



N THE Nation.

JUNE 2024

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HEATHER BOOTH:
THE O.G.
ORGANIZER
JOAN WALSH

THE MYTHS OF
ANNE CARSON
EMILY WILSON

The Plot Against America

**The right has
a detailed
program for
counterrevolution
should Trump
win in November.**

**It's called
Project 2025.**

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The Plot Against America

ROBERT L. BOROSAGE

HOW FAR MIGHT DONALD TRUMP GO, IF GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE? THE estimates range from dictatorship to a rerun of his first term, when indolence, ignorance, and incompetence mitigated his menace.

But this time promises to be different—and far worse. Trump’s tempestuous stump performances, which meld vaudeville with venom, provide a clue. He has repeatedly promised to round up and deport millions of immigrants, pardon the January 6 offenders, prosecute his persecutors, impose tariffs on all imports—perhaps higher than 60 percent on goods from China—and “Drill, baby, drill!”

What’s different this time, as this special issue details, is that there is now an organized effort to transform Trump’s resentments and impulses into policy. Trump’s MAGA acolytes have not only dethroned the Republican establishment in Congress and red-state legislatures; they have taken over the party’s think tanks, including the Heritage Foundation, once the bastion of Reagan conservatism.

Now these MAGA operatives are, in the words of Heritage president Kevin D. Roberts, intent on “institutionalizing Trumpism.” The foundation’s Project 2025 includes a 900-page book, *Mandate for Leadership*, that lays out a Trumpist agenda for every corner of the government; a still-secret 180-day Transition Playbook for the first six months in office; a right-wing version of LinkedIn to recruit and vet candidates for political appointment; and a Presidential Academy to train them.

The essays in this issue describe core aspects of what is more assault than agenda, revealing how Project 2025 turns Trump’s insults and grievances into policy predicates. The result is a chilling guidebook to a second Trump term.

Kim Phillips-Fein outlines how Heritage’s new *Mandate* is far more extreme than the original 1980 plan that guided Reagan’s administration. An immediate priority, as Chris Lehmann details, will be to bring the permanent bureaucracy to heel. Schedule F—an executive order that Trump released in the last weeks of his presidency—will be revived, empowering the president to turn the civil service into a spoils system, creating 20,000 to 50,000 political appointees instead of the normal 4,000. In his second term, Trump will open not just the White House for business but the entire government. Central to this, as Elie Mystal explains, will be squelching any independence in the Department of Justice while continuing to pack the courts with reactionary partisans.

If Trump wins, any hope of addressing the real threats to our security, from climate change to corruption and inequality, will be lost.

Once ensconced in office, MAGA operatives will push to turn Trump’s threats into action. In year one, as Gaby Del Valle reports, his poisonous xenophobia will lead to

an unprecedented roundup of millions of the undocumented, employing the National Guard and building detention camps as way stations to deportation. Sasha Abramsky reveals how part of Trump’s planned assault on public housing will aim at dispossessing US citizens born to noncitizen parents.

Trump’s embrace of white male privilege and Christian nationalism will be expressed in a “whole of government” offensive against what Roberts calls the “Great Awakening,” the phantom nightmare of a “totalitarian cult” that purportedly has subverted American institutions. All traces of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) programs will be eradicated. All mention of gender will be extirpated. Government support for abortion and birth control (beyond abstinence) will be eliminated, as Joan Walsh discusses.

Another target will be any action on climate change, reflected in the reports of Trump’s Mar-a-Lago meeting with oil executives, in which he offered to push their agenda

from day one in exchange for \$1 billion for his campaign (and, inescapably, his legal bills). As Bill McKibben notes, *Mandate* describes in considerable detail the plans to eliminate programs, disembowel bureaus, and end reporting on anything climate-related.

Abroad, China is the new *bête noir*. As Jake Werner explains, China is blamed for everything from stealing jobs to spreading pandemics and drug addiction, and as William Hartung details, the China threat also propels a massive buildup of an already bloated military.

At home, Project 2025 suggests, Trump will follow the traditional Republican gospel: more tax cuts for corporations and the rich, and more deregulation emasculating the agencies that protect our water, air, food, workplaces, and pocketbooks. Trump’s government will throw a truly bacchanalian orgy for entrenched interests: Big Oil, Big Pharma, Big Ag, the military-industrial complex, Wall Street, and more.

As John Nichols describes, delivering this will require Trump and his minions to further undermine American elections and democracy. Trump refuses to accept the results of any election he loses; if elected, his administration will work to make elections come out the right way.

Defeating Trump is necessary—but not sufficient. One realization that emerges from this special issue is how much damage has already been inflicted on our flawed democracy. Unions have been smashed, the floodgates to dark money and political gerrymandering opened wide, the Voting Rights Act gelded. Trump will make the country more corrupt—but Washington is already a lobbyists’ paradise, its culture defined by revolving doors, expense-account excess, and quid pro quo bribery. Trump will make America even more unequal, but billionaires already pay taxes at lower rates than working people. Trump will extinguish any hope of dealing with climate change, but the US is already at peak oil.

Yet a second Trump term promises an assault that will make America much worse—and this time the threat is far more serious. As Trump has said, “When I first got to Washington, I knew very few people.” Now he knows many—and the people he knows are central to Project 2025 and its detailed plans for a second term.

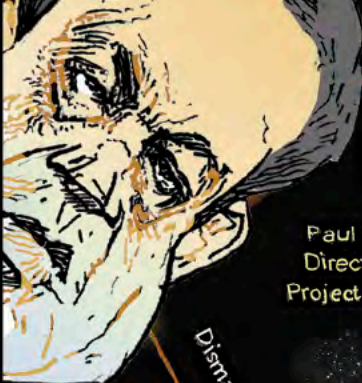
Of course, there will be resistance—in Congress, the bureaucracy, and the press. But we can be certain that if Trump is elected, America will become more corrupt, more xenophobic, more bellicose, less inclusive, less democratic, and less secure. Any hope of addressing the real threats to our security—from climate change to pandemics to inequality and corruption—will be lost.

Are enough Americans so disgruntled and disillusioned as to risk giving Trump the keys to the White House once more? That remains to be seen. **N**

Robert L. Borosage is a leading progressive writer and activist.

PROJECT 2025

The Weapons of the Heritage Foundation



Paul Dans,
Director,
Project 2025

Kevin Roberts,
President,
Heritage
Foundation



Russell Vought,
President,
Center for
Renewing
America



Dismantled federal agencies: FBI, DOJ, FCC, FTC, etc.

Christian Nationalism dominates



Charlie Kirk,
Executive
Director,
Turning Point
USA

Climate regulations gutted, fossil fuel production boosted



Donald Trump,
Enforcer

Unitary executive theory adopted, giving Trump absolute power

Thousands of civil servants replaced by MAGA recruits



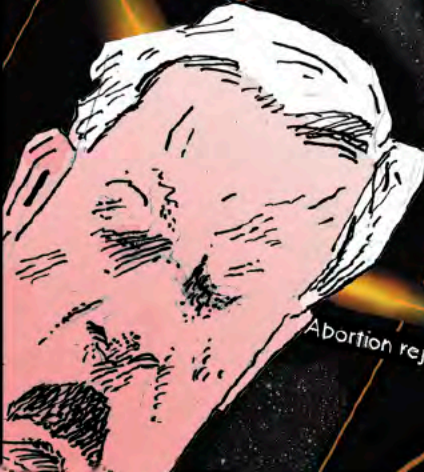
Leonard Leo,
dark-money funder,
Co-chairman of
Federalist Society

Mark Meadows,
Senior Partner,
Conservative
Partnership
Institute



Stephen Miller,
President,
America
First Legal

Insurrection Act used to pursue political enemies



Abortion rejected, contraception restricted

BRODNER

THE NEW NEW RIGHT



The Conservative Promise

This year's Mandate for Leadership sets out to follow through on a political program initiated in 1980.

AFTER RONALD REAGAN WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT IN NOVEMBER 1980, THE Heritage Foundation—then an upstart think tank—released a pre-publication draft manuscript of *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration* to the presidential transition team and to the press. Written over the course of 1980, the 3,000-page manuscript (1,093 pages when published as a book) reflected the aspirations of a surging political movement about to take power. When Richard Nixon was elected in 1968, let alone when Barry Goldwater ran for the presidency in 1964, there had been no comparable intellectual infrastructure that could have produced anything like *Mandate*. There were a handful of free-market intellectual societies and anti-communist propaganda outfits, but most were broadly ideological, offering sweeping political and economic visions rather than a detailed policy program.

By 1980, though, conservatism had come to Washington, and the entire organizational landscape had changed. Not only was there Heritage, founded in 1973 with the support of beer magnate Joseph Coors, but also the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, the American Conservative Union, and more. Edwin Feulner, then the president of Heritage, recalls that the inspiration for *Mandate* was a meeting at which former treasury secretary William Simon complained that when he got to Washington to serve under Nixon, he had no guidance on any “practical plans” for enacting a conservative agenda. The Heritage Foundation set to work to make sure this wouldn’t happen again under Reagan in 1981.

The idea was to offer the new administration a manual on how to restrain the federal government, in the belief that doing so would lead to an explosion of entrepreneurial activity that would power the United States back to dominance in global affairs. Reagan passed out copies of *Mandate* at his first cabinet meeting, and many of its contributors would win posts in his administration (most notably James Watt as secretary of the interior). The book itself became a bestseller.

This year, Heritage—through Project 2025, its umbrella coalition of conservative organizations—has released a new *Mandate for Leadership*, intended to guide the presidency of Donald Trump should he win the election. While Heritage does this every time a new president enters office, and twice for Republican administrations, the current *Mandate*—at more than 880 pages—is far more ambitious than most of the earlier versions. As in 1980, the document is supposed to indicate the “new vigor of the right,” and to this end it marshals “more than 350” conservative thinkers and “45 (and counting)” conservative organizations to provide policy advice to a new administration. Feulner himself wrote the afterword (which he retitles “the ‘Onward!’”), in which he notes that the current “economic, military, cultural, and foreign policy turmoil” echoes that of the Carter years (“actually, even worse”).

Kim Phillips-Fein teaches American history at Columbia University and is the author of Invisible Hands and Fear City.

But despite the invocation of 1980, this new *Mandate* reflects a very different phase of American conservatism. While the right may be hoping to recapture the élan of the early Reagan administration, in tone and substance the document

reveals a fractious, internally divided movement. It does so even as it suggests the real ideological transformation of the right as it has struggled to integrate Donald Trump’s electoral successes into its broader political vision.

