

# Obama Fills in Blanks of Romney's Plans, and G.O.P. Sees Falsehoods

By [MICHAEL COOPER](#)

The Obama campaign has run advertisements charging that Mitt Romney's Medicare plan "could raise seniors' costs up to \$6,400 a year" and that his tax proposal "would give millionaires another tax break and raises taxes on middle-class families by up to \$2,000 a year."

In making such assertions, the Obama campaign is taking advantage of the many unknown details of Mr. Romney's policy proposals by filling in the blanks in the least flattering light, often relying on the findings of research organizations. In doing so, the campaign has leveled some charges that are more specific than the known facts warrant and others that are most likely wrong — though Mr. Romney's decision not to provide more detailed explanations of his Medicare and tax proposals have made it difficult to provide a fuller evaluation of some of the competing assertions.

The outdated charge that future Medicare beneficiaries could face \$6,400 in higher costs comes from an analysis of an old proposal by Mr. Romney's running mate, Representative Paul D. Ryan, that has since been revised, a point that President Obama himself acknowledged in a speech last week. And the assertion that Mr. Romney would raise taxes on the middle class — contrary to his oft-repeated pledge not to — is based on an independent analysis of his tax plan that found it was "not mathematically possible" for his plan to achieve all of its goals without raising taxes on the middle class.

Now, as both campaigns prepare for the first Obama-Romney debate next week, Republicans have been signaling that they plan to more aggressively question the accuracy of the Obama campaign's assertions. The Obama campaign has run ads distorting Mr. Romney's abortion position; Republicans and some independent groups have questioned the president's decision to count the savings that come from winding down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan toward deficit reduction; and Mr. Obama recently said incorrectly that Operation Fast and Furious, a botched gun trafficking case, began during George W. Bush's administration. (A similar program was started under Mr. Bush, but Operation Fast and Furious began in October 2009.)

In an interview this month with ABC News, Mr. Romney — whose own campaign has been criticized for making misleading claims — suggested that he would be more aggressive in questioning Mr. Obama’s accuracy. “I think the challenge that I’ll have in the debate is that the president tends to, how shall I say it, to say things that aren’t true,” he said. And Karl Rove, who was Mr. Bush’s political strategist and who founded a political action committee that opposes Mr. Obama, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* on Thursday that Mr. Romney should make the case that “Mr. Obama doesn’t shoot straight because he can’t defend his record.”

How both sides talk about Medicare and taxes is likely to come under increasing scrutiny.

The Obama administration’s charge that beneficiaries could see their Medicare payments rise by \$6,400 under Mr. Romney is based on an out-of-date analysis. Mr. Ryan’s original plan called for giving future beneficiaries fixed amounts of money to buy private insurance — and it limited the growth of those payments to the rate of inflation. Since health care costs rise faster than inflation, such a plan would leave beneficiaries to face higher costs.

Mr. Ryan then revised his plan, and Mr. Romney has further altered it. The Romney campaign’s policy director, Lanhee Chen, wrote last month that while older people with higher incomes may be asked to pay more, “all seniors will be guaranteed sufficient support because the support is actually set based on what plans will cost.”

But the campaign has not detailed how the plan would work. A question-and-answer section of the campaign’s Web site puts it this way: “How high will the premium support be? How quickly will it grow? Mitt continues to work on refining the details of his plan, and he is exploring different options for ensuring that future seniors receive the premium support they need while also ensuring that competitive pressures encourage providers to improve quality and control cost.”

Mr. Romney has in the past suggested limiting the growth of the subsidies. He told *The Washington Examiner* last December that allowing the subsidies to grow at the rate of medical inflation “would have no particular impact on reining in the excessive cost of our entitlement program.” So if his campaign’s theory that increased competition among private plans will slow health care costs proves wrong, future beneficiaries could face higher costs. And Mr. Romney’s pledge to repeal Mr. Obama’s health care law would cost them more, since part of the law helps beneficiaries pay for prescription drugs. But without knowing the size of the subsidies or how fast they would grow, it is impossible to assign a dollar value to the cost, as the Obama campaign has tried to do.

The Obama campaign's television ad charging that Mr. Romney would raise taxes on the middle class was found to be accurate by several fact-checking organizations, even though it runs directly counter to Mr. Romney's pledge that he will not do so.

The ad is based on an analysis of Mr. Romney's vague proposals by the Tax Policy Center, a nonpartisan group, which found that it was impossible for his plan to achieve all of its stated goals. Mr. Romney wants to cut income tax rates by 20 percent while continuing to collect the same amount of revenue by eliminative tax breaks — all without raising taxes on the middle class.

The center projected that the tax cuts alone would reduce revenues by \$456 billion in 2015. But the center's director, Donald Marron, later wrote that he did not read the analysis as "evidence that Governor Romney wants to increase taxes on the middle class in order to cut taxes for the rich" but rather as "showing that his plan can't accomplish all his stated objectives."

Mr. Romney has declined to say which tax breaks he would reduce.

An adviser to the Romney campaign, Kevin A. Hassett, suggested this week at a panel discussion that Mr. Romney might scale back his cuts to the tax rates if he failed to eliminate enough tax breaks to make up for the lost revenue. Mr. Hassett said that Mr. Romney would not raise taxes on the middle class. The Romney campaign later posted a statement on its Web site reiterating the outline of its tax plan, including the call to cut rates by 20 percent without losing revenue.

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