DOGE's Only Public Ledger Is Riddled With Mistakes

The figures from Elon Musk's team of outsiders represent billions in government cuts.

They are also full of accounting errors, outdated data and other miscalculations.

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Elon Musk has been a central figure in the first month of the Trump administration.Eric Lee/The New York Times

By [Aatish Bhatia](#)[Emily Badger](#)[David A. Fahrenthold](#)[Josh Katz](#)[Margot Sanger-Katz](#) and [Ethan Singer](#)

The reporters reviewed hundreds of federal contracts, interviewed contracting experts and spoke to recipients of canceled contracts.

Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency say they have saved the federal government $55 billion through staff reductions, lease cancellations and a long list of terminated contracts published online this week as a "wall of receipts."

President Trump has been celebrating the published savings, even musing about a proposal to mail checks to all Americans to reimburse them with a "DOGE dividend."

But the math that could back up those checks is marred with accounting errors, incorrect assumptions, outdated data and other mistakes, according to a New York Times analysis of all the contracts listed. While the DOGE team has surely cut some number of billions of dollars, its slapdash accounting adds to a pattern of recklessness by the group, which has recently gained access to sensitive government payment systems.

Some contracts the group claims credit for were double- or triple-counted. Another initially contained an error that inflated the totals by billions of dollars. In at least one instance, the group claimed an entire contract had been canceled when only part of the work had been halted. In others, contracts the group said it had closed were actually ended under the Biden administration.

The canceled contracts listed on the website make up a small part of the $55 billion total that the group estimated it had found so far. It was not possible to independently verify that number or other totals on the site with the evidence provided. A senior White House official described how the office made its calculations on individual contracts, but did not respond to numerous questions about other aspects of the group's accounting.

But it is clear that every dollar the website claims credit for is not necessarily a dollar the

federal government would have spent — or one that can now be returned to the public.

Wall of Receipts
A transparent account of DOGE's findings and actions.

Total Contract Value | Savings

Contracts

AGENCY	DESCRIPTION	UPLOADED ON	LINK	SAVED
COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION	RENEW WEST PRINT SUBSCRIPTI...	2/11/2025	↗	$0
COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION	ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION TO POLI...	2/13/2025	↗	$60,373
CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU	BLOOMBERG TERMINALS	2/11/2025	↗	$148,350
CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU	BLOOMBERG GOVERNMENT SUBSCR...	2/11/2025	↗	$584,172
CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU	POLITICO PRO	2/11/2025	↗	$522,660
CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU	WASHINGTON POST SUBSCRIPTION	2/11/2025	↗	$183,398

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Real Estate

MAIN AGENCY	LOCATION	SQ FT	SAVED
DEPARTMENT OF STATE	MIAMI, FL	3,076	$7,383
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE	CINCINNATI, OH	3,068	$30,295
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE	KANSAS CITY	51,138	$1,275,000
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION	O'FALLON, IL	4,599	$239,258
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION	FAIRBORN, OH	2,983	$80,292
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	ATLANTA, GA	119,812	$2,000,883

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A screenshot of the DOGE site's "wall of receipts" on Friday.

The mistakes touched a wide range of contracts — some worth hundreds of millions of

dollars and others worth just a few thousand.

David Reid, an environmental scientist in Michigan, was surprised to learn his contract

studying invasive species in the St. Lawrence Seaway was included on the list. "That

contract wasn't canceled by DOGE or anyone else," he said. The contract expired on Dec.

31 and he decided to retire and not renew it, he said. "If they took credit for canceling the contract, they're lying."

The group claimed $25,000 in savings from his project.

Though the group's public messaging has focused on the efficiency in its name, most of the canceled contracts appear to relate to other administration priorities, such as the shuttering of U.S.A.I.D. and the elimination of government programs on diversity, equity and inclusion. The cancellations listed come disproportionately from businesses run by women and people from minority groups.

The numerous mistakes, according to people familiar with the complex world of government contracting, suggest that Mr. Musk's team of outsiders, charged by the president with cutting spending, don't fully understand it.

The numbers have been cheered by Mr. Musk's online followers, who are eager for the new administration to reduce wasteful spending funded by taxpayer dollars. But even contracting insiders who share that goal — and who believe that the government systems that track spending badly need repair — were increasingly skeptical of the effort this week.

Amber Hart, the co-founder of a research and advisory firm, [the Pulse](#), that specializes in federal contracting, said it's simply not possible to create a real-time accounting of contract savings with the data the team has used — as DOGE has promised on its website.

"There's no way for them to make it possible unless they completely overhaul the way the data is reported — which would be awesome," she said. "I would absolutely love for them to break that. They're breaking the wrong things."

Why it's hard to say how much is really being saved

The 1,125 contracts the initiative's website listed as of Friday night make up about 20 percent of the project's overall spending cuts, the website said, although The Times's analysis could not reconcile those numbers. The website says the remaining dollars come from efforts like reducing the federal work force, but provides no data or specific estimates.

The dollar values posted for each contract derive from data in a central tracking system for government contracts with outside vendors.

