



**WEEKLY MEDIA AVAILABILITY WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
AND JOHN WODATCH, DISABILITY RIGHTS SECTION, CIVIL RIGHTS
DIVISION**

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Q Good morning.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Good morning.

Q Long time no see.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Yes. (Off mike.) I miss you all.

Q Thank you! (Laughter.)

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think I do miss you all. You keep me on my toes. I will frankly tell you that I think the First Amendment is reflected best around this table, in many instances that I see in Washington. You ask good, searching questions. You ask them in a thoughtful,

human way, and I guess I do miss you all -- now. (Laughter.)

(Cross talk.)

ATTY. GEN. RENO: This morning I am very pleased to announce that after a lengthy mediation process, we have reached an agreement with Days Inn of America, Inc. and the Cendant Corporation which will ensure that all newly constructed Days Inn hotels are fully accessible to persons with disabilities. As a result of today's agreement, Days Inn and Cendant have agreed to institute an ADA initiative that sends a message to its hotel franchises across the country that ADA compliance is a high priority. Days Inn's actions will ensure that all their guests, including guests with disabilities -- that they will all feel welcome. We hope this initiative will serve as a model for hotel operators nationwide.

This agreement is a wonderful example of how effective mediation can be when resolving civil rights issues. This brings an end to more than three years of litigation and resolves five cases at the district court level and three cases at the appellate court level. As a result of this agreement, Days Inns and Cendant will ensure that before a new hotel is opened for business using the Days Inn name, the architect, the contractor or the owner of the hotel certify that the hotel meets all ADA requirements.

Days Inn also will conduct surveys to identify any ADA problems at newly constructed hotels. In addition, it will establish a \$4.75 million interest-free loan program. This program will help Days Inn franchises pay for renovations to bring their hotels into compliance.

The Justice Department receives more complaints from persons with disabilities about hotels failing to comply with the ADA than any other type of public accommodation. Because of the large number of complaints about hotels, the Justice Department considers ADA enforcement of hotels one of its highest priorities. We intend to continue investigating and conducting compliance reviews of hotels.

We urge hotels and other lodging facilities to become familiar with and comply with the requirements of the ADA, and we will help them do so, because it is so important. A hotel can have business; people with disabilities can have greater access to all things that most Americans enjoy; and it's a win-win situation for everyone.

Today, the Justice Department, in order to assist hotel owners in understanding compliance needs with ADA, is releasing three new documents designed to assist hotel owners, franchisers, architects and contractors gain a better understanding of ADA requirements for newly constructed hotels. The publications are: "Five Steps to Making New Lodging Facilities Comply with the ADA;" the second is "Common ADA Problems at Newly Constructed Lodging Facilities," and third is the "ADA Checklist for New Lodging Facilities."

We hope that these publications will help hotel operators to not only comply with the law but to roll out a welcome mat for all travelers.

I'm pleased that John Wodatch, the chief of the Disability Rights Section of the department's Civil Rights Division, is here with me today to answer any questions you may have.

Q Ms. Reno and Mr. Wodatch, where were these Days Inn hotels built across the -- do you have a general idea where they are?

MR. WODATCH: They're built in a variety of -- we investigated during the course of our investigations 30 of these hotels around the United States. The lawsuits were filed in states from South Dakota to California, Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky. A large number of the hotels are being built in the Southern states, in Georgia, Florida, and that region. But it's a nationwide chain, and it's one of -- it's the largest chain in the United States.

Q Why were they ignoring the ADA requirements in building the hotels? What was happening there?

MR. WODATCH: The dispute that we had with the Days Inn system and with architects and contractors was ensuring that all those who are involved in the design and construction of new hotels have a role in ensuring that they're accessible. Today's agreement deals with the role of a franchiser, and in -- many of the hotel systems in the United States are franchised. They're really small businesses but are linked through major corporations. And this agreement is about the role that the major corporation plays in ensuring that the facilities it accepts into its systems are accessible.

Q Could you explain that? When the bottom line here is to make sure that there is accessibility, what difference does the role of people

along the way make?

MR. WODATCH: Well, they all have a role in what the facility looks like. Certainly the owner and the architect and the building contractor probably have a role that's more readily understandable, but the franchise -- franchisors of the United States also lay down some rules about what their product is going to look like, what a Days Inn hotel looks like.

They may have plans that they give to people that would give guidance in terms of what a facility should look like, and we want to ensure that when they are doing that that they take steps to ensure that the facility is accessible.

