



WEEKLY JUSTICE DEPARTMENT MEDIA BRIEFING WITH

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

SUBJECTS: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA)

AND COPS PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 2000

9:32 A.M. EDT

Q Good morning.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Good morning.

Q Good morning.

(Pause.) Mm-hmm. (In acknowledgment.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you. (Laughs.) (Laughter.)

Q Do you have a statement for us this morning?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes.

In 1994 Congress passed, and the president signed into law, sweeping legislation to fight crime. The legislation is an important part of our community-based crime-fighting efforts, a strategy that involves working in partnership with local law enforcement and local communities to improve public safety.

Today, crime is at its lowest level in more than a quarter of a century.

But as I have said on many occasions, we cannot become complacent; we must continue our progress. And Congress needs to reauthorize the key crime-control programs of the 1994 Crime bill. Today, I want to focus on two programs from that historic legislation, the Violence Against Women Act and the COPS Program, which have contributed to the reduction in crime over the past six years.

The Violence Against Women Act sent a clear message across the land that this was going to be a priority, that we were going to focus together on the issue of violence against women.

Through new criminal provisions and grant programs, we have been able to improve the criminal- and civil-justice systems' response to domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Six grant programs have helped ensure the safety of countless women by providing victims' services, supporting coordinated strategies among law enforcement, prosecution, victims services' providers and the courts, and by creating centralized sexual-assault and domestic-violence units in police and prosecutors' offices.

These monies have been able to be used by states to develop shelters to give people a haven, to provide for a one-stop court center where people are not pushed from one place to another, and they have been very effective.

The Community-Oriented Policing Services program has helped to put more police where they can do the most good -- on the streets and in our communities. Through the COPS program we have provided grants to 12,000 local law enforcement agencies to fund more than 104,000 community police officers. Nearly 60,000 of those officers are already on the beat.

And last year, the president proposed the 21st Century

Policing Initiative, which, if funded, will continue the COPS program and put up to 50,000 community policing officers on the beat and provide funding for over 7,500 new community and gun prosecutors over the next five years.

We are proud of these programs and believe that both have really contributed significantly to a safer America. But the authorization of these programs is set to expire at the end of fiscal year 2000, in less than four months, and Congress needs to act now.

I commend Senator Joe Biden and Congressman Anthony Weiner and all the other hard-working members of Congress who have introduced bills which would extend the life of COPS and the Violence Against Women Program for another five years, but I am worried that no action has been taken in either the Senate or the House.

On behalf of America's citizens, especially abused women and children who have been exposed to violence, I urge Congress to act and to act swiftly.

Q Ms. Reno, essentially, with the Violence Against Women Act, you are calling for the reenactment of all the provisions except the one which was specifically struck down by the Supreme Court in -- Brancala (sp)?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Yes.

Q Why has it taken so long to get these 100,000 officers actually on the streets, not just funded, not just in the pipeline?

ATTY GEN. RENO: There are two reasons for that:

First of all, Congress made clear; and we have implemented a program where, through automating existing services, we have freed officers to go to the streets to participate in community policing.

The development of an automated system, particularly in larger offices, can be a long involved program. I have had

experience in a local office, in a local prosecutor's office. You start, you test it; it's not testing right, and you sometimes start over again in order to make sure that you're spending your money as wisely as possible. So that has been one of the reasons for it taking this long.

The second is that the recruiting, hiring and training to ensure good police officers takes time, as well. So you have that range; I'd like it to move faster, frankly. But I would prefer that the automation, that it be in place -- be in place in a well-planned effective manner and that the police officers hired by the grants be well-trained and prepared.

Q And are you convinced that every community that got the grants, that hired new officers under this program, really needed them and really has used them in the spirit of the program?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't answer for every one of the 12,000 communities. But I can say, knowing how hard it is to get money from municipal functions, they are not going to make the match for the program unless they really need them.

Secondly, we have focused on the monitoring function of the COPS Office to make sure that the monies are spent as wisely as possible, consistent with community policing goals. In instances where we find that that is not the case, we have secured the return of the dollars.

Q Ms. Reno, on that point exactly, you also said the inspector general of the Justice Department issued a fairly critical report about sampling of the COPS grants that were given out last year. There has been no official response from the Justice Department.

