



Fact checking the last Republican candidates for President debate with PolitiFact

January 28, 2016

Fact checks:

Ted Cruz said “Barack Obama, right now, No. 1, over seven years has dramatically degraded our military.” We rate this statement as Mostly False.

Chris Christie said neighbors of the San Bernardino shooters “knew that they were talking about trying to take our country and attack it.” We rate this statement as False.

Ted Cruz said he's never insulted Donald Trump. We rate this statement as Mostly False.

Rand Paul said “A third of the budget for the city of Ferguson (Missouri) was being reaped by civil fines.” We rate this statement as Mostly False.

Ben Carson said "Last year, there were an additional 81,000 pages of government regulations. If you stack that up, it would be a three-story building." We rate this statement as Mostly False.

Donald Trump said he 'never once asked' for Megyn Kelly's removal from debate. We rate this statement as False.

Has Marco Rubio flip-flopped on opposing citizenship for illegal immigrants? We rating this as a half flip.

Fact check #1: Ted Cruz said “Barack Obama, right now, No. 1, over seven years has dramatically degraded our military.”

It’s inaccurate for Cruz to solely fault Obama for budget cuts as a result of sequestration. Both Democrats and Republicans share the blame for the budget negotiations that fell apart.

We found that Congress shoulders a good deal of the responsibility, and Obama has actually asked for larger increases than Congress approved.

A Cruz spokesman declined to respond on debate night.

It is a common talking point among Republican candidates to portray the United States’ military spending as weak during Obama’s administration.

They argue that the cuts, known as sequestration, make it harder for the United States to battle terrorists. PolitiFact has previously fact-checked claims related to the military budget as well as whether our Navy and Army are shrinking. We will recap our earlier findings here.

Spending on national security includes the Pentagon budget as well as other agencies, such as the Energy Department's work on nuclear weapons. Spending increased in 2010 and 2011, but it has fallen every year for four years since then by a cumulative 15 percent.

Other ways of looking at the question show declines as well. National security spending made up 20.1 percent of the federal budget in 2010, but in 2015 it was 15.9 percent. Over the same period, spending fell from 4.6 percent of gross domestic product to 3.3 percent.

There are two main reasons for the spending drop. The first is the Obama administration's decision to start removing U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. The second has to do with a process known as sequestration.

Sequestration refers to automatic, across-the-board cuts to both military and nonmilitary spending that were originally designed to force bipartisan negotiators in Congress to strike a deal in 2011.

Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward's book *The Price of Politics* showed that defense sequestration was an idea that came out of Obama's White House. But the intention was to force Republicans to negotiate, not to actually put the cuts into effect.

But negotiations fell apart, so the cuts went into effect. The bipartisan nature of the sequestration provision means that both parties merit a share of the blame, experts say.

The most recent Obama budget proposed a 7.8 percent increase in the base Defense Department budget between 2015 and 2016.

The spending bill enacted this fall puts the defense budget on a path to start growing in fiscal year 2016, up about 6 percent from the previous year.

"For five years in a row, Congress enacted a defense budget that was less than President Obama requested," said Todd Harrison, director of defense budget analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told PolitiFact the night of the debate. "So I don't think it's accurate to pin the blame on the president for reductions in defense spending."

Cruz's statement contains an element of truth in that military spending has decreased, but ignores critical facts that would give a different impression.

Our ruling: We rate this statement Mostly False.

Data curated by InsideGov

Fact check #2: Chris Christie said neighbors of the San Bernardino shooters “knew that they were talking about trying to take our country and attack it.”

The threat to the United States from Islamic terrorists was a lead-off topic in the Republican debate in Iowa, and the December shootings in San Bernardino, Calif., was a prime example of how real that threat can be. Fox News moderator Megyn Kelly asked New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie about the reluctance of the shooters’ neighbors to report suspicious activity for fear of using ethnic profiling.

Christie said what the neighbors saw had nothing to do with profiling.

“These folks had weapons, they knew that they were talking about trying to take our country and attack it,” Christie said. “That’s not profiling, that’s law enforcement.”

Kelly interjected, “They didn’t know they were going to attack the country.”

“They knew they were talking about attacking people,” Christie shot back.

We looked for any reports of the neighbors saying they had an inkling of any plans for an attack. We didn’t find any. We did find second-hand reports that weren’t well sourced, and these were repeated primarily on right-leaning news websites.

