

News Conference on the Arrest of a Unabomber Suspect with Janet Reno

April 4, 1996

Attorney General Janet Reno talked with reporters about the FBI arrest of a Montana man who may be a suspect in the Unabomber case. She also expressed sorrow at the death of Secretary Brown and others.

Justice department weekly media availability with attorney general Janet Reno
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This is a rush transcript.

Press: Good afternoon.

Janet Reno: Good afternoon.

First I want to note my great sadness over the loss of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown. He was so eloquent and articulate and effective in our Cabinet meetings. He had such great warmth and energy. He loved this country. He did so much for it, and he died serving it. Show Less Text

We have also lost Charles Meissner, who was the assistant secretary of Commerce for international economic policy. He was the husband of Doris Meissner, our commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. They made a great team, and he was so supportive of her efforts here at the department. He was a scholar, he was a devoted public servant, and he was a wonderful father, and we're going to miss him very much. Show Less Text

All those who were on that mission were serving their country. We grieve for them, and we honor them for their great service. On behalf of everyone at the Department of Justice, I extend our heartfelt sympathy to all the families. Our thoughts and our prayers are with them. Show Less Text

Next I want to state that on Wednesday, agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the Postal Inspection Service began executing a search warrant at the residence of Theodore John Kaczynski near Lincoln, Montana. That activity is continuing. Also on Wednesday, Mr. Kaczynski was taken into custody by the agents. Show Less Text

He has been presented today in federal district court in Helena, Montana, charged as a result of the search with one count of Title 26, United States Code, Section 5861, which is possessing – illegally possessing a destructive device. Nothing further can be said at this time. Show Less Text

Press: Ms. Reno – are you finished? Let me ask a negative. Has the Department or the FBI ruled out any accomplices to this suspect, or alleged accomplices to the suspect? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: As you know, I really cannot comment on a pending matter.

Press: Ms. Reno, is he the Unabomber?

Janet Reno: As you know, I really cannot comment on a pending matter.

Press: Ms. Reno, this subject has lived in this remote cabin for almost 20 years. He had no car, no electricity, yet somehow he's managed to allegedly get around the country mailing explosives and other missives to some very particular targets. Given those facts, can the department or the FBI even at any point rule out any accomplices; that this is one person? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: All I can say is that the investigation is continuing.

Press: Ms. Reno, how do you get from the point of- (inaudible) - to linking him to the Unabomber crimes? What evidence do you need to assemble to make that case? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: Again, I won't comment on the pending matter except, as I've already said, the search is continuing.

Press: Ms. Reno, the charge against Mr. Kaczynski is the exact same charge that was originally leveled against James Nichols in the beginning of the Oke (sp) City bombing investigation, and that charge was later dropped against Mr. Nichols amidst criticism that it was a penny ante kind of charge to bring against somebody. Show Less Text

Janet Reno: There you go, generalizing.

Press: Do you know on what grounds the original search warrant was executed? You charged him with things that came out of the search warrant, but on what basis was the original search warrant done? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: Again, to comment on a matter like that would be to comment on evidence, and that would not be -

Press: Ms. Reno, could you comment in general on how good a job the FBI and the other agencies have done in this case?

Janet Reno: Again, what I think is very important is that the investigation is continuing, agencies have been working together, they have done an excellent job, but we have much to do yet. Show Less Text

Press: If -

Ms. Reno, what - I'm sorry. Go ahead.

If in the end he is indeed the Unabomber, I know there's a million dollars reward money out there, and if it turns out that his brother turned him in, would the family be eligible for that money? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: We don't do "what ifs".

Press: Ms. Reno, what will happen to Mr. Kaczynski now? Will he stay in Montana, or is it the intention of the authorities to move him?

Janet Reno: As I have said, the investigation will continue and we will make such judgments as are appropriate as the investigation unfolds.

Press: For now he'll stay in -

Can you tell us – (inaudible) – Kaczynski came to the attention of the FBI or the Justice Department?

