



NATIONAL JOURNAL

OUTLOOK: Musk leaves 'disappointed' in 'Big, Beautiful, Bill' and well short of \$2 trillion spending-cut goal

Plus: Supreme Court backs railroad expansion; Democrats slam Trump administration over 'misleading' budget; and states sue over science cuts.



Elon Musk (left) receives a chainsaw from Argentina's President Javier Milei at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Oxon Hill, Md., in February. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana)

**Ledyard King ,
Emily Scaff and
Amelia Monroe and
Philip Athey**

🕒 May 29, 2025, 7:57 p.m.

Turns out a chainsaw wasn't enough.

Elon Musk left his federal job disappointed and unfulfilled, not unlike some of the government workers he jettisoned over the past few months. The world's richest person called it

quits this week, about the time his 130-day stint leading the Department of Government Efficiency was set to expire.

He leaves far short of his original moonshot goal of [slashing \\$2 trillion](#)

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_X6VmsMWiI),

from the budget. The \$9.4 billion in spending cuts spearheaded by DOGE, which Congress could consider next week, is far less than the \$160 billion he claims to have saved.

In addition, Musk, whose \$288 million in campaign donations helped propel Donald Trump and the GOP to power last year, departs as the president's "Big Beautiful Bill" wends its way through a divided Congress. The CEO of Tesla (and SpaceX, and X) doesn't like that Trump's signature bill to extend tax cuts and increase security spending is projected to balloon the national debt by as much as \$4 trillion over the next decade.

"I was disappointed to see the massive spending bill, frankly, which increases the budget deficit, not just decreases it,

and undermines the work that the DOGE team is doing," Musk said in an interview with *CBS Sunday Morning*. "I think a bill can be big or it can be beautiful, but I don't know if it can be both—my personal opinion."

Despite being disillusioned, Musk has left his mark on the federal workforce. Ask the tens of thousands of government employees who lost their jobs, or the scores of Social Security recipients who had trouble finding a human to help them, or the organizations no longer able to fight hunger and illness in poor communities abroad.

When he [paraded around the stage at CPAC](https://www.google.com/search?q=musk+reached+end+of+120-day+employment&rlz=1C1GCEB_enUS1049US1049&oq=musk+reached+end+of+120-day+employment&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyCQgAEEUYORigATIHCAEQIRigATIHCAIQIRigATIHCAMQIRigATIHCAQQIRigATIHCAUQIRiPatIBCDY2NzFqMGo3qAIAAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:3ca26afb,vid:k9uCh-OIvWA,st:0) (https://www.google.com/search?q=musk+reached+end+of+120-day+employment&rlz=1C1GCEB_enUS1049US1049&oq=musk+reached+end+of+120-day+employment&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyCQgAEEUYORigATIHCAEQIRigATIHCAIQIRigATIHCAMQIRigATIHCAQQIRigATIHCAUQIRiPatIBCDY2NzFqMGo3qAIAAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:3ca26afb,vid:k9uCh-OIvWA,st:0) in February waving a

chainsaw, Musk likely could not have foreseen how disappointed he would be three months later. If he only knew.

—[Ledyard King](/search/?a=Ledyard%20King) (/search/?a=Ledyard%20King).



HOTLINE

SCOTUS hears oral arguments on Tennessee's ban on gender affirming care for minors

MARY FRANCES MCGOWAN

(/s/726952)

Supreme Court backs Utah oil railroad expansion over environmental concerns

The Supreme Court [unanimously ruled](https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/cadc/22-1019/22-1019-2023-08-18.html)

(<https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/cadc/22-1019/22-1019-2023-08-18.html>).

Thursday to back the expansion of a multibillion-dollar railroad expansion in Utah, limiting the scope of environmental reviews required by federal agencies.

The case centers on the proposed Uinta Basin railway, which would connect the remote Uinta basin oil fields to a national rail network. The railway could quadruple oil production in the region.

The construction of the railway was approved in 2021 after a review documented in a [3,600-page report](#)

(<https://www.stb.gov/news-communications/latest-news/pr-21-51/>), was conducted by the

[Surface Transportation Board](#)

(<https://www.stb.gov/>), a federal agency that oversees the nation's freight rail network.

Colorado's Eagle County and five environmental groups, including the Center for Biological Diversity, challenged the board's review, arguing it had not adequately addressed potential negative environmental impacts. The railway would disturb more than 400 Utah streams and strip 10,000 acres of wildlife habitat, according to the [Center for Biological Diversity](#)

([.](https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/supreme-court-takes-up-case-challenging-utahs-uinta-basin-railway-2024-06-24/?_gl=1*stkb3b*_gcl_au*MTYzNjY1OTQzLjE3NDg1NDAzMMDM.)

In 2023, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit [ruled](#)

(<https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate->

[courts/cadc/22-1019/22-1019-2023-08-18.html](https://www.courts/cadc/22-1019/22-1019-2023-08-18.html)), for the plaintiffs. The [Seven County Infrastructure Coalition](https://scic-utah.org/) (<https://scic-utah.org/>), which backs the Utah construction project, appealed the decision.

