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Mandate for Leadership

The Conservative Promise

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Foreword by Kevin Roberts, PhD
Edited by Paul Dans and Steven Groves





FactCheck.org is an online project of the nonprofit, nonpartisan Annenberg Public Policy Center. Launched in 2003, the project aims to identify misinformation and hoaxes. This goal is reached through rigorous, original research.

On September 10, 2024, a trio of Fact Check journalists published an online analysis of Project 2025. It was written by Eugene Kiely, D'Angelo Gore and Robert Farley. This is their report. Images were added by the Honorary Monarchy.

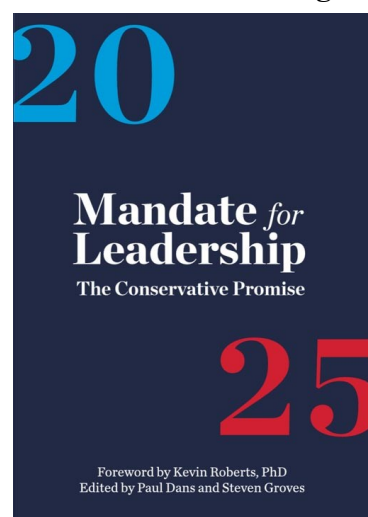
Project 2025 provides a roadmap for “the next conservative President” to downsize the federal government and fundamentally change how it works, including the tax system, immigration enforcement, social welfare programs and energy policy, particularly those designed to address climate change.

It also wades deeply into the culture war that has been dividing the country. Project 2025 calls for abolishing the teaching of “‘critical race theory’ and ‘gender ideology’” in public schools, and “deleting” terms such as “diversity, equity and inclusion,” “gender equity,” and “reproductive health” from “every federal rule, agency regulation, contract, grant ... and piece of legislation that exists.”

Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, has sought to tie Donald Trump to the 887-page book, which was written in part by the former president’s aides. Harris and Democrats refer to the plan as “Trump’s Project 2025 agenda,” and cite it as evidence (not always accurately) of what Trump will do as president, particularly on hot-button issues such as Social Security, Medicare and abortion.

For his part, Trump has claimed he knows nothing about the plan, and his campaign said that Project 2025 “should not be associated with the campaign.”

Here, we take a look at the plan: what’s in it, who wrote it and what the candidates have said about it.



Who funded and wrote Project 2025?



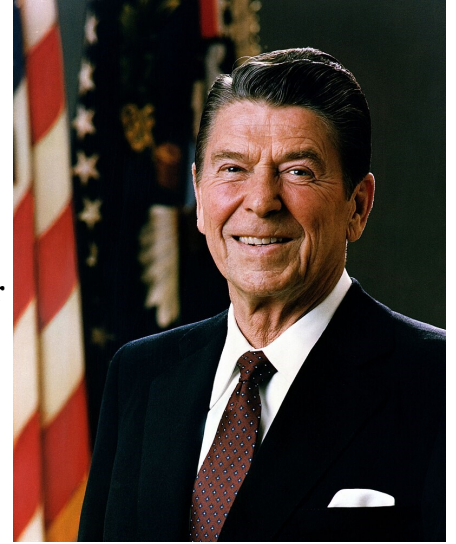
The project is being led and funded by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative public policy think tank founded in 1973. In addition to Heritage, there are more than 100 conservative organizations on Project 2025’s advisory board. Among those “coalition partners” are the Center for Immigration Studies, Moms for Liberty, Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, Tea Party Patriots, Turning Point USA and America First Legal Foundation, which is headed by Stephen Miller, a former Trump senior adviser.

The project’s policy agenda was published online as a book titled *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*. The book has 30 chapters, each credited to one or more of its 35 primary authors and editors --- although the final product includes input from “hundreds of contributors,” the project’s organizers said in a press release.

It’s the ninth edition in the *Mandate for Leadership* series, the first of which was published in 1981, during the Reagan administration. According to its authors, earlier editions have had success in influencing government policies.

