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A health-care expert on how PolitiFact ignores the facts

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I have already **documented at some length** the way in which PolitiFact attacked a prominent New Jersey conservative over a question that was not a matter of fact but a matter of opinion.

If you look at the comments that appear after my column, you'll see that this is true. Opinions were all over the map on whether PolitiFact was correct to call Lonigan a liar for saying Social Security is broke.

If PolitiFact had stuck to the facts, such as the numbers he quoted, there would have been nothing to debate. But his numbers were fine. Meanwhile as you can see above, his debate opponent, liberal think-tanker Deborah Howlett, made a number of statements about Social Security that could be termed false as well, such as her statement that "minor tweaks" could save it.

Here's Michael Cannon of the Cato Institute **weighing in** on why Politifact can't be taken seriously as an arbiter of the truth.

Cannon writes that he was interviewed by PolitiFact several times but will no longer cooperate with them because of their habit of leaving out facts that contradict their opinions.

He cites the controversy over the Sarah Palin "death panel" comment: PolitiFact's "death panels" fact-check never considered whether President Obama's contemporaneous "IMAC" proposal would, under standard principles of administrative law, enable the federal government to ration care as Palin claimed. (In an August 2009 oped for the Detroit Free Press, I explain how the IMAC proposal would do just that.)

PolitiFact's "government takeover" fact-check hung its conclusion on the distinction between "public" vs. "private" health care, without considering whether that distinction might be illusory. (In a January 2011 column for Kaiser Health News, I cite well-respected, non-partisan sources – and even one of President Obama's own health care advisors – to demonstrate that this distinction is illusory.) Aside from whether they arrived at the truth, each of these fact-checks was woefully incomplete.

When I discussed this with Cannon on the phone, he noted what should be obvious to any critic of any health-care scheme: It's impossible to design such a scheme without including some mechanism for denying expensive end-of-life care. If an 85-year-old with lung cancer and a bad heart demands a liver transplant at a cost of \$200,000, someone has to decide whether he gets it. If you want to call that someone or someones a "death panel" then that's a matter of opinion, not fact. By the way, I have long criticized of Palin for being an airhead, and for that reason I took **the exact opposite tack** on this. What she argued, at least as it applies to Medicare, is that working Americans should pay taxes to keep her parents alive at whatever expense that entails.

No, Sarah. Save up your own money for that.

Here's Cannon weighing in on the issue in an op-ed he did on the subject:

No one ever accused Palin of being a health policy expert, and many found her hyperbolic term "death panel" off-putting. But that should not distract voters from this reality: President Obama has proposed a new body that would enhance Medicare's ability to deny care to the elderly and disabled based on government bureaucrats' arbitrary valuations of those patients' lives.

It is right there in the legislation now before Congress, and it is called the Independent Medicare Advisory Council.

Whether that is a "death panel" is a matter of opinion, not fact.

And the PolitiFact people keep inserting their opinions into what is supposed to be a matter of fact. Note this passage from **the entry on Palin's putative death panels**:

"We agree with Palin that such a system would be evil."

That's opinion, not fact. In Medicare we already have a system of socialized medicine that takes money from younger workers who may be poor to support older retirees who may be rich.

Is it "evil" to say that at a certain point, that system should put a limit on the amount of money spent?

Then it must be "evil" to argue Medicare should be abolished. So I guess I'm evil.

Of course, I think both Palin and PolitiFact are big-spending liberals. Neither wants to face the real issue: Medicare cannot keep giving medical services with no check on costs.

Neither PolitiFact nor Palin seem to be able to conceive of a world where the government does not have infinite resources.

But that's the world we live in.

And that's a fact.

ADD: At least **this PolitiFact piece is funny**. It covers the question of whether Mitt Romney went on family vacations with his dog atop the station wagon. Reader MadinNJ commented on it.