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GOP New Hampshire Debate

What seven candidates got wrong -- and right -- in a nationally televised debate.

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Summary

In the first New Hampshire debate among 2012 presidential hopefuls, we found a number of incorrect, misleading or shaky factual claims:

- Pawlenty was wrong when he boasted that he was "one of the few governors" to respond to a Bush request to send guardsmen to the southern border. In fact, all 50 states participated in that border operation.
- Romney claimed that "we didn't raise taxes in Massachusetts" to pay for his health care law. In fact, his successor imposed a \$1-a-pack tax increase on cigarettes to pay for the new law.
- Santorum claimed a Medicare advisory board created by the new federal health care law will result in a rationing of care for seniors. The law specifically says the board "shall not include any recommendation to ration health care."
- Santorum was wrong when he said the Obama administration is "against any kind of exploration offshore or in Alaska." The administration has approved 296 new permits for new offshore oil wells since taking office, and it is considering granting the first permits in Alaska since 2004.
- Bachmann claimed the Congressional Budget Office "has said that Obamacare will kill 800,000 jobs." That's a distortion. CBO said some Americans would work less or leave their jobs if they can get health insurance outside the workplace.
- Pawlenty said that "[if] Brazil can have 5 percent growth, then the United States of America can have 5 percent growth," showing his economic plan is not unreasonable. But the fact is, World Bank figures show Brazil has failed to achieve 5 percent growth for 23 of the past 30 years.
- Gingrich again tried to rewrite history by claiming that his words "right-wing social engineering" were "totally taken out of context." In fact, he called Paul Ryan's plan "too big a jump" and "radical" change as well.

Analysis

Seven Republican presidential hopefuls for 2012 debated in New Hampshire June 13. The event was cosponsored and televised nationally by CNN. We present here a few factual claims that we found to be false or misleading — and an example of one claim the debaters got right.



Pawlenty Not 'One of the Few'

Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty falsely claimed he was "one of the few governors" to respond when President George W. Bush asked states to send guardsmen to support Border Patrol agents in four states along the U.S.-Mexico border. In fact, all 50 states participated in the two-year program.

Tim Pawlenty: ... when President Bush asked governors to volunteer their National Guard to go to the border to help reinforce, through Operation Jump Start, our border, I was one of the few governors who did it.

Operation Jump Start was undertaken to beef up patrols along the U.S.-Mexico border. The idea was to deploy guardsmen from around the nation to border states to carry out non-law enforcement work, so that Border Patrol agents could "return to law enforcement duties along the southwest border," according to the 2006 Army National Guard Annual Financial Report. In the first year, that report says, the plan involved nearly 5,000 guardsmen from 41 states.

Army National Guard: At the close of FY06, Operation Jump Start included nearly 5,000 ARNG Soldiers from 41 states and resulted in an initial return of 394 CBP agents back to the border.

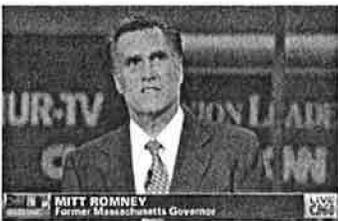
Over the course of the two-year campaign, all 50 states (plus the District of Columbia, Guam, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico) sent a little more than 30,000 guardsmen to four states: New Mexico, California, Arizona and Texas, according to a 2008 National Guard report on the program. That report (page 79) shows that Minnesota provided 370 guardsmen.

Clearly, Pawlenty was not "one of the few governors" to support the program. (Note: We asked Pawlenty's campaign about this, and a spokesman furnished a link to a 2006 press release saying that Minnesota was one of the first 11 states to participate. That would support a claim that he was "one of the first" to participate, but not one of the "few.")

Read My Lips?

Mitt Romney repeated a false claim that the Massachusetts health care overhaul didn't include new taxes.

Romney: [The federal law] raises \$500 billion in taxes. We didn't raise taxes in Massachusetts.



As we pointed out before, the state did raise taxes — increasing the cigarette tax by \$1 per pack. That hike was put in place by Romney's successor, Gov. Deval Patrick, not Romney himself.

