

On the day of his inauguration, President Donald J. Trump issued an executive order establishing the Department of Government Efficiency (the United States DOGE Service). Since then, spending has been scrutinized, government offices have been reorganized and staff decimated, a federal hiring freeze was implemented, sensitive data has been shared with temporary government employees, deregulation has begun, and scores of federal contracts and grants have been terminated. ¹

These changes have caused widespread chaos and uncertainty for federal agencies, civil servants, and entities that rely on federal funding to provide essential services to the public. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has not escaped that chaos, and concerns exist among VA staff about the impact on DOGE's work inside the agency and the impact it will have on the veterans and the families the agency serves.²

Concerns about service from the VA are only amplified by the agency's own troubled past — years ago, whistleblowers and watchdogs exposed a lack of oversight and accountability within the agency, and "excessive wait times" that likely resulted in preventable hospitalizations and even deaths.³

An effective government, one that serves its people and its veterans well, must rely on watchdogs and whistleblowers, but oversight is not enough. We also need ethical and transparent

¹ Executive Order No. 14158, 90 Fed. Reg. 8441 (January 20, 2025), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-01-29/pdf/2025-02005.pdf; Annette Choi, Alex Leeds Matthews, Danya Gainor and Amy O'Kruk, "Tracking Trump's overhaul of the federal workforce," CNN, March 28, 2025, updated April 28, 2025, https://www.cnn.com/politics/tracking-federal-workforce-firings-dg/index.html; Senate Democrats, "Doge is Cutting Veteran Benefits to the Bone," April 8, 2025, https://www.democrats.senate.gov/newsroom/pressreleases/doge-is-cutting-veteran-benefits-to-the-bone; Memorandum from Donald Trump, president, to the heads of executive departments and agencies, about "Hiring Freeze," January 20, 2025, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-01-28/pdf/2025-01905.pdf; Stephen Fowler and Jenna McLaughlin, "DOGE says it needs to know the government's most sensitive data, but can't say why," NPR, March 26, 2025, https://www.npr.org/2025/03/26/nx-s1-5339842/doge-data-access-privacy-act-social-security-treasury-opm-lawsuit; Executive Order No. 14219, 90 Fed. Reg. 10583 (February 25, 2025), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-02-25/pdf/2025-03138.pdf; Executive Order No. 14222, 90 Fed. Reg. 11095 (March 3, 2025), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-03-03/pdf/2025-03527.pdf; Executive Order No. 14248, 90 Fed. Reg. 14005 (March 28, 2025), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-03-28/pdf/2025-05523.pdf. ² Eric Umansky and Vernal Coleman, "Internal VA Emails Reveal How Trump and DOGE Cuts Jeopardize Veterans' Care," Truthout, May 6, 2025, https://truthout.org/articles/internal-va-emails-reveal-how-trump-and-dogecuts-jeopardize-veterans-care/.

³ Mia Steinle, "VA Healthcare System Failing Veterans, Study Says," Project On Government Oversight, March 28, 2013, https://www.pogo.org/analysis/va-healthcare-system-failing-veterans-study-says; Eric Katz, "Years After Scandal, the VA Is Still Reporting Misleading Medical Appointment Wait Times for Veterans," *Government Executive*, April 7, 2022, https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2022/04/years-after-scandal-va-still-reporting-misleading-medical-appointment-wait-times-veterans/365406/">https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2022/04/years-after-scandal-va-still-reporting-misleading-medical-appointment-wait-times-veterans/365406/">https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2022/04/years-after-scandal-va-still-reporting-misleading-medical-appointment-wait-times-veterans/365406/">https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2022/04/years-after-scandal-va-still-reporting-misleading-medical-appointment-wait-times-veterans/365406/; Ensuring Independence and Building Trust:

Considering Reforms To Whistleblower Protections at VA: Hearing before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, 117th Cong. (June 16, 2022) (testimony of Joanna Derman, policy analyst, Project On Government Oversight), https://www.pogo.org/testimonies/pogo-calls-for-more-oversight-and-accountability-at-the-va.

governance, wise spending decisions, effective contracting laws, and a strong civil service with expertise in serving the American people. The president's "DOGE agenda" undermines all of these.⁴

Failures of Transparency

Some in the administration have claimed that DOGE has been completely transparent because the public has access to its website highlighting "Estimated Savings," canceled contracts, grants, and leases, and a "Deregulation Leaderboard." But the way DOGE operates — its authorities and processes — have been established and operated in complete secrecy.

