



February 12, 2026

Ranking Member Garcia, Representative Subramanyam, and Representative Walkinshaw, thank you for inviting me today to speak about the damage done to federal workers, public services, and everyday Americans since January 2025.

My name is Faith Williams, and I am the Director of the Effective and Accountable Government Program at the Project On Government Oversight (POGO), a nonpartisan, independent watchdog that investigates, exposes, and champions reforms on systemic corruption, abuse of power, and waste. For more than 40 years, POGO has strived to ensure that our government serves everyone, not just the wealthy and well-connected.

When President Donald Trump took office a little more than a year ago, he came in with sweeping promises to alter the landscape of government and an unusual body to help do it: the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). An entity that acted as an agency when it was handy to assume authority and acted as a White House office when it was handy to avoid accountability, this effort — led by billionaire Elon Musk — took a chainsaw to government. By disregarding norms, regulations, and laws, DOGE wreaked havoc while failing miserably in its stated aim to save two trillion dollars. In fact, federal spending rose in FY 2025.

In addition to establishing DOGE, Trump signed a flurry of executive orders targeting the federal workforce. The administration has also attacked or undermined oversight bodies, whistleblowers, and watchdogs, including but not limited to inspectors general (fired en masse last January), the Office of Special Counsel, the Merit Systems Protection Board, the Office of Government Ethics, internal Department of Homeland Security watchdogs, and the Government Accountability Office, making it more difficult to investigate the impacts of these changes, shield the employees who remain, and protect the public from abuses of power. The result is generational damage to our merit-based civil service, a failure of government services, a flourishing culture of corruption and abuse of power, and a people whose faith in their government is nearing all-time lows.

A Decimated Civil Service

In Trump's first year in office, an estimated 317,000 federal employees have left or been forced out of government, a reduction the Cato Institute called the "largest peacetime workforce cut on record." Workforce cuts were neither thoughtful nor precise; rather, they reflect the administration's attacks on diversity, foreign aid, civil rights, consumer protection, and other programs, departments, agencies, and people deemed "woke." They have impacted senior Black officials, and Black women, in particular.

Just last week, the administration released its final rule to reclassify a portion of career civil servants as at-will employees. POGO anticipates that stripping employment protections from federal employees will make it easier to fire tens of thousands of workers and replace them with partisan loyalists.

Breakdowns in Government Services

From last January to March, the wait time for a call back from Social Security peaked at an average of two and a half hours. In August, the inspector general at Veterans Affairs reported “severe occupational staffing shortages” at VA facilities, a 50% increase from the prior fiscal year. Staffing cuts at the IRS prompted two tax watchdogs to warn the agency may struggle to maintain service levels this tax season. Many stories of impact are anecdotal for now; it will take years for a full accounting of the effect of the past year’s cuts.

Growing Corruption and Abuse of Power

The administration’s blitz on oversight bodies and whistleblowers has been accompanied by a pattern of corruption. A DOGE staffer signed a secret agreement to share sensitive Social Security data with an unidentified political advocacy group. An official from the Executive Office of the President oversees ethics at the White House. The border czar was allegedly recorded accepting \$50,000 from FBI agents posing as business executives seeking government contracts (which he denies), while the Department of Justice division devoted to combating public corruption has been gutted. Contracts are awarded to the president’s supporters, and the revolving door is spinning at full speed. The president and his family have grown immeasurably richer over the last year, announcing new business ventures around the world and jumping into the crypto market while the president is promoting its use and deregulation.

Failing Trust

According to the Pew Research Center, in December, just 17% of Americans said they trust the government to do what is right “just about always” or “most of the time,” one of the lowest levels in nearly 70 years.

Distrust is sadly not a new phenomenon, but this administration’s efforts to remodel the federal government have directly impacted people across the country and around the world. Immigrants, communities of color, women, LGBTQ people, and those relying on the social safety net have been especially harmed.

Solutions

Though there is an incredible amount of work to be done, much of this damage can be repaired. POGO has several solutions Congress can implement to restore the merit-based civil service, strengthen whistleblower protections, protect inspectors general and other watchdogs, combat corruption and abuse of power, and strengthen congressional oversight. I am happy to share more detailed proposals to address each of these solutions with you during and after the hearing.

There is an arrogance and a brutality in this administration’s approach toward our government and the people it serves. And there is a certain sly grin and winking nod that seems to imply that while many are losing out, a select few are more powerful and profitable than ever. This harms all of us.

Meaningful change will require Congress to be a powerful, engaged, representative body committed to rigorous oversight and ethical governance.

POGO is ready to work with each of you, with any member of Congress regardless of party, to repair what we can and create what we need to build the government that we, the people, deserve.