



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Press Conference

HON. JANET RENO, UNITED STATES ATTORNEY GENERAL

Thursday, March 5, 1998

9:30 a.m.

P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:30 a.m.)

QUESTION: Good morning.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Good morning.

QUESTION: Shall we have at you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Oh, that sounds ominous.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, is the Justice Department investigating as well as reviewing allegations against Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr in regards to his representation of General Motors?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have just received that, and we are reviewing it.

QUESTION: And is the Justice Department still reviewing the allegations from Representative Conyers, Senator Torricelli and, I believe, Attorneys Speights and Ginsburg?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes.

QUESTION: Which entity in Justice is doing the reviewing, is it OPR?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are all reviewing it to determine the appropriate course of action.

QUESTION: You have had the letter from Conyers for quite some time now. And I believe he sent another letter, complaining that he has not had a response yet. What is taking so long to even decide who should do it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As you know, this is a novel issue. We are certainly going to respond to the Congressman. And we will try to do so with all deliberate speed, consistent with making the proper determination.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, when you say, in answer to my question, that you just received that, what was it that you received, a letter or a --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I just received an urgent notice, describing the problem.

QUESTION: From?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it was -- I am not sure -- I will ask Bert to let you know how it came through the Department.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, you told us earlier that it was very important to allow Mr. Starr to do his work with independence. Is there concern on your part that all these complaints might impede that, and is that part of your deliberations?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I cannot really comment further, because, as I have told you in the past, I try not to comment with respect to matters involving the Independent Counsel so that I do nothing that would impair that independence.

QUESTION: Do you continue to have complete confidence in Mr. Starr's office -- in Mr. Starr in his office?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, I do not comment with respect to it, because I have tried to make sure he is independent and being independent, I am not familiar with the details of how his office works. So I could not comment.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, has Mr Starr complained to you about -- (off microphone)  
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ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would let Mr. Starr speak for himself.

QUESTION: But, Ms. Reno, I suspect you can speak to good cause for removal. Is there really a definition anyplace of exactly what constitutes good cause?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: These would be all the matters that I would not comment on. Again, I think we are in the context of a situation where I simply should not comment.

QUESTION: Can we ask, is Mr. Starr --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You can ask anything you want.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: I probably will.

Can we ask if Mr. Starr is regularly contacting the Department? Is he regularly consulting with the Department?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think Mr. Starr would have to comment with respect to any actions he takes.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno -- (off microphone) -- how his office runs, and if you could explain, how can you carry out your duties to remove him if there is gross misconduct, say, in the conduct of his office?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: If that matter came to our attention and if we were able to justify exercising our authority, we would do so.

QUESTION: But could you describe -- let us get some feel for what reviewing it needs? I mean, is that simply that people look over the letter and say, what are we going to do with this? Or is it something more systematic than that? And is it also -- (off microphone) -- by the pending court matter?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As Mr. Holder indicated last week, the fact that a court matter or a court proceeding is pending is certainly one of the factors being consider. With respect to how we are reviewing it, it is consistent with the processes of the Department as we deal with a new issue that the Department is confronting.

QUESTION: When you said, we are all reviewing it, does that mean various sections of the Justice Department?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The Deputy and myself and the people that work with us.

QUESTION: Since Mr. Starr was authorized by you to go into the matter of Lewinsky and the deposition on the Jones case, since he got that authorization, has he been back to you with any of the results of the investigation coming from his office or from the new grand jury? Have you done a review of his work?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, Mr. Starr would have to comment on any contacts that he has made or any actions that he has taken.