“The Reagan administration implemented nearly half of the ideas included in the first edition by the end of his first year in office, while the Trump administration embraced nearly 64% of the 2016 edition’s policy solutions after one year,” the Heritage Foundation said in a press release announcing Project 2025.

Some of the notable authors of this most recent version include Dr. Ben Carson, Christopher Miller and Russ Vought, who are all former cabinet secretaries under Trump. Carson, who wrote the book’s chapter on housing, was the secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development; Miller, who wrote the chapter on defense, was an acting secretary of the Department of Defense; and Vought, who directed the Office of Management and Budget, wrote the chapter about the executive office of the U.S. president.



Ken Cuccinelli, who was a deputy secretary for Trump’s Department of Homeland Security, and Peter Navarro, Trump’s White House adviser on trade, also penned book chapters.

“In fact, at least 140 people who worked in the Trump administration had a hand in Project 2025,” a CNN review found.

The book is one of “four pillars” that will be available to the next conservative president. The other pillars are:

- ◆ ” to allow the next president to implement plans quickly. A personnel database, which will allow Project 2025 coalition members to “review and voice their recommendations” for appointments.**
- ◆ A “Presidential Administration Academy” to teach new hires “how the government functions and how to function in government.”**
- ◆ A second document — “the Playbook” — which will include “transition plans”**

What does Project 2025 propose?

Project 2025 attempts to put “in one place a consensus view of how major federal agencies must be governed.”

We cannot summarize all of its proposals, but here are some examples:

Abortion: Project 2025 describes the Dobbs decision, which overturned Roe v. Wade, as “just the beginning.”



“Conservatives in the states and in Washington, including in the next conservative Administration, should push as hard as possible to protect the unborn in every jurisdiction in America,” the book states. “In particular, the next conservative President should work with Congress to enact the most robust protections for the unborn that Congress will support while deploying existing federal powers to protect innocent life and vigorously complying with statutory bans on the federal funding of abortion.”

The book calls on the Department of Health and Human Services to protect “the health and well-being of all Americans,” beginning at conception, and to end mandatory health insurance coverage of Ella, an emergency contraceptive that Project 2025 describes as a “potential abortifacient.” It also advocates using an 1873 anti-vice law to block abortion pills from being sent via the mail. (More about that later.)

The book also calls for ending federal funding for “Planned Parenthood and all other abortion providers and redirect[ing] funding to health centers that provide real health care to women.” As we have written before, Planned Parenthood provides more than abortion services. In its 2022-2023 annual report, Planned Parenthood said it provided 4.6 million tests and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, 2.25 million contraception services, 464,021 cancer screenings and prevention services (mostly breast exams and Pap tests), and 1.1 million pregnancy tests and prenatal services.

Government ‘efficiency’: Project 2025 proposes cutting federal spending and firing “supposedly ‘un-fireable’ federal bureaucrats.” (Separately, Trump has praised businessman Elon Musk for firing employees and floated the idea of putting Musk in charge of a government efficiency commission.)

The project recommends privatizing government functions, including the National Weather Service, Transportation Security Administration, or TSA, and the National Flood Insurance Program, as well as eliminating the Department of Education and scores of programs, bureaus and offices throughout government. The project also calls for removing the Biden administration’s expansion of Title IX, which bans sex discrimination in education, to include sexual orientation and gender identity. The courts have blocked the rule from taking effect.

As for other departments, the project calls for the “wholesale overhaul” of the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, the “top-to-bottom overhaul” of the Department of Justice, and a return “to the right mission, the right size, and the right budget” at the Department of Homeland Security. The Justice Department overhaul would include “a plan to end immediately any policies, investigations, or cases that run contrary to law or Administration policies.”



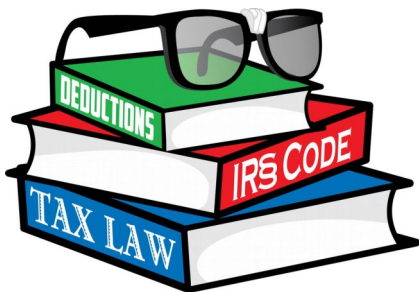
One frequent target for cuts are offices and programs that promote clean energy and monitor or mitigate the effects of climate change.

