



GOP debate: Reality Check Team inspects the claims

March 11, 2016

The Republican candidates for president gathered in Miami on Thursday, and CNN's Reality Check Team spent the night putting their statements and assertions to the test.

The team of reporters, researchers and editors across CNN selected key statements and rated them true; mostly true; true, but misleading; false; or it's complicated.

Reality Check: Trump on unemployment and GDP

By Tami Luhby, CNNMoney

Donald Trump is billing himself as the candidate that will bring back jobs to America and revive the economy. But he got some basic facts about the U.S. economy wrong Thursday night.

Trump erroneously said that the U.S. economy isn't growing: "GDP was zero essentially for the last two quarters. If that ever happened in China, you would have had a depression like nobody's ever seen before. They go down to 7 percent, 8 percent, and it's a national tragedy. We're at zero, we're not doing anything."

We'll allow that he meant GDP growth, not the gross domestic product itself. But he's still wrong that the U.S. economy has completely stalled. GDP growth came in at 1 percent during the most recent quarter and at 2 percent the quarter before. Granted, it's not going gangbusters, but it's not flat, either.

Trump also blasted the nation's trade negotiators, saying they've agreed to terrible deals that have cost the country good jobs. But he botched the way the jobs report classifies the employed and unemployed.

"You look at the recent jobs reports, which are really done so that presidents and politicians look good because all of these people looking for jobs, when they give up, they go home, they give up and they are considered statistically employed," Trump said.

The way the unemployment rate is calculated has been criticized because it only counts those who are out of work but have looked for a job over the past four weeks. Some say that method underestimates the true number of the unemployed.

However, people who completely give up looking for work are considered out of the labor force, not employed or unemployed.

Verdict: False.

Reality Check: Trump on the feds taking over Common Core

By Kate Grise, CNN

Trump kicked off the latest round of Republican sparring by taking on Common Core education standards and accusing the federal government of having "taken over" the standards.

"It's all been taken over by the bureaucrats in Washington and they are not interested in what's happening in Miami or in Florida and in many states," Trump said.

Has the federal government really taken over common core?

Common Core standards are benchmarks in English and math that specify a bar students in each grade level should be able to hit. They standardize that bar across the country, but states choose to opt into the standards. Forty-two of them, plus the District of Columbia, have chosen to do so.

The standards were developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers in consultation with teachers, parents, and experts, and the Common Core program says the federal government did not play a role in developing the standards.

The only reading required by the Common Core throughout a student's entire education career pop up in the 11th and 12th grades. Students are expected to understand the Declaration of Independence, the preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and former President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address. There are plenty of recommended readings in the Core's Appendix B, but they are just suggested texts that the developers of Common Core believe are age appropriate and will help students reach the benchmarks.

It is true, however, that the federal government did have a role in encouraging states to adopt the standards.

In order to qualify for grants under President Barack Obama's Race to the Top program, states must show that they have standards to prepare students for college and the working world. Common Core standards are one way to qualify for those grants and the states get incentives to implement Common Core standards. RTTT basically made Common Core standards a de facto requirement for states to receive education grants from the federal level.

We rate Trump's claim that Common Core standards have been taken over by the federal government as it's complicated because the federal government has not been involved in the development of the benchmarks students should meet throughout their school years, but they have played a large role in compelling states to implement the Common Core standards in order to receive education funding.

Reality Check: Rubio on entitlements' impact on the federal budget

By Tami Luhby, CNNMoney

In talking about solving Social Security's looming shortfall Florida Sen. Marco Rubio once again mentioned how much that entitlement program -- and others -- eat into the federal budget.

"In less than five years, only 17 percent of our budget will remain discretionary. 83 percent of the federal budget in less than five years will all be spent on Medicare, Medicaid, the interest on the debt," Rubio said.

CNN's Reality Check team has looked at that claim before. We found that those three programs and interest payments actually are projected to make up only 60 percent of the federal budget in 2021, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center, citing Congressional Budget Office estimates. They currently make up 54 percent of the budget.