This excerpt from the conservative website Daily Caller was typical:

“A neighbor of Farook’s mother in Redland — said that another neighbor told him “they had I guess been receiving packages — quite a few packages within a short amount of time, and they were actually doing a lot of work out in the garage.”

“She was kind of suspicious and wanted to report it,” Elswick explained, “but she said she didn’t want to profile.”

There were many articles of this sort. All of them sourced back to a local ABC news affiliate broadcast and all of them had pretty much the same details.

None of these accounts supports Christie’s assertion.

First, they talk about what the neighbors of Farook’s mother saw, not the neighbors of Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, themselves. The mother lived in Redlands, not San Bernardino. We should also note that this account comes from a neighbor saying what he learned from another neighbor, not what he saw himself.

Second, no one was reported as saying that they thought an attack was being planned.

Our ruling: We rate this statement False.

Data curated by InsideGov

Fact check #3: Ted Cruz said he's never insulted Donald Trump.

During the Fox News-Google debate in Des Moines, Iowa, Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz said he's taken the high road in his squabbling with fellow candidate -- and frontrunner -- Donald Trump.

"I have not insulted Donald personally, and I don't intend to," Cruz said during the Jan. 28, 2016, debate.

We wondered, is Cruz's claim accurate? Not really.

Cruz, who once had a warm relationship with Trump, has been increasingly taking jabs at him, ever since Trump attacked him for possibly not qualifying for the presidency (due to his birth in Canada) and for saying things like, "Ted is a nasty guy. People don't like him." (Cruz's staff did not respond to an inquiry.)

One attack line Cruz has used that might be considered a personal insult is that Trump embodies "New York values."

During a previous GOP debate in North Charleston, S.C., moderator Maria Bartiromo pressed Cruz on his use of that line. The Texas senator doubled down. "You know, I think most people know exactly what New York values are," Cruz said.

"I am from New York," Bartiromo said. "I don't."

Cruz responded, "What? You're from New York? So you might not. But I promise you, in the state of South Carolina, they do."

Later in the debate, Trump parried Cruz's attack by citing the city's response to the 9/11 attacks as examples of "New York values." Trump received plaudits from many observers for his counter-shot, but that didn't stop Cruz from later releasing a television ad with the closing line, "Donald Trump: New York values. Not ours."

Another example of a Cruz swipe at Trump: After Trump pulled out of the Des Moines debate, saying that Fox moderator Megyn Kelly was biased against him, Cruz mockingly referred to the businessman as "gentle Donald" at a West Des Moines event.

"Apparently Mr. Trump considers Megyn Kelly very, very scary," Cruz continued. "And, you know, Donald is a fragile soul."

He also said that debate questioning could make Trump's hair "stand on end."

Cruz also had a joke at Trump's expense during an appearance at the Jackson County Fairgrounds in Iowa. Cruz referred to Trump's earlier citation of "two Corinthians" in the Bible, rather than the more usual title, "Second Corinthians."

Cruz joked, "Two Corinthians walk into a bar -- Ah, yes, Ricardo Montalban -- genuine Corinthian leather!" (Those Cruz's age or older may recall the old Chrysler Cordoba commercials in which Montalban, the late, debonair actor, touted the car's "rich, Corinthian leather," which was actually a figment of the carmaker's marketing imagination.)

Then there's the line Cruz used earlier in the very same Des Moines debate in which he made light of the absent Trump's habit of insulting his fellow candidates: "Let me say I'm a maniac and everyone on this stage is stupid, fat and ugly. And Ben (Carson), you're a terrible surgeon. Now that we've gotten the Donald Trump portion out of the way...."

To be fair to Cruz, there's a fuzzy line between making personal insults and fair-game critiques.

And Todd J. Gillman has written in the Dallas Morning News that Cruz's attacks "are sharp but indirect. And usually, he leaves enough wiggle room that Iowans believe him when he insists that he's the one taking the high road, refraining from name-calling and personal insult."

For instance, Gillman cited a comment Cruz made on the Christian Broadcasting Network, that "this election is not about any one person, any one individual who believes he or she will make America great. You know what, for seven years we've had a president in the White House who has had a Messiah complex."

Gillman asked, "Did Cruz say Trump has a Messiah complex? Not exactly, but it definitely sounded that way."

Our ruling: We rate this statement as Mostly False.

Data curated by InsideGov

Fact check #4: Rand Paul said "A third of the budget for the city of Ferguson (Missouri) was being reaped by civil fines."

How to relieve the tension between police officers and the communities they serve was a topic during the Jan. 28, 2016, Republican presidential debate in Des Moines, Iowa. The question specifically focused on Ferguson, Mo., the site of protests and riots after a police officer fatally shot Michael Brown in August 2014.

When Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., was asked to address the issue, he said, "I've been trying to look for solutions to our criminal justice problem. One thing I discovered in Ferguson was that a third of the budget for the city of Ferguson was being reaped by civil fines. People were just being fined to death."

"Now you and I and many of the people in this audience, if we get a \$100 fine, we can survive it. If you're living on the edge of poverty and you get a \$100 fine or your car towed, a lot of times you lose your job," Paul said.

We wondered whether fines actually represented a third of Ferguson's budget.

The short answer: No.

Ferguson's annual operating budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014, lists actual revenue and expenditures for 2012, forecasted revenues and expenditures for 2013, and budgeted estimates for 2014.

In 2012, revenue from "fines and public safety" was \$2.2 million out of a budget of \$19.5 million.

That's 11 percent.

That revenue was expected to go up to \$2.6 million on a \$25.9 million budget, or 10 percent.

And for the 2014 fiscal year, Ferguson was expecting fines and public safety revenue to jump even higher, to \$2.7 million in a budget of \$26.4 million. That means that that line item would be bringing in, once again, 10 percent of the revenue needed to run the city.

Even if you look at income from the "fines and public safety" line item and only compare it to revenue -- and not the total budget -- you don't come close to the 33 percent or so Rand is talking about.

It's 13 percent for 2012, 13 percent for 2013 and 14 percent for 2014.

When Paul's spokesman got back to us, she directed us to the probe of the Ferguson Police Department by the U.S. Justice Department.

Released in March 2015, it reports on efforts by the city to use Municipal Court fees and fines to increase revenue, particularly on missed court appearances and missed payments. The report notes, "The court's practices also impose unnecessary harm, overwhelmingly on African-American individuals."

The Justice Department report says that for the 2015 fiscal year, the city was expecting to collect \$3.09 million in fees, fines and costs, with all revenues expected to total \$13.26 million. That's 23 percent of revenue from fees and fines.

However, that didn't happen.

The city's latest budget, submitted June 24, 2015, specifically declares, "It is not the city's policy to maximize its government finances through the use of the judicial process. Therefore, court fines are not considered a targeted revenue source that the City strives to achieve."

That's reflected in the numbers.

While the city said it actually collected \$2.1 million for its \$13.2 million budget in 2014, it was expecting to get just \$1 million in fines and public safety revenue in 2015 on a \$14.4 million budget. That's 16 percent and 7 percent respectively.

Our ruling: We rate this statement as Mostly False.

Data curated by InsideGov

Fact check #5: Ben Carson said "Last year, there were an additional 81,000 pages of government regulations. If you stack that up, it would be a three-story building."

There are too many government rules stifling small businesses, said neurosurgeon-turned-Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson at a Fox News debate in Des Moines, Iowa.

"Last year, there were an additional 81,000 pages of government regulations," he said at the Jan. 28 debate. "If you stack that up, it would be a three-story building."

A few readers asked us if Carson's claim was accurate, both the number of pages and subsequent height, so we decided to take a crack at it.

Ream by ream

Carson's 81,000 pages figure refers to the number of pages that were published in the Federal Register, a daily journal of the U.S. government that contains agency rules, proposed rules and public notices. In each edition, the Register posts a running tally of the pages printed so far the year. The final total at the end of December is often used as a gauge of regulatory activity during the year.

The Federal Register's final tally for 2015 was 82,036 new pages of regulations, just over the figure Carson cited. According to the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a free market-focused policy group, this is a record.

So far in Obama's term, the government has published 555,882 pages of new regulations total. During the comparable period of former President George W. Bush's term, the Register published 533,593 pages.

Carson is right that 82,036 pages stacked up would, in fact, just about reach the height of a three-story building.

Using standard printer paper as our gauge — 250 pages per inch — 82,036 pages would be about 330 inches tall, or 27 feet. Carson's campaign sent us the same arithmetic.

But there's a big catch to these numbers: A large percentage of these pages don't actually contain regulations or final rules.

Deeper meaning

The Register also includes notices about agency meetings and public comment periods, presidential documents and other items that are not considered rules.

From 2010 through 2014, just 31 percent of pages actually contained rules, according to Federal Register data.

Overall Register page counts "may not be an accurate proxy for regulatory activity or measure of regulatory burden for several reasons," the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service said in November 2014 report.

