



More Florida Fouls

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Newt Gingrich falsely claimed he never favored a federal mandate requiring individuals to have health insurance. Rick Santorum claimed five times more people are seeking free care at Massachusetts hospitals because of Mitt Romney's health care law — a claim contradicted by official statistics.

Romney repeated a false accusation that President Obama failed to denounce Hamas rocket attacks in a speech to the United Nations. And Santorum insisted that Muslim terrorists are seeking missile bases in Cuba — a wild claim based most likely on mistranslations of an Italian newspaper report.

These were among the factual fouls that we noted as four GOP presidential candidates met for yet another [debate](#). This one, the final debate prior to Florida's Jan. 31 primary, took place Jan. 26 at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Fla., and was carried live on CNN.

Gingrich Rewrites His Mandate History

Former House Speaker Gingrich claimed he had never favored a federal mandate requiring individuals to obtain health insurance — only a state requirement.

Gingrich: I didn't advocate federal mandates. I talked about it at a state level ...

Not true. Gingrich said "Congress" must require high-income persons to have insurance, not state legislatures. He did so explicitly in [a 2007 opinion piece](#):

Gingrich, June 25, 2007: In order to make coverage more accessible, Congress must do more, including passing legislation to [among other things] require anyone who earns more than \$50,000 a year to purchase health insurance or post a bond.

His support for a federal mandate is of long standing. In 1993, on NBC's "Meet the Press," he said:

Gingrich, 1993: I am for people, individuals — exactly like automobile insurance — individuals having health insurance and being required to have health insurance. And I am prepared to vote for a voucher system which will give individuals, on a sliding scale, a government subsidy so we insure that everyone as individuals have health insurance.

Gingrich was proposing an individual mandate as an alternative to the Clinton administration's ill-fated health care plan, which was centered on an employer mandate, requiring businesses to provide insurance for their workers. And [he held to a similar position as recently as last May](#), also on "Meet the Press":

Gingrich, May 15, 2011: Well, I agree that all of us have a responsibility to pay — help pay for health care. And, and I think that there are ways to do it that make most libertarians relatively happy. I've said consistently we ought to have some requirement that you either have health insurance or you post a bond ... or in some way you indicate you're going to be held accountable.

NBC's David Gregory: But that is the individual mandate, is it not?

Gingrich: It's a variation on it.

If Gingrich was thinking about a state-only mandate, he never said so at the time. And he clearly said "all of us" would be subject to his "variant" of the mandate just last May. We judge that Gingrich is falsifying his own history on this matter.

Santorum Attacks 'Romneycare'

Former Pennsylvania Sen. Santorum claimed the Massachusetts health care law had quintupled the number who seek free care at hospitals rather than buying coverage.

Santorum: Free ridership has gone up five-fold in Massachusetts. Five times the rate it was before. Why? Because ... Because people are ready to pay a cheaper fine and then be able to sign up to insurance, which are now guaranteed under "Romneycare," than pay high cost insurance, which is what has happened as a result of "Romneycare."

Romney, the former Massachusetts governor, said that was "simply impossible" that free riders had gone up, because the percentage of insured residents had increased under the law to 98 percent.

Romney is right. The [percentage of insured residents](#) in the state went up from 93.6 percent in 2006, the year the law was enacted, to 98.1 percent in 2010. And [data from the state Division of Health Care Finance and Policy show](#) a 46 percent decline in the number of free care medical visits paid for by the state's Health Care Safety Net. The number of inpatient discharges and outpatient visits under the program went from 2.1 million in 2006 to 1.1 million in 2010 (see page 12).

Contradicting Santorum's claim, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation said in a November report that usage of the state's free care, or safety net, "fell dramatically, as expected" after the law took effect.

BSBC Foundation report, Nov. 2011: In fact, the number of HSN patient visits at hospitals and community health centers declined by 36 percent in the first full HSN fiscal year of health reform. Over the past three years, HSN utilization has trended upward but is still below pre-reform levels.

A Santorum campaign spokesman pointed us to a [Wall Street Journal column](#) by Michael F. Cannon of the libertarian Cato Institute, who stated that "Massachusetts reported a nearly fivefold increase in such free riding after its mandate took effect." But that doesn't square with official data just cited. Cannon didn't specify the time period and so may have referred to some temporary or transitory bump in free riders. We will update this item if we are able to get more information from Cannon.