For example, the project calls for the dismantling of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which conducts research and issues reports on climate change. Project 2025 says “many” of NOAA’s functions can be “eliminated, sent to other agencies, privatized, or placed under the control of states and territories.”

It also calls to eliminate or overhaul the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations and the Office of State and Community Energy Programs, which works with communities “to significantly accelerate the deployment of clean energy technologies.” Similarly, it recommends the elimination or “reform” of the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, calling for an end to the agency’s “focus on climate change and green subsidies.”



Tax policy: Project 2025 calls for “low tax rates” and minimal “interference with the operation of the free market and free enterprise.”



Specifically, the plan calls for abolishing the seven tax brackets for federal income taxes --- 10%, 12%, 22%, 24%, 32%, 35% and 37% --- and creating a “two-rate individual tax system of 15 percent and 30 percent that eliminates most deductions, credits and exclusions.” It doesn’t say what specific deductions, credits and exclusions should be eliminated.

It also calls for reducing the corporate tax rate from 21% to 18%. The corporate tax rate was 35% before Trump signed the Tax Cut and Jobs Act in 2017, which cut the tax rate to 21%. The capital gains tax --- which ranges from 0% to 28%, depending on your income and type of asset --- would also be cut for a high of 20% to 15%. The IRS says that most taxpayers currently pay 15%.

“It’s hard to know who gets hurt by this because they never say what the standard deduction is. For low-income people, moderate-income people standard deductions [are] a big deal,” Howard Gleckman, a senior fellow at the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center, said about Project 2025’s tax proposals in an interview with CBS News. “But, as you say, there are seven rates and three of them --- 32%, 35% and 37% are higher than 30%, so it’s pretty clear that high income people who are currently paying a top rate paying higher than 30% would benefit significantly. They are also going to benefit substantially from the lower capital gains rates. Many of them are paying capital gains almost at 25%, and in this proposal, they’d be paying as low as 15%. So, a big deal for high income people. Impossible to know what it means for lower income people.”



Trump has offered his own tax plans, which include making the 2017 tax cuts permanent and further reducing the corporate tax rate.

Immigration: Project 2025 seeks to reinstate “every rule related to immigration that was issued during the Trump Administration,” and calls for new immigration policies and a reorganization of all immigration operations.



The book recommends tightening asylum requirements, reducing the number of refugees, and reinstating Trump’s Migrant Protection Protocols, also known as Remain in Mexico program, which required immigrants to wait in Mexico during their immigration proceedings.

It seeks “the overturning of the Flores Settlement Agreement,” a 1997 court-approved agreement that serves as a national policy on how to humanely treat minors who enter the country illegally. Among other things, the agreement prohibits the federal government from detaining minors for more than 20 days.

It also includes proposals to “[e]liminate or significantly reduce the number of visas issued to foreign students from enemy nations,” cut the number of guest worker visas and repeal the diversity visa program that awards visas on a lottery basis to countries with low immigration to

the U.S.

As president, Trump unsuccessfully sought to repeal the diversity visa program and move from a family-based to a merit-based system for admitting immigrants. Project 2025 also calls for a merit-based system.

The book also labels these two programs as “unlawful”: the Humanitarian Parole Program for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, which bars the deportation of certain people who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children.

Social welfare programs: Project 2025 cites fraud and waste in safety net programs and calls for eliminating or reducing basic benefits for low-income individuals and families.



For Medicaid, Project 2025 proposes adding work requirements for beneficiaries and “time limits or lifetime caps ... to disincentivize permanent dependence.” The health insurance program for low-income Americans covered nearly 74 million people in May, according to the latest data.

The conservative plan also calls for tightening work requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps, and changing the eligibility requirements for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, which was created by the overhaul of the welfare system in 1996. New eligibility requirements would also reduce the number of students served by the national school breakfast and lunch programs — which were described in the book as “inefficient, wasteful” programs.

Project 2025 also seeks to incentivize at-home childcare. “Instead of providing universal day care, funding should go to parents either to offset the cost of staying home with a child or to pay for familial, in-home childcare,” the plan states.

