

Project 2025 Training Video Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

Climate change allegedly is everywhere. And if the American people elect a conservative president, his administration will have to eradicate climate change references from absolutely everywhere. And according to our intelligence community, the number one threat facing our country today is drum roll, climate change. Not Russia, not China, not AI, climate change.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([00:26](#)):

Today we're going to talk about Project 2025, the controversial playbook for a right-wing Presidential administration. You just heard a clip from one of their training videos obtained by ProPublica and Documented, but what exactly is Project 2025? Who created it and what would it mean for climate progress?

Dr. Leah Stokes ([00:51](#)):

Welcome back to A Matter of Degrees. I'm Dr. Leah Stokes.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([00:55](#)):

And I'm Dr. Katharine Wilkinson.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([00:57](#)):

Project 2025 calls itself the Presidential Transition Project. It's housed at the ultra conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation. In April 2023, the group published an almost 900 page document titled Mandate for Leadership, the Conservative Promise.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([01:15](#)):

The proposal lays out detailed plans for the next conservative presidential administration. It's essentially a wishlist of the far right to gut the US government.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([01:25](#)):

On the first page of their website, which is just project2025.org, you can see what they're all about. Finish building the wall is the first bullet point and the proposals just go on from there.

Project 2025 Training Video Speaker 2 ([01:37](#)):

In the eighties it was acid rain, we were all gonna die from the acid rain and then it moved to global warming, which I think you know most of the people watching this tape will remember that wasn't, that was during the Obama administration.

Project 2025 Training Video Speaker 1 ([01:51](#)):

Yes.

Project 2025 Training Video Speaker 2 ([01:51](#)):

And then science comes along and disproves the global warming theory in large part and we have one of the most frigid winters ever known. And then the next thing you know, they're calling it climate change. Now, I always understood that climate change meant seasons.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([02:10](#)):

It is quite a document, a playbook really penned by far right wonks for the next conservative in the White House.

Abigail Dillen ([02:19](#)):

Project 2025 is really accessible. You can Google it and it's worth seeing how this group of Washington Insiders talks.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([02:29](#)):

That's Abbie Dillen, the President of EarthJustice, which is a leading nonprofit environmental law organization. In her decades long legal career, Abbie has litigated cases to make polluters pay and set new environmental standards nationwide, like getting the EPA to finally create rules for coal ash disposal. And let me just tell you, she is not a fan of Project 2025.

Abigail Dillen ([02:52](#)):

Some of it's coded, but you don't need to be an expert to understand what's going on. And what I think you'll see are a few gigantic themes that have consequences across the board in the federal government. One is it's anti-government. The whole idea is get as much out of the federal government's hands as possible. Zero out regulations whenever you can. And if you have to have some, throw them to the states, to local governments if you can, no matter whether those are states with horrible environmental records.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([03:27](#)):

As you heard in the opening clip Project 2025 envisions a government that erases the very idea of climate change. Agencies and federal workers in charge of tracking and addressing the climate crisis are eliminated.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([03:40](#)):

It recommends dismantling agencies that we rely on for basic functions like predicting the weather and it even gives legal protections for killing birds. I mean, you cannot make this stuff up.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([03:53](#)):

And I truly cannot stress enough how critical these federal agencies are for holding polluters accountable and addressing the climate crisis. We sometimes call this collection of agencies the administrative state, and that's because they are the day-to-day administrators of most of our government functions.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([04:11](#)):

These agencies ensure that laws are backed by science. They make regulations that protect people and they even implement climate legislation like the Inflation Reduction Act. The Heritage Foundation knows this all too well and that's why Project 2025 is their plan to undermine our progress. Here's how Abbie talks about Project 2025's plans for the Department of Energy.

Abigail Dillen ([04:36](#)):

When you think about all the solutions that now make it possible to think about clean power and then electrifying everything with clean energy, the DOE has been at the forefront of developing those. Project 2025 just says stop it. Stop doing the R and D, stop doing pilots, experiments, and support of clean technology, solutions of any kind. End grid planning and focus instead on reliability. How is it possible to have a reliable electric grid without any planning? It says it all.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([05:14](#)):

You might say the devil is in these details. As just one example, the plan includes gutting the DOE's loan office, which is responsible for distributing the incentives outlined by the Inflation Reduction Act.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([05:29](#)):

And the consequences of these changes would be dire. The Think Tank Energy Innovation recently published a report which quantified what it would look like if Project 2025 was reality. The report finds that Project 2025 would actually result in job losses. I'm talking 1.7 million jobs gone. Compared to, you know, the current trajectory that we're on Project 2025 would result in an emissions increase of 27%, making it basically impossible for us to achieve any of our goals in 2030, let alone 2050. I mean this would lock in catastrophic climate change.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([06:13](#)):

But Abbie says that is par for the course with Project 2025.

