

# DOGE

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The size and scope of the federal government has grown dramatically in the last few years. So too has frustration with how it operates. According to several polls, many Americans [now believe](#) Washington is too slow, too inefficient, and too costly, and worry whether their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent wisely.

Previous presidents have pushed ambitious plans to reform government, from President Ronald Reagan's Grace Commission to Bill Clinton's National Performance Review. But while the headcount of the federal government has stayed roughly the same for decades, government expenditures have steadily risen, from \$1.56 trillion in 1996 to \$5.5 trillion in 2019, before getting supercharged during the Covid pandemic. In 2024, the federal government [spent](#) \$6.75 trillion, while taking in less than \$5 trillion in revenue, creating a deficit of \$1.8 trillion. America's national debt – which is the accumulation of the federal government's deficits and surpluses since its founding – now stands at \$36 trillion.

President Trump's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), headed up by Elon Musk, is the latest effort to reform and rightsize the government, and its ambitions far exceed those of previous efforts. Musk initially said he hopes to squeeze [\\$1-2 trillion](#) in annual savings out of the government. The Trump administration has already fired tens of thousands of federal workers, with some of the firings being challenged in federal courts.

Supporters of DOGE see it as a necessary course correction after years of unchecked growth. But the scale and speed of DOGE's cuts have raised concerns among members of Congress of both parties. They worry eliminating jobs and restructuring agencies overnight with the speed of a Silicon Valley startup could cause major disruptions to everyday Americans' lives, affecting everything from Social Security to veterans' services to national defense.

This discussion guide explores the history and motivations behind DOGE and the various government reform efforts that preceded it, and what may lie ahead. We hope this guide will give you the tools to understand how DOGE could overhaul our federal government – or leave it in tatters.

## THE BASICS

### What is DOGE?

The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is a task force set on improving the federal government's operations. President Trump's [executive order](#) establishing DOGE lays out its goal simply: "maximize governmental efficiency and productivity." In practice, DOGE appears more focused on rooting out what they deem wasteful spending.

DOGE is designed to be temporary; the task force is supposed to terminate on July 4, 2026, – the "Semiquincentennial" (a fancy way to say "America's 250th birthday").

Shortly after President Trump's inauguration, DOGE took over an existing government unit called the United States Digital Service (USDS), which was created by President Obama in 2014. The USDS [website](#) says they pair private-sector professionals with federal agencies to consult on big technological projects, web design, data science, and buying digital services. The flawed rollout of the Healthcare.gov website in 2013, through which Americans could buy healthcare plans in the wake of the passage of the Affordable Care Act, inspired the creation of USDS.

On paper, [Amy Gleason](#) is the acting administrator of DOGE. She was previously an employee of USDS working on healthcare data projects. It is not clear why she was chosen to be acting administrator, but Elon Musk has clearly been the main public face of the effort.

There are currently about [100 employees](#) of DOGE, many of whom are young computer programmers from Musk's other companies such as Tesla, SpaceX, or X (formerly known as Twitter).

## The History

On August 13, 2024, then-candidate Donald Trump participated in a [virtual interview](#) with Elon Musk on X (Twitter). Musk suggested creating a "government efficiency commission" and offered to help with it, an idea Trump clearly liked.

About a week later, an anonymous X user [suggested](#) the commission should be called the Department of Government Efficiency and abbreviated as DOGE, a reference to a meme and a cryptocurrency Musk has [promoted](#). Musk responded to the tweet, "that is the perfect name."

On September 5, 2024, Trump proclaimed at an event with the Economic Club of New York, "I will create a government efficiency commission tasked with conducting a complete financial and performance audit of the entire federal government and making recommendations for drastic reforms."

DOGE was made official just one week after the election. On November 12, 2024, President-elect Trump [announced](#) that "the Great Elon Musk" and "American Patriot Vivek Ramaswamy" would co-lead the Department of Government Efficiency.

