

## Elon Musk attack on social security causing complete, utter chaos, staff says

### Understaffed agency sent into 'death spiral' as employees warn Musk-led cuts will lead to structural collapse

**Michael Sainato**

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Office closures, staffing and service cuts, and policy changes at the [Social Security Administration](#) (SSA) have caused “complete, utter chaos” and are threatening to send the agency into a “death spiral”, according to workers at the agency.

The SSA operates the largest government program in the US, administering social insurance programs, including retirement, disability and survivor benefits.

An average of almost 69 million Americans per month will receive a social security benefit in 2025, totaling about \$1.6tn in benefits paid during the year and accounting for 22% of the federal budget. While expensive and challenged by an ageing population, social security remains [overwhelmingly popular](#) with Americans. But the agency has been dubbed a “Ponzi scheme” by [Elon Musk](#), the billionaire whose so-called “department of government efficiency” (Doge) is currently slashing its staff and budgets.

Musk echoes rightwing conspiracy theories to defend social security cuts

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“They have these ‘concepts of plans’ that they’re hoping are sticking but in reality, are really hurting American people,” said a longtime SSA employee and military veteran who requested to remain anonymous for fear of

retaliation. “No one knows what’s going on. They’re just coming up with ideas at the top of their head.”

The SSA website has **crashed** several times this month.

Wired **reported** Doge staff want to migrate all social security data and rewrite code in months, which could cause system collapse and further outages.

The agency plans to eliminate the jobs of 7,000 workers at the agency through voluntary buyouts, resignations or firings, though the union representing SSA employees anticipate even more firings beyond cutting staff to 50,000 workers.

Acting commissioner Leland Dudek has **acknowledged** to staff that Doge are making the decisions at the agency. Musk, **Donald Trump** and others have claimed action is being taken to tackle widespread fraud at the agency.

Dudek was appointed acting commissioner after he **reportedly secretly shared** information with Doge staff. He has **threatened** to shut down the agency in response to a court order barring Doge from accessing the data. “It’s just been a lot of craziness, a lot of foolishness. Until they get rid of Doge and the person in office right now, and the Republicans actually get a backbone and stand up for something for once in their lives, things are just going to be complete chaos. That’s really the best word to describe SSA right now, just complete, utter chaos,” the worker added. “They couldn’t understand the coding, so everything they said SSA was doing illegally, they weren’t. Common sense is something they lack. They don’t know what they’re doing.”

Rich Couture, a spokesman for the American Federation of Government Employees' Social Security Administration general committee, the union representing roughly 42,000 social security workers, said Doge's public targets for cuts make no sense.

Why are they cutting 7,000 jobs, asked Couture. "It has never been explained with any degree of clarity how they came up with that figure. What's being served by that by a loss of 7,000 jobs? How does any of that supposedly makes this operation more efficient? How does it improve service? How does it improve productivity? Our position is that losing 7,000 people doesn't do any of those things," he said.

"I don't think they're going to stop at 7,000 people lost. If they lose 10,000 or 12,000, they're running up their high score. They're able to brag about it." Departments at the agency have been closed and reorganized, with workers forced to take reassignments or risk firings, and all workers have been ordered to return to the office five days a week.

Couture noted the return to office order occurred a day before a buyout offer was set to expire, in violation of union contract agreements, and the offices were not prepared or equipped to handle it, as many workers had no desks or equipment to work.

Phone services for the public have also been **cut**, and field and regional offices are **slated for closure** around the US.

"There is no safe office in this country," added Couture. "It's a concerted attack on the legitimacy of social security itself. The promise that this country has made to the public with respect to income security is being broken."

The cuts come as staffing is already at a 50-year low despite the agency serving a **record number of recipients** as the US population above the age of 65 is **growing**.

The office of the inspector general at SSA **reported** in August 2024 that a record backlog of payment actions impacting social security beneficiaries was due to lack of staffing, increased workloads, and decreased funding for the agency, driving improper payments because staff weren't available to update records.

Couture noted the **operating overhead** of the agency, as a share of benefits paid out, has shrunk by 20% over the last ten years and is now less than 1%. He disputed any claims of inefficiency or waste at the agency, claiming the agency is already a model of efficiency and as effective as possible under its fiscal and staffing constraints.