QUESTION: When you talk about court proceedings, are you factoring in that Judge Johnson, in the end, could ask the U.S. Attorney or could appoint a special counsel herself to investigate allegations of leaks out of Mr. Starr's office?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment other than to say that it is a factor.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, on the question of this question of good cause, you said that if the Justice Department were made aware of problems -- what are the mechanisms by which the Justice Department can be made aware of problems other than outside persons such as Representative Conyers or others filing complaints? Is there any mechanism that the Justice Department itself has on an ongoing basis to evaluate in any way what the special prosecutor is doing?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, if there is any matter that is brought to our attention, it will be handled appropriately based on the circumstances that exist at the time.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, is it appropriate for the Justice Department to communicate with Judge Holloway to see where her deliberations are? Are you attempting to do that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment.

QUESTION: Has the DEA finished its response to the internal review on physician-assisted suicide?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes, it has.

QUESTION: What were the results of that response?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We had a meeting, and I am now reviewing that response.

QUESTION: Can you give us a timetable on when you might let us know about what the review said?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am anxious to have it resolved as soon as possible.

QUESTION: Will that be in the next few days, do you think?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't know.

QUESTION: Switching gears to the Internet and off-shore gambling. There were some indictments handed down yesterday. And you made some comments to denote some concern. Could you elaborate a bit?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The Internet is an extraordinarily wonderful tool for the future, a tool for communication, a tool for learning and a tool for bringing us together. But it is, at the same time, a tool that can be used to commit crimes, whether it be gambling or pornography or conveying pornography, or fraud. And what we want to do is be in a position to make sure nobody abuses this tool, in terms of committing crimes, and if they do, they know they will be held accountable.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, what is the violation that these folks are charged with, is it wire fraud?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That is my understanding, but I will ask Bert to give you the absolutely correct cite so I do not mis-cite it.

QUESTION: I guess I am curious about the Department's decision to prosecute, given that all of these entities are offshore.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is clear, under our law, that this is a violation of our law, that you cannot go offshore and convey the crime to our shores. I think this presents the classic example of what the challenge of the Internet brings for law enforcement, that boundaries, in many instances, become meaningless, and that we are going to have to work together with other countries around the world to make sure that you cannot go offshore and hide, you cannot go online and hide, you cannot do online what you cannot do in a house -- I mean in a store in Washington, D.C.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, what did you think of Bill Gates appearance this week?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I did not see it.

QUESTION: Did you hear about it or read about it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I read about it, but not enough to form an opinion.

QUESTION: Will it affect your investigation of Microsoft?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: If there was any information that he developed and presented at the hearings that is evidence and that relates and is relevant, that would certainly be taken into consideration.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, you called the Internet an extraordinary tool. Have you been on the Internet yet? I know you have been past this before.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes, I have been on the Internet. Not enough to be at all -- I cannot talk the language. I do not profess to be an expert. But I see enough of the wonder of it. I mean, it is like a miracle. And a miracles in terms of people learning from it, people who have never been interested in a variety of subjects, now start pulling things off the Internet and are sending me things. It really is fascinating.

But, at the same time, it presents a challenge for law enforcement. And we are going to have to be able to meet that challenge, consistent with constitutional due process and the laws of our country. And it is a challenge for law enforcement.

QUESTION: You talked last week about challenges to the infrastructure. What is that all about? Do you know something that we do not know? Is there something that is imminent?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not think I know anything that you do not know. But I think it is important to understand where we are at when we speak of the infrastructure of this country, what we are talking about. I was at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory last week. And I talked about the need to protect the systems and the networks that make our Nation go around.

We are the most advanced nation in the world, and we rely on technology probably more than any other nation in the world to do the things that we all take for granted. When you make a phone call, for example, you are relying on an extensive telecommunications system. When you get a glass of water, you are counting on a complex water filtration system. When you buy fresh vegetables in the market, you are relying on a vast transportation system that is now timed systematically with automation. And when you turn on the light switch, you are relying on an intricate energy distribution structure.

That is what we are talking about when we talk about this Nation's critical infrastructure. And it is something that is a part of our lives.

