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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:27 P.M. CDT

APRIL 29, 1976

THURSDAY  
(Conroe, Texas)

MR. NESSEN: I am trying to set something straight that has been getting out of hand. There have been some stories written suggesting that the White House planted six questions at the Contractors meeting. This grew out of a press release that the Contractors put out in advance, saying that, "The interests of the Contractors are reflected in the questions posed to the President, which are as follows:" This was put out before the briefing, before the forum. This refers to some stories, I understand, suggesting that the White House had planted six questions.

The fact is that these were six questions developed ahead of time by the Associated Builders and Contractors of Texas for members to ask the questions concerning their interest in certain areas. I understand the six questions were prepared ahead of time and were to be spread around among the members. Three questions were not answered and those three were to be sent back to the White House for the President to answer, and the answers will be sent back to the Association.

Vernon Bratten, President of the Greater Houston Builders Association, I believe, is the one that dreamed up the six questions, put the questions together, and parcelled out one or two that were asked that were of interest to the Contractors.

What I am really saying is the White House had nothing to do with advance planning of questions or arranging questions. There obviously were advance arrangements for those questions but it was done by the Contractors.

The only reason I asked you to stay here and let me tell you this is because I understand some stories have been broadcast that the White House planted the questions and I wanted to avoid other similar stories.

Q The President had no preparation? His answers were not prepared or discussed in advance?

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MR. NESSEN: No.

Q The President's answers were very, very detailed. Are you saying he had no advance knowledge of these questions?

MR. NESSEN: There was no preparation, Jim. This is the first time I ever saw this list of questions.

Q Has the Ford Committee ever prepared questions for the audience on Meet the Press?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge.

Q Ron, did the President have any idea that the cleared cut question was going to be asked?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he didn't know any question that would be asked.

Q Is the President not given a book ahead of his meetings so that the areas of questions are outlined to him?

MR. NESSEN: The way we have been doing this is, he gets a statewide briefing book in advance of his travels to different primary States and it covers the major issues of interest to that State. That is the case in Texas, but there was no special briefing that I know of prepared for the Contractors Association. In fact, I can show you the briefing he had for that meeting, if you are in doubt about it.

Q The Contractors meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q For instance, he is briefed on the North-South Louisiana issue before he goes into Louisiana, right?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

I will dig that out for you.

END (AT 12:32 P.M. CDT)