availabilities are great champions of the First Amendment, and I just can tell you after five years, don't let anybody ever do anything to that amendment.

(Applause and, at 9:46 a.m., end of press conference.)