Abigail Dillen ([06:14](#)):

If you are a scientist reading this document, there is a very clear message to you and it is be afraid we are going to get out of the enterprise of doing science as the federal government and we are going to not only come after you ourselves, but we are going to invite members of the public to point out flaws and try to scandalize you.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([06:36](#)):

The Heritage Foundation wants us to pretend like the climate crisis isn't happening. It's not just getting rid of science, it's also getting rid of scientists, firing a lot of the career staff. Instead of having all these experts in federal agencies, they wanna have political appointees.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([06:55](#)):

I don't know about you, but I would, much rather have someone working at NOAA, let's say the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration because they are an expert and deeply understand the issues they're in charge of researching and regulating, not because they support a right wing political agenda.

Abigail Dillen ([07:11](#)):

Our government is the sum of the people who are in it. Those brilliant scientists, economists, epidemiologists, social scientists, policy experts who had spent their life trying to make our laws work. There is no substitute for having the full faith and credit of the United States represented by great experts. It is so much easier to wreck something than it is to build something. And that applies to the nth degree when you're talking about teams of people who have complex work to do.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([07:50](#)):

Project 2025 lays out a future of climate policy that's very much in line with this alarming post truth, post science attitude that we see in a lot of recent conservative politics and policies.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([08:02](#)):

If we threw out teams of scientists at NOAA, you know, we would lose a lot of essential data on emissions levels and climate change that would affect our ability to see and know what policy is needed in the future. If we aren't collecting data, we can't identify the problem and it's really hard to address something we can't even see.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([08:24](#)):

We can't fix it if we can't see it and we can't act on things that we can't name. And that seems to be at the very heart of the Project 2025 recipe, which also takes aim at efforts to advance environmental justice.

Abigail Dillen ([08:38](#)):

All of the gains that we've seen in equitable and just climate policy, for example, Justice40. This is a plan to eviscerate that and really attack anyone who's taking those important policy, taking those important funds and putting them to work.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([08:55](#)):

As we talked about last season, the Justice40 Initiative directs 40% of the overall benefits of climate investments towards disadvantaged communities. With Project 2025, that whole idea, it would just go away.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([09:10](#)):

So there you have it. This nearly 900 page document to overhaul the US government includes a multifaceted plan to gut federal climate action in every single agency where it happens.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([09:22](#)):

And it really makes you wonder who exactly is responsible for this plan.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([09:28](#)):

As we said, it was published by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank that pulled together over 400 people, many who have experience working in government to write this, how to guide for systematically dismantling the administrative state. I mean it literally has a section for each agency, each bureau, and then it walks you through the steps to run it into the ground.

Zoya Teirstein ([09:53](#)):

The impact of Project 2025 on climate policy falls into four buckets. Slashing funding for government programs across the board, weakening federal oversight and policymaking capabilities rolling back legislation passed during Biden's first term and eliminating career personnel and all of those things, even though they seem perhaps on their face that they don't have much to do with climate policy fundamentally will restructure the way the United States approaches thinks about an acts on climate change. It's not the first time that Heritage has put out sort of a roadmap or a blueprint for a future administration.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([10:27](#)):

That's Zoya Teirstein, a staff writer at Grist. She recently wrote an article about the Heritage Foundation and Project 2025 and what it would mean for US climate policy.

Zoya Teirstein ([10:39](#)):

They have been trying to shape a conservative agenda since I think the 1980s, early 1980s to great effect, I think in some regards. I mean they claim that Ronald Reagan's administration was roughly two thirds of the policy suggestions that the blueprint made at the time.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([10:56](#)):

Heritage releases these blueprints about every four years, including shortly after Trump's election in 2016.