In his foreword to the 1980 *Mandate*, Feulner wrote, “Political imagination and conservative philosophy are not ‘strange bedfellows,’ as some political commentators claim,” but rather “necessary and equal partners in the business of government.” Indeed, many of the authors were people with some history in Washington themselves, as congressional or cabinet staff members; out of 32, there was only one woman.

To show how conservatives would govern, the 1980 *Mandate* began with descriptions of the various cabinet departments and provided detailed agendas for each. The net effect was a blueprint for how American government could work if many of the executive agencies that had been created during the New Deal and the Great Society were cut back or eliminated. The Department of Education should be “completely restructured” to return decision-making to state and local levels. The entire Soviet bloc should be embargoed (“all trade with the U.S.S.R., as the major world outlaw, is immoral”). Economic regulation “threatens to destroy the private competitive free market economy it was originally designed to protect” and so should be overhauled. The section on the Department of Labor called for right-to-work bills for particular groups of employees, like students or journalists, and took an especially harsh stance toward public workers, foreshadowing Reagan’s retaliation against the air traffic controllers’ strike of 1981. Influenced by supply-side economics, the report recommended ending the capital gains tax and the corporate income tax to give people a greater incentive to “work, save, invest, and produce real output.”

Reflecting the fears of the right after the American defeat in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the 1980 *Mandate* called for a revived anti-communist campaign. The chapter on the Department of Defense warned that the US was “moving toward a state of military inferiority” vis-à-vis the USSR and that the military budget had to be drastically expanded. The section on the State Department was especially harsh toward Jimmy Carter’s Central America policies, urging the United States to “discourage the Soviets in their attempts to establish another communist country in this hemisphere.”

The 1980 *Mandate*’s call for a new embrace

of capitalism through supply-side economics and anti-communism could tolerate some nuance. On immigration, for example, the 1980 *Mandate* was ecumenical, pointing out that some conservatives saw the “entrance of illegal aliens” as a good way to find people to do jobs that Americans would not do at the “market price,” while others believed that “a large unassimilable foreign culture” would create “unsustainable burdens.” Although the section on the Environmental Protection Agency described its regulations as “crippling,” it also conceded that there had been “remarkable progress” in controlling pollution. There is scant mention of abortion, family values, crime, religion, or sexuality. The agenda was sweeping, but the rhetorical tone was, for the most part, cool.

Compare all this to the Project 2025 *Mandate* (subtitled “The Conservative Promise,” as opposed to “Policy Management in a Conservative Administration”). Where in 1980 the focus was on the *structure* of the federal government and on refocusing the state on national security, the current *Mandate* begins by depicting the problems facing America today: inflation “ravaging” family budgets, drug overdoses, the “toxic normalization” of transgenderism, “pornography invading” school libraries, and most of all the “Great Awakening,” which it likens to a “totalitarian cult.” Kevin Roberts, the president of Heritage, warns against “globalist elites” and the “strategic, cultural, and economic Cold War” being waged by the “totalitarian Communist dictatorship” in Beijing, with TikTok as one of its major weapons.

As in 1980, the argument is that the “modern conservative president” must “limit, control, and direct” the executive branch. This *Mandate* also calls for the elimination of the Department of Education and envisions a “conservative EPA,” noting the agency’s roots in the Nixon administration and suggesting that “cooperative federalism” will produce a “culture of compliance.” It proposes abolishing Head Start, alleging the program is “fraught with scandal and abuse,” and argues that the Department of Justice (including the FBI) has been captured by “an unaccountable bureaucratic managerial class and radical Left ideologues.” Tax policy must be revised to “improve incentives to work, save, and invest”—almost an exact quote from the 1980 *Mandate*.

But what had once been a clarion call to confidently advance a conservative project now seems shrill. The vision of reshaping the state and unleashing new energies has become an “existential need,” with a weakened president overwhelmed by a state grown out of control. One suggestion for reining in the state is cutting federal salaries and benefits, described in *Mandate* as adopting “market-based pay”; another is dismantling the Department of Homeland Security to create a “stand-alone” border and immigration agency with at least 100,000 employees.

Mandate acknowledges the divides on the right over Ukraine and Russia, but it seeks to rally the troops around “a generational opportunity” to resolve these tensions and recognize “Communist China” as the “defining threat.” It gives up any pretense of shared values around trade policy, with one essay on “fair trade” focused on protecting US manufacturing given the “existential threat” of China, and another in defense of “free trade” that suggests rejoining the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

In place of the idea that rolling back the state and unleashing the free market will lead to a revival of national power, the new *Mandate* offers a vision of “restoring the family.” In a loose adaptation of Edmund Burke, it accuses the federal government of “subverting” people’s “*natural* loves and loyalties” with “unnatural” ones. The argument is that people exist within families and communities; unless these are protected, atomized individuals will be prostrate before the all-powerful state. Transgender politics, abortion rights, smartphones, and pornography all delink people from their “natural” loyalties, with the underlying goal, presumably, of making them vulnerable to state control. Where earlier iterations of conservatism focused on liberating the individual, the 2025 *Mandate* seems to see communities and families as bulwarks protecting defenseless individuals from the otherwise overweening power of the state.

Unsurprisingly, *Mandate* aligns itself in opposition to “corporate and political elites,” arguing that “nearly every top-tier U.S. university president or Wall Street hedge fund manager has more in common with a socialist, European head of state than with the parents at a high school football game in Waco, Texas.” But the distance from earlier versions of conservatism is nonetheless remarkable. We’re told that labor policy should be revised to focus on “the good of the family,” with on-site childcare and more paid time off. Congress is enjoined to “encourage communal rest” by amending the Fair Labor Standards Act to mandate overtime pay for people who must work on the Sabbath. Family authority is the model for the nation: “As the family necessarily puts the interests of its members first, so too the United States must put the interests of American workers first.” The document sets itself the aim of uniting the “conservative movement and the American people” in a campaign against “elite rule.”

In his foreword, Roberts is careful to position *Mandate* as the work of a broad movement, noting that it serves as an agenda “*by and for* conservatives” who want to be ready on day one to “save our country from the brink of disaster.” As part of Project 2025, Heritage has been building a database of personnel who might serve in a Trump administration—especially important because, as *Mandate* suggests, “political appointees who are answerable to the President” are key to carrying out its vision. But Trump’s campaign, as Sam Adler-Bell has reported, has been careful to distance itself from Project 2025’s efforts—as though they threaten to siphon political energy from the singular goal of electing Trump.

Still, even if a reelected President Trump should ignore the suggestions provided in *Mandate*, the document is instructive. The transformations that began in 1980 with Reagan’s election reshaped American society, just as the original group of Heritage authors suggested they would. The vision of the market and of state rollbacks that they promoted eroded living standards and wages and propelled a stunning rise in economic inequality and social hierarchy. Private economic wealth is all that has filled in the gap, and the far-right mobilization of the present—with its conspiratorial fantasies of malign takeover and internal subversion—is the legacy of the atomized, hierarchical society produced by the Reagan revolution. For all the ways that Project 2025 may fantasize about a return to 1980, we find ourselves in a very different place today. As Feulner says, “Onward!”



The Plot Against America

The transformations that began in 1980 with Reagan’s election reshaped American society.

CHRIS LEHMANN

THE EXECUTIVE



One Nation Under God

In the right's culture war, a second Trump administration would pursue unprecedented power over all branches of government.

THE FIRST PAGES OF PROJECT 2025'S *MANDATE FOR LEADERSHIP* INVOKE THE Beltway axiom that "personnel is policy." If that's the case, readers should pay especially close attention to the handiwork of Russell Vought. Vought served as Donald Trump's director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the critical nexus of policy execution and agency performance in the executive branch. He has also served, by some accounts, as the lead administrator of the Project 2025 initiative, overseeing 1,000 employees in 30 separate task groups under its aegis. He also contributed a central chapter to Project 2025's blueprint for a second Trump administration, bearing the deceptively anodyne title "Executive Office of the President of the United States." In it, Vought lays out the case for unleashing untrammelled executive power from the maw of a "sprawling federal bureaucracy" that, contrary to the intent of the Constitution, "is carrying out its

own policy plans and preferences—or, worse yet, the policy plans and preferences of a radical, supposedly 'woke' faction of the country."

Vought proposes to curb the excesses of this dangerous administrative elite by expanding the prerogatives of presidential authority in every facet of the federal government's operations. Right-wing power-mongers have long expounded the theory of a "unitary executive" as the most durable, efficient, and potent way to achieve a policy

agenda that remains deeply unpopular with the American electorate, yet Vought seeks to transform that theory into a comic book plot arc, with a S.H.I.E.L.D.-style rescue mission to redeem a republic besieged by sinister bureaucratic scheming and administrative power grabs at every turn. "The overall situation is constitutionally dire, unsustainably expensive, and in urgent need of repair," he writes. "Nothing less than the survival of self-governance in America is at stake."

In this dark vision of a looming administrative coup, the president becomes the Nick Fury savior figure: a master accruer of power devoted at the same time to its wide dispersion among the satellite communities of superheroes practicing an elevated MAGA-sanctioned lifestyle in conditions of stoic watchfulness. The president must be a figure of unparalleled

ingenuity to carry out this ambitious agenda of national deliverance: "Success in meeting that challenge will require a rare combination of boldness and self-denial: boldness to bend or break the bureaucracy to the presidential will and self-denial to use the bureaucratic machine to send power away from Washington and back to America's families, faith communities, local governments, and states." (If you think, as Vought clearly does, that Donald Trump is the duly anointed avatar of this brand of benevolent spiritualized federalism, then I have a warehouse full of MAGA-branded Bibles to sell you.)

Since at least the heyday of Ronald Reagan, the American right has been steeped in the strongman vision of the presidency as a maximum lawgiver of patriotic virtue. That vision has guided the rampant consolidation of executive power, producing a model of presidential authority tailor-made for the abuses of a Caesarist figure such as Trump. Vought seeks to extend this legacy by championing his former bureaucratic haunt as the great cross-agency enabler of the Caesarist-Christian mashup that he wants a second Trump administration to be. He argues that the OMB must assume a far more aggressive role, for example, in securing the legal foundation of a MAGA imperial presidency—a great rolling brief for executive impunity that even past legal quislings such as John Yoo, the deputy assistant attorney general for the Office of Legal Counsel under George W. Bush, wouldn't dare to dream of: "The Director must ensure the appointment of a General Counsel who is respected yet creative and fearless in his or her ability to challenge legal precedents that serve to protect the status quo." This swashbuckling executive would rely on the OMB to face down renegade federal agencies "that attempt to protect their own institutional interests and foreclose certain avenues based on the mere assertion (and not proof) that the law disallows it or that, conversely, attempt to disregard the clear statutory commands of Congress."