Furthermore, the law Romney signed includes penalties similar to those he himself describes as "taxes" when attacking the federal law. In a list of those taxes provided to us by the Romney campaign, he includes penalties on individuals who don't purchase insurance and businesses that don't offer it to employees. The Massachusetts law Romney signed also includes penalties on individuals who don't purchase insurance and businesses that don't offer it to employees. The first year's penalty was a loss of the personal exemption on income tax returns; in subsequent years, the penalty has been half of the cost of the lowest priced plan available through the state exchange.

Santorum Wrong on 'Rationing'

Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum is the latest Republican to falsely claim that a Medicare advisory board created by the federal health care law will result in a rationing of care for seniors.

Santorum: What President Obama — let me finish, please — what President Obama has done is he put in, in the Obamacare bill, the Independent Payment Advisory Board. Ladies and gentlemen, seniors, Medicare is going to be cut, starting in 2014, by the federal government, and it's going to be rationing of care from the top down.

The Independent Payment Advisory Board, as we have written about three times before, is prohibited from rationing

care. In fact, the law on page 490 specifically bars the advisory board from making "any recommendation to ration health care."

The board was created to identify and recommend ways to slow the growth of Medicare spending — which both parties agree needs to be done. The law gives the president the power to appoint — with the usual advice and consent of the Senate — 15 board members.

They must be medical providers and other professionals in the private sector with experience in such areas as health care finance, management and actuarial science.



Obama 'Against Any Kind' of Offshore Drilling?

Santorum was wrong when he said the Obama administration is "against any kind of exploration offshore or in Alaska." In fact, the administration has approved 296 new permits for new offshore oil wells since taking office, and it is considering granting the first permits in Alaska since 2004.

Santorum: The reason we're seeing this second dip is because of energy prices, and this president has put a stop sign again — against oil drilling, against any kind of exploration offshore or in Alaska, and that is depressing. We need to drill.

It's true that no new permits have been issued for oil drilling in Alaska under Obama. It's also true that the president opposes opening the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge for drilling, which Bush and many Republicans support. There have been no permits approved since 2004, according to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement. However, the agency is currently reviewing two exploration plans, including Shell's plan for the Beaufort Sea.

Regardless of whether those plans are eventually approved or not, Santorum is simply wrong to say the administration is "against any kind of exploration offshore." A database tool on the BOEMRE website shows the agency approved 295 new permits for exploratory and development oil wells and one relief well since Jan. 20, 2009, when Obama took office. That's far fewer than the number of wells approved during the same time in Bush's second term. We found the Bush administration had approved 867 wells from Jan. 20, 2005, to June 14, 2007.

Now, Republicans have complained of slow permit approvals ever since the administration imposed a moratorium on new deepwater drilling permits after the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010. The moratorium was lifted in October and new safety regulations were put in place, but there were no new deepwater permits issued until February. The agency says it has now issued eight deepwater drilling permits under the new safety regulations.

The moratorium did not extend to new permits in shallow waters (500 feet or less). The administration issued new safety regulations for shallow waters on June 8, 2010, and since then it has approved 56 permits for new wells.

Santorum can argue that there should be even more approvals. That's a matter of opinion. But the facts contradict his claim that the administration opposes "any kind of exploration." That's simply false.

Not Much of a Job Killer

Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota repeated a false Republican talking point about the impact of the federal health care law on jobs.

Bachmann: The CBO, the Congressional Budget Office has said that Obamacare will kill 800,000 jobs. What could the president be thinking by passing a bill like this, knowing full well it will kill 800,000 jobs?

The CBO never said that. The CBO has said the law would have a "small" impact on employment, mainly by reducing the amount of labor Americans decide to supply. In other words, some workers will choose to work less, or retire earlier, because of the health care law. Their jobs wouldn't be killed.

CBO first explained its analysis in August 2010, saying the health care law would "reduce the amount of labor used in the economy by a small amount—roughly half a percent—primarily by reducing the amount of labor that workers choose to supply." In February testimony to Congress, CBO Director Douglas Elmendorf acknowledged to Republican Rep. John Campbell that "half a percent" of the estimated workforce at the end of this decade would be equal to 800,000 workers. But again, he didn't say that those jobs would be killed. Elmendorf talked about a "reduction in the labor used."



