

## **Sunday Shows Cover Climate Change As Much In First Half Of 2014 As In Last Four Years Combined**

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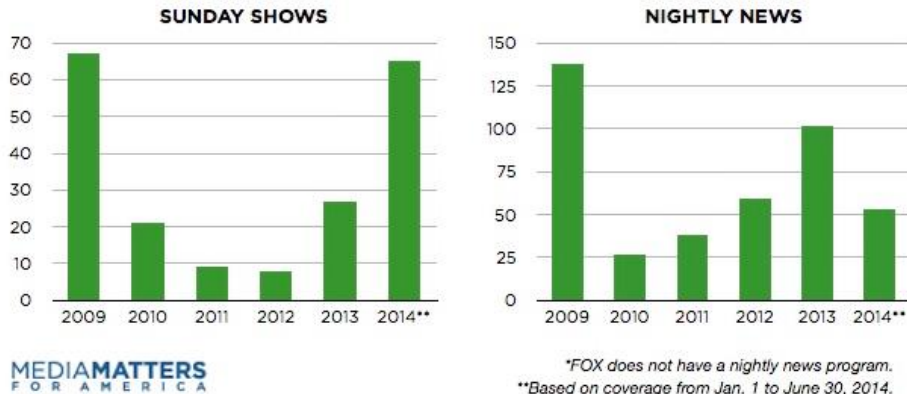
A *Media Matters* analysis finds that the Sunday shows covered climate change more in the first half of 2014 than in the last four years combined, following a push from nine U.S. Senators for increased coverage. Although these shows gave the issue more coverage, at times they used false balance, enshrouding the scientific consensus surrounding climate change.

### **After Criticism From Senators, Major Sunday Talk Shows Air More Climate Coverage**

**In First Half Of 2014, Sunday Shows Covered Climate Change More Than In All Of 2013.** Already in 2014, climate change-related events have garnered more attention than they did in 2013 on the Sunday shows. The United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that climate change will jeopardize food security, harm economies around the globe, worsen coastal flooding, trigger heat waves and more if global warming remains unmitigated. The federally mandated National Climate Assessment sounded the alarm that climate change already has started to leave its mark on the United States with more droughts, hotter temperatures, and rising sea levels -- and several extreme weather events in the U.S. this year illustrated these changes. Scientists discovered the "unstoppable" collapse of an Antarctic ice sheet, which could trigger a dramatic rise in sea levels. The Environmental Protection Agency proposed carbon pollution standards for power plants to combat global warming and improve public health. [*New York Times*, [3/31/14](#); *Media Matters*, [5/9/14](#); *Media Matters*, [5/14/14](#); *Media Matters*, [6/6/14](#)]

## BROADCAST NEWS COVERAGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Minutes of airtime on ABC, CBS, NBC & FOX\*



### **U.S. Senators Demanded More Climate Change Coverage On Sunday Shows.**

In response to lackluster media coverage in 2013, U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), along with eight other Democratic U.S. senators, forged a campaign in January to get more people talking about how to mitigate climate change, starting by demanding greater coverage of the issue from the Sunday shows. The senators sent a letter to executives at ABC News, CBS News, NBC News and Fox News, asking why "shockingly little discussion" involved climate change as part of these Sunday shows. From the letter:

We are writing to express our deep concern about the lack of attention to climate change on such Sunday news shows as ABC's "This Week," NBC's "Meet the Press," CBS's "Face the Nation," and "Fox News Sunday."

According to the scientific community, climate change is the most serious environmental crisis facing our planet. The scientists who have studied this issue are virtually unanimous in the view that climate change is occurring, that it poses a huge threat to our nation and the global community, and that it is caused by human activity. In fact, 97% of researchers actively publishing in this field agree with these conclusions.

The scientific community and governmental leaders around the world rightly worry about the horrific dangers we face if we do not address climate change. Sea level rise will take its toll on coastal states. Communities will be increasingly at risk of billions of dollars in damages from more extreme weather. And farmers may see crops and livestock destroyed as worsening drought sets in. Yet, despite these warnings, there has been shockingly little discussion on the Sunday morning news shows about this critically important issue. This is disturbing not only because the millions of viewers who watch these shows deserve to hear that discussion, but because the Sunday shows often have an impact on news coverage in other media throughout the week.

