



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

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

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0520.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Good morning.

Q How are you?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I'm fine, thank you.

Q Ms. Reno, a Saudi Arabian national is about to be extradited back to Saudi Arabia. He claims he would face possible torture and beheading in Saudi Arabia. Have you received assurances from the Saudis that he will be treated fairly?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: We have received assurances, formal assurances, from the Saudi government that it would fulfill its responsibilities under the Torture Convention, and that we will have access to Mr. al- Sayegh upon his return.

Q Is that ongoing access?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Yes.

Q (Off mike) -- legal proceedings against him there. Is there any assurance that he wouldn't be put to death in Saudi Arabia?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: We have assurances in terms of the -- that they would comply with the Torture Convention.

Q Which doesn't preclude their putting him on trial and, upon conviction, executing him?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: If it's done in compliance with the Torture Convention.

Q Did you feel any ethical reservations about this whole process? Mr. al-Sayegh, at first, was going to cooperate with the FBI into the investigation of the Khobar Towers bombings. Instead, he reneged on the negotiation and sought asylum. Now, even though you're trying to extradite him, if he changed his mind again and said, Hey, I'll cooperate, would you keep him in the United States?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: We intend to remove him to Saudi Arabia and other than that, I can't comment.

Q Is the U.S. any closer today to solving the Khobar Towers

bombing than it was a year ago?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I can't comment.

Q Can you comment, Ms. Reno, on what's called a "draft resolution" on sanctions on the Taliban government of Afghanistan for giving sanctuary to bin Laden? This is a matter that both the U.S. and Russia now are working on jointly. Can you say anything about what has moved the U.S. government to take this to the U.N.?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: No, I can't comment.

Q Ms. Reno, the National Rifle Association is running some radio ads complaining about what they call a lack of federal enforcement of gun laws. And this is being picked up on Capitol Hill, Republicans saying, We don't need federal gun laws because we don't enforce the ones we have now. What is your response to that line of attack?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: What we have tried to do is make sure that federal and state authorities work together, determining each, based on its own laws, what is the best way to handle a case consistent with principles of federalism and consistent with the best interest of the community. As a result, state and federal gun prosecutions have increased in the last several years.

We want to do what's right based not on who gets the credit or whose turf it is, but on -- a principled decision based on what is in the best interest of the community. And as we have seen, crime has come down six years in a row. I think progress is being made, but I think it is important that we continue and renew our efforts, both with respect to reasonable gun laws that keep guns out of the hands of people who are not legally entitled to have them by, for example, closing the gun show loophole, and secondly, by making sure that we work with state and local authorities to handle the illegal-possession-of-gun cases in the most appropriate manner possible.

Q But do you think that this using these federal numbers

that are going down, has that attack been effective, and has it hurt your efforts to try to get better legislation?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I would trust it would not hurt our efforts, because it's a sensible approach based on what is in the best interest of the community as opposed to a numbers game of who has the most numbers.

And furthermore, how can anybody object to a process whereby we check to make sure that a person is legally authorized to have a gun?

Q Ms. Reno, the president had some pretty strong things to say about the rejection of Judge White to the federal bench. Do you have any thoughts about it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I was bitterly disappointed, because I think it is so important that we encourage people like Judge White to think that they can rule as they see it based on the evidence and the law, that they can do their job the right way and that they will have other opportunities. He has, from what I have heard, a very fine record, and I'm just really -- really concerned that we are not giving people such as Judge White the opportunity to serve on the federal bench, because I think they can bring tremendous perspective.

Q Do you think he was turned down for racial reasons?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think that issue has been raised and people have said that that is not the case. I would not question their motivation. I just think we have missed a wonderful opportunity to have a distinguished state court jurist serve on the federal bench.

Q Ms. Reno, the president went beyond Judge White, to suggest that a number of his judicial nominees have been delayed or, in the case of Judge White, denied as a result of ethnic, racial and/or gender bias. You keep score. You know who's who when they go over there. Which -- is he right?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm not going to question the motivation of people. I just think it is important that everybody, regardless of their race, their ethnic background, their gender, have an opportunity to serve the American people in all positions of government. And I think we must do everything we can to ensure that opportunity, and that we make very certain that there is no discrimination based on race.

Q If you saw a pattern, as the president claims to see, would you tell us, or would you say what you just said a second ago?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't do what-ifs.

Q Ms. Reno --

Q Well, it wasn't a what-if question, I think. Is there a pattern there or not? I mean, you're the score-keeper.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it is important not to jump to conclusions about people's motivation, let them speak for themselves. I want to concentrate on this particular nomination. And I think it's a crying shame that he wasn't confirmed and that he doesn't have the opportunity to serve in this capacity.