The administration's efforts to obfuscate who runs DOGE and what is really happening there are equivalent to the so-called magic performed by the Wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*, with lots of boasting, mystery, and scare tactics until the curtain is finally pulled back. With the exception of the DOGE agency teams spread out across our government, DOGE's own internal records have been kept from the public, walled off behind the Presidential Records Act, which can conceal records for up to 12 years. This is an affront to good government and true accountability.

This lack of transparency makes it difficult to evaluate the wisdom of DOGE's spending decisions. What we can see is that the cuts have been dramatic. While President Trump vowed to use a "'scalpel' rather than the 'hatchet,'" when deciding which federal agency work, staff, and spending to cut, DOGE and agency heads have done little to prove the president was correct.⁸ All available information suggests that DOGE's work is politically motivated, with cuts based on keyword searches rather than data-driven or evidence-based decision making.⁹

⁴ Executive Order No. 14158, 90 Fed. Reg. 8441 (January 29, 2025), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-01-29/pdf/2025-02005.pdf.

⁵ Avi Asher-Schapiro, Andy Kroll, and Christopher Bing, "DOGE's Millions: As Musk and Trump Gut Government, Their Ax-Cutting Agency Gets Cash Infusion," *ProPublica*, February 20, 2025, https://www.propublica.org/article/doge-trump-musk-funding-foia-congress-transparency; Department of Government Efficiency, accessed June 8, 2025, https://doge.gov/regulations.

⁶ Alex Woodward, "DOGE administrator's name finally revealed after White House lawyers and press secretary refused to say," *Yahoo News*, February 25, 2025, https://www.yahoo.com/news/white-house-won-t-tell-194500086.html; Faith Williams, "What's Wrong with DOGE? Its Structure, for One," Project On Government Oversight, April 2, 2025, https://www.pogo.org/analysis/whats-wrong-with-doge-its-structure-for-one.

7 44 U.S.C. §§ 2202, 2203(a), 2204(a) (2025), https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/44/chapter-22; Project On Government Oversight, "POGO Sues President Trump and DOGE Over Access to Records," Press Release, February 21, 2025, https://www.pogo.org/post/pogo-sues-president-trump-and-doge-over-access-to-records; Agency teams are required to operate under the Federal Records Act, a collection of statutes that governs the creation, management, and disposal of federal or agency records and that allows the records to be made publicly available upon request. 44 U.S.C. §§ 2101-18, 2902-09, 3101-07, and 3301-24 (2025), https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/44/chapter-21, https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/44/chapter-21, https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/44/chapter-21, https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/44/chapter-22, https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/44/chapter-22, h

https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/44/chapter-31, and https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/44/chapter-33.

Nnamdi Egwuonwu, "Trump puts new limits on Elon Musk's authority amid backlash to DOGE cuts," *NBC News*, March 6, 2025, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/doge/trump-cabinet-meeting-new-limits-elon-musk-backlash-doge-cuts-rcna195259.

