

# CRITICAL TAKE-AWAYS



## Redefining Governance: How Project 2025 Impacts Institutions and Social Trust

**Eric Katz** | Moderator, Senior Correspondent, *Government Executive*

**Don Kettl** | Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland

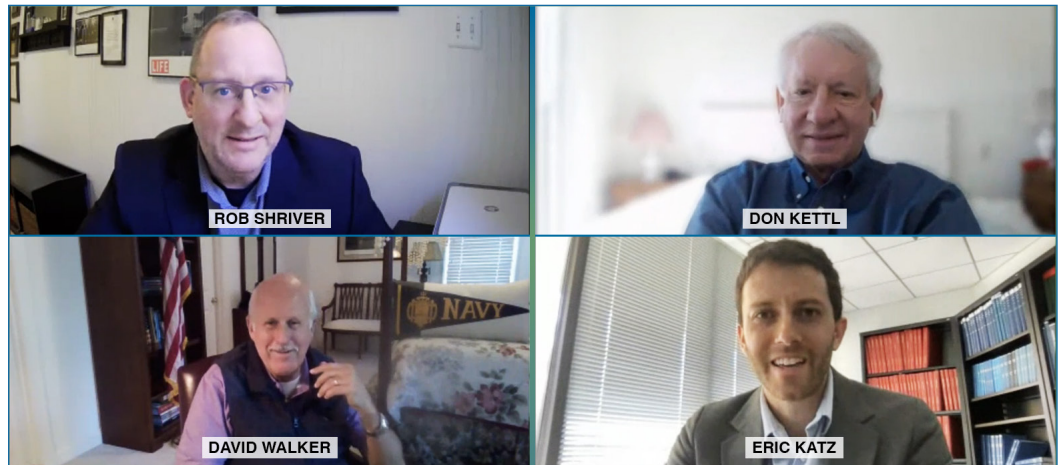
**Rob Shriver** | Managing Director, Democracy Forward and Former Deputy Director, Office of Personnel Management

**David M. Walker** | Former Comptroller General of the United States

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### KEY POINTS

- **Shutdowns are increasingly** used as leverage, not a last resort.
- **DOGE prioritizes** speed and headcount over mission and capacity.
- **Oversight institutions** are being weakened as risks increase.
- **Schedule G** may quietly reshape federal hiring and expertise.
- **Rebuilding will require** mission-focused, accountable reform.



The federal government had barely reopened from the longest shutdown in US history when ASPA convened a group of seasoned governance experts to examine Project 2025 and what it is already changing. Yes, paychecks were flowing again. Offices (some) were reopening. But no one on the webinar panel treated the moment as a victory lap. It felt more like a warning sign.

Moderated by *Government Executive*'s **Eric Katz**, the discussion featured **Don Kettl**, **David Walker** and **Rob Shriver**. Drawing on decades of experience inside federal agencies and oversight institutions, the panelists described a government under sustained pressure—politically, structurally and operationally—with capacity, accountability and public trust all trending downward.

“Congress has only ... to pass all of the appropriations bills by the beginning of the fiscal year. The last time they did that was 1996. That is an F-minus.”

**David Walker**

Shutdowns themselves are no longer rare, but this one, Kettl argued, marked a turning point. In the past, shutdowns largely paused operations. This time, they were used to destabilize agencies from within, turning uncertainty into a management tool. Over time, that instability



They don't know what it is that they want the government to do. There's no strategic vision. There's just destroy, destroy, destroy.



Don Kettl

erodes performance and makes it harder to recruit and retain skilled workers. "It's not only what has happened over the last 40-plus days," Kettl said. "It's what's facing us in another month, two months and heaven only knows what happens after that."

Walker placed responsibility squarely on Congress, pointing to lawmakers' repeated failure to pass appropriations on time. Shutdowns drive up costs, reduce productivity and further weaken public confidence at a moment when trust in government is already thin.

While Project 2025's Schedule F drew early attention, the panel cautioned that Schedule G may prove more impactful over time. Faster paths for political appointees, combined with new barriers to merit-based hiring, quietly tilt the balance toward loyalty over expertise.

Much of the discussion focused on DOGE, the administration's rapid-fire effort to impose efficiency across government. Improving performance, the panelists agreed, is not the issue. The concern is how those changes were carried out.

Shriver noted that DOGE teams were embedded in agencies before Senate-confirmed leaders arrived. "DOGE was not accountable for delivering the mission of the agency in the way that a secretary or director would be," he said. "They just hacked away," leaving accountability blurred and decisions driven by headcounts rather than public service results.

Probationary employees—often newer hires and technical specialists—were hit first; many were dismissed with little regard for performance. When deferred resignations followed, the scale of the loss became clear: roughly two million years of institutional experience gone in a single day.

Another example? More than a dozen inspectors general were removed without required notice or

explanation, with little congressional response. Walker called the firings inappropriate and illegal, while Shriver noted that inspectors general often help agencies catch problems early, preventing failures rather than uncovering them after the damage is done.



Taken together, the conversation revealed a government shaped more by disruption than design, thanks to Project 2025. As Shriver put it, "I don't think anybody that's in this business thinks that we should be rebuilding to what was in place on January 19th of this year." The real test now is whether change is guided with purpose—strengthening capacity, restoring oversight and rebuilding trust—or whether uncertainty itself becomes the operating model.

The shutdown was the signal. What follows will define the system.

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