The report noted that many of the pages "typically have little, if anything to do with federal regulations," and many pages dealing with final rules don't contain any regulatory language but rather explanations about public comments on the rule. The CRS noted, for example, that a 2013 rule enacted as part of the Affordable Care Act filled 137 pages, but only 16 pages detailed the rule itself.

The Register page count is often cited because it's easy to find, Cary Coglianese, a law professor and director of the Penn Program on Regulation at the University of Pennsylvania, told PolitiFact Virginia for a similar fact-check.

"I wouldn't use it as an indication of the level of regulation because it's so prone to having so much else in it," Coglianese said. "The other thing to keep in mind is, just because you know something about the number of pages, (that) doesn't tell you the wisdom of having those pages. It might be those pages are helping to save people's lives or keeping banks from failing or airplanes from crashing."

Peter Van Doren, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, was also leery of citing the page count, telling PolitiFact Virginia that it's his "least favorite" way to measure regulation.

Other analysts have said the overall page count gives a general idea of the country's regulatory environment, including one from the conservative American Enterprise Institute and another from the libertarian Cato Institute. James Gattuso, a senior fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, told PolitiFact Virginia for a 2011 article that the annual page count "as a very broad measure" indicates more regulatory activity now compared to past years.

Our ruling: Mostly False

Data curated by InsideGov

Fact check #6: Donald Trump said he 'never once asked' for Megyn Kelly's removal from debate

If you read the news, Donald Trump's boycott of the Fox News/Google debate is the result of his ongoing war with anchor Megyn Kelly.

Trump, however, says that's not true. He says a biting Fox News release is why he pulled the plug.

"Well, I'm not a person that respects Megyn Kelly very much. I think she's highly overrated. Other than that, I don't care," he told CNN an hour before the debate. "I never once asked that she be removed. I don't care about her being removed. What I didn't like was that public

relations statement where they were sort of taunting. I didn't think it was appropriate. I didn't think it was nice."

His assertion that he "never once" asked for Kelly's removal piqued our interest.

We took a look at Trump's public comments over the past couple of days.

Contrary to what Trump said on CNN, he had been calling for Kelly's exclusion for days before the debate and the "taunting" Fox statement.

Here's the timeline:

Jan. 23: This latest chapter of the Trump-Kelly spat started when Trump voiced his disapproval a few days before the debate on Twitter.

He made similar comments in a campaign rally in Iowa.

Fox responded, "Megyn Kelly has no conflict of interest. Donald Trump is just trying to build up the audience for Thursday's debate, for which we thank him."

Trump repeated his position according to Boston Globe reporter James Pindell.

Jan. 24: According to New York, Trump began to threaten a boycott a day later and toy with the idea of holding his own event.

"Let's see what happens," Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski told the magazine. "It's fair to say Mr. Trump is a significant ratings driver for these debates. If we aren't on stage for some reason, they wouldn't have the record 24 million viewers and would be back with 1-2 million people."

Jan. 25: CNN's Wolf Blitzer asked Trump if he'll show up given his beef with Kelly. Trump gave conflicting responses but doubled down in his Kelly criticism.

"I'll see. If I think I'll be treated unfairly, I'll do something else," he said. "I think she's very biased and I don't think she can treat me fairly, but that doesn't mean I don't do the debate. I like doing the debates."

Fox responded, "Sooner or later Donald Trump, even if he's president, is going to have to learn that he doesn't get to pick the journalists — we're very surprised he's willing to show that much fear about being questioned by Megyn Kelly."

Trump's indecision was echoed by Lewandowski, who told New York, "We haven't said he'll be there, and we haven't said he won't be there. The bottom line is Megyn Kelly shouldn't be rewarded for her media bias."

Jan. 26: Two days before the debate, Trump polled his Twitter followers.

Trump also retweeted several attacks on Kelly including one that claimed, "Fox will drop Kelly if it means no Trump."

Fox News released two statements in response.

"We learned from a secret back channel that the Ayatollah and Putin both intend to treat Donald Trump unfairly when they meet with him if he becomes president — a nefarious source tells us that Trump has his own secret plan to replace the Cabinet with his Twitter followers to see if he should even go to those meetings," the network wrote.

"Megyn Kelly is an excellent journalist, and the entire network stands behind her — she will absolutely be on the debate stage on Thursday night," Fox News CEO Roger Ailes told Mediaite.

Later that night, Trump hosted a press conference announcing that his boycott and veterans rally as a response to the network "playing games."