Q Ms. Reno, is the treatment of Judge White, or has the treatment of Judge White and other nominees eroded at least a feeling of judicial independence in the United States on the federal bench?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's one of the points that I'm trying to make. I think it is so important that judges be able to call it like they see it. Let me give you an example. Concern was expressed because he wasn't pro-prosecutor, or that he was pro-criminal. The man had over 60 death penalty appeals. He affirmed in, I think, some 41 cases.

You don't do that type of decision-making and be considered pro- criminal.

Some of you have heard me talk, though, about a case that I reviewed once in another jurisdiction in Florida, where a man had been prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced to death for the poisoning death of his seven children. The case was affirmed all along the way. Subsequently, with the development of new evidence and new information, we determined that he had probably not committed the crime, and that he should go free.

There is no one around this table, there is no one in this nation that wants its judges rubber-stamping lower-court decisions.

We have got to make sure that judges at every level of our government feel free and understand that what we expect of them is that they call it like they see it and that they make sure that their rulings are based on the evidence and the law. That is what the law is all about -- to protect people, protect them from influence that's not based on the evidence and the law.

Q Ms. Reno, next week is the one-year anniversary of the Matthew Shepard slaying in Wyoming. Why does it seem like the momentum has been lost on hate crimes -- the federal hate crimes legislation? And what is so lacking in the current law now that the new legislation is needed?

ATTY GEN. RENO: One -- there are two reasons why the new legislation is critically needed. First of all, the law, as it stands now, says that the government -- the federal government will have jurisdiction only where the action involves federally protected activities, such as going to school or going to vote, or something like that.

We have seen instances where it is impossible to prove that the hate crime or the discrimination is based on a federally protected activity, but it is still a federal right. And it is important that we do everything we can to make sure that we don't have to deal with this jurisdictional issue. And the passage of the legislation would help us achieve that goal.

Secondly, it affects -- it would provide coverage in cases in which sexual preference, gender, and disabilities were involved.

And these are among the most reported in terms of hate crimes, and I think it would be important to make sure there was coverage in those instances.

I'm not sure that momentum is being lost. I think it is important for people to hear what's going on around the country. I've had occasion to be in Sacramento at a hate crimes conference, where the community and where law enforcement is vitally concerned, and where we want to make sure that we have a partnership between federal, state, and local law enforcement to properly address the issues. If we can secure the amendment with respect to the federally protected activity, we can be a better partner in that effort.

I have been to Los Angeles, where people have spoken out against hate crimes and gathered together to speak out. I think there is a momentum in this country, because people understand that a crime directed against a person because of their race, their ethnic background, the fact that they have a disability, that's not just a crime against one person; that's a crime against the whole group, and more importantly, it's a crime against everything we hold dear in America.

Q Ms. Reno, are the cases of hate crimes really on the rise, or are they just -- are they being better reported now, especially on sexual preference, crimes against gays and lesbians?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We -- frankly, this is one of the issues that I have been grappling with. And the Bureau of Justice Statistics is developing some procedures whereby we can better measure and make sure that we are comparing apples and apples, and oranges and oranges, and that it's not a matter of over- or under-reporting.

Q You're scheduled to attend and were invited to attend and

speak at the Human Rights Campaign dinner this weekend. I was hoping you could briefly talk about some of the things you've done related to sexual orientation, at the Justice Department, and also explain why you have decided not to enter a brief in the Colorado Amendment 2 case.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I will have Myron speak to the latter issue, so that I can appropriately reflect the decisions by the solicitor general and others.

With respect to what I'm going to comment on Saturday night, we'll see.

Q On the issue we were -- you were talking about earlier in response to questions regarding the pending removal to Saudi Arabia, how long could the process last, in your view, with the appeal that's been made in the 11th Circuit to stay the deportation? What's the time frame under which the Justice Department is operating and the court is operating?

How long could this go on?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, I don't think it appropriate to speak for the court, so I think we need to look at what the court's processes will be and make appropriate judgments that are based on reasonable time frames.

Q From your perspective, what is the time frame, not from the court's perspective but from your perspective? Are we looking at a matter of days, potentially, if you prevail in a proceedings, or weeks or months or years, or what are we talking about?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We want to do it in a reasonable time frame.

Q (Off mike) -- there's been more and more at least speculation about a connection, an Iranian connection to the group which bombed the Khobar Towers. I'm not going to ask you specifically about an Iranian suspect, but if the evidence leads to an official of another government, or



wherever, will you seek an indictment of that official even if it seems to clash with the current American policy towards Iran?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's an awful lot of "ifs" -- (laughter) -- and that is clearly a what-if question and it should not be answered.