I cannot underestimate the threat of an attack on our infrastructure. If somebody can, as I have told you before, sit in a kitchen in St. Petersburg, Russia, and steal from somebody in this country, we have got to be prepared. And to that end, we have created a new center, the National Infrastructure Protection Center, to cope with this threat. It will be responsible for detecting, preventing and responding to cyber and physical attacks. And it will also oversee the FBI computer crime investigations.

But it cannot be done alone. Because we have a new technology, a technology where government and the private sector must work together. These are private sector systems as well as public sector systems. It is national defense, but it is transportation. And it is very important, as I stressed in California last Friday, that we build a partnership with the private sector, that we have an exchange, that we have a means of exchanging information, and exchanging information concerning threats.

It is very important that we work with State and local law enforcement and State and local agencies to ensure that they have the expertise and that equipment is available to them that can help them address problems. And as I found at the National Laboratory, it is very important that we work with academia. Because they are doing some marvelous things in terms of problem-solving for law enforcement.

If we can work together, we can minimize the threat and we can protect this infrastructure. But that is what it is all about. It is a glass of water and a light switch. But it is a very complicated system that runs that glass of water to our dinner table and that turns on that light switch.

QUESTION: Well, Ms. Reno, while we are talking about technology, do you have an E-mail address? (Off microphone) -- leave the room if you do.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I do not have an E-mail address.

QUESTION: Can I ask a couple of follow-up questions about infrastructure? Number one, where will the National Infrastructure Center be?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It will be at the FBI Headquarters Building. And what we are doing is -- it is important that the different agencies of government, the Department of Energy, the Department of Treasury, the Department of Defense, all of us who are involved with critical infrastructures, work together. It will be important that the Department of Energy be involved so that they can make sure that, from their experience with the private sector, that is considered in building the partnership that is so important.

QUESTION: My other question is, the folks who have been involved in the infrastructure effort so far, the panel that made the recommendations to the President, for example, say that the sort of weak link in this chain is it depends on industry fessing up to its own security problems, so that everybody can get a better idea of how big this problem is, and that folks coming to the table are reluctant to admit their own vulnerabilities.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think this is the reason it is so important to build a partnership with the private sector, to let them know that they can come to us and that they can trust us. It is building trust. It is building confidence. The Center may not know, for example, some of the issues that are vital to the

private sector. And the private sector might not realize some of the implications of law enforcement.

But one thing is for sure: We are all in this together. And there comes a point, sooner or later, where the private sector must come to law enforcement. If they do not, there is too much at risk.

And there is a point where law enforcement simply cannot do the job without the private sector. So this envisions new partnerships that law enforcement generally has not been involved in on a day-to-day basis. And it is a new partnership with a number of agencies.

It is an extraordinary challenge. But I am very impressed with the way the agencies are coming together, the way that the FBI and the Criminal Division are pursuing this, and the interest that has been evidenced by the private sector and academia in really creating some good working relationships.

QUESTION: Just to follow up there. Will there be some sort of a liaison or a formal liaison with the private sector out of the Center?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We very much hope that the private sector will be represented at the Center, so that there can be a good exchange. At the same time, we are committed to doing outreach in every venue that we can find to explain, to answer questions. And I ask a question sometimes and get some marvelous answers. The question I oftentimes ask is, if you were Attorney General, what would you do to make this partnership more effective and to build trust and confidence?

And I had the opportunity to do that last Friday, and got some really thoughtful, thoughtful comments. And so it is the outreach. It is bringing people together. It is building the Center so that representatives of the other government agencies and State and local law enforcement can be together, to understand who does what in the process.

It is very important that we maintain our traditional lines of law enforcement jurisdiction, and that agencies responsible for law enforcement pursue that, that the other agencies pursue their obligations and responsibilities. If we can work together in that Center, as I see every indication that we can, it will have, I think, a great effect in this area.

QUESTION: I wonder if I could follow up.