Janet Reno: Again, if I were to comment on that, I would discuss evidence, and that would not be right at this time.

Press: Are other parties still under investigation?

Janet Reno: I cannot comment any aspect of the continuing investigation.

Press: Ms. Reno, where were these FBI agents from?

Ms. Reno, can you tell us anything about the –

Ms. Reno, is the department going to seek a warrant for DNA materials from this subject, or will it use DNA material from his residence?

Janet Reno: Again, as I have said, it would not be right to comment on a pending matter or what steps we would be taking in the course of this investigation.

Press: How long will it take to evaluate all that stuff you got out of the cabin? How many – are we talking days, weeks? How long?

Janet Reno: We will do it as thoroughly and as completely as possible. And I never put time limits on anything because I don't know what I will find.

Press: Does he have a bond hearing coming up or an arraignment or anything?

Janet Reno: That will depend on his public defender. I understand that he is being held at this moment without bond.

Press: General, can you talk to us about the number of people involved in the investigation, or resources, money spent, anything along those lines, to get an idea of how vast the investigation has been? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: I would simply refer you to the FBI for specifics.

Press: Ms. Reno, there was a debate within the Bureau about whether to put out more information or no information. Are you now – are you reassured and confident that you made the right decision in asking the Washington Post and the New York Times to publish the Manifesto? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: If I were to answer your question, it would require that I again comment on –

Press: No it doesn't.

Janet Reno: Well, since you don't know what it is, you can't answer that question, and I can. And I cannot comment on it.

Press: On a broader note, to what extent – the first anniversary of the Oklahoma bombing is coming up, another group in Montana, this case here.

To what extent do you think this makes the case for stronger domestic anti-terrorism laws?

Janet Reno: I think each case has to be taken on its own basis. This case will speak for itself as the evidence comes to light. And I think we just have got to look at each case and make a judgment on that case as to what's important. Show Less Text

Press: Ms. Reno, how long can Mr. Kaczynski be held under the present charge? Is there any limit under that law and will he be held without bond?

Janet Reno: That will be up to the court and those – that matter will have to be litigated in court.

Press: Ms. Reno, the arrest warrant's a public document. Can you characterize it or describe it in any way?

Janet Reno: No. I think it is important that you not characterize it but let the document speak for itself.

Press: Ms. Reno, there were a couple of apparent bomb explosions in Oregon this morning not related to the Unabomber. But I'm wondering, have those incidents been brought to your attention? The FBI is apparently involved in that – that – Show Less Text

Janet Reno: I have not gotten specifics. I have heard, but again, we hear different comments, so I cannot verify any reports.

Press: Are you concerned about that incident, or do you have any information at all on it?

Janet Reno: I don't have specifics on it, and so I would refer you to the FBI for anything that is appropriate to say.

Press: Ms. Reno, also in Montana, the situation still ongoing with the Freemen, could you tell us anything about the negotiations that are going on?

Janet Reno: No. The – we are continuing in every way possible to resolve this matter peacefully and without disturbance.

Press: Ms. Reno, as it's clear we all want to know if this could potentially be the Unabomber. And, of course, that's what you want to

Press: know, too. Do you have any sense of how long it will take to answer that question?

Janet Reno: No. Other than to say that the FBI and the other agencies involved are working on this with as much diligence as I've ever seen in an investigation. I think they've done a good job and they will continue to do it in a thorough, complete manner. Show Less Text

Press: What are the applicable statutes for the Unabomber crimes themselves?

Janet Reno: Again, I don't want to comment with respect to any aspect of the investigation because it would go again to the evidence in terms of showing what was applicable and what was an appropriate statute. Show Less Text

Press: (Off mike) – investigation so far have you been able to rule out any sort of, you know, participation by an accomplice at all here, or is that – ?

Janet Reno: Again, I would not comment.

You know me well enough by now to know that I just cannot comment on a pending investigation. It should be conducted thoroughly, completely, and then decisions made based on the evidence and the law. Show Less Text

Press: Would anyone from main Justice be going to Helena for this case?

