

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

April 23, 2025

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

Federal agencies depend on technology systems and electronic data to carry out their missions, conduct operations and to manage essential information. The security of these systems and data is vital to public confidence and national security. Many of these systems contain vast amounts of personally identifiable information (PII),¹ making it essential to safeguard the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of this data. Recent developments involving the United States DOGE Service (DOGE) have raised serious questions about whether federal agencies and new executive initiatives are complying with many longstanding statutory requirements and information security standards designed to protect sensitive information. Given the scope and sensitivity of the information at stake, we request that the Government Accountability Office evaluate how the United States DOGE Service and affiliated agency personnel are accessing, handling, and protecting federal systems and data and whether appropriate safeguards and oversight mechanisms are in place.

Federal Information Security and Privacy Framework

A legal and policy framework has long governed the federal government's information security responsibilities. Congress and the executive branch have established multiple statutory requirements and directives to ensure that agencies protect the systems and data under their control. For example:

- Under the Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014 (FISMA), federal agencies are required to establish and implement comprehensive information security programs.²
- The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has key policy and oversight roles under FISMA, as well as responsibility for the information management portfolio responsibilities under the Paperwork Reduction Act and the Clinger-Cohen Act.³ Under these authorities, OMB Circular A-130, *Managing Information as a Strategic Resource*, establishes government-wide policy for information governance, acquisitions, records management, open data, workforce skills and development, security, and privacy.⁴ It also emphasizes the integration of security and privacy throughout the federal information life cycle as crucial elements of a comprehensive, strategic, and continuous risk-based program.
- The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), a component of the Department of Commerce, also plays a central role in securing federal networks by issuing standards and guidance to

¹PII is any information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity, such as name, date and place of birth, or Social Security number, and other types of personal information that can be linked to an individual, such as medical, educational, financial, and employment information.

²The Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-283, 128 Stat. 3073 (Dec. 18, 2014) (FISMA), largely superseded the Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-347, Title III, 116 Stat. 2899, 2946 (Dec. 17, 2002).

³See, for example, 40 U.S.C. §§ 11302, 11303.

⁴OMB, *Managing Information as a Strategic Resource*, Circular No. A-130 (July 28, 2016).

protect government information, information systems, and privacy. For example, NIST Special Publication 800-53 establishes comprehensive security and privacy controls for federal information systems and organizations,⁵ and OMB has required agencies to implement NIST’s cybersecurity standards and guidelines for all non-national security systems.⁶

- The Privacy Act of 1974⁷ and the E-Government Act of 2002⁸ provide foundational privacy protections for federal data containing PII of all Americans, including procedures for sharing such data among government organizations.

United States DOGE Service

The United States DOGE Service (DOGE) was created by executive order on January 20, 2025.⁹ The executive order states that DOGE “shall adhere to rigorous data protection standards” and authorizes it to obtain access to agency information from agency heads “to the maximum extent consistent with law.”¹⁰ It further instructs agency heads to take all necessary steps to ensure that DOGE has full and prompt access to all unclassified agency records, software systems, and IT systems.

Reports suggest that DOGE has gained widespread access to sensitive information at agencies within the jurisdiction of the House Natural Resources Committee, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Department of Energy’s Power Marketing Administrations,¹¹ and the Department of the Interior (DOI).^{12,13,14,15}

These agencies maintain information that, if improperly accessed or disclosed, could put companies out of business, drain retirement savings, move markets, and compromise national security. Also at risk are “high-value assets”—information systems so critical that their loss, corruption, or inaccessibility would significantly impair an agency’s ability to perform its mission or conduct business. These include satellite imagery, systems controlling electricity generation from federal dams, and U.S. Geological Survey data on oil production that could enable insider trading. Past attempts to access such information caused a major national scandal when former Secretary Zinke sought exclusive access to oil production data without justification.¹⁶ In addition, companies routinely share trade secrets with these agencies. The unauthorized release of such intellectual property could destroy businesses built over a lifetime.

⁵National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), *Security and Privacy Controls for Information Systems and Organizations*, Special Publication 800-53, Rev. 5 (Gaithersburg, Md.: Sept. 2020).

⁶OMB, Circular No. A-130.

⁷Privacy Act of 1974, Pub. L. No. 93-579, 88 Stat. 1896 (Dec. 31, 1974) (codified as amended at 5 U.S.C. § 552a).

⁸E-Government Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-347, § 208, 116 Stat. 2899, 2921 (Dec. 17, 2002).

⁹Executive Order 14158, 90 Fed. Reg. 8,441 (Jan. 29, 2025). The executive order also calls for the organization to undertake a software modernization initiative to improve the quality and efficiency of governmentwide software, network infrastructure, and IT systems. In doing so, the order provides that the organization shall work with agency heads to promote interoperability between agency networks and systems, ensure data integrity, and facilitate responsible data collection and synchronization.