The senators reportedly had a meeting with CBS News President David Rhodes in response to the letter. Sen. Sanders' office stated that "Fox News has not yet replied" to

the letter in February 2014. [Office of U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, [1/16/14](#); Office of U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, [2/16/14](#); Huffington Post, [1/27/14](#)]

**Sunday Shows Offered As Much Climate Change Coverage In Six Months As In The Last Four Years.** Sunday talk shows aired far more coverage related to climate change during the first six months of 2014 than they broadcast in all of 2013. ABC's *This Week*, CBS' *Face The Nation*, NBC's *Meet The Press* and FNC's *Fox News Sunday* together aired 1 hour, 5 minutes of climate change-related coverage during the first six months of 2014, as much as they did during the last four years combined (1 hour, 5 minutes). Much of this coverage occurred in February, following extreme winter weather and a campaign led by U.S. senators demanding more reporting on global warming, which drew greater national attention to the issue. [*Media Matters*, [1/16/14](#); *Media Matters*, [2/16/14](#); Office of U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, [2/16/14](#)]

- NBC's *Meet The Press* gave more climate change-related coverage in the first six months of 2014 than any other major Sunday talk show, devoting 21 minutes of its broadcast to global warming. This signaled a dramatic change from 2013 when the show gave the issue no significant coverage whatsoever. Its network competitors, CBS and ABC, ran slightly less coverage with 18 minutes and 16 minutes, respectively.
- *Fox News Sunday* gave the least coverage with less than 9 minutes of airtime devoted to global warming.

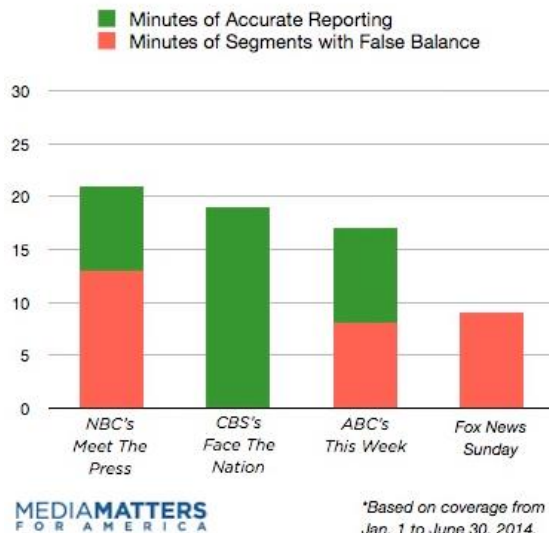
**Some Sunday Shows Gave False Balance National Platform.** Although the Sunday shows aired more climate coverage, some also misinformed audiences about its threat with false balance. ABC, NBC and FOX altogether featured nearly 30 minutes of segments that included flawed debates in the first half of this year. CBS' *Face The Nation* was the only Sunday show that avoided giving airtime to those who question the consensus surrounding climate change.

- A portion of NBC's *Meet The Press*' first climate coverage in two years featured false balance between a scientist and a politician. In February, the show invited Bill Nye "The Science Guy" and fossil fuel-funded U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) to discuss how the extreme cold weather is or is not driving climate action. Host David Gregory led in by confirming the scientific consensus on climate change, but the discussion quickly devolved into a debate about whether or not climate change is even happening. During the segment, Rep. Blackburn insisted that there was no scientific consensus on climate change, and suggested the consensus consists of merely "hypotheses or theories or unproven sciences." During another segment, the show included comments from Patrick Michaels, the Cato Institute's discredited climate expert, who suggested that by adjusting for growing global population, the world has seen no real "weather-related damages." [*Media Matters*, [2/16/14](#); NBC, *Meet The Press*, 2/16/14, via Nexis; Center for Responsive Politics, accessed [7/15/14](#), *Media Matters*, [7/10/13](#)]
- *Fox News Sunday* only discussed climate change once in 2014, with syndicated conservative columnist George Will and others dismissing the climate consensus.

In a February 2014 segment, the panel dismissed the issue as "an article of faith on the left" and a "rich man's issue," and attacked the basic premise of manmade climate change. [*Media Matters*, [2/16/14](#)]

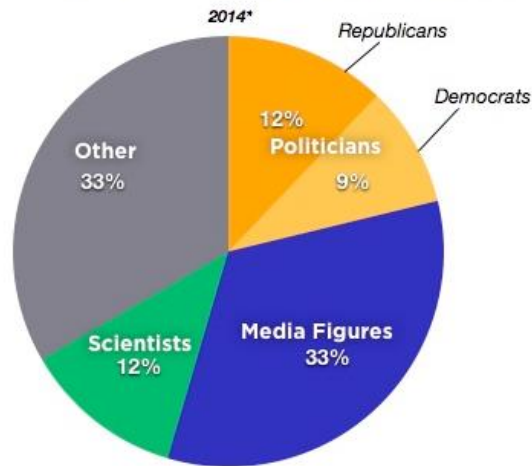
- On the February 16 edition of ABC's *This Week*, host George Stephanopoulos posed a question about climate change's impact on a harsh winter to North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory, who has rejected the science behind manmade global warming, in light of his comments that climate change "is in God's hands." McCrory said: "I think the big debate is how much of it is manmade and how much of it will just naturally happen as Earth evolves," despite overwhelming evidence and a scientific consensus that human action worsens climate change. He then stressed the need to clean the environment and improve quality of life. No one challenged McCrory about a massive coal ash spill from Duke Energy, a major campaign contributor to McCrory, that occurred in his state earlier that month. [*Media Matters*, [2/16/14](#); *Media Matters*, [2/20/14](#)]

How Much Time Did Major Sunday Shows Yield To False Balance On Climate Change In 2014\*?