Janet Reno: When you say going to Helena, we have already had people on the scene. But in terms of how this matter is handled, that will have to be litigated in court. Show Less Text

Press: Will the Unabomber investigation continue in areas beyond this suspect? In other words, is the Unabomber operation being dismantled around this arrest, or does it – Show Less Text

Janet Reno: Is it being what?

Press: Dismantled around this arrest, as far as looking for a particular suspect?

Janet Reno: Again, as I have said, this investigation continues. It continues in as thorough a manner as possible. It is not being dismantled and it will be continued until it is complete. Show Less Text

Press: The local sheriff out there has complained about being kept in the dark. Do you have any response?

Janet Reno: I think it's important that everybody understand that communications are difficult out there because of the phone situation and that everybody should try to work together as much as possible. Show Less Text

Press: (Off mike) – told about the surveillance or anything like that.

Janet Reno: Again, I think it's very important that everybody work together but everybody understand the demands being made on all concerned and try to work through it. Show Less Text

Press: (Off mike) – told about the surveillance?

Did he ask for a public offender, or was one assigned to him?

Janet Reno: I don't know.

Press: You've mentioned a couple times here that the question of what happens to Mr. Kaczynski now has to be litigated. What is there to litigate? What's unusual about this? Or what's the question that's up in the air that needs further addressing in court? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: That will depend on whatever his lawyer would like to raise, but those matters should be handled in court.

Press: Ms. Reno, can you give us any more details about how you were pointed in the direction of Kaczynski?

Janet Reno: If I were to do so, I would, again, have to comment on the evidence, and that's just not right.

Staff: This is our general availability, so if you have questions on any subjects, they're welcome.

Press: Ms. Reno, on something that I'm sure is probably the furthest thing from your mind but you may have to address, what happens with Mr. Pearson's (sp) investigation at this point? Do you make a recommendation – Show Less Text

Yeah. Do you make a recommendation to the appeals court? Does that –

Janet Reno: I think that in this context, this is a matter that will ultimately be discussed with the independent counsel, but it's a matter that should be addressed at some time in the future. Show Less Text

Press: Ms. Reno, would that be addressed by Justice with the IC, or does the IC have to deal with it with the court, the special division?

Janet Reno: That would be what would be developed from a conversation with the independent counsel.

Press: Ms. Reno, without the parents or the family giving you this information, are you all confident that you would have – (word inaudible) – on the same person within due course or – Show Less Text

Janet Reno: Again, that would be to comment on the evidence, and I don't think that would be right.

Press: What's taking place in Riverside, the Riverside investigation –

Janet Reno: The FBI is conducting a joint investigation with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office, the Civil Rights Division, the United States Attorney for the Central District of California, and the district attorney for Los Angeles County are working together to pursue this investigation. Show Less Text

Press: Ms. Reno, Human Rights Watch and other civil organizations wrote letters to you expressing their complaint about this case, the Riverside case, and they suggested some measures to avoid in the future. Are you going to take upon consideration these recommendations? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: I've not received those letters.

Press: What would you recommend or what do you think can be done to avoid in the future these kind of incidents?

Janet Reno: I think – I don't – have not received those letters so I can't comment with respect to them. But what we need to do is to make sure that this investigation is conducted as vigorously and as thoroughly as possible, and that appropriate action be taken based on the evidence developed. Show Less Text

Press: The GSA said that they will be watching on the commemoration of the Oklahoma City bombing date to make sure that there's enough security and everything. Is there anything in particular that DOJ will be doing? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: We can't comment on specific security measures except to say that we have worked over this past year with the General Services Administration and the United States Marshals Service in reviewing security requirements for all federal facilities and in taking steps where appropriate to enhance them. And we will continue all of those efforts to the extent possible. Show Less Text

Press: In the Martin Pang extradition case, is there anything new on the steps the government might take now?

Janet Reno: I have not received any new information since last week.

