

The Project 2025 Shutdown Is Here, adapted from *The Atlantic*, October 2, 2025

Thirty-four days into the previous government shutdown, in 2019, reporters asked President Donald Trump if he had a message for the thousands of federal employees who were about to miss another paycheck. “I love them. I respect them. I really appreciate the great job they’re doing,” he said at the time. The following day, caving after weeks of punishing cable-news coverage, he signed legislation to reopen the government, lauding furloughed employees as “incredible patriots,” pledging to quickly restore their back pay, and calling the moment “an opportunity for all parties to work together for the benefit of our whole beautiful, wonderful nation.”

Doesn’t really sound like the same guy, does it? This time, it took Trump fewer than 24 hours to turn a shutdown into a weapon wielded against the civil servants he once praised and the opposing party he has long derided. The administration has targeted Democratic districts, announcing holds on more than \$25 billion in projects in Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, and elsewhere, with more cuts believed to be on the way. Trump has threatened to fire government workers en masse, casting the lapse in funding that led to their furloughs as an “opportunity” to further decimate their ranks and gut agencies he doesn’t like. Officials have defied ethics guidelines, with blatantly partisan out-of-office messaging and banners blaming Democrats for the shutdown splashed across government websites.

This is what happens when a partial closure of the government meets the president’s second-term campaign to expand his powers and punish his enemies. The dynamic has created widespread uncertainty, as some Republicans blanch at the brazen norm-busting and some Democrats begin to reconsider how much pain they’re willing to bear in what they hoped would be a fight over health-care subsidies.

The president has shown no willingness to retreat, even as millions of federal workers and military troops are now working without pay or staying home. “I have a meeting today with Russ Vought, he of PROJECT 2025 Fame, to determine which of the many Democrat Agencies, most of which are a political SCAM, he recommends to be cut, and whether or not those cuts will be temporary or permanent,” Trump wrote this morning on Truth Social, referring to the director of the Office of Management and Budget. “I can’t believe the Radical Left Democrats gave me this unprecedented opportunity.” Compare that with Trump’s comments a year ago, during a presidential debate, when he said: “I have nothing to do with Project 2025. I haven’t read it. I don’t want to read it purposely. I’m not going to read it.”

Democrats have quite obviously taken note of Trump’s more aggressive tactics now that he’s president again, as has anyone paying attention. Last time around, Senator Mark Warner of Virginia told us, “there was none of this kind of activity, because there were people inside the White House who put guardrails on him.” Now those people are gone, and Trump has “people like Russ Vought, who’s whipping up a frenzy,” he said.

When we asked him whether Trump’s actions would lead the Democrats to reconsider their strategy of trying to force Republicans to negotiate before reopening the government, Warner would say only that he was “not going to predict” what would happen next. But at one point, he openly speculated about whether the federal workers he represents may eventually ask the Democrats to fold.

“I think we had to bring the fight—it’s about health care,” he told us, adding that many of his constituents have encouraged him to stay in the fight, at least for now. “Now, but I’ll be the first to admit it: Will they still say that if this goes for two or three weeks? I don’t know.”