

By Adrian Smith

U.S. Congressman, 3rd District

Presidents always have surrounded themselves with advisors and counselors. Beginning with President George Washington, these individuals play an important role in public and foreign policy.

To date, the Obama Administration has appointed more than 30 new advisors to oversee various industries and governmental functions. Though each position has its own official title, these advisors have been commonly referred to as “czars” for their large areas of oversight responsibility.

For example, the President has appointed advisors to oversee U.S. energy policy, border security, stimulus accountability, and safe schools, among numerous others. These positions are in addition to his Cabinet and sub-Cabinet.

Though czars have offered advice and counsel to presidents since the administration of President Richard Nixon—who appointed the first “Drug Czar”—through President George W. Bush and while these appointments claim to provide more government oversight, the recent expansion and increased numbers of czars represent an unnecessary expansion of the federal government and its bureaucracy.

Moreover, there must be more transparency regarding the job functions of these advisors, particularly because many of these individuals—unlike Cabinet secretaries, judges and other presidential appointments—have bypassed Article II, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, which mandates the advice and consent of the Senate when the President appoints principle officers.

Specifically, the article reads the President “shall nominate, and by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, shall appoint ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls, judges of the Supreme Court, and all other officers of the United States.”

Without this oversight, answers to important questions about a person’s motivations, professional conflicts, and qualifications are not known at least until a czar is already ensconced in office.

Especially in these tough economic times, taxpayers deserve to know what these new offices are costing. The median czar salary, paid out of the White House’s administrative fund, is \$172,000. Each office also includes a staff and transportation and travel budgets.

Recently a number of controversies have arisen over several of the czars appointed by President Barack Obama, drawing attention away from important issues such as health care reform and economic recovery.

Van Jones, the Administration’s “green jobs” czar, created a fire storm in September when—among other revelations—it was shown he signed a petition asserting the American government had foreknowledge and was complicit in the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Jones stepped down amid heavy criticism from both Democrats and Republicans.

I have heard from many of my constituents echoing my concern our country is turning too much power over to individuals who were not elected by the people and who do not answer to Congress.

With this in mind, I have cosponsored H.Con.Res. 185, which requests the President report to Congress the responsibilities and qualifications of each of his czars.

Another bill I support, the Czar Accountability and Reform Act (H.R. 3226), would prohibit the use of funds to pay either expenses or salaries of members of task forces, councils, or similar

offices established by the President without the advice and consent of the Senate.

The Constitution of the United States grants Congress the responsibility to advise and consent in numerous areas of public policy, including the appointment of high ranking officials by the President.

It is important Congress live up to that responsibility to ensure the American public knows exactly who is helping craft the policies which govern our nation.