



GOP Presidential Hopefuls Spar Over Social Security

As the battle to become the Republican nominee for President heats up in advance of next year's primary elections, one of the most mine-ridden fields is that surrounding Social Security and its future solvency.

One of those competing to represent the GOP in 2012 made a now-infamous remark on the subject during a debate held September 7 in Simi Valley, California at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Texas Governor Rick Perry (left) was asked to [explain](#) his position on Social Security as it impacts the right of states to govern themselves. He responded:



Well, I think any of us that want to go back and change 70 years of what's been going on in this country is probably going to have a difficult time. And rather than spending a lot of time talking about what those folks were doing back in the '30s and the '40s, it's a nice intellectual conversation, but the fact is we have got to be focused on how we're going to change this program.

And people who are on Social Security today, men and women who are receiving those benefits today, are individuals at my age that are in line pretty quick to get them, they don't need to worry about anything. But I think the Republican candidates are talking about ways to transition this program, and it is a monstrous lie.

It is a Ponzi scheme to tell our kids that are 25 or 30 years old today, you're paying into a program that's going to be there. Anybody that's for the status quo with Social Security today is involved with a monstrous lie to our kids, and it's not right.

Predictably, Perry backed away somewhat from that controversial (though actually quite accurate) position in an [op-ed](#) he penned for *USA Today*. In that piece, Perry stopped short of reiterating his Ponzi scheme characterization of the program. Then again during the latest Republican [debate](#) in Tampa, the Governor assured viewers that he wasn't the first to use that term in describing Social Security.

But the idea that we have not had the courage to stand up and look Americans in the face, young mid-career professionals or kids that are my children's age and look them in the eye and said, listen, this is a broken system. It has been called a Ponzi scheme by many people long before me. But no one's had the courage to stand up and say, here is how we're going to reform it.

Pegging Perry as one of the walking wounded and vulnerable ever since the Ponzi scheme bomb went off in his face, ostensible front runner Mitt Romney has gone on the offensive.

If we nominate someone who the Democrats could correctly characterize as being against Social Security, we would be obliterated as a party, Romney said Thursday while appearing on Sean Hannity's radio program.

The next battlefield is Iowa where early primary and older voters combine to make it a crucial test for



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all the candidates. The same is true of Florida and the Sun Belt where retiring and retired Baby Boomers are being frightened by the specter of the removal of the federal safety net.

As [explained](#) by one political insider from the Sunshine State who has declared his support for the former Governor of Massachusetts:

I know Florida certainly has an interest in Social Security given the large number of seniors we have here. Its not whether its a Ponzi scheme or not. These are retired people who are pretty intelligent. They want Social Security to be maintained. And they understand there are problems that need to be fixed. There is an opportunity to fix Social Security so its a continued benefit for people who are getting it now and those who will get it in the future.

Perry seems surprisingly undaunted by the Romney salvo and has more or less stood firm in the defense of his attack on Social Security, particularly his assertion that any such scheme should be administered by the states.

For people who are on Social Security now, like my folks, and people who are approaching Social Security, like me, its going to be there, he said. He then indicated that he couldnt guarantee how long Social Security would be around.

Anybody that's for the status quo with Social Security today is involved with a monstrous lie to our kids, and its not right, he said earlier this week.

It is nearly as axiomatic that candidates should avoid even hinting at altering Social Security as it is that Social Security is bankrupt or soon will be. As was highlighted in a recent Associated Press [article](#) on the subject:

An aging population has put a heavy burden on the Social Security Trust Fund: too few workers are paying for the benefits of a growing number of retirees. In 1950, there were 16 workers paying into the fund for each recipient. Last year, that ratio fell to three workers for every recipient. Left unaddressed, cuts in benefits would be forced in 2037.

The critical question for Perry, Romney, et al is whether the political risk associated with Social Security soundbites is worth the potential gain.

As it stands, Rick Perrys present concern is disabusing voters of the notion that he will kill the federal Social Security program were he to occupy the Oval Office.

Whatever tack he chooses, Perry needs to move quickly to heal the rift and move past the misconception. There are a number of debates on the horizon and given the careless way words such as treason are being bandied around by these competitors, there will likely be no letup in the assault on Perry and his Social Security sentiment.

One party certain to strike while the iron is hot is Barack Obama. With Florida likely to reprise its quadrennial role as king maker, the incumbent will undoubtedly draw the attention of elderly voters to Perrys pronouncement and declare himself to be the protector of the Greatest Generation.

Mitt Romney has the most to lose as the internecine skirmish widens. Early poll results indicate that his numbers have fallen in inverse proportion to Perrys. This political reality will compel Romney to attack the Governor of Texas directly in an effort to distinguish himself and put distance between Perry's radicalism and his own common-sense approach.

Addressing the topic at a recent debate, Romney appealed to the burgeoning bloc of retired voters,



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declaring, The governor says look, states ought to be able to opt out of Social Security. Our nominee has to be someone who isn't committed to abolishing Social Security, but who is committed to saving Social Security.

There is a dichotomy that is distilled through recent poll numbers that all sides of the donnybrook can manipulate to their gain. According to an AP-GfK poll, 70 percent of Americans consider Social Security a critical element of their retirement plans. On the other hand, 6 percent said it was not at all important.

The gap through which foes of the socialist system may attack is exposed by the fact that 35 percent of respondents said that it is extremely or very likely to provide income their entire retirement, 30 percent somewhat likely, and 35 percent not too or not at all likely.

Regardless of the sentiments expressed in these answers, Social Security has many flaws, chief among them the fact that the Constitution nowhere grants authority to any branch of the government for the creation of such a program. Ponzi scheme or not, Perry is correct in his assertion that the federal government has overstepped the bounds of its enumerated powers in the founding and funding of Social Security. Constitutionalists say it is up to the states to assert their sovereignty and refuse to acquiesce to this decades-old usurpation.



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