

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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April 8th, 2025

The Honorable Janet Petro
Acting Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
300 Hidden Figures Way, SW
Washington, D.C., 20546

Dear Acting Administrator Petro,

Thank you for your response to our February 21st, 2025 letter regarding the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and its presence at NASA. As the Ranking Members of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology (the Committee), as well as the Subcommittees on Space and Aeronautics and Investigations & Oversight, we appreciate the agency's continuing engagement on this matter.

Once again, however, our oversight into the danger that DOGE poses for NASA is being impeded by a lack of comprehensive and transparent responses and disclosures on the part of the agency. This is regrettable, because we have reason to believe DOGE is more harmful than ever. We have obtained new information regarding the DOGE team at NASA and the alarming degree of access they have been granted to agency facilities and data systems without undergoing NASA's standard vetting process used to identify the potential risk of an employee's system access. The agency must explain why it has allowed this to happen. DOGE may not currently answer to the law or the best interests of America's civil space program, but we intend to do everything we can to make sure they answer to Congress.

In our first letter sent to you on February 6th, we expressed "grave concern" over DOGE's presence inside NASA and detailed numerous conflicts-of-interest due to Elon Musk's dual roles as the leader of DOGE and the CEO of SpaceX, the agency's second largest contractor.¹ NASA responded on February 13th and confirmed that "DOGE has identified an individual who will be employed at NASA," but left many of our questions unanswered.² Our second letter to you, sent

¹ <https://democrats-science.house.gov/news/press-releases/committee-leaders-stress-to-nasa-the-threat-of-elon-musk-demand-answers-on-whether-doge-has-made-contact>.

² <https://democrats-science.house.gov/news/press-releases/committee-leaders-unsatisfied-with-nasa-response-regarding-doge-access-demand-more-information>.

on February 21st, pressed the agency for more information about DOGE’s activities within NASA, as well as the safeguards that the agency intended to put in place to maintain ethical requirements and prevent DOGE-related conflicts-of-interest.³ We also insisted that NASA disclose the identities of any DOGE individuals working at the agency and make them available for a briefing with Committee staff to explain their work. This disclosure is a crucial measure of transparency, given the astonishing power that DOGE has accumulated throughout the executive branch since January 20th. If NASA is allowing – or being forced to allow – DOGE-associated persons such sweeping access to data and systems within the agency, it must ensure that those individuals are rigorously vetted at a level commensurate with their vast degree of access. It must also ensure that they possess the knowledge, experience, and personal integrity necessary to use that access responsibly.

On March 12th, you replied to our second letter in your capacity as Acting Administrator. We appreciate that your response did answer some of our prior questions. You stated that “DOGE-associated persons” currently work at the agency as “civil servants,” and you explained that these “DOGE-associated persons” report directly to you in an “advisory role.” These clarifications provide a degree of helpful specificity about the nature of the DOGE team and its reporting structure at NASA. You also acknowledged that “NASA does not have a separate vetting process for DOGE employees” and that DOGE-associated persons “must comply with OGE requirements,” which illuminates their legal obligations as they carry out their work.

Unfortunately, we must also observe that your letter does not address some issues and leaves others ambiguous. For example, after initially describing DOGE individuals as being “employed by NASA” in its February 13th letter, the agency now appears to have shifted its description by labeling the DOGE team as “DOGE-associated persons working at the Agency.” Your March 12th letter repeatedly uses the phrase “NASA employees, contractors, and partners” to describe these “DOGE-associated persons” without clarifying which of these categories (“employees,” “contractors,” or “partners”), if any, the DOGE-associated persons fall under. It is unsettling that NASA appears to be struggling to find the right words to simply describe the employment relationship between these individuals and the agency.

Additional ambiguities and omissions run throughout this March 12th response. Your letter notes that no DOGE-associated persons serve in any position that “requires” access to classified information at the agency. But that does not directly answer the question as to whether any of them have been *granted* access to classified information at the agency and whether they have used that access, which is precisely what we seek to understand. Further, your letter does not address whether NASA had any input into the selection of DOGE-associated persons or the hiring authorities used to deploy them at the agency, despite our prior questions on these topics. And finally, once again, the agency has failed to provide a straightforward answer regarding the ability of DOGE-associated persons to access sensitive and proprietary information belonging to SpaceX competitors, which represents one of the most egregious conflict-of-interest risks in their work at the agency. We are not satisfied with the letter’s generic affirmations of a “fair and open acquisition process” and the “protection of confidential information” when the agency has repeatedly declined to offer even the simplest reassurances about its ability to safeguard

³ <https://democrats-science.house.gov/news/press-releases/committee-leaders-unsatisfied-with-nasa-response-regarding-doge-access-demand-more-information>.

proprietary information from employees and agents of Elon Musk, let alone provide any documented validation of actions the agency has taken to ensure such safeguards. We remain highly concerned about the threat posed by DOGE to the integrity of NASA's acquisition process and the grave harm it poses to the agency and the broader industry.

