

A Closer Look at Some of the More Hotly Disputed Assertions

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Body

At the second presidential debate, everyone played fact-checker.

President Obama said, "Not true, Governor Romney" to dismiss his rival's charge that oil and gas production permits and licenses on federal lands and waters had been cut in half over the past four years. (They have declined, but not by half).

Mitt Romney said at one point, "Let me go back and speak to the points that the president made, and let's get them correct" after Mr. Obama falsely charged that he had called the strict Arizona immigration law "a model for the nation." (Mr. Romney has spoken favorably of the state's immigration law, but the "model" Arizona law he talked about was the mandatory use of a federal electronic verification system to check the immigration status of new hires.)

And the moderator, Candy Crowley of CNN, got into the act, too, when Mr. Romney challenged Mr. Obama's assertion that he had gone into the Rose Garden the day after the attack on the American diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, and called it an act of terror.

"You said in the Rose Garden the day after the attack it was an act of terror?" Mr. Romney said disbelievingly. He later added: "I want to make sure we get that for the record, because it took the president 14 days before he called the attack in Benghazi an act of terror."

"Get the transcript," Mr. Obama replied.

Ms. Crowley interjected: "He did in fact, sir."

To which the president added, "Can you say that a little louder, Candy?"

The Obama administration has been criticized for shifting assessments of what really happened in Benghazi, which continued to change over the course of two weeks. But the day after the attacks, Mr. Obama did say, "No acts of terror will ever shake the resolve of this great nation, alter that character or eclipse the light of the values that we stand for."

There were plenty of questionable assertions at the second presidential debate. Here is a look at some of them:

Energy Policies

Mr. Obama and Mr. Romney carried out an extended dispute over energy policy that wandered into a thicket of half-truths, started by a question about gasoline prices that was never fully addressed.

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Mr. Romney, describing Mr. Obama as hostile to traditional energy sources, repeated his assertion that all of the increase in domestic oil and gas production in the past three years had come on private, not public, lands and that the Obama administration had cut the number of oil and gas drilling permits on public lands in half. Neither assertion is quite true.

Oil and gas production on public lands has fluctuated during the Obama administration, but it has increased modestly (about 13 percent for oil and about 6 percent for gas) in the first three years of the Obama presidency, compared with the last three years of the administration of President George W. Bush, according to an analysis from the Energy Information Administration.

The Interior Department produced a report this year showing that drilling permits received and issued by the agency had indeed declined from the last years of the Bush administration to the first years of the Obama administration -- but not by half. (In the 2007 fiscal year, the government issued 8,964 permits to drill on public lands; in 2008 the figure was 7,846. The numbers for 2009 and 2010 were 5,306 and 5,237.)

Mr. Obama said that 7,000 drilling permits had been granted but were not being used by oil companies, an accurate figure, according to the Interior Department.

Mr. Obama stated that renewable energy production had doubled during his presidency, which is true, and that oil imports were at their lowest level in 16 years, also accurate. He also said that the boom in natural gas production could produce 600,000 new jobs, a highly optimistic estimate, but he qualified it with the word "potentially."

But Mr. Obama mischaracterized Mr. Romney's energy plan, saying it was written by oil companies and favored only traditional sources of energy: oil, gas and coal. But Mr. Romney's energy plan does include a place for renewables, although he would sharply cut back on federal subsidies for wind, solar and other alternative energy sources. JOHN M. BRODER

Tariff on Chinese Tires

Mr. Obama said, "We had to make sure that China was not flooding our market with cheap tires," and therefore took action to save 1,000 jobs. It is true that in 2009, the Obama administration imposed a duty on Chinese tires, but last month the administration let the tariff expire.

The United Steelworkers Union, an Obama political supporter, sought the action, and many economists criticized it as politically motivated.

A study by the Peterson Institute for International Economics found that the tariff protected at most 1,200 American jobs. But last year alone, the institute found, it cost American consumers \$1.1 billion in higher-priced tires.