"See, the point is with me they're dealing with somebody that is a little different. They can't toy with me like they toy with everybody else. So let them have their debate and let's see how they do with their ratings," he said. "I came here to do the debate. When they sent out the wise guy press releases done a little while ago, done by some PR person along with Roger Ailes, I said 'bye bye,' okay?"

Trump denied that he was afraid to debate, pointing out his participation and past performance, and reiterated his distaste for Kelly.

"This to me isn't a reporter. This to me is just a lightweight. Megyn Kelly shouldn't be in the debate. I don't care about Megyn -- when Megyn Kelly didn't ask me a question, she made a statement last time, I thought it was inappropriate," he said.

Fox, in turn, responded with another statement emphasizing Trump's agenda against Kelly and alleging that Lewandowski had personally threatened the anchor: "We're not sure how Iowans are going to feel about him walking away from them at the last minute, but it should be clear to the American public by now that this is rooted in one thing – Megyn Kelly, whom he has viciously attacked since August and has now spent four days demanding be removed from the debate stage."

Jan. 27: Trump took to Twitter to rebut claims that Kelly was why he pulled out.

He emphasized to Fox's Bill O'Reilly that it was ultimately the network's disrespectful statements that led to his decision: "I was not treated well by Fox. They came out with this ridiculous P.R. statement, it was like drawn up by a child. And there was a taunt. And I said, you know, "How much of this do you take?" I have zero respect for Megyn Kelly. I don't think she's very good at what she does. I think she's highly overrated. And, frankly, she's the moderator, I thought her question last time was ridiculous."

Our ruling: We rate this statement as False.

Data curated by InsideGov

Flip Check: Marco Rubio on opposing citizenship for illegal immigrants

Fox News host Megyn Kelly asked Marco Rubio to explain what sounded like different positions on granting legal status to people living in the country illegally, often described as amnesty, during the Republican debate in Des Moines, Iowa, on Jan. 28.

“When you ran for Senate in 2010, you made clear that you opposed legalization and citizenship for illegal immigrants,” Kelly said during the Republican debate in Des Moines on Jan. 28. “You promised repeatedly that you would oppose it as a U.S. senator as well.”

She then played a series of video clips in which he spoke against “amnesty” in the past.

Kelly then asked Rubio, “Within two years of getting elected, you were co-sponsoring legislation to create a path to citizenship, in your words, amnesty. Haven't you already proven that you cannot be trusted on this issue?”

Rubio countered: “No, because if you look at the quote, and it's very specific. And, it says blanket amnesty, I do not support blanket amnesty” The back and forth between Rubio and Kelly continued.

We decided to put Rubio’s past statements on amnesty on our Flip-O-Meter, which measures to what extent -- if any -- a politician has flipped on an issue. We don’t make a judgment on the change of position, only whether the candidate actually changed position or not.

Rubio’s statements about amnesty in 2010 race

Immigration reform was a hot topic in the 2010 Florida Senate race when Rubio ran against Charlie Crist, who ultimately ran as an independent, and Democrat Kendrick Meek.

The conservative Shark Tank blogger, Javier Manjarres, asked Rubio in 2009: “Are you pro-amnesty for illegal immigration?”

"No, no. Never have been. In fact, I'm strongly against amnesty for a number of different reasons. The first is, I always use the example of the speed limit. If you say the speed limit is 70, but you don't ticket people until they reach 80, well then the speed limit is really 80, it's not 70. Amnesty is the same thing. The most important thing we need to do is enforce our existing laws. We have existing immigration laws that are not being adequately enforced. Nothing will make it harder to enforce your existing laws if you reward people who broke them."

Rubio also said: "I will never support – never have and never will support – any effort to grant blanket, legalization, amnesty to folks who have entered or stayed in this country illegally."

In October 2009, Rubio said in an interview on WSRE in Pensacola: “You cannot grant amnesty. If you grant amnesty, you will send a message that all you have to do is come into America illegally, stay here long enough, and we will let you stay. No. 2, you will destroy any hopes you have of having a legal immigration system that works. If the American people see us grant amnesty, they will never again believe in legal immigration, they will never again support it. And that’s wrong for our country, bad for our future.”

“In fact in ’86 when Reagan created an amnesty program, about 3 million people were granted amnesty. The result was that you had a bunch of people standing in line to enter legally who all claimed to be illegal because it was easier to get through the amnesty program. So we can’t have amnesty.

“And I think if you have a guest worker program in place that functions, the illegal folks that are here now will go back home through attrition.”

