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BACKGROUND

What is DOGE?

By NBC Chicago Staff and Associated Press

In the parade of executive orders Trump signed on his first day in office was one renaming the U.S. Digital Service as the U.S. DOGE Service. It further directed that DOGE be established within the Executive Office of the President. When he announced the creation of the department in November, Trump said it would “provide advice and guidance from outside of government.”

DOGE, spearheaded by Musk, has rapidly burrowed deep into federal agencies and taken drastic actions to cut spending. This includes trying to get rid of thousands of federal workers, shuttering the U.S. Agency for International Development and accessing the Treasury Department's enormous payment systems.

Trump appointed Musk to lead DOGE in a push to slash the federal workforce and reduce or end disfavored programs. The administration dismissed probationary employees and Trump in an executive order told agency leaders to plan for “large-scale reductions.”

Musk said on his social media platform X that “we need to stop government spending like a drunken sailor on fraud & waste or America is gonna go bankrupt. That does mean a lot of grifters will lose their grift and complain loudly about it. Too bad. Deal with it.”

Musk’s team has roamed from agency to agency, tapping into computer systems, digging into budgets and searching for what he calls waste, fraud and abuse. Last week, Musk called for the U.S. to “delete entire agencies” from the federal government as part of his push to radically cut spending and restructure its priorities.

WHAT DOGE HAS DONE SO FAR

By Nik Popli in Time Magazine

Here is what we know about what DOGE is doing across the federal government, and the ways it has impacted federal agencies so far.

Cutting the federal workforce

Mass layoffs have begun at multiple government agencies as DOGE has been tasked by Trump to drastically shrink the federal workforce. Reuters reported that termination emails have been sent to federal employees at various agencies, including the Education Department, the Small Business Administration, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the General Services Administration. Many of those fired were recently hired employees still on probation, according to Reuters.

The firings come as the government’s offer for federal workers to accept a so-called buyout—an offer initiated by Musk allies at the Office of Personnel Management—expired on Feb. 12. The White House said that the offer was accepted by about 77,000 workers, or around 3% of the civilian workforce. The offer encouraged federal employees to leave their jobs with the promise of continuing to be paid through September.

In mid-February, layoffs spearheaded by DOGE expanded, and health agencies were hit hard: on Feb. 15, layoffs began at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and on Feb. 14, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) fired 1,300 employees, Bloomberg reported.

Weeks after a midair crash between a regional jet and a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter brought new scrutiny to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the agency's union shared that several hundred employees were terminated with messages sent from an 'exec order' Microsoft email address, not an official .gov email address," according to the union. The union's president, David Spero, wrote in a statement that these messages began on Friday night and went late into the night of Feb.

"These are not nameless, faceless bureaucrats. They are our family, friends and neighbors. They contribute to our communities. Many military veterans are among them," Spero wrote. "It is shameful to toss aside dedicated public servants who have chosen to work on behalf of their fellow Americans."

On Feb. 17, new Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy posted on X that Musk's Space X team would take a tour of the Air Traffic Control System Command Center in Virginia to review the current system and "envision how we can make a new, better, modern and safer system." Duffy disputed any claims that he is giving Musk special access.

Also on Feb. 14, 388 employees were also terminated at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "in accordance with President Trump's executive orders," EPA spokesperson Molly Vaseliou told Politico.

One department experienced a false alarm. According to the Associated Press, up to 350 employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration were abruptly laid off late on Feb. 13. The next day, though, those layoffs were rescinded, and less than 50 people were reportedly officially fired.

Several lawmakers in Congress have spoken out against the mass layoffs.

“Let’s be clear that these sweeping layoffs do not address fraud or waste. These firings are totally arbitrary—pushing out high performers and the promising next generation of our federal workforce who won’t be easily replaced.” Democratic Senator Patty Murray wrote in a statement. “Two billionaires who have zero concept of what the federal workforce does are breaking the American government—decimating essential services and leaving all of us worse off.

Terminating federal contracts

DOGE has terminated scores of federal contracts it deems unnecessary or wasteful, including high-profile agreements related to federal technology infrastructure and healthcare programs. While Musk has asserted that DOGE is "maximally transparent," its claims about the contracts it has terminated have often been vague, incomplete, or unsubstantiated.

A recently launched doge.gov website features the agency’s posts on X, most of which provide scant details of the contracts cancelled. One post from Feb. 3 reads: “All in today, 36 contracts were terminated for a total savings of ~\$165mm across 6 agencies, including a DHS contract for ‘people and culture survey and climate support services.’”