Last week, a panel of engineers from the Sandia National Labs told Rep -- Senator Saxon's committee that Radio Shack technology can be used to generate radio frequency disruption of computer systems, the very infrastructure that you described. Their sense was that this is something that is not fully understood or fully appreciated. Has this been discussed at the Center?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not discussed it with anybody. But it surprised me in the sense of just the remarkable challenges that we face in all of information technology, and the vast development of information just in the 5 years that I have been Attorney General. That is the reason I think it is so important that scientists and law enforcement agents work together, to say, okay, now, we see this problem; how do we solve it?

Some of the research will be short-term, aimed at an immediate problem. In other instances, we should engage in more long-range research. And we are trying to plan accordingly, so that we will be prepared for 5 years down the line.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Ms. Reno, the Justice Department sent over an anti-money laundering proposals over to Congress. And in it, it set up some of the provisions for suspicious behavior. Does it also include lowering the limits on the amount of money that someone can wire out of the country?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I will ask Bert to get you the exact language on it.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, how close is the Department to making a decision on whether to file an antitrust complaint against the Microsoft Corporation? And has the Department hired additional attorneys to gear up for such a --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I will ask Bert to put you in touch with the Antitrust Division so that you can get any personnel changes that have been made. And with respect to time frames, I just do not comment about whether or not or what is going to happen. There is an investigation. It will be done based on the evidence and the law. And the timing will be dictated by the evidence.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, back to the matter of money laundering and other drug-related matters. Ms. Feinstein and Senator Coverdell have both strongly objected to the certification of Mexico. The DEA has said, and I quote them, during the past year, the Government of Mexico has not accomplished its counternarcotics goals or succeeded in cooperation with the U.S. Government. And they say, further, that the scope of Mexican trafficking has increased significantly. Yet the Drug Czar, Barry McCaffrey, has said that the cooperation -- there is absolutely superlative cooperation between the United States and Mexico.

Ma'am, my question is, should Mexico have received a national security waiver?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I indicated when I was with Secretary Albright, I believe that it is appropriate that Mexico was certified. I have a close, good working relationship with Attorney General Medraza. And I have had a very good meeting and expect a good working relationship with the new Foreign Minister, Mrs. Greene.

Mexico has -- President Zedillo has described drugs as one of its principal national security problems. From my experience to date with Attorney General Medraza, he is doing everything that he can against some significant odds.

As I have indicated, and I believe as Tom Constantine has indicated, there have been some successes this year. We are developing trust with special units. We are exchanging information with respect to special units. Extradition continues. And there is a good understanding with respect to extradition.

They have enacted laws, and I think they are beginning to implement them. We are seeing more arrests. I think, based on my law enforcement observations, which includes a wide range of things -- eradication, arrests, extradition, exchange of information -- that they should be certified.

QUESTION: Yes, ma'am, but this statement --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What you are doing is reading from the newspaper. And remember, don't believe everything you read in the newspaper.

QUESTION: Well, I believe that the DEA has said that the scope of Mexican trafficking has increased significantly. Do you believe that that is the case? And, even more importantly, a question I asked Mr. Holder, more importantly, is the United States threatened -- is the national security of the United States threatened to a very significant extent due to this drug trafficking?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think that drug trafficking is a real threat to this country. And that is the reason we have put so much resources into it. I have not quantified whether trafficking has increased or decreased, because I am looking at the steps being taken by the Mexican Government in the area that I am most familiar with -- to wit, the Attorney General's Office. And I think that steps are being taken there that indicate their effort that justifies certification.

I think Mr. Constantine and I would both say much, much more needs to be

done. And we look forward to working with Mexico to get that done.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, why has the Department pulled back on its plan to put Eric Rudolph on the 10 Most Wanted List?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would refer you to the FBI, because I am generally not involved in who is on the 10 Most Wanted List. But while you are asking that question, I would just ask, if anyone has any information concerning where Mr. Rudolph may be, I would ask them to call 1-800-575-9873 or 1-888-ATF-BOMB. There is \$100,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Eric Rudolph.