The plan calls for the elimination of Head Start, a program that funds education, health and social services programs for low-income children under 5 years old.

What has Trump said about it?

Back when Project 2025 was just getting started, Trump spoke at the Heritage Foundation’s annual leadership conference on April 21, 2022, and appeared to refer to the project, saying, “This is a great group, and they’re going to lay the groundwork and detail plans for exactly what our movement will do and what your movement will do when the American people give us a colossal mandate to save America. And that’s coming.”

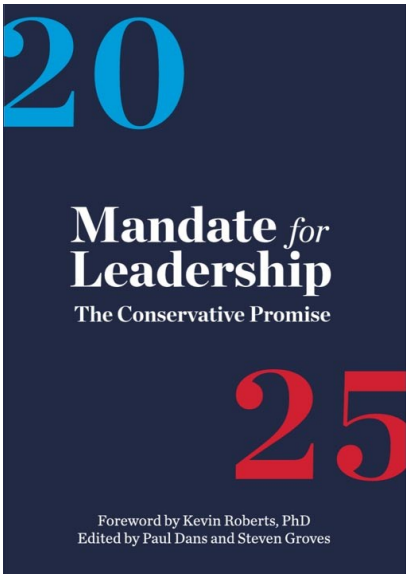
But Trump has since pivoted sharply against the plan. “I know nothing about Project 2025,” Trump wrote on Truth Social on July 5. “I have no idea who is behind it. I disagree with some of the things they’re saying and some of the things they’re saying are absolutely ridiculous and abysmal. Anything they do, I wish them luck, but I have nothing to do with them.”

A week later, on July 11, Trump again took to Truth Social to further distance himself from the plan. “I know nothing about Project 2025,” Trump wrote. “I have not seen it, have no idea who is in charge of it, and, unlike our very well received Republican Platform, had nothing to do with it. The Radical Left Democrats are having a field day, however, trying to hook me into whatever policies are stated or said. It is pure disinformation on their part. By now, after all of these years, everyone knows where I stand on EVERYTHING!”



In a July 22 speech in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Trump accused Democrats of trying to falsely tie him to the plan. He said that “the other side is going around trying to make me sound extreme, like I’m an extremist. I’m not. I’m a person with great common sense. I’m not an extremist at all. Like, some on the right, severe right came up with this Project 25, and I don’t even know. I mean some of them, I know who they are, but they’re very, very conservative. ... They’re sort of the opposite of the radical left, OK? You have the radical left and you have the radical right, and they come up with this. ... I don’t know what the hell it is. It’s Project 25. ‘He’s involved in Project ...’ And then they read some of the things, and they are extreme. I mean, they’re seriously extreme, but I don’t know anything about it. I don’t want to know anything about it.”

Trump went even further in his rejection of the plan in an interview on “Fox & Friends” on July 25, claiming Democratic efforts to tie him to it were “pure disinformation.”



“It’s a group of very, very conservative people and they wrote a document that many of the points are fine,” Trump said. “Many of the points are absolutely ridiculous. I have nothing to do with the document. I’ve never seen the document. I’ve seen certain things that are said in it. And it’s a group of very conservative people that probably like me, but it doesn’t matter because it doesn’t speak for me.

“They wrote something that I disagree with in many cases --- and in some cases, you agree. But it’s like a group of radical left people that write something and, you know, people get angry by it. This is a document I know nothing about. It’s called Project 25 --- I heard about it a week ago --- and has nothing to do with me whatsoever.

“But, of course, our friends that are Democrats --- radical left Democrats -- - they take the document, which is, I guess, pretty big and thorough, and they scour through it. And anything that’s bad in there or that’s a little bit less than mainstream, they take it and they make a big deal out of it. ... I



haven't seen the document. I don't intend to really see the document. And it's a group of people that got together that wrote some kind of a dream document for them. But it has absolutely nothing to do with me."

Five days later, on July 30, the day the Heritage Foundation announced that Paul Dans, director of Project 2025, was stepping down, the Trump campaign put out a statement on "Project 2025's Demise."

