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## Social Security misinformation common on Fox's *Special Report*

Members of the "Fox News All-Star Panel" propagated two pieces of Social Security misinformation that have become increasingly common among the network's pundits. On the March 15 edition of *Special Report with Brit Hume*, National Public Radio national political correspondent Mara Liasson falsely suggested that private accounts "might do something to help the solvency" of Social Security, and *Weekly Standard* executive editor Fred Barnes erroneously claimed that Social Security will be "insolvent" in 2018.

*Media Matters for America* has documented three instances in the last six weeks ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) of Fox News pundits wrongly suggesting that President Bush's proposed private accounts would address Social Security's solvency problem, as Liasson did on March 15. In fact, even the White House has [admitted](#) that private accounts would do nothing to address Social Security's long-term revenue shortfall, and President Bush said at a March 16 [press conference](#) that "[p]ersonal accounts do not solve the issue" of solvency. Indeed, as *Media Matters* has [explained](#), diverting payroll tax dollars into private accounts without cutting benefits would actually exacerbate the solvency problem. Social Security's chief actuary recently informed the White House that under Bush's proposal to let workers divert a portion of payroll taxes into private accounts, "[a]nnual cash-flow deficits (negative annual balances) appear in 2012, or six years earlier than under current law," as *The Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) on February 8.

Barnes's false claim that Social Security will be "insolvent" in 2018 is also popular on Fox News ([here](#) and [here](#)). As *Media Matters* has [noted](#), 2018 is the year the Social Security trustees project that benefit payouts will begin to exceed payroll tax revenues, at which point the program will have to begin tapping into the trust fund to meet benefit obligations. But the system will be neither insolvent nor bankrupt. It is projected to pay out full benefits until [2042](#), according to the trustees, or [2052](#), according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

From the March 15 edition of *Special Report with Brit Hume*:

LIASSON: The question is what are you going to do to fix the solvency? And that is actually the debate that we haven't been having. **We've been having a big heated debate about private accounts, which might do something to help the solvency problem.** But certainly they're not going to be the big fix for it.

[...]

BARNES: They've [Democrats] been shamed into agreeing that something needs to be done now. The year is not 2042, either. It's 2018. That is the year -- and actually, one of the trustees of Social Security said the other day 2017; that is the year when Social Security brings in less than it's paying out. ... **That's when it becomes basically -- not bankrupt, but insolvent.** So something does have to be done now.

— *J.C.*

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