Most glaringly, your March 12th letter failed yet again to identify the DOGE-associated persons working at NASA despite our explicit request for their names and employment dates. This lack of transparency is indefensible, particularly if these individuals are truly "civil servants" as the agency now claims. These senior "advisors" are federal employees, paid by the taxpayer to work on behalf of the public. They have no legitimate claim to anonymity – not from the American people, and certainly not from Congress. If DOGE intends to assert sweeping influence over NASA, the DOGE-associated persons working at NASA must account for their roles and the access they have been granted. Public accountability demands no less.

In spite of NASA's refusal to comply with Committee oversight, we have worked to understand the DOGE team and its activities within the agency. We have identified at least three DOGE-associated persons operating inside NASA: Mr. Scott M. Coulter, a "Senior Advisor" who appears to be the most senior member of the DOGE team; Mr. Riley J. Sennott, a "Senior Advisor;" and Mr. Alexander Simonpour, an "Advisor." Mr. Sennott and Mr. Simonpour previously worked for Tesla, the electric vehicle company owned by Elon Musk, highlighting the conflicts-of-interests presented by Musk loyalists at the agency. Compounding the absurdity of NASA's unwillingness to formally disclose their identities to Congress, Mr. Coulter⁴, Mr. Sennott⁵, and Mr. Simonpour⁶ have all been publicly named in multiple press reports as members of the DOGE team at NASA.

None of these three individuals possess the slightest background or experience in space policy or government service. Yet they have been granted, with virtually no vetting and no training, an extraordinary and alarming degree of access to highly sensitive facilities and personnel systems at NASA. We have learned that all three members of the DOGE team possess unrestricted physical access, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, to NASA facilities, including the NASA Administrator's suite on the 9th floor of NASA headquarters in Washington, D.C. We have also reviewed information revealing that they possess a sweeping level of access to data systems at NASA HQ and each of the agency's field centers across the country, encompassing information on the NASA workforce; performance appraisals for civil servants and senior level executives; workforce demographics; and training and career development.

The types of systems to which DOGE has access contain information about NASA employees and sensitive information regarding agency workforce composition and succession planning. We believe the DOGE team's ability to access these systems poses an intrusive risk to the privacy of NASA employees and the integrity of NASA data management.

We are particularly concerned about the role and access granted to Mr. Coulter, given his apparent leadership of DOGE's efforts at NASA. Mr. Coulter is a failed hedge fund manager. His

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/02/27/us/politics/doge-staff-list.html>.

⁵ <https://www.businessinsider.com/doge-nasa-google-calendar-public-2025-3>.

⁶ <https://www.businessinsider.com/tesla-employee-alexander-simonpour-nasa-doge-team-2025-3>.

hedge fund, Cowbird Capital, opened in 2017 and managed hundreds of millions of dollars at its peak, but the firm's investment portfolio declined until it was forced to close in the summer of 2024.⁷ Mr. Coulter oversaw his hedge fund investments through a corporate structure that included multiple linked business entities, including an investment manager named Cowbird Capital LP⁸ and a domestic entity named Cowbird Capital Partners LLC,⁹ incorporated in Delaware and based in New York City. The corporate structure also included another entity: Cowbird Capital Fund Ltd., incorporated and based out of the Cayman Islands. According to filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Cowbird Capital Fund Ltd. raised tens of millions of dollars in the Cayman Islands for Mr. Coulter's hedge fund from a small group of undisclosed investors.¹⁰ Meanwhile, according to property records, Mr. Coulter agreed in August 2024 to a consolidation of the \$6.5 million mortgage on his residence that allowed him to defer payments towards the unpaid principal balance of the mortgage for ten years.¹¹ This consolidation occurred during the same period that his hedge fund was forced to close in the summer of 2024.

The portrait of Mr. Coulter's recent activities, in conjunction with his sudden ascension to a leadership position as advisor to the acting administrator at NASA, underlines the need – at a bare minimum – for the agency to thoroughly vet him before being compelled to entrust him with his responsibilities. But we fear that NASA may have cut corners – or been forced to cut them – instead. We have learned that under NASA's internal vetting process, which assesses a degree of confidence for each employee in terms of accessing agency data and facilities, Mr. Coulter's confidence value was far lower than the access level that he has been granted. Under the agency's standard vetting process, regular full-time employees would typically receive a certain confidence designation after the completion of a standard background check. But we have reviewed information that indicates Mr. Coulter possesses a confidence level closer to that of an intern than a career employee. Mr. Coulter is no intern – he possesses privileged physical and IT access at NASA that extends vastly beyond what most agency employees possess, outside of the most senior ranks of agency leadership. And the other members of the DOGE team, Mr. Sennott and Mr. Simonpour, possess confidence levels similar to Mr. Coulter's. These confidence levels suggest an ominous possibility: namely, that none of the three DOGE team members have even completed their standard background checks, let alone the more rigorous vetting processes that would be appropriate and necessary for agency employees with far-reaching access and influence. This situation is extremely troubling. NASA risks enormous harm by allowing these unvetted individuals to access sensitive agency systems.