Zoya Teirstein ([11:04](#)):

And then in 2015 Heritage put out another blueprint and about two thirds of that was either considered or implemented under Trump during his first term. So when we look at this document, of course, and and I note this in the article that I wrote for Grist, it's not like this is something that Trump commissioned and has said publicly, yes this is gonna guide my whole second term. In fact, he said the exact opposite. But there's reason to believe that some element of this or maybe multiple elements will make it into a second Trump term if he is reelected.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([11:37](#)):

And this history is revealing. Part of why Project 2025 is getting so much attention is because this is a credible threat. You know, this is not some just random document from an extreme corner of the internet.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([11:49](#)):

No, in fact it is by and for some of the most powerful people in the conservative movement, the very people who would be most likely to have roles in a future conservative administration.

Zoya Teirstein ([12:01](#)):

It's an interesting question like why has Heritage risen above the rest in terms of being so influential?

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([12:08](#)):

The call is coming from inside the house

Dr. Leah Stokes ([12:10](#)):

And there's a reason you've probably heard of the Heritage Foundation before, they've been a core part of blocking climate progress for years. This is just the latest and most extreme example.

Zoya Teirstein ([12:22](#)):

The Heritage Foundation is, is very well funded. There are a lot of major conservative donors that have donated to the Heritage Foundation, including the Kochs.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([12:35](#)):

She was talking about Charles and his late brother David, the billionaire, conservative activists and oil barons of Koch industries. One of the country's biggest polluters.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([12:44](#)):

Through this network that the Koch brothers have long funded, which includes nonprofits like Heritage. They have spent billions over the past several decades to unwind regulations, protect their polluting companies and spread climate denial.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([12:59](#)):

These are the kinds of people that Project 2025 is made for people who view the entire administrative state as nothing more than a threat to their own pollution soaked profits.

Zoya Teirstein ([13:09](#)):

The main thing that's been a constant with Heritage is this effort to dismantle the administrative state. And the idea there is that there's been government overreach. That the government has extended its control into more aspects of American life and more aspects of energy production or of public lands management or reproductive health than conservatives are comfortable with.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([13:38](#)):

When I think of the administrative state, I don't think of some big conspiratorial evil thing that needs to be dismantled frankly. I think of pretty garden variety regulatory functions that most of us take for granted, even as they play a huge role in keeping us safe. For example, we don't have a huge acid rain problem in this country anymore and that is because of EPA regulation and action. That effort in fact was championed by the first President Bush.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([14:08](#)):

You know, it's easy to forget about these problems when they're solved, when there's not literally acid raining from the sky.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([14:15](#)):

Project 2025 stands out as going after parts of our government that even conservatives once thought were beneficial. So why do this? Or at least why go this far?

Zoya Teirstein ([14:27](#)):

Is there a goal to dismantle these things that seem mundane and you know, apolitical and relatively harmless all things considered, or is their aim something much larger? Which do they have some sort of master plan? I think it's a mix of, of both things. There is some element of this being a collaborative document and many people contributing to it and Heritage trying to just create sort of a big tent for conservative voices. But I also think there may be something else going on. And this is something a source told me for this article that I wrote. What conservatives have tended to do in the past is break the government and then say, look, the government is broken or, or make it very difficult for the government to function and say, look, the government's not functioning. Who wins when the administrative state is weakened or dismantles? I think that in the eyes of the Heritage Foundation and the other groups that came together to create this document, it's industry, it's private companies.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([15:28](#)):

And in some places it seems like the authors don't even fully understand what these agencies are doing. But that doesn't seem to get in the way of them just proposing elimination.

Zoya Teirstein ([15:39](#)):

It's an interesting thing because it's not glamorous, right? There are so many different parts of running the country that are so tedious. I don't know that the foundation understands why privatization might not work in all of those realms. And I think a great example is NOAA, there are weather and satellite capacities that NOAA has that help various parts of the government predict, you know, for example, like when a hurricane is gonna come and how strong it'll be. And if you look in the document in the blueprint Project 2025 advocates for keeping the Hurricane Forecasting Center, but getting rid of NOAA's satellite and you know, weather predicting capabilities. The Hurricane Forecasting Center pulls its data from NOAA's larger functions. There's no eliminating one, but keeping the other.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([16:32](#)):

Even though Project 2025 is a continuation of a trend, it's still extreme in what it's trying to accomplish. Like why go after NOAA? You would think all Americans, including the people who wrote this document, would like to have accurate weather reports every morning.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([16:47](#)):

It's helpful to know things like if it's going to rain and what Zoya is talking about lines up with Abbie Dillen's framing of the Project 2025 ethos, fundamentally anti-government, fundamentally anti-science and fundamentally anti-equity and anti-justice.