For adherents of actual democratic self-governance, Vought's administrative theory of maximum executive power is plenty unnerving on its own. But an even fuller picture of the sort of substantive policy agendas that it would

Since at least the heyday of Ronald Reagan, the right has been steeped in the strongman vision of the US presidency.

Chris Lehmann is The Nation's DC bureau chief.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHANNA GOODMAN



serve emerges in the theocratic mission of the think tank Vought launched after his tour at the OMB, the Center for Renewing America. This group is a partner in Project 2025, but it's also a policy shop positioned firmly in the vanguard of the Christian nationalist movement, fiercely dedicated to shoring up a militant right-wing culture-war agenda and based on the lie that the United States was founded as an exclusionary, Christian nation. "Our mission is to renew a consensus of America as a nation under God with unique interests worthy of defending...where individuals' enjoyment of freedom is predicated on just laws and healthy communities," the CRA's website announces.

If you're curious to learn more about what the CRA's vision of "healthy communities" might be, you can toggle over to a series of policy "primers" on the subject that advance a wide range of righteous crusades for a unitary executive to undertake. "Palestinian Culture is Prohibitive for Assimilation," one such entry

boldly asserts. "Yes, America's Institutions Are Grooming Your Children," another QAnon-adjacent offering proclaims. If that doesn't have you sufficiently alarmed, check out "School Systems Are Corrupting Children with Pornography" or "Biden's Woke War on Police." There's a rich mosaic of election-denial content under the deeply misleading heading of "Election Integrity," while the designations "Medical Tyranny" and "Woke and Weaponized" speak—or rather shout—quite unmistakably for themselves. The overarching mood is less that of a colloquy of policy wonks than Steve Bannon podcasting on a meth binge.

Yet this is the labor of intellectual love undertaken by a man plainly positioning himself to be the cross-agency administrative czar in a second Trump administration. So if Trump wins another term and grants Russell Vought's wishes, stand warned: He has already pledged his fealty to a vision of the MAGA imperial presidency that is equal parts Cotton Mather and Roy Cohn. **N**

JOHN NICHOLS

DEMOCRACY



The Great Dismantling

A second Trump administration could weaponize existing government agencies to subvert democracy itself.

DONALD TRUMP HAS MADE NO SECRET OF HIS DETERMINATION TO GOVERN AS A "dictator" if he regains the presidency, and that's got his critics warning that his reelection would spell the end of democracy. But Trump and his allies are too smart to go full Kim Jong Un. Rather, the former president's enthusiasm for the authoritarian regimes of Russia's Vladimir Putin, Turkey's Tayyip Erdoğan, and Hungary's Viktor Orbán suggests the models he would build on: managing elections to benefit himself and his Republican allies; gutting public broadcasting and constraining press freedom; and undermining civil society. Trump, who famously demanded that the results of Georgia's 2020 presidential voting be "recalculated" to give him a win, wants the trappings of democracy without the reality of electoral consequences. That's what propaganda experts Edward Herman and Frank Brodhead once described as "demonstration elections," in which, instead of actual contests, wins are assured for the authoritarians who control the machinery of democracy.

The outline for such a scenario emerges from a thorough reading of Project 2025's *Mandate for Leadership*, which specifically proposes a Trump-friendly recalculation of the systems that sustain American democracy. The strategy for establishing an American version of Orbán's "illiberal democracy" is not spelled out in any particular chapter of *Mandate*. Rather, it is woven throughout the whole of the document, with key elements appearing in the chapters on reworking the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the Federal Election Commission (FEC). In the section on the DHS, for

instance, there's a plan to eliminate the ability of the agency that monitors election security to prevent the spread of disinformation about voting and vote counting.

How serious a threat to democracy would that pose? Think back to November 2020, when Trump was developing his Big Lie about the election he'd just lost. Trump's false assertion that the election had been characterized by "massive improprieties and fraud" was tripped up by Chris Krebs, who served as director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) in the DHS.

The Republican appointee and his team had established a 24/7 "war room" to work with officials across the country to monitor threats to the security and integrity of the election. The operation was so meticulous that Krebs could boldly announce after the voting was finished: "America, we have confidence in the security of your vote, you should, too." At the same time, his coordinating team declared, "The November 3rd election was the most secure in American history." This infuriated Trump, who immediately fired the nation's top election security official.

In *Mandate's* chapter on the DHS, Ken Cuccinelli writes, "Of the utmost urgency is immediately ending CISA's counter-mis/disinformation efforts. The federal government cannot be the arbiter of truth." Cuccinelli previously complained that CISA "is a DHS component that the Left has weaponized to censor speech and affect elections." As for the team that worked so successfully with Krebs to secure the 2020 election, the Project 2025 document declares that "the entirety of the CISA Cybersecurity Advisory Committee should be dismissed on Day One." The potential impact? "It's a way of emasculating the agency—that is, it prevents it from doing its job," says Herb Lin, a cyber-policy and security scholar at Stanford's Center for International Security and Cooperation.

John Nichols is a national affairs correspondent for The Nation. His latest book is It's OK to Be Angry About Capitalism.

This is just one way that Project 2025's cabal of "experts" is scheming to thwart honest discourse about elections and democracy. A chapter on public broadcasting proposes to defund the Corporation for Public Broadcasting as part of a larger plan to upend NPR, PBS, and "other public broadcasters that benefit from CPB funding, including the even-further-to-the Left Pacifica Radio and American Public Media." More destabilizing than the total funding cut that Project 2025 entertains is a parallel plan to end the status of NPR and Pacifica radio stations as "noncommercial education stations." That could deny them their current channel numbers at the low end of the radio spectrum (88 to 92 FM)—a move that would open prime territory on the dial for the sort of religious programming that already claims roughly 42 percent of the airwaves that the FCC reserves for noncommercial broadcasting. And don't imagine that the FCC would be in a position to write new rules that guard against the surrender of those airwaves to the Trump-aligned religious right.

In the words of *Politico*, Project 2025 seeks "to give the president complete power over quasi-independent agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission, which makes and enforces rules for television and internet companies that have been the bane of Trump's political existence in the last few years." As part of its focus on the agency, Project 2025 champions the abandonment of the FCC's legacy as "a New Deal-era agency" and proposes "eliminating many of the heavy-handed FCC regulations that were adopted in an era when every technology operated in a silo. These include many of the FCC's media ownership rules." That's a recipe for empowering media giants like the Sinclair Broadcast Group. In a 2019 article in the *American Political Science Review*, Gregory Martin and Josh McCrain determined that the "stations bought by Sinclair reduce coverage of local politics, increase national coverage and move the ideological tone of coverage in a conservative direction relative to other stations operating in the same market." Sinclair already reaches 40 percent of American households via more than 180 stations, and when the group's chair, David Smith, met with Trump in 2016, he said, "We are here to deliver your message."

WHILE PROJECT 2025 SEEKS TO rewire the FCC to favor Trump's allies, it also wants to lock in dysfunction at the Federal Election Commission, the agency that is supposed to govern campaign spending and fundraising. Established 50 years ago, the FEC has six members—three Republicans and three Democrats—who are charged with overseeing the integrity of

federal election campaigns. In recent years, however, this even partisan divide has robbed the FEC of its ability to act because, as a group of former FEC employees working with the Campaign Legal Center explained, "three Commissioners of the same party, acting in concert, can leave the agency in a state of deadlock." As the spending by outside groups on elections "has exponentially increased, foreign nationals and governments have willfully manipulated our elections, and coordination between super PACs and candidates has become commonplace," the former employees noted. Yet "the FEC [has] deadlocked on enforcement matters more often than not, frequently refusing to even investigate alleged violations despite overwhelming publicly available information supporting them."


One logical reform, supported by many Democrats, would reduce the number of FEC commissioners to five, with two Democrats, two Republicans, and an independent chair. *Mandate's* chapter on the FEC rejects that reform, arguing that Trump and a Republican Congress must resist "efforts to impose a 'nonpartisan' or so-called 'independent' chair." Instead, Project 2025 supports "removing the Federal Election Commission's independent litigating authority"—a move that would render the agency even more toothless. In addition, it advocates a strategy that would direct the US attorney general to defend the FEC in circumstances in which citizens sue the agency to get it to enforce the law—an approach that would effectively block one of the last remaining avenues for addressing illegal electioneering.

This is all part of Project 2025's broader vision for restructuring the Department of Justice so that it can be weaponized by a new Trump administration when it comes to election-related issues. In *Mandate's* chapter on the Department of Justice, Gene P. Hamilton, a DOJ appointee under Trump, proposes reassigning responsibility for prosecuting election-related offenses from the department's Civil Rights Division to its Criminal Division. Why? To ensure that Republican-generated claims about "fraudulent voter registration," "mail-in ballot fraud," and presumably the various targets of Trump's Big Lie claims regarding the 2020 election are "appropriately investigated and prosecuted."

Instead of focusing on voter suppression, the manipulation of election processes by domestic and foreign agents, and other genuine threats to democracy, *Mandate for Leadership's* authors would have these agencies do the bidding of Trump and his MAGA movement. That's a formula for giving Trump the authoritarian power he seeks—not through an explicit crushing of electoral democracy, but by "reforming" it in precisely the way that the nonpartisan group Protect Democracy warns is most dangerous.

"The biggest innovation of 21st-century authoritarians has been to maintain the facade of democratic elections while at the same time tilting the rules against their opponents," the group explains in its report, *The Authoritarian Playbook*. "They do this by suppressing votes and biasing, distorting, falsifying, or even overturning the results—either through capturing the referees or by manipulating the electoral rules in their favor."

The assault on democracy takes many forms and many names in countries around the world. In the United States, its name is Project 2025. But this assault is not a fait accompli. By incorporating a smart, aggressive critique of the Trumpian *Mandate* in all of their campaigning in 2024—thus ensuring that voters know the fate of democracy really is at stake—Trump's foes can and must prevent this right-wing fever dream from becoming an American nightmare.



Project 2025 seeks to rewire the FCC to favor Trump's allies, and it also wants to lock in dysfunction at the FEC.

ELIE MYSTAL

JUSTICE



A Legal Heist

Conservatives want to use the DOJ to make their darkest desires legal, while removing the legal means to stop them.

THERE HAS PROBABLY NEVER BEEN A PRESIDENT WHO WAS MORE ignorant of the government, the Constitution, and the laws of this country than Donald Trump was in 2017. The man came to power with a child's understanding of civics and a mob boss's understanding of power. Instead of using the power of government to effectuate his agenda, he thought he could simply bend the law to his will.