On January 20, 2025, Ramaswamy [announced](#) he was stepping away from DOGE before it officially got to work. Ramaswamy went on to launch a campaign for governor of Ohio, which he would not have been permitted to do as a federal employee.

That same day, President Trump issued the [order](#) to officially start DOGE, and the rest is history.

## Previous Attempts at Efficiency

DOGE is not the first attempt at making Washington work better. Presidents of both parties have launched similar efforts, with much less hubbub from the media.

Well over a century before Elon Musk got to Washington, President Theodore Roosevelt created a task force called the [Keep Commission](#) in 1905. Named after its leader, the banker Charles Keep, this commission made hundreds of changes to improve government practices, such as issuing calculators to accountants, installing telephones to facilitate inter-agency communications, and implementing productivity quotas and firing workers who failed to meet them. Although it faced pushback from Congress, the Keep Commission truly modernized the federal government – for example, the U.S. Treasury began using [double entry bookkeeping](#), the gold standard of modern accounting practices, in 1907.



Decades later, President Ronald Reagan tried his hand at making Washington run better. In 1982, he tapped industrialist J. Peter Grace to run an initiative called the [Grace Commission](#). Funded entirely by private-sector contributions, the Commission made 23,000 pages of recommendations they said would result in \$424 billion in savings, such as cracking down on tax evasion, reforming civil service pensions, and tweaking how and when the Treasury paid its bills. Eventually, President Reagan would save the government a total of \$100 billion over 3 years by implementing some of the Commission's recommendations through executive orders; but 75% of the Commission's plans needed authorization from Congress, which never came.

President Bill Clinton launched his own effort to make government more efficient with the [National Performance Review](#) in 1993. Comprised of a team of 250 career civil servants led by Vice President Al Gore, this initiative aimed to create a government that "works better and costs less" by cutting red tape, streamlining agencies, and improving customer service. The review produced 384 recommendations, including major changes like eliminating 252,000 federal jobs and more mundane tweaks like using customer satisfaction surveys to measure agency performance. Though Congress enacted only a fraction of the proposals, the initiative saved a total of [\\$136 billion](#) over 7 years and laid the groundwork for a more accountable and performance-driven federal government.

## WHAT IS DOGE DOING?

DOGE is building on the work of its predecessors.

Pursuant to the executive order establishing the task force, DOGE members have [embedded](#) into 20 different federal agencies so far to identify spending and personnel that could be cut. Agencies DOGE is working in as of March 13th include:

- The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), where 83% of programs have been officially canceled. Secretary of State Marco Rubio [says](#) 5,200 contracts worth tens of billions of dollars have been nixed.
- The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), which has been effectively shut down. DOGE fired all but five out of CFPB's 1,700 staffers, a move that is currently [being reviewed](#) by the courts.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ([NOAA](#)), the Social Security Administration ([SSA](#)), the U.S. Forest [Service](#), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration ([NASA](#)), which have each seen about 10 percent of their employees laid off.

All told, DOGE's efforts resulted in [62,000](#) federal workers across 17 different agencies losing their jobs in February alone. For comparison, in February 2024, just 151 federal employees lost their jobs.

These departures are in addition to the [75,000 workers](#) who accepted "buyouts" to resign from their posts earlier this year. These buyout offers did not come from DOGE; they came directly from the White House's Office of Personnel Management. But they helped achieve DOGE's goal of saving taxpayer money by reducing the federal headcount.

The Trump Administration does not intend to replace the workers who have been let go. President Trump ordered a [hiring freeze](#) across the federal government with few exceptions.

But there is a limit to how much DOGE could save by cutting federal jobs. In 2024, the federal government spent a total of [\\$293 billion](#) compensating its 2 million employees. That is about 4 percent of government spending. To really make a dent, DOGE must aim for more than just layoffs.

Beyond shrinking the federal workforce, DOGE also claims to have canceled over 5,000 government contracts worth \$20 billion.