Santorum blamed the supposed increase in free riders on persons choosing to pay the penalty instead of buying insurance. But that doesn't square with official state data either. In 2009, only 48,000 residents paid a penalty — 26,000 of them were uninsured for the entire year, and 22,000 for part of the year, [according to state figures](#). Those aren't big numbers compared with the usage numbers for the Health Care Safety Net — 1.1 million payments in 2010. The evidence doesn't suggest that those penalty-payers are driving an increase — let alone a "fivefold" one — in reliance on free care.

Romney's False Rocket Claim, Again

Romney once again falsely accused Obama of saying "nothing" about the Palestinians launching rockets into Israel during a 2009 speech to the United Nations. In fact, Obama said those who suffer include "the Israeli girl in Sderot who closes her eyes in fear that a rocket will take her life in the middle of the night."

We [called out Romney for this same false claim](#) last year, when he made it at a GOP debate in Orlando, Fla., on Sept. 22. Here's the way he worded it this time:

Romney: This president went before the United Nations and castigated Israel for building settlements. He said nothing about thousands of rockets being rained in on Israel from the Gaza Strip.

Romney is referring to President Obama's first-ever [address to the United Nations in September 2009](#), but his claim is still false. We'll just repeat what we said last time.

Obama not only said, "We continue to call on Palestinians to end incitement against Israel," he made specific reference to suffering caused by rocket attacks:

Obama, Sept. 23, 2009: We must remember that the greatest price of this conflict is not paid by us. It's not paid by politicians. It's paid by the Israeli girl in Sderot who closes

her eyes in fear that a rocket will take her life in the middle of the night. It's paid for by the Palestinian boy in Gaza who has no clean water and no country to call his own.

Jihadist Missiles in Cuba

Santorum made a wild claim that Cuba is working to harbor Muslim terrorists seeking to develop missile sites.

Santorum: We're going to reward a country [Cuba] that is now working with these other countries to harbor and bring in Iran and the terrorist — the Jihadists who want to set up missile sites and to set up training camps.

Santorum's comment sounds [very similar to a claim](#) that Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann made back in the fall about Hezbollah working with Cuba, and potentially building missile sites within its borders.

Bachmann, Sept. 26, 2011: There's reports that have come out that Cuba has been working with another terrorist organization called Hezbollah. And Hezbollah is potentially looking at wanting to be part of missile sites in Iran and, of course, when you're 90 miles offshore from Florida, you don't want to entertain the prospect of hosting bases or sites where Hezbollah could have training camps or perhaps have missile sites or weapons sites in Cuba. This would be foolish.

But [according to a report](#) on the Hill's Briefing Room blog, Bachmann was getting her information from an Italian newspaper that did not report that Hezbollah was developing missile sites in Cuba.

The Hill, Sept. 27, 2011: Bachmann was referring to a report in the Italian daily Corriere della Sera, which claimed that Hezbollah was setting up a base in Cuba to target Israelis in Latin America. The article was circulated on some conservative blogs, but did not report that Hezbollah planned to import weapons; rather, the terror operation was said to be oriented around intelligence collection, coordination of the group's logistics in Latin America and identification forgery.

'Language of the Ghetto'

Asked about an ad running in Florida that claims Gingrich once said "Spanish is the language of the ghetto," Romney claimed not to know about the spot, adding, "I doubt that's my ad." It is. And that's not exactly what Gingrich said. He referred to "bilingual" education but not specifically to Spanish.

The *Miami Herald* [reported](#) this week that the Romney campaign released a Spanish-language radio ad in Miami that argues that Ronald Reagan would not have agreed with Gingrich. The *Herald* translated it as saying, "Reagan would have never offended Hispanics as Gingrich did when he said Spanish is the language of the ghetto."

The announcer says the ad was “paid for by Romney for President.” And then Romney himself adds at the end, in Spanish, “Soy Mitt Romney. Estoy postulado para presidente y apruebo este mensaje.” Translation: “I’m Mitt Romney. I’m running for president, and I approve this message.”

After a commercial break, CNN debate moderator Wolf Blitzer noted that his staff had checked, and confirmed the ad was Romney’s. Romney then posed a question to Gingrich: “Did you say what the ad says or not?”

Gingrich said the “language of the ghetto” comment was “taken totally out of context.”

“Oh, OK, he said it,” Romney responded.

Not exactly. Gingrich claimed he never specifically used the word “Spanish” in connection with the phrase “language of the ghetto,” and that he was speaking “in general, about all languages.” That’s true. Gingrich never specifically mentioned Spanish at all. In fact, shortly after making his “ghetto” comment, Gingrich criticized the government for printing ballots in 700 languages.

As Romney said, “Let’s take a look at what he said.”

