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What has DOGE done in Trump's first 100 days?

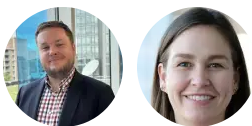
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Elon Musk wields a chainsaw at the Conservative Political Action Conference on Feb. 20 in Oxon Hill, Md.

Andrew Harnik / Getty Images



By Stephen Fowler and Shannon Bond

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When President Trump returned to the White House in January, he promised to “**restore competence and effectiveness**” to the federal government by establishing a Department of Government Efficiency.

In the lead-up to his inauguration, DOGE evolved from a **meme** to an outside commission to a White House office given carte blanche to upend the executive branch in the name of combating perceived waste, fraud and abuse.

A small cadre of software engineers and others with connections to billionaire Elon Musk quickly **fanned out across federal agencies**, where they have **encouraged the firing of tens of thousands of federal employees, overseen the effective dismantling of agencies, slashed spending on foreign food aid, medical research and basic office supplies** and burrowed into **multiple sensitive data systems**.

Last week, Musk said he would **spend less time on DOGE** and **focus on Tesla**, as the 130-day clock on his appointment as a “special government employee” runs down. “The DOGE team has made a lot of progress in addressing waste and fraud,” he said.

In an **interview** with *TIME* last week, Trump called DOGE a “very big success.” “We found hundreds of billions of dollars of waste, fraud, and abuse,” he said. “It’s a scam. It’s illegal, in my opinion, so much of the stuff that we found, but I think DOGE has been a big success from that standpoint.”

Despite those claims, 100 days into Trump’s second term, DOGE has not delivered on its promised savings, efficiency or transparency in meaningful ways.

Musk’s vision of DOGE taking a **chainsaw** to government spending has hit repeated snags. An initial savings goal of \$2 trillion was lowered to \$1 trillion before being downgraded again recently to \$150 billion — less than a tenth of Musk’s original promise. Even that number may be difficult to reach, given **DOGE’s history of inaccurate and overstated claims** combined with Trump’s desire to shield spending on Social Security and Medicare, which are major drivers of the federal budget.

Many of DOGE’s initiatives have been reversed or delayed after legal setbacks and backlash in the court of public opinion. Since Jan. 20, dozens of federal lawsuits have **challenged DOGE’s activities** or mentioned its actions, according to NPR’s

Still, DOGE has already reshaped the federal government in significant ways — and is amassing unprecedented power over government data. With Trump’s blessing, Musk’s group has tried to grant itself virtually **unfettered access** to the most sensitive personal and financial systems the federal government maintains.

From a meme to the White House

DOGE’s very genesis was marked by inefficiency: A week after the November election, Trump announced the **entity would be co-led by Musk**, the billionaire CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, and Vivek Ramaswamy, a biotech entrepreneur and former Republican presidential candidate.

“Together, these two wonderful Americans will pave the way for my Administration to dismantle Government Bureaucracy, slash excess regulations, cut wasteful expenditures, and restructure Federal Agencies,” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

Not only did DOGE have **two leaders**, they had competing visions of how to accomplish its goal. Ramaswamy pushed to work through the courts and Congress, **WIRED** and **The Washington Post** reported. But by Inauguration Day, **Ramaswamy had left** and Musk’s version prevailed: directly reshaping the federal bureaucracy through mass firings, similar to what he did when he **bought Twitter** in 2022, and by seizing control of technology across agencies.

While DOGE was originally described as operating outside the government — a sort of blue-ribbon commission that would make recommendations — an executive order Trump signed on his first day in office gave DOGE a **home in the White House** and a mandate for direct action.



Musk speaks alongside President Trump in the Oval Office on Feb. 11.

Andrew Harnik / Getty Images / Getty Images

But the DOGE spelled out by Trump's order and the DOGE that has embedded itself across and beyond the executive branch share few similarities, NPR's reporting over the first 100 days of the administration has found.

Some agencies have upwards of a dozen DOGE-affiliated personnel, while others have just one or two. A small number of DOGE-linked staffers have been working at multiple federal agencies at the same time.

DOGE's nebulous organizational structure extends beyond rank-and-file employees: Musk's role as the **de facto head of DOGE** has been touted by the White House but downplayed by Justice Department lawyers when legally expedient. Still, Trump has repeatedly **described Musk** as leading DOGE, and the bulk of its work has been in service of Musk's stated goal to dramatically slash the federal deficit by the Sep. 30 end of the fiscal year.

'Savings' claims were off from the start

There's little evidence to support the claim that DOGE is saving agencies significant money or changing the fact that the **federal government spends more money than it collects** — mainly on non-discretionary programs like Medicaid and Social Security. In fact, as of March 31, government spending is up 10% from the same period last year while revenue is only up 3%, leading to a 23% increase in the deficit, according to **Treasury Department data**.

Even after Musk's latest downward revision of DOGE's savings goal to \$150 billion, that number is unlikely to be reached.

On its **website**, DOGE claims \$160 billion has been saved through canceling contracts, firing workers and other measures. As NPR has reported, that tracker is **plagued with inaccuracies, errors, omissions and overstatements**.

