

# Stimulus watch: Obama's economy claims count salary raises as saved jobs

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WASHINGTON — The government's latest count of stimulus jobs significantly overstates the effects of the \$787 billion program under a popular federal preschool program, raising fresh questions about the process the Obama administration is using to tout the success of its economic recovery plan.

An Associated Press review of the latest stimulus reports — which the White House promised would undergo extensive reviews to ensure accuracy — found that more than two-thirds of 14,506 jobs credited to the recovery act under spending by just one federal office were overstated because they counted pay increases for existing workers as jobs saved.

The inflated job count is at least partly the product of the administration instructing local community agencies that received money to count the raises as jobs saved.

"That's more than ridiculous," said Antonia Ferrer, a spokeswoman for Republican House Minority Leader John Boehner.

Most of the inflated figures were like those cited in the 935 saved jobs reported by the Southwest Georgia Community Action in Moultrie, Ga. The agency, like hundreds of others collecting Head Start money, claimed all its existing employees' jobs were saved because they received a pay raise with the stimulus cash.

Similar claims led to overstating by more than 9,300 the number of jobs saved with more than \$323 million in stimulus money distributed by the Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, the AP's review found.

More than 250 other community agencies in the U.S. similarly reported

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saving jobs when using the money to give pay raises, pay for training and continuing education, extend employee work hours or buy equipment, according to their spending reports.

The Georgia program inflated the numbers even further by claiming the recovery money saved more jobs than the number of people it actually employs. The agency employs 508 people but claimed 935 jobs were saved because of confusion over government reports.

That type of accounting error was found in an earlier AP review of stimulus jobs, which the Obama administration said was misleading because most of the government's job-counting mistakes were being fixed in the new data.

The AP's new review focused only on the money distributed by the Administration for Children and Families and was not an assessment of the money handled by dozens of other federal programs and other job claims made in the new stimulus report.

The administration acknowledged overcounting in the new numbers for the HHS program. Elizabeth Oxhorn, a spokeswoman for the White House recovery office, said the Obama administration was reviewing the Head Start data "to determine how and if it will be counted."

But officials defended

the practice of counting raises as saved jobs.

"If I give you a raise, it is going to save a portion of your job," HHS spokesman Luis Rosero said.

The raises themselves were appropriate since the stimulus law set aside money for Head Start salary increases, but converting that number into jobs saved proved difficult. The Obama administration told Head Start officials to consider a fraction of each employee as a job saved.

Many Head Start programs around the country went further, counting everyone who received a raise as a saved job.

"It's a glitch in the system," said Ben Allen, the research director at the National Head Start Association. "There was some misunderstanding among some in the Head Start community about completing the reporting requirements."

Allen said a cost-of-living adjustment "may not be viewed traditionally as a job saved, but one could interpret it that, by providing COLA, you're retaining staff."

The Bergen County Community Action Program in Hackensack, N.J., noted the nearly \$213,000 it received went to cover raises for existing staff only. But it also reported saving 85 jobs.

At Southwest Georgia Community Action Council, director Myrtis Mulkey-

Ndawula said she followed the guidelines the Obama administration provided. She said she multiplied the 508 employees by 1.84 — the percentage pay raise they received — and came up with 935 jobs saved.

"I would say it's confusing at best," she said. "But we followed the instructions we were given."

Ed DeSeve, who oversees the stimulus at the White House, said the Head Start numbers "represent a few percent of all jobs reported" and said the problems would probably be balanced out by other errors that underreported jobs.

"We don't expect any corrections to this data to meaningfully impact the total 640,000 direct jobs," DeSeve said.

Last week's stimulus report claimed 640,000 jobs saved or created by the economic recovery plan so far. Those jobs came from 156,614 federal contracts, grants and loans awarded to more than 62,000 recipients, worth a total of \$215 billion.

Obama has promised the stimulus would save or create 3.5 million jobs by the end of next year, and the data released Friday represented the first head count toward that goal.

## Entertainment News

### White House to host episode of food show 'Iron Chef America'

NEW YORK (AP) — Michelle Obama's vegetable garden is about to become a culinary battlefield. The Food Network announced Wednesday that an episode of "Iron Chef America" will be taped at the White House featuring Mario Batali, Bobby Flay and Emeril Lagasse.



Obama

The three chefs, joined by White House chef Cristeta Comerford, will be welcomed by the first lady and allowed to use anything found in the garden to help create their meals.

The competition will then move back to the network's Kitchen Stadium in New York, where Flay and Comerford will face off against Batali and Lagasse to produce five dishes showcasing the ingredients.

The judges will include chef Nigella Lawson, Olympic gold medalist Natalie Coughlin and actress Jane Seymour.

The episode airs Jan. 3.

### New reality cooking show for volatile chef Gordon Ramsay

NEW YORK (AP) — Celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay has some new people to yell at.

The verbally abusive star of Fox's "Hell's Kitchen" has signed a deal with Fox for a second show. Tentatively called "Masterchef," it will feature Ramsay trying to turn people who have no experience in the food industry into expert cooks. Not surprisingly, producers say Ramsay won't be afraid to tell the would-be cooks the cold, hard truth about their work.

Contestants will compete by whipping up dishes to be judged by a panel of expert chefs. The new series follows a format that has already proven successful in England and Australia.

Fox did not immediately say when the new show will go on the air.

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## VETERAN: Telling his war story

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Davis said locals often would take pity on members of his battalion during the holiday season.

"One family brought us rabbit once," he said. "One man brought us a bottle of wine. He said he had been saving it for people like us."

Although the men spent their days working, they were able to celebrate, especially on their first anniversary of work.

The members of the battalion put on skits, listened to a live band and celebrated with beer and food.

Members of the armed services today can keep in touch with family and friends over Facebook, e-mail and even video. But when Davis was in the Army, the only way of communication was through the mail.

"We didn't write too often," he said. "Just because you had to be careful with what you sent."

Davis' granddaughter,

Members of the armed services today can keep in touch with family and friends over Facebook, e-mail and even video. But when Rolan Davis was in the Army, the only way of communication was through the mail.

Crystal Davis, said her grandfather still has some of the letters he received and sent while he was in the Army.

Davis sent a tablecloth, a fishing reel and a small typewriter to his wife while serving. They had been married almost 58 years when she died in February 1999.

"I just had to box it all up," he said. "It had to get the OK first."

When he returned to Ottawa after his tour, he returned to work at Kansas City Power and Light, where he worked until he retired.

"I retired in '74," he said. "I spent almost 30 years with them."

At his age, Davis said he wishes he had the ability to walk better, but is grateful to have his family around him.

"Being drafted made me grow up pretty fast."

## VETERANS DAY: Events

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Daniel Gilyeat, Overland Park, will serve as the grand marshal of the parade. He is a veteran Marine who lost his leg while serving in Iraq. Last year he was featured on ABC's "Extreme Makeover

Home Edition."

The closing ceremony, which will be conducted by Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 912, is something new this year, Wright said. She said the weekend's events could draw 3,000 people to Ottawa.

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