



A public education and mobilization campaign

FEBRUARY 2024

© STOPTHECOUP2025.ORG

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Who's Zooming Who?

Who's doing what, with what money, to push Project 2025's agenda

As the saying goes, money talks.

Project 2025 is a planned extension of a long game by Leonard Leo and his close circle to remake America's legal system and government structure to reflect an arch-conservative evangelical agenda, using their own money to fund priority causes.¹ The Heritage Foundation's **Mandate for Leadership (Project 2025)** blueprint puts forward many ideas and talking points that Leo-linked groups have been pushing for years. Now, armed with a big infusion of billions from Chicago industrialist **Barre Seid**, they are laser-focused to deliver. (*See main story, Who's Behind Project 2025?*)

Project 2025 consolidates the agenda, complete with a "Day One" presidential transition plan and a 180-day policy instruction playbook, but it reflects Leo and Co.'s collective eye on the long game and America's future. With the November election looming, the push to prepare for a GOP takeover is moving into high gear.

A look at the Leo-linked Project 2025 advisory groups reveals their current priorities and legislative targets. Leo's bigger front-company funders – **Concord Fund, 85 Fund, Donors Trust, Rule of Law Trust, Marble Freedom Fund, the Heritage Fund Foundation**, and the new Silicon Valley fund, **Tineo Network** – are raising and redistributing millions to direct the current judicial and legislative GOP agenda to build the legal and policy base for Project 2025's attack plan. (*See Who's Who list and map*)

A quick look at their priorities, activities, and allies reveals their focus and possible contributions to Project 2025's agenda: **Honest Elections Project** is pushing voter restrictions and gerrymandering;² the **Alliance Defending Freedom** is weaponizing trans and LGBTQ issues; the **Claremont Institute** and **Free to Learn** are fighting "wokeism," backed by the newer **Teneo Network**; the **Foundation for Government Accountability, American Commitment** and the **Ethics and Public Policy Center** are aiming to weaken the FCC and censor Big Tech; anti-feminist **Concerned Women for America**, the **Family Research Council**, and **Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life** are fighting abortion and the Affordable Care Act, the latter targeting swing states; the **Mercatus Center** and **Paragon Health** are pushing deregulation, attacking science, and the EPA...the list goes on.



A public education and mobilization campaign

It includes **Turning Point USA** and **Students for Life** targeting DEI and transgender rights and recruiting students to the cause on US campuses, and the **Frederick Douglass Foundation**, putting up anti-abortion billboards and speaking for evangelical, anti-choice Black leaders. Then there's **C-FAM**, aiming its homophobia at Africa and the world, lobbying UN officials to adopt anti-LGBTQ policies, pointing to Putin and Russia as a model. All are important goals in the detailed master plan that is Project 2025. (*See list, and read our Project 2025 summary and by-chapter breakdown to learn more*)

The underlying how-to legal strategy

Leo's well-publicized plan to move the courts further to the right is deeply embedded in Project 2025's vision of **rewriting federal policy** to reshape the structure, chain of command, and duties of the federal government.³ (*see Who Is Leonard Leo?*) A key strategy to achieve that goal is *pre-arming* conservative judges with a base of *pre-tested* legal arguments and laws.

At the Heritage Fund, **Paul Dans** is tasked with recruiting the loyalist legal and policy wonk army that will defend Project 2025 and the next president's radical proposals to rule without resistance. He and allies are busy vetting resumés and offering training courses to would-be recruits.

That's where the **advisory groups** play a role. Combine the **Claremont Institute's** traditionalist legal scholars, and the **Becket Fund's** pro bono help, and the **Blackstone Institute's** lawyers training programs, and add Leo's **Donors Trust** money, and you see how they come together to arm new loyalist recruits for the battle ahead.

Legal groups also include the **New Civil Liberties Alliance (NCLA)**, a Leo-Koch backed group fighting to roll back government regulations – a key ideological goal of Project 2025.⁴ The Supreme Court has already taken up three of NCLA's cases, including the recent **Chevron doctrine** case, aimed at weakening the authority of the EPA to set health, safety, and environmental rules, while protecting private corporate interests.⁵ Another lawsuit challenges the authority of the Securities and Exchange Commission and Federal Trade Commission – also Project 2025 targets. The cases are prime examples of the preparatory work that Project 2025 will build upon.

How does this legal strategy work?

It often starts with a conservative think tank that identifies a divisive hot-button topic sure to fire up a MAGA base. In 2022, focus groups identified transgender issues – specifically gender



A public education and mobilization campaign

transition – as just the ticket. They then worked with right-wing activists and media groups to present trans identity as a threat to children and conservatives, using inflammatory rhetoric and disinformation. (See our *Reader's Guide – Unpacking Project 2025's Propaganda*)

The stealth weapon: amicus briefs

The same think tanks then recruit plaintiffs willing to bring a lawsuit in the name of aggrieved citizens against a target institution: a university, a library or school board, a cafe with a drag brunch, etc. This strategy allows conservative lawyers to file the critical secret weapon: a “friends of the court” amicus brief that gets entered into the legal record. Such briefs often deliberately misinterpret the law or repeat biased rhetoric. That’s how false interpretations of law have made their way into lower, federal, and even Supreme Court rulings.

