



Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

grats on directorship: Accountability at IFCN

3 messages

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Mon, Jul 17, 2023 at 8:46 AM

To: aholan@poynter.org

Dear Angie Drobnic Holan,

Congratulations on your new job as the IFCN director. You have an outstanding opportunity before you to demonstrate the highest and most admirable adherence to journalistic integrity by transparently reforming the IFCN's accountability system. That would ideally include transparency regarding the IFCN's past failures in this regard.

It's Possible You Don't Know What I'm Talking About

Despite serving as PolitiFact editor-in-chief for some years, you may find yourself wondering how IFCN accountability has failed. I'll offer an example to make my point.

"Real wages": What does it mean?

Real wages are wages adjusted for inflation. That's common knowledge among most journalists and more commonly among fact-checking journalists. When real wages fall, they're failing to keep pace with inflation. When real wages stay static, they're keeping pace with inflation. When real wages increase, they are outpacing inflation.

PolitiFact Wisconsin: Real wages are increasing but failing to keep pace with living expenses

On [February 28, 2020](#), [PolitiFact Wisconsin](#) misreported on real wages.

PolitiFact Wisconsin said "Accounting for inflation, the median wage has only increased \$3 (**per hour--bww**) since 1990 — and the cost of living expenses has far outpaced that number."

PolitiFact Wisconsin added:

An [August 2018 study](#) from the Pew Research Center showed that at least since 2000, most of the country's wage growth is distributed among the top 10% of earners.

For those closer to the median and below it, the growth line is nearly flat.

What's more, the cost of living has undergone a much steeper hike: from 1983 to 2013, the Bureau of Labor Statistics [reported](#) a roughly 3% annual increase in rent and food prices, and a 1.3% annual increase in new vehicle prices.

(PolitiFact Wisconsin showed that inflation-adjusted wages did not increase commensurate with the inflation rate for various necessities of living—a notably wrong approach to the calculation)

PolitiFact Wisconsin continued to drive the (false) point home in the concluding paragraphs:

A quick comparison shows that wages today are slightly higher than what they were then, once inflation is factored in.

But the cost of everyday goods like rent, groceries and cars have outpaced that median wage growth, meaning a worker's 1990 weekly paycheck, at a \$10.43-an-hour rate, would have held more spending power than the \$23.33-an-hour rate does today.

To sum up, PolitiFact Wisconsin made a big mistake.

I noticed the mistake and [sent a correction request](#) through truthometer@politifact.com.

When the mistake persisted despite the correction request, [I sent a complaint to the IFCN](#), alleging that PolitiFact had failed to scrupulously observe an open and honest corrections policy.

What happened?

Years have passed, and the error at PolitiFact Wisconsin remains. I have no means of knowing whether an outside assessor ever considered PolitiFact's error in its annual-ish review. Not without the assessment mentioning something about it or somebody at the IFCN answering my questions about what happened with that complaint (and others). Yes, the IFCN has described its policy such that I should expect the independent assessor was given access to the complaint. There's simply no evidence that occurred (mistake remains, complaints not mentioned in the assessment covering that time period aside from this cryptic remark:

Additional explanation from IFCN Staff

The complaints that this applicant has received are not substantiated in showing a petter on violating any criteria, therefore do not constitute a violation of the Code of Principles.

Is this accountability?

At minimum, if the IFCN reviewed the complaint about the mistake at PolitiFact Wisconsin, and communicated that to PolitiFact, shouldn't I expect the IFCN to ensure PolitiFact would fix its mistake?

If my expectations are too high, I hope you will take the time to explain the error in my thinking. On the other hand, if you agree that I'm making a valid point I hope you will encourage your staff to cooperate in identifying and correcting various failures in the IFCN system of accountability. And I hope that will include transparency by the IFCN regarding its past problems in properly ensuring accountability among its stable of verified signatories.

I am eagerly looking forward to your on-the-record reply. Or, lacking that, eager cooperation on the reform effort from IFCN staff with your blessing. Cheers.

Note: I'm reaching out separately to D. Gonsalves this morning.

--
Sincerely,

Bryan W. White
editor
zebrafactcheck.com

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: aholan@poynter.org

Mon, Jul 24, 2023 at 11:16 AM

Dear Angie Holan,

It's been a weeks since I reached out to you trying to encourage transparency and accountability from the IFCN. And, while I have received a reply from you in specific response to my email, I have since received this from you (albeit to a different email account):

I'm especially grateful for those of you who joined my session where I answered questions about the future of the IFCN and opportunities for this network to be an effective conduit of truth, transparency and accountability.

Accountability starts at the top, and these days at the IFCN that's you. The IFCN has a bad record on truth, transparency and accountability. It's documented, and I can lead you and/or Deirdre Gonsalves through it step by step. Ignoring that history will not help fix the problems. Rather, that will ensconce the IFCN as a bastion of journalistic hypocrisy.

To establish the IFCN as a "conduit of truth, transparency and accountability" you need transparency (why don't you answer my emails, for starters?), accountability (why is the complaints system such a mess and how will you fix its past mistakes?) and truth (the truth is Michael Wagner botched the only attempt I know of at disputing one of my complaints, yet his botched work forestalled any effect from my complaints). Will you prefer to bury the truth or help bring it to light?

Please encourage D. Gonsalves to cooperate in providing me answers to my longstanding unanswered questions. That will help establish a path toward successful reform of the system.

Baybars Orsek wrote: "We need to answer him."

Enock Nyariki wrote: "You make valid points."

If the IFCN values transparency, then why do I not yet have answers?

Have a good week. Delegate to Deirdre if you can't stomach a dialog with me. I look forward to hearing from one or both of you.

Thanks.

[Quoted text hidden]

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: aholan@poynter.org

Mon, Jul 24, 2023 at 11:19 AM

A little late with the proofread, apparently:

"It's been a week since I reached out to you trying to encourage transparency and accountability from the IFCN. And, while I have not received a reply from you in specific response to my email..."

[Quoted text hidden]