Zoya Teirstein ([17:04](#)):

I was pretty bowled over by the sheer breadth of what they are calling for and and I will note that other publications have noted that this is the first time Heritage has grown this bold. There has never been a document that has conservative policy priorities in it that are spelled out so explicitly and that are so wide ranging. It was really the smaller things that sources said would have huge impacts on communities across the US. There's actually a whole slew of EPA related policy recommendations in here that would fundamentally make it more difficult for the government to understand how its policies affect people of color, low income communities, urban dwellers versus rural dwellers. I mean this document would basically make it impossible for the government to understand how its investments are affecting people differently. And that's so crucial. That's what the government does. It looks out for people. That's the whole aim.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([17:59](#)):

The goal clearly is to eliminate the institutions that make addressing climate change possible. To make government dysfunctional so that they can just say, Hey, government doesn't work.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([18:10](#)):

And as Abbie said, it is much easier to destroy something than to build it. If you wreck government, good luck putting it back together again. And that is exactly the aim. One of the people working to make sure that government does protect all of us, particularly on issues of environmental and climate justice is organizer, political advisor, and all around superstar Jade Begay.

Jade Begay ([18:36](#)):

First and foremost, I wanna share, I'm a citizen of Tesuque Pueblo and I'm Diné. I am also, at the heart of it, I would say an organizer that is really at the core of everything I do. But more specifically, I work at the intersections of climate justice and environmental justice policy and Indigenous rights and self-determination.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([19:02](#)):

Jade has been tracking the Project 2025 roadmap very closely, and that's because it threatens to undo the progress that she has seen on the issues she cares the most about.

Jade Begay ([19:14](#)):

I think that all of the progress that has happened over the last however many decades, whether it's advancing workers' rights or advancing climate policy and driving huge investments to black and brown communities who have been so disproportionately impacted by pollution and climate change, or expanding Indigenous rights and reckoning with how this country has treated Indigenous communities and tribes. All of that is a threat to the hierarchies and the power structures that the conservative movement so deeply need to keep in place if they want to maintain power. So I see Project 2025 as a desperate attempt to block our wins and keep us, the progressive movement, from winning.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([20:17](#)):

For the advocates and organizers who have propelled the climate justice movement forward, Project 2025 threatens everything they have worked for and accomplished.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([20:28](#)):

As Jade pointed out to us, every hard earned win is on the line.

Jade Begay ([20:33](#)):

In the last two years, let's just say there's been lots of events in my own community in this region called Chaco Canyon, which is a very sacred place for both of my tribes, the Navajo and the Pueblo people. We won a 20 year ban on oil and gas leases, and this is a fight that has been fought for decades. It's a huge climate win. That would be rolled back and under Project 2025, we would see this type of thing happen across the country. That's a big loss as far as driving down emissions and also protecting communities. Unfortunately, it means more deaths in our communities. It means a lack of preparedness for a lot of frontline communities. We need to get better at preparing for things like heat waves and extreme weather. But under this plan, we won't have a safety net. We won't have the support from the federal government to respond to some of these climate impacts. I really do think about the fact that tribal communities or native people are more likely to die from heat waves than any other ethnic group. And the combination of that with more pollution and the inaccessible healthcare on tribes and reservations, all of these things are just recipe for disaster. So Project 2025 would overburden a lot of these communities that have already been overburdened by pollution and climate change.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([22:20](#)):

Climate change does not affect everyone equally. Its harms fall disproportionately on marginalized communities and those with fewer resources to protect themselves.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([22:31](#)):

Because the impacts of the climate crisis are so broad. When we think about how Project 2025 and climate intersect, it is not just the chapters on the EPA or the DOE or NOAA. The entire document matters.

Jade Begay ([22:46](#)):

One of the things that alarmed me is the restrictions and the caps on Medicaid and other healthcare programs that are outlined in Project 2025. When I think about where we are in the climate crisis and how we've already seen a pandemic, we've already seen heat waves put people's lives in danger. We see floods that cause a lot of health concerns. We need expanded access to healthcare and not restrictions and not reduction of healthcare accessibility. I also think about education and access to diverse information. In this era of the climate crisis, it's really important. We are all informed to know when there is potential extreme weather on its way so that we can prepare. But also as a climate organizer and an advocate, I think it's really important that we start teaching our kids about climate justice. Also, climate change in itself, Project 2025 wants to dismantle the education department and it wants to restrict public broadcasting. So the ways in which we learn, the ways in which we get information are gonna shift under this plan. And I think that's very dangerous for so many reasons, especially when we're dealing with a very active climate crisis.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([24:27](#)):

Having a government ready to meet the multifaceted challenges of climate change is about environmental justice, it's about public health, it's about education, it's about building an economy for the future. So the climate impacts of Project 2025 could be vast and wide in the worst ways possible. But at the same time, and perhaps unexpectedly, Jade actually thinks Project 2025 has some useful lessons for us.

