

Elon Musk Goal Is Not Efficiency — It is a Liquidation Sale

By

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The Department of Government Efficiency isn't bumbling through an ill-advised reform effort. It's deliberately sabotaging federal agencies to make way for privatization.

Earlier this week, the *Economist* [asked plaintively](#) whether Elon Musk was fixing the federal government, as promised, or destroying it. "This newspaper looked forward to what Mr Musk might do with some hope," it stated, but has watched with mounting concern as Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has "broken laws with glee and callously destroyed careers," as well as "made false claims about waste and seized personal data protected by law."

The article concludes that Musk has become so intoxicated with authoritarian power and consumed by petty cultural and political grievances that his otherwise good organizational sense has fallen by the wayside — a genius's tragic decline, dragging the federal government down with him.

The *Economist* should give Musk a little more credit. If DOGE fails at making the federal government more efficient, it's instead because Musk has a grander vision for it, one many at the *Economist* might find agreeable: privatization.

All the smashing and breaking and outright ruining is not accidental. It serves a higher purpose: breaking public institutions to make way for private sector alternatives.

Speaking at a Morgan Stanley conference in March, Musk was [open about this ambition](#), saying the government should privatize "everything we possibly can."

The American right has long wanted to accomplish exactly this. In George W. Bush-era [conservative strategist](#) Grover Norquist's famous [poetic phrasing](#), "I don't want to abolish government. I simply want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub." Of course, when public services are no longer reliable or available, that doesn't mean they're no longer needed. It means that control of their provision will revert to the private market, where capitalists stand to profit from selling replacements for what has been destroyed. (Norquist, for his part, is [enthusiastic](#) about DOGE.)

Even minimal attention to Musk's [own statements](#) on privatization clarifies the issue. He's not bumbling his way through an ill-advised attempt at streamlining and fine-tuning government agencies. Making public institutions work better would be counterproductive to the ultimate goal of shifting their assets and services to the private sector. The chaos is intentional. The weaker federal agencies are, the easier they are to drown.

The Chain Saw Brotherhood

The image of Musk [brandishing a chain saw](#) onstage at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in February quickly became emblematic of DOGE's strategy of hacking away at federal agencies. On closer scrutiny, it also offers a window into DOGE's fundamental philosophy and longer-term objective of advancing privatization.

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The man who gifted Musk the chain saw onstage was Argentine president Javier Milei, who himself is so devoted to privatization that he's proposed [turning organ donation](#) into "just another market" to be handled by "market mechanisms." Milei had previously performed the chain saw gesture [many times](#), as first a self-proclaimed "anarcho-capitalist" candidate and then, after December 2023, as Argentina's elected leader.

For Milei, the chain saw has an unambiguous meaning, representing a disruptive strategy of punishing austerity and radical privatization. After his election, Milei [declared](#), "Everything that can be in the hands of the private sector will be in the hands of the private sector." Within months, he moved to privatize state-owned media outlets and energy companies while also imposing brutal austerity measures on ordinary Argentines.

Milei has since dismantled over half of Argentina's ministries, created new pro-market agencies like the Ministry of Deregulation, and fired tens of thousands of public employees. Sound familiar? His government has collaborated with figures like Marcos Galperin, whom *Boston Review* [describes](#) as "the Elon Musk of Argentina," while pursuing international alliances with tech billionaires for lithium extraction and satellite internet expansion. In January, Milei's [sale of IMPSA](#), a national energy and technology company, to a US investment fund marked his first formal privatization. He promises more privatizations to come.

Donald Trump has declared Milei his "[favorite president](#)." Musk and Milei, meanwhile, [frequently post](#) messages of admiration to each other on X. In April 2024, [they met](#) at Tesla's Texas facility, where they discussed their shared political vision — and Argentina's precious lithium reserves, which are valuable for Tesla's electric vehicle batteries. Beyond the CPAC spectacle, they "have created a [mutual amplification system](#) — Milei points to Musk's support as validation while Musk points to Argentina as proof that his approach works."