Trump was wrong, and the Department of Justice showed him why. Trump fired FBI director James Comey (whose decision to reopen the investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails happened to be one of the proximate causes of his election in the first place) for his lack of loyalty. That led the DOJ to investigate Trump's abuse of power. Trump likely assumed that his attorney general, Jeff Sessions, a longtime senator and an early supporter of Trump's vile candidacy, would put a stop to the inquiry. But to Trump's surprise, Sessions followed department rules and norms and recused himself from the case, leaving Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to handle the investigation. Rosenstein eventually appointed former FBI director Bob Mueller as a special counsel, and while Trump was never held accountable for this crime, he learned that the Justice Department could be a threat to his lawless abuse of power.

It's a lesson he will not have forgotten if he wins or steals a second term. *Mandate for Leadership*, the Project 2025 blueprint for an eventual authoritarian takeover of the federal government, contains a lot of dangerous proposals for how Trump and his ruling conservatives can remake the executive branch. The authors' ideas for the Department of Justice reflect not only their lust for unchallenged power, but also a deep fear of the DOJ's independence—and, more particularly, the way that independence might be used against them if the DOJ is not brought to heel. Put simply: The conservatives hope to use the DOJ to make their darkest desires legal, while at the same time taking away the best legal means to stop them.

As a first step, the Project 2025 *Mandate* recommends hollowing out the FBI. Why the FBI? Think of it this way: If Project 2025 is basically a conservative heist plot, then the chapter on the DOJ is the part where the plotters explain how they plan to take out the security cameras and floodlights so they can proceed under the cover of darkness.

The chapter begins like the *Seinfeld* holiday of Festivus: with an airing of grievances that the conservatives have against the FBI, including its alleged

attempts to “convince social media companies and the media generally that the story about the contents of Hunter Biden's laptop was the result of a Russian misinformation campaign.” There are also entire paragraphs dedicated to railing against the FBI and the DOJ for trying to halt the spread of lies about the 2020 election—and, again, if you understand who these people are, you can see why stopping the government from policing their lies is a key goal.

In order to accomplish this, Project 2025 proposes pushing Congress to demote the FBI, and its director, to a lower rung on the DOJ's organizational chart and make the director report to a political functionary. It also wants Congress to eliminate the 10-year term of the FBI director to make it easier for the president to replace the director at will, like most other political appointees. Again, Trump got burned for firing Comey, and this proposal would make sure any future FBI director is sufficiently loyal.

If the conservatives simply wanted to destroy the FBI, I might agree with them. Even a cursory knowledge of the bureau's history shows that the FBI is problematic: a dangerous tool of the surveillance state that, more often than not, has been deployed against civil liberties, civil rights, and social progress.

The problem with Project 2025 is that it doesn't actually want to destroy the FBI; it wants to get rid of its independence—while keeping all of the FBI's jackbooted thuggery so that it can hurt the “right” people. The Project 2025 *Mandate* calls for renewing the bureau's focus on “violent” crime—and that word choice is important, because it leaves out nonviolent crimes like bank fraud, tax evasion, bribery, and document theft—you know, all the things that Trump or his business or donor-class friends are accused of doing. The document further suggests stripping the FBI of its legal workforce—the 300 or so attorneys employed by the bureau—which would turn the FBI into an even blunter weapon than it already is, completely untethered from the Constitution or civil rights.

In line with the mission of hurting the “right” people, *Mandate's* chapter on the DOJ details big plans for resuming Trump's campaign against immigrants. Those plans include deploying the power of the Justice Department against Democrats who govern in “sanctuary cities.” Indeed, there's a whole paragraph devoted to the wild idea of using the DOJ to sue district attorneys who use their discretion in ways that the conservatives don't like—including, though hardly limited to, refusing to help deport immigrants:

Where warranted and proper under federal law, initiate legal action against local officials—including District Attorneys—who deny American citizens the “equal protection of the laws” by refusing to prosecute criminal offenses in their jurisdictions. This holds true particularly for jurisdictions that refuse to enforce the law against criminals based on the Left's favored defining characteristics of the would-be offender (race, so-called gender

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identity, sexual orientation, etc.) or other political considerations (e.g., immigration status).

That paragraph is bonkers (and its recommendations would be unconstitutional if the people behind Project 2025 hadn't already secured a conservative Supreme Court to rubber-stamp their authoritarian plans). But it reflects a general trend in *Mandate's* chapter on the DOJ to put the department on the offense against the favored targets of the MAGA movement: people of color, women, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community.

Toward that end, this chapter proposes transforming the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ into a tool to fight *for* white supremacy instead of against it. It aims to do this by using the division to prosecute institutions and organizations that promote diversity as violating the civil rights and equal protection of whites, and it's the logical conclusion of the conservative assault on affirmative action and DEI programs. Here's the breathless language:

The Biden Administration—through the DOJ's Civil Rights Division and other federal entities—has enshrined affirmative discrimination in all aspects of its operations under the guise of “equity.” Federal agencies and their components have established so-called diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices that have become the vehicles for this unlawful discrimination.... The Civil Rights Division should spend its first year under the next Administration using the full force of federal prosecutorial resources to investigate and prosecute all state and local governments, institutions of higher education, corporations, and any other private employers who are engaged in discrimination in violation of constitutional and legal requirements.

Using the DOJ to sue companies that hire people of color or women is meant to dissuade companies from hiring people of color or women, because according to conservative whites, anytime a person of color or a woman is hired for anything, it is because of affirmative action or DEI. This section is an attempt to whitewash America through force of law, since “the market” has rejected white supremacy (at least superficially) as a sound business practice.

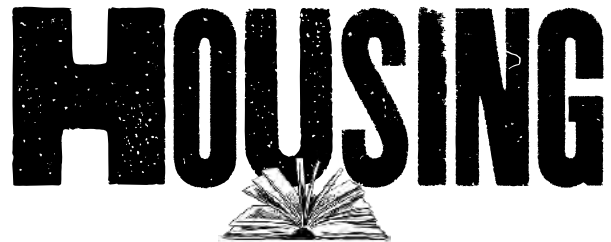
When you break down what Project 2025 wants to do with the Justice Department, it's chilling and terrifying, and yet I'm also struck by how petty and mean-spirited the tone of the document is. These people are consumed by their personal grievances (against Black people, against the media, against Hunter Biden and his laptop). There are multiple passages devoted to complaining that the DOJ has prosecuted people who threaten abortion clinics and parents who threaten school boards, as if being vile and hateful toward pregnant people and schoolteachers is their most precious “freedom.” Giving these people the DOJ is like giving a chimpanzee a gun: It's

inherently dangerous even when the chimp wields it like a crooked club.

Next time, Trump will not be handing the DOJ to people like Jeff Sessions and Bill Barr—people who wanted to use the department to further the MAGA agenda but felt bound by the rule of law. Next time, Trump will let someone like Stephen Miller, a ghoul who wants the law to promote bigotry instead of eradicating it, run the Justice Department. He'll hand it to a devout loyalist and unreconstructed racist who wants to weaken the DOJ so it can't hurt Trump, while weaponizing it against Trump's enemies and the vulnerable communities he has decided to harass and terrorize.

Project 2025 is telling us exactly how the conservatives plan to take away the rights of women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community. I beg the American people to believe them. This dystopian future isn't a threat, it's a certainty, should we give these people power again. **N**

SASHA ABRAMSKY



America's Landlord

Project 2025 calls on Trump to run the country the way he did his businesses: as a crooked real estate mogul.

PROJECT 2025'S BLUEPRINT FOR HOUSING POLICY IN A POTENTIAL SECOND Trump presidency is predictably awful. It manages to combine the worst traditional GOP obsessions around deregulation and rolling back what remains of the American welfare state with the most destructive Trumpian impulses to use the power of the state to crush the professional civil service and penalize immigrants. Add into the mix an effort to privatize the most valuable parcels of public housing stock and the obligatory swipe at the diversity, equity, and inclusion programs championed by the Obama and Biden administrations within federal housing agencies, and you have Trump's grab bag of grift and cruelty in a nutshell.

It is a collection of bad policies tailor-made to appeal to the instincts of Donald Trump, who inherited his family fortune from his father, Fred, a harsh and frequently racist New York City landlord. The younger Trump's own real estate ventures over the past half-century have frequently involved cutting corners, making life miserable for rent-controlled tenants in an effort to get them to pack up and leave his properties, and failing to pay contractors in a timely manner. Project 2025 would effectively give Trump a green light to keep it up, suggesting that he use his powers as president to push through a set of regulatory changes that would take a wrecking ball to federal housing policy.

Despite the hundreds of thousands of homeless Americans and the years- or even decades-long waiting lists that families remain on for public housing or Section 8 vouchers, the Project 2025 *Mandate* refers to a nearly century-long “mission creep” by federal housing agencies from the New Deal on. It places blame for that supposedly overgenerous housing impulse on “an

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ILLUSTRATION BY MELINDA BECK





**The
Plot Against
America**

empowered and unelected bureaucracy that is insulated by civil service protections.” Its solution is to urge an incoming Trump administration to remove those civil service protections and replace the top tier of federal housing officials with “motivated and aligned” political appointees, so as to be better able to “end progressive policies that have been put in place at the department.” Translation: An already imperfect, frequently unsympathetic, and underfunded system for providing housing assistance will be eviscerated by a new leadership of hard-right political cadres committed to reducing federal housing guarantees back to their almost nonexistent, pre-New Deal level.

This is policy tailored to meet the needs not of housing-insecure residents, but of the most malicious landlords and real estate interests.

The document is clear about its goals, chief among them a renewed effort to exclude immigrants—both documented and undocumented—and their US-born children (i.e., US citizens) from any access to the social safety net; to banish all use of federal agencies to boost efforts to tackle

climate change; and, through repeal of the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing regulation that Biden strengthened in his first week as president and proposed expanding again last year, to reverse all efforts at fair housing policies that protect access to federally funded or subsidized housing for women and racial and LGBTQ minorities in particular. Under Biden’s proposed rule, municipal public housing agencies would be required to start submitting equity plans to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) every five years; under Trump, such reporting would immediately be scrapped.

If these policy recommendations are implemented, the country’s already grossly unequal access to affordable housing would be made even worse; the homelessness crisis in cities like Los Angeles, home to large numbers of mixed-status families, would skyrocket; and equity would no longer be a goal of federal housing policy.

While an array of minorities stand to lose out from this regulatory shift, no group would lose more in the immediate aftermath of a Trump victory than immigrants and their families, who bore the brunt of Trump’s xenophobia and racism in his previous White House sojourn and would again be in his crosshairs from day one of a second presidency. From 2016 to 2020, the Trump administration attempted to end the practice of “pro-rated” housing benefits, which historically allowed mixed-status families to live in public housing, but with benefits extended only to those in the household with citizenship, while noncitizens were charged their percentage of the rent. Instead, it sought to use the Department of Homeland Security’s Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) system to exclude mixed-status households from all public housing and Section 8 vouchers. Eighty-five percent of these families were Latino, according to estimates from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; 56 percent of these household members were female (some of whom were fleeing from domestic violence); and 53 percent were children.

