



POLICY COMPASS

Elon Musk and DOGE at a Crossroads: *Leadership disputes and an uncertain path ahead*

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Table of Contents

Page | 2

Executive Summary	Page 3
1. Background: DOGE's conflicting 'dual leadership'	4
2. Heightened Pressure Leading to a Potential end-date?	4
3. DOGE's Future: Uncertainties and Few Knowns	5
NOTES	6

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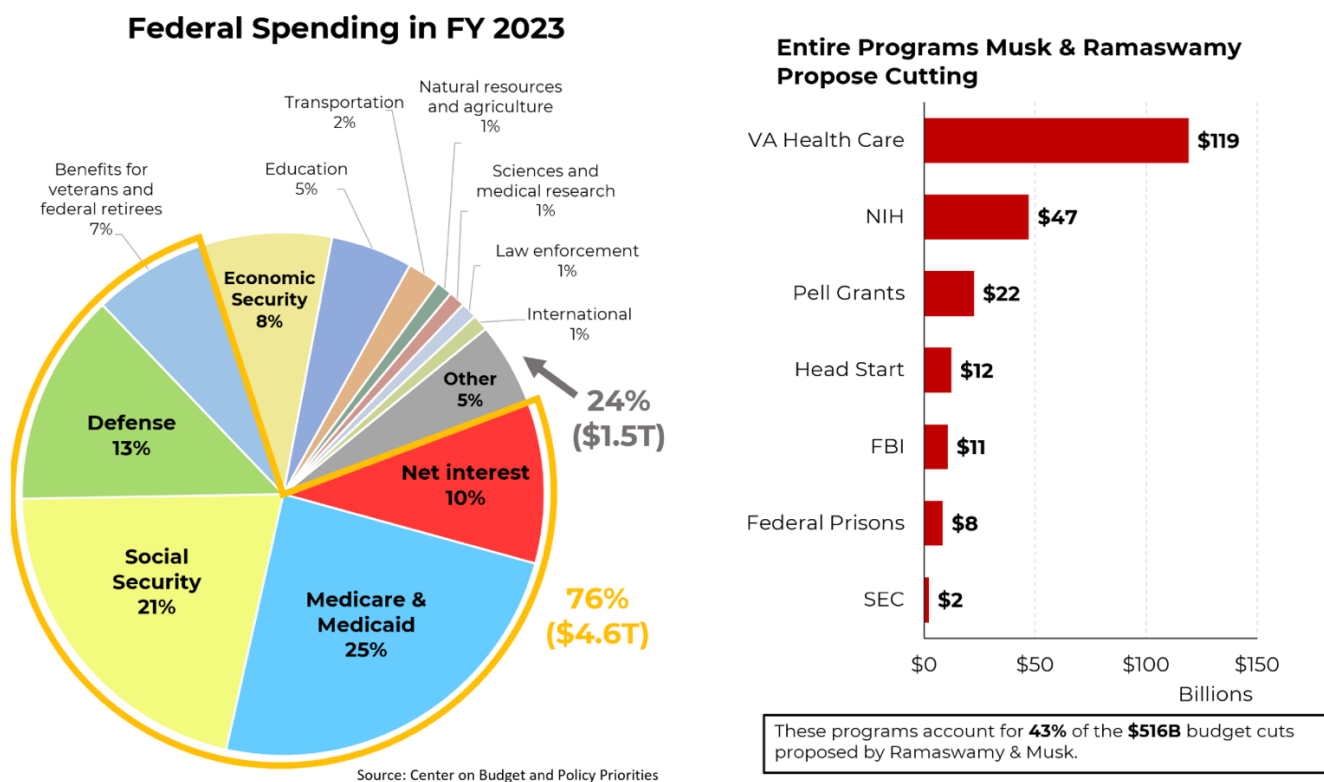
Page | 3

25 April 2025

Executive Summary

- ✦ The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has faced constant scrutiny due to its *dual leadership* structure with Elon Musk's as *leader* of DOGE's activities and Amy Gleason's designation as DOGE administrator, resulting in lawsuits and judicial rulings questioning Musk's authority.
- ✦ The ambiguity over Musk's role and the resulting constitutional concerns have highlighted governance problems within DOGE.
- ✦ DOGE's future remains uncertain, depending on Elon Musk's role and its ability to deliver its promised reforms.
- ✦ With Musk's term as special government employee nearing its 130-day limit, pressure mounts for him to step down by 30 May, resulting in a potential weakening DOGE's influence and casting doubts on the body's continuity.

Key Picture: Federal Spending (2023) vs Musk's Proposed Cuts through DOGE (Dec. 2024)



Source: [Steven Rattners](#)

1. Background: DOGE's conflicting 'dual leadership'

Donald Trump was elected as President of the United States and was sworn into office on 20 January 2025. On that same day, he issued around 100 executive orders to mark what the White House designated as the "historic first 100 hours, historic action to kick off America's golden age".¹

Among these, one of the most notable establishing a new advisory body named Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), whose objective was to "implement the President's DOGE Agenda, by modernising Federal technology and software to maximize governmental efficiency and productivity".² Formerly known as US Digital Service (USDS), the body now abbreviates US DOGE Service and comprises the US DOGE Service Temporary Organisation (USDSTO), which is scheduled to be dissolved on 4 July 2026.³