⁹ Donavan Wilson, "Why DOGE failed," *The Hill*, June 2, 2025, https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/5326096-tesla-ceo-political-involvement-scales/; Dinah Voyles Pulver, "Is DOGE risking the government's cybersecurity? Some have lost their jobs to block them," *USA Today*, April 28, 2025,

Generally, the results are cuts made by neither a scalpel nor a hatchet but a chainsaw: layoffs and canceled contracts and grants that have caused significant chaos and disruptions to services taxpayers rely on, followed by backpedaling when someone finally realizes that those services are essential to the public good. ¹⁰

Unwise, Uninformed Spending Cuts

For all of the talk about DOGE slashing waste, fraud, and abuse, it seems some within the administration are using the term "fraud" to describe any spending they don't agree with. ¹¹ When it comes to contracts, termination for convenience of the government — not default — has been the commonly used cancellation option. ¹² That shows that these contracts aren't canceled due to a lack of performance, a breach, or fraud by anyone involved. It shows only that the current administration has a different philosophy of what goods and services the government should provide to the public. ¹³

A former DOGE VA agency team staffer, Sahil Lavingia, confirmed that DOGE findings suggest fraud wasn't rampant, or even really present, in the agency. In an interview with *PBS News*, Lavingia stated, "In terms of fraud, generally, we didn't find any examples of fraud, fraud meaning someone who broke the law, who was getting money they shouldn't have been getting. ... We didn't find any examples of fraud, which is great, right? That's great news for the American taxpayer." ¹⁴

Despite these findings, DOGE implemented significant — and often unwise — cuts at the VA. Part of the reason why these cuts have been so haphazard is that this administration has prioritized slashing the federal workforce. VA leadership is on the record stating that "The department's history shows that adding more employees to the system doesn't automatically equal better results."¹⁵ It has said that it wants to cut "non-mission-critical" positions and

 $\underline{https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/04/28/doge-database-quest-risking-government-cybersecurity-musk/83144274007/.}$

¹⁰ Adriana Gomez Licon, "Musk waves a chainsaw and charms conservatives talking up Trump's cost-cutting efforts," Associated Press, February 21, 2025, https://apnews.com/article/musk-chainsaw-trump-doge-6568e9e0cfc42ad6cdcfd58a409eb312; David A. Fahrenthold and Jeremy Singer-Vine, "DOGE Removes Dozens of Resurrected Contracts From Its List of Savings," *New York Times*, May 13, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/13/us/politics/doge-musk-contracts-trump.html.

¹¹ Stephen Fowler and Shannon Bond, "What has DOGE done in Trump's first 100 days?," NPR, April 28, 2025, https://www.npr.org/2025/04/28/nx-s1-5377445/doge-musk-trump-100-days.

¹² Amy L. Fuentes, Holly A. Roth, and Roza Sheffield, "What Government Contractors Need to Know: Terminations for Convenience," Holland & Knight, March 18, 2025, https://www.hklaw.com/en/insights/publications/2025/03/when-contracts-are-terminated-for-convenience.

¹³ The White House, *DOGE is WINNING! Thank you, Elon! US D.O.G.E Press Conference President Trump & Elon Musk*, video, May 30, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/videos/doge-is-winning-thank-you-elon-%F0%9F%87%BA%F0%9F%87%B8/.

¹⁴ Laura Barrón-López, Sarah Clune Hartman, and Shrai Popat, "Ex-DOGE staffer: 'I have no idea' who was in charge," *PBS News*, June 3, 2025, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/it-was-unclear-who-was-in-charge-ex-staffer-describes-confusion-of-working-for-doge.

¹⁵ Jory Heckman, "VA plans to cut 1,000 IT positions after Biden-era push to retain them," *Federal News Network*, June 3, 2025, https://federalnewsnetwork.com/veterans-affairs/2025/06/va-plans-to-cut-1000-it-positions-undoing-biden-era-hiring-surge/.

contracts. ¹⁶ That might be true, but rather than gutting the workforce, why not study the cause of the inefficiencies and right the ship so that veterans are not negatively impacted? ¹⁷