Had it been implemented, this noxious policy would have resulted in huge numbers of US-citizen and legal-resident children (55,000, according to HUD’s own analysis) born to noncitizen parents being excluded from such benefits. Trump’s HUD secretary, Ben Carson, portrayed it as a commonsense measure, saying, “You take care of your own first.” In reality, it was a recipe for wholesale immiseration. The *Los Angeles Times* estimated that more than 3,000 mixed-status households in LA County, including roughly 11,000 people in the city of Los Angeles alone, would lose their housing benefits if the change were implemented and that, in a tight and overpriced housing market, many of these men, women, and children would end up on the streets.

Now, a resurrection of this policy—which Trump’s own HUD team described

as deliberately “ruthless” in 2019—is at the center of Project 2025’s housing proposals, some 500 pages into its 900-page blueprint for the next Trump presidency. Under Trump, the document declares, HUD would move to “prohibit noncitizens, including all mixed-status families, from living in all federally assisted housing.” In a metropolitan area such as Los Angeles, with a high immigrant population and a catastrophic homelessness crisis—upwards of 75,000 people in LA County lack housing, according to HUD’s most recent Point-in-Time estimates—resurrecting this particularly vicious policy would have an immediate, and calamitous, impact.

The document’s ambitions, however, go far beyond simply institutionalizing xenophobia. Project 2025 suggests putting in place strict time limits for public housing residents, much like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families welfare “reforms” in the mid-1990s did regarding cash assistance for poor families, and it also hints at establishing work requirements for the recipients. It seeks to end “housing first” policies aimed at getting people with substance abuse and serious mental health problems off the streets and into assisted-living situations regardless of whether they’re still using drugs or have untreated mental illness. And it takes a policy championed by Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in the UK in the 1980s—the selling-off of existing public housing stock—and updates it for the US in the 2020s, pushing for “maximal flexibility to direct PHA [Public Housing Agency] land sales that involve the existing stock of public housing units. Congress must consider the future of the public housing model...where land can be sold by PHAs and put to greater economic use.” In other words, housing the poor at below-market rates isn’t an efficient use of land capital—whereas selling off those homes could result in a real estate bonanza and a payday for today’s investor class.

Under the guise of protecting local autonomy, Project 2025’s *Mandate* urges an incoming Trump administration to “oppose any efforts to weaken single-family zoning.” This flies in the face of the advice offered by most urban housing experts, who argue that the country’s housing crisis can’t be solved without building more high-density affordable-housing apartment complexes and mixed-use neighborhoods. If the federal government puts its muscle behind NIMBYist movements and their efforts to protect, at all costs, low-density suburban-sprawl development models, these affordable-housing efforts will be eviscerated.

The goal of using federal financial instruments to encourage low-income residents to find ways to buy homes also takes a hit in *Mandate*. The document’s authors urge the Federal Housing Administration to push for shorter mortgage terms for lower-income first-time buyers by

making it more costly for them to get FHA-backed mortgage insurance on 30-year mortgages—and this despite the fact that, according to Freddie Mac, 90 percent of American homeowners opt for a fixed-rate 30-year mortgage, and the majority of Americans could not afford the monthly payments that would be needed on a 15- or 20-year mortgage. In other words, what's good enough—and even considered necessary—for most middle-class Americans would likely be discouraged for lower-income people seeking a foothold in the overheated housing market.

To be clear, these aren't radical new policies. Rather, using a nefarious language of “choice” and “local autonomy,” they are radical old policies, microwaved leftovers of the worst of the Reagan-and-Thatcher-era assaults on the housing safety net

on both sides of the Atlantic, adorned with a Fred Trump-like disdain for any efforts to discourage bias in the housing sector or to hold landlords and local housing agencies to account when they discriminate against tenants and would-be tenants on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, or any other prejudice. This is federal housing policy tailored to meet the needs not of housing-insecure residents, but of the most malicious landlords and real estate interests. It is a package of proposals intended to scare off poor, minority, and especially immigrant residents from reliable access to the housing safety net, and to make it easier for profiteers to make a quick buck off of the poor and the already denuded public housing stock that, for so many, serves as a fragile protection against homelessness and destitution. **N**

JOAN WALSH

HEALTHCARE



Bad Medicine

Under Trump, Health and Human Services would become the “Department of Life” once again—and worse.

ROGER SEVERINO, A PROMINENT ATTORNEY FOR THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT, LED the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Civil Rights during the Trump administration. In 2017, *The Atlantic* called him “the man behind Trump's religious-freedom agenda for health care.” The profile contrasted Severino's sparsely decorated office—adorned with a crucifix and a Clarence Thomas bobblehead—with his elaborate domestic agenda.

During Severino's time there, Trump's Department of Health and Human Services weakened the Affordable Care Act; strengthened the ability of healthcare providers to claim religious exemptions from providing all kinds of medical care, from abortion to birth control to vasectomies to gender-affirming care; and created a Conscience and Religious Freedom Division in his office.

Under Severino's legal counsel, HHS cut teen-pregnancy prevention programs and prioritized abstinence in its Title X family-planning grants. Backing Severino's crusade was his boss, HHS secretary and former Eli Lilly president Alex Azar,

best known for helping Trump botch his Covid response and presiding over his border policy of separating migrant children from their parents. Azar came to call his department “the Department of Life.”

In his chapter of Project 2025's *Mandate for Leadership*, Severino promises to make HHS the “Department of Life” again—and to go even farther than Azar did. The plan outlines how HHS would use its power as a federal agency to dramatically

curtail access to reproductive health services. Severino pledges that HHS will restrict access to birth control, rescind the FDA's approval of medication abortion, and abolish what he calls “mail-order abortion”—the latter by using the long-dormant Comstock Act to prosecute anyone who provides such medication by mail. HHS will also focus on weeding out programs geared to the rights of LGBT people, especially anyone who is transgender. It would direct subsidies for childcare facilities to parents themselves—all in a punitive, misguided effort to shore up the nuclear family. This isn't a public health document; it's a theocratic manifesto, an attempt at ensuring public health through ultra-orthodox Christianity.

So much for “religious freedom.” Under “the next administration” (read: a Trump administration), Severino recommends that nearly every HHS program or agency—with special emphasis on the Administration for Children and Families, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the Office of the Surgeon General—be retooled with the goal of promoting heterosexual marriage and procreation. He argues that the next president should use his powers to “maintain a biblically based, social science-reinforced definition of marriage and family.” Of course, he believes that “families comprised of a married mother, father, and their children are the foundation of a well-ordered nation and healthy society.” He claims that “all other family forms” apart from “heterosexual, intact marriage...involve higher levels of instability.”

Severino attacks President Biden for “focusing on ‘LGBTQ+ equity,’ subsidizing single motherhood, disincentivizing work, and

Severino's critique of HHS shouts Christian fundamentalism—and rests on tons of junk science.

penalizing marriage”—while offering no examples of his policies that did any of the last three things. Severino calls on HHS to repeal antidiscrimination policy statements that identify sex with “gender identity or sexual orientation.” Here’s the crescendo: “Working fathers are essential to the well-being and development of their children, but the United States is experiencing a crisis of fatherlessness that is ruining our children’s futures.”

Thus, HHS policies would “prioritize married father engagement” and stress the importance of heterosexual marriage in all of its health, education, and welfare programs, and it would even enable child-abuse prevention funds to be applied to marriage promotion efforts. The CDC would be directed to “eliminate programs and projects that do not respect human life and conscience rights and that undermine family formation.”

The anti-abortion crusade, too, would continue throughout each of the department’s agencies: “HHS should return to being known as the Department of Life by explicitly rejecting the notion that abortion is health care,” and the secretary should make sure that “all HHS programs and activities are rooted in a deep respect for innocent human life from day one until natural death.” He or she would see to it that no funding whatsoever goes to abortion—not via Hyde Amendment exceptions for rape, incest, or the life of the mother; not even via private insurance subsidized by the Affordable Care Act. Severino recommends eliminating the HHS Reproductive Healthcare Access Task Force and creating a “pro-life task force to ensure that all of the department’s divisions seek to use their authority to promote the life and health of women and their unborn children.”

Severino would force the FDA to “reverse its approval of chemical abortion drugs because the politicized approval process was illegal from the start. The FDA failed to abide by its legal obligations to protect the health, safety, and welfare of girls and women.” This argument is in front of the Supreme Court right now, and even some of the conservative justices don’t appear to be convinced by it.

Severino promises that no Medicaid funding will go to Planned Parenthood. He also proposes reversing a Biden administration regulation that groups receiving Title X funds must be willing to “refer” women to abortion providers even if they

don’t provide abortion themselves, thereby allowing “otherwise qualified pro-life grantees” to receive funding.

Severino also aims to restrict access to birth control, which many of us said would be the right’s next priority after banning abortion wherever possible. He announces that HHS must promote “public messaging about the unsurpassed effectiveness [fact check: This is widely disputed] of modern fertility awareness-based methods (FABMs) of family planning.... CDC should fund studies exploring the evidence-based methods used in cutting-edge fertility awareness.” Severino calls for HHS to prohibit women’s health facilities that receive Title X funding from distributing condoms. And by declaring that life begins at conception, his manifesto appears to commit HHS to finding ways to outlaw IVF, which relies on generating multiple embryos, most of which are not implanted. It could also eliminate birth control methods like the IUD and even some forms of the pill.

Severino reserves special vitriol for the CDC, which he derides as “perhaps the most incompetent and arrogant agency in the federal government.” He wants to strip the CDC of its capacity to issue any kind of public health advice, because issuing such guidance is “an inescapably political function.... For example, never again should CDC officials be allowed to say in their official capacity that school children ‘should be’ masked or vaccinated (through a schedule or otherwise) or prohibited from learning in a school building,” his edict declaims. Instead, “a separate agency should be responsible for public health with a severely confined ability to make policy recommendations.”

Severino’s critique of the CDC also shouts Christian fundamentalism, as he complains about the agency “shutting down churches on the holiest day of the Christian calendar and far beyond as happened in 2020.” Yes, that was Easter 2020. “What is the proper balance of lives saved versus souls saved?” he asks.

