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21 DOGE staffers resign, saying they won't help 'dismantle' public services

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Bobby Allyn



Elon Musk, who oversees the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, holds a chainsaw as he arrives to speak at the Conservative Political Action Conference Thursday in Oxon Hill, Md.

Jose Luis Magana/AP

A group of 21 civil servants whose team was folded into Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency resigned on Tuesday, writing in a joint letter posted

publicly that they refuse to use their skills to put Americans' data at risk and "dismantle critical public services."

The federal workers, mostly software engineers and product managers, were once part of the U.S. Digital Service, which was renamed DOGE when Musk launched his initiative from within the White House. The Musk-led unit has laid off thousands of workers and moved to dismantle entire agencies in a slash-and-burn campaign to reduce the size of government.

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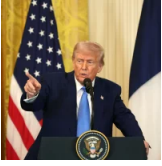
In the letter addressed to White House Chief of Staff Susan Wiles, the government employees wrote that they swore an oath to the Constitution to serve the American people but that "it has become clear that we can no longer honor those commitments at the United States DOGE Service."

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt responded to the 21 DOGE workers resigning en masse, in a statement: "Don't let the door kick you on the way out," she said.

The letter was first reported by the Associated Press.

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The departure of the 21 staffers comes as Musk's DOGE workers spread across vast parts of the federal government and gain access to key data systems in an effort to dig into sensitive federal data and "delete entire agencies," as Musk has put it.

Over the weekend, Musk prompted widespread confusion after millions of government workers received an email from the Office of Personnel Management asking them to account for what they did in the past week in the form of five bullet points. Musk indicated on X, the social media site he owns, that not responding could result in job loss.

The OPM message led to panic and chaos, as federal agencies gave conflicting advice about whether or not employees should respond. There is pending litigation about whether Musk, as a senior adviser to the president, has the legal authority to make decisions himself.

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In their Tuesday letter, the DOGE employees noted that about 40 staffers in the office were laid off last week. They had been working on improving the technical

systems behind Social Security, veterans' services, disaster relief and other government functions.



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"Their removal endangers millions of Americans who rely on these services every day. The sudden loss of their technology expertise makes critical systems and Americans' data less safe," the resigning employees, who did not list their names, wrote in the letter to Wiles.

Among the 40 who were terminated earlier this month was Jonathan Kamens, a DOGE engineer who said he believes he was targeted for publicly endorsing Kamala Harris for president.

"The U.S. Digital Service spent more than a decade making government better to serve normal, everyday people," Kamens told NPR. "Elon Musk doesn't care about any of that. All he cares about is seizing power and making his obscene fortune even larger."

Musk did not return NPR's request for comment.

On Jan. 21, according to the letter, Musk's lieutenants, some wearing White House visitor badges, refused to identify themselves and asked the staffers questions about their political loyalties and technical skills. "This process created significant security risks," the group wrote in the letter.

Have information you want to share about the ongoing changes across the federal government? Bobby Allyn is available via the encrypted messaging app Signal at ballyn.77