I have been told that there is a committee, under Mr. Holder, that has been reviewing these OIG reports.

When will that report be available? When will some action be taken on the IG -- > ATTY GEN. RENO: I will ask Myron to give you the latest information that he can as to when the

response would be available publicly.

And again, I want to stress that this is a continuing effort both with the monitoring function of the COPS Office; the IG has spent considerable time on the COPS Program. And it's one that we want to make sure involves the correct expenditure of dollars.

Q Ms. Reno, some have suggested that many of the officers have gone to the streets too early, like in the case of Los Angeles where they have had so many problems with corruption, that officers aren't trained properly before they are put to the streets.

Do you have any new concerns about pushing officers so quickly to the streets and that may have some impact on ethics and corruption?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have long said, whether it would be the Border Patrol or other instances, that we must move carefully.

Right now for example, federal law enforcement has experienced significant new hiring during the last seven years. And a large number of federal law enforcement's agents are young with less than three or four years of experience.

That makes it all the more important that we focus on developing the best training programs and at the same time, providing field training officers who are experienced, who are good teachers and who can make a difference. If the ratio of young to experienced officers is skewed, then that's going to skew the training. And it is a delicate balance.

I think training is one of the most important functions in policing. As I've mentioned, it's not just what you learn at the academy; it's what you learn in the field with an experienced, thoughtful, careful, positive officer.

But I think we can do more in terms of policing in this

country in the wisest way possible. I'd like to see a greater emphasis in continuing training on problem-solving policing. For example, just for discussion purposes, what if we developed a program of problem-solving where one experienced police officer, well-trained and well-experienced in community problem-solving initiatives, took 20 officers and for a week trained them by identifying and then solving problems. If we train police officers in how to relate to young ex-offenders who have returned to the streets, how do we give them a positive message, while at the same time properly overseeing their actions?

These are some of the things that I think we can do better and we're determined to try to do it.

Q Is there any new function that will provide that additional training in this new authorization, or proposed authorization?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: The COPS program has contributed to a number of the police integrity initiatives, and we would hope that that could continue.

Q Ms. Reno, do we have any -- do we have the figures for how much each of these programs would cost annually, if they were fully re-funded, in today's dollars?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I don't have it right off the top of my head, but I'll ask Myron to give it to you.

Q Any word from -- any anecdotal information from cities to say that they'd have to reduce their forces if the federal funds are not forthcoming?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Well, one of the provisions of the grant is that you have to provide for some continuity and some -- this is not -- this is to provide long-range community policing initiatives.

Q Ms. Reno, we understand that the 11th Circuit might rule today. Do you have any sense of which way they might be leaning?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I am never so presumptuous. (Laughter.)

Q How is Elian doing, according to your sources?

You know, what -- is he continuing to be tutored?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I understand that he is; I understand that he is doing well.

Q Have you been in touch with he or his attorney or any of those that are charged with his safety?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I have not.

Q This is about six months now. How anxious are you to see a resolution to this?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, I think everyone is anxious to see a resolution of it, myself included.

Q Why? Why are you anxious now? I mean, you may get a ruling today. What are your feelings today?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am surprised at your question. I don't know of anybody who has followed this, that isn't anxious to get it resolved.

Q Ms. Reno, what are the possibilities of Elian and his father leaving this country after a ruling in their favor today?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Let's not do "what if"s. I'll undoubtedly be back again.

Q This is a procedural matter, though. How quickly, if a judge orders, a judge rules that Elian does not have the right to seek political asylum; as a legal matter on appeal, how quickly could that order go into effect and him be allowed to leave?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It will depend on what the order says.

Q (Inaudible) -- the question. I mean, would you keep a Justice Department departure order on retaining or keeping Elian in the country, for a little while, to allow the family one more appeal, even if the Appeals Court doesn't have some sort of order saying he has to stay in the country? Or would you just leave it to the courts to decide whether there should be any more order keeping him in the country?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It is now quarter of 10:00. In an hour and 15 minutes, we can discuss this in a far more intelligent way.

Q So we'll come back up here then? (Laughter.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know. We'll work it out with Myron so that everybody has a chance to read the opinion.

Q But does the Justice Department have any interest that's different than court in terms of deferring to the judicial process?

