

# The Florida Times-Union

## The Obama Record: How has he really done?

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J. Scott Applewhite Associated Press President Barack Obama's administration's most recent tally shows 8 million people have signed up for private health insurance and about 6.1 million beneficiaries have been added to Medicaid as of the end of April.

So how is President Barack Obama doing? FactCheck.org checks periodically on selected statistical indicators of what has happened since Obama first took office in January 2009. Some are positive and some are not, but all are from sources that FactCheck.org considers solid and reliable. But it comes with a caveat: No single number or collection of numbers can tell the entire story.

### **AFFORDABLE CARE ACT**

Information on the effects of Obamacare continues to accumulate, showing the law is reaching millions of its intended beneficiaries.

- The administration's most recent tally shows just over 8 million people signed up for private health insurance. Nearly half of those signed up in March, as the deadline was approaching.
- There also has been a surge in new sign-ups for Medicaid, the joint federal-state insurance program for low-income people. The administration's latest tally shows nearly 6.1 million Medicaid beneficiaries had been added as of the end of April, compared with the July-September quarter of last year.

A poll by the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation shows that the majority of those who signed up for individual policies rate their Obamacare-compliant coverage as excellent or good, believe it is a good value for what they pay for it, and say they are satisfied with various aspects of their plans.

To be sure, an unknown number of those who signed up through the exchanges failed to make their first premium payments, and so never completed enrollment. How many? Early reports ranged widely, most estimating that 80 percent to 90 percent who signed up had also paid.

As for the 6 million new Medicaid beneficiaries, an unknown portion would have been added even without Obamacare. However, states that have chosen to expand eligibility under the ACA

saw a 15.3 percent increase, while states that declined to expand eligibility, like Florida, experienced only a 3.3 percent increase.

## **JOBS**

The economy as of June had gained just over 4.8 million jobs since Obama took office in January 2009. The unemployment rate has declined to 6.1 percent, which is 1.7 points lower than when he took office and 3.9 points lower than it was at its worst point during October 2009.

The economy has not only regained the 4.3 million jobs lost during Obama's first 13 months in office, but also has regained the 4.4 million jobs lost during the 12 months before he entered the White House. Total employment now is at a record high — 415,000 jobs higher than the peak number reached before the great recession of 2007-2009.

Many without jobs continue to struggle, however. Despite improvements in recent months, the number of those who have been out of work for at least 27 weeks — the so-called long-term unemployed — is still more than 3 million, and 382,000 higher than when Obama took office.

## **WAGES, HOME OWNERSHIP**

Even for those who have jobs, wages have risen so slowly they have barely kept up with historically low rates of inflation. Average weekly earnings of workers on payrolls, measured in inflation-adjusted dollars, have edged up a scant 0.3 percent between Obama's first month in office and May 2014, the most recent on record. And there's no clear upward trend.

Relatively fewer people now own their homes. Under Obama, the home ownership rate has continued to slide, declining by 2.5 percentage points since he took office.

## **FOOD STAMPS**

The number of low-income people on food stamps (officially called Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP) has declined recently from the record levels reached during Obama's tenure.

The most recent figures from the Department of Agriculture put the number receiving benefits at 46.1 million as of March. That's down from the nearly 47.8 million who were getting benefits in December 2012 — a record. But the most recent number is still more than 14 percent of the entire U.S. population, and is an increase of 44 percent since the month Obama first took office.

The increase in food stamp beneficiaries is due partly to economic pressures, and partly to liberalizations in both benefits and eligibility under Obama and his predecessor. The number of food stamp beneficiaries increased by 14.7 million during Bush's two terms in office, which exceeds the current increase under Obama of 14.1 million.

## **OIL, GAS, WIND, SOLAR**

Production of crude oil in the U.S. now has increased 67 percent since Obama took office, while imports of foreign oil and petroleum products have declined by 48 percent, as measured by the Energy Information Administration figures, comparing the most recent three-month period with the last quarter of 2008.

As a consequence, U.S. dependency on imported oil has dropped sharply. The nation imported 30 percent of what it consumed in the first five months of 2014, according to the most recent EIA figures. That's a drop of 27 percentage points from 2008, when the U.S. imported 57 percent.