Press: Is it your understanding that it is now basically up to the State Department to pursue that, or is it still within the purview –

Janet Reno: The State Department has worked closely with us, and together we will continue to pursue all possible opportunities for making sure that he is tried for the crime he truly committed. Show Less Text

Press: The District Metropolitan Police Department is the focus of an administrative investigation regarding its compliance with civil rights laws, (with ?) Title 6.

They've come under investigation from the administrative – in this administrative context because of this. They received federal grants for various law enforcement programs. Part of the final report says that they are indeed violating the civil rights of Hispanic officers at the department. Should we take this as a signal that the Justice Department is going to be looking with greater vigor at whether departments that receive federal funding are complying with civil rights laws? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: As I understand it, the Civil Rights Division is continuing its usual review and will continue to pursue its – what it has over this past year.

Press: What is the administration's position on local police departments' playing a role in illegal immigration – in curbing illegal immigration? There are two provisions in both the Senate and the House that would broaden the powers of local police departments, state and local. Show Less Text

Janet Reno: I have not looked at the specific provisions in their latest form. But what we have tried to do, in terms of the southwest border, is to work with local law enforcement so that in situations where they're not enforcing border or immigration laws, but where they can be of service in terms of surveillance or they can be of service in other ways, that we work together to ensure that our resources are used as wisely as possible. Show Less Text

Press: Should their policing powers be broadened, though? I mean, should they be able to arrest someone they think maybe is an illegal immigrant?

Janet Reno: I think that it is important that the – that we differentiate between law enforcement authority and border control.

Press: Ms. Reno, in the Riverside case, what – I realize that you have to do an investigation, but ultimately what is there to investigate? Is – are there any conceivable circumstances under which that amount of force could be justified? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: Again, it would be inappropriate for me to make a comment before the investigation was complete and an appropriate decision made.

Press: Ms. Reno, can you tell us whether or not the case against Mr. Kaczynski – or at least the investigation – will be pursued from Montana, or will he be moved to some other venue? Do you know? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: That will depend on the course of the investigation and the evidence developed.

Press: Without commenting on the specifics of the Unabomber case, could you give us a sense of whether or not you think this is the biggest breakthrough in the case; are you optimistic that this case will be resolved soon; or just some sense of how you're feeling about this? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: I think it would be premature for me to comment. Hopefully, as the matter progresses and our determinations are made, we can reveal more.

Press: Can you confirm that (Marie ?) Kaczynski, an attorney in Washington, was the intermediary?

Janet Reno: Can't confirm anything in that regard.

Press: Ms. Reno, Duval Patrick's down in Alabama today talking with law enforcement about the church arsons down there, and there are some hearings coming up on the Hill. Are you concerned that the sort of political climate in the country right now is making these kinds of crimes more likely? And secondly, do you think that hearings are a good or bad idea? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: I can't comment on the hearings because I don't know what the purposes are. I think it is important that this nation constantly be vigilant to anyone who would do something so terrible as burning a church or doing anything that perpetrates hate. It is for that reason that we have focused on hate crimes, on those that would indicate hatred of others based on race, ethnic background. And it is important for communities to speak out against such hatred and that everyone working together take effective action to stem it. Show Less Text

Press: Ms. Reno, apparently two ATF agents involved in the church bombing investigations have attended some of the rallies. Do you recommend that they be taken off the case? Show Less Text

Janet Reno: I understand that the Department of Treasury is reviewing that and they will give us their recommendation and we will consult together.

Press: Is there any doubt now that these church fires were racially motivated?

Janet Reno: Again, I think it's important that you take each case on a case-by-case basis, look at the evidence and the law and make a determination, and that's what we're in the process of doing. Show Less Text

Staff: Anything further?

Janet Reno: Thank you.

Yes?

Press: Ms. Reno, it's going to be a pretty sad Easter. Are you going to go home?

Janet Reno: No. No, I'll be here in Washington.

Staff: Thank you very much.

Janet Reno: Thank you.

A critique of his ideas & actions.



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