Here's an example of how Mr. Musk's team made one such calculation, according to the White House official's description of the process:

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY (DEIA) PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Contract #70RSAT23FR0000139 awarded by DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY to THE MILLENNIUM GROUP INTERNATIONAL, LLC

$0 Obligated spending

$5,400,000 Savings

Take this contract for D.E.I. services for the Department of Homeland Security. DOGE says can

To arrive at this figure, it started with the contract's total potential value: around **$7.5 million**.

Then it subtracted the amount that appears to have already been spent.

At first glance, this seems straightforward

Figures a···

But such savings estimates can be too high, several experts said, for a few reasons.

For one, the spending figure may undercount what the government has already spent, because the data in the federal contracting system can be several months out of date.

The numbers shown above also don't account for additional termination costs the government will have to pay to close these contracts, making them a "meaningless metric," said Steven Schooner, a professor of government procurement law at George Washington University Law School.

Contractors will have to wind down staff, close offices, terminate leases and offload equipment — a normally lengthy process that will now be rushed and potentially litigated. (The White House official did not address this issue but said that the estimate was conservative because it did not include any administrative savings from managing the canceled contracts.)

The group also claims unrealistic estimates from several special kinds of umbrella contracts. When the government expects many different offices may want ongoing orders of the same general product or service — say, I.T. — it creates an overall contracting mechanism with a set ceiling under which several pre-vetted vendors can compete for individual orders. Each of those individual orders represents money the government has committed to spend. But the ceiling on the whole umbrella doesn't.

"It's not real money," said Kelly Saldana, who spent nearly two decades working at U.S.A.I.D., including as the director of its office of health systems. If one of these larger contracts has a ceiling of $100 million and there's only one $10 million order under it, the remaining $90 million isn't savings or money that could be spent elsewhere.

"Nobody ever does that math," Ms. Saldana said, describing the kind of math Mr. Musk's group appears to have done.

A report by CBS News this week [found](#) another type of error involving this kind of contract: The group had triple-counted the $655 million maximum value of one contract for U.S.A.I.D. with numerous sub-contracts. DOGE has since removed two of the duplicate listings. But on the line item that remains it still overestimates savings by at least $270 million, the Times analysis found.

In another case, DOGE claimed $232 million in savings on a contract [providing information technology support to the Social Security Administration](#). But [The Intercept](#) reported that only a sliver of the contract was canceled — a program to let users mark their gender as "X" — bringing the actual savings closer to $560,000.

Other anomalies on the site this week were apparent even without much knowledge of the apparatus of government contracting.

Do you have a [confidential news tip](#) about canceled contracts? Submit it here: [nytimes.com/tips](#)

The Times reported Tuesday about an $8 million contract for technical support services at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency that had been [mistakenly entered](#)

[into the database at a value of $8 billion](#), close to the size of the entire agency's budget. This error alone made up nearly half of the combined value of all listed contract cuts.

The "wall of receipts" also lists hundreds of cases in which — even by the website's own accounting — the changes saved taxpayers nothing. In one contract, the Securities and Exchange Commission had agreed to spend $10 million for a five-year subscription to the legal-research site Westlaw. But the savings are listed as $0. The S.E.C.'s [contract](#) expired in March 2024.

Far from 'fully transparent'

The "wall of receipts" page acknowledges that it may contain some inaccuracies. "Over time, the website will improve and the updates will converge to real-time," it says. It also promises to share data in a "digestible and fully transparent manner with clear assumptions."

So far, the site has not been fully transparent about the data it includes or about the changes it makes.

Around the same time news organizations published articles on major inaccuracies, the "wall of receipts" website was updated to correct the errors without changing the "last updated" date.

The contract list itself also represents only a small share of the group's claimed overall savings. The website says the effort has saved $55 billion in total, but has provided no details on its "wall of receipts" for the bulk of that money. The top-line number also did

not change this week, even after the site fixed errors that inflated the savings of individual grants.

One place where the office has more regularly communicated with the public is on the social media platform X, owned by Mr. Musk. But it has repeated some of the same kinds of errors there. In one post about the $8 billion mistake, the group claimed it had "always used the correct $8M in its calculations," despite its updates to its site.

On Wednesday, the DOGE account reposted a message on X from the Treasury Department, saying that the I.R.S. had "rescinded a previously planned $1.9B contract" and done so "in connection" to the group's work — describing a canceled contract that wasn't yet on the DOGE.gov "wall of receipts."

The account added a screenshot showing a $1.9 billion purchasing agreement — another one of those umbrella contracts — with an unnamed vendor, now marked "terminate for convenience."

A code in the screenshot identified the vendor as Centennial Technologies, a company in Northern Virginia. But that company said its agreement had actually been canceled in the fall, during the Biden administration.

"Nothing changed now," Mani Allu, the company's chief executive, said in an email. He said that the slow-moving contracts database had not been updated to show the cancellation until this month, making the change appear new.

DOGE Claimed It Saved $8 Billion in One Contract. It Was Actually $8 Million.
Feb. 18, 2025
How Trump's Medical Research Cuts Would Hit Colleges and Hospitals in Every State

The House Wants to Pass Trump's Agenda in One Big Bill. Here's What's in It.

Aatish Bhatia, a graphics editor at **The Upshot**, creates interactive articles that explain complex ideas in simple ways. **More about Aatish Bhatia**

Emily Badger writes about cities and urban policy for The Times from Washington. She's particularly interested in housing, transportation and inequality — and how they're all connected. **More about Emily Badger**

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