



The Truth-O-Meter Says:

"(Texas Republicans) believe in abolishing Social Security, abolishing V.A. health care." -Bernie Sanders on Wednesday, September 25th, 2013 in an MSNBC interview

Sen. Bernie Sanders says Texas Republicans want to abolish Social Security, V.A. health care

By Julie Kliegman

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There have been no shortage of claims about Obamacare in the build up to the health insurance marketplaces opening on Oct. 1.

On MSNBC, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., called the effort by some Republicans to defund Obamacare in exchange for funding the government "nickels and dimes" in comparison with other stances they take.

"What Mr. (Ted) Cruz and his Republican friends think in terms of health care is that we should voucherize Medicare, make massive cuts in Medicaid and ignore the fact 48 million Americans have no health insurance at all," he said Sept. 25.

He used the Republican Party of Texas to criticize the beliefs of the entire party.

"If you look at something like the Texas Republican platform, do you know what they believe in? They believe not only in getting rid of Obamacare," he said. "They believe in abolishing Social Security, abolishing V.A. (Veterans Affairs) health care."

It's not shocking that most Republicans would have differing views on these programs than Sanders, who caucuses with the Democrats. But do they really call for these services to be abolished? We wanted to find out.

Sanders was referring to the Republican Party of Texas 2012 party platform, spokesman Michael Briggs told PolitiFact in an email. We noticed the platform's language called for the "privatization" of both government programs, but never mentioned the word "abolish" or anything similar.

GOP Texas Chairman Steve Munisteri said the group does not support abolishment. "To me, both statements he made are grossly inaccurate," he said.

Let's delve further into each issue.

Proposed Social Security changes

Munisteri emphasized that the proposed Social Security changes would not affect retirees and near-retirees, who have already paid into the Social Security system.

Then, for younger people, the platform calls for a "transition to a system of private pensions based on the concept of individual retirement accounts."

According to previous proposed privatization plans, this would entail individuals redirecting all or part of their current Social Security taxes to a personal account, which would be invested in some sort of asset, said Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute who specializes in Social Security policy.

"They're very different programs, but there still exists a mandatory, government-regulated retirement program," he said. "People would not be free to invest in their brother-in-law's South American gold mining stock."

Former President George W. Bush and others have proposed many Social Security privatization plans over the years, but we should note that the platform Sanders referenced doesn't cite any specific proposal. Still, privatizing Social Security isn't the same thing as abolishing it.

Efficient care for veterans

The Republican Party of Texas platform directly addresses health care for veterans, saying, "The Veterans Administration must become more responsive and more efficient by eliminating its backlog and reducing waiting times for treatment. We support the privatization of veterans' health care."

To Munisteri, the platform's call for the privatization of health care means exploring a system in which the government would pay veterans to seek out private health care. Currently, veterans enrolled in the program seek treatment from government-funded facilities.

"The current system is causing veterans to wait too long (for treatment)," he said. "We support having other options available for veterans."

Kevin Bacon, a public affairs professor at the University of Texas at Austin, said abolishment of a health care system -- one that includes more than 8.7 million veterans, 150 hospitals and 80 clinics -- would not be a realistic stance. Veterans face a unique set of medical issues that need to be treated, like multiple amputations and PTSD, he said.

"Privatization is one of those terms that have so many different flavors to it," Bacon said, noting the complexity of the issue.

There are lots of different propositions out there to privatize health care, but no serious options call for an end to providing health care for veterans, Bacon said.

Due to a host of different possibilities within the realm of privatized veterans' care and again, a broad statement from the GOP platform, it's unclear to us if the V.A. facilities would remain open if the system were privatized.

In any case, the Oxford dictionary defines "abolish" as meaning to "formally put an end to (a system, practice, or institution)." While the privatization of either system Sanders mentioned could drastically change the way these issues are handled, the government would not be removing itself from the responsibility of providing either of these services. Generally speaking, government-funded medical treatment for veterans and retirement benefits for seniors would still exist in some form.

Our ruling

Sanders' claim that the Texas GOP wants to "abolish" Social Security and VA health care didn't line up with the official 2012 party platform, which called for a "privatization" of both programs. Privatization could bring systemic shake-ups to either issue in question, but wouldn't entirely eliminate the programs.

While the state party would like veterans to get their health care through private plans and young people to direct their Social Security taxes to private accounts, we found no evidence that GOP Texans are pushing to eliminate either system entirely.

We rate Sanders' claim False.