I mean, in other words, if the court says, "Okay; you know, we are going to lift this stay right now and allow Elian to leave," do you have any personal interest, or does the Justice Department institutionally have an interest, in forcing Elian and his father to stay pending the further proceedings?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it best to read the opinion and then make a statement.

Q Ms. Reno, what's behind all this speculation is there have been considerable speculation that there -- if the ruling is favorable and if the stay is listed (sic), that there would be a race somehow to get Elian out of the country.

Can we at least assume that as a matter of policy, the Department defers to an appeals court in terms of some pending --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I am deferring to the appeals court right now by not talking too much when the opinion is about to come down!

Q Ms. Reno, in the time since Elian has been returned to his father, I know that initially you gave us some insight into what your thinking was that day. Have you reflected on it in the time since, at all?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Yes.

Q And if so, how? Would you change anything?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Oh, I'd change a lot of things, if I could.

Q Such as?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Get the father to -- I mean, the great uncle to voluntarily transfer the child.

Q Anything within your power? Would you change anything that -- any of your decisions, any of your actions?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: (Pause.) I haven't -- I'd perhaps word things differently or something like that, but I feel comfortable with what was done.

Q Ms. Reno, to change the subject? All right. Ms. Reno, there's --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Are you getting majority votes to change the subject now? (Laughter.)

Q Well, in other press forums, we basically notify the press that we're changing the subject and if anybody objects to that, then we defer.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Well, I never object to changing the subject.

Q Oh, well, thank you very much. Ma'am, what can you say about this holdup of the \$1.3 billion, I believe, in funds for Colombia, the anti-drug funds? There's no equipment, there's no funding in Colombia, and basically things are just stalled, according to reports. What's wrong at this end? What's wrong in the Congress?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I would hope that everyone would come together, get the legislation passed, because there are too many important issues at stake here. And we have had -- I've been impressed with some of the steps that have been taken by Colombia.

We have a nation that wants to try to respond, and we need to be a good partner.

Q Are you personally lobbying any of the Congress or anyplace in the administration to speed up the transfer of these funds?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I have not personally done so yet.

Q No?

Q Ms. Reno, Governor George W. Bush of Texas has said he might go for a stay for a prisoner who is scheduled to be executed so the DNA testing can be double-checked. Do you have any comment on that?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I'm not familiar with the facts of that case, or the record in that case, so I don't think it would be wise for me to comment.

Q Do you have any comment on his overall criminal justice record in the State of Texas?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: No.

Q While we're on --

Q Actually, on that, one of the things that the Republicans have brought up in the campaign -- more, actually, in

Congress -- and that Bush has criticized about the Clinton administration implicitly is the enforcement of gun cases. It's something that's been trotted out every time there has been a gun control debate in Congress. They say that, or they assert, that the Justice Department isn't doing a vigorous enough job prosecuting gun cases. What is your evaluation of that? Your job?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: What we have tried to do is focus on the major violent organizations, those that convey the terror, the horror of crime, and get them convicted and put away for a very long time. We have worked with state and local law enforcement over the last seven and a half years to ensure an effective prosecution of smaller gun cases.

For example, in Boston, we have taken certain cases and the local DA has taken certain cases, based on what is in the best interest of the community.

In Richmond, through Project Exile, the feds have taken most of the cases. Laws are different in different states, and so we have got to adjust. We're working on other areas, and we have increased the number of gun prosecutions state and federally.

I'm not as interested in numbers as I am in results, and I think we're seeing results in a reduction in crime in this country that I think has occurred because people have put aside partisan political rhetoric in communities and have figured out who can do what best and how it should be done, and prioritizing their efforts.

Q But as far as targeting the serious gun traffickers, the study that came out from Syracuse at the end of last year, found that the severity, the length of sentences, of ATF cases has actually gone down significantly in the last six or seven years.

There was some indication that you were going to look at those numbers back when that came out. Do you believe that they have an accurate gauge of sentences going down?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think ATF has suffered some budget reductions. I'll ask Myron to give you the details, to make sure that I am correct.

And I think that has probably well had an impact.