"President Trump's campaign has been very clear for over a year that Project 2025 had nothing to do with the campaign, did not speak for the campaign, and should not be associated with the campaign or the President in any way," co-campaign managers Susie Wiles and Chris LaCivita stated. "Reports of Project 2025's demise would be greatly welcomed and should serve as notice to anyone or any group trying to misrepresent their influence with President Trump and his campaign—it will not end well for you."

Heritage Foundation President Kevin Roberts said the project had "completed exactly what it set out to do: bringing together over 110 leading conservative organizations to create a unified conservative vision, motivated to devolve power from the unelected administrative state, and returning it to the people." Roberts said the project was always slated "to conclude its policy drafting after the two-party conventions this year, and we are sticking to that timeline." Although the policy writing portion of the project was finished, he said, "Project 2025 will continue our efforts to build a personnel apparatus for policymakers of all levels --- federal, state, and local."



Roberts also stressed that Project 2025 was a "tool ... built for any future administration to use."

What have Democrats said about it?

In several cases, Democrats have gone beyond the facts, calling it "Trump's Project 2025 agenda" and claiming, based on the conservative proposal, that Trump will implement policies that he says he opposes.

"When you read it, you will see Donald Trump intends to cut Social Security and Medicare," Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, said at a July 23 rally in Milwaukee, for example.

Project 2025 does lay out "four goals and principles" for Medicare "reform," but there is nothing in the book that calls for cutting Social Security, which the authors of the project call a "myth."

Furthermore, Trump has said that he has no plans to cut Social Security or Medicare. When he was president, Trump did not propose cutting Social Security's retirement benefits, and his budgets included bipartisan proposals to reduce the growth of Medicare without cutting benefits.



Project 2025 also came up many times during the Democratic National Convention in August.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, who spoke on the third night of the DNC, called the plan “Donald Trump’s roadmap to ban abortion in all 50 states.” He also claimed that the plan “puts limits on contraception” and “threatens access to IVF,” or in vitro fertilization.



The book does suggest enforcing the Comstock Act, an 1873 anti-vice law, to prevent the mailing of abortion pills, which are used in more than half of U.S. abortions. But Trump, when asked in an August interview about enforcing the law, indicated he would not.

As for contraception, Project 2025 does not generally call for limiting common methods of contraception, such as birth control pills or intrauterine devices, or IUDs. Instead, the book specifically proposes eliminating mandatory insurance coverage for Ella, an emergency contraceptive that the book’s authors say could induce abortions. But that concern is not backed by science, as emergency contraceptives work by preventing ovulation and pregnancy.



The proposal also says that the government “should end taxpayer funding” of Planned Parenthood, which provides abortion and contraception services, and that the government should maintain religious and moral exemptions for employers who do not wish to cover contraceptives for workers.

In the case of IVF, the book does not propose outlawing the reproductive procedure in which eggs from ovaries are fertilized with sperm to create embryos that are later implanted in the uterus. But language in the plan could be interpreted to support the idea that embryos or fetuses should be granted the same rights as a person who has been born. That could lead to legal challenges around IVF because unused embryos are often discarded.

However, Trump has said he supports both contraceptives and IVF. He also has proposed mandating that the federal government or health insurance companies “pay for all costs associated with IVF treatment.”

The Harris campaign also has paid for TV ads that say Project 2025 proposes “eliminating the Department of Education” while “requiring the government to monitor women’s pregnancies.”

The conservative plan does say that “Congress should shutter” the Education Department “and return control of education to the states.” Trump also supports abolishing that federal department.

In addition, in a section about the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the policy agenda calls for the improved reporting of abortion data, including through legislation that requires “states, as a condition of federal Medicaid payments for family planning services, to report streamlined variables in a timely manner.”

But Trump has not made such a proposal. In an April interview with the magazine *Time*, Trump was asked whether he thought states that had banned abortion “should monitor women’s pregnancies so they can know if they’ve gotten an abortion after the ban.” In response, Trump said, “I think they might do that,” adding that would be left to “the individual states” – just as he says abortion laws should be determined by each state.