

# Who is Doge's official leader? White House says it's not Musk

14 hours ago

Kayla Epstein



Reuters

On Monday afternoon, a federal judge had a simple question for the Trump administration's lawyers: Is tech billionaire Elon Musk the Department of Government Efficiency's administrator?

The agency more popularly known as "Doge" is Musk's brainchild, but the White House insists that he is not its leader - or even employed by it.

Justice department lawyer Bradley Humphreys told the judge that: "I don't have any information beyond he's a close adviser to the president."

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt doubled down on this position at a Tuesday press briefing.

"The president tasked Elon Musk to oversee the Doge effort," she said, but she later added that "career officials" and appointees were helping Musk run Doge, and that people who have "onboarded" as federal employees were working at various agencies.

She declined to provide specific names, but she announced that Musk would attend President Donald Trump's first cabinet secretary meeting alongside the Secretary of Defense, the Attorney General and other top US political appointees who were vetted and confirmed by the Senate.

The White House later told the BBC that a person named Amy Gleason is the acting administrator. They did not provide additional details about her or when she was appointed.

Ms Gleason declined to comment, CBS News reported.

Watch: Elon Musk handed chainsaw by Argentina's President Milei at CPAC

Musk has been leading an outside effort to aggressively curtail government spending through funding cuts and firings.

"They're playing a game," said Max Stier, president and CEO of the non-partisan Partnership for Public Service, an organisation that has provided past administrations with procedure and ethics guidance.

"If [Musk] were actually the administrator, then this issue about him needing Senate confirmation and his actually having to abide by the conflict of interest laws would be much clearer."

Experts said that Musk has given the impression of being in charge of Doge by staffing the government entity with employees and engineers from his various companies, posting constantly about its work on X, appearing alongside Trump in the Oval Office to promote the cuts it has made to the federal workforce, and representing it on stage at the Conservative Political Action Committee gathering last week while wielding a chainsaw.

"We're in Alice in Wonderland right now," Mr Stier said. "We're through the looking glass."

Trump established Doge by renaming the United States Digital Service - an agency focused on digital and web infrastructure - to the United States Doge Service via an executive order.

[The order](#) establishes Doge's leadership structure, saying that "there shall be a USDS Administrator" that reports up to the White House chief of staff.

It does not name a specific individual for the role. In fact, Musk's name never appears in the executive order, though Trump has credited his work with the team.

Doge's arrival has caused turbulence in the existing US Digital Service ranks. The administration fired several staffers there earlier this month, and the Associated Press reported that 21 employees resigned in protest on Tuesday.

Watch: 'Thank God for Elon Musk' - Maga Republicans praise Doge cuts

In a letter to management, they alleged Doge employees were creating "significant security risks".

"We swore to serve the American people and uphold our oath to the Constitution across presidential administrations," their letter stated, according to the AP. "However, it has become clear that we can no longer honor those commitments."

BBC News has reviewed the letter but has not been able to verify its contents.

A series of lawsuits challenging Doge have slowed some of the administration's effort to cut the federal workforce, and they have forced the Trump White House to face the question of Musk's status in court.

Until the administration stated that Ms Gleason was the acting administrator late on Tuesday, it gave vague answers about Doge's leadership across multiple lawsuits.

Though she did not rule in the hearing on Monday, Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly expressed concern about Doge's constitutionality. She noted it might run afoul of the appointment clause of the US Constitution, which sets out nominating procedures for agency leaders.

"It does seem to me if you have people that are not authorised to carry out some of these functions that they're carrying out that does raise an issue," she said.

"I would hope that by now we would know who is the administrator, who is the acting administrator and what authority do they have?"

Experts say that Musk's work does not fit the traditional definition of "special government employee", which has specific rules.

The White House has previously said that Musk "is a special government employee and has abided by all applicable federal laws".

William Resh, a professor who studies the executive branch at the University of Southern California, said typically such employees have been hired as advisers for their relative expertise.

"But they do not hold distinct executive power the way that a Senate-confirmed appointee would, or even a unilateral permanent appointments that a president can make," he said.

While Musk appears to have made several moves regarding the federal workforce largely unencumbered, his recent demand that federal employees list five accomplishments in an email was met with pushback from some Trump-appointed agency leaders.

The directive was walked back as optional at some agencies, over concerns staff could reveal sensitive information and that the order violated federal policies.

Asked whether this showed tension between Doge and Trump's other officials, Leavitt insisted that "everyone is working together as one unified team at the direction of President Trump".



## US POLITICS UNSPUN

The newsletter that cuts through the noise



Follow the twists and turns of Trump's second presidential term with North America correspondent Anthony Zurcher's weekly [US Politics Unspun](#) newsletter. Readers in the UK can [sign up here](#). Those outside the UK can [sign up here](#).

Elon Musk

Donald Trump

US politics

United States

## Related

**Thousands of Canadians sign petition to revoke Musk's citizenship**

9 hrs ago | US & Canada

**Who is on Trump's top team?**

13 hrs ago | US & Canada

**Key US agencies tell staff not to answer Musk email on what they did last week**

17 hrs ago | US & Canada

## More

42 mins ago

**Why does the US want access to Ukraine's minerals?**



42 mins ago

**What is Nato and how much do members spend on defence?**

The UK says it will boost defence spending, as arguments continue about whether Ukraine could join Nato.



46 mins ago | Europe

**Trump accelerated UK military boost, says former defence chief**

General Sir David Richards said the decision "almost certainly would not" be happening if not for Trump.



2 hrs ago | Politics

4 hrs ago

## Ukraine official says minerals deal agreed with US

Donald Trump says the deal would give Ukraine "the right to fight on" in its war with Russia.



4 hrs ago | World

6 hrs ago

## Why Edinburgh has a Confederate soldier memorial

The statue commemorates Colonel Robert A Smith, a Scot who was struck down in Kentucky during the US civil war.



6 hrs ago | Edinburgh, Fife &amp; East

**B B C**
[Home](#) [News](#) [Sport](#) [Business](#) [Innovation](#) [Culture](#) [Arts](#) [Travel](#) [Earth](#) [Audio](#) [Video](#) [Live](#) [Weather](#) [BBC Shop](#)
[BBC in other languages ▾](#)
**Follow BBC on:** [X](#) [f](#) [o](#) [tiktok](#) [in](#) [y](#)
[Terms of Use](#) [About the BBC](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility Help](#) [Contact the BBC](#) [Advertise with us](#) [Do not share or sell my info](#)
[Contact technical support](#)

Copyright 2025 BBC. All rights reserved. The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites. [Read about our approach to external linking](#).