Q Ms. Reno, we've heard a strong opinion from Joel Klein on the Microsoft matter. Do you have any opinion that you'd like to express about how Microsoft has conducted itself and generally about how it does business?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. I'd rather let the court decide the case.

Q Ms. Reno, on the -- there is a -- (inaudible) -- on the paper today; the government test-fired a Stinger missile in Florida, I think it was a month ago, on the TWA 800 case. Did the Justice Department play any role at all? And why in your opinion, is that being done if the FBI has concluded that there was no missile fired?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I just learned about it this morning in the paper, as well.

So I'll ask Myron to check into it and try to answer your question.

Q Do you have just sort of a gut reaction, if you will, to this? Were you surprised to see this?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Now, you know I am not going to do gut reactions with you. (Laughter.) I'd just get myself in trouble.

(Laughter.)

Q Ms. Reno, one of the reasons you picked Senator Danforth as special counsel investigating the Waco matter was his political independence. Some credible reports indicate that Governor Bush has at least approached the senator as a possible vice presidential candidate this fall and has asked the special counsel whether his investigation will be

cleared out of the way in time for a fall campaign. Do you have any concerns that the Waco investigation could be politically tainted? Or has you taken steps to make sure that it is not tainted?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am sure, if it materialized, that Senator Danforth and I would talk about it and deal with it.

Q Has such a conversation taken place?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Has Senator Danforth told you about any contact --

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q -- from Governor Bush?

Q Would you talk to him yourself or -- I mean, I thought you were recused from the matter. Would you be able to talk to him about this type of subject, or would you have to defer to the deputy?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We would look at it and make a determination, since I'm the one that selected him. And I would discuss with the deputy the issue of recusal and make a determination as to who should make the contact.

Q Attorney General Reno, excuse me, if I might return the subject to Microsoft. On April 28th, when the government --

when the Antitrust Division first proposed the breakup of Microsoft, we asked Assistant Attorney General Klein if in fact the U.S. government was one of the mainstays of the Microsoft monopoly because you know, the FBI has 24,000 PCs and the Antitrust Division has 11,000 PCS, the INS has -- oh, what is it? -- 23,000 PCs, and they all run on Microsoft Windows.

And he said well, that's a matter of procurement. He couldn't answer that.

And so we're wondering if we could take it to the top with you.

Do you think it's likely in the future that the U.S. government will be procuring other types of operating systems apart from Microsoft?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What we want to do, just aside from the Microsoft case, so let me answer your question generally, is in procurement buy the best equipment possible at the lowest price possible to benefit the American taxpayers. We think we can do that more effectively if we have greater competition.

Q Ms. Reno, back to TWA 800 just for a moment. Sitting here now, do you have any doubts at all about the conclusions of the government that there was no criminal activity involved in that crash?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As sure as I can be about anything. But you always look for additional leads or other circumstances.

But I have no reason to question it at this time.

Q Ms. Reno, if I can sneak one more in, isn't the government's purchase of machines operating with Windows software tacit admission that at least for the moment, this is the lowest cost and best system for government use? I mean, aren't you tacitly endorsing Microsoft?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Under -- I don't want to get into a discussion of the Microsoft case because I think that should be litigated in court. But let's go to another case.

I don't think that you endorse something by purchasing it, if that's the only game in town.

Q There are alternative operating systems.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: If that's the only game in town in terms of an effective machine, low price, the lowest price available.

I'll ask Myron to give you whatever you need in terms of procurement policy.

But the whole thrust of the anti-trust effort is to create competition, good competition, vigorous competition. America was not made the industrial giant of the world by the robber barons alone. It was made the industrial giant of the world by competition, by encouraging new developments, by encouraging young entrepreneurs to break into the market.

It's the best system I've seen so far.

Q Thank you.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Thank you.

Q Ms. Reno --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Yeeesss? (Laughter.)

Q Would you have -- there has been another tragic shooting in a school close to your home in Florida, and I wondered if you had any comment with regard to how you felt about that and what it might mean?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think it's very important that we not jump to conclusions, because each one of these tragedies probably has a different origin, different, sometimes subtle, differences and causes. But what I see are young people and children crying out for supervision, for attention, for guidance, for all that it takes to grow up in a complex society with so many different pressures on you. And I think we've got to renew our efforts in that regard.

Thank you.

END.