Jade Begay ([24:54](#)):

My initial reaction when I saw this was really <laugh> kind of silly. I think I was envious. I was like, if only we, you know, the climate or environmental justice movement had this type of plan, if only we could come together and be so cohesive to build something like this and organize around it and from it. I had a little tinge of of envy there. 'cause I dream of having this type of plan for our movement, of course one that's not so dangerous and horrifying, but one that is built from foundations of equity and and real justice.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([25:38](#)):

I agree with what Jade is saying. There are lessons here for the climate movement. Lessons about how we organize and plan and advocate for structural change, how we look at our institutions and whether they serve us or fail. Imagine if we had a 900 page roadmap for the world. We want to see if the Heritage Foundation can dream up a US government that works for them. Why can't we?

Jade Begay ([26:05](#)):

Why doesn't the climate movement or the environmental justice movement have our plan for what's next? I'm happy to say that there are lots of groups working on these types of plans. What does climate ambition look like in 2025 and beyond? And while those plans are still coming together, all of them really are looking to advance equity and climate justice. They wanna deliver cleaner air, cleaner water.

They wanna provide more good paying clean jobs, more clean and affordable housing plans for what climate policy could look like beginning January 2025, build on the winds and the work that we've already done.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([26:59](#)):

There is a lot to build on and there is a lot still to do. Project 2025 is such a sad, narrow, hollowed out vision of the future.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([27:10](#)):

And that's not the future that we want to live in. The fact is that the climate movement has shown we can win. We have the momentum, the policies passed by the Biden administration put us on a path to a brighter future with more jobs, better public health, and a lot less pollution. We can and we must do more. There is a lot of possibility in motion and there is so much more worth fighting for.

Jade Begay ([27:39](#)):

I really hope that we can get energized in this moment, show up to the polls, organize our neighbors, organize our communities to vote climate so that we can just continue the good work that we've already been doing.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([27:59](#)):

I don't know about you, Katharine, but strangely, after this dark and winding road, I'm feeling kind of energized.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([28:06](#)):

I will say I haven't totally abandoned a spiral of doom, but I'm with you, Leah. I feel fired up to make climate 2025 a reality. And not just at the federal level, but at the state level too.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([28:19](#)):

And it's funny you should say that, Katharine, because that's exactly where we're headed. Our next episode is going to be a deep dive on state level climate action. We'll be looking at how governors and advocates are leading the way to a brighter future and what we can all learn from their success.

([28:42](#)):

A matter of degrees is co-hosted by me, Dr. Leah Stokes

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([28:46](#)):

And me, Dr. Katharine Wilkinson.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([28:48](#)):

We are a production made in partnership with FRQNCY Media, the 2035 Initiative at UC Santa Barbara, and the All We Can Save Project.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([28:57](#)):

Thanks to our funders and supporters who make this show possible, including the 11th hour project. Special thanks to Fossil Free Media and the Make Polluters Pay campaign, which is working to hold big

oil accountable for the damage they're doing to our climate and our communities. Find out more at makepolluterspay.net.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([29:15](#)):

And if you're digging the show, please hop on Apple Podcasts or Spotify and give us a five star rating or leave us a review.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([29:23](#)):

Script writing, fact checking, communication and production support are by Lucas Boyd, Alex Dileo, Quinn Lewis, Christin Palmstrom, and Anusha Singh.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([29:32](#)):

At FRQNCY Media, Michelle Khouri is our executive producer. Lizzie Stewart is our producer and Claire Bidigare-Curtis is our editor and sound designer.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([29:42](#)):

Rose Wong designed our show, art Sean Marquand composed our theme song and additional music came from Blue dot sessions.

Dr. Leah Stokes ([29:49](#)):

Find us online at degreespod.com and @degreespod on the artist, formally known as Twitter. And you can also find us on YouTube.

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson ([30:01](#)):

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