

WORKFORCE

A year after Trump's DOGE cuts, workers whose lives were upended question what was saved

A year after federal employees were hit by the Trump administration's cost-cutting efforts through DOGE, it remains unclear what the agency saved.



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WASHINGTON (AP) — Thea Price anticipated changes under the second Trump administration, but she never expected her life to be thrown into such disarray.

Along with the 300 other employees of the United States Institute of Peace, Price was fired, rehired and then fired again as part of President Donald Trump's crusade to shrink the federal government, [a chaotic effort \(https://apnews.com/article/doge-musk-trump-gsa-fired-employees-ce18553b281fbf5816ec2fd491d79b78\)](https://apnews.com/article/doge-musk-trump-gsa-fired-employees-ce18553b281fbf5816ec2fd491d79b78) that cut tens of thousands of jobs and shrank or dismantled entire agencies.

One year later, many of those impacted are left wondering whether their pain was worth it.

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USIP, a congressionally funded independent nonprofit, became a symbol of the upheaval. DOGE staffers entered the USIP building early last year, [setting off a battle](https://apnews.com/article/doge-trump-us-institute-of-peace-03362c3440884c6b29e28ad0d88f5014) over who controls the institute, which later saw Trump [plant his name](https://apnews.com/article/trump-institute-of-peace-6545c0101a02b677359f2732b019bf6a) on its Washington headquarters.

The blow to its workers came on March 28, 2025, when they were fired, a decision a judge later reversed and then another one reinstated — whiplash that still weighs on the former staffers.

A year on, DOGE's toll on people's lives is clear — [what was actually saved](https://apnews.com/article/doge-federal-contracts-canceled-musk-trump-cuts-a65976a725412934ad686389889db0df) in the process of upending them is not.

Questions over how much DOGE has saved

Musk set a target of \$2 trillion in savings. The DOGE website says it has saved about \$215 billion through job cuts, contract and lease cancellations and asset sales, as well as grant rescissions.

More than 260,000 workers left federal service due to Trump administration initiatives in 2025, according to the Office of Management and Budget, including reductions in force, early retirement, deferred resignations and a hiring freeze.

"President Trump was given a clear mandate to eliminate waste, fraud and abuse from the federal government," said White House spokesperson Davis Ingle when asked how much was saved. "In just a year, he has made significant progress in making the federal government more efficient to better serve the American taxpayer."

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Organizations that have examined elements of the DOGE operation, along with the Government Accountability Office, a congressional watchdog of how taxpayer dollars are spent, have not been able to pinpoint how much was saved, or lost, by the reform efforts. Many challenge the Republican administration's numbers.

Dominik Lett, a budget analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, said there were basic mistakes on the DOGE pages tracking savings, leading him to believe the numbers were too high. He said Cato and other organizations have shied away from trying to arrive at a number because of the complexity of the moves.

"Who is getting fired matters. How they're getting fired, will there be lawsuits?" was among the questions Lett has. Even terminating leases and contracts wasn't as simple as it sounds.

In the end, he said, "we don't know how much DOGE has saved."

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the cancellation of grants, mass firings and buyouts, to access to sensitive U.S. Treasury data and payment systems, to the closure of massive federally funded programs.

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Musk, in an interview with conservative influencer Katie Miller, said last December that his efforts leading DOGE were only "somewhat successful" (<https://apnews.com/article/elon-musk-doge-donald-trump-57e05951a01ff9e63b3aabc23dfc2ebb>) and he would not do it again.

Whiplash at the US Institute of Peace

Created by Congress during the Reagan administration, USIP was meant to promote peace and prevent global conflict. At the time it was shuttered, the institute operated in more than two dozen conflict zones, including Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Employees watched as DOGE dismantled another organization, the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-musk-rubio-usaid-foreign-aid-bf442d62af67918a6fc5eee839074601>). Then, DOGE staffers [showed up multiple times at USIP](#) (<https://apnews.com/article/doge-trump-us-institute-of-peace-03362c3440884c6b29e28ad0d88f5014>) and ultimately took over the headquarters. Most of the institute's board and the acting president were fired.

On the evening of March 28, 2025, [termination notices began showing up](#) (<https://apnews.com/article/us-institute-peace-trump-doge-mass-firing-746aa4fce9ad35fe17e8e22ce29417e3>) in employees' personal emails. Within two hours, most of the 300-plus staffers were gone.

USIP leaders and employees sued, arguing it was independent of the executive branch. A federal judge ruled Trump had acted outside his authority, in a decision that [restored control](#) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-doge-institute-of-peace-lawsuit-39d79077c8fa5336634d518f30a9a807>) of the institute and reinstated workers with backpay — though few returned as operations resumed gradually.

In June, an [appeals court stayed that decision](#) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-doge-institute-of-peace-1ef3d3d5307a8421d9490d41b40f4c70>). And for the second time, the staff was fired.

The case is suspended now, awaiting a U.S. Supreme Court decision in another personnel-related case, which could expand the president's control over federal agencies that have long been considered independent of the executive branch.

Depending on that decision and what the appeals court does, the staff could be due back pay and benefits again, despite not having worked for months.

DOGE's aftershocks are still being felt

While the original iteration of DOGE has dissipated from the public view, its presence is still felt in parts of the government. High-ranking DOGE officials have been hired as permanent staffers in federal agencies, including at the Treasury Department.

For the people who worked at USIP, the past year has been a whirlwind.

Some have found jobs, but many have faced headwinds in a market flooded with skilled labor. Some meet regularly and update one another on job searches and the suspended court cases they still hope might revive their former employer.

Price came off maternity leave one day before she was fired. When she was fired for the second time, she and her husband, who had lost his job as a contractor at a museum when his project's funding was cut, lived on their reserves and applied for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which took months to be approved.

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