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Interim chair of the Democratic National Committee, Donna Brazile walks on stage to deliver remarks. | Getty

## **New email shows Brazile may have had exact wording of proposed town hall question before CNN**

By **HADAS GOLD** | 10/12/16 02:40 PM EDT

A new email obtained by POLITICO is shedding more light on the mystery of whether and how interim DNC chair Donna Brazile might have obtained the text of a proposed question from a town hall between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders in advance, and possibly

shared it with the Clinton campaign.

And now CNN, which co-hosted the town hall with cable network TV One, is pointing the finger at its media partner for what appears to be a breach of the traditional secrecy surrounding the questions for such events.

The email obtained by POLITICO was written by town hall co-moderator Roland Martin on the day of the town hall to CNN producers. But it shows him using word for word the language of a question that Brazile appeared to have sent to the Clinton campaign a day earlier. That email, from Brazile to the campaign, was included in yesterday's release of hacked emails by Wikileaks of Clinton campaign chair John Podesta.

Here's what the record shows: On March 12, Brazile, then vice chair of the DNC and a CNN and ABC contributor, allegedly wrote an email with the subject line "From time to time I get the questions in advance." It continues:

*Here's one that worries me about HRC.*

#### **DEATH PENALTY**

*19 states and the District of Columbia have banned the death penalty. 31 states, including Ohio, still have the death penalty. According to the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, since 1973, 156 people have been on death row and later set free. Since 1976, 1,414 people have been executed in the U.S. That's 11% of Americans who were sentenced to die, but later exonerated and freed. Should Ohio and the 30 other states join the current list and abolish the death penalty?*

Jennifer Palmieri, director of communications for the Clinton campaign, wrote back within three hours, seemingly not as worried:

*Hi. Yes, it is one she gets asked about. Not everyone likes her answer but can share it.*

She then instructs a copied employee to share the campaign's standard answer to the question to Brazile.

The next day, Roland Martin, a host on the TV One cable network who was co-hosting the town hall with CNN's Jake Tapper, sent an email to CNN producers with three questions, the third of which dealt with the death penalty. POLITICO obtained that email, and here's the text of the third question:

#### **DEATH PENALTY**

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The wording, spacing, capitalization are identical.

At the town hall later on the same day Martin sent the question to CNN producers, Martin introduced an audience member who asked Clinton about the death penalty with similar language.

"Secretary Clinton, since 1976, we have executed 1,414 people in this country. Since 1973, 156 who were convicted have been exonerated from the death row. This gentleman here is one of them. This is Ricky Jackson, wrongfully convicted of murder in 1975, he spent 39 years in prison. He is undecided. Ricky, what is your question?" Martin said before introducing questioner Ricky Jackson.

Martin initially said in an interview on Tuesday that he did not "share my questions with anybody. Literally. My executive producer wasn't even aware of what I was going to ask."

In a follow up interview on Tuesday, Martin said that he did send his questions to CNN via his producer and his TV One team.

In a follow up email on Wednesday, upon being informed of the email POLITICO had obtained, Martin said he did not believe had had consulted with Brazile ahead of the town hall.

"As far as consultation, I don't believe I did. I know I asked all of my social media followers for their input on what they wanted me to ask. I did the same for the Hillary Clinton town hall we did in South Carolina in 2014. And I know that I called Rep. Clyburn to lock down language on his 10-20-30 amendment. That is an issue I've pushed for several years. I also know I called other members of Congress to ask them specific questions about their various bills and their status. All of that informed my questions. That's called research," Martin wrote.

But he did not explain how Brazile could have had the same exact language of a proposed question a day before he submitted them to CNN producers. CNN, in turn, is pointing the finger at TV One.

“As we have said since news of this broke, CNN did not share any questions with Donna Brazile, or anyone else for that matter, prior to the town hall,” a CNN spokesperson said in an email to POLITICO. “Given that our broadcast partners for the town hall at TV One sent this question to us the day AFTER it appeared in Donna’s email, we have every reason to believe it came from them.”

In a statement on Tuesday, Brazile, whose contracts with CNN and ABC were suspended when she became interim DNC chair in July, denied receiving questions in advance or sharing them with the campaign, writing, in part, “As a longtime political activist with deep ties to our party, I supported all of our candidates for president. I often shared my thoughts with each and every campaign, and any suggestions that indicate otherwise are simply untrue. As it pertains to the CNN Debates, I never had access to questions and would never have shared them with the candidates if I did.”

Brazile also cautioned that the intelligence community has made it clear the Russian government is responsible for cyberattacks “aimed at interfering with our election, and that WikiLeaks is part of that effort.” The argument seems to suggest that some of the emails may be fakes, but no specific effort to authenticate or deny the authenticity of this email or any others in the most recent Wikileaks release has been made.

A Democratic party official suggested Brazile was simply preparing for a panel. She did appear on ABC’s “This Week” the same day as the town hall. But the death penalty was not discussed during that show.

Asked about the new email on Wednesday, a DNC spokesman referred POLITICO to Brazile’s previous statement.