Severino wants to use the CDC’s data collection capacity to police abortion, especially those obtained by women forced to travel because of restrictions in their home state. “Because liberal states have now become sanctuaries for abortion tourism, HHS should use every available tool, including the cutting of funds, to ensure that every state reports exactly how many

(continued on page 44)

BILL MCKIBBEN

CLIMATE



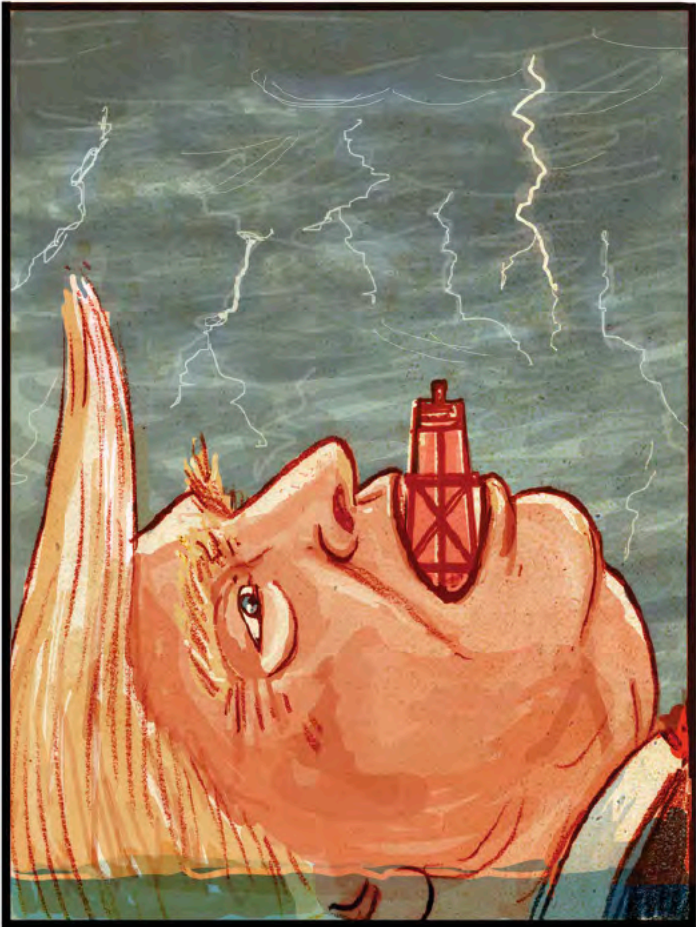
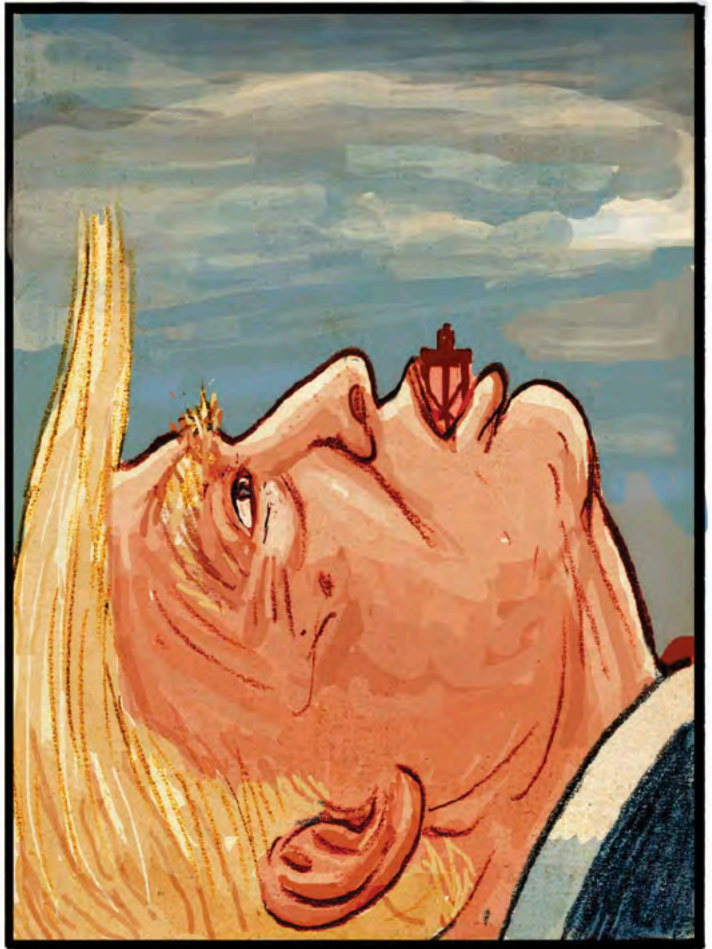
License to Drill, Drill, Drill

With guidance from Project 2025, Trump could do damage that will last, in human terms, forever.

A SECOND HELPING OF DONALD TRUMP CAN DO ENDLESS damage on any number of fronts. But with the climate crisis, he can do damage that will last, in human terms, forever—damage that will be visible in the geologic record for eons to come. His actions can literally help melt the poles and raise the oceans—and in the pages of Project 2025’s *Mandate for Leadership*, his conservative legions have made it abundantly clear that they will.

The suggestions range from the massive—ending support for everything from electric vehicles to offshore wind farms—to the cruelly specific. Project 2025, for instance, takes aim at the EPA’s Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights (environmental justice concerns have been enshrined in Biden-era energy policy in a way we’ve never seen before). It even goes out of its way to ensure that political appointees at the National Security Council take over preparation of the National Defense Strategy from the Pentagon, partly to make sure that “climate change” and “critical race theory” aren’t somehow

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER KUPER





**The
Plot Against
America**

used to “discourage our nation’s finest men and women from enlisting to serve in defense of our liberty.”

The authors of the Project 2025 *Mandate* believe that the United States has an “obligation to develop the vast oil and gas and coal resources for which it is responsible.” They also promise to reach back to 2009 to reverse a crucial finding from the EPA that carbon dioxide causes harm, a position that undergirds much federal environmental regulation. Their plan would even abolish the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which measures the damage we’re doing to air and water—because those findings are “one of the main drivers of the climate change alarm industry.”

In some ways, though, the particulars aren’t all that crucial—or not as crucial as what they collectively add up to: giving the oil industry absolutely anything it wants. Already, Trump has signaled his willingness to do just that: As *The Washington Post* reported in May,

Trump has gone begging for campaign contributions from Big Oil by promising to do anything—anything—its executives desire. And they, in turn, are preparing their demands: *Politico* has reported that the oil industry is happily drawing up executive orders for a second Trump term.

What makes all of this particularly terrifying is that we’ve already seen what a Trump administration can do when it’s not well organized. Trump came to power in 2016, on the heels of the Paris climate accord, which promised serious momentum on tackling the climate crisis. He managed to kill that momentum by pulling the country out of the globe’s only serious effort to rein in greenhouse gas emissions, even though the United States has put more of those heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere than any other nation. His announcement came at a Rose Garden ceremony attended by exactly the same kind of DC think-tank denizens who have produced the Project 2025 *Mandate*. Myron Ebell, who helms a group calling itself the Cooler Heads Coalition, told the *Post* that he thought scientists endorsed the prevailing views on global warming in hopes of getting government grants. “They are all in lock-step,” Ebell said. “It has all the appearance of being a scam.”

Bill McKibben is an author, educator, and environmentalist. He is the founder of both 350.org and Third Act.

While Trump gleefully embraced the climate change denialists in his midst, Biden has used his time in the White House to begin addressing climate threats—thanks largely to pressure from the left flank of his party. When Bernie Sanders emerged as the early leader in the 2020 Democratic primaries, Biden’s climate team sat down with New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Varshini Prakash of the Sunrise Movement to hammer out a joint plan. It wasn’t the Green New Deal per se, and it got whittled down in Congress and then larded with gifts to the oil industry from West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin—but Biden expended huge amounts of personal and political capital and, against the odds, shepherded through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which has now begun disbursing tens of billions of dollars to goose the energy transition. Indeed, to help make sure those dollars flow as quickly as possible, White House senior adviser John Podesta—the definition of an éminence grise—has set up a team to monitor the critical bottlenecks, trying to make sure projects get approved much faster than the usual pedestrian pace of federal decision-making. And by now, the deadline couldn’t be clearer: Any projects that aren’t approved by January 2025 won’t be—not in a Trump regime.

It’s not that Biden has been a green dream. The IRA had to find a 50th vote

to pass, and so Manchin—who was the top recipient of money from the oil and gas industry during the 2022 election cycle—wrote in extravagant funding for Big Oil boondoggles like carbon capture at power plants. And even without pressure, Biden has done boneheaded things—exhibit one was his approval of the absurd Willow oil complex in Alaska, which may require ConocoPhillips to refrigerate ground that global warming has thawed in order to anchor its infrastructure.

Biden’s game has been improving, though. Earlier this year, he announced that his administration would pause permits for new liquid-natural-gas export terminals before this biggest of greenhouse gas bombs could blow any higher (if allowed to continue, American LNG exports would produce more greenhouse gases within the next few years than every car, home, and factory in the European Union). That pause will end, administration officials say, shortly after the election; if Biden wins, there’s at least the hope of rewriting rules that reflect the folly of sending a fuel dirtier even than coal overseas. If Trump wins—well, consider the US an Exxon station, open 24 hours a day.

This also means that every other oil-state plutocrat the world over will have free rein to do what they want too; if the US isn’t willing to limit production of hydrocarbons, there’s no reason for anyone else to even consider it. Trump is the ultimate permission slip for endless pumping—and Project 2025 is only too happy to help him write that permission slip, with *Mandate* calling on the State Department to “rescind all climate policies from its foreign aid programs” and “cease its war on fossil fuels in the developing world.”

Under a second Biden term, by contrast, Podesta would continue in his new role as our emissary to the global climate talks (a role he took over from John Kerry), bringing with him the credibility that comes from implementing the IRA. And those talks could be crucial: The climate crisis obviously can’t be solved by any single country, but if the US can figure out how to make clean investments in the developing world less risky, then the huge cache of American cash sitting in pension funds might someday bankroll both American retirements and African solar farms, to the profit of all.

Trump has a record on climate change—a baleful record. Project 2025 makes very clear that he will build on that record, and this time not from a standing start. If you want a numerical sense, here’s the careful analysis carried out by the UK think tank Carbon Brief: “A victory for Donald Trump in November’s presidential election could lead to an additional 4 billion tonnes of US emissions by 2030 compared with Joe Biden’s plans.” And if you wonder if 4 billion

tons is a lot: “This extra 4bn tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO₂e) by 2030 would cause global climate damages worth more than \$900bn, based on the latest US government valuations. For context, 4GtCO₂e is equivalent to the combined annual emissions of the EU and Japan, or the combined annual total of the world’s 140 lowest-emitting countries.”