He said he was concerned the situation was creating a "negative feedback loop" where, as more employees leave, more work is put on those remaining, depressing morale and inducing more to leave "until the agency ends up in a death spiral with staffing, inducing office closures".

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“You’re going to see a wholesale collapse in the agency’s service structure.

Call wait times will skyrocket, wait times for appointments, processing times, all of it going to skyrocket because there won’t be enough people to do the jobs, which opens the door to privatization.”

Musk has **called** social security “the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time” and has consistently pushed false claims and conspiracies about the program.

On senator Ted Cruz’s podcast last month, Musk **repeated** a white supremacist conspiracy theory that Democrats use entitlements to “attract and retain” undocumented immigrants as voters.

This week, Musk **shared a chart** of immigrants receiving social security numbers, falsely claiming they’re receiving benefits, though the program of providing social security numbers to legal immigrants began under Trump’s first term as part of program to facilitate employment. He’s also **falsely claimed** dead people are receiving benefits, despite the acting commissioner of the SSA has **dispelled the claim**.

In 2024, social security direct deposit fraud was at a **rate** of 0.00625% and less than 1% of social security payments had been found to be incorrect.

US commerce secretary and billionaire Howard Lutnick claimed in an **interview** on a podcast earlier this month that only a “fraudster” would complain about missing a social security benefit check.

“I worked there for 32 and a half years, and I rarely saw cases of fraud,” said John Oertel, a retired SSA employee for over 32 years in Redding, California.

“Because the agency is so understaffed that people who report their income, that’s not getting reported into the system. Musk and his group are saying look at all these people who are being overpaid, they must be committing fraud. They’re not committing fraud. They’re doing what they’re supposed to be doing, but because there are so few employees, none of that information is getting into the system.”

Oertel also **dismissed** false claims from Trump and Musk that dead people are getting social security benefits.

“They don’t understand or they don’t care. Those people aren’t collecting benefits, but the numbers are still technically active, because you can’t just erase social security numbers,” he said, noting that the numbers began being issued in the 1930s and are not deleted or reused, so they still remain in the system. “President Trump, **Elon Musk**, and whoever the next commissioner is going to be, I really think their ultimate goal is just to destroy social security.”

A spokesperson for the SSA deferred to **press releases** on the cuts and reorganization of the agency.

“We have listened to our customers, Congress, advocates, and others, and we are updating our policy to provide better customer service to the country’s most vulnerable populations,” said Dudek, the SSA’s acting commissioner. “In addition to extending the policy’s effective date by two weeks to ensure our employees have the training they need to help customers, Medicare, Disability, and SSI applications will be exempt from in-person identity proofing because multiple opportunities exist during the decision process to verify a person’s identity.”

They said in regard to office closures, that “to use our space more efficiently, we provided [the General Services Administration] a **list of leases** for termination,” and claimed that the return-to-office mandate was ordered to ensure “maximum staffing is available to support the stronger in-person identity proofing requirement”.

On claims of waste, fraud and abuse, a spokesperson said in an email: “The agency will continue to monitor and, if necessary, make adjustments to ensure it pays the right person the right amount at the right time while safeguarding the benefits and programs it administers.”

# Elon Musk says he wants a 'zero tariff situation' and a 'free trade zone' for Europe amid Trump's trade war

In streamed remarks at an event hosted by Italy's right-wing deputy prime minister, Musk said Europe and the U.S. should move to "a zero tariff situation."

By [Alexandra Marquez](#)

Tech mogul Elon Musk, who has served as a close advisor to President Donald Trump, on Saturday broke with the president's decision to [impose expansive tariffs](#) on most foreign nations, saying that he hopes to see a "zero tariff situation" between the United States and Europe.

"I hope it is agreed that both Europe and the United States should move, ideally, in my view, to a zero tariff situation, effectively creating a free trade

zone between Europe and North America," Musk [told "The League Congress"](#) on Saturday, an event hosted by right wing Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini.

"That's what I hope occurs, and also more freedom of people to move between Europe and North America if they wish, if they wish to work in Europe or wish to work in America, they should be allowed to do so, in my view. So that has certainly been my advice to the president," Musk added.

