

Orlando's Rep. Adams fears Obama power grab

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WASHINGTON — A White House order updating federal emergency powers has raised alarm among some conservative commentators, and U.S. Rep. Sandy Adams, that President Barack Obama is attempting to grab unconstitutional powers. A columnist with The Washington Times declared the mid-March order — an update of a 60-year-old document outlining the president's authority in a national emergency — "stunning in its audacity and a flagrant violation of the Constitution." The conservative Drudge Report website linked to it with the headline, "Martial Law?"

And Adams, R-Orlando, said it "leaves the door open for the president to give himself control over American resources during both times of peace, and national crisis."

So Adams filed a nonbinding resolution specifying what Obama cannot do with the order — including institute a draft, confiscate personal property and "force civilians to engage in labor against their will or without compensation."

But legal experts from both ends of the political spectrum said it's a stretch — at best — to believe the order allows any of those powers.

As written, the executive order outlines the powers the president can exercise "in the event of a potential threat," such as mobilizing for war. These range from the mundane, such as preparing disaster plans, to more robust authority that includes taking control of civil transportation and forcing U.S. companies to prioritize defense contracts.

All this has been on the books for decades. Experts on national-security law say the big difference between what Obama signed and the version in place since President Bill Clinton was in office is reference to the Department of Homeland Security, which wasn't around then.

"It's valid to be concerned that the president has too many powers that are justified by national-defense needs," said Benjamin Friedman, a defense expert with the libertarian Cato Institute. "But this executive order doesn't change much compared to prior executive orders that Republican and Democratic presidents have put in place." The last time the order was invoked in a major way was in January 2001, when Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush both utilized it to direct emergency supplies of electricity and natural gas to California in order to prevent blackouts.

"No one hollered dictator then," said Peter Raven-Hansen, who teaches national-security law at George Washington University.

Adams, in a brief interview, said Obama's order could unconstitutionally expand the president's authority and cited as an example its inclusion of a section of the Stafford Act, which defines the government's role in dealing with disasters.

"It is my first [term] in Congress. I know we are responsible for oversight," she said.

But the section of the Stafford Act deals primarily with disaster preparation and training. In regard to civilian labor, it requires workers on construction projects be paid fair market wages and overtime if they work more than 40 hours in a week.

When asked how this could equate to civilians being forced into labor, an Adams spokeswoman said the congresswoman was trying to ensure there was "no misunderstanding as to the powers of the executive."

Adams' resolution has at least 37 co-sponsors, including six Florida [Republicans](#): Gus Bilirakis, Jeff Miller, Richard Nugent, [Dennis Ross](#), [Steve Southerland](#) and [Allen West](#). It has yet to receive a committee hearing.

The bill is in line with her previous support of causes embraced by some hard-core conservatives. Last year, she introduced a bill to prohibit the use of foreign law in U.S. courts, though there is little evidence that's happening. And Adams supports the indefinite detention of immigrant criminals who can't be deported, despite objections of human-rights groups.

"Congresswoman Adams is doing what the GOP does best: pandering to tea-party extremists instead of helping businesses create jobs and grow our economy," said David Bergstein, a spokesman for the Florida [Democratic Party](#).

Adams denies any political motivation and said she was doing her duty to uphold the U.S. Constitution. Still, she is running in a tough Republican primary against veteran U.S. Rep. [John Mica](#) of [Winter Park](#) and is positioning herself as the hard-line conservative in that race.

Dropping a bill that feeds into the "existing narrative that he [Obama] is trying to expand government and take away people's rights" is one way to do that, said Aubrey Jewett, a political scientist from the University of Central Florida.