



Land of the Free Now Home of the “Czars”

House Minority Leader John Boehner has accused President Obama of circumventing and subverting the Constitution by appointing more than 30 "czars" to oversee government operations from newly created positions, most of them not subject to Senate confirmation.



Many of the positions and responsibilities duplicate those of cabinet-level officials and their departments.

"He clearly is circumventing the Constitution, in my view, and I think the heat continues to build on the administration to deal with this," Boehner said in an interview with Newsmax TV. "It's one thing to have domestic policy advisers or international policy advisers, but to have this many people at the White House who have really more control than the Cabinet secretaries, I think is a subversion of the Constitution."

Any list of so-called czars is to some extent subjective, since the word "czar" is not in any official title and which positions qualify for the designation may be debatable. According to Wikipedia, the current use of the term once reserved for the rulers of pre-revolution Russia started during the administration of Franklin Roosevelt, who had 12 such appointees. The number dropped to six under Truman and one in Eisenhower's administration. Reagan had only one, the Director to the White House Drug Abuse Policy, and George H.W. Bush had 2. The number increased to seven under Clinton, then ballooned to 31 under George W. Bush, according to the Wikipedia list. There are 32 thus far in the Obama administration, which began in January of this year.

The offices created by executive order of George W. Bush included the Chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, or the bioethics czar, and the Advisor to the President for Public Health Emergency Awareness, dubbed the bird flu czar. The special counselors to the President included a communications czar. Bush created the Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives, headed by the faith-based czar, and even gave the nation a birth-control czar, formally the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Population Affairs in the Department of Health and Human Services. Former Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams was the Deputy National Security Advisor for Global Affairs, known incongruously as the democracy czar.

Obama's additions include an Advisor to the President and the Vice President on Domestic Violence and Assault Issues, or the domestic-policy czar. The green-jobs czar is the Special Advisor for Green Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. There is a health czar who is the Director of the White House Office of Health Reform and Counselor to the President. There is also a car czar for the auto industry, a



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compensation, or pay, czar for companies receiving money under the Troubled Assets Relief Program, which has its own TARP czar, the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Financial Stability. The White House has both a science czar, the Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, and a Chief Technology Officer known as the technology czar. The Director of the Office Safe and Drug free Schools is the safe schools czar. There is even a regulatory czar, confirmed by the Senate, to regulate the regulators. The Director of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs is within the Office of Management Budget.

On the international scene, there is the Guantanamo Base closure czar, who is a special envoy of the Department of State. The United States has former UN Ambassador Richard Holbrooke as the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, or the Afghanistan czar. Former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell has an even broader role as the Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, or Mid-East peace czar. The Sudan czar is officially the Special Envoy to Sudan.

Even in the comparatively czar-free Clinton years, when there were only seven, the President had an advisor to oversee the efforts of the other domestic policy advisors. The chief domestic policy advisor and Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council was called, simply, the "czar czar."

"I think this whole issue has gotten way out of control in terms of the number of czars that he has and advisers around him," Boehner said about the reign of czars under Obama. Some Senate Democrats, including Dianne Feinstein of California and Russ Feingold of Wisconsin also have expressed misgivings.

The dean of the Senate, Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) wrote Obama a letter warning: "The rapid and easy accumulation of power by White House staff can threaten the constitutional system of checks and balances. At the worst, White House staff have taken direction and control of programmatic areas that are the statutory responsibility of Senate confirmed officials."

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