



Obama's 'Muslim outreach,' hosing volunteer firefighters and guns in schools: PolitiFact Roundup

By: Dana Tims – December 16, 2013

PolitiFact's "Lie of the Year" is safely behind us, but the claims from politicians and other public figures, including Internet bloggers, just keep coming.

For today's PolitiFact Oregon Roundup, we've selected three claims representing a broad swatch. They include assertions focused on President Obama, how his Affordable Care Act may – or may not – affect volunteer fire departments and the incendiary subject of guns in and around schools.

First up is a recent flurry of chain emails claiming that Obama is pursuing a "nationwide Muslim outreach program for children" in grades K through 12.

The story, written by Louis Jacobson, included some of the text that typically accompanies the claim:

"At a press conference today, President Obama announced plans for the first ever federally funded Muslim outreach program. The program will be available nationwide for all elementary school students grade K-12 beginning February 1st, 2014. The program is designed to educate children about the fundamental beliefs of the Muslim religion and Islamic belief."

The email goes on to provide quotes Obama supposed gave to justify the program. Just a bit of checking was all it took to verify that no such program has been proposed and no such news conference took place to herald its benefits. Fittingly, some of the claim was apparently recycled from a previous satire article that PolitiFact examined and debunked. Pants on Fire.

Today's second Roundup item also is rooted in an Internet-based claim. It includes this assertion: "Obamacare could force thousands of volunteer fire stations to cut service or close entirely!"

Writer Steve Contorno correctly noted that a considerable amount of concern and question surrounds the president's signature health-care law. Lawmakers on both sides of the Capitol, and both sides of the aisle, agree.

But some further checking showed that most volunteer fire departments don't include enough people to reach the 50-employee threshold that could be affected under the new law. The word "could" in the claim also opened the door to all sorts of possible interpretations, the piece found.

"There certainly is cause for concern, but even those looking to change the status quo see this as an exaggeration," the story concluded. "We rate it as Half True."

Finally, we cast a glance to Texas, where Republican U.S. Rep. Steve Stockman jumped in at the last minute to challenge incumbent Republican Sen. John Cornyn. In talking about the matchup of two conservative candidates, Huffington Post columnist Howard Fineman said Stockman's world is "all about guns," according to Jon Greenberg's story.

"This is a guy who not only doesn't want gun-free zones around schools," Fineman said. "He basically wants gun-filled zones in schools."

A first check of the claim showed that, at the start of this year, a few weeks after the Newtown, Conn., shootings, Stockman introduced the Safe Schools Act of 2013. The bill, simply put, would repeal a federal law that bans everyone except law enforcement from bringing a weapon inside a school.

A spokesman for the libertarian Cato Institute dinged Fineman slightly for using the term "gun-filled zone." Other gun-supporters reached for the story said the key point of Stockman's bill was to give principals, teachers and staff ability to defend themselves and their students.

"We did not hear from Stockman's office so there is no way to know if he envisioned an upper limit to that increase," Greenberg wrote, alluding to the fact that gun presence in schools would arguably increase significantly had Stockman's bill won approval. "Based on his bill itself, there would be none. We rate the claim True."