



Whistleblower responds after DOJ confirms DOGE mishandled Social Security data

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The Social Security Administration says members of Elon Musk's DOGE team working at the agency accessed and shared sensitive data. The latest disclosure from the Trump administration seemed to confirm some key concerns first raised in a whistleblower complaint filed by the agency's chief data officer, Chuck Borges. Amna Nawaz spoke with Borges and his lawyer, Debra Katz.

Read the Full Transcript

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Amna Nawaz:

The Social Security Administration now says members of Elon Musk's DOGE team working at the agency last year accessed and shared sensitive data.

In a court filing earlier this month, the Trump administration amended what it had previously disclosed, writing that one DOGE employee at SSA signed an agreement with an unnamed political advocacy group to analyze voter rolls to -- quote -- "find evidence of voter fraud and to overturn election results in certain states."

In another instance, a DOGE member shared personally identifiable information of 1,000 people in an encrypted e-mail attachment, though the government says they aren't sure what specifically was shared or whether it was accessed. And SSA also said DOGE shared data on third-party cloud servers that are -- quote -- "outside SSA's security protocols," so the agency doesn't know what information was shared or if it still exists on the server.

The latest disclosure by the agency's chief data officer.

That whistle-blower last year.

I spoke with him earlier.

Welcome to you both.

Thanks for being here.

Debra Katz, Attorney

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Chuck Borges, Former Chief Data Officer, Social Security Administration:

Thank you. Great to be here.

Amna Nawaz:

So, Chuck, before we get into the details, these new details -- filing, rather, confirms what first you shared when you came forward in your whistle-blower complaint months ago.

What did you think when you saw all this, especially after months of government denials?

Chuck Borges:

I will be honest. I was pretty disappointed.

This is a situation where the public loses. My disclosure essentially outlined three concerns that I had. The first was that DOGE employees had inappropriate access to our data. The second was that they violated a temporary restraining order and that the third was that they had uploaded sensitive Social Security data to a cloud server without adequate security controls.

In all three of those instances, the public state is at risk. So to have validation of those first two concerns is disappointing, especially in light of the fact that these could have been investigated and uncovered months ago.

Amna Nawaz:

Well, speaking to that timeline, Debra, the court filing was on January 16. There were a number of corrections to the previous testimony from agency officials. What's your understanding of why it took so long for the government to correct those previous testimonies?

Debra Katz:

Because the government's not telling us the truth. I still don't think we know the full story. The allegations that Mr. Borges raised are quite serious.

And he raised them rather than investigating

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And rather than all.

So we have a situation

Amna Nawaz:

Let's talk about what

Chuck, you mentioned in some of the details of what you came forward to share. Broadly speaking, what are the dangers as you see them of sharing that kind of personal data on a cloud server?

Chuck Borges:

Right.

So, Social Security data is your most sensitive personal information. It's the information that's on your birth certificate. So when you apply for a mortgage and you have to answer security questions, and it's what's your mother's maiden name and what's your place of birth and what's your father's middle name?

All of that information is held resident at Social Security. So to put that personally identifiable information that can be used to propagate identity theft, mortgage fraud, steal small business loans, impersonate dead people into an environment where it could be downloaded or accessed inappropriately or stolen or shared, it's a risk to literally every single living and dead American's ability to have a daily life.

Amna Nawaz:

And we should point out, we don't know what was on the cloud server, correct?

Chuck Borges:

So my disclosure pretty specifically alleges that a database called the Numident, which is the master database of your personal information, was uploaded to an AWS cloud environment.

Now, that is different from the court filing last week, which resided around specific data access for specific DOGE employees. But if those first two things that I alleged were correct, I'm very concerned about the third one, especially when, when you're normally protecting data, it is very easy to produce documentation that shows that the data has been safe and secure all along.

