

Third Trump-Clinton Election Debate: Clinton Promises to Increase Social Security Tax, Confrontation with Russia

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During [the final Presidential candidates' debate, on October 19th](#), Hillary Clinton said that workers' "social security payroll contribution will go up" if she becomes President, and she went on to add, "as will Donald's — assuming he can't figure out how to get out of it."

The "Social Security payroll contribution" is the phrase policymakers customarily use to refer to what ordinary people refer to simply as "the Social Security tax," which is currently 6.2% of the employee's wages, and an additional 6.2% of the employer's payment of those wages, thus amounting to 12.4% of total payroll (wages) that are paid by the employer.

Trump ignored what she had just said there, and responded simply with "Such a nasty woman" — referring to her demeaning reference to himself: he utterly failed to indicate what he would do as President in order to, as Clinton had stated her reason for hiking those taxes: "replenish the Social Security Trust Fund."

The way that the former candidate Bernie Sanders had proposed to deal with this problem was to eliminate the Social Security payroll cap, which is [\\$118,500, above which amount any income is received free of any Social Security tax — on either the worker or the employer](#).

Trump has never, on any occasion, said what his policy on this matter would be, other than a vague ["It's my intention to leave Social Security the way it is. Not increase the age and to leave it as is."](#) In other words: he has no proposal to address the long-term problem of Social Security.

So: Hillary Clinton has already said that she will raise Social Security taxes on people who make less than \$118,500 per year, but Donald Trump has not indicated whether he will impose Social Security taxes on income above \$118,500 per year.

Other proposals that have been pushed in order to "replenish the Social Security Trust Fund" — or to achieve the long-term stability of the Social Security system — mainly focus on three approaches:

One is privatizing Social Security, as Wall Street wants, and which proposal is based on private gambles that the assets that are [purchased](#) by the Wall Street firm for the individual investor will continually increase in value, never plunge, and never be reduced by annual charges to pay Wall Street's fees for management and for transactions, throughout

the worker's career until retirement.

Another approach is gradually reducing [the inflation-adjuster for benefits](#), the inflation-adjusted value of the benefits that Social Security recipients will be receiving. President Obama had been trying to get congressional Republicans to agree with him to do that (which some call "the boiling-frog approach" because it's applied so gradually), but they continued to hold out for privatizing Social Security, and thus nothing was done.

And the third option is to increase the retirement-age, as Obama also wanted to do (and which is really just another form of "boiling-frog approach"), but also couldn't get congressional Republicans to accept that. (Trump's comment to "Not increase the age and to leave it as it is" is a clear repudiation by him of this approach. And his promise to not increase taxes would, if taken seriously, also prohibit him from endorsing Hillary Clinton's approach.)

Consequently, if Trump is a traditional Republican, then his policy would be to privatize the Social Security system, but if he is a Bernie Sanders progressive — someone in the pre-Bill-Clinton, FDR Democratic Party, mold — then his policy would instead be to eliminate the Social Security payroll cap. Those two are really his only major options.

Trump had the opportunity during the debate to make clear what his own policy would be on this important matter, and whether (and presumably that) it would be different from Clinton's, and if so, how and why it would be different; but, instead, he ignored what she had said her policy as President will be on this matter, and he responded only to her demeaning personal reference against himself. He could have gone in for the policy-kill against her proposal on this, but instead took her personalizing bait and merely insulted her personally right back.

That was one of the two major opportunities Trump had in this debate to attack Ms. Clinton's positions on the issues. The other was when she said, "I'm going to continue to push for a no-fly zone" in Syria. She has stated this position consistently throughout her campaign, and it would mean that she would warn both the Syrian government and the Russian government that unless they halt, by some specified date, their bomber-flights over Syrian territory, the United States will shoot those planes out of the sky, and the U.S. will then be at war against both Syria and Russia, over Syrian territory — a U.S. invasion. This does not necessarily mean that the war there would escalate to nuclear conflict, but it does mean that in [order](#) to avoid such World War III, either the U.S. or else both Syria and Russia would need to capitulate to the opponent (U.S. capitulate to Russia and Syria, or else Russia and Syria capitulate to U.S.) — which is highly unlikely to occur (probably less likely than nuclear war would be).

In other words: Trump also missed his opportunity — which he has had many times throughout his campaign against her — to point out that, if Ms. Clinton becomes the U.S. President, then nuclear war, WW III, will be the likely outcome of her election.

Instead, the main issue that likely will determine the outcome of this Presidential election is rape — the personal charges that have been alleged against (this time not Bill Clinton, but) Donald Trump. The fate of our planet, within just a year or two, might depend on whether the U.S. electorate focus mainly on that issue, in 2016. Consequently: the long-term problem of Social Security might actually be a moot point, anyway.

Investigative historian Eric Zuesse is the author, most recently, of [They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010](#), and of [CHRIST'S VENTRILOQUISTS: The Event that Created Christianity](#).

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