Looking at the cuts on DOGE's "Wall of Receipts," it's easy to see potential negative impacts. The VA stated that 585 contracts were canceled as of March 3, 2025. That number has since been decreased to 447 contracts and, according to *Military.com*, with any savings potentially shifted to other programs. Recently canceled VA contracts show what appear to be essential VA services, including critical nursing services, help desk services, Freedom of Information Act support, health and safety inspections, and services to help the agency get off the Government Accountability Office's "High Risk" list and improve veteran health care. ¹⁸ With proposed staff cuts looming, it is difficult to believe that veterans and their families will not see a decline in services provided by the agency and the entities that support it. ¹⁹

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¹⁶ Heckman, "VA plans to cut 1,000 IT positions after Biden-era push to retain them," [see note 15]; Department of Veterans Affairs, "VA to terminate 585 non-mission-critical or duplicative contracts," Press Release, March 3, 2025, https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-to-terminate-585-non-mission-critical-or-duplicative-contracts/.

¹⁷ Kate Nalepinski, "Federal Government Layoffs Tracker 2025: Latest DOGE Cuts So Far," *Newsweek*, March 10, 2025, updated March 14, 2025, https://www.newsweek.com/doge-layoffs-federal-government-tracker-2025-dod-cuts-2042525; Eric Katz, "Lawmakers raise bipartisan concerns over VA RIFs as secretary says he may alter plans," *Government Executive*, May 6, 2025, https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/05/lawmakers-raise-bipartisan-concerns-over-va-rifs-secretary-says-he-may-alter-plans/405106/.

¹⁸ Rebecca Kheel, "VA Shuffles Money from Canceled Contracts While Keeping Congress Mostly in the Dark," *Military.com*, May 21, 2025, https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/05/21/va-shuffles-money-canceled-contracts-while-keeping-congress-mostly-dark.html; "Savings: Wall of Receipts," Department of Government Efficiency, last modified June 3, 2025, https://doge.gov/savings; Department of Veterans Affairs contract with EGA Associates, LLC, Award ID 36C24624F0037, contract termination date February 20, 2025, <a href="https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/jsp/viewLinkController.jsp?agencyID=3600&PIID=36C24624F0037&modNumber=P00005&transactionNumber=0&idvAgencyID=3600&idvPIID=36F79719D0122&actionSource=searchScreen&actionCode=&documentVersion=1.5&contractType=AWARD&docType=C%2; Department of Veterans Affairs contract with TekFive, Inc., Award ID 36C10X24N0117, contract termination date February 25, 2025, <a href="https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/jsp/viewLinkController.jsp?agencyID=3600&PIID=36C10X24N0117&modNumber=P00001&transactionNumber=0&idvAgencyID=3600&idvPIID=36C10X21A0018&actionSource=searchScreen&actionCode=&documentVersion=1.5&contractType=AWARD&docType=A%2; Department of Veterans Affairs contract with Pathfinder Consultants, LLC, Award ID 36C10B24F0132, contract termination date February 28, 2025.

https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/jsp/viewLinkController.jsp?agencyID=3600&PIID=36C10B24F0132&modNumber=P00004&transactionNumber=0&idvAgencyID=4732&idvPIID=GS10F238AA&actionSource=searchScreen&actionCode=&documentVersion=1.5&contractType=AWARD&docType=C%27; Department of Veterans Affairs contract with J&A Occupational Health And Safety Consulting, LLC, Award ID 36C24823P1630, contract termination date March 7, 2025,

https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/jsp/viewLinkController.jsp?agencyID=3600&PIID=36C24823P1630&modNumber=P00002&transactionNumber=0&idvAgencyID=&idvPIID=&actionSource=searchScreen&actionCode=&documentVersion=1.5&contractType=AWARD&docType=B%27; Department of Veterans Affairs contract with Sigma Health Consulting LLC, Award ID 36C10X22P0121, contract termination date March 4, 2025, https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/jsp/viewLinkController.jsp?agencyID=3600&PIID=36C10X22P0121&modNumber=P00004&transactionNumber=0&idvAgencyID=&idvPIID=&actionSource=searchScreen&actionCode=&documentVersion=1.5&contractType=AWARD&docType=B%27.

