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Big mistake from PolitiFact Oregon (2014)

1 message

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To: truthometer@politifact.com

Mon, Apr 1, 2019 at 12:52 PM

Dear Truth-O-Meter,

[Back in 2014](#) PolitiFact Oregon botched a gender pay gap fact check. I sent messages at the time pointing out the need for a correction but did not get anywhere.

PolitiFact tends to produce two kinds of gender pay gap fact checks. If a politician refers to the raw gender pay gap in the context of advocating measures helping to ensure equal pay, PolitiFact tends to give a "Mostly True" rating (or thereabouts).

The second type of fact check occurs when a politician references the pay gap and augments the claim with the suggestion that the gap exists when men and women are doing the same job. PolitiFact tends to give such claims a "Mostly False" rating.

PolitiFact Oregon's fact check of Democrat Brad Avakian flips the customary script. Avakian alleged that Oregon's raw wage gap represented a difference when men and women are doing the same work. But PolitiFact Oregon gave Avakian's claim a "Mostly True" rating in spite of a lengthy summary portion pointing out the many problems with his claim.

Avakian, citing Census data and echoing claims by Obama and others, said women in Oregon "earn an average of 79 cents for every dollar that men earn for doing the same job." The report he relied on noted that the 79-cent figure applies to full-time, year-round work, although Avakian didn't include those stipulations.

For starters, the commissioner loses points for cherry-picking the 79-cent figure. Other means of measuring pay gaps between men and women put it considerably less.

The same can be said of the "for doing the same job" piece. As PolitiFact has found previously, the existence of a pay gap doesn't necessarily mean that all of the gap is caused by individual employer-level discrimination, as Avakian's claim implies. Some of the gap is at least partially explained by the predominance of women in lower-paying fields, rather than women necessarily being paid less for the same job than men are.

Finally, Avakian used the term "average" when the report he relied on said "median." He could have avoided that by simply saying women "make 79 cents for every dollar a man earns," but since the information he cited contains only median incomes, we find the difference to be inconsequential.

Those caveats aside, he still is well inside the ballpark and the ratio he cited is a credible figure from a credible agency. We rate the claim Mostly True.

PolitiFact Oregon explained that it relied in part on [this gender pay gap fact check](#) for its ruling. Note the *credible figure from a credible agency* language the two have in parallel. But the rating PolitiFact Oregon used as its template for the Avakian claim did not give nearly the same emphasis to the idea the gap exists where men and women are doing the same job.



"In Oregon, women earn an average of 79 cents for every dollar that men earn for doing the same job. That's just wrong."

— Brad Avakian on Friday, January 31st, 2014 in a campaign website statement





In fact, the fact check of Obama's version of the claim went to some lengths to divorce it from making implications about the discrimination aspect of the gender pay gap:

Ultimately, we decided that Obama's statement that "women deserve equal pay for equal work" was aspirational rather than a part of his statistical claim, so we're judging him on his claim that women "make 77 cents for every dollar a man earns."

Two ratings so embarrassingly out of sync require a correction, no?

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Sincerely,

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