In November 2024, President-elect Donald Trump announced his intention to nominate Elon Musk, owner of Tesla and X (formerly Twitter), and Vivek Ramaswamy, an American entrepreneur, to co-preside DOGE, once it was formally established.⁴ In February 2025, the White House announced Amy Gleason, a former emergency room nurse-turned-healthcare technologist, who had worked at the USDS from 2018 to 2021 and re-hired in 2024, as acting DOGE administrator.⁵ Despite placing Ms. Gleason as DOGE administrator, President Donald Trump emphasized Elon Musk's role within the advisory body, stating "I [he] signed an order creating the Department of Government Efficiency and put a man named Elon Musk in charge".⁶ Her nomination followed weeks of questioning and confusion over DOGE's power structure, as well as lawsuits questioning Musk's lawful authority over DOGE.⁷

The lawsuits resulted in Joshua Fisher, special counsel in the US Justice Department's Civil Division, to clarify that Elon Musk "has no actual authority to make government decisions".⁸ Mr. Fisher confirmed Elon Musk was an employee of the White House Office, "not of USDS or US DOGE", and that his role was limited to advising the President or communicating the President's directives, in line with the responsibilities of other senior White House officials.⁹ A month after Mr. Fisher's declarations, a judge in Maryland highlighted Musk's role likely violated the constitution's appointment clause as he had "exerted authority" that only a properly appointed Officer could carry out.¹⁰

2. Heightened Pressure Leading to a Potential end-date?

On 20 January, Donald Trump issued an executive order calling for a comprehensive review of all foreign assistance programs.¹¹ In February, DOGE targeted USAID, the US agency responsible for foreign social and economic development, arguing that a \$153 million were wrongfully spent, to which USAID officials justified the payments underscoring these payments did not violate the Trump foreign aid freeze.¹² This resulted in roughly 600 members of its 10.000-plus staff were placed on staff, and the website shut down, which prompted lawsuits contesting the Trump administration's authority to place thousands of employees on administrative leave and potentially restructure or diminish the agency's operations.

Nonetheless, USAID is not the only federal agencies targeted by DOGE. The Independent Federal Agency Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), responsible for consumer protection in the financial sector, was proposed to be eliminated on 27 November 2024 – even before Trump was formally appointed –.¹³ On 1 February, CFPB Director Rohib Chopra was replaced by Project 2025 advocate Russel Vought, who attempted to close the CFPB as Elon Musk tweeted "CFPB RIP"¹⁴, followed days after a judge's order ordering to not "delete, destroy, remove, or impair data or other CFPB records (...) and not terminate any CFPB employee, except for cause".¹⁵ Other federal agencies, including the Department of Defence, the Department of Education, and others have been targeted by DOGE.

DOGE's intensified scrutiny has placed significant institutional pressures on federal agencies, resulting not only in operational disruptions but also in broader concerns over agency independence and long-term governance stability. Along the multiple court orders and lawsuits, Musk has been criticised for pushing for policies that benefit his business interests, creating a dynamic where corporate interests are actively pushing to reshape government agencies that affect the industries they operate. In turn, Musk's direct influence on appointments,

namely the replacement of the CFBP Director, or policy shifts, like the targeting of USAID and the Department of Education, have further strained the integrity and independence of government institutions, with some describing the current period as a “constitutional crisis”.¹⁶

3. DOGE's Future: Uncertainties and Few Knowns

On 10 April, a group of 77 House Democrats called on the White House to commit to a 30 May deadline for Elon Musk to terminate his role, given the requirement that special government employees (SGEs) only serve 130 days in office.¹⁷ SGEs are limited to working for the government for no more than 130 out of 365 days, though they can work multiple years in a paid or unpaid basis.¹⁸ The letter comes after multiple lawsuits against both DOGE and Elon Musk since DOGE's inception alleging that its actions, ranging from unauthorised surveillance and data access to bypassing transparency and appointment laws, violate federal privacy statutes, constitutional provisions and administrative procedures, raising concerns about overreach and legality.

Page | 5

While numerous media reports have speculated that Elon Musk might step away entirely, citing his limited statutory period and mounting criticisms, President Trump and Vice President JD Vance have publicly stated that even once Musk's direct role concludes, he is expected to remain a “friend and adviser” to the administration¹⁹, while reportedly informing his top advisers that Elon Musk could be taking a step back from his current role in the administration.²⁰

What can we expect if Elon Musk leaves DOGE? Trump when asked whether DOGE would continue to operate without Musk, stated that he could not confirm its future but noted that many individuals within governmental agencies had engaged with DOGE personnel, gained valuable experience and might attempt to sustain the initiative.²¹ However, he ultimately suggested that it may come to an end at some point.²² Should Musk exist his current capacity, Amy Gleason, DOGE's acting administrator, may take on a more prominent public-facing position, given that no official successor has been named to lead DOGE after Musk's potential departure.

Without Musk's leadership, scepticism could grow among federal employees and oversight bodies about whether the deeper cuts and transparency measures can be sustained or even expanded. In such a scenario, DOGE's authority could weaken, and prompt further litigation challenging the constitutional validity of the government entity. Conversely, if Musk continues to act as an informal adviser after his tenure, the ongoing influence might mitigate some of the operational risks. However, this would strain even more accountability and transparency matters, igniting further controversies regarding conflicts of interest. Altogether, regardless of whether Musk stays or departs, DOGE is scheduled to dissolve on 4 July 2026, with the hopes of having achieved its planned objectives, although as of April 2025, DOGE has only cut 15% of the savings it promised.²³

NOTES

Page | 6

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