The chain saw has rightly become symbolic of DOGE's strategy of aggressive cuts, but it's also emblematic of the purpose behind the strategy. Milei isn't concerned with rationalizing government operations; he fundamentally rejects the legitimacy of government itself beyond serving as a minimal administrative apparatus for private market operations. This ideological foundation is equally true for Musk, whose DOGE disruptions are Times New Roman misguided attempts at reform but a deliberate assault on the very concept of public governance.

Chum in the Water

Unlike the *Economist*, the *Washington Post* [appears wise](#) to DOGE's raison d'être, asserting that the task force is "paving the way for a new shift to the private sector," and that its "ultimate goal is to limit the scope of government and privatize what is left."

The paper points to less-discussed initiatives already underway. At the DOGE-affiliated General Services Administration, for example *Times New Roman*, officials are quietly [orchestrating the sale](#) of hundreds of federal buildings to private companies — including the Justice Department and Department of Housing and Urban Development headquarters — which would then lease the space back to the government. Career staffers have expressed alarm that these properties might be sold at steep discounts to Trump allies.

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Meanwhile, DOGE has targeted the National Weather Service for significant staff reductions, seemingly in line with Project 2025's vision of “fully commercializing” weather forecasting. The Federal Aviation Administration is exploring the potential [role of Starlink](#) satellites, owned by Elon Musk, in contributing to weather forecasting — surely a coincidence.

Beyond DOGE, the broader Trump administration has embraced privatization with equal enthusiasm. Trump's interior secretary is working to [open federal lands](#) across the West to private developers, while his treasury secretary has [explicitly vowed](#) to “reprivatize the economy.”

Per the *Post*, other privatization-oriented proposals are also under serious consideration. The administration is entertaining a plan to allocate \$40 billion from the shuttered United States Agency for International Development to private investors and companies. And the far-right military contractor Erik Prince, who founded the mercenary service formerly known as Blackwater and to whom the Trump administration has [strong ties](#), has proposed turning over [defense operations](#) and [immigration enforcement](#) to private security firms.

A chief economist at the financial services network RSM told the *Post*, “It's been clear from the first days of the administration that one of their main longer-term objectives is privatization of many government assets. They've been very clear about their intent.”

For anyone tracking these developments closely, it's evident that the chain saw is not a tool to trim away excess. It's a tool to clear-cut public infrastructure to prepare the ground for corporate control.

Be Like Wells Fargo

There is no more obvious example of the privatization push unfolding than DOGE's [interference](#) in the United States Postal Service (USPS). In February, DOGE “partnered” with USPS to cut ten thousand jobs and slash \$3.5 billion from its operating costs. Theoretically, these reforms are being pursued in the name of efficiency. Critics, however, point out that cuts will make USPS [less efficient](#), especially in rural areas where service is already stretched thin.

Separately, Elon Musk has been clear that he would like to see USPS [outright privatized](#). What's more likely — that DOGE's USPS cuts are an attempt to improve operations or to degrade them, eroding public support for the service and paving the way for private alternatives?

Wells Fargo knows the answer. As [Jacobin reported](#), the banking giant, licking its chops, circulated an internal memo in March that outlined a detailed plan for USPS privatization. Its blueprint calls for initially splitting the agency in two: selling off the profitable package and parcel components while

leaving mail delivery as a bare-bones taxpayer-funded entity. It admits that the new private company would need to raise prices, and that the remaining public portion of USPS would struggle to keep up deliveries. The scenario would make it easier to overcome opposition from unions and the public to achieve wholesale privatization.

The strategy is straightforward: break the public service badly enough that privatization becomes the default solution. As sociologist Paul Starr noted in his [analysis of privatization strategies](#), this approach exemplifies “privatization by attrition,” where public services are deliberately pushed to deteriorate, encouraging people to turn to private options, even as those newly commodified services come with higher prices and [worse performance](#). The other privatization methods Starr identified — direct asset transfers, outsourcing, and deregulation — are also being deployed simultaneously across the federal government at DOGE’s insistence.

Trump [recently suggested](#) that Musk’s term with DOGE may be coming to an end. Even so, the chain saw is up and running. DOGE isn’t failing at making government more efficient. It’s successfully sabotaging public institutions in order to transfer them into private hands. Wells Fargo recognizes it. We should too. Times New Roman