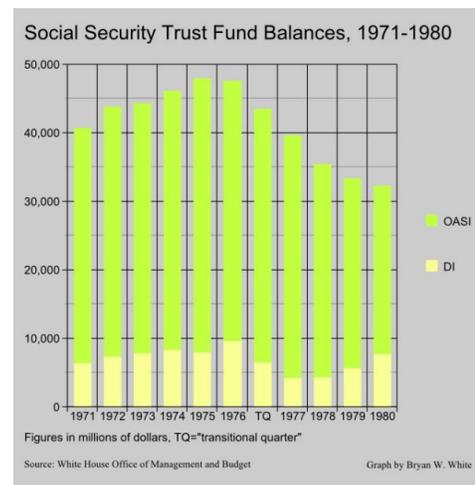


PolitiFact declines to correct botched PolitiFact Oregon Fact Check

On [Sept. 8, 2014](#), PolitiFact Oregon ruled it “Half True” that Social Security has never contributed a penny to the federal budget deficit.

The ruling noted that Social Security is kept off-budget by law, but with the caveat that it affects the deficit when the federal government redeems treasury bills to pay Social Security benefits.

But the story is not that simple. Social Security has not always been an off-budget item ([it was moved on-budget by the Johnson administration](#) in the late 1960s and remained that way until the 1990s). PolitiFact Oregon failed to mention the by-law-on-budget accounting of Social Security during this period. While on-budget, Social Security disbursements exceeded Social Security income multiple times--the very definition of a deficit. With Social Security an on-budget item at the time, the conclusion that Social Security added to the federal deficit is inescapable.



I contacted PolitiFact about this problem on June 13, 2019, pointing out that the omission of Social Security’s on-budget history counted as a disservice to the public.

That history directly contradicts the justification PolitiFact offered in support of its “Half True” rating on its trademarked “Truth-O-Meter” (bold emphasis added):

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.

It’s not reasonable to cite Social Security’s “off-budget” accounting to justify that it has never contributed to the deficit if Social Security hasn’t always been treated as an off-budget item.

PolitiFact's fact check simply omits a key part of Social Security history. PolitiFact should correct the record and update its ruling. [To date](#), PolitiFact has apparently offered no reply to my message and has not fixed the problem.

PolitiFact's failure to correct such an obvious oversight suggests in turn a failure to adhere to an open and honest corrections policy.

Thanks for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Bryan W. White
Editor, Zebra Fact Check