QUESTION: Why do you think he has been able to to allude capture for so long?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't know.

QUESTION: Have you reorganized the investigation -- (off microphone) -- the Olympic Park bombing in Atlanta?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Mr. Holder is working with everybody concerned, and I am sure of close cooperation on the investigation.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, you may have just answered this question. I sometimes cannot hear Stephanie's questions. But there was a Birmingham policeman killed in that -- well, she whispers in your ear -- it is very tough to hear.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: I speak for all of us who sit below the -- (off microphone).

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Next week, you can come up here.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, hearing me has never been a problem for anyone in this room.

I apologize. It is Stephanie Lambidokis. That is L-a-m --

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: For the people writing the transcript. I am only thinking of them.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: There was a Birmingham policeman who was killed -- an off-duty policeman who was killed in that explosion. And just to follow up on her question. In looking at potentially reorganizing who is in charge of the investigation, the Birmingham Police Department made it very clear that they want to be part of the investigation because they lost one of their own. How do you accommodate that if the Birmingham bomb investigation is to be folded into the Federal task force?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it is absolutely essential that the Birmingham Police Department be involved in whatever is done with respect to the conduct of the investigation. And I am going to make sure that they are.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno -- (off microphone) -- 1995, requested Washington State Governor Mike Lowry -- (off microphone). After the investigation finished and you said there was no evidence of prosecutable violations -- (off microphone). But according to a series of articles that ran in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer last week, or over the last couple of weeks -- (off microphone) -- a number of the witnesses and some of the people who lived in the town, there were in fact a lot of violations of law -- (off microphone).

(Off microphone) -- the children say -- one of the children who were interviewed -- (off microphone) -- sort of coerced or sort of forced into testimony. Some of the witnesses said that the detectives pushed them into signing confessions. According to the FBI agent who conducted the investigation, they just looked over the court transcripts and did not interview anybody.

So I guess my question is, in light of the new -- in light of these interviews in the Post-Intelligence, does that warrant a new investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: If there is any new information that would be available in those articles, we will certainly take a look at it. But I think -- and I have not seen the articles myself -- but what was asked of us is that we review the prosecutor's actions. And we do not have supervisory responsibility over State prosecutors. The principles of Federalism indicate a clear distinction.

We reviewed it. We did not conduct a full investigation. We reviewed it to

determine whether there was any possible basis for Federal action. And determined that there was not. If there is any new information that would give rise to some Federal action, we would certainly review it.

QUESTION: The plaintiffs in the Winstar S&L investigation, in which the Court of Claims ruled that the government had breached its contract with S&L's by raising the capitalization limits, are saying that as they embark on discussions with the Justice Department to settle these cases they are unsure whether or not there is money in the Treasury to finance any settlement that would be negotiated in the next year or so. Are you confident that the Department is negotiating with money behind it if it is necessary to settle it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am amazed. I would not negotiate something that I could not carry through on.

QUESTION: Do you have any idea -- speaking of Winstar -- do you have any idea how much this particular case is going to end up costing the government? I would say we are estimating tens of billions, 100 billion.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am not going to do "what ifs" at this point. I think this will be something that will be considered.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you.

QUESTION: (Off microphone) -- doing any special -- (off microphone) --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Who?

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: I would yield to -- (off microphone) --

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: If I can ask just one sort of general question. Is it unusual for an investigator to be hired to investigate the opposing side's legal team? I mean, you have been a prosecutor. Can you comment on that generally?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You are very shrewd, because you did not put it in

the context of a particular case. But since we all know what case you are talking about, I cannot comment.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: You have been here 5 years. Are you getting tired yet?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No.

QUESTION: You are about to set a record.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No.

QUESTION: No?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No.

QUESTION: (Off microphone) --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, no. I am not interested in a record. It has been an extraordinary opportunity to use the law, to try to serve the American people the right way.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(Whereupon, at 10:00 a.m., the press conference concluded.)