¹⁹ Heckman, "VA plans to cut 1,000 IT positions after Biden-era push to retain them," [see note 15].

Suicide prevention services were canceled in early March, but subsequently listed as "Un-Terminate" a week later. ²⁰ Medical coding work in Maryland, which is very important in the medical profession, was also canceled. ²¹

Mission-critical or non-mission-critical depends on many factors, which are intertwined. The concerns with DOGE's approach are that there is no transparency or faith that the entire landscape and the interplay between existing internal and external services provided to veterans was considered before hitting the fired or termination button on a computer. There is a reason lots of time and money goes into personnel management, and it takes time and resources to determine which goods and services the VA requires and how it should acquire them.

While more should certainly be done to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent wisely, it's unreasonable to say it takes a matter of weeks and keyword searches to decide which offices or contracts should be terminated.²²

Inaccurate Savings Tallies

It appears that the haste to obtain quick results and a governmentwide savings total were more about ego than accuracy. The total savings claimed by DOGE are almost certainly inaccurate. DOGE's estimated savings are an unreliable guestimate at best, as even before its founding, contracts were terminated for convenience, fault, or cause, orders were not placed, and option years or renewals went unexercised.²³

The so-called "savings" total touted by DOGE is a worst-case scenario, a number that assumes that all of the contracts will reach their end dates and ceiling prices. The savings figure also conveniently ignores the process that allows terminated contracts to settle any remaining bills for work performed and termination costs, including profits.²⁴

https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/jsp/viewLinkController.jsp?agencyID=3600&PIID=36C10X24N0223&modNumber=P00001&transactionNumber=0&idvAgencyID=3600&idvPIID=36C10X20D0006&actionSource=searchScreen&actionCode=&documentVersion=1.5&contractType=AWARD&docType=C%27 and contract "Un-Terminate" date March 11, 2025,

 $\frac{\text{https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/jsp/viewLinkController.jsp?agencyID=3600\&PIID=36C10X24N0223\&modNumber=P00002\&transactionNumber=0\&idvAgencyID=3600\&idvPIID=36C10X20D0006\&actionSource=searchScreen\&actionCode=\&documentVersion=1.5\&contractType=AWARD\&docType=C\%27.}$

https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/jsp/viewLinkController.jsp?agencyID=3600&PIID=36C24524N0268&modNumber=P00002&transactionNumber=0&idvAgencyID=3600&idvPIID=36C10G21A0004&actionSource=searchScreen&actionCode=&documentVersion=1.5&contractType=AWARD&docType=A%27.

²⁰ Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation, contract with Titan Alpha, LLC, Award ID 36C10X24N0223, contract termination date March 4, 2025,

²¹ Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation, contract with Maxim Healthcare Services, Inc., Award ID 36C24524N0268, contract termination date March 4, 2025,

²² Brandon Roberts, Vernal Coleman, and Eric Umansky, "DOGE Developed Error-Prone AI Tool to 'Munch' Veterans Affairs Contracts," *ProPublica*, June 6, 2025, https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-doge-veterans-affairs-ai-contracts-health-care.

²³ Federal Acquisition Regulation Subparts 49.100, 16.5, and 17.207 (2025), https://www.acquisition.gov/browse/index/far.

²⁴ Federal Acquisition Regulation Subpart 49.201 (2025), https://www.acquisition.gov/far/part-49#FAR 49 201.

It may be flashy to have a weekly savings total and brag about it, but that total is neither certain nor accurate.²⁵

Increased Spending at the VA

What is certain is that VA contracting data does not show any savings when compared to previous years. Despite the hundreds of contract terminations prompted by DOGE, VA contract spending has not receded. In fact, it is likely to exceed the contract total for fiscal year 2024.