As of late April, out of \$160 billion in claimed savings, DOGE's "wall of receipts" has data to account to just \$63 billion in purported claims.

The five contract cancellations with the most claimed savings, accounting for nearly \$7.5 billion in the DOGE tracker, actually amount to just under \$1 billion in potential savings. They include a contract that was never awarded, one that was already terminated and another that doesn't appear to be canceled at all, as DOGE continues to use **misleading math**.

Cutting contracts and stopping spending

NPR's reporting shows the contracts DOGE has terminated and spending it has frozen largely reflect **policy disagreements** with the Biden administration rather than waste, fraud or abuse. In some cases, DOGE targeted spending on the types of software modernization and efficiency efforts that its mandate claims to support. It **eliminated 18F**, a tech unit inside the General Services Administration that helped improve digital services across agencies, including developing the IRS' free online tax-filing software.

According to the DOGE tracker, many of the contracts terminated would not actually



Protesters gather on the National Mall for the "Hands-Off" protest against the Trump administration on April 5.

Dominic Gwinn / AFP via Getty Images / AFP via Getty Images

Federal employees say it appears little thought has been given to many of the cuts beyond trying to reach Musk's savings target.

"They are roving in search of cuts they can put up on their wall to get that number up, whether it's cutting staff, contracts, leases, grants, programs, offices, whatever," said one General Services Administration worker who asked to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation from the Trump administration.

Reshaping the federal workforce

From the beginning, Trump and Musk zeroed in on federal workers, saying they want to "**dismantle government bureaucracy**" and root out what Trump calls "**rogue bureaucrats.**"

An **opening salvo** haphazardly targeted tens of thousands of workers still in **probationary periods** because they had recently been hired or promoted into new roles.

Some firings were so abrupt that agencies scrambled to **bring back terminated staff**, including those at the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration who **oversee the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile**. Others saw employees fired, then unfired, before being **fired again**.

While challenges to those terminations have worked their way through the legal system, some agencies have said court-ordered **reinstatement** caused "significant administrative burdens." The **Supreme Court** and a federal **appeals court** paused those rulings this month, clearing the way for firings to continue.

Then there was the **"fork in the road" resignation offer** for federal employees to get paid through September without having to work, similar to a push Musk made after taking over Twitter. **Some workers** who accepted the offer have since been told they can't actually take it.



A terminated federal worker leaves the offices of the U.S. Agency for International Development in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 28 after being laid off following Trump's order to cut funding to the agency. That decision was driven by DOGE's work.

Bryan Dozier / AFP via Getty Images / AFP via Getty Images

A Department of Agriculture employee, who spoke to NPR on condition of anonymity because they feared retaliation in their job, was approved to take the resignation offer and was supposed to go on administrative leave on May 1. On Apr. 23, the employee received an email notifying them their job was considered “mission critical” and asking them to “reconsider their enrollment.” They still plan to resign.

“At this point, it’s their loss after firing [probationary employees], rehiring, uncertainty, mental anguish, being kept in the dark about decisions that affect your livelihood,” the employee said. “It isn’t fair to Americans because we will all feel the effects of agencies that can’t run effectively, but that’s not my fault. It’s the fault of the decision makers.”

At some agencies, workers say the number of people who are leaving, between **firings**, **buyouts** and early retirements, is affecting the government's ability to provide **services to the public**.

“People are dropping like flies in terms of those who are eligible for retirement,” said an employee at the Internal Revenue Service, to whom NPR granted anonymity because they fear retaliation from the Trump administration. “That makes a lot of work for everyone else, especially since they can’t hire. So many people can’t do their jobs because of the lack of people.”

“Extreme levels of fraud” – but no proof

Another Musk-driven initiative asked employees to send weekly emails to the Office of Personnel Management outlining **five things they accomplished**. Those emails **sparked confusion** among workers and Cabinet officials who gave **conflicting guidance** on whether their employees should comply. Musk and Trump claimed the email was meant to identify federal workers who **don’t actually exist** — an allegation for which they provided no evidence.

“We think there are a number of people on the government payroll who are dead, which is probably why they can’t respond, and some people who are not real people. Like, there are literally fictional individuals that are collecting paychecks,” Musk said in a February Cabinet meeting.

Musk has similarly claimed, without providing proof, that the **Social Security system** is plagued by “extreme levels of fraud,” including benefits checks going to dead people and recipients who are impossibly listed as well over 100 years old in the SSA database. His **claims have been debunked** by the Social Security Administration’s inspector general and its acting commissioner, **Leland Dudek**.

Nowhere to work and nothing to work with

Federal workers who still have jobs have been **ordered back into offices**, only to face shortages of desks, internet bandwidth, and even toilet paper. Dozens of workers across multiple agencies told NPR the return to office mandate has made

including under Trump's first term, which the federal government estimates has saved hundreds of millions of dollars in reduced costs.