President Donald J Trump and Tesla CEO Elon Musk on the South Lawn at the White House on March 11, 2025. Jabin Botsford / The Washington Post via Getty Images

Musk's remarks come days after Trump [unveiled tariffs](#) on some of the nation's largest trading partners. The U.S. is set to impose a 20% tariff on the European Union under Trump's plan.

On Thursday, the day following Trump's announcement, [markets plunged](#), as the S&P 500 index fell nearly 5%, the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 4% and the Nasdaq plummeted 6%, with all three posting some of the largest declines since the start of the Covid pandemic in 2020.

During a White House event announcing the tariffs on Wednesday, Trump said the U.S. has been "looted, pillaged, raped and plundered," by other nation's trading policies and called the next era in the U.S. the "golden age of America."

In [a post on Truth Social](#) Saturday, after two days of the stock market falling, Trump was steadfast in his rationale for imposing these widespread tariffs, writing that China "and many other nations, have treated us unsustainably badly. We have been the dumb and helpless 'whipping post.'"

"THIS IS AN ECONOMIC REVOLUTION, AND WE WILL WIN. HANG TOUGH, it won't be easy, but the end result will be historic. We will, MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!!!" the president added.

So far, European leaders have threatened to respond to Trump's tariffs, with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, [writing in a post on X](#) that, "Europe is prepared to respond. We'll always protect our

interests and values. We're also ready to engage. And to go from confrontation to negotiation."

The European Union, as well as other nations targeted by tariffs, has [threatened to impose countermeasures](#) later this month.

Trump has long railed against free trade, which Musk expressed support for on Saturday. The White House and Musk did not immediately respond to a request for comment for this story.

## Musk Melts Down at Trump's Tariff Guru as Feud Goes Public

Story by Will Neal

[Elon Musk](#) has taken a massive swipe at President [Donald Trump's](#) trade adviser amid the deepening economic chaos caused by the [sweeping "Liberation Day" tariffs](#).

In a Saturday X post, the [Tesla](#) CEO ripped [Peter Navarro](#) as someone who "ain't built s--t" and shaded his [Harvard](#) PhD in economics as "a bad thing, not a good thing."

Musk, who's openly expressed disdain for [Ivy League](#) institutions, commented, "yup" under a quote from U.S. economist Thomas Sowell that read: "In every disaster throughout American history, there always seems to be a man from Harvard in the middle of it."

He also seemed to suggest that Navarro had an excess of self-confidence and dearth of actual intelligence, writing "results in the ego/brains>> 1 problem."

A seemingly [ubiquitous presence across U.S. television](#), Navarro has been one of Trump's staunchest defenders over the president's controversial obsession with holding to account both allies and adversaries he believes have long been taking U.S. markets for granted at the perceived expense of domestic businesses and jobs.

“Tariffs are the most common sense route to balancing our trade deficit and thereby stimulating economic growth, and strengthening the U.S. dollar,” Navarro told Semafor [during an interview](#) from jail last year, where he served a four-month sentence over refusing to cooperate with a [Jan 6](#) investigation.

Maintaining that position has arguably become more of a challenge over the past few days, with Trump’s new financial measures having already wiped trillions of dollars off the global stock market. Three major U.S. stock indexes— the S&P 500, Dow Jones and Nasdaq— also recorded their biggest one-day drops on Friday since the 2020 outbreak of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic.

At a videoconference with the Italian far-right League party later on Saturday, Musk called for Europe and the U.S. to move toward a “zero-tariff situation, effectively creating a free-trade zone.”

During his appearance, the Space X founder lambasted [European](#) leaders over the perceived dangers of mass immigration and censorship while railing against the recent conviction of [France’s](#) far-right leader [Marine Le Pen](#) on embezzlement charges, which have now seen her banned from running again for the French presidency.

But his comments on economic ties with Europe, in particular his hopes that the U.S. and the E.U. might “establish a very close partnership” and wishes for “more freedom of people to move between Europe and North America,” appear to put him firmly at odds with other members of Trump’s cabinet, including the president himself.

High ranking members of the new administration such as Vice President [JD Vance](#) and Defense Secretary [Pete Hegseth](#) have repeatedly taken aim at European leaders for what they perceive as a sustained failure to align with MAGA’s far-right agenda.