It looks like Rubio was referring to the increase in government spending, not the actual budget. Social Security, major federal health programs and interest will account for 83 percent of the increase in government outlays between 2016 and 2026, the center said.

Verdict: False.

Reality Check: Rubio on climate change

By Lydia O'Neal and Amy Gallagher, CNN

Rubio claimed that U.S. legislation to combat climate change would have "zero" impact on the environment due to China and India's relatively larger contributions to global pollution levels.

According to data from the European Commission, the United States is second to China in terms of carbon dioxide emissions, while India is third.

If the world's second largest polluter, responsible for 15.9 percent of the world's carbon emissions per capita, drastically reduced its carbon footprint, researchers say it would have some impact on the environment.

Therefore we rate Rubio's claim as false.

Reality Check: Cruz on trade pact positions

By Theodore Schleifer, CNN

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said he has "always opposed" the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the massive trade deal that would be the largest trade agreement in history if it becomes law.

"There are two different agreements, there's TPA and TPP. I oppose TPP and have always opposed TPP, which is what you asked about," he told CNN's Jake Tapper, drawing a distinction with the Trade Promotion Authority that the White House asked for to help the deal be reached.

Cruz used to vocally support TPA which allows the president to negotiate trade deals and then to have the Senate consider them without attaching any amendments, which is meant to ease

passage of an agreement. In a Wall Street Journal column authored with Paul Ryan, the now-speaker allied with the House's business wing, Cruz wrote that, "Congress needs to strengthen the country's bargaining position by establishing trade-promotion authority."

But two months later, Cruz changed his mind, telling Breitbart that TPA had changed since he last wrote a column.

"TPA in this Congress has become enmeshed in corrupt Washington backroom deal-making, along with serious concerns that it would open up the potential for sweeping changes in our laws that trade agreements typically do not include."

While his position on TPA has changed, Cruz is correct that he never publicly backed TPP. He was long skeptical of the trade deal on the campaign trail, but he did not come out formally against it until he told a crowd in Harlan, Iowa, in November.

Verdict: True.

Reality Check: Cruz on Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act

By Ryan Browne, CNN

Cruz and Trump battled over trade policy and whether the imposition of tariffs would aid the American economy.

Trump favored the use of tariffs while Cruz cited the passage of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act as evidence of the damage that tariffs can do to an economy, blaming the act for causing the Great Depression. The act increased nearly 900 American import duties.

Cruz said, "We've seen prior presidential candidates who propose massive tariffs, you know. Smoot-Hawley led to the Great Depression."

But did the act cause the Great Depression?

The Great Depression began with the stock market crash of October 24, 1929, also known as Black Thursday.

The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act was signed into law on June 17, 1930 by President Herbert Hoover.

In 2013, Ben Bernanke, then-chairman of the Federal Reserve, said "Economists still agree that Smoot-Hawley and the ensuing tariff wars were highly counterproductive and contributed to the depth and length of the global Depression."

The act is also well known for being the topic of Ben Stein's economics lecture in the 1986 comedy film "Ferris Bueller's Day Off."

While it may have contributed to its "depth and length," the act was passed nearly eight months after the start of the Great Depression, therefore it could not have "led to the Great Depression."

Verdict: False.

Reality Check: Cruz on U.S.-Israel relationship

By Jamie Crawford, CNN National Security Producer

In a discussion about United States' support for Israel, Cruz said: "The reason we are friends and allies with Israel is that they are a liberal democratic country that share our values. They are our strongest ally in the region. We get billions in intelligence resources, billions in military resources."

The United States has benefited from its relationship with Israel when it comes to confronting the geo-political complexities of the Middle East. Other benefits include: intelligence sharing about terrorist groups; nuclear proliferation throughout the region as well as the sudden political twists and turns taking place throughout the Middle East; and advice on airport and transportation security.

Israel has also been a global leader and defense supplier in drone technology, cyber warfare applications and electronic warfare systems that the United States has purchased and used in its own military action throughout the past decade.