¹⁰Several lawsuits have been filed alleging possible violations of law that DOGE access to federal records would create. In at least two of these cases, the courts have temporarily limited U.S. DOGE Service access to certain systems. *See Order, Alliance for Retired Americans, et al. v. Bessent, et al.*, No. 25-cv-313 (D.D.C. Feb. 6, 2025); *Order, State of New York, et al. v. Trump, et al.*, No. 25-cv-1144 (Feb. 8, 2025) (as modified by Order dated Feb. 11, 2025).

¹¹Nilsen, Ella, et al., “Trump energy secretary allowed 23-year-old DOGE rep to access IT systems over objections from general counsel.” February 7, 2025. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/06/climate/doge-energy-department-trump/index.html>

¹²Tim Marchman et al., *This DOGE Engineer Has Access to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*, February 5, 2025. <https://www.wired.com/story/doge-engineer-noaa-data-google-musk-climate-project-2025/>

¹³Andrew Freedman, *Scoop: Trump nominates Neil Jacobs to head NOAA*, February 4, 2025. <https://www.axios.com/2025/02/04/trump-nominates-noaa-head-neil-jacobs>

¹⁴Douglas, Leah. “USDA secretary says DOGE team has been at the agency for weeks.” February 14, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/usda-secretary-says-doge-has-been-agency-weeks-2025-02-14/>

¹⁵Davenport, Coral. “DOGE accesses federal payroll system over objections of career staff.” March 31, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/31/us/politics/doge-musk-federal-payroll.html>

¹⁶United States, Congress, House, Committee on Natural Resources. (2018). Grijalva McEachin Letter to Zinke on USGS Science Violation Feb. 27, 2018. <https://democrats-naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Grijalva%20McEachin%20Letter%20to%20Zinke%20on%20USGS%20Science%20Violation%20Feb.%2027%202018.pdf>

DOGE employees appear to have access to usernames, passwords, login credentials, port numbers, IP addresses, and server names from across the agency. They likely have access to the deeply sensitive information of the more than 112,000 employees from all three agencies like birthdates, biometric information, medical information, credit card numbers, passport numbers, and human resources files, all of which are routinely collected by employers. All three agencies carry out law enforcement operations, increasing the risk that officer identities and other sensitive data could be exposed.

Furthermore, reports involving at least two DOGE employees raise serious questions about the adequacy of DOGE's vetting practices for individuals with access to federal IT systems. One DOGE employee was removed from his position after making racist statements online.¹⁷ Despite this, Vice President JD Vance led a campaign to have the employee reinstated,¹⁸ and Elon Musk reinstated him.¹⁹

Another DOGE employee, Edward Coristine, was previously fired by a cybersecurity firm for leaking secrets. "(After he was fired), Coristine wrote that he'd retained access to the cybersecurity company's computers, though he said he hadn't taken advantage of it."²⁰ He refused to apologize or admit wrongdoing, stating that he did "nothing contractually wrong." Online, he has sought information on a "type of cyber attack that knocks out websites with overwhelming internet traffic"²¹ and reportedly "once provided support to a cybercrime gang that bragged about trafficking in stolen data and cyberstalking an FBI agent, according to digital records reviewed by Reuters."²²

At the U.S. Treasury, a threat intelligence team designated DOGE staff as an "insider threat." In an email to employees, the team warned: "Continued access to any payment systems by DOGE members, even 'read only,' likely poses the single greatest insider threat risk the Bureau of the Fiscal Service has ever faced."²³

While DOGE's intended use of the information is unclear, reporting suggests they may be inputting federal records into software that has not been evaluated for cybersecurity vulnerabilities. According to one report, "DOGE associates have been feeding vast troves of government records and databases into artificial intelligence tools, looking for unwanted federal programs and trying to determine which human work can be replaced by AI, machine-learning tools or even robots."²⁴ AI is a rapidly evolving field, and ensuring that new AI tools meet federal cybersecurity standards takes time and diligence. The DOGE teams appear to be moving ahead without either.