Furthermore, NASA's failure to vet Mr. Coulter properly extended beyond the decision to grant him extraordinary access despite a confidence level commensurate with an intern. We have also learned that when he joined the agency, Mr. Coulter received a highly unusual one-year exemption from completing NASA's Cybersecurity Training requirement. The exemption permitted him to carry out his duties with full access to NASA data and information systems

⁷ <https://www.businessinsider.com/lone-pine-spinouts-struggle-except-mala-gaonkar-surgocap-tiger-cubs-2024-10>.

⁸ <https://www.sec.gov/edgar/browse/?CIK=1761435>.

⁹ <https://www.sec.gov/edgar/browse/?CIK=1736190>.

¹⁰ <https://www.sec.gov/edgar/browse/?CIK=1736189>.

¹¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/finance/property/acris.page>.

without any education or training in cybersecurity protocols. He received this exemption despite possessing no previous experience in government, and despite joining NASA in a leadership position that allowed him access to information of the utmost sensitivity at the agency. We are deeply concerned that Mr. Coulter's inexperience in government and in safeguarding sensitive government information, as well as his lack of cybersecurity training, creates a serious vulnerability for the agency – concerns that have been amplified by the reckless behavior of other senior Trump Administration officials in recent days.¹²

Despite being the apparent leader of the DOGE team at NASA, Mr. Coulter's status at the agency is unclear to us. Recent press reports have revealed that, similarly to many DOGE employees, he is currently assigned to more than one agency and now apparently serves as the Chief Information Officer at the Social Security Administration (SSA) in addition to his assignment at NASA.¹³ This bizarre situation deepens the absurdity of Mr. Coulter's position at NASA, but it gives us no comfort. The unfolding crisis at SSA threatens the basic functionality of Social Security, one of the most important programs ever created by the federal government, and Mr. Coulter bears responsibility for it.¹⁴ That is not an association that NASA, or any agency, should want.

The information we have reviewed of NASA's vulnerability to DOGE-related threats is chilling. The agency has allowed unvetted and untrained individuals to obtain unprecedented access, seemingly in defiance of standard agency protocols and simple common sense. If the agency has vetted these DOGE-associated persons for their questionable professional histories or apparent conflicts-of-interest, we are not aware of it. But we do know that the data and information of our civil space agency, along with personnel information related to the brilliant and dedicated employees of NASA, need to be protected from DOGE's malign influence. The agency must assert control over this situation and mitigate any damage that has and could continue to occur.

We have repeatedly sought answers about the relationship between NASA and DOGE since before DOGE had even arrived at the agency. In our previous letters, we asked a series of detailed questions about DOGE's presence at NASA and how DOGE-associated persons would interact with the agency. We also requested a staff briefing from the DOGE-associated persons to learn about their work. But the agency has provided few direct and straightforward answers in response to our questions, and our request for a briefing from the DOGE team was ignored. We are now compelled to request a briefing from senior agency officials capable of explaining the operation of the DOGE team and the procedures that govern their activities. We believe the NASA General Counsel, Iris Lan, and the NASA Chief Information Officer, Jeff Seaton, are the most appropriate officials to brief Committee staff on these matters. We request that the agency coordinate immediately with the Committee to schedule a staff briefing with Ms. Lan and Mr. Seaton, to take place no later than two weeks from today, April 22nd, 2025.

In addition to this staff briefing, we also request that the agency provide to the Committee all finalized ethics documents submitted by DOGE-associated persons Mr. Scott Coulter, Mr. Riley

¹² <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2025/03/trump-administration-accidentally-texted-me-its-war-plans/682151/>.

¹³ <https://fedscoop.com/social-security-administration-swaps-out-one-doge-staffer-at-cio-for-another/>.

¹⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/07/social-security-website-crashes-musk-trump/>.

Sennott, and Mr. Alexander Simonpour. These documents include any completed Public Financial Disclosure Reports (OGE Form 278e), Ethics Agreements, and any other form or document necessary to comply with the requirements set forth by the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) governing federal employees. These documents should be provided to the Committee no later than 48 hours before the date of the staff briefing detailed above.

Pursuant to Rule X of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology “shall review and study on a continuing basis laws, programs, and Government activities relating to nonmilitary research and development.”¹⁵ The Committee possesses jurisdiction over the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, as well as “astronautical research and development, including resources, personnel, equipment, and facilities” and “outer space, including exploration and control thereof.”¹⁶

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Pamela Whitney or Josh Schneider with the Committee’s Minority staff at (202) 225-6375. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology



Valerie P. Foushee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics



Emilia Sykes
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight

CC: Chairman Brian Babin
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Chairman Mike Haridopolos
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics

Chairman Rich McCormick
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight

¹⁵ [119 First Session House Rules](#).

¹⁶ *Id.*