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PolitiFact Oregon, Social Security and the deficit

1 message

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: truthometer@politifact.com

Thu, Jun 13, 2019 at 1:46 PM

Dear Truth-O-Meter,

PolitiFact Oregon's fact check of Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) [from Sept. 8, 2014](#) contains a fundamental error.

Merkley claimed Social Security has never added so much as a dime to the federal deficit. PolitiFact Oregon rated the claim "Half True," with the supposedly true part of the claim resting on the fact that Social Security is kept off-budget by law.

The problem? That hasn't always been the case.

Zebra Fact Check [looked at the question in 2013](#):

Social Security has not always been an off-budget item. [From 1969 to 1992](#) Social Security was part of the regular budget. Social Security had a budget deficit for seven consecutive years during that period.

Even ignoring Social Security's effect on the unified budget since 2010, the House Democrats are incorrect to claim that Social Security has not added to the deficit "since its inception." No charitable interpretation, short of assuming the House Democrats intended to use different words, permits an escape from that conclusion.

PolitiFact Oregon failed to acknowledge that Social Security was on-budget in the past, leading to its incorrect conclusion that Merkley's statement was "Half True":

The ruling:

Merkley told a gathering of seniors that "Social Security has never contributed one cent to the deficit." Until 2010, that was true. However, the program has chalked up increasingly large deficits each year since, requiring money to be taken from its bonds to make up the difference.

The senator argues, reasonably, both that Social Security is by law a closed system, and that its trust fund is sufficient for now to cover the current gap. It's also true, however, that these gaps do affect other parts of the federal government because they require borrowing elsewhere to make up the difference. We rate Merkley's claim Half True.

I trust you will agree that leaving out a key piece of information like that results in an unsatisfactory fact check. I look forward to seeing PolitiFact fix the problem in accordance with its statement of principles.

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Sincerely,

Bryan W. White
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