

# Here's how many billions Elon Musk's companies are making from U.S. taxpayers

**While their boss takes a sledgehammer to federal agencies, SpaceX and Tesla are earning big money from government contracts, writes [Io Dodds](#)**

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Elon Musk is on a crusade against government spending. Unless, apparently, it's going to him.

"If action is not taken to curb the deficit, America is in deep trouble. No different than a person who gets into too much debt," said the DOGE boss on his social network X in December.

"The corruption and waste is being rooted out in real-time," he added on February 2, as he took a sledgehammer to federal agencies and [all but dismantled the U.S. Agency of International Development with no authorization from Congress](#).

Yet according to federal data analyzed by *The Independent*, Musk's own companies have been promised or awarded nearly \$21 billion by the U.S. government since 2008.

The cash was still flowing as of Feb 17, with another \$76.7 million promised since Donald Trump's inauguration.

So how much of money is the American taxpayer forking over to each of Musk's companies, and what is it all for?

## Flying NASA to the moon

The vast majority of this funding comes from federal contracts with SpaceX, the private space company Musk founded back in 2002.

According to [USASpending.gov](https://www.usaspending.gov), a legally-mandated public database of federal contracts, the most common way to measure such contracts is to look at the total amount the U.S. government is contractually obliged to pay out. So that is what we'll do.

Since records began, SpaceX has been promised nearly \$20.7 billion in government contracts, research grants, and other forms of public assistance, with roughly \$8.7 billion actually paid out so far.

Of that promised money, \$14.6 billion came from contracts with NASA, covering everything from supply runs to the International Space Station to the design and testing of a new moon lander.

One contract covers launch services for various NASA satellites, while another covers cargo flights to the agency's planned Lunar Gateway space station, which will be put in orbit around the moon to support future visits.

Perhaps the most exciting is [a contract to safely destroy the International Space Station when it is abandoned some time after 2030](#). The company is building a souped-up version of its Dragon crew capsule, [which will use its powerful engine to push the station into a declining orbit](#) that will ultimately cause it to burn up in Earth's atmosphere.

And while \$14.6 billion might seem like a nice payday, that's nothing to the maximum payout that SpaceX could get in future if NASA chooses to exercise all options in every contract: a whopping \$56.4 billion.



Photo provided by SpaceX: Tesla roadster launched from the Falcon Heavy rocket with a dummy driver named 'Starman' (Getty Images)

## Secretive DoD satellite launches

The bulk of the rest of SpaceX's contracts are with the Department of Defense, which has promised \$5.6 billion and offered a maximum future payout of \$32.8 billion.

Perhaps characteristically given their military nature, these contracts' descriptions are rather more vague. Most of them involve satellite launches, including for the country's secretive National Reconnaissance Office.

Indeed, [reports indicate](#) that SpaceX is under contract to build hundreds of spy satellites with an unnamed U.S. intelligence agency.

Other payments relate to SpaceX's subsidiary [Starlink](#), which provides mobile internet services to remote regions [from a constellation of more than 7,000 satellites in low Earth orbit](#).

Here we find an example of Musk's penchant for corny acronyms: a U.S. Air Force contract for a "basic agreement for devices and Starlink subscription", or BADASS for short.

On top of various research grants, SpaceX also has contracts with other U.S. agencies, though these are vastly smaller. The company is owed \$1.4 million by the Department of Commerce, for instance, and \$578,875 by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Most of the contracts cover Starlink services, including for ocean research ships away from port, workers repairing a bridge in Yellowstone National Park, and U.S. Geological Survey officials in Anchorage, Alaska.

Starlink was also promised around \$2.3 million in government assistance by USAID — an agency Musk has called "evil" and "a criminal organization" that needs to "die" — apparently as part of an infrastructure program in Macedonia.



Elon Musk    
@elonmusk

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USAID is a criminal organization.

Time for it to die.



**Autism Capital**  @AutismCapital · Feb 2



**BREAKING: USAID Senior Officials put on Leave after Physically Trying to stop DOGE from accessing Agency Systems**

Two USAID officials, John Voorhees and his deputy, were put on leave late Saturday night after refusing to allow DOGE members access to USAID ...

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*Elon Musk's tweet on Feb 2 about USAID, an agency whose funding he is crushed (X)*



## Tesla brings up the rear

Tesla, the electric vehicle company that Musk also runs, has made far less from government contracts and awards. USASpending.gov lists only \$4.5 million, mostly for solar power generation or the purchase of government vehicles.

However, the firm has benefited significantly from other kinds of taxpayer help in the past. In 2010, when it had sold fewer than 2,000 cars, it got a \$465 million low-interest loan from the Department of Energy to help it develop new electric vehicles.

Tesla has also benefited from at least [an estimated](#) \$3.4 billion in tax credits given to its customers in order to buy its cars, allowing the company to sell more vehicles [at higher prices](#) than otherwise would have been possible.

Famously, it has made much of its profit — [\\$10.7 billion, by one recent estimate](#) — from selling emissions credits to other, more polluting carmakers. These aren't paid for by taxpayers, but they are mandated by government regulations.

