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Missing fact check at PolitiFact Illinois

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: truthometer@politifact.com

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Dear Truth-O-Meter,

A funny thing happened [when PolitiFact Illinois fact-checked a claim by Sean Casten this week](#).

PolitiFact Illinois reached its conclusion without checking the key part of the claim, that "most" scientists support a relatively short window (10 years) for significant action mitigating climate change.

As Truth-O-Meter doubtless knows, a claim of "most" applied to the beliefs of a group like "climate scientists" fairly begs for survey data for that group. Lacking that, the fact checker ought to have a whale of a proxy. In the case of PolitiFact Illinois, the IPCC report on climate change was apparently used as a proxy, but without any explanation to readers why they should accept it as a reasonable proxy.

[The 2018 IPCC report itself](#) has just one mention of scientists (from the Acknowledgements):

We are very grateful for the expertise, rigour and dedication shown throughout by the volunteer Coordinating Lead Authors and Lead Authors, working across scientific disciplines in each chapter of the report, with essential help by the many Contributing Authors. The Review Editors have played a critical role in assisting the author teams and ensuring the integrity of the review process. We express our sincere appreciation to all the expert and government reviewers. A special thanks goes to the Chapter Scientists of this Report who went above and beyond what was expected of them: Neville Ellis, Tania Guillén Bolaños, Daniel Huppmann, Kiane de Kleijne, Richard Millar and Chandni Singh.

That paragraph serves as the very thinnest of reeds supporting the inference that IPCC report's judgment on the time frame for effective climate change mitigation receives support from "most" climate scientists.

A fact checker ought to do better than that.

If PolitiFact Illinois cannot do better, the "Mostly True" rating does not mesh with its findings, particularly this from the fact check's conclusion (bold emphasis added):

Casten said that "most climate scientists agree that we only have less than a decade to turn things around or else we'll be stuck with a 'worst case scenario' including rising sea levels, devastating droughts, and worsening famines."

A 2018 UN climate report determined a significant decrease in carbon emissions by 2030 is necessary in order to keep global temperatures from rising 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels in years to come, and to mitigate even more severe effects of a warming planet.

Experts told us action taken to decrease emissions in the next decade will be critical. However, they **said it's an oversimplification to suggest we face a hard deadline of a decade to address climate change before crossing a threshold into climate disaster.**

What fact checker would find that, in 2019, "by 2030" represents "less than a decade"? Intentionally or otherwise, PolitiFact Illinois papers over the discrepancies between Casten's words and its own findings.

Thanks for your attention to this matter.

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Sincerely,

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