Contracts				
Displaying 5631 contract terminations totaling ~\$20B in savings.				
AGENCY	DESCRIPTION	UPLOADED ON	LINK	VALUE
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT	EEO DEIA SUPPORT	2/13/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$440,000
CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COM...	CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS P...	2/26/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$3,204,278
COMMITTEE FOR PURCHASE FROM PEOPL...	Legal Database that allows lawyers to cond...	2/20/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$199,305
COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMIS...	Annual subscription to Politico Pro	2/13/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$255,863
COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMIS...	FT.COM SUBSCRIPTION	2/25/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$188,073
COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMIS...	RENEW ONLINE SUBSCRIPTION TO THE W...	2/25/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$169,259
COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMIS...	ONLINE SUBSCRIPTION TO THE NEW YOR...	2/25/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$41,106
COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMIS...	DEIA INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP TRAINING F...	2/26/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$443,742
COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMIS...	BLOOMBERG LAW SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL	2/27/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$194,760
COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMIS...	INTEGRATED MARKETING SUPPORT FOR T...	2/28/2025	<a href="#">🔗</a>	\$1,410,519

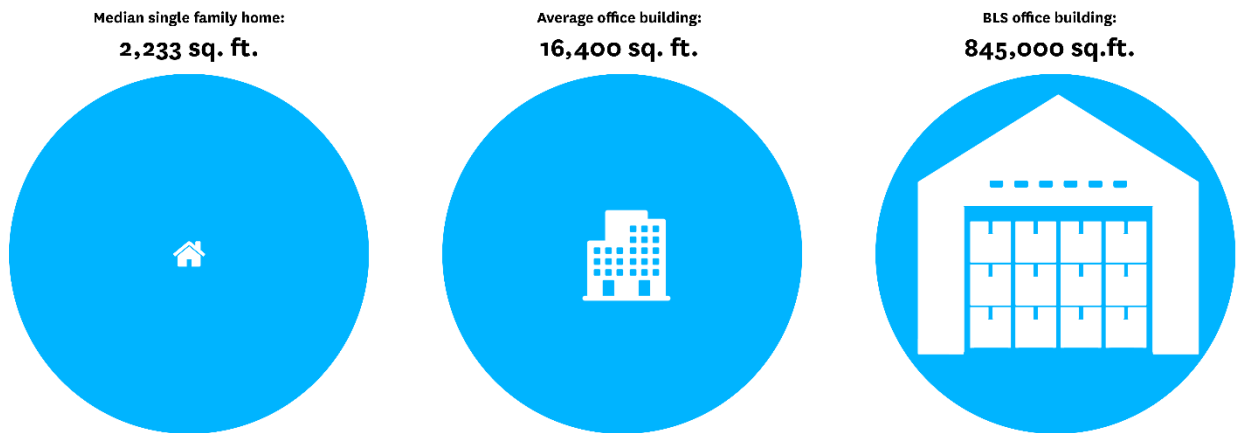
You can [browse through](#) the individual contracts for more information on each one. We noticed that many of the contracts were for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) services, along with subscriptions to news services like Politico Pro and the Wall Street Journal.

The DOGE website also claims they have canceled nearly 7,500 government grants totaling \$17 billion. While contracts are government agencies purchasing

services from private companies, grants are typically given to individuals or non-profits with nothing received in exchange. That is why many of the grants listed on the website come from USAID, the agency responsible for foreign aid.

Finally, the DOGE website shows they are canceling leases for what they deem unnecessary government buildings. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, according to the website, was paying \$26.3 million per year for an 845,000-square-foot office space – which is about the size of 4.5 Walmart supercenters.

## The BLS building is a behemoth



In total, DOGE claims they have saved \$500 million on canceled leases.

## What They're Saying About DOGE

How does the public feel about DOGE? There is more bipartisan consensus than you might think.

In a February 2025 Harvard Harris [poll](#), 72 percent of Americans – including majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents – agreed that “there should be a U.S. government agency focused on efficiency initiatives.”

At the same time, 56 percent of people – including nearly half of Republicans, who support DOGE at higher rates – also believe the court actions against DOGE so far have been based on the law, not on politics.