Moreover, China responded by imposing tariffs on imports of American chicken parts that cost American poultry producers an estimated \$1 billion. Last month, the Obama administration quietly let the tire tariff expire. Critics say it recognized that the economic costs of the sanction were too great. SHARON LaFRANIERE

Relations With Israel

Mr. Romney said that "the president said that he was going to put daylight between us and Israel." Is he correct?

Mr. Romney's campaign cites a newspaper account of a meeting with Jewish leaders at the White House in 2009 as evidence for Mr. Romney's statement. In that account, published in The Washington Post, people at the meeting said Mr. Obama had said that "there was no space between us and Israel" during the Bush administration, which he said had hurt the ability of the United States to influence Israeli actions or cajole Arab nations. "When there is no daylight, Israel just sits on the sidelines, and that erodes our credibility with the Arab states," the newspaper quoted Mr. Obama as saying.

An Obama administration official said they did not know whether Mr. Obama made that statement during a private meeting.

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The newspaper account did not quote Mr. Obama as explicitly stating that his "goal" was to put distance between the United States and Israel, as Mr. Romney characterized Mr. Obama's intentions during a recent speech.

Instead, the account indicates that Mr. Obama was complaining that what he suggested was the Bush administration's unwillingness to challenge the Israelis had reduced the American government's leverage over Israel and hurt its reputation with Muslim countries. At the same time, a plain reading of the account would also suggest that Mr. Obama wanted for his administration to be seen as less of a rubber stamp for Israel than the Bush administration was.

Obama administration officials have said that there is no daylight whatsoever between the United States and Israel on the issue of preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr.

Pell Grants for College

Mr. Romney said he wanted to keep the Pell Grant program growing. This is a new position for him.

The governor and his campaign have repeatedly criticized Mr. Obama's expansion of the Pell Grant program, which they have said is unsustainable. Mr. Romney's position paper on education says he would "refocus Pell Grants dollars on the students who need them most."

For months, this was widely interpreted as meaning that fewer people would qualify for Pell Grants -- an issue the Romney campaign declined to clarify.

Mr. Romney would also restore banks to their role in making student loans. Mr. Obama eliminated that role and used some of the savings to pay for the Pell Grant expansion. RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA

Illegal Immigration

Mr. Obama said Mr. Romney's "main strategy" to curb illegal immigration would be to "encourage self-deportation."

Mr. Romney has never clarified precisely what he would do about the more than 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States. During the Republican primaries he called for tough enforcement to pressure them to leave the country. Since June he has moderated that position, saying he could support some measures that would allow a limited group to remain here legally.

Mr. Romney says he opposes any amnesty. During a primary debate in January, he said he would seek a mandatory nationwide program to verify the legal status of all new hires, expanding an existing federal program known as E-Verify, which is now voluntary. With that program in place, he said, illegal immigrants would soon discover that they could not get jobs and that "they're going to self-deport."

Mr. Romney was pressed for more details on the self-deportation strategy during a town hall-style meeting last month with Univision, the Spanish language network. But he did not provide them. "I believe people make their own choices as to whether they want to go home," he said.

But he said he would not favor "a mass deportation effort, rounding people up, 12 million people." Mr. Romney said, "Our system is not to deport people."

He has said he would support giving permanent resident green cards to illegal immigrants who serve in the military, a group probably numbering in the tens of thousands.

Mr. Romney has said he will "put in place a permanent solution" for illegal immigration, but he has not described what it would look like or how he would get around the roadblocks in Congress that stalled Mr. Obama's efforts to pass legislation. Most Republican lawmakers in Washington have rejected any legal status for illegal immigrants, calling it amnesty. JULIA PRESTON

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/17/us/politics/a-closer-look-at-some-disputed-claims.html>

Graphic

CHARTS: Have Gas Prices Doubled Under Obama? Mr. Romney said that gas prices have doubled since Mr. Obama took office in 2009. They have, but Mr. Obama took office just after prices plummeted during the financial crisis. (Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration)

What's Happened to Jobs? Mr. Obama said the private sector has added five million jobs. This is true if you start counting in February 2010, the month that jobs bottomed out. (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics)

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