Eight of the nine justices ruled to overturn the lower-court decision. The ninth, Justice Neil Gorsuch, recused himself. Writing for the majority, Justice Brett Kavanaugh said the Surface Transportation Board has leeway and “may weigh environmental consequences as the agency reasonably sees fit.”

“The Board did not need to evaluate potential environmental impacts of the separate upstream and downstream projects,” Kavanaugh wrote. “The environmental consequences of future oil drilling in the Basin are distinct from construction and operation of the railroad line.”

Since 1970, the National Environmental Policy Act has required federal agencies to analyze the environmental impact of a proposed project.

Environmental activists fear the ruling could narrow the extent to which federal agencies must review projects for all foreseeable environmental harm.

"The government has an obligation to 'look before it leaps' when it comes to major federal actions, " Katherine Merlin, staff attorney for WildEarth Guardians, one of the five groups who sued, said in a [press release](#)

(<https://earthjustice.org/press/2025/supreme-court-limits-scope-of-nations-bedrock-environmental-law>), after the ruling. "At

heart, the law says we have to take a hard look at reasonably foreseeable consequences—and that law has recently been under increasing attack as business interests try to sacrifice our country's irreplaceable natural treasures."

—[Emily Scaff](#) (</search/?a=Emily%20Scaff>).



DAILY

Democrats: Trump budget 'a blueprint for dismantling' Interior Department

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum at hearing defends 30 percent cut, including steep reductions in national parks, land conservation, and tribal assistance.

BELLA TIMMERDING

([/s/728560](#)).

Democrats slam Trump administration over 'misleading' budget

Democrats are complaining that the Trump administration has yet to release its full budget, exactly one month after a line-item spending plan for all government departments should have made its way to Congress.

The two top Democrats on the Appropriations committees, Sen. Patty Murray and Rep. Rosa DeLauro,

[accused](https://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-appropriations.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/250527-delauro-murray-fy25-omb-spend-plan-letter.pdf) (<https://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-appropriations.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/250527-delauro-murray-fy25-omb-spend-plan-letter.pdf>), the Office of Management and Budget of intentionally misleading their committees by the delay.

“Your lack of transparency shows disdain for the right of the public to understand how taxpayer dollars are being spent and for the rule of law,” [the lawmakers wrote in a letter](#)

(<https://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-appropriations.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/250527-delauro-murray-fy25-omb-spend-plan-letter.pdf>), to OMB Director Russell Vought.

On May 2, OMB released a preliminary spending plan known as the [“skinny” budget](#) (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fiscal-Year-2026-Discretionary-Budget-Request.pdf>), but it includes limited information and only broad categorical spending—not the detailed expenditures and revenues that a complete plan would include and that Congress is authorized to receive.

The Democrats’ criticism was leveled amid deep cuts and [freezes](#)

(<https://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/news/press-releases/new-100-days-trump-blocking-least-430-billion-dollars-funding-owed-american>), made by the Trump

administration, including the elimination of some agencies. They were especially critical about the fact that questions regarding funding for both the Health and Human Services and Education departments—the latter of which President Trump has proposed eliminating—have gone unanswered for weeks.

Once the [Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act](https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/newsroom/record/murray-de-lauro-call-out-trump-admins-lack-of-transparency-on-spending-demand-detailed-agency-spend-plans-be-submitted-as-required-by-law)

(<https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/newsroom/record/murray-de-lauro-call-out-trump-admins-lack-of-transparency-on-spending-demand-detailed-agency-spend-plans-be-submitted-as-required-by-law>).

took effect, all departments and agencies had 45 days to submit complete spending plans to the committees. The lawmakers noted that only some departments had provided plans, consistent with the act's requirements, by the April 29 deadline.

When the “skinny” budget came out earlier this month, DeLauro said it was difficult to gauge the full scope of Trump’s budget cuts. She said she expects that domestic investments would be cut by at least 23 percent.

—[Amelia Monroe](#) ([/search/?](#)

[a=Amelia%20Monroe](#)).

State AGs sue Trump administration over cuts to science grants

Attorneys general from 16 states filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration Wednesday over massive budget cuts to the National Science Foundation, which they claim violate the Constitution and will damage the U.S. economy.

Since President Trump took office in January, the White House has terminated more than 1,700 grants adding up to \$1.4 billion. The administration has also announced a cap on federal funding for indirect research costs, including money needed for space and equipment.

“This administration’s attacks on basic science and essential efforts to ensure diversity in STEM will weaken our economy and our national security,” New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a [press release](#)

(<https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2025/attorney->

[general-james-sues-trump-administration-protect-](#)

[scientific-research-and](#)), announcing the

lawsuit. “Putting politics over science will only set our country back, and I will continue to fight to protect critical scientific research and education.”

New York is joined in the lawsuit by California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, and Washington. All 16 states have Democratic attorneys general.

The lawsuit asks the court to block future cuts to NSF that are not approved by Congress and to reverse the cuts that have already been made by the administration.

—[Philip Athey](#) ([/search/?a=Philip%20Athey](#)).