According to government contract data, the VA awarded nearly \$67 billion in contracts in fiscal year 2024, and the fiscal year 2025 total (\$36.6 billion) is on pace to exceed that figure. ²⁶

That same data filtered by "Fiscal Quarter" doesn't show a decline for the second quarter of 2025 — it actually shows a \$1.4 billion increase over quarter two of 2023 and a \$3.6 billion increase over January through March of 2024.²⁷

The vast majority (78%) of the VA's contract spending (\$52.3 billion) is on services in fiscal year 2024. That number isn't surprising, considering the range of services that the agency provides to veterans, including medical, disability, educational, home loan, life insurance, small business, and burial benefits. There is no shortage of support, management, professional, and training service contracts in the DOGE list of canceled VA contracts. Finding wasteful spending, at the VA or any agency, is a valid task, but it must be done right and with a scalpel, not a hatchet or chainsaw.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the federal government must constantly battle to evaluate its mission, programs, staffing, and spending.

Agencies need to evaluate and re-evaluate all the time as government missions and needs change. The inspectors general system and the Government Accountability Office are designed to help agencies improve their performance and reduce wasteful spending or illegal activities.

²⁵ Dan Ruetenik and Julia Ingram, "DOGE continues to publish misleading or inaccurate claims on its 'Wall of Receipts," *CBS News*, May 13, 2025, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/doge-wall-of-receipts-misleading-inaccurate-claims/.

²⁶ "Advanced Search," USAspending, data for the Department of Veterans Affairs, All Fiscal Years, Results of Time by Year, Contracts, Contract IDVs, data searched June 8, 2025, https://www.usaspending.gov/search?hash=59d332ce96150470343c7e1d02bb6a94.

²⁷ "Advanced Search," USAspending, data for the Department of Veterans Affairs, All Fiscal Years, Results of Time by Fiscal Quarter, Contracts, Contract IDVs, data searched June 8, 2025, https://www.usaspending.gov/search?hash=59d332ce96150470343c7e1d02bb6a94.

²⁸ "Advanced Search," USAspending, data for the Department of Veterans Affairs, All Fiscal Years, Results of Time by Year, Contracts, Contract IDVs, Product or Service Code (PSC) Services, data searched June 4, 2025, https://www.usaspending.gov/search?hash=ae07b1f53285337c731bbf3e7529924a.

²⁹ Department of Veterans Affairs, "Discover VA," https://discover.va.gov/.

Equally, a robust whistleblower system, in which civil servants are protected from retaliation by our merit system, is vital to rooting out waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption.³⁰

In his first few months in office, President Trump has demolished these systems and sent a message that oversight is unwelcome during the next four years.³¹

POGO supports making government work better for all people — not just the powerful and politically connected. We oppose any effort to bypass transparency, ethics, and oversight in the name of "efficiency." The secrecy surrounding DOGE, its expanding mandate and effort to access sensitive government data, and the chaos it has created for government employees, contractors, and especially veterans is unnecessary and the antithesis of efficient government.

DOGE is not just an attack on good governance — it's a threat to the democratic system that holds power accountable. Real reform requires accountability, oversight, and the rule of law. That's what we're fighting for.

³⁰ Trust in Transparency: Holding VA Accountable and Protecting Whistleblowers: Hearing before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, 118th Cong. (November 2, 2023) (testimony of Joe Spielberger, policy counsel, Project On Government Oversight), https://docs.house.gov/meetings/VR/VR08/20231102/116446/HHRG-118-VR08-Wstate-SpielbergerJ-20231102.pdf.

³¹ Sean Michael Newhouse, "Trump's picks for oversight roles will jeopardize independent scrutiny of government operations, watchdog groups say," *Government Executive*, June 2, 2025, https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2025/06/trumps-picks-oversight-roles-will-jeopardize-independent-scrutiny-government-operations-watchdog-groups-say/405747/; Faith Williams, "What's Wrong With DOGE? Its Disregard for the Law," Project On Government Oversight, May 13, 2025, https://www.pogo.org/analysis/whats-wrong-with-doge-its-disregard-for-the-law.