Q Is it surprising to you that as large an industry as the hospitality industry as many years after the ADA was enacted still are having trouble complying?

MR. WODATCH: I think they are making steps toward compliance. I think it was troubling to us, and one reason we have spent a great deal of our resources on this issue that noncompliance with new constructions standards was still as prevalent as we found it to be, and that the problems tended to be recurrent ones. So we thought that by entering into -- especially doing the documents that are listed today to try and let people know what the common problems are and to avoid them.

Q Were you essentially trying to send a message to the corporate ownership that the onus is on you, not so much the franchises? It's your job to make sure they know and comply.

MR. WODATCH: I don't think it's we were trying send a message in that regard. I think we were trying to acquaint them that they did have an obligation. It wasn't just the owner. It wasn't just the architect or the building contractor, but they had a role in this as well.

Q When you say that disabled people were denied access, what types of problems were there? Were there no ramps? I know with Holiday Inn, there were bathroom problems and so on.

MR. WODATCH: There were a variety of problems, and if you want more detail on it, one of the documents -- the "ADA Common Problems in Hotels" -- list them. But to give you an example, hotel doors

throughout the hotel facility were not wide enough to permit wheelchairs to enter. So they might have a few accessible guestrooms, but all the other doors in the facility were not accessible. There might not be enough parking. In terms of the type of rooms that were accessible, some of these hotels feature basically fairly simple kinds of choices -- smoking; non-smoking; a room with a double bed; or a room with twin beds. And what we found was that people who use wheelchairs didn't have that same choice. So a parent traveling with a child in need of an accessible room couldn't get a room with twin beds. Or a disabled person who traveled with an attendant couldn't get one room with twin beds, would have to either share a bed or rent two rooms.

And then the variety of not having enough parking spaces, having doors to the entrance that weren't ramped, a variety of issues.

Q John, how did Days Inn compare to the industry norm? Is this far worst than what you've seen throughout the hotel industry?

MR. WODATCH: Well, we spent -- we got a lot of complaints about Days Inn, and therefore spent a lot of time with them.

I think part of our concern is that they are not so far out of the norm in terms of violations in new construction that we were just selecting them. We think it's an industry-wide problem. We intend to follow up with other hotels and hotel chains in the United States to ensure that this problem doesn't exist.

Q Have there been other agreements of this scale with other hotels before this one?

MR. WODATCH: We have had -- in the past year we had an agreement with the Holiday Inn chain, but it really was -- it wasn't dealing with new construction issues, it dealt with reservation issues, which is another common problem in hotels, as well as existing barriers at hotels that had already been built. During the past year we also had a major agreement with MGM Grand, which is a huge hotel in Las Vegas. So it's an important part of our work.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I would just urge everyone to think about how they can make their store, their facility accessible to people with disabilities. It opens up tremendous doors. It provides business, new

business for the business owner. It just makes sense. And compliance can be achieved so often in the simplest sort of ways, but mostly with respect to new construction. You can build a door this wide or you can build it this wide. It's much easier to build it this wide from the beginning.

Q Other topics? If I might.

Ms. Reno, Tom Constantine was quoted this week as saying, quote -- on the Mexican drug situation, he said, quote, "I watched the situation for 5-1/2 years, and every year it became worse. We are not adequately protecting the citizens of the U.S. from these organized-crime figures." And I would ask you specifically to respond to the exhumations in Juarez.

ATTY GEN. RENO: That is an ongoing matter now. We're working with the Mexican authorities. And it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

Q Can you comment on Mr. Constantine's characterization of the increasing -- we have increasing amounts of drugs being confiscated, which is indicating greater numbers of shipments and greater quantities in the shipments? Could you comment on his assessment of the Mexico drug problem?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think it's wise to comment on one specific drug problem. I think we must comment on drugs and what it's doing to America generally. And that requires continued and enhanced effort aimed at preventing the problem; educating people; providing treatment; providing effective intervention, such as through drug courts, for first offenders; providing vigorous enforcement actions; and providing after-care and reentry programs that give people a chance to come back from prison with a chance of success.

We must continue this effort in every way that we can, and around the world we must continue to work with our friends to focus on what we can do to bring these people to justice.

Q Ms. Reno, during the Cold War, we used to talk about losing a country to communism. Now the talk in Latin America is losing a country to drug gangs who have so much money and so much organization, they're like a separate government within these countries.