Whether Musk or DOGE has the legal authority to end so many federal contracts has been a subject of debate. The savings from the contracts that have been cancelled also remains unclear. For instance, Nat Malkus, a senior fellow at the conservative think tank American Enterprise Institute, told The Washington Post that the actual savings from dozens of cancelled Education Department may be half as much as DOGE has claimed, or less, noting that some claims appear inflated, and much of the money had already been spent in some of the others cancelled contracts.

Sweeping cuts at USAID

Among the first and most significant targets of DOGE's reach is the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a cornerstone of the country's global humanitarian efforts. Musk has made it clear his disdain for the agency's operations, which he claims are riddled with inefficiency and waste. Since DOGE's involvement began, USAID has seen dramatic staffing changes, with nearly 7,000 employees placed on leave or fired, a move that has sparked considerable controversy.

As part of its ongoing effort to reduce the agency's footprint, DOGE has implemented measures that critics argue jeopardize the future of global development and humanitarian aid. USAID's website, an essential resource for many aid organizations, was temporarily shut down, leaving workers in the field uncertain about the continuity of their programs. The moves were met with swift legal action, with a judge temporarily halting the removal of thousands of employees, but the long-term viability of USAID remains uncertain as DOGE continues its push for cuts.

Canceling DEI programs and grants

Since taking office, Trump has made canceling contracts related to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility a priority. One of his first executive orders of his second term rolled back DEI practices across the federal government. DOGE has claimed a role in cancelling dozens of DEI-related expenditures. It announced on Jan. 29 that it had canceled \$45 million in "DEI scholarships" that allowed Burmese students from marginalized and underprivileged backgrounds to study at universities across Asia. The program was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID. A Jan. 31 DOGE post on X included a table that claims \$1 billion in savings from more than 100 DEIA-related contracts. In February, DOGE posted that the Department of Education terminated 32 DEI training grants totaling \$116 million. On Feb. 14, DOGE posted a letter on X sent to each state's Department of Education, threatening to cut federal funding of any school that does not remove DEI programming.

Terminating federal leases for office space

DOGE has been involved in efforts at the General Services Administration, which manages federal property for various agencies, to begin terminating leases on roughly 7,500 federal offices around the country, according to The Associated Press. In early February, DOGE claimed that nearly two dozen office leases had been terminated, saving the government \$44.6 million. No details were provided on the offices or proof of the savings.

Eliminating pennies

A day after Trump took office, DOGE posted on X that the penny costs over 3 cents to make and cost taxpayers over \$179 million in the 2023 fiscal year. Following that post, Trump directed the Treasury Department to stop minting new pennies, citing the rising cost of producing the one-cent coin.

Accessing Treasury Department data

DOGE's infiltration of the Treasury Department has drawn among the strongest reaction from lawmakers and the public. The department is responsible for managing federal finances, including overseeing the issuance of money, managing public debt, and collecting taxes.

In early February 2025, DOGE staffers gained access to the Treasury's expansive payment system, which disburses trillions of dollars annually, and is normally overseen by a small group of nonpartisan Treasury employees. While Musk has defended this action, claiming that it was necessary for identifying fraud and inefficiencies, critics argue that it could compromise financial transparency and security, and raises myriad conflict-of-interest questions, particularly given Musk's vast business dealings.

DOGE's access to the Treasury Department's systems included read-only access to data that involved sensitive information, such as taxpayer records, Social Security numbers, and banking details of millions of Americans. Treasury officials revealed in a court document released on

Feb. 11 that 25-year-old DOGE staffer Marko Elez was “mistakenly” given the power to edit a sensitive Treasury payments system. Elez never made use of that access before it was revoked, according to the filing.

DOGE’s moves at Treasury have sparked legal challenges from federal employee unions and advocacy groups. A federal judge issued a temporary restraining order, halting DOGE’s ability to access certain critical taxpayer information.

Paralyzing the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

As a watchdog agency tasked with safeguarding consumers from financial abuse, the CFPB plays a crucial role in regulating banking, lending, and credit practices. However, under DOGE’s influence, the agency has been paralyzed. On Feb. 7, Musk hinted at shuttering the agency, a move that aligns with broader conservative goals to reduce oversight of the financial industry. t DOGE staffers entered the CFPB's offices, demanding "read-only" access to sensitive financial applications, according to WIRED. After Trump fired the agency’s director, its acting director, Office of Management and Budget director Russell Vought, instructed staff members “not to perform any work tasks” starting Feb. 10. The National Treasury Employees Union has filed multiple lawsuits against DOGE, challenging its unprecedented access to CFPB systems and its attempts to eliminate or drastically alter the agency’s operations.