**Scientists Included In Climate Coverage On Every Sunday Show Except On FOX.** Each Sunday show interviewed at least one scientist as part of its global warming coverage, except for *Fox News Sunday*. That stands in stark contrast to 2013 when CBS' *Face The Nation* was the only Sunday talk show to interview scientists about climate change. Prior to 2013, none of the outlets turned to scientists to explain the ramifications of manmade climate change. In the first half of 2014, Sunday shows continued to rely far more on politicians than scientists when discussing climate change: 21 percent of their guests were politicians, while 12 percent were scientists. [*Media Matters*, [4/16/2012](#), *Media Matters*, [1/8/2013](#), *Media Matters*, [1/16/2014](#)]

WHO DID THE SUNDAY SHOWS  
HOST OR QUOTE ON CLIMATE CHANGE?



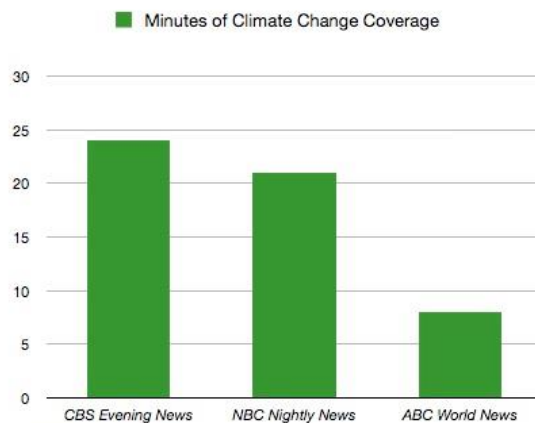
Based on coverage from Jan. 1 to June 30, 2014.

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## Nightly News Coverage Remained Fairly Consistent With 2013 Trends

**Major Network Evening News Shows Did Not Improve From 2013 Coverage.** Network nightly news shows continued to offer their audiences coverage similar to what they saw in 2013. Together, the network evening news programs aired 53 minutes of coverage that included global warming during the first six months of 2014, roughly half of the 102 minutes broadcast in all of 2013. From segments on diseased coffee beans in Central America to dying moose in Northern Minnesota, network reporters used the context of climate change to frame their stories and better inform the public.

How Much Time Did Network Nightly News Shows Spend On Climate Change In 2014\*?



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\*Based on coverage from Jan. 1 to June 30, 2014.

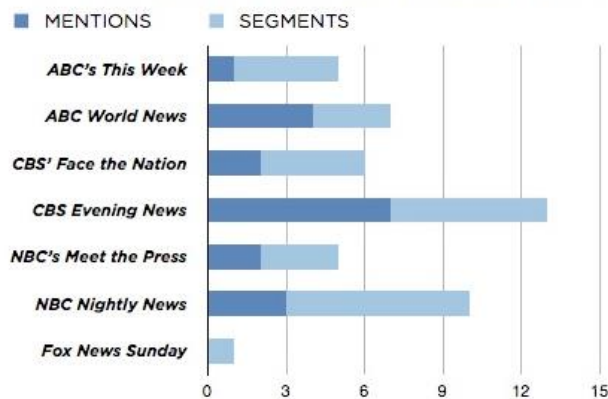
- Once again, *ABC World News* covered climate change the least among the three outlets, with less than 8 minutes, but this was almost as much as the 10 minutes of coverage it aired during all of 2013. One example of a missed opportunity for ABC occurred in June when the Environmental Protection Agency proposed carbon pollution standards to curb greenhouse gases. *ABC World News* anchor Diane Sawyer simply told the audience this major proposal had been issued, while the network's competitors both aired full packages that gave greater context to how these standards might combat climate change.
- *CBS Evening News* produced the most news related to global warming, giving nearly 24 minutes of its broadcast to the issue. *NBC Nightly News* offered marginally less with over 21 minutes of airtime. NBC and CBS are both on track to offer approximately as much coverage as last year.

[*Media Matters*, [1/16/2014](#)]

## Methodology

This report analyzes coverage of "climate change" or "global warming" between January 1, 2014 and June 30, 2014, on four Sunday morning talk shows (*ABC's This Week*, *CBS' Face the Nation*, *NBC's Meet the Press*, and Fox Broadcasting Co.'s *Fox News Sunday*) and three nightly news programs (*ABC World News*, *CBS Evening News* and *NBC Nightly News*). Fox Broadcasting Co. airs *Fox News Sunday*, but does not air a nightly news equivalent; Fox News is a separate cable channel. Our analysis includes any segment devoted to climate change, as well as any substantial mention (more than one paragraph of a news transcript and/or or a definitive statement about climate change). Timestamps were acquired from *Media Matters'* internal video archive, the [Internet Archive](#) online database, and online videos and were applied generously. For instance, if a segment about an extreme weather event mentioned climate change briefly, the entire segment was counted as climate coverage. For a few segments where video was unavailable, the length of the segment was estimated based on its word count.

TOTAL COVERAGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN 2014\*



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\*Based on coverage from Jan. 1 to June 30, 2014.