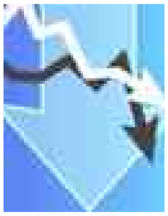
Elon Musk Lied To America About Cutting $2 Trillion. Government Spending Went Up Instead



from the *move-fast-and-break-government* dept

Mike Masnick

Elon Musk's promises on government spending cuts have followed a predictable trajectory: **slash $2 trillion**, then **$1 trillion**, then **a mere $150 billion**. Now we have the final accounting from the **Congressional Budget Office**: DOGE didn't just fail to cut spending—it presided over spending increases that exceeded even pre-DOGE projections.

Failures

The CBO's fiscal year 2025 report shows that despite all the performative cruelty, mass firings, and destruction of essential programs, total federal spending (excluding interest) rose by $220 billion, or 4%, for the entire fiscal year. As budget expert Bobby Kogan notes **in his analysis** of the numbers, even accounting for some accounting adjustments related to student loans, noninterest spending still increased substantially.

This is the perfect capstone to what we've been documenting all along: DOGE was never about efficiency. It was always about ideological destruction masquerading as fiscal responsibility.

The Wall Street Journal's analysis of the year-end figures **puts DOGE's failure in stark relief**:

> As the Trump administration started, **Elon Musk** claimed his Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, could achieve **$2 trillion in savings**—equal to more than a quarter of total spending in fiscal 2024.
>
> Not even close. DOGE did claw back some grants and fire some probationary employees. And some savings will show up later as federal workers who accepted deferred resignation drop off government payrolls in fiscal 2026.
>
> But that **hasn't changed the big picture** much so far. Total spending excluding interest rose $220 billion, or 4%, for the entire fiscal year.

The numbers are even more damning when you dig deeper. The WSJ notes that the Trump administration recorded a $131 billion noncash spending reduction related to modifications in student-loan programs—essentially an accounting adjustment, not actual savings. Without this paper shuffle, noninterest spending would have risen by $351 billion for the entire year. DOGE was so ineffective at cutting real spending that they had to rely on accounting gimmicks to make their numbers look less catastrophic.

So much for revolutionary cost-cutting. The only categories where spending actually declined were the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (because fewer banks failed) and the Small Business Administration (because disaster-related loan costs from 2024 didn't recur). Neither had anything to do with DOGE's "efficiency" efforts.

The real story in these numbers is what any competent budget analyst could have predicted: the biggest drivers of spending—Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid—all increased by 8%. These programs grow because of aging demographics and rising healthcare costs, not because of bureaucratic inefficiency that can be solved by firing middle managers. Addressing these trends would require serious policy work around healthcare costs, immigration to support the tax base, and long-term fiscal planning. Instead, DOGE chose X-fueled tantrums about "government waste" while the actual budget drivers continued their inexorable climb.

The spending increases become even more damning when you remember what DOGE actually accomplished during its reign of chaos. As we documented in our previous coverage, DOGE managed to **waste at least $21.7 billion** in just six months while destroying life-saving programs based on conspiracy theories Musk found on social media. The agency eliminated USAID—which had prevented 92 million deaths between 2001 and 2021—because Musk believed fringe accounts claiming it was funding Hamas and manufacturing COVID-19.

And then there's the perfect metaphor for DOGE's "efficiency": the government is **now scrambling to rehire** many of the workers Musk fired in his cost-cutting blitz. The General Services Administration recently begged hundreds of federal employees to return after Musk's cuts left the agency "broken and understaffed." These workers had been getting paid during their forced seven-month vacation while taxpayers footed the bill for mounting costs from properties that couldn't be properly managed without them.

The GSA rehiring wave is spreading across multiple agencies—the IRS, Labor Department, and National Park Service have all had to bring back employees who took DOGE's buyout offers. When you're rehiring at multiple major agencies simultaneously, that's not fine-tuning efficiency—that's admitting your entire approach was fundamentally broken.

Of course, trying to bring all those people back while all non-essential government work is shut down and many government employees are simply not getting paid suggests that it's going to be even more difficult (and, therefore, costly) to eventually restaff the jobs that DOGE screwed up in cutting.

This spectacular failure was entirely predictable to anyone who understood that DOGE was never a serious efficiency effort. It was performance art designed to satisfy the fantasies of people who think running a government is like optimizing a social media algorithm. Musk and his DOGE vandals assumed that complex government operations were just inefficient startups waiting to be "disrupted," when in reality they were critical functions that keep society running.

The CBO numbers now provide the final proof: after all the chaos, cruelty, and conspiracy theories, DOGE didn't save money—it cost money. Government spending went up, essential services were destroyed, and taxpayers are left cleaning up the mess.

Despite all of DOGE's supposed efficiency measures, spending increased because the agency focused on ideological destruction rather than understanding what government actually does. You can't achieve efficiency by firing the people who know how to do essential jobs and then having to hire them back at higher costs.

This is what happens when you put conspiracy theorists and tech bros in charge of complex systems they don't understand. DOGE's legacy isn't fiscal responsibility—it's expensive chaos that proves some people's expertise actually matters, especially when Silicon Valley billionaires don't understand what that expertise does.

DOGE's singular achievement was proving that "move fast and break things" is catastrophically unsuited to governing a democracy. In Silicon Valley, you can break a social media feature and roll back the code. In government, you break USAID and people die. You fire essential workers and create expensive chaos that costs more to fix than the original "inefficiency" ever did.

The CBO numbers are the final punctuation mark on this expensive lesson in the difference between actual efficiency and performative destruction. We now have the receipts showing exactly how much Musk's conspiracy-theory-driven approach cost taxpayers—and given the ongoing government shutdown and hiring crisis, we should expect that bill to keep growing.