And it’s even worse than that. The climate crisis—unlike most of our political woes—is a timed test; past a certain point, we can’t repair the damage. Once you melt the Arctic, no one knows how to freeze it back up again. And that “certain point” is approaching: Climate scientists have made it clear that emissions need to fall by half by 2030; Trump’s term would end in January of 2029, giving his successor... 11 months. Good luck. **N**

GABY DEL VALLE

IMMIGRATION



Deport, Detain, Deny

Project 2025 lays out a vision of a new immigration enforcement agency that is even more draconian than its predecessor.

THE CHAPTER ON THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY IN PROJECT 2025’s *Mandate for Leadership*, written in part by Ken Cuccinelli—who notoriously served as the acting director of US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) under President Trump—lays out a vision of an immigration enforcement agency that is even more draconian than its previous incarnation, one that will be purged of personnel who aren’t loyal to Trump and will be far less subject to oversight. Under the plan, the DHS would be dismantled, and immigration-related agencies from across the executive branch would be combined into “a stand-alone border and immigration agency” (except for the Transportation Security Administration, which would be privatized). Abolishing the DHS and starting from scratch would give the Trump administration an opportunity to oust anyone in the department who could pose a threat to the other plans laid out by Project 2025—such as the people who, during Trump’s first term, spoke out against policies like the asylum ban. This, the chapter notes, would require an act of Congress, as would many of the other recommendations delineated over the next 34 pages. But that could be less unlikely than it seems if Republicans take the Senate and hold on to the House this November.

Still, as *Mandate* lays out, there’s plenty that can be done without congressional approval. For better or worse, the Supreme Court has granted the executive branch broad discretion when it comes to immigration. This was, after all, how Trump accomplished most of his immigration policies, from the Muslim ban to family separation. During a second Trump term, executive authority would be used to deport as many people as possible: Project 2025 calls on Immigration and Customs Enforcement to expand “expedited removal,” a speedy deportation process for people apprehended within 100 miles of the border, to cover the entire country.

ICE would lose much of its leeway to be able to deem cases “administratively closed,” as it sometimes does for people it determines aren’t a priority for removal. The agency would be required to detain most noncitizens with criminal records and almost entirely eliminate its “Alternatives to Detention” program, in which people in deportation proceedings are tracked in lieu of incarceration.

Legal immigration would also be curtailed: Several visa categories would be reduced or eliminated altogether, including so-called T and U visas, which are issued to victims of trafficking and other crimes who help police investigate the perpetrators of said crimes.

Asylum, too, would be gutted. The plan includes a new authority that would allow the DHS to expel migrants whenever there has been what it calls a “loss of operational control of the border.” Migrants who do manage to ask for asylum would likely be sent to other countries, because the proposal calls for reviving Trump-era border policies like “Remain in Mexico” and the “asylum cooperative agreements” with Central American nations.

People who are currently in the United States but lack permanent status—including people with temporary protected status and the hundreds of thousands of Afghans, Ukrainians, Venezuelans, Cubans, Nicaraguans, and Haitians recently admitted to the country under humanitarian parole—could have their status rescinded.

Under a second Trump administration, USCIS officers would be retrained to focus on “fraud detection rather than speed in processing.” Slow processing times would be used against migrants and prospective immigrants alike; the chapter suggests that, until the agency catches up on its backlog of cases, anyone

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**The
Plot Against
America**

Key to Project 2025's vision is purging the immigration agency of anyone who opposed Trump's agenda in his first term.

whose application is rejected would be required to “leave the U.S. immediately,” eliminating any possibility of appealing the decision or reapplying from inside the country. USCIS would also increase the cost of all applications, implement fees for asylum petitions, and expand the “premium” processing track that would let people pay more to skip the line.

Congress hasn't passed a major immigration law in decades, and the most recent attempt, which included plenty of restrictive policies that could have been plucked straight from the Heritage Foundation's wish list, failed because Republicans refused to give President Biden a “victory” on immigration. Under Trump, the inverse would likely occur: Democrats who supported Biden's attempted crackdown at the border would refuse to vote to codify policies backed by Trump. But Democratic opposition may be stymied if Republicans assume legislative control this November. With Congress on board,

there is far more that Project 2025 envisions for Trump's second term. The DHS chapter in *Mandate* calls on Congress to pass a bill that allocates additional funding for ICE agents to arrest immigrants living in the US; for the attorneys who argue for their deportations; and for more beds in immigrant detention facilities. To ensure that those beds are filled, the document also suggests that Congress change the law to state that noncitizens in deportation proceedings “shall” be detained. (Right now, the statute says immigrants “may” be detained, a stipulation few presidents have used with restraint.)

Project 2025 also proposes that Congress limit asylum eligibility for those hoping to find refuge in the US. It calls for raising the standard for what counts as a “credible fear,” the initial bar that migrants must clear as part of their asylum applications; codifying Trump-era barriers to asylum; and eliminating certain categories for asylum eligibility, which the Trump administration interpreted narrowly so as to exclude victims of domestic violence and people targeted by gangs.

As *Mandate* makes clear, Project 2025 also intends to make it easier to detain children in awful conditions. It calls on Congress to rescind the court settlement agreement that requires unaccompanied minors to be held in the “least restrictive setting” possible. Instead, large numbers of them could again be held in ICE detention. And those children would be deported more expeditiously too, since Project 2025 recommends that Congress repeal a section of the law that guarantees certain protections for migrant children.

Each of these policies would do significant damage on its own. Together, they'd affect tens of millions of people. As of late 2023, there were nearly 700,000 people with temporary protected status and 530,110 DACA recipients living in the US. Since he took office, Biden has admitted more than 1 million people from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Haiti into the country, albeit temporarily. The policies would also be disastrous for the more than 12 million people with green cards, not to mention the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants who have made lives here despite their lack of status.

Crucially, this would all happen with limited oversight. Expulsions during “mass migrations,” for example, would “not be subject to the requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act,” a law that prohibits capricious rulemaking. During Trump's first term, many of his policies were scrapped not because of their discriminatory intent or horrific outcomes, but because they violated the APA. With four years to prepare, however—and a federal judiciary stacked in Trump's favor—it looks like a second Trump term wouldn't succumb to such pitfalls again.

(*Walsb, continued from page 40*)

abortions take place within its borders, at what gestational age of the child, for what reason, the mother's state of residence, and by what method.”

So the CDC won't deal with genuine public health crises, but it will use its data collection expertise to collect abortion data. Please remember: People may have religious objections, but abortion is safer than giving birth.

Severino would also leave Americans far more vulnerable to crass capitalism when they are seeking healthcare. He wants HHS to promote private-sector Medicare Advantage plans, which—take it from me, I did my homework—may give healthy “young” seniors decent benefits at lower costs, but which get more expensive, and more restrictive, as seniors age and need more care. He recommends making Medicare Advantage the “default option” once a person qualifies for the senior-citizen health program at age 65, which would be a boon to private insurance companies, since it essentially privatizes the wildly popular public program.

Severino would also repeal recent legislation allowing Medicare to negotiate better prices for commonly used drugs. And he doesn't like Medicaid any better: He would weaken the ACA provisions that rely on Medicaid expansion and would impose work requirements on recipients.

HHS currently funds certain childcare and preschool programs for low-income parents, and Severino doesn't like any of them, either. His plan would do away with the entire Head Start program for low-income preschoolers. (It's “fraught with scandal and abuse,” he writes.) And he advises that federal childcare subsidies be directed from care providers to parents themselves, enabling them to stay home with their children or pay a family member to do it instead, a longtime priority of the Christian right.

Finally, Severino would cancel the “woke policies” of the NIH, abolishing its diversity, equity, and inclusion office and halting its efforts to understand gender diversity. “Instead, it should fund studies into the short-term and long-term negative effects of cross-sex interventions,” he huffs. In fact, in every agency and activity under HHS's auspices, Severino and his allies would root out any support for LGBT people, including research on their health needs.

So that's what HHS will do under Trump: Ban abortion. Police marriage. Force women to give birth, even if they don't want to. Force women to marry men, and vice versa, even if they don't want to. Privatize Medicare. Tighten restrictions on Medicaid. And if you feel like you'd rather not live this way? Severino wants to criminalize “euthanasia,” too.

(*This special section continues on page 54.*)



JAKE WERNER

CHINA



A New Exclusion Act

Demonizing China allows Republicans to unite around an authoritarian agenda at home—and unfettered Pentagon profiteering.

IN PROJECT 2025'S *MANDATE FOR LEADERSHIP*, FEAR AND HATRED OF CHINA HAVE replaced the interests of big business and free-market dogma as the motive forces in Republican politics.

The Chinese exclusion agenda has lent new vitality to the Republican policy program. In the wake of Trump's disorienting triumph over the GOP mainstream, vilification of China is also creating shared ground for the party's discordant factions. And because animosity to China helps make sense of widespread hardship in the US (which the Biden campaign is simply denying), it helps the otherwise unpopular politics of conservatives gain majority backing.

In his framing essay, Heritage Foundation president Kevin Roberts rehearses familiar conservative themes of cultural decay and government interference, but the pivot on which Project 2025 turns marks a new direction for the right. The many challenges facing the American people, Roberts writes, can in fact be traced to a Chinese conspiracy against America and the US elite's treason in joining it.

Roberts claims that the “woke Left”—which supposedly includes big business, public institutions, and popular culture—wants to foist open borders and free trade on the American people in order to hoard power, expand profits, flaunt its own virtue, and secure cheap “housekeepers, landscapers, and busboys.”

According to Roberts, the US elite has carried out this betrayal hand in glove with the “totalitarian Communist dictatorship in Beijing”: “For a generation, politicians of both parties promised that engagement with Beijing would grow our economy while injecting American values into China. The opposite has happened. American factories have closed. Jobs have been outsourced. Our manufacturing economy has been financialized.” Roberts singles out Wall Street and Big Tech in particular, describing the latter as “operatives in the lucrative employ of America's most dangerous international enemy.”

But, Roberts continues, China's reach into American society goes beyond the corruption of the elite and laying waste to the economy. Through TikTok, China corrupts teenage girls; through its Confucius Institutes, it corrupts American universities. Other chapters in *Mandate* expand on the indictment.

Christopher Miller, who served as acting secretary of defense under Trump, writes that China “aspires to dominate Asia and then, from that position, become globally preeminent. If Beijing could achieve this goal, it could dramatically undermine America's core interests, including by restricting U.S. access to the world's most important market.”

According to Kiron Skinner (the State Department's director of policy planning under Mike Pompeo), “The same cartels that parasitically run Mexico are also working with the PRC to fuel the largest drug crisis in the history of North America.”

Peter Navarro (formerly Trump's director of the White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy) asserts that China created the pandemic: Covid-19 “almost certainly

originated as a genetically engineered virus from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.”

Navarro also includes an eight-page list of Chinese “economic aggression,” including such nefarious practices as making use of publicly available knowledge, investing in technology, and offering to support US priorities in exchange for US support of Chinese priorities.