Vance, for one, accused E.U. “commissars” of “running in fear of your own voters” while overseeing “the retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values” during [a highly controversial address](#) at a Munich security conference earlier in February.

Though Hegseth has perhaps proven a little more sanguine in his public statements, he nevertheless wrote to Vance that “I fully share your loathing of European free-loading. It’s PATHETIC” in messages [recently leaked from a high-level White House Signal chat group](#).

Trump meanwhile has himself also pushed wild claims about Europe. He alleged that the E.U. was [established to “screw” the U.S.](#) and has “really taken advantage of us” over the years. He also [threatened to abandon NATO](#)-assured security guarantees for any European members of the alliance who he feels are not pulling their weight in terms of defense spending.

How any apparent rift might deepen between Musk and the rest of the MAGA team remains to be seen. However, as one source close to the administration told [Semafor](#), it could be a battle “Elon won’t win.”

[Read more at The Daily Beast.](#)

# Musk lashes out at architect of Trump’s tariffs in first public comments about shock policy

DOGE boss says Peter Navarro being Harvard trained is a ‘bad thing, not a good thing’

**Graig Graziosi**

There's trouble in Trumpland; **Tesla** CEO and head of the **Department of Government Efficiency**, **Elon Musk**, has taken public swipes at **Donald Trump's** adviser on trade and manufacturing, **Peter Navarro**, who helped shape the president's reciprocal **tariff policy that tanked markets** across the world.

Musk is typically vocal in his support and defense of the president, but has been quiet since Trump's "Liberation Day" tariff announcement that killed \$2.5 trillion from the U.S. stock market — a loss of value that **cost the Tesla CEO** more than \$30bn, according to **CNBC**.

On X, which Musk owns, he took swipes at Navarro, a Harvard-educated economist who advises Trump on trade. Navarro who was originally tapped for a spot in the White House by Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, is the author of books on China and the economic threats he says the nation poses to the U.S.

A user on X posted a video from CNN in which Navarro defends the tariffs, noting positively that he went to Harvard. Musk took issue with that, calling it a "bad thing."

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*(AP)*

"A PhD in Econ from Harvard is a bad thing, not a good thing," he wrote. "Results in the ego/brains>>1 problem."

Another user replied, insisting that Navarro was correct in his defense, but Musk rejected that and questioned Navarro's practical economic

experience.

"He aint built s\*\*\*," Musk wrote.

Navarro was jailed after a grand jury indicted him in 2022 on **two counts of contempt of Congress**. He refused to comply with a subpoena from the White House Select Committee investigating the Capitol riot on January 6, 2021.

The economist was **sentenced to four months in jail** and was fined \$9,500. He was the first former White House official imprisoned on a charge of contempt of Congress.

In another post, an X user shared a quote from conservative American economist Thomas Sowell that critiqued Harvard-trained professionals.

"In every disaster throughout American history, there always seems to be a man from Harvard in the middle of it," the quote, attributed to Sowell, said.

Musk replied to the post with a simple "yup."

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*(AFP via Getty Images)*

Sowell has been a vocal critic of Trump's tariffs, and warned that the president's policy could set off a global trade war and potentially another Great Depression, **according to Fox Business**.

Despite the shock and condemnation of Trump's tariffs **even by some conservatives**, it hasn't dulled the **negative attention** Musk is facing for his actions as the head of DOGE. Under Musk, the agency has demanded the **firing of tens of thousands of federal workers**, effectively **shuttered entire agencies**, and has **crippled some agencies'** ability to work efficiently. Protesters took to the streets on Saturday to voice their anger at Trump and Musk for their dismantling of the federal government.

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*(Fox News)*

Americans frustrated by Musk — who was not personally elected — meddling in the federal government have responded by **protesting outside Tesla facilities** and boycotting the company's vehicles. Some have gone so far as to vandalize or even **destroy Tesla vehicles and showrooms**.

**Tesla** announced a **13 percent drop in its first quarter sales** this year when compared to last year, making it the company's worst quarter since 2022, according to a company statement. As of Friday, Tesla's stock price was down 10 percent between **Musk-related blowback** and Trump's tariffs.

Musk's comments come shortly after news broke that Trump told his inner circle that the Tesla CEO will be **stepping back from his duties** at the White House, although he has not given a timeline for this happening.

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