

DOGE wants to trim a \$500 billion list of federal 'zombie' programs that includes veterans' healthcare, Pell Grants, and NASA

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- **Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy wrote an op-ed detailing their vision for cutting government costs.**
- **One of their targets is a list of programs with expired funding authorization totaling \$516 billion.**
- **The largest items on that list include veterans' healthcare, college grants, and housing assistance.**

Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy are eyeing recommendations to trim a list of government programs that include veterans' healthcare, childcare grants, and NASA.

The leaders of President-elect Donald Trump's new Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, wrote in a Wednesday opinion piece that the commission would target federal spending that's "unauthorized by Congress or being used in ways that Congress never intended."

The opinion piece, published in The Wall Street Journal, provided few details on the exact programs DOGE would want to cut; however, DOGE posted a link on X to a report from the Congressional Budget Office confirming that the commission would aim to cut funding for a range of programs with lapsed funding authorization.

The CBO report included 491 such programs totaling about \$516 billion. Most of that money goes to two dozen big-ticket items, including medical care for veterans, housing-assistance vouchers for low-income renters, college Pell Grants, the National Institutes of Health, the FBI, and NASA's major initiatives.

The programs' funding authorizations have lapsed because they were established or renewed by legislation authorizing Congress to allocate funds for a set number of years. But Congress still allocated funding to these programs during the annual budget process after that period ended, even though the original authorization expired.

"If the spending isn't authorized, then we shouldn't be spending it," Ramaswamy wrote on X on Thursday. "That shouldn't be controversial."

The above programs, with at least \$4 billion each in 2024 appropriations, together total \$391 billion, or about three-quarters of the \$516 billion total. Some of the programs specifically highlighted by Musk and Ramaswamy in their op-ed involve much smaller

sums, such as the \$525 million in funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and \$286 million for grants to organizations such as Planned Parenthood for family-planning services and education.

NASA's budget for space exploration, one of the programs that CBO identified as having a lapsed authorization, clocks in at about \$7.7 billion. NASA's planned human moon lander, the first of which is contracted to be built by Musk's SpaceX, is one of the major components of that program, according to a NASA 2024 budget-request analysis from The Planetary Society.

This isn't the first attempt to tackle unauthorized government spending. GOP Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers introduced legislation in 2016 — the USA Act — which would sunset what she called "zombie government spending programs" in three years and establish a commission to review all mandatory spending programs.

"What all of this means is that too much of the federal government is on autopilot, and it is preventing the American people from exercising their authority to review, rethink, and possibly eliminate government programs," McMorris Rodgers wrote in a 2016 opinion piece.

Data from the Treasury Department showed the US government spent a total of \$6.75 trillion in fiscal year 2024, with the most spending allocated to the Social Security Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Treasury Department.

The implications of DOGE could be widespread if Musk and Ramaswamy fulfill their goals of eliminating government agencies, which would lead to layoffs for thousands of federal workers. The two commission leaders said in their opinion piece that impacted

employees could be offered early retirement and severance payments to allow for a "graceful exit."

"Employees whose positions are eliminated deserve to be treated with respect," they wrote, "and DOGE's goal is to help support their transition into the private sector."