Why would some Americans choose to work less? CBO has explained that those with low incomes would have more financial resources due to the expansion of Medicaid and subsidies to purchase health insurance. "Those additional resources will encourage some people to work fewer hours or to withdraw from the labor market," CBO said. Plus, some workers nearing retirement will retire earlier than normal because the law provides more protections for health insurance, such as limiting how much more companies can charge older persons and requiring the coverage of preexisting conditions.

The CBO did say that some companies would hire fewer low-income employees because of a requirement that businesses provide insurance or pay a penalty. Those businesses could hire part-time or seasonal employees in lieu of full-time low-wage workers. CBO didn't put a number on that. Nor did it estimate how many jobs might be added in the health care and insurance sectors because of the law's expansion of the insured.

Republicans have repeatedly twisted the CBO's, and Elmendorf's, words on this point.

Gingrich, In Context

Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich once again engaged in revisionist history in trying to explain why he called Rep. Paul Ryan's Medicare plan "right-wing social engineering."

Gingrich: Well, first of all, it was a very narrow question, which said, should Republicans impose an unpopular bill on the American people? Now, I supported the Ryan budget as a general proposal. I actually wrote a newsletter supporting the Ryan budget. And those words were taken totally out of context.

Gingrich uttered the words "right-wing social engineering" on "Meet the Press" in response to host David Gregory's question about Ryan's plan. Here are the pertinent portions of the exchange between Gingrich and Gregory:

Gregory: Do you think that Republicans ought to buck the public opposition and really move forward to completely change Medicare, turn it into a voucher program where you give seniors...

Gingrich: Right.

Gregory: ...some premium support and — so that they can go out and buy private insurance ?

Gingrich: I don't think right-wing social engineering is any more desirable than left-wing social engineering. I don't think imposing radical change from the right or the left is a very good way for a free society to operate. I think we need a national conversation to get to a better Medicare system with more choices for seniors... .

Gregory: But not what Paul Ryan is suggesting, which is completely changing Medicare.

Gingrich: I, I think that, I think, I think that that is too big a jump. ... I'm against Obamacare, which is imposing radical change, and I would be against a conservative imposing radical change.

And it's true that on a net basis, the U.S. has fewer jobs now than it did a decade ago. BLS figures for total nonfarm employment (seasonally adjusted) show a loss of 1.1 million as of May, compared to the same month in 2001. Paul was a little off on the population figures, however. According to Census Bureau estimates, the U.S. population is now 26.5 million more than it was in mid-2001.

Pawlenty's Shaky Growth Figures

Pawlenty was on shaky factual ground when he argued that the U.S. could meet the growth targets called for in his economic plan.

Pawlenty: If China can have 5 percent growth and Brazil can have 5 percent growth, then the United States of America can have 5 percent growth.

The fact is, Brazil's growth rate has fallen short of 5 percent for 23 out of the last 30 years according to the World Bank. In the same period, the U.S. growth rate has hit that level only one time.

It's true that China's growth rate has been phenomenal. In the last decade, the rate of real GDP growth was consistently above 8 percent. In the last 30 years, China's growth rate only fell short of 5 percent two times.



We won't presume to predict the future, and it may turn out to be possible for the U.S. to grow 5 percent each year for 10 years straight. But Brazil's experience actually undercuts Pawlenty's argument, falling far short of consistent 5 percent annual growth.

Bachmann Right on Debt

Bachmann hit the nail on the head when she said of Obama:

Bachmann: Under his watch, in two and a half years, we've increased the federal debt 35 percent just in that amount of time.

That's true, as measured by Total Debt Outstanding (which includes Social Security trust funds and other debts the government owes to itself, as well as money borrowed from the public). The total stood at \$10.6 trillion the day Obama took office, and now stands at just over \$14.3 trillion, an increase of 35 percent. (We thought Bachmann deserved credit for getting this right, in contrast with former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, whom we faulted for incorrectly claiming recently that Obama had doubled the debt.)

— by Brooks Jackson, Eugene Kiely, Lori Robertson, Scott Blackburn and Wendy Zhao

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