Accessing Department of Education data

The Department of Education has also become a focal point in DOGE’s campaign to shrink the federal government. On Feb. 5, reports surfaced that DOGE staff had been granted access to federal student loan data, which sparked an outcry among lawmakers and education advocates. While Musk’s allies claim that this move is part of a broader efficiency effort, many see it as a direct attack on federal education programs, which have long been a pillar of U.S. domestic policy.

In addition to gaining access to sensitive student loan records, DOGE has made cuts to the Department of Education’s research programs, including those with the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), according to the AP.

Accessing Federal Aviation Administration technology

In early February, Musk claimed that his team had gained access to the Federal Aviation Administration’s technologies to facilitate "rapid safety upgrades." While the notion of improving safety in the aviation sector is widely supported, critics point to the potential conflict of interest arising from Musk’s own aerospace company, SpaceX, which is regulated by the FAA, as well as concerns that Musk’s team may lack the expertise needed to overhaul a critical system in which mistakes can mean lives lost.

“With the support of President @realDonaldTrump, the @DOGE team will aim to make rapid safety upgrades to the air traffic control system,” Musk wrote on X.

DOGE’s reach has extended to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, although the full extent of their involvement remains unclear. According to The Washington Post, DOGE representatives visited the CDC’s headquarters and made requests for detailed personnel information, specifically asking for lists of employees with less than a year of service or those within probationary periods. The actions have raised concerns from critics about privacy and the potential for political influence over a health agency that plays a central role in managing the nation’s response to public health emergencies.

Accessing Medicare and Medicaid systems

At the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), DOGE agents have gained access to IT systems to scrutinize spending across Medicare and Medicaid, which manage trillions of taxpayer dollars, the Wall Street Journal reported. Though CMS maintains that the access is limited to read-only to identify fraud and inefficiencies, critics warn that DOGE's

involvement could reshape how these programs operate, especially given their massive scope in the healthcare system.

Accessing Department of Energy systems

Despite objections from cybersecurity officials, DOGE managed to gain access to the Department of Energy's basic IT systems, including email services and Microsoft 365, according to CNN. Sources told the outlet that a 23-year-old former SpaceX intern with no formal background check was granted access, prompting internal fears about security risks, especially given the DOE's role in managing the nation's nuclear arsenal.

Accessing Environmental Protection Agency contracts

Beyond the February layoffs, DOGE's footprint within the EPA has remained ambiguous, though there are signs of increasing involvement. According to Politico, DOGE has been granted read-only access to the EPA contracting system that details millions of dollars in agency spending.

Accessing Federal Emergency Management Agency systems

Four FEMA officials were fired by the Department of Homeland Security on Feb. 11 after Musk claimed on X that DOGE uncovered millions of dollars being spent illegally by FEMA to house migrants in New York City. He alleged the money had been intended for American disaster relief and was wrongly spent for "high end" hotels.

Trump has zeroed in on FEMA on the campaign trail in the fall, criticizing its response after Hurricane Helene pummeled western North Carolina. He has since threatened to terminate the agency and accused it of misappropriating funds. The Washington Post reported that a small DOGE team, without security clearances, has gained access to FEMA's sensitive data systems, including private information about disaster survivors.

Working with Veterans Affairs

At the Veterans Affairs (VA), DOGE officials have been working with the department to identify wasteful spending and improve the management

of IT projects. Hundreds of thousands of veterans rely on VA services for medical care and disability benefits. So far, DOGE said that it removed a section on gender identity on the department's profile page.

Canceling media subscriptions

The White House announced that the federal government would cancel \$8 million worth of Politico subscriptions after a false theory about the media organization being funded by the government caught fire in right-wing circles. Various agencies had subscribed to Politico Pro, which is used by government and private sector customers to track policy and regulatory issues. DOGE posted that it was ending subscription payments to Politico and the Associated Press.