Q Well, let me rephrase it. Let me rephrase it, then. Do you see any barrier to indicting anybody in this case if you have the evidence to seek an indictment?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I really don't think it is appropriate to consider what-ifs.

Q Can you explain for us what it means by allowing "access," the Saudis will allow the U.S. access to al-Sayegh?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I can't comment other than that.

Q Does that mean questioning?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't comment other than that.

Q The Justice Department statement on Khobar did acknowledge that the Iranian government officials are under suspicion in the investigation. What prompted the Justice Department to take that step in public acknowledging that there is an investigation into possible involvement?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment other than what I have done so so far.

Q Just to be clear, when you said that you intend to remove him, and now that the Wednesday deadline is past, is it absolutely too late for him to indicate cooperation? Has he run out of time, period?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment.

Q Ms. Reno, what is your assessment on whether the FALN

members who were recently given clemency, whether they pose a continuing threat?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think the FBI has spoken with respect to that issue, and I think their statement is clear.

Q Do you agree with their statement?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I would let the FBI's statement speak for the -- I think they best describe the existence.

Q Ms. Reno, on the Patty Hearst matter that's come up in the last couple of days, can you tell us about the contacts you've had from President Carter on that? And what are the issues that you see as possibly factoring into a recommendation on a possible pardon?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I will be happy to have Myron give you whatever information we've had from President Carter, if it is appropriate. As I recall, there may be one letter. The factors that go into it will have to be considered first by the pardon attorney.

Q Any personal thoughts, though, on the possibility of that at this early point?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: No.

Q Indictments were unsealed in the Bank of New York case this week. What can you tell us about your thoughts about the pace and the nature of the investigation to date?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: You know I don't comment on --

Q I'm asking you for a comment on the fact that the Justice Department decided to unseal these indictments at this time, and does that indicate that there's a -- I mean, it seems like this investigation may be going faster than many of us would have thought.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I don't comment on the speed of investigations because I never know what I will find and I

never know how long it will take.

Q I have another one for you.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: All righty.

Q The --

Q (Laughs.) Go ahead, Bill.

Q The drug czar, Mr. McCaffrey, has an editorial in the Washington Times this morning, basically decrying a conference at the CATO Institute here in Washington where Governor Johnson of New Mexico will basically be the lead-off guy in a conference on legalization of drugs. And I just wondered if you had seen the article of Mr. McCaffrey and if you stand behind him 100 percent in fighting this misinformation about legalization? And then finally, I would ask where do you stand, can you tell us, on the D.C. referendum on marijuana?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: With respect to Governor Johnson's comments, I have not heard them in their entirety, so I can't respond specifically to them, and I have not seen General McCaffrey's editorial or commentary, so I can't respond directly to it.

I will say that with respect to legalization, there are some that cry for legalization because, they say, efforts have not worked.

I think it is important, however, that we focus on the efforts and that we take it in a comprehensive way, first of all making sure that our children have the education, the support, and the structure around them that will give them the opportunity to say no to drugs, to reject pressure, and to have a strong and positive future. I think it important that we expand on efforts focused on intervention, early intervention, when a person is first arrested. And through drug courts we have done so much using the carrot-and-stick approach that permits them to get into to a treatment program, but they have to test

regularly for drugs, and any positive tests or other violations of the conditions of their program would cause a sanction to be imposed. Those drug courts have expanded across the nation and are having a far greater effect than the absence of a drug court.

I think it is important, if people continue to abuse drugs or to traffic in them, to get firm, fair penalties that fit the crime. And then I think it is important to bring people back to the community, controlling them so that they will have a chance to get off on the right foot, have the opportunity at job training and placement, so that they can get into productive, positive undertakings and have a future. I think we need to do more in that regard.

Q Yes, but would you be behind or standing with Barry McCaffrey on the "legalization becomes a drug disaster" in America? Do you believe that that's what would happen with legalization and from state to state?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm very much opposed to legalization.

Q I know you are. And what about this referendum in D.C.? Would you ask community-minded citizens in D.C. to vote it down?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Which referendum are you --

Q There's a referendum on legalization of marijuana for medicinal purposes --

Q It's already passed.

ATTY GEN. RENO: It's already passed.

Q Oh, it passed?

Q It's passed.

Q Oh, is it in effect?

Q No, Congress hasn't allowed it to go into effect.

Q Oh, okay. So where do you stand with regard to the Congress --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm opposed to it.

Q You're opposed to it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm opposed to legalization.

Q Okay. Thanks.

Q For medicinal purposes as well?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it is important that that be determined by scientists and by medical experts. And we're in the process of having appropriate testing done and study done.

Q At the Justice Department?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. The government and other are, to see whether there are medicinal properties that are unique to marijuana.

