



Fox News 72 Percent Wrong on Climate Change

By Lydia Bradbury

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A report has come out from the Union of Concerned Scientists measuring the levels of accuracy various cable news networks have achieved on the issue of climate change with Fox News coming in dead last. The report looks at the overall percentage of accuracy and what types of errors the networks have made that leads to the overall total. It is an interesting examination of how the media reports on science, but it will largely be remembered for its characterization of the right-wing news channel as mostly inaccurate. In fact, the report says that Fox News channel is only right about climate change 28 percent of the time, meaning that it is 72 percent wrong.

Accuracy of facts is a highly prized aspect of news reporting. There are fact checkers employed in pretty much all the major newspapers in the world because getting something wrong is not only a code of practice, it hearkens to issues of ethics in reporting. To intentionally mislead an audience is a punishable offence in some cases and news outlets assiduously avoid opening themselves up to that kind of mistake. But the reporting surrounding climate change is a different ballgame. Parts of it can be argued against in the realms of science and politics, in which there are varying levels of debate. That is the explanation for the portrayals of climate change uttered on Fox News, which this report shows are particularly egregious.

In its role of absolute skeptics, the conservative news network plays an important part in the debate over the science of climate change and this report is part of understanding what that part is. The cable network represents the extreme negative end in reporting on climate change. The inaccuracies reported by the Union of Concerned Scientists could also be interpreted as one bias (a pro-climate change one) looking at another bias (an anti-climate change one represented by the cable channel) and seeing how much they disagree. In that respect, it shows the divide between supporters and deniers of man-made climate change.

But scientifically, there is no room for political bias because scientific facts are facts. Therefore, the conservative news channel could really just be factually inaccurate. Fox News really is just so wrong on climate change, a whopping 72 percent, but that actually shows an improvement according to this report. Fox has increased its accuracy percentage by seven percent, meaning

that at one point it was even more wrong than it is now. That is not a very heartening portrayal of one of the most watched news channels in the United States.

What will most likely be overlooked in this report, though, are the ratings of CNN and MSNBC, both of which are substantially better than Fox. MSNBC is the most accurate with 92 percent, followed by CNN, which is 70 percent accurate. At this point, critics of the report will throw it out as a left-wing, liberal greenie propaganda job. But the report does give reasons why the networks were rated as they are, which stems some of the complaints to a certain extent by being critical of everyone.

MSNBC shows its own bias towards climate change by only being inaccurate because it “overstated” the effects of climate change. For critics, that will probably just prove how liberal MSNBC is. CNN is a more interesting case. The most common reason for its inaccuracies is not in reporting, but in the debates it holds between climate change deniers and supporters, meaning that it more fairly shows both sides of the argument than does MSNBC or Fox News. The climate change deniers in those debates are the main cause of inaccuracy and the report recommends that if CNN wants to up its accuracy rating, it needs to stop having two-sided debates on the issue.

Interestingly, a question that has not been asked very often on these networks is whether or not they should be hosting people with views that are so inaccurate? One response comes from Greg Gutfeld, one of the hosts of *The Five*, which was Fox News’ most inaccurate show on climate change bar none. In his 2012 book, *The Joy of Hate: How to Triumph over Whiners in the Age of Phony Outrage*, he discussed being criticized on climate change, saying that reports in the same spirit as this one are a way of changing the game board so that anyone who disagrees is disqualified from playing. Basically, he believes that supporters of climate change are cheating and not giving Fox News and himself a fair chance at voicing their opinion.

It is interesting to note that while Gutfeld strikes back at “cheaters,” he does not seem to be playing by any rules of civility on his show. In one clip featured in a Mother Jones article, he criticizes an environmentalist, accusing him of “beta-male sniveling,” calling him a “dweeb,” a “dishonest hysteric,” and “crooked” in a segment on climate change. There were also crude comments about the environmentalist having a vasectomy. Claims of hysteria on the part of environmentalists are present in the clip, which plays into the Union of Concerned Scientists’ report which states that the most common mistake Fox News makes in their reporting in understating the reality of climate change.

Nevertheless, the conservative network has the right and will no doubt continue in its reporting, however inaccurate it may be according to this report. Just yesterday Fox News hit back at pro-climate change reports, claiming that the divide over climate change is deepening. Foxnews.com posted an article about the International Panel on Climate Change report which claims that climate change is not only manageable, but beneficial to the environment. The report, as the article notes, was funded by a conservative think tank. It also quotes the vice president for legal affairs at the Cato Institute, Roger Pilon, who claims that there has been no climate change for approximately 17 years and eight months, characterizing that information as a political “dirty little secret.”

There are as yet no calculations on this report and others will affect Fox News overall 72 percent wrong rating on climate change. Though, since it was published online, it does not exactly relate to the television coverage there is data for. Perhaps there will have to be a second report entirely based on online reporting of climate change facts.

Opinion By Lydia Webb

Sources:

Mother Jones

Huffington Post

Union of Concerned Scientists

The Washington Post

Fox News