

Has DOGE Destroyed Social Security?

Admin User · January 30, 2026

Long waits, waves of calls, website crashes: The Washington Post reports how a flood of cuts led by Elon Musk has sent the agency into chaos.

By Mary Helen Gillespie

The [Social Security Administration](#) website crashed four times in 10 days thus far in March because the servers were overloaded, blocking millions of retirees and disabled Americans from logging in to their online accounts. In the field, office managers have resorted to answering phones in place of receptionists because so many employees have been pushed out.

Amid all this, [The Washington Post](#) (subscription required) reported Tuesday that the agency no longer has a system to monitor customer experience because that office was eliminated as part of the cost-cutting efforts led by Elon Musk.

And the phones keep ringing. And ringing.

The federal agency that delivers \$1.5 trillion a year in earned benefits to 73 million retired workers, their survivors, and poor and disabled Americans is engulfed in crisis — further undermining the already struggling organization's ability to provide reliable and quick service to vulnerable customers, according to internal documents and more than two dozen current and former agency employees and officials, customers and others who interact with Social Security.

The turmoil is leaving many retirees, disabled claimants, and legal immigrants needing Social Security cards with less access or shut out of the system altogether, according to those familiar with the problems.

Financial services executive Frank Bisignano faced lawmakers Tuesday at a Senate confirmation hearing as President Donald Trump's nominee to become the permanent

commissioner.

For now, the agency is run by a caretaker leader in his sixth week on the job who has raced to push out more than 12 percent of the staff of 57,000. He has conceded that the [agency's phone service "sucks"](#) and acknowledged that Musk's U.S. DOGE Service [is really in charge](#), pushing a single-minded mission to find benefits fraud despite vast evidence that the problem is overstated.

"What's going on is the destruction of the agency from the inside out, and it's accelerating," Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) said in an interview. "I have people approaching me all the time in their 70s and 80s, and they're beside themselves. They don't know what's coming."

King's home state has the country's oldest population. "What they're doing now is unconscionable," he said.

Leland Dudek, who became acting commissioner after he fed data to Musk's team behind his bosses' backs, has issued a series of rapid-fire policy changes that have created chaos for front-line staff. Under pressure from the secretive Musk team, Dudek has pushed out dozens of officials with years of expertise in running Social Security's complex benefit and information technology systems. Others have left in disgust.

The moves have upended an agency that, despite the popularity of its programs, has been underfunded for years, faces potential insolvency in a decade and has been led by four commissioners in five months — just one of them Senate-confirmed. The latest controversy came last week when Dudek [threatened to shut down operations](#) in response to a federal judge's ruling against DOGE that he claimed would leave no one in the agency with access to beneficiaries' personal information.

Alarmed lawmakers are straining to answer questions back home from angry constituents. Calls have flooded into congressional offices. [AARP](#) announced Monday that more than 2,000 people a week have called the retiree organization since early February — double the usual number — with concerns about whether benefits they paid for during their working careers will continue. Social Security is the primary source of income for about 40% of older Americans.

Trump has said repeatedly that the administration "won't touch" Social Security, a promise that aides say applies to benefit levels that can be adjusted only by Congress. But in just six weeks, the cuts to staffing and offices have already taken a toll on access to benefits, officials and advocates say.