Amna Nawaz:

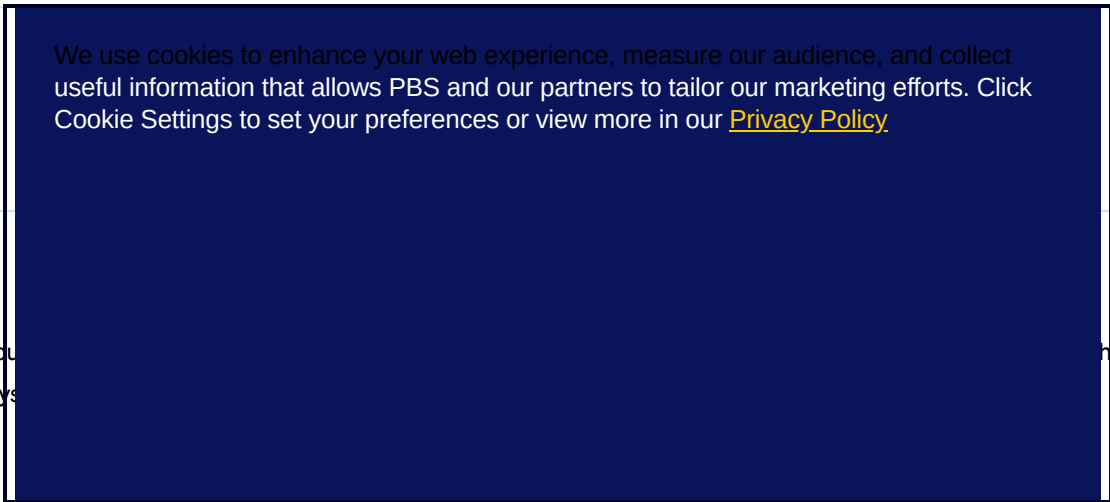
Let me try to square some of the information we have seen out there now.

Chuck Borges:

Sure.

Amna Nawaz:

Because, when you see the government and their filing says



Chuck Borges:

Yes.

Amna Nawaz:

Do you believe it could be limited to just 1,000?

Chuck Borges:

No.

Amna Nawaz:

There's no way?

Chuck Borges:

No.

Amna Nawaz:

And why not?

Chuck Borges:

So, again, my disclosure outlined a pattern of bad behavior. This court filing validates the first two pieces of that puzzle. The third piece has not yet been validated or refuted yet with any documentation.

But if the first two
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Amna Nawaz:

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accountability there?

Debra Katz:

I trust there will be no accountability there.

In fact, when members of this administration have been found guilty of violating the Hatch Act, there's no consequences, none at all. The Hatch Act is -- there are no civil -- there are no criminal penalties. If this has happened, these are criminal violations.

And they need to be fully investigated, and these people need to be prosecuted. And there needs to be a complete, thorough investigation to see the extent of this. And I believe, as Mr. Borges just said, it's far greater than the thousand documents that they acknowledge, 1,000 people that they acknowledge are at risk.

Amna Nawaz:

A thousand is a far cry from the 300 million that you say would be at risk here.

Debra Katz:

Or 500 million potentially.

Amna Nawaz:

So can Americans know, can they be sure that their data has not been compromised?

Chuck Borges:

They can't be sure until the agency releases documentation that proves or refutes my allegations one way or the other.

To date, they have released zero. As a matter of fact, if I recall right, one of the people involved in the investigation into my concerns was one of the people named in the disclosure.

Amna Nawaz:

We also need to dis

Chuck Borges:

I am, correct.

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Amna Nawaz:

Correct? You're running for a Maryland state Senate seat.

Chuck Borges:

I am.

Amna Nawaz:

Tell us why.

Chuck Borges:

I had a very good job in a very high agency. I walked away from that to do the right thing. Now I see the challenges we have at the federal level. I see them replicated at the local level. I want to fix where I live. I want to be a leader that will do the right thing, rather than what's politically expedient.

And I want to solve people's problems and replace leadership that, quite frankly, doesn't have the imagination, the initiative, and in some cases the moral integrity to do it.

Amna Nawaz:

We have talked to a number of other whistle-blowers from various agencies who talked about harassment, backlash after they come forward. Did you see any of that? Do you have any message for people who are still working in the government?

Chuck Borges:

I do.

I did not receive an
I'm guessing that's

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Amna Nawaz:

Chuck Borges here with his attorney, Debra Katz, thank you both for your time. Really appreciate it.

Debra Katz:

Thank you.

Chuck Borges:

Thank you.

Amna Nawaz:

And following our conversation this afternoon, the Office of Special Counsel reached out to Chuck Borges' attorney to gather more information about his retaliation complaint.

By — Amna Nawaz

Amna Nawaz serves as co-anchor and co-managing editor of PBS News Hour.

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