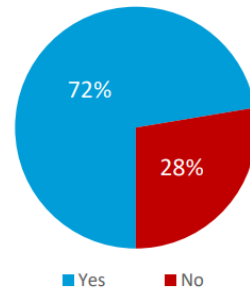
Many commonsense members of Congress on both sides of the aisle endorse the mission of DOGE – to make government more efficient – but question the legality and prudence of some of its tactics.

Republican Senator [Susan Collins](#) of Maine, the chair of the Appropriations Committee, seems hopeful for judicial oversight: “The President appears to have empowered Elon Musk far beyond what I think is appropriate. I think a lot of it is going to end up in court.”

Democratic Congressman [Josh Gottheimer](#) of New Jersey supports DOGE’s mission but disagrees with some of the tactics: “I’m all for making government more efficient, but not haphazardly hacking away at our most essential benefits that so many desperately rely on. DOGE’s chaotic mismanagement has already caused system-wide outages and disruptions, making things worse.”

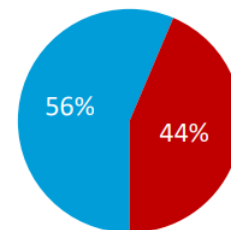
Republican Congressman [Dusty Johnson](#) of South Dakota, a member of the House’s “DOGE Caucus,” knows there has been some growing pains but believes that DOGE is on the right track: “When we’ve made mistakes, of course we’ll come back around and we’ll make sure we do right by those areas, but overwhelmingly, on net, these things are moving us in the right direction.”

Do you think there should be a U.S. government agency focused on efficiency initiatives, or not?



Column %	DEM	GOP	IND/OTH
Yes	60%	89%	67%
No	40%	11%	33%

Do you think that courts that restricted the access of DOGE to government expenditure information were doing so on the basis of the law or partisan politics?



Column %	DEM	GOP	IND/OTH
On the basis of law	67%	48%	54%
On the basis of partisan politics	33%	52%	46%

## IS DOGE WORKING?

All in all, [DOGE's website](#) claims they have saved \$115 billion in total, or about \$715 per taxpayer. Considering they have only been working for a couple of months, that is quite the feat.

To put it in perspective, the federal government spends [\\$7 trillion](#) per year, meaning DOGE has saved about 5 days' worth of government spending so far.

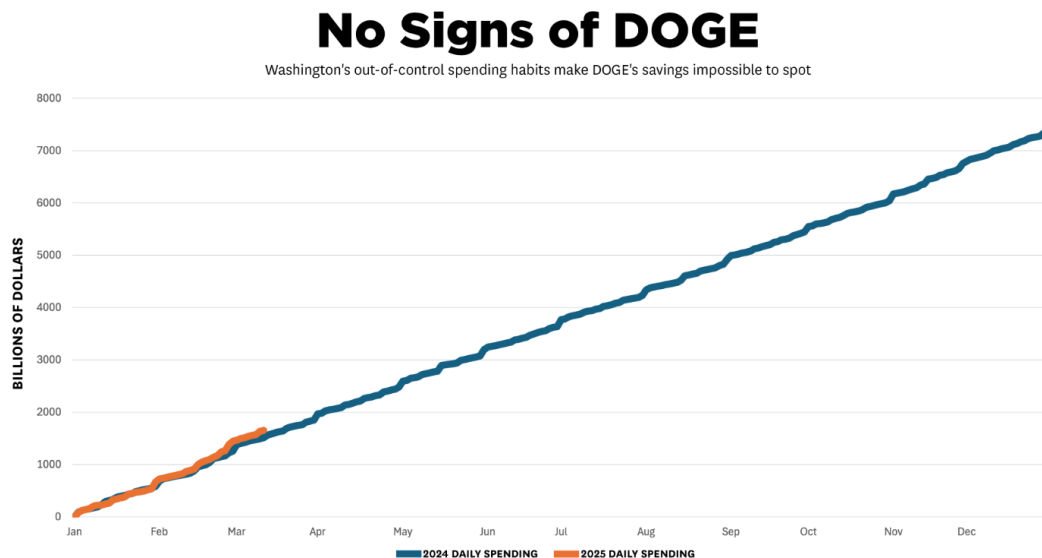
But recent investigations call some of these savings into question.

