

CRITICAL TAKE-AWAYS



From the Heritage Foundation to the White House: Project 2025 in Practice

John Hatton | Moderator, Staff Vice President of Policy and Programs at the National Association of Retired Federal Employees (NARFE)

Tom Moore | Senior Fellow for Democracy Policy, Center for American Progress (CAP)

Mara Rudman | Professor of Practice and Former Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, UVA Miller Center

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KEY POINTS

- **Project 2025 is already** reshaping federal structure and staffing.
- **Speed and coordination** drive its early impact.
- **Civil service protections** are being weakened.
- **Executive power** is increasingly centralized.
- **The challenge ahead** is how government rebuilds.



This opening webinar in ASPA's five-part **Project 2025 Series** arrives at a time when theory has already given way to practice. Less than a year into the Trump administration, Project 2025 has moved from a transition blueprint into the day-to-day reality of governing. This first session focuses on where the initiative came from, how it is being applied and why its early impact matters for public servants and to democracy more broadly.

At the center of the discussion, moderated by **John Hatton**, is the Mandate for Leadership 2025, a nearly 900-page document that frames itself as a mission rather than a set of recommendations. It is designed to help a "conservative" administration take control of government immediately upon inauguration. While President Trump publicly distanced himself from Project 2025 during the campaign, the panelists argue that its influence since Inauguration Day is unmistakable.

Tom Moore notes that his organization, CAP, warned of several risks if the project were implemented, including politicizing independent agencies, weakening congressional authority and reshaping the civil service to reward loyalty over expertise. In his view, most of those warnings have already materialized. Just as important as what has happened is how fast it occurred.

“
The policies laid out in that document have basically directed every major thing the administration has done.
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Tom Moore

1730 Rhode Island Ave NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036
E-mail: info@aspanet.org



If no one can tell the emperor he has no clothes, we are dismantling the basic foundations of our country.



Mara Rudman

Traditional transition processes and controls were largely bypassed.

Mara Rudman adds that what makes Project 2025 especially potent is its obvious understanding of how government actually works. The document maps where authority sits, how funding flows and which positions matter most. When one of its principal architects, Russell Vought, took charge of the Office of Management and Budget, she argues, the outline became operational. Both panelists regard Project 2025 not as an abstract policy exercise, but as a coordinated effort already reshaping federal power.

Moore and Rudman stress that Project 2025 differs from earlier efforts by outside groups to shape an administration's agenda. Rudman rejects the idea that it reflects traditional small-government conservatism. Instead, she sees an effort to consolidate power in the executive branch, often at the expense of long-standing institutions. She points to the rapid dismantling of parts of the U.S. Agency for International Development as one example. Even where Project 2025 called for restructuring, the administration went further, canceling programs abruptly and testing legal boundaries.

A central theme of the webinar is the idea that "personnel is policy." Project 2025 emphasizes weakening civil service protections and expanding political control over career roles. Moore explains that proposals like Schedule F—retooled as Schedule Policy/Career—would dramatically increase the number of positions subject to political appointment.

Rudman warns that substituting loyalty tests for experience undermines government effectiveness, particularly in roles where professional judgment is essential. She describes a federal workforce operating under fear, where raising concerns can carry real consequences.

Moore adds that this pressure is intentional, citing public statements by Vought about wanting to "traumatize" federal workers as a way to neutralize internal resistance.

Underlying many of Project 2025's proposals is the

Unitary Executive Theory: the idea that the entire executive branch should function as an extension of the president. Moore explains that while courts have not fully endorsed this theory, it helps explain efforts to weaken independent agencies and remove oversight officials. Rudman cautions that this concentration of power threatens accountability and public trust. When watchdogs are sidelined and basic data becomes politicized, the damage extends beyond government into everyday civic life.



Despite the alarm, neither panelist argues for simply restoring the past. Rebuilding, Rudman suggests, should focus on what people need from government now: competence, stability and fairness. Moore echoes that view, noting that disruption, while costly, can create space to rethink outdated structures.

This opening session does not resolve debates around Project 2025. Instead, it sets the foundation for the rest of ASPA's series: examining how power is shifting, what that means for public servants and how democratic institutions respond under sustained pressure.

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