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Elon Musk's leadership of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has led to significant negative societal impacts across various sectors, federal agencies and global programs. Where available, I've included data points or media coverage to inform/add context to the cuts and malfeasance under Musk's leadership. (Editor's note: this document will continue to evolve)

- **Veterans' Employment: Job Losses:** DOGE's aggressive staffing reductions have disproportionately affected veterans, who constitute approximately 30% of federal employees. In February, the veteran unemployment rate increased as 175,000 veterans lost their jobs, raising concerns about the administration's commitment to those who served the nation. ([coverage](#))
- **Federal Workforce and Public Services: Mass Layoffs:** Thousands of federal workers have been laid off due to DOGE's cost-cutting measures. These layoffs have disrupted essential services, including flood prediction tools, clinical research on blindness treatments, and grants for elderly home repairs, affecting communities that rely on these programs. ([coverage](#))
- **Democratic Processes and Accountability: Bypassing Congressional Oversight:** DOGE has attempted to implement significant government spending cuts without the usual Congressional approval, raising concerns about undermining democratic checks and balances. This approach has alarmed conservatives who value the traditional legislative process. ([coverage](#))
- **Conflicts of Interest: Business Interests:** Musk's leadership of DOGE has raised ethical questions due to his companies' extensive contracts with the federal government. Critics argue that his dual roles could lead to decisions that favor his business interests over public welfare. ([Wiki](#))

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

- **Agency Dismantling:** In February 2025, DOGE personnel, under Musk's direction, attempted to access classified information at USAID without proper clearances. This led to the shutdown of USAID's website, termination of staff, and cessation of overseas operations. Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared himself acting administrator, despite USAID's long standing independence.
- **Aid Suspension Consequences:** The abrupt freeze on foreign aid disrupted essential services in refugee camps, including medical care and education. Reports indicate that these disruptions have led to deaths and the closure of critical programs addressing human trafficking and civil rights. Independent media outlets, crucial for countering propaganda, are also facing existential threats due to funding cuts.
- **Predicted Increase in Mortality Rates:** Internal memos from senior USAID officials warned that the agency's dismantling could result in up to 166,000 additional malaria deaths, a 30% rise in new tuberculosis cases, and 200,000 more children paralyzed by polio over the next decade. ([coverage](#))
- **Disruption of Essential Services:** The suspension of USAID's foreign aid has led to significant disruptions in refugee camps, affecting medical care and education. Reports indicate that these interruptions have resulted in deaths and the closure of programs addressing human trafficking and civil rights. ([coverage](#))
- **Impact on Malaria Control in Africa:** USAID's funding cuts have raised concerns among African health officials about potential setbacks in malaria control efforts. In Uganda, for instance, the cessation of U.S. funding threatens the supply of critical antimalarial medicines and mosquito control measures, potentially leading to severe outbreaks.

Social Security

- **Data Access Concerns:** DOGE's intrusion into federal agencies has raised alarms about unauthorized access to sensitive information, including Social Security numbers. This breach poses significant risks to individual privacy and the security of personal data
- **Unauthorized Data Access:** A coalition of labor unions filed an emergency motion to prevent DOGE from accessing the Social Security data of millions of Americans. Concerns were raised about data security and potential misuse, especially given that DOGE's access was granted under questionable pretenses. ([coverage](#))
- **Misinterpretation of Data:** Elon Musk claimed that millions of deceased individuals were receiving Social Security benefits, citing records of individuals aged 150 and above. However, experts clarified that these records often lack death dates due to historical data limitations and do not indicate active benefit payments. ([coverage](#))

Government Operations, Legal & Security Concerns

- **Potential Government Shutdown:** Concerns have emerged that DOGE might gain control over federal payment systems during a government shutdown, allowing it to decide which obligations to fulfill. This unprecedented authority could lead to a constitutional crisis and destabilize government operations. ([coverage](#))
- **Agency Shutdown Attempts:** DOGE has targeted various federal entities for shutdown, including those managing federal parks and development foundations. For instance, a U.S. District Judge recently blocked the immediate shutdown of the U.S. African Development Foundation, an agency supporting investments in African countries, which DOGE attempted to dismantle. ([coverage](#))
- **Regulatory Overreach:** Musk proposed the non-enforcement or repeal of all federal regulations as a default stance of the Trump administration, raising concerns about unchecked executive power and the potential erosion of regulatory safeguards.
- **Privacy Act Violations:** The unauthorized access and use of sensitive government data by DOGE may violate several laws, including the Privacy Act of 1974, which governs the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of personally identifiable information by federal agencies. ([coverage](#))
- **Federal Judge Intervention:** A federal judge blocked DOGE from accessing sensitive U.S. Treasury records, highlighting concerns about unauthorized access to personal data. ([coverage](#))