Outlets including [NPR](#) and [Wall Street Journal](#) previously found that DOGE's claimed savings were unverifiable, exaggerated, or erroneous. In one particularly egregious [example](#), DOGE reported that they canceled a single contract worth \$8 billion... but it was actually just \$8 million.

DOGE's purported savings of \$115 billion is nothing to sneeze at, but why has it not been more? The answer lies in "mandatory spending." No Labels published a previous [discussion guide on the budget process](#) to unpack this dynamic, but here is a recap:

Almost three quarters of all government spending is classified as mandatory, which refers to programs and commitments like Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, and interest payments on our debt that are authorized by laws already on the books. The annual Congressional budget process – and DOGE's work – do not touch mandatory programs; they are essentially on autopilot, rising automatically each year.

That is why DOGE's savings are not visible in the government's ledgers. Daily [federal outlays](#) – the amount of money the government actually spends each day, not just the theoretical amount budgeted – for 2025 appear to be following the same pattern as 2024, before DOGE was implemented. The \$115 billion in savings has been dwarfed by skyrocketing mandatory spending programs.



## How DOGE Affects You

DOGE's impact may extend well beyond the millions of people who work for the federal government.

All things being equal, cutting waste and fraud means more resources for essential services like national security, a safety net for those who truly need it, or paying down the national debt. President Trump even [suggested](#) sending 20 percent of DOGE's savings directly to the taxpayers.

DOGE's efforts to reduce bureaucracy and red tape could also be a boon to businesses and taxpayers. By cutting unnecessary regulations and delays, it could be easier to start and grow a business, as well as to build the energy and infrastructure projects that drive prosperity and strengthen our economy.

But if DOGE is not surgical enough with its cuts, there could be serious consequences. Some concerning cases have already emerged:

- The Department of Agriculture mistakenly fired the top experts working on the ongoing [bird flu](#) epidemic.
- Hundreds of employees responsible for [nuclear weapons safety](#) were laid off at the Department of Energy.
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had to rehire employees overseeing the safety of critical [medical devices](#) like X-rays and pacemakers.

## THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

Many of DOGE's critics are pointing to the traditional checks-and-balances system our government is supposed to have.

Traditionally, congressional committees are responsible for conducting oversight of government agencies within their jurisdiction. But as Congress has ceded more power to the executive branch over the years, their ability to conduct productive oversight (versus the performative theatre that many hearings devolve into has diminished.)

In the vacuum of power that Congress has left, DOGE is moving fast and operating with the full authority of the executive branch. With either direct approval from President Trump or executive orders backing its actions, DOGE has been investigating and implementing changes with little delay and little prior notice. Courts will likely decide whether many of these moves are legal, but for now, DOGE is plowing ahead.

President Trump has [tried to clarify](#) that DOGE's role is just to recommend cuts and reforms, and that it is up to the Senate-confirmed agency heads to make the final decisions.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. We should all agree with DOGE's goal to reduce wasteful spending and unnecessary regulations, but how do you feel about what DOGE has done so far?
2. What kinds of government spending should be prioritized for cuts, and what should be off-limits?
3. How can we encourage Congress to take the lead in oversight and reform, like DOGE is doing now?
4. If DOGE's reported savings are exaggerated or unverifiable, does that undermine its legitimacy, or is some level of inaccuracy expected in a project of this scale?
5. DOGE has been criticized for acting too quickly and causing disruptions. How do you balance speed with careful decision-making in government reform?
6. If you were leading DOGE, what would be your top priorities for making the government more efficient?
7. Would you like to see your state or local government create a task force like DOGE? What issues in your community would you want them to address?