Q Ms. Reno, there was a report this morning about the chief of the FBI's National Infrastructure Protection Center complaining that he is understaffed, that he -- a lot of the FBI agents that have been assigned to the NIPC have been pulled off to go chase Chinese influence over political campaigns and things of that matter.

Do you think the NIPC needs more resources? Is the administration taking the threat of cyberattacks and cyberterrorism seriously enough?

ATTY GEN. RENO: This is one of my highest priorities, and I want to make sure, and have been working with Director Freeh to make sure, first of all, that we have sufficient personnel with the cyber expertise necessary to match wits with the bad guys. This is a very difficult undertaking

because right now there are a limited number of people in this country with that expertise, and when I see stories in the paper talking about what a 17-year-old or 18-year-old computer whiz just out of high school can make, I realize that I'm not very competitive with them.

So we're exploring ways of attracting people to the bureau, making sure that we develop the expertise. And in addition to the expertise, making sure that we develop a system that will enable both the federal government and state and local officials to share equipment that is expensive, that doesn't have to be duplicated from one jurisdiction to another, and that can be utilized by both federal, state and local governments and law enforcement.

I happened to be in San Diego recently and saw a wonderful example of just how that can work. It was a computer forensic lab in which federal, state and local officials from San Diego County, the city of San Diego and some surrounding municipalities, along with state officials, were working together with the federal government in a lab by which equipment and expertise were shared, equipment and expertise that was essential in being able to search computers.

Here is another factor that we've got to consider. Up until recently, if we wanted to get the drug dealers' information, we knew pretty much from an informant or from some associate that he kept all his records in a little black book, so we could get a search warrant because we had probable cause for the little black book. Now if he has a computer with all the information in it, we've got to be able to search that computer, pursuant to an appropriate court-authorized search warrant. And that laboratory is both developing the forensic standards for introduction of evidence and sharing the expertise necessary to effect such searches.

So there are a number of areas that we have got to continue to address and it is going to be a real challenge, but I think it's one of the most important challenges that we face.

Q Ms. Reno, quickly, on that topic, the NSC is proposing a federal CyberCorps to offer money for school in exchange for four years of government service as a computer scientist. Did you have any input into that proposal? And if it comes about, are you trying to make sure that your agency gets its fair share?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Yeah, I did. (Laughter.)

Q Is this your idea?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: No, I won't claim credit for it, but what I -- with so many people not having -- I mean, people my age and even people some of your ages -- not that many of us have computer qualifications. And in this transition period, as this nation becomes computer-literate and adept at all age levels, I think it is important that we do everything we can to encourage people who have the aptitude. And what I'd thought about was the four years of college in return for three years of commitment to the federal government. Another -- or a master's, another two years -- add another year or two, and for a Ph.D. add five years to the original four.

But it is also encouraging to me to see some wonderful work being done by some very talented agents around the country, and the jobs here are really extraordinary. You've not only got to be the computer whiz, but you've got to be the person who understands what's necessary for a search warrant, what you can do if -- what type of evidence you have to have, what the standards are, and then, if we're going to prosecute the case, we've got to have prosecutors with the same abilities. So I do hope we get our fair share.

Q Well, as I understand it, the CyberCorps is only -- at least in the beginning, is only looking at 300 people each year, which would be spread out over 42 non-DOD agencies. I mean, what kind of an impact will this have?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Well, one of the things that we want to explore is how we identify agents with the aptitude and the

interest in this area, how we identify prosecutors with the aptitude and interest -- and it really is gratifying to see how many have that capacity -- and then get them into special training programs that will prepare them for this work.

Q Ms. Reno, Mr. Vatis said that he had resources, that he had agents, but that they were pulled off. He now has fewer people to investigate cybercrimes and cyberattacks and cyberintrusions than he had six months ago. Do you see more agents going there in the near future, or going back to the NIPC?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'll have to review it with Director Freeh because I want to make sure not only that the National Infrastructure Protection Center, but the whole capacity of the Bureau to investigate cyber-crime, to provide for forensic expertise in the investigation of cyber-crime, that that effort is properly staffed by people who are sophisticated enough in computer technology and in the law to be able to match wits with the bad guys.

Q On the subject of resources, you have a very active Anti-trust Division. This week it became apparent that they're going to have another massive investigation, probably, into the WorldCom merger, this on top of Microsoft and -- well, lots of other things. Have you talked with Mr. Klein about the WorldCom merger proposed? And have you talked with him about the resources needed by his division?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not talked with him about the details of the merger. I have talked with him about resources.

This is always a recurring issue with the component heads and myself, and we continue to try to do what we can to make sure we have the resources to address matters of concern.

Q Thank you.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you.



Q Thank you very much, ma'am.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Have a good day, everybody.

END.