“The goal of remote work and telework was to bring down the taxpayer burden, to be more efficient,” said a Food and Drug Administration employee who asked to remain anonymous for retribution. The employee was assigned to an office with insufficient space. “This is not sustainable. They are going to have to get bigger spaces,” said the employee, who requested anonymity because they feared retribution for speaking publicly.

However, even as the administration has demanded workers **return to the office**, it's also looking to shrink the federal government's **real estate footprint** by up to 25%, an **NPR analysis found**. Some federal employees have been told the offices they are assigned to work in may close in the near future – and some planned closures have been reversed after public outcry.



Many workers say their ability to do their jobs is also being stymied by a **freeze on government-issued payment cards**, which has disrupted their ability to buy supplies and services, book travel, and carry out statutorily mandated work. Routine spending now has to be approved by leadership at some agencies, leading to long delays.

“We are literally jumping for joy over here in our local office because HQ/DOGE has approved our expenses to pump [a] vault toilet at one of our field offices,” said one worker at the Bureau of Land Management, who requested anonymity because they fear retaliation from the Trump administration. “It took weeks to get this approved when it was not an issue before.”

DOGE in court

While DOGE has changed how the federal government operates, its own work has largely been conducted in secret, with most of the information about its actions coming from court filings.

An NPR review of **thousands of pages of filings** in federal lawsuits over DOGE’s actions finds an alarming pattern across agencies, where DOGE has given conflicting information about what data it has accessed, who has that access and, most importantly, why.

In a case against the Office of Personnel Management, the Treasury Department and Education Department, a **federal judge found** agencies shared data with DOGE affiliates “who had no need to know the vast amount of sensitive personal information to which they were granted access.”

Another **judge wrote** that DOGE gaining broad access to Social Security data instead of a more narrow approach “is tantamount to hitting a fly with a sledgehammer.” In a different case, the court expressed concern that **sensitive Treasury Department data** was potentially shared outside of the agency, in violation of federal law.

In **more than a dozen court cases** alleging DOGE illegally accessed sensitive

evidence of DOGE staffers violating data-sharing rules and skirting required training.

Other **court documents reveal** that a small number of DOGE employees have essentially unlimited access to different federal systems that could be combined to create dossiers about American citizens and noncitizens in violation of privacy laws.

What is DOGE doing with government data?

Concerns about data abuse are not just hypothetical. This month, a whistleblower provided evidence that DOGE may have **taken sensitive data** from the National Labor Relations Board and hidden its tracks.

Democrats on the House Oversight Committee have **alleged** that other whistleblowers have evidence that DOGE is creating a master database of Americans' private information.

Already, DOGE appears to be using its access to disparate datasets, including Social Security records, to advance **baseless claims about noncitizen voting** and massive fraud within government programs.

Its data access is also being used to further the Trump administration's immigration policies: The Department of Homeland Security **announced last week** that DOGE helped overhaul an immigration database to serve as "a single, reliable source for verifying non-citizen status nationwide."

As Musk steps back, DOGE's work continues

It's too early to say what the long-term impact of DOGE will have on the federal government. Trump's order gives the temporary DOGE organization a deadline of July 4, 2026 to accomplish its goals.

What is certain is that DOGE has already reshaped the federal workforce: More than 100,000 federal workers have been fired or taken buyouts to leave the civil service so far, though ongoing court battles mean that number is likely to change in the coming months. Add in planned **reductions in force efforts** across agencies and

close to 10% of the 2.5 million-person federal workforce could be gone by the end of the fiscal year.



Musk speaks during a Cabinet meeting at the White House on March 24.

Win McNamee / Getty Images / Getty Images

The layoffs are likely to have far-reaching ramifications in **communities across the country**: the federal government is the nation's largest employer and **more than 80% of its employees** live outside of the Washington, D.C., metro area.

Legal and logistical challenges to DOGE's efforts could still block some of its efforts. But in the meantime, changes are already underway that will be hard to unwind, from cutting off funding for scientific research to a reduced foreign policy influence as the U.S. cedes soft power to other countries. Additionally, a number of people who have worked at Musk's companies are installed in key positions at agencies throughout the government.

As for Musk, he said he expects to still spend “a day or two a week” on government work.

“I’ll have to continue doing it for, I think, probably the remainder of the president’s term, just to make sure that the waste and fraud that we stop does not come roaring back, which will do if it has the chance,” he said.

*Have information or evidence to share about DOGE’s access to data and other activities inside the federal government? Reach out to these authors through encrypted communications on Signal: **Stephen Fowler** is available at stphnfwlr.25 and **Shannon Bond** is available at shannonbond.01. Please use a nonwork device.*

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Stephen Fowler is a political reporter with NPR's Washington Desk and will be covering the 2024 election based in the South. Before joining NPR, he spent more than seven years at Georgia Public Broadcasting as its political reporter and host of the Battleground: Ballot Box podcast, which covered voting rights and legal fallout from the 2020 presidential election, the evolution of the Republican Party and other changes driving Georgia's growing prominence in American politics. His reporting has appeared everywhere from the Center for Public Integrity and the Columbia Journalism Review to the PBS NewsHour and ProPublica.



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