What all these claims have in common is their focus on problems facing the US, and the world, in which China plays some role: job loss, community disintegration, violation of data privacy, drug addiction, pandemic disease. Then they assert, on flimsy evidence, that China is not only the primary cause of these problems but has deliberately created them in order to victimize Americans. In other words, these are conspiracy theories.

Skinner admits as much: “The reality, however, is that the PRC's actions often do sound like conspiracy theories—because they are conspiracies.” The conspiracy theorist insists that, in this case, the conspiracy really is real.

These allegations have just enough truth to be superficially plausible. China is involved in the core problems facing America and the world. But it is never the sole or even the primary author of them, and its own contribution to these problems is generally similar to US behavior rather than representing a contrast.

Deindustrialization, the destruction of organized labor, and the suppression of wages in the US, for example, began decades before China became an important exporter. What created these problems was instead a crisis of business profitability in the 1970s and Ronald Reagan's policies of crushing unions and deregulating the economy. The dismantling of workers' power in China in order to draw foreign investment there makes China's path all too similar to America's.

Yet *Mandate* claims that China's unchanging cultural essence, radically different from that of the West, makes confrontation inevitable. According to Skinner, “Chinese power today is the product of history, ideology, and the institutions that have governed China during the course of five millennia...meaning that internal culture and civil society will never deliver a more normative nation.” (Skinner, who is Black, argues that the US is facing “a fight with a really different civilization” in China, because “it's the first time that we will have a great-power competitor that is not Caucasian.”)

Fear of this alien influence justifies one of *Mandate*'s most noteworthy through lines: centralizing political power in order to carry out a wide-ranging purge of “un-American” elements from the body politic—starting with government personnel. Ironically, this closely mirrors the conduct of Xi Jinping himself, who launched an anti-corruption campaign that allowed him to concentrate power in his own hands.

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To what ends is this American authoritarianism directed beyond consolidating Republican power? If China by its very presence in American society endangers the nation, the solution must be Chinese exclusion from the United States—accompanied by confrontation in those areas (like the Asia-Pacific) where unilateral action cannot achieve exclusion. Project 2025's proposals range from the complete decoupling of the United States from the Chinese economy, to restarting the Department of Justice's China Initiative (a racial-profiling program devoted to harassing researchers with connections to China), to the exclusion of China from global standards-setting bodies. As William Hartung shows below, Miller justifies his proposals to massively expand the US military by citing the need to make US threats against China credible.

This zeal to punish China—and its resonance with GOP traditions of militarism and nativism—also eases the way toward repudiating the party's previous commitments to free markets, free trade, and concentrated wealth. Billionaires looking to avoid populist wrath, like JPMorgan Chase's Jamie Dimon, have learned that you can still crush workers, shirk taxes, and get rich—as long as you cover

yourself in belligerent patriotism. Yet precisely because Sinophobia allows Republicans to connect with popular animosity against a rigged system run by unaccountable and condescending elites, it opens a path to reviving the popularity of conservative politics.

Far from attacking this Sinophobic worldview, the Biden administration has largely adopted it. Biden officials say that China—not transnational threats like climate change, global inequality, and the collapse of the global system into warring great-power blocs—is the primary threat America faces. Which only affirms the basic Republican narrative. As the more aggressive party, the GOP will always have a clear advantage when both parties encourage the idea of shadowy foreign threats. At the same time, the Biden campaign is having a hard time speaking to the widespread sense of national decline and injustice, leaving the field open to reactionary explanations.

Yet pandering to nationalism while preparing for war is not the only way forward. Popular hostility to China is widespread—but also very shallow. Americans remain open to more complex understandings that acknowledge the terrible abuses of the Chinese state while focusing on shared experiences of everyday injustice and suffering in the US and China, and to solutions that don't pit the people of each country against the other.

Standing against the nativist populists, who claim that inclusion at home can be achieved only through the exclusion of foreigners, multiracial and internationalist populists offer a progressive critique of the status quo. This analysis has the potential to mobilize popular dissatisfaction into the fight for an alternative vision that would embrace everyone. Merely dismissing Sinophobia will only make it stronger—and we urgently need a powerful response. **N**

WILLIAM HARTUNG

THE PENTAGON



Masters of War

Project 2025's vision for "the common defense" is a blueprint for unchecked militarism.

WHEN I DIPPED INTO THE 195-PAGE SECTION ON "THE COMMON DEFENSE" in Project 2025's *Mandate for Leadership*, my first question was how even the most hawkish of hawks could be disappointed with a Pentagon budget that is now soaring toward \$1 trillion a year—hundreds of billions of dollars more than at the height of the Vietnam War or the peak year of the Cold War. I was particularly intrigued because the author of its chapter on the Pentagon is Christopher Miller, who, after a brief stint as acting secretary of defense under Donald Trump, wrote a memoir in which he asserted that our military is "bloated and wasteful" and argued that we could "cut our defense budget in half and it would still be nearly twice as big as China's."

Unfortunately, Miller the budget cutter is nowhere to be found here. Instead, Miller calls for expanding the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Space Force and increasing the

funding for nuclear weapons, missile defense, and offensive weapons in space. Perhaps that's because, according to a number of veteran Pentagon watchers, he is the current favorite to serve as secretary of defense in the unfortunate event of a second Trump administration.

Miller conveniently fails to mention how much all of his proposals will cost. At a minimum, they would add hundreds of billions of dollars to the Pentagon's spending plan for the next five years—and they would do so at the expense of everything else we need to protect the lives and livelihoods of the people of America and the world, from promoting public health to addressing climate change to rebuilding basic infrastructure to reducing poverty and hunger.

The central component of Miller's ultra-muscular approach to "defense" is to double down on efforts to create a military that can beat China in a potential conflict. "By far the most significant danger to Americans' security, freedoms,



THE
PLOT AGAINST
AMERICA

and prosperity is China,” he warns, adding, with some redundancy, that “U.S. defense strategy must identify China unequivocally as the top priority for U.S. defense planning.” Far from ensuring this country’s safety, however, a military-first approach to China increases the prospects for a war between nuclear-armed powers that we should be doing everything in our power to prevent. (For more on Project 2025’s plans for the US-China relationship, see Jake Werner’s “A New Exclusion Act” on page 54.)

Along with its hyper-militarism, Project 2025’s call for a neo-McCarthyite cleansing of the military is decidedly new.

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To its credit, *Mandate for Leadership* makes a frank admission of the severe split within the Republican Party over the conflict in Ukraine. It notes that one conservative faction argues for “continued U.S. involvement including military aid, economic aid, and *the presence of NATO and U.S. troops if necessary*” (emphasis added), while the other side wants a negotiated end to the conflict and “denies that U.S. Ukrainian support is in the national

security interest of America at all.”

Meanwhile, Miller’s proposals for changes in nuclear policy, missile defense, and the militarization of space are both straightforward and extremely aggressive: building more nuclear-armed bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles than are currently planned, ensuring the viability of warheads on existing missiles, and developing new types of nuclear weapons. Keep in mind that these increases would come on top of the Pentagon’s current \$2 trillion plan to build a new generation of nuclear weapons. It’s a recipe for an

accelerated three-way arms race with Russia and China that will make a nuclear confrontation more likely.

Given Miller’s unalloyed militarism here, it’s not surprising that he calls for sharp increases in spending on missile defense and space war—items that have been near-sacred commitments of the Republican national security elite ever since Ronald Reagan’s 1983 “Star Wars” speech. The Project 2025 *Mandate* proposes the closest thing to a comprehensive missile defense program since that failed effort of the 1980s. Perhaps most important, Miller denies the very real likelihood that building up “defensive” systems will only provoke rival nuclear powers to increase their deployments of offensive weapons in return.

The flip side of such wholesale militarism is Miller’s call to jettison diplomacy. Among the chapter’s major proposals are plans to “streamline” the State Department by means of a deep restructuring; to issue a freeze on international agreements that are not enshrined in formal treaties; and to withdraw from international organizations like the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees and the World Health Organization.

WHILE MUCH OF MILLER’S CHAPTER IS A FAMILIAR RIGHT-WING wish list for US military dominance—albeit a Trumped-up version—there is one element that is decidedly new: the obsession with rooting out “Left” ideas like diversity, equity, and “gender radicalism.” Miller takes aim at these on the very first page, claiming that “the Biden Administration’s profoundly unserious equity agenda and vaccine mandates have taken a serious toll” on the military—and he goes on to blame the current low recruitment numbers on Biden-era interventions. Never mind that potential recruits may be having second thoughts after looking at the disastrous wars of this century—wars that have resulted in the deaths or severe physical and psychological wounding of hundreds of thousands of US troops, to say nothing of the massive death toll, devastation, and destabilization

of the targeted countries. For Miller, the blame lies with DEI and public health.

The degree of focus on these issues is so far over the top that it’s hard to know whether it’s cynical, delusional—or both. For example, one of Miller’s major recommendations is to “eliminate Marxist indoctrination and divisive critical race theory programs and abolish newly established diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and staff.”

Elsewhere, Project 2025 proposes a litmus test for military leaders: The National Security Council “should rigorously review all general and flag officer promotions to prioritize the core roles and responsibilities of the military over social engineering and non-defense related matters, including climate change, critical race theory, manufactured extremism, and other polarizing policies that weaken our armed forces and discourage our nation’s finest men and women from enlisting.”

Or, put another way, even modest efforts to root out racism, sexism, and anti-government extremism in the ranks of the US military are too much for the Project 2025 crowd to bear.

Along with its hyper-militarism, this call for a neo-McCarthyite cleansing of the military and the diplomatic corps is different in kind from what has come before. Advocates of a more peaceful world must vigorously oppose this approach to “the common defense.” But blocking these proposals is not enough. We also need to press for an alternative to current US policies, which prioritize force and the threat of force over nonmilitary tools of interaction like diplomacy, dialogue, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange.

Existing US strategy is premised on maintaining a posture of global military dominance, despite the overwhelming evidence that this approach has done far more harm than good in Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond. This is painfully evident in the Biden administration’s shameful policy of enabling Israel’s criminal attacks on Gaza.

We need to articulate a new vision for US foreign policy that not only refutes the validity of the hawkish policies proposed by Project 2025 but also advocates for a sharp departure from our current force-based approach to solving global problems. A short-term agenda should include pushing for a cease-fire in Gaza, pulling back from the brink of a potential war with Iran, halting the new nuclear arms race, reducing Pentagon spending, and taking a more constructive approach to relations with China. The fact that Project 2025’s recommendations would make things even worse than our current course is no reason to accept the status quo. It’s just another indication of how desperately we need to reverse course. **N**



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