

Back in 2014 ([Feb. 19, 2014](#)), PolitiFact Oregon published a fact check of a statement about Oregon's gender pay gap.

The ruling was wildly out of step with many other rulings PolitiFact has done on the gender pay gap (not to suggest that it's any kind of model for consistency). So back in 2014 we contacted the writer and editor and explained the problem. The author replied and (to my great surprise) stood behind the fact check.

For background, if a politician accurately cites the raw gender wage gap and suggests the raw gap occurs where men and women **are doing the same job**, PolitiFact usually issues a "Mostly False" rating.

On the other hand, if a politician is talking about the need to legislate protections for women to ensure equal work for equal pay and just happens (!?) to cite the raw gender wage gap, PolitiFact tends to rate that claim "Mostly True."

PolitiFact Oregon rated Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian's claim about the gender pay gap "Mostly True" though it was of the former variety.



This screenshot shows a PolitiFact Oregon fact check. On the left is a small portrait of Brad Avakian. The text reads: "In Oregon, women earn an average of 79 cents for every dollar that men earn for doing the same job. That's just wrong." Below this is the attribution: "— Brad Avakian on Friday, January 31st, 2014 in a campaign website statement". On the right is a "Mostly True" badge with a green dot.

Note the key line "for doing the same job."

In his response to me, Dana Tims said he relied in large part on PolitiFact's State of the Union fact check of President Obama. [This one](#):



This screenshot shows a PolitiFact Oregon fact check. On the left is a small portrait of Barack Obama. The text reads: "Women 'make 77 cents for every dollar a man earns.'" Below this is the attribution: "— Barack Obama on Tuesday, January 28th, 2014 in the State of the Union address". On the right is a "Mostly True" badge with a green dot.

Note that the fact checks were published just a few days apart. Also note that Tims borrowed a key justification from the Obama summary, that the raw gender wage gap is "a credible figure from a credible agency."

Tims' summary for the Avakian fact check offers a strong contrast to the summary for the Obama fact check. Tims created four paragraphs of damning observations leading to the "Mostly True" rating. The Obama fact check sums up in two paragraphs, centered on the "credible figure" comment and the rest trying to excuse Obama for perhaps making some people feel he was implying discrimination accounted for the raw wage gap. The fact check insists Obama wasn't connecting the pay gap to discrimination. That excuse won't wash when Avakian is specifically claiming the pay gap exists where men and women are doing the same job.

It should go without saying that asserting the gap occurs where men and women are doing the same work directly implies that sex discrimination accounts for the difference. And that's how PolitiFact [typically rules on these cases](#), repeatedly issuing ratings of "Mostly False."*

With such a clear-cut error surviving at PolitiFact Oregon for several years, it seemed another good test case for PolitiFact's system of open and honest corrections. How would PolitiFact go about fixing the error when PolitiFact Oregon no longer exists as such?

Apparently PolitiFact will avoid the problem of fixing the error by continuing to leave it as-is with no additional explanation. I sent an email to the recommended email address (truthometer@politifact.com) pointing out the problem on April 1, 2019. I received no reply and the PolitiFact Oregon fact check [remains as flawed as ever](#).

*It's notable that [PolitiFact Florida made an error similar to PolitiFact Oregon's](#). PolitiFact Florida somehow failed to recognize that "just because she isn't a man" is an even stronger implication of gender bias than "for doing the same job." As noted above, consistency is not PolitiFact's strong suit where the gender wage gap is concerned.

Sincerely,

Bryan W. White
Editor, Zebra Fact Check