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Washington Post: '3 Pinocchios' to Obamacare Enrollment Numbers

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By: Drew MacKenzie

Glenn Kessler, who writes The Fact Checker column for The Washington Post, has given "three Pinocchios" to the White House for its claim that 6 million people have enrolled in Obamacare, and warned the media to ignore the distorted government figures.

On President Barack Obama's official Twitter account, the president recently tweeted:

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{^OoyalaVideo|(url)<blockquote class="twitter-tweet" lang="en"><p>Six million Americans have gotten covered. Have you? <a href="http://t.co/9v9Gs3H0hg">http://t.co/9v9Gs3H0hg</a> <a href="http://t.co/KOWEd1SR6E">pic.twitter.com/KOWEd1SR6E</a></p>&mdash; Barack Obama (@BarackObama) <a href="https://twitter.com/BarackObama/statuses/421668496120897536">January 10, 2014</a></blockquote><script async src="//platform.twitter.com/widgets.js" charset="utf-8"></script>^}
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The figure comes from a combination of 2.1 million people who have enrolled under federal and state healthcare insurance exchanges, plus 3.9 million who have qualified for coverage on Medicaid through November.

But Kessler says the "bottom line" on the **3.9 million figure** is that "it tells you almost nothing about how the Affordable Care Act is affecting Medicaid enrollment." He added, "Reporters need to stop using it."

Kessler pointed out that the White House has been keeping the media posted on the number of people deemed eligible to enroll in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

"But what these figures do not tell you is how many additional people have joined Medicaid because of the Affordable Care Act," he said. "No one really knows, though some have tried to tease out figures from the data that has been presented."

Kessler points out that there is no comparison available to figures for October and November 2013 compared to 2012 on how many people have enrolled in the healthcare program for the poor due to its expansion under Obamacare.

"Information about the number of people added because of the Medicaid expansion will not be available until after the end of March, when states start sending their quarterly bills to the federal government for their 100 percent refund of people in the expansion pool," he said.

Kessler noted that the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, a unit of the Department of Health and Human Services, had admitted that the 3.9 million figure "includes some Medicaid and CHIP renewals."

The Washington Post Fact Checker also warned the media about the Medicaid numbers for December, which are coming out soon.

"Presumably the new numbers will reveal as little about the impact of the Affordable Care Act as the 3.9 million figure. Reporters need to be very careful about using the new figure in any sentence that includes a reference to the new healthcare law."

Kessler added, "We're awarding Three Pinocchios to everyone, including The Fact Checker, who improperly used this number or left the wrong impression about it."

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