



November 20, 2009

## Watchdog Urges Caution on Claims of 640,000 Stimulus Jobs

By [MICHAEL COOPER](#)

WASHINGTON — The government watchdog overseeing the federal stimulus program testified Thursday that he could not vouch for the Obama administration's recent claims that the money had saved or created 640,000 jobs. He suggested that the administration should have treated the number with more skepticism.

The 640,000 figure, announced by the White House with some fanfare last month, came from reports filed by recipients of the stimulus money, many of which have been shown to be inaccurate or overstated since they were made public. But the watchdog, [Earl E. Devaney](#), the chairman of the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, said that it was also possible that the figure understated how many jobs were affected. Up to 10 percent of the recipients had not filed the required reports showing how many jobs they had created or saved, he said.

"I have no doubt that there's a lot of jobs being created," Mr. Devaney said at a hearing of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. "I think it could be above or below 640. I think missing reports might drive the job numbers up, and I think there's enough inaccuracies in here to question if the 640 number might go down."

When the White House announced the figures three weeks ago, officials hoped to reassure people that the \$787 billion stimulus program was working in the face of rising unemployment. Many economists credit the stimulus with helping the economy, but tallying the actual jobs has proved difficult. A series of embarrassing reports — of raises being counted as new jobs, of jobs claimed in Congressional districts that do not exist, of school districts claiming to have saved the jobs of more teachers than they employ — may have ended up undermining confidence in the stimulus program.

This week, Representative David Obey of Wisconsin, an influential Democrat who helped write the stimulus

bill, issued a blistering statement calling the mistakes in the data “ludicrous” and “outrageous.”

“Credibility counts in government, and stupid mistakes like this undermine it,” he said. Vice President [Joseph R. Biden Jr.](#) was even quizzed about the figures when he sat for an interview on [“The Daily Show.”](#)

Also Thursday, a report issued by the [Government Accountability Office](#) identified “significant” problems with the jobs numbers. It found that 58,386 of the jobs were being claimed by recipients who had not reported spending any money; on the other hand, recipients who had received nearly \$1 billion had claimed no jobs at all.

Administration officials have said that they believe that mistakes overcounting jobs are likely to be offset by mistakes undercounting them.

Representative [Darrell E. Issa](#), the ranking Republican on the committee, read the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of propaganda at the hearing, and suggested that the administration was using the faulty jobs figure to promote its policies.

He read a series of statements of administration officials trumpeting the figure, and asked Mr. Devaney if it would have been better to have simply acknowledged that the data came from recipients and could not be verified.

Mr. Devaney, who has warned for months that the data was likely to contain inaccuracies, seemed to agree, saying that he liked that statement. The data is all publicly available on the government’s Web site, [www.recovery.gov](#), which he oversees.

Elizabeth A. Oxhorn, a White House spokeswoman, said that Mr. Biden had warned publicly that the data was not 100 percent accurate and would require corrections.

Mr. Devaney said that the mistakes were coming to light because of the effort toward transparency, and said, “My expectation is that any embarrassment suffered will encourage self-correcting behavior and lead to better reporting in the future.”

*Jackie Calmes contributed reporting.*

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