Constantine, almost from the day he got here, used to warn about the "Colombianization" of Mexico, and Mexico was getting so pervaded by the influence of drug cartels that virtually they were going to control the government at one point.

Have we done enough, especially over the last five years, to stem this development in Mexico? I know you say that we cooperate, but have we really done enough to --

ATTY GEN. RENO: We have tried to work with Mexican authorities in every way that we can, and we will continue to do that.

But it -- in terms of specific countries, we've got to work with each country. The circumstances are different in each country. We've got to respect the sovereignty of each country. And as in Colombia and other situations, we've got to recognize that there are a vast array of issues that require careful, common-sense, firm solutions.

Q Were there indications as early as 1993 that there might be graves at these sites?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I, again, can't comment while the matter is pending.

Q Are you skeptical at all -- just maybe you can give us a little bit of guidance. There were, we know, 150 people -- some number thereabouts -- have disappeared from this area. Are you skeptical that the remains of these people could be found in this area? I mean, give us your degree of confidence in the mission that's under way, in terms of the interment that's going on.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it is important that the investigation and the processes take their course, so that we don't prematurely jump to conclusions and that we get to the truth and the heart of the matter. And we will not rest until we do that.

Q (Off mike) -- about the information leaking before any bodies were found, or any remains? And how has that complicated things for you?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I think the best thing to do in a situation like this is not leak information but conduct the investigation in a careful way, a very thorough way, and then let the facts speak for

themselves.

Q Ms. Reno, a month ago, more than a month ago, there was an incident in Matamoros, Mexico, where an FBI agent and a DEA agent were surrounded by narcotraffickers and almost killed -- well, trying to kill them or threatening to kill them. Are you concerned with the security of the U.S. agents working inside of Mexico? And also, it was a clear violation by these agents of a Mexican law. They were carrying guns in the car they were driving. Have you responded to the reaction of Mexico in this incident?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have discussed the matter with the attorney general and discussed it with Director Freeh and with Acting Administrator Marshall.

Q Are you concerned with the security of these agents in Mexico?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am always concerned with the security of agents, both here and around the world.

Q Did --

Q Are you continuing to --

ATTY GEN. RENO: She hasn't had a chance yet.

Q I was just going to follow up. Did Director Freeh and Administrator Marshall have an explanation for why these agents were armed?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I can't discuss matters.

Q Are you continuing to negotiate with the Mexican government that they allow the DEA agents to carry guns for their own security?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What we do is to work with the Mexican authorities to ensure that we cooperate with them in every way we possibly can, and that agents' lives are appropriately protected. But to comment on how we protect those agents' lives is, I think, inappropriate.

Q Ms. Reno, is there any significance to this cooperation with Mexico? It seems that the FBI-- (inaudible) -- this as a move forward in cooperating with Mexico. Do you see it that way?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't judge things based on whether it's a move forward or a move back. I judge it based on how effective it can be in terms of dealing with situations as they arise. And this obviously is a very serious matter that requires close cooperation, and we're gratified by that.

Q Ms. Reno, you have stated clearly on a number of occasions you don't think politics should play any role in law enforcement, that you make decisions based on the law. The head of EgyptAir has said that he has no objection at this stage to the FBI taking the primary role in the investigation of the crash of EgyptAir Flight 990. Are you concerned that diplomacy has gotten in the way of effective law enforcement here?

And could you give us a sense of where things stand on this matter?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: The National Transportation Safety Board currently is the lead on this. I think everybody concerned at the Justice Department and the National Transportation Safety Board are doing everything they can to make sure that the right steps are taken that will ultimately produce the truth.

Q Ms. Reno, are you concerned that diplomacy has gotten in the way of effective law enforcement? And do you feel things should move forward now as -- (Inaudible.)

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think, based on our perspective of law enforcement's needs, that everything is being done to get to what we need, which is the truth.

Q Ms. Reno, can you update us on whether -- Mr. Hall last said that no indications of mechanical, no indications of a weather-related problem. Is that still where things stand, as far as you know?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I would let the National Transportation Safety Board make the appropriate comments.

Q Ms. Reno, do you foresee a need, and would you agree with the use of FBI personnel to remove the demonstrations that have been settled on the island of Vieques?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I would not comment. The matter is obviously under discussion, and I think it would be inappropriate to comment prematurely.

Q On Egypt --

Q Ms. Reno, what's your view of the constitutionality of using secret evidence in immigration proceedings?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I depends on the circumstances.