In a Senate debate on Univision in September 2010, Rubio spoke against the DREAM Act, which Senate Democrats planned to debate the following week. Dreamers are young people brought to the United States illegally as children.

“What they're offering now is a bill that would in essence grant amnesty to 2 million people,” Rubio said. “It’s a cynical way to play politics with the lives of real people . . . This is what always happens with Hispanic voters in this country, they manipulate them come election time.”

(The DREAM Act didn’t pass. In 2012, President Barack Obama announced Deferred Status for Childhood Arrivals to give temporary status, without a path to citizenship.)

In an October 2010 debate, CNN’s Candy Crowley asked Rubio what he would do with the nation's 12 million undocumented immigrants. Rubio replied: “Well, first, I don't believe we can grant amnesty, because I think it's unfair to the people who have entered this country legally. And I also think it will undermine ...

Crowley: “So you would send them all out of the country?”

Rubio: “Well, it's not that simple. We all know -- I've never advocated that we round people up. I don't know anyone who is seriously talking about that. What I have said needs to have happen is we have to have a legal immigration system that functions.”

Later in the debate, Rubio said: “First of all, (an) earned path to citizenship is basically code for amnesty. It's what they call it. And the reality of it is this: This has to do with the bottom line that America cannot be the only country in the world that does not enforce its immigration laws.

“It is unfair to the people that have legally entered this country to create an alternative pathway for individuals who entered illegally and knowingly did so. And all I'm saying is that if you do that ... you will never have a legal immigration system that works. No one is going to follow the law if there is an easier way to do it.”

So in 2010, Rubio spoke against amnesty. In the CNN debate, Rubio opposed amnesty and linked it to an earned path to citizenship. This is a contrast to how he would later talk about the 2013 bill.

What Rubio said about amnesty in 2011 and 2012

In May 2011, Rubio told Politico with respect to the DREAM Act, the solution "can't be part of some broader effort to grant blanket amnesty."

"I've said repeatedly I want to help these kids. I think these were kids who were brought to this country by their parents when they were very young; they were high academic achievers and want to go to college and contribute to America's future or serve in the armed forces," Rubio said. "And I think helping them would be good for America. I do want to help them; I just don't think the DREAM Act is the right or best way to do it."

What Rubio said about amnesty in 2013

While a senator, Rubio co-authored the Gang of Eight bill in 2013 that included a pathway to citizenship. Ahead of the release of the bill, Rubio said that the proposal "is not amnesty."

Rubio argued that the legislation outlining a 13-year pathway to legal status and eventually citizenship is not amnesty. He was right that the bill does not offer blanket legal residency to unauthorized immigrants. The bill mandated fines, background checks and waiting periods, and it was tougher than its 1986 predecessor. But it also offered a measure of clemency to those immigrants, who would not be required to return to their home countries. We rated his statement that the proposal "is not amnesty" Half True.

In April 2013, Rubio went on Meet the Press to defend the bill. Host David Gregory asked Rubio about his past and current positions on amnesty:

Gregory: "Three years ago in a debate you were clear on this. You said, 'To earn a pathway to citizenship, you have to leave this country if you are here illegally -- go back home. And then you could come back in.' You said an earned pathway was amnesty. Yet you've changed your mind here -- why?"

Rubio: "Well, first of all, what I said throughout my campaign was that I was against a blanket amnesty, and this is not blanket amnesty. On the contrary, this is not blanket anything. And, secondly, it's not amnesty because you pay serious consequences for having violated the law.

"Third, we need to understand the existing law. The existing law does not prohibit someone -- the law today does not prohibit someone who violated the immigration laws from getting a green card. It simply says you have to leave the United States, and you have to wait 10 years."

He then recapped the provisions of the bill that include the waiting period.

The bill never reached a vote in the House and died. Rubio now favors a piecemeal approach rather than one comprehensive bill.

Rubio opposed amnesty while running for Senate in 2010. He flatly said that he would oppose granting “blanket, legalization, amnesty” in an interview with a conservative blogger. In a CNN debate that year, he again opposed amnesty and linked it to a path to citizenship when he said that an “earned path to citizenship is basically code for amnesty” and that it would be unfair to “create an alternative pathway for individuals who entered illegally and knowingly did so.”

But in 2013, he was one of eight authors of a Senate bill that included a path to citizenship and declared that it was not amnesty.

Rubio can argue that the bill -- which died in the House -- was not “blanket amnesty,” because it included significant hurdles including fines and a waiting period.

Our rating: This is a partial change of position, so we rate it a Half Flip