The comment in question comes from [a speech](#) Gingrich gave to the National Federation of American Women on March 31, 2007, which C-SPAN has archived in its video library (the part in question begins around the 24-minute mark).

Gingrich, March 31, 2007: [W]e should replace bilingual education with immersion in English so people learn the common language of the country and so they learn the language of prosperity, not the language of living in a ghetto.

That same day, [the Associated Press wrote a story](#) — later picked up by the *Washington Post* — about Gingrich’s comments and quoted Peter Zamora, co-chair of the Washington-based Hispanic Education Coalition, saying, “The tone of his comments were very hateful.”

Several days later, Gingrich posted [a video](#) on YouTube, in which he addressed his comments, in Spanish (he explained in the video that he had been taking Spanish lessons “for a while now”). According to the English subtitles provided, Gingrich began:

Gingrich, April 4, 2007: Last weekend I made some comments that I recognize produced a bad feeling within the Latino community. The words I chose to express myself were not the best, and what I wanted to say is this. In the United States it is important to speak English well in order to progress and have success. To achieve this goal, we should replace bilingual education programs with intensive English instruction courses and in this way permit that English be the language that all of us have in common.

This is an expression of support for Latinos, not an attack on their language. I have never believed that Spanish is a language of people of low income nor a language without beauty.

Gingrich's Dubious Freddie Mac Claim

Gingrich said the consulting contracts between the Gingrich Group and Freddie Mac expressly stated that he would do “no lobbying, none.” His campaign website makes the same claim. But that’s not quite true. The 1999 contract did contain such language, but the 2006 contract did not.

Gingrich, Jan. 26: The contracts we released from Freddie Mac said I would do no consulting, wrote in, no — I mean no lobbying, none.

[Gingrich website](#), Nov. 9, 2011: Speaker Gingrich’s consulting firm, The Gingrich Group, was retained in 2006 by Freddie Mac. To be clear, Speaker Gingrich did no lobbying of any kind, nor did his firm. This was expressly written into the Gingrich Group contracts.

On Jan. 23, the Gingrich Group released a [one-year consulting contract](#) for 2006 with Freddie Mac, the government-sponsored mortgage entity. The contract paid the firm \$25,000 a month in exchange for “consulting and related services by Freddie Mac’s Director, Public Policy,” Craig Thomas, who is a registered [federal lobbyist](#).

There was no provision “written” into the 2006 contract that Gingrich would do “no lobbying,” as Gingrich said. Lobbying was mentioned only once in the contract: “Consultant will also supply copies of any disclosures or reports it may be required to file by law, such as reports filed under the Lobbying Disclosure Act.”

A day after releasing the contract, the Gingrich Group released a second contract: a [1999 agreement](#) with Freddie Mac that also paid \$25,000 a month, plus reimbursement of up to \$1,000 per month for expenses. It was this contract — as Gingrich said — that had language clearly stating that Gingrich would do no lobbying for Freddie Mac. It said: “Neither The Gingrich Group nor Newt Gingrich will provide lobbying services of any kind nor participate in lobbying activities on Freddie Mac’s behalf.”

The 1999 contract “was entered into by the Gingrich Group on July 21, 1999 and was a renewable contract, which lasted through 2002,” according to the firm’s [press release](#).

Bottom line: There were two contracts released, and only one contained the language cited by Gingrich and his website. So they are wrong to use the plural form “contracts” when saying that the agreements released to date included a no-lobbying clause.

Santorum: ‘Stolen’ Social Security Numbers?

We have a small quibble with former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum's choice of words in claiming that most illegal immigrants are working on Social Security numbers that are "probably stolen."

Santorum: And people who have come to this country illegally have broken the law repeatedly. If you're here, unless you're here on a trust fund, you've been working illegally. You've probably stolen someone's Social Security number, illegally.

His word choice — describing the numbers as "stolen" — wasn't exactly on target. But his overall point is [backed up](#) by Pew Hispanic Center estimates that most illegal immigrants are working under "fraudulent" Social Security numbers, which could be stolen or just falsified.

The *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) in 2008 that workers have traditionally used phony names and Social Security numbers to gain employment. But technology has made it increasingly difficult for counterfeit documents to pass muster, resulting in illegal immigrants increasingly acquiring the documents of real people. In 2009, the Supreme Court [noted](#) the difference between fake and stolen Social Security numbers, ruling that harsher federal sentences for identity theft cannot be handed down unless an illegal immigrant knowingly uses the number of a real person. Either way, the illegal immigrants are breaking the law, which was Santorum's point.