The Trump administration's broader handling of cybersecurity issues has only heightened concerns. President Trump fired four star General Timothy Haugh, who led both the National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command, as well as National Security Agency Deputy Director Wendy Noble, for what appear to be political reasons, even though both were considered to be nonpartisan.²⁵ It is now well known that the Secretary of Defense and the Vice President of the United States discussed highly classified information in

¹⁷ Bobby Allyn. "Member of Elon Musk's DOGE team resigns after racist posts resurface." February 7, 2025. <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/06/nx-s1-5289337/elon-musk-doge-treasury>

¹⁸ JD Vance. [@JDVance]. (2025, February 7). *Here's my view: I obviously disagree with some of Elez's posts, but I don't think stupid social media activity should ruin.* [Post]. X. <https://x.com/JDVance/status/1887900880143343633>

¹⁹ Joey Garrison. "Musk reinstates DOGE staffer who resigned over racist posts after JD Vance leads outcry". February 7, 2025. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/02/07/jd-vance-doge-marko-elez-resignation-racist/78333485007/>

²⁰ Jason Leopold, et al., "Musk's DOGE teen was fired by cyber security firm for leaking company secrets." February 7, 2025.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-02-07/musk-s-doge-teen-was-fired-by-cybersecurity-firm-for-leaking-company-secrets>

²¹ Jason Leopold, et al., "Musk's DOGE teen was fired by cyber security firm for leaking company secrets." February 7, 2025.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-02-07/musk-s-doge-teen-was-fired-by-cybersecurity-firm-for-leaking-company-secrets>

²² Satter, Raphael. "Exclusive: DOGE staffer 'Big Balls' provided tech support to cybercrime ring, records show." March 26, 2025.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/doge-staffer-big-balls-provided-tech-support-cybercrime-ring-records-show-2025-03-26>

²³ Vittoria Elliott, et al. "A US Treasury threat intelligence analysis designates DOGE staff as insider threat." February 7, 2025.

<https://www.wired.com/story/treasury-bfs-doge-insider-threat/>

²⁴ Jeff Stein, et al. "In chaotic Washington blitz, Elon Musk's ultimate goal becomes clear." February 8, 2025.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/02/08/doge-musk-goals/>

²⁵ Miller, Maggie and Mackinnon, Amy. "Trump's firing of NSA chief is 'rolling out the red carpet' for cyber attacks." March 4, 2025.

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/04/trumps-shock-firing-of-nsa-chief-is-rolling-out-the-red-carpet-for-cyber-attacks-00273859>

a group chat that included a journalist²⁶—an incident emblematic of the administration’s casual approach to sensitive data. Furthermore, DOGE’s leader, Elon Musk, also leads X (formerly Twitter), which suffered a cyberattack and extended service outage on March 10, 2025.²⁷ Cyberattacks on federal IT systems are a regular occurrence. At the Department of the Interior, senior IT officials were placed on leave after raising concerns about granting DOGE access to highly sensitive payroll data for 276,000 federal employees across multiple agencies.^{28,29}

Given the sensitivity of the systems and data to which the United States DOGE Service (DOGE), agency DOGE teams, and personnel previously associated with DOGE may have access, we request that GAO:

1. Evaluate the extent to which DOGE, agency DOGE teams, and personnel previously associated with DOGE have established and implemented controls to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of agency systems and information as required by applicable laws and guidance; and
2. evaluate the extent to which agencies have established and implemented controls to ensure that DOGE, agency DOGE teams, and personnel previously associated with DOGE are appropriately protecting the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of agency systems and data as required by such laws and guidance.
3. Describe the systems and data DOGE, agency DOGE teams, and personnel previously associated with DOGE have accessed, the purpose of their access, and how the systems and data have been used and stored.
4. Determine whether DOGE, agency DOGE teams, and personnel previously associated with DOGE have complied with applicable laws and guidance when accessing and storing the systems and data.

In doing so, we ask that your review focus on DOGE’s activities related to the Department of the Interior, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, United States Forest Service, and the Department of Energy’s Power Marketing Administrations.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. Please contact the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Democratic staff at (202) 225-6065 to discuss the details and timing of this GAO review.

Sincerely,



Jared Huffman
Ranking Member,
House Committee on Natural Resources



Maxine Dexter
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

²⁶ Mackinnon, et al., “‘Amateur hour’: Washington aghast at Trump administration’s war plan group chat.” March 24, 2025.

<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/24/hegseth-national-security-group-chat-atlantic-reaction-00244983>

²⁷ Emily Forlini. “Elon Musk Blames X Outage on ‘Massive Cyberattack.’” March 10, 2025. <https://www.pcmag.com/news/elon-musk-blames-x-outage-massive-cyberattack-ddos-dark-storm>

²⁸ Davenport, Coral. “DOGE accesses federal payroll system over objections of career staff.” March 31, 2025.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/31/us/politics/doge-musk-federal-payroll.html>

²⁹ Sreater, Scott. “Three Interior officials placed on leave after DOGE dustup.” April 3, 2025.

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/04/03/three-interior-officials-placed-on-leave-after-doge-dustup-00265896>