Q On EgyptAir, Mr. Freeh earlier this week downplayed really any significant difference between the NTSB or the FBI being the lead agency in that, saying that really it was just a -- public disclosure is really the only significant difference; other than that it's sort of a distinction without a difference. Do you agree with that characterization? And should the public really care whether or not the FBI takes over the EgyptAir case or not?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: What I think Director Freeh and I care about is getting to the truth, and we want to pursue the truth in the most effective manner possible. I think we both at this point feel that we're doing that.

Q Ms. Reno, there's a lawyer for Marion Barry has sent the Department a letter -- I guess it's to you -- asking for some information about the apparent investigation of him. Have you received that letter?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Yes, I have.

Q He asks a number of questions. For example, he asks whether there are any pending investigations of Mayor Barry. How are you going to respond to this letter? What can you --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: We are reviewing it now to determine how we should respond.

Q How is that review being done?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It is being done through the department, and then I will look at it, and we will make a determination.

Q Do you know anything about the case, about what he's talking about? Have you heard anything at all about this investigation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know what investigation you refer -- whether it's the investigation referred to in the letter or --

Q Yes.

ATTY GEN. RENO: The lawyers' investigation?

Q Well, do you know anything about what the proposed FBI operation involving Marion Barry -- in other words, have you been briefed on the facts of the case?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I have not.

Q Do you plan to -- but you won't say whether you plan to go ahead and follow through with his request that you investigate this sting against him that would -- never materialized?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I indicated, we're reviewing the letter to determine what the appropriate response should be.

Q On the Juarez situation, Mexican authorities have reportedly said they believe there are up to 22 U.S. citizens who may be on one of these ranch sites where these mass graves are being unearthed now. Do you have any information that would confirm that or --

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I indicated earlier, I think it's important not to jump to conclusions but to wait until the investigation is complete and all the facts that can be made available are considered in determining just what the circumstances are.

Q Ms. Reno, is there an agency that keeps track of how many Americans might be missing in Mexico? Separate and apart from this particular investigation, do we have any sense of the number of Americans who might be missing in Mexico?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know the answer to that question. I will ask Carol (sp) to provide you with whatever information we can.

Q Ms. Reno, if I can go back to the incident the two agents had, in your discussions with the Mexican authorities, they told you it was the state police involved in the incident?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not discuss the conversations.

Q Ms. Reno, if I could go back to Vieques for a moment, the protesters down there are expecting -- fully expecting either FBI or marshals to go in there and try and arrest them. They're boosting their numbers by the hour. There are more people going. And are you concerned that their anticipation of some action might make this much a more volatile and dangerous

situation and possibly put FBI or marshals, agents in danger, physical danger?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment. We're obviously reviewing the matter, making the best determinations that we can, and it would be premature to comment.

Q Have you already made a recommendation to the president on what should or should not be done?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think I should discuss my recommendations or lack thereof with the president -- with -- in public.

Q Ms. Reno, you said that it would depend on the circumstances whether or not it was constitutional to use secret evidence.

Under what circumstances would it not be constitutional in your view?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't do hypotheticals, because I don't know all the circumstances.

Q But I'm not asking you a hypothetical. I'm saying what circumstances are there? This is a legal question, it's not a hypothetical question.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't do what-ifs because I don't know all the circumstances. And to describe to you all the circumstances and then have you say, "Well, what about it if it changes this way?" It becomes a hypothetical.

Frankly, I've got enough to do that is actual that I've got to make determinations on.

Q In a matter that occurred this week, we were anticipating a decision by you earlier this week. And then the Immigration and Naturalization Service withdrew its request. Can -- it appeared -- can you explain to us what actually occurred in that process and what role you play?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The case is still pending, so I don't think it would be appropriate to do so.

Q Ms. Reno, we often try to get you to comment on things that are going on, and you say you can't comment on ongoing investigations. One investigation which is certainly completed involved Monica Lewinsky. Several weeks ago, the president gave an interview in which he said -- acknowledged personal mistakes, but said he was defending the Constitution with many of the acts that he took. All during this process, you told us that one day, you'd be able to tell us what was going on or tell us what you really thought about the process. Has the time come for you to tell us what you really think about that process?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Not yet. (Laughter.)

Q Would you --

ATTY GEN. RENO: And in that connection, there are processes that have got to run their course, and I cannot comment.

Q You're talking about the independent counsel's continuing investigation, and you may even be talking about the end of the administration, but can you give us a quasi-commitment in some way? (Laughter.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't give quasi-commitments. (Laughs. Laughter.)