Beyond that, there is a robust commercial military relationship between the two countries. A 2012 article on the subject in Foreign Affairs outlined the extent to which Israel has become a critical defense supplier to the United States. In 2006, Israel made \$1.1 billion in arms transfer sales to the United States at the height of United States involvement in both Iraq and Afghanistan. But the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which closely tracks military sales around the world, says that figure of Israeli arms sales to the United States between 2014 and 2015 fell to \$70 million.

The same research institute reports \$314 million in arms sales by the United States to Israel during the same 2014-2015 time period. It should be noted that the United States provides \$3.1 billion in foreign military assistance to Israel.

While the United States does purchase and receive a large amount military resources from Israel, those amounts from the most recent years on record do not measure in the billions.

Verdict: False.

Reality Check: Cruz on Obama and Common Core

By Eve Bower, CNN

Cruz criticized the Common Core academic standards, which had been strongly promoted by the Obama administration. But while his opposition to the program was clear, his plan to dismantle it showed a murky understanding of the way Common Core works.

"If I am elected president," Cruz promised, "I will direct the Department of Education that Common Core ends that day. Now let me tell you why you can do that."

But the president cannot do that -- anymore. Once the Common Core standards were agreed upon at the federal level -- based on input from governors, state school superintendents and state school boards -- it was up to the state legislatures to adopt the standards, and nearly all of them

have. At this point, all but eight U.S. states have adopted Common Core standards, and even if the federal Department of Education ended the Common Core program, as Cruz promises to do, the standards would still exist at the local level until and unless they were modified there.

Cruz further argued that the Obama administration has forced Common Core on the states using federal incentives from the "Race to the Top" fund. It is true that Obama's Department of Education reworked federal rules so that adherence to Common Core was a de facto requirement for states to maintain control over federal education dollars. Cruz said the Obama administration's approach was effectively "blackmail" and "abused" executive power. Whether that is the case is a matter of opinion. In any given year, roughly one-quarter of spending at the state and local levels comes from federal grants, and these grants often come with requisite conditions attached.

Because Cruz promises to dismantle the Common Core standards if elected president within one day, we rate his claim false.

Reality Check: Kasich on UFOs and Social Security

By Tami Luhby, CNNMoney

While discussing his plans to reform Social Security, Ohio Gov. John Kasich brought up a curious stat.

"Now there are more 18-year-olds who believe they have a better chance of seeing a UFO than a Social Security check," Kasich said.

This statistic appears to come from a 1994 poll of 18- to 34-year-olds done by Third Millennium, which the New Republic described as "a youth-oriented organization bankrolled in part by conservative foundations and such longtime Social Security critics as Pete Peterson" in a 1998 article. The magazine mentions that Kasich had cited this data point, as did former President Bill Clinton. Kasich also included it in his 2006 book, "Stand for Something: The Battle for America's Soul."

The libertarian Cato Institute asked a similar question in 1999 of 18- to 30-year-olds and found that 43 percent think they'll see a UFO during their lifetime, but only 28 percent think they'll see a Social Security check.

While Kasich's statement may have been true in the 1990s, CNN's Reality Check team can't find a more recent poll showing how today's 18-year-olds feel. So we'll rate Kasich's statement as outdated and therefore false.

Reality Check: Kasich on Ohio jobs

By Lisa Rose, CNN

Kasich has repeatedly touted his job creation record in Ohio, declaring that he's unleashed the power of the private sector to turn the state's economy around.

According to his estimates, Ohio has gained 400,000 private sector jobs since he took office. (During the debate, he misspoke and said "400 private sector jobs.")

Although Kasich's job creation stat is technically correct, a closer look at the numbers reveals a less-than-impressive employment picture. The state added just 100 jobs in January and its unemployment rate increased from 4.8 percent to 4.9 percent, according to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

Furthermore, Ohio's job growth has not kept pace with the national average. Between 2011 and 2015, Ohio's overall job growth rate was 7.6 percent, while the national average was 9.5 percent, according to FactCheck.org.

While the Buckeye State has failed to match the gains achieved elsewhere in the country, we rate Kasich's claim as true, because more than 400,000 private sector jobs have been created in Ohio on the governor's watch.