

# Washington Examiner



## **The Left's real power is controlling the bureaucracy**

**By Douglas Carswell**

**September 23, 2025 5:00 am**

*Throughout this week, the Washington Examiner's Restoring America project will feature its latest series titled "Reforming the Deep State: Reining in the Federal Bureaucracy." We invited some of the best policy minds in the conservative movement to speak to the issues of what waste, fraud, abuse, and unaccountability exist throughout the federal government and what still needs to be done.*

Which is more important: winning elections or controlling institutions? Achieving the former doesn't guarantee the latter.

Since the New Deal, Republicans have won the presidency 11 times, occupying the White House for nearly half the time since World War II. Yet public policy has steadily shifted leftward, with expanding welfare programs, economic and environmental regulations, increased government intervention in the economy, and the rise of federally sanctioned DEI initiatives. It often feels like the Left has maintained control regardless of who holds office.

This is largely due to the administrative state — America's de facto permanent government — which consistently leans left.

The progressive push for an expansive administrative state has deep roots. Ever since Woodrow Wilson wrote his influential 1887 essay, "The Study of Administration," the Left has regarded an enlarged administrative state as necessary in order to govern a complex modern society, requiring a new kind of expertise.

To progressives, an expanded administrative state is not just necessary for governing a complex modern society. It's a means of achieving through bureaucratic fiat what they could never hope to achieve via the ballot box.

A technocratic system, centralized in Washington, D.C., can amass enough expertise to determine the "right" public policies and engineer desired social and economic outcomes.

Such an outlook is, of course, antithetical to conservatism, and it's why the administrative state almost always leans left.

Too often, Republicans naively imagine that if only they appointed the right people to lead federal agencies, we would see more conservative outcomes. The examples of Paul O'Neill at the Treasury Department, or Christine Todd Whitman at the Environmental Protection Agency during the Bush era, suggest that equally likely is institutional capture, the conservative appointee changing their perspective once encased in the bureaucracy they are supposed to steer.

The administrative state also encourages the greater centralization of power. Why? When you believe Washington, D.C.'s experts know best, allowing 50 states to pursue their own approaches starts to look illogical.

The Founding Fathers designed a system that is essentially Hayekian. That is to say, they assumed that knowledge and institutions would evolve through trial and error over time. In contrast, progressives built an administrative state driven by deliberate design, assuming centralized experts could engineer optimal outcomes.

Dr. Anthony Fauci at the National Institutes of Health, progressives assumed, could decide the best response to COVID-19. Michael Regan at the Environmental Protection Agency, they imagined, knew better than any state officials how best to conserve the natural world.

I doubt President Donald Trump has read much Hayek, but as the 47th president, he's the first president to attempt seriously to deconstruct the administrative state that the Left has put in place.

In his second term, Trump has issued executive orders to review and repeal regulations, such as the Clean Power Plan, prioritizing economic growth over bureaucratic oversight. He has implemented massive job cuts, with about 300,000 set to disappear across dozens of agencies. He is changing the terms of employment for civil servants, making it harder for officials to obstruct.

It has helped Trump to have the Supreme Court on his side.

For the first time in decades, the Supreme Court appears poised to shift power from the administrative state back to the states. In *West Virginia v. EPA*, the court ruled that the EPA needs explicit congressional authorization to impose sweeping regulations, curbing federal agencies' ability to create regulations with the force of law without clear legislative backing.

In another ruling, the court clarified that agencies cannot build intricate regulatory frameworks based on vague statutes, further limiting bureaucratic overreach.

Dismantling the administrative state is long overdue. It ensures that when Americans elect conservative leaders, they can expect conservative policies. More importantly, shifting power from federal agencies to states will also foster better public policy.

From charter schools to red tape reduction, most of America's innovative policies originate at the state level. This is why, as a former member of the British Parliament wanting to work for a conservative think tank in America, I wanted to work at the state level. As State Policy Network's recent Annual Meeting showed, it's at the state level where many of the key innovations from school choice to tax reform and labor deregulation are happening.

*Douglas Carswell is the president & CEO of the Mississippi Center for Public Policy.*