



CAMPAIGN 2012

Obama flexing same powers he once criticized

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As he eyes re-election, President Obama is increasingly flexing his executive muscle to outflank congressional Republicans, even though he railed against such expansive uses of presidential power as a candidate in 2008.

Over the past week alone, Obama pushed through the appointment of a consumer-protection agency head opposed by Senate Republicans, unveiled a plan to recast the U.S. military and slash defense spending and issued new rules allowing some illegal immigrants to remain in the country while they apply for legal status. Obama not only acted without congressional approval, but, in many cases, despite strenuous congressional opposition.



President Barack Obama speaks in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Wednesday, during a forum on "Insourcing American Jobs". (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

Obama says he's been forced to rely more on his executive authority because congressional Republicans legislation that he believes will improve the economy.

"You've got the top Republican in the Senate saying his party's No. 1 priority is not to create jobs, not to fix the economy, but to beat me," Obama said. "Whenever this Congress refuses to act in a way that hurts our economy or puts our people at risk, I've got an obligation as president to do what we can without them."

As a candidate, Obama railed against former President Bush's expansion of presidential powers, particularly the power to invade Iraq.

"These last few years we've seen an unacceptable abuse of power at home," then-candidate Obama said in October of 2007. "We've paid a heavy price for having a president whose priority is expanding his own powers."

But since taking office, Obama has issued 108 executive orders -- seven fewer than Bush issued during his second term -- to implement new policies without congressional approval.

"Obama has amazingly enough gone even further than President Bush in the use, or abuse rather, of executive power," said Gene Healy, vice president of the Cato Institute and author of "The Cult of the Presidency: A Dangerous Devotion to Executive Power."

The president's latest string of unilateral actions has delighted many of his supporters, who have complained that the president was too quick to acquiesce to Republican demands on a long list of issues, from tax breaks for the wealthy to budget cuts.

But Republicans and even some Democrats in Congress were outraged when Obama sidestepped them by appointing Richard Cordray to head the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau by declaring -- against the Senate leadership -- that Congress was in recess.

"This is an extraordinary and entirely unprecedented power grab by President Obama," House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said.

Obama triggered a similar response from Congress when he decided to join a NATO military mission in Libya without seeking lawmakers' approval. Obama argued that the Libyan mission wasn't a declared war that needed congressional backing but a "kinetic military action" he had the power to launch.

Under the campaign-style slogan "We Can't Wait," Obama has been rolling out executive initiatives every day, including a summer jobs program for young people, new rules for mortgage lenders that would reduce or eliminate homeowners' refinancing fees, and minimum-wage protections for workers who provide in-home care services for the elderly.

The slogan is catching on among Obama's Democratic base -- it's showing up on bumper stickers and T-shirts everywhere. But it also caught on with Republicans, who have tried to turn the sentiment against the president.

"We can't wait," Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus wrote on Twitter, "to make @BarackObama a one-term president."

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