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TPM's Inaccurate Reporting on the Ryan-Biden Debate (Updated)

Timothy B. Lee – October 12th, 2012

Update (4 PM): After I posted this story, Kapur updated his story to correct its mischaracterization of Paul Ryan's comments during last night's debate. The story now has the headline "Ryan: I Still Support Social Security Privatization," and correctly acknowledges that Ryan did not claim that Romney supports privatizing Social Security. My original story is below.

In last night's debate, Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) was asked by moderator Martha Raddatz about his support for George W. Bush's Social Security privatization proposal in 2004. Here was Ryan's response:

For younger people, what we said then and what I've always agreed is, let younger Americans have a voluntary choice of making their money work faster for them within the Social Security system.

That's not what Mitt Romney's proposing. We say no changes for anybody 55 and above. And then the changes we talk about for younger people like myself is don't increase benefit for the wealthy people as fast as anybody else, slowly raise the retirement age over time. It wouldn't get to the age of 70 until the year 2103, according to the actuaries.

In the first paragraph, Ryan acknowledges that he supported George W. Bush's proposal to privatize Social Security, and personally he still favors that approach. But in the second paragraph, he makes clear that "that's not what Mitt Romney's proposing." Instead, Romney favors shoring up the system's finances by cutting the benefits promised to younger workers.

What headline did Sahil Kapur of TPM give this story?

“Ryan: Romney And I Support Social Security Privatization”

Kapur writes that “Ryan seemed to indicate that a Romney-Ryan administration would support the idea of giving younger Americans the option to move their Social Security benefits into private retirement accounts.”

Of course, Ryan did no such thing, and it’s hard to see how his comments could plausibly be read that way. To the contrary, “that’s not what Mitt Romney’s proposing” seems like a pretty clear statement that whatever Ryan might think about the issue, Romney was *not* planning to privatize the system.

I’ve been making a nuisance of myself on Twitter with Kapur and his colleague Brian Beutler about this, but for some reason they’ve stuck to their guns. That’s disappointing. Reporters sometimes make mistakes. I’ve made plenty of them myself. But the great thing about the web is that you can always go back and correct the story. Unfortunately, TPM seems to have decided to continue misinforming its readers rather than admitting it made a mistake.