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## **Kuster stretches truth on Bass' Social Security stance**

By *JAKE BERRY Staff Writer*

Says Rep. Charles Bass "supports privatizing Social Security, risking trillions more on Wall Street."

--Ann McLane Kuster on Thursday, June 7, 2012, in a rally outside the N.H. Statehouse.

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Social Security may not be in the news as much as it has in past elections, but congressional candidate Ann McLane Kuster wasted no time this month making it one of the first talking points in her 2012 election bid.

Just minutes after filing her election papers, Kuster, a Concord Democrat, accused her Republican opponent, U.S. Rep. Charles Bass, of supporting the privatization of Social Security.

"Unfortunately for New Hampshire, my opponent is part of the problem," Kuster told supporters during a June 7 rally outside the Statehouse.

"He supports privatizing Social Security, risking trillions more on Wall Street," she said. "Our country and our state cannot support more of the same from Congressman Bass."

Kuster and Bass know each other well. In the 2010 race, Bass defeated Kuster by a tight 2 percent margin. But, how well does Kuster know the Congressman' stance on Social Security? We decided to check the records.

To support Kuster's claim, her campaign staff pointed us first to a series of votes and statements Bass has made on the matter over his years in office.

Bass, a Peterborough Republican, served six terms in Congress between 1994-2006 before returning to office in 2010, and the matter of Social Security came up several times during his first years in office.

In 2001, President George W. Bush launched the President's Commission to Strengthen Social Security to look into the future of the institution. In

December of that year, the 16-member panel issued its final report, which urged Congress to incorporate a system of private accounts for personal investment.

Opposed by Democrats, the commission's recommendations never reached the floor of Congress for a vote. But, the House did consider a number of proposed resolutions and amendments on both sides of the issue.

Bass joined each of his Republican colleagues in voting against H.AMDT.245, a Democrat sponsored amendment that would have prohibited any funding of the commission's recommendations. Kuster's staff pointed to the amendment, which failed 188-238, as evidence of Bass' support for privatization. But, according to analysts, the amendment was more of a partisan pre-emptive strike than a true endorsement of privatization.

"He may have (supported privatization)," said Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the conservative Cato Institute. "Republicans generally did at that point, but this vote was certainly not a vote that could be read that way."

Over the years to follow, several efforts to push a privatization bill fell short at the committee level. But, Bush brought the issue to the forefront once again when he included it in his 2005 State of the Union address.

In the Feb. 2, 2005 speech, the president outlined a plan for partial privatization, which he pledged to make a key part of his second term agenda.

Immediately following the speech, Bass issued a written statement supporting the President's plan, which reflected one of the recommendations of the 2001 commission.

"I am an advocate of the President's call for Social Security reform and will work with him in the next two years to save and protect this important program," Bass wrote, according to the National Journal and Project Vote Smart.

Six weeks later, Bass further endorsed Bush's plan during stops in Claremont and Lebanon, N.H.

"I support the establishment of private savings accounts because it allows low- and middle-income workers the chance to get ahead," Bass said, according to the Eagle Times, of Claremont.

President Bush's plan, to allow workers under 55 the option of directing up to 4 percent of their payroll taxes into private accounts, came as close as political discourse has reached in recent years to a debate over privatization.

"Virtually no one has proposed replacing all of Social Security with private accounts," said Paul Van de Water, a senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "Given the way the debate has evolved, being for ... privatization doesn't mean you're for privatizing the whole darn thing."

In past rulings, PolitiFact has determined that the private accounts proposal does not meet the definition of full privatization.

In August of 2010, President Barack Obama earned a Mostly False ruling on a similar claim about Congressional Republicans, and later that month, Arkansas Sen. Blanche Lincoln earned the same rating on a claim about her opponent, Rep. John Boozman.

Bass' position on Social Security, like those of other Republicans addressed in these past PolitiFact pieces, is in support of giving taxpayers the option of investing in private Social Security accounts, according to campaign spokesman Scott Tranchemontagne.

"To address this financial crisis facing the Social Security program, one such idea Congressman Bass has supported would create a program that would allow individuals to voluntarily place a portion of their money that they currently pay as part of the payroll tax and place it into a personal account," Tranchemontagne wrote in an email to The Telegraph. "Saying that (he) supports 'privatizing Social Security' is pure political rhetoric devised by Democrat spin doctors to frighten seniors."

Our ruling:

Bass, like most other Congressional Republicans at the time, supported President Bush's plan to introduce the option of private savings account into the Social Security equation. This partial privatization plan would have brought change to the system, but, as PolitiFact has ruled in the past, it would not affect people older than 55 and it does not meet the criteria for full privatization, as Kuster claims. We rate her statement Mostly False.