

That Elon Musk event on Fox News revealed MAGA's snafu fears

The first sign of trouble was that the interview even took place

By

Brett Arends

Just how worried is the Trump administration about a recent stream of snafus? If Elon Musk's interview on Thursday night with Fox News's Bret Baier is any guide, the answer is: plenty.

The first sign of trouble was that the interview even took place. You'd think Musk and seven other senior members of the "Department of Government Efficiency," or DOGE, operation had enough to do without sitting down with Baier for a lengthy interview.

But the DOGE budget-cutting agenda, coinciding with President Trump's turbulent approach to trade and international affairs, is now provoking alarm and concern. Tens of millions of Americans who depend on programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid have become increasingly worried about what these cuts will mean for them. None of this has been helped by messaging that has been at times confused, contradictory or worse.

Don't miss: Social Security says it's only closing one field office. So what about the 22 leases that were terminated?

Musk notably took pains to distance himself from eyebrow-raising recent remarks by Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick. No, Musk emphasized, people

complaining about not getting Social Security checks were not all fraudsters. On the contrary, he said, they are the *victims* of fraudsters.

And, no, 94-year-old grandmothers were not going to have their Social Security checks withheld as DOGE tries to weed out criminals. On the contrary, he said, DOGE is going to make sure that “the 94-year-old grandmother is actually, as a result of DOGE’s work, going to get her check.”

Oh, and Elon Musk and his DOGE committee insisted they are cutting the federal government with “a scalpel, not a hatchet,” he noted.

They are being “caring” and “generous” and “compassionate” and “treating everyone with dignity and respect.”

They’re doing it so carefully that “almost no one has gotten fired.”

They are shocked — shocked — that anyone would think they were approaching this in a cavalier manner. Where these rumors started is anyone’s guess.

And, once I had stopped laughing, I thought: Man, their internal polling must be really bad.

It’s barely been a month since the world’s richest man was bouncing around on a stage in sunglasses and a graphic T-shirt, waving a chainsaw in the air and joking about job cuts.

Now? For the Fox event, some of Musk’s colleagues — including multibillionaire Airbnb

ABNB
-3.95%

co-founder Joe Gebbia, a Tesla

TSLA

-3.51%

board member — were even wearing neckties. (A charm offensive, the New York Times called it.)

As anyone who has ever been in the business of cutting jobs, laying people off and reorganizing operations would know, DOGE should have been behaving like insurance salesmen, brain surgeons or funeral directors *from Day 1*.

When the inevitable news rolls in about Department of Veterans Affairs cuts and nursing-home closures in rural counties, you don't want people thinking of you waving around a chainsaw.

This is the interview they should have given at the start. Musk, and especially his seven fellow DOGE executives, talked mostly about serious stuff — duplicated functions, computer systems that don't talk to each other, good people stuck in organizational silos, research funds not reaching the right people and so on. (Though Musk could not resist another attack on judges opposing the president — a stupid and counterproductive line of argument — and Baier called him out on some of his previous incendiary remarks.)

Musk and DOGE may still be able to turn public opinion around. The real verdict on DOGE won't come until the actual results are in. Still, it would have been a lot easier to get this right from the start.

Read on: Despite Musk's claims, the Trump administration's spending is on pace to surpass Biden levels