The decline began in George W. Bush's second term, after U.S. dependency peaked at 60.3 percent in 2005.

One factor is motorists buying more fuel-efficient vehicles. The latest figures from the University of Michigan's Transportation Research Institute show the average EPA city/highway "window sticker" mileage of cars and light trucks sold in June was 25.5 miles per gallon, an improvement of 21.4 percent over the average for vehicles sold in the month that Obama took office.

Under Obama, wind and solar power has more than tripled. In the most recent 12 months on record (ending in April) electricity generated by wind and solar had increased by 231 percent over the total for 2008. That was spurred in part by large federal tax subsidies.

## **MODERATE INFLATION**

Consumer prices have risen slowly under Obama. As of May, the Consumer Price Index has risen 11.9 percent since he first took office.

The highly visible price of regular gasoline has continued to fluctuate at well below the record high of \$4+ per gallon that it reached in June and July 2008, before he took office.

## **EXPORTS**

The president hasn't said much lately about the goal he set in his 2010 State of the Union address, when he said, "We will double our exports over the next five years." That is now hopelessly out of reach.

As of the first quarter of 2014, seasonally adjusted exports of goods and services have increased only 34.7 percent since the quarter before Obama took office, according to the most recent data from the U.S. Commerce Department. That's being charitable to the president; compared with the quarter in which he actually made his promise to double exports by the end of this year, the increase has been only 30.9 percent.

## **SPENDING AND DEBT**

Since Obama took office, federal spending has risen much more slowly than it did under his predecessor. But annual deficits, while shrinking, remain high, with no end in sight. Obama's legacy surely will include a doubling of the most important measure of the federal debt.

Federal outlays for the current fiscal year are estimated to be \$3.65 trillion. FactCheck.org calculates that to be just 10.1 percent higher than fiscal 2009 spending levels he inherited from George W. Bush.

Obama's increase in federal spending over five years contrasts dramatically with the 78 percent increase during Bush's eight years (FY 2001 vs FY 2009, minus the \$203 billion attributed by FactCheck.org to Obama). And that is giving Bush the benefit of the doubt. A Republican economist, Daniel Mitchell of the libertarian Cato Institute, has figured that only \$140 billion of fiscal 2009 spending can be attributed to Obama.

Currently, total federal debt stands at nearly \$17.6 trillion, which is 66 percent higher than when Obama took office. That figure includes money the government owes to itself, chiefly through the Social Security trust funds. But when it comes to what the government owes to the public — a figure that economists consider more important — the debt almost exactly doubled since Obama took office. As of June 30, debt owed to the public was just under \$12.6 trillion, an increase of 99.2 percent under Obama.

## **GUN PRODUCTION**

Gun sales have boomed under Obama, who did not deliver on campaign pledges to restore the ban on "assault weapons" that expired in 2004, or promises to require background checks for sales by non-dealers at gun shows and on the Internet.

Reliable statistics on total sales don't exist, but U.S. makers of firearms do report figures on new weapons produced each year. U.S. production of new handguns — revolvers and pistols — topped 4 million in 2012. That's more than double the figure for 2008 — a rise of 128 percent during the president's first term alone.

In 2013, after the Newtown, Conn., school massacre that left 20 children dead, Obama tried and failed to push through Congress a package including expanded background checks of gun buyers and a renewed ban on some "assault weapons." He recently called that failure the "biggest frustration" of his presidency.

## **GUANTANAMO**

The president also failed to deliver on his intention to close the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba. Recently, five senior Taliban commanders were released from there in exchange for the return of Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl. That brought the total number being held there to 149. It represents a decline of 38 percent compared with the 242 who were being held there when he entered the White House in 2009.

## **MILITARY FATALITIES**

Even with the U.S. role in Afghanistan winding down, casualties continue. The total number of U.S. military fatalities in that country has now grown to 2,335, according to iCasualties.org.

The number of U.S. military fatalities in the Iraq war since 2008 is 264, including one soldier who died in a vehicle accident in Bahrain two months after Obama pulled out all of the troops at the end of 2011. But more recently, he announced he is sending hundreds of troops back to Iraq as “advisers” and to provide embassy security because of the crisis there. But so far none has been reported as killed or wounded.