

Submitted Oct. 5, 2018

[PolitiFact Missouri issued a Sept. 20, 2018 fact check](#) of a Republican gubernatorial candidate that appears to flatly contradict what PolitiFact flatly stated as fact in 2013.

PolitiFact Missouri gave Republican candidate Josh Hawley a “Mostly False” rating for claiming millions of Americans had lost their insurance plans. The problem? Hawley’s claim closely matched PolitiFact’s charge against President Barack Obama in awarding its 2013 “Lie of the Year” (bold emphasis added):

"If you like your health care plan, you can keep it," President Barack Obama said -- many times -- of his landmark new law.

But the promise was impossible to keep.

So this fall, **as cancellation letters were going out to approximately 4 million Americans, the public realized Obama’s breezy assurances were wrong.**

Note how Hawley’s claim serves as a close parallel:

"McCaskill told us that if we liked our healthcare plans, we could keep them. She said the cost of health insurance would go down. She said prescription drug prices would fall. She lied. **Since then, millions of Americans have lost their health care plans."**

PolitiFact Missouri ignored the context establishing the parallel to PolitiFact’s 2013 “Lie of the Year” and reasoned that the ACA’s overall effect of increasing insurance coverage made Hawley’s claim “Mostly False.”

It’s hard to see why that reasoning wouldn’t apply equally to PolitiFact’s reporting from 2013, if it applies at all.

In essence, Hawley repeated PolitiFact’s reasoning from 2013 (applied to Sen. Claire McCaskill instead of to Mr. Obama) and received a “Mostly False” rating for an accurate paraphrase of PolitiFact’s reasoning.

We contacted PolitiFact via Twitter ([Oct. 2, 2018](#)) and via email (the latter using the email address PolitiFact recommends). This is the email message we sent on Oct. 3, 2013:

Dear Truth-O-Meter,

The [Sept. 20, 2018 PolitiFact Missouri fact check of Republican senatorial candidate Josh Hawley](#) requires an extensive correction.

The fact check gives Hawley a "Mostly False" rating for claiming millions of Americans have lost their health care plans. PolitiFact Missouri argues that gains in health care coverage somehow whittle down the truth value of Hawley's claim down to a mere element.

But Hawley specified "health care plans" and not simply "health insurance." Anyone familiar with the public history of the Affordable Care Act should have noticed the parallel with the promise President Obama made that PolitiFact has claimed won its 2013 "Lie of the Year."

"If you like your health care plan, you can keep it," President Barack Obama said -- many times -- of his landmark new law.

But the promise was impossible to keep.

So this fall, as cancellation letters were going out to approximately 4 million Americans, the public realized Obama's breezy assurances were wrong.

That's PolitiFact Editor Angie Drobnic Holan on Obama's assurances that if people liked the health care plans they had then they could keep them. Holan offers an estimate of 4 million Americans receiving cancellation notices relieving them of plans they may have liked. Holan assesses Obama's promise as "impossible to keep" and "wrong."

Note the clear parallel in the statement from Hawley (as presented by PolitiFact Missouri, bold emphasis added):

"McCaskill told us that if we liked our healthcare plans, we could keep them. She said the cost of health insurance would go down. She said prescription drug prices would fall. She lied. **Since then, millions of Americans have lost their health care plans.**"

PolitiFact is awarding Hawley a "Mostly False" rating for saying something PolitiFact reported as true.

If Hawley was wrong that millions of Americans lost their health care plans then PolitiFact was equally wrong for saying the same thing. There is no significant [sic] difference in the context, given the rationale PolitiFact Missouri offers for its "Truth-O-Meter" rating of Hawley.

This apparent inconsistency deserves a response, so we respectfully request that if PolitiFact decides no correction is necessary it will share (for publication) its rationale for that decision.

If PolitiFact's reasoning behind its 2013 "Lie of the Year" counts as correct, then the reasoning from PolitiFact Missouri qualifies as false:

Hawley's claim is misleading because it asserts that coverage was automatically lost. Other options and a sizable time period were given to those experiencing cancellations. Coverage was only lost if a new plan was not sought out by the individual before his or her previous plan was phased out.

Did Hawley assert that "coverage was automatically lost"? Given the context describing the oft-made promise that people could keep the insurance plans they liked, it is hard to see how that follows. Indeed, it appears the fact checkers at PolitiFact Missouri equivocate between *insurance plan* and *insurance coverage*. PolitiFact Missouri ends up absurdly saying that people didn't really lose the insurance plans they liked if they were able to replace those plans with other plans.

We identified this fact check to PolitiFact as a mistake in need of correction.

[As of Oct. 5, 2018](#) PolitiFact had not noticeably corrected or updated the story. Nor did we receive any other discernible answer to our messages pointing out the error.

We do not regard it as a close question whether the two PolitiFact accounts contradict each other. Instead of drawing a conclusion of professional incompetence we conclude that PolitiFact is failing to follow its policy on "open and honest" corrections.

Thanks for your attention to this matter.