Q Well, give us a commitment.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I either commit or don't.

Q Well, give us a commitment that at some point, when it obviously -- when you're obviously free to do so, you will talk about this whole process and tell us what you were really thinking while all this was going on.

ATTY GEN. RENO: You mean all these last six-and-a-half years?
(Laughter.)

Q No. Basically the process that led up to the impeachment of the president.

ATTY GEN. RENO: One of the issues that I have considered -- let me answer the question in a long-winded way, if you'll forgive me.

As I have said on past occasions, I came from a state that had a sunshine law, a public records law. And whereas I could not comment during a pending matter, when the investigation was concluded and when there were no further leads to be followed that led to other criminal investigations, I would make the file available and make the information available because I thought that there should be openness in government. Under federal law and the Federal Privacy Act and the FOIA Act, there are limitations on what can be done, and the Department of Justice has long-standing policies from one administration to another that limits comment.

I will continue to try to do everything I can to be as open as I can while at the same time complying with these long-standing regulations and federal law. I think it is one of the most difficult issues I know, because I think for the public to have total confidence in its government, it must know what its government is doing. There are a range of issues that make that difficult at times, including national security issues. But I believe in open government and I'm going to try to do my best to comply with that.

Q Within a relatively short time, this will not be news, it will be history. The president is having his say. Starr's going around saying, well, he never was particularly mad at the president, he was just doing what he thought was right. What you have to say as a third party who was actually involved in most of these decisions would be of some historical value. At some point, would you consider, like, devoting a whole half-hour of your news conference to openly answering questions, as far as you can, about that process?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It will depend on what I can comment on.

Q Ms. Reno, will you write a book after you're -- (inaudible)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Let me get in the truck and go across the country first. (Laughter.)

Q I think other people are going to be writing books and you're going to play a prominent role in them. I'm just wondering if you're going to give your side of the story.

ATTY GEN. RENO: What I would like to try to do is serve now in the best way I can possibly serve the American people.

And then, come the time I leave here, I'll be like Scarlet and think about that tomorrow. (Laughter.)

One of the things that I think is important, though, is that those of us who have the opportunity to serve provide what insight they can to those who come after about pitfalls to watch out for and circumstances that can be illuminating to future issues, while at the same time not wearing people down with old war stories. So if I can figure out how to do it in a thoughtful, constructive way that might be helpful to others, I may try.

Q Ms. Reno, were you appalled, were you surprised, as many of us were, at the level of violence in Seattle this week?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think it's going to be important for us all to sit down together and look at this and determine how we try to avoid situations like this for the future.

Q Did you have some notification about the plans of some of these more radical people that showed up in Seattle?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Again, I think it's going to be important for us all not to speculate, but in the calmness after the fact, figure out what can be done.

Q Okay, thanks.

Q Ms. Reno, today's Washington Times said the drug czar, Barry McCaffrey, is calling for a billion dollars for expanded assistance to the Colombian police. He said, quote, "Colombia is out of control. It is a flipping nightmare." Do you agree with any part of that statement?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I don't know what he means.

Q I think he means that it's out of control in term of the narcotrafficking and the drug crime killings.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Considering his whole statement, I think, before I commented on what he was saying, I'd best better understand his statement.

Q Ms. Reno, back to Mexico, in terms of fears about the "colombianization" of Mexico. There is obviously an increase of drug trafficking from Mexico to the United States. Are you really sure that the Mexican authorities are doing their best to stop these drug traffickers sending narcotics to the United States? Are you sure -- why is this increase? What's wrong?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think early on President Zedillo described it as one of the most important national security problems facing his country. Each time I've had the opportunity to talk with him, I have been really impressed with his dedication to doing something about it. I also realize that he has many obstacles to overcome and I think he has, with the issues facing him, attempted to deal with those obstacles, and I think progress has been made.

Q He will be in town next week.

Are you going to discuss the Juarez issue with him or with Attorney General Madrazo, and also the security for DEA agents and FBI in Mexico?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, we don't -- I discuss these matters with Attorney General Madrazo on a regular basis.

Thank you.

Q All right. Did you have a good Thanksgiving?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I had a wonderful Thanksgiving.

Q You went to Florida?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Went to Florida. South Florida was beautiful. The leaves were green and shining. The sky was blue. It was even a bit brisk, but there was warm water, too --

(Laughter, cross talk.)

Q Thank you, Ms. Reno.

END.