Dobbs is a recent example of what constitutional scholars call an alarming judicial trend. There, Princeton Professor **Robert P. George**, a conservative scholar and **Leo** confidant, filed an amicus brief arguing against *Roe*, a year before the Supreme Court issued its landmark reversal ruling, *Dobbs*. George argued that *Roe* had been decided on “plain historical falsehoods” and cited old English law to back up his view. Within months, that same argument turned up in dozens of amicus briefs supporting Mississippi’s restrictive abortion law, including *Dobbs* – cited by SCOTUS justice Alito in a majority opinion that overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

By now, this incorrect interpretation has become like a Bible verse peppering other conservative lawsuits, even though progressive scholars have argued that George, who is not a historian, flatly got it wrong.⁶ The damage is done – or the victory, from a conservative point of view.

That’s also why 315 anti-LGBTQ bills were introduced in 2022 in the US and, while 90 percent failed, conservatives still saw a silver lining victory.⁷ Not only do such attacks polarize communities, and harm those attacked, while uniting evangelical and MAGA-land voters, they build law. This exact strategy is now playing out on American campuses and in business sectors, where Leo-linked Project 2025 groups are flooding local and state legislatures with anti-DEI and anti-climate change and anti-regulatory lawsuits. Many will fail, but the legal arguments in their amicus briefs will advance the legal agenda and prepare the ground for Project 2025.

That’s also why Project 2025 is recruiting some 5,000 lawyers to help carry out their legal dismantling of the government, and how they’re preparing for the fight back. Several proposals will test uncharted legal waters. Leo and Co. want to be ready.

Uncharted waters



A public education and mobilization campaign

Some are advancing the legal doctrine known as **originalism**, which calls for relying on a literal reading of the Constitution, not modern interpretations, or context. But others embrace a more novel doctrine, **Catholic integralism**, favored by leading conservative legal scholars including Harvard's **Adrian Vermeule**. Catholic integralism supports an interpretation of the Constitution that argues for an authoritarian and anti-pluralistic Catholic state in which the Bible replaces secular law.

Looking to Project 2025, one sees both originalism and Catholic integralism being promoted, and reflected in the call to realign US policy with Christian anti-choice principles and values and erase the lines separating Church and State. (*See Who Is Leonard Leo?*)

Recruiting a loyalist legal army

At Heritage, recruiting is ramping up. The election is in nine months. The recruits will include lawyers in private legal firms who will be invited to not only advise the federal government, but will be given unprecedented decision-making authority, per Project 2025. They will *represent* federal agencies, and be in charge, too. Privatization is a key goal of Project 2025.

It's also an alarming judicial trend, warn watchdogs. In Florida, Governor **Ron DeSantis** recently paid four leading Republican private firms \$16.7 million to help defend his egregious anti-LGBTQ Stop WOKE act; so far, he's facing 15 lawsuits brought against his policies.⁸ That expensive private help wasn't publicly known: a *Tampa Bay Times/Miami Herald* investigation of financial records exposed their role, to the dismay of the taxpayers who will foot the bill.

Now, with Project 2025, conservatives want to not only defang federal agencies and fire 50,000 career federal workers and appoint unelected loyalists in their place, but also give outside conservative lawyers and legal firms a parallel role, like a shadow force. It's all a further attack on the separation of powers in our current system of federal government.

It's also a major irony – a clear hypocrisy – since Project 2025's conservative authors repeatedly claim that unelected people in government are a big part of the Deep State problem. That's why they want to fire them *en masse*. The exception appears to be Christian Right loyalists – and private lawyers.

Who's zooming who, then?

The immediate 2024 electoral targets of Project 2025's backers are swing voters and court battles around hot-button issues including immigration, DEI, transgender and LGBTQ identity, abortion, and voter redistricting that will help decide the election in November. But the big-



A public education and mobilization campaign

picture target is clear: the ultimate target is America and our pluralistic democracy, and the broad diverse society of American people, who remain largely unaware of the people, dark money, and faith-led ideological agenda behind Project 2025.

Whether one labels Project 2025 a future template for autocracy, or oligarchy, or future theocracy, or a twist on plutocracy, as some Leo-watchers put it – a “pluto-theocracy”⁹ – very big money is being put into service of the vision. If Republicans don’t win in November, they have no plans to stop, either. As Leo and Co. tell anyone who asks, they’re on a mission, with marching orders from God. Project 2025 is their true believer’s modern political Bible. -- **ACD**

¹ “Leonard Leo: Architect of the Right-Wing Agenda,” *Accountable US*.

² Chris McGreal, “Leonard Leo: the secretive right-winger using billions to reshape America,” *The Guardian*, September 4, 2022.

³ Heidi Przybyla, “‘Plain historical falsehoods’: How amicus briefs bolstered Supreme Court conservatives,” *Politico*, December 3, 2020.

⁴ Lydia Wheeler, “Big Donors Back New Group to Fight ‘Deep State’ at Supreme Court,” *Bloomberg Law*, January 26, 2024.

⁵ The other cases are *Garland v. Cargill*, in which conservatives hope to prevent the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) from banning semiautomatic weapons as illegal machines guns; and *Murphy v. Missouri*, where conservatives hope to prevent the Biden administration from blocking Covid misinformation on social media platforms. Private attorneys from the firm Lathan and Watkins, and the conservative Cause of Action Institute are allied with the NCLA on the Chevron case.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ “Human Rights Campaign Foundation State Equality Index: 91% of Anti-LGBTQ+ Bills in 2022 Failed to Become Law,” *Human Rights Campaign*, January 26, 2023.

⁸ Mary Ellen Klas, “These law firms have been paid at least \$16.7 million to defend DeSantis’ culture wars,” *Tampa Bay Times/Miami Herald*, November 22, 2022.

⁹ Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, Bloomsbury, 2020.