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CNN reporter breaks down how Trump's DOGE may force federal workers to quit

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**(CNN)** — President-elect Donald Trump's new Department of Government Efficiency, a nongovernmental entity helmed by billionaire Elon Musk and biotech entrepreneur and former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, is expected to make a push for an end to remote work across federal agencies as a way to help reduce the federal workforce through attrition.

Both Musk and Ramaswamy have recently publicly lamented the number of employees working remotely across the government.

A source familiar with early discussions about the focus of DOGE, as the initiative is known, told CNN that while nothing is final, early priorities include an effort to immediately end remote work across federal agencies, making a five-day work week a requirement for all federal employees.

"It's a no-brainer step and many companies have done this. So why shouldn't federal employees who are paid with taxpayer dollars be required to be in office?" the source said.



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The thinking is this kind of mandate, coupled with moving agencies out of Washington, DC, would cause many federal workers to voluntarily leave, helping the new Trump administration thin out the federal workforce ranks and save the government money.

Ending remote work across government is being considered a potential "early candidate" for executive orders that members of DOGE will recommend to Trump, the source said. "It's definitely on the table," the source said, though it's unclear how much they believe this will save the federal government.

On Wednesday, following the publication of this story, Musk and Ramaswamy published an op-ed in The Wall Street Journal that outlined their plans to reform the government and took aim at remote work. "Requiring federal employees to come to the office five days a week would result in a wave of voluntary terminations that we welcome: If federal employees don't want to show up, American taxpayers shouldn't pay them for the Covid-era privilege of staying home," they wrote.

Currently, not all federal workers are required to be in the office five days a week. Each agency determines its remote policy to best complete its mission. There are 1.3 million federal workers approved for telework, according to data from the Office of Personnel Management.

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Government data shows teleworking federal workers spend 60% of their time performing work in person.

“The implication that federal employees writ large are not working in-person is simply not backed up by data and reality,” Everett Kelley, national president for the American Federation of Government Employees, a union that represents more than 800,000 federal workers, told CNN in a statement. “When it comes to changes in working conditions that could impact union contracts, AFGE takes the position that such changes must be negotiated with the union through the normal collective bargaining process.”

Sources also told CNN that conservative activist and Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk – who has grown close with Musk – is expected to serve as an unofficial adviser to DOGE. Kirk has taken aim at remote work, calling it “one giant looting operation and US taxpayers are their mask” on X on Monday, another sign this could be a key early priority.

## Disrupting lives

Some federal employees who have been allowed to work fully remotely say that forcing them to come back to the office would upend their lives – and not necessarily save the government as much money as one might expect.

“I can’t abandon this career,” one Library of Congress worker who lives in the Midwest told CNN. “I would be forced to move back to Washington, DC, even if it means separating my family.”

The worker, who requested anonymity to protect their job, had reported to their office in Washington, DC, five days a week for many years. But when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the employee was allowed to work remotely and moved to the Midwest to be closer to family and save money – even though it meant taking a \$12,000 pay cut. They have since bought a home and entered into a relationship.

Adding to the complications, the worker doesn’t have an office to return to since others within the Library of Congress have already moved into their former space.

But some of their colleagues, particularly those with children, have said they wouldn’t be able to move back. That would hurt the Library of Congress’ mission since it, like many other government agencies, is already dealing with high turnover, the worker said.

Another federal employee who works remotely told CNN that they would have to commute two to three hours to the nearest office. That would be a deal-breaker for the worker, who has been

with the federal government for more than 10 years.

"The stress would be through the roof," said the employee, who requested anonymity to protect their job. "I am at the point where if I had to commute, I would resign. I would take this as a sign to move on and start a new chapter in my life."

The worker, who is employed by the General Services Administration, said that forcing them to come to an office would make them less productive. Currently, they work more hours – including when they are sick or scheduled to be off – even though they don't receive overtime pay.

## Other targets beyond remote work

Remote work isn't the only cost-cutting measure that is likely to be addressed through executive orders.

The source familiar with early discussions on DOGE said that very early on in the administration, there are expected to be several other executive orders that have the fingerprints of DOGE and are aimed at cutting costs.

But DOGE recommendations aren't likely to solely take the form of executive orders, which can easily be overturned under future administrations, the source said. "There will also be a longer-term plan for more and deeper reductions through the rulemaking process," the source added.

Ramaswamy recently took to social media to note plans for cutting funds for programs Congress no longer authorizes but that still receive appropriations.

"We shouldn't let the government spend money on programs that have expired. Yet that's exactly what happens today: half a \*trillion\* dollars of taxpayer funds (\$516 B+) goes each year to programs which Congress has allowed to expire. There are 1,200+ programs that are no longer authorized but still receive appropriations. This is totally nuts," he posted on X.

The source familiar with early discussions told CNN that Musk and Ramaswamy don't plan on reinventing the wheel when it comes to determining how to best cut the fat in government spending.

"They'll be pulling from existing reports from Congress and the executive branch and previous outside government commissions focused on cutting government spending," the source said, noting that previous conservative targets will inform what DOGE does. "They don't view themselves as having the only answer to government spending and efficiency."

Musk and Ramaswamy are currently identifying all the places across the sprawling federal

government where they might be able to cut, according to the source, while Ramaswamy is simultaneously taking the lead on crafting the legal justification for the cuts they recommend.

They will hire additional people eventually, but it's going to be a small, nimble team, the source said. "It won't be hundreds of people. It will be very small. A lot of this is going to also involve agencies identifying places to cut. It's going to be on them too."

*This story has been updated with additional information.*

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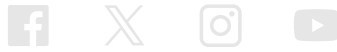
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