According to reports, [a \\$400 million contract for "armored electric vehicles" is in the works](#) — though after the story broke, its wording was amended to avoid specifically mentioning Tesla.

## What does SpaceX say?



*A SpaceX rocket launching into the sky (John Raoux/AP)*

To be clear, Musk's companies — SpaceX and Tesla have been asked for comment for this story — are providing real services to the U.S. government, and those services cost money.

"We earned that," said SpaceX's chief operations officer Gwynne Shotwell in November 2024, in reference to SpaceX's close relationship with NASA. "We bid it, we were the lowest price, best bidder, we won and we execute. It's not a bad thing to serve the U.S. government with great capability and products."

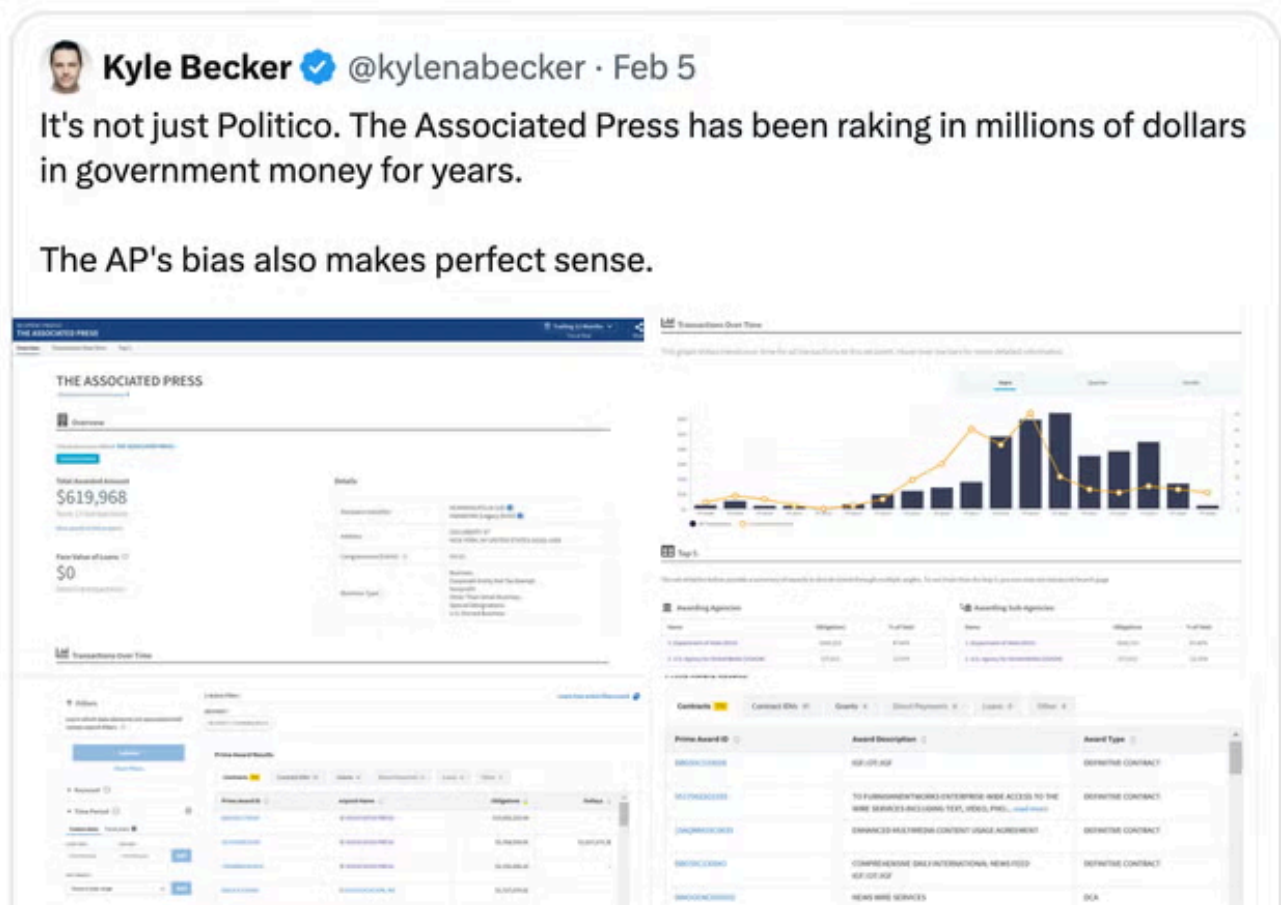
Musk has also been incredibly broad in his definition of "waste, fraud, and abuse", often completely misrepresenting the programs he spotlights on social media.

For example, he has [attacked media companies such as Politico](#) for selling subscription services to [government agencies](#) — not unlike SpaceX — and falsely claimed that [a DoD contract with Reuters to help resist cyberattacks](#) was a contract to deceive the U.S. public.



Not for long.

**This is obviously a huge waste of taxpayer money!**



*Elon's tweet on Feb 5, 2025, about media organizations getting money from government subscriptions (X)*

But don't worry. According to the White House, [it's Musk himself](#) who'll decide whether or not his own business dealings cause a conflict of interest.