

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #570
DOGE | Elon Musk's Quest to Shrink the US
Government
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Transcript

[00:00:05] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about DOGE, the Department of Governmental Efficiency.

[00:00:31] It was established by Executive Order on Donald Trump's first day back in office and has been [plagued](#)¹ by [controversy](#)² ever since.

[00:00:39] So, in this episode, we'll look at what it did, what it still does, why it is loved and [loathed](#)³ in almost equal measure, and ask ourselves what happens next.

[00:00:50] OK then, let's get right into it and talk about DOGE.

[00:00:57] On Saturday, 22nd February, earlier this year, millions of American [federal](#)⁴ employees got the same email.

[00:01:06] It was, on one level, a simple request.

¹ badly affected or troubled by it for a long time

² public argument or disagreement

³ strongly hated

⁴ relating to the national government of a country (not local or state)

[00:01:10] It asked them to list five things that they achieved that week. They shouldn't [disclose](#)⁵ any [classified](#)⁶ information, and simple [bullet points](#)⁷ were fine.

[00:01:21] The email came from the OPM, the Office of Personnel Management, which is the US government's human resources agency.

[00:01:31] However, a quick [glance](#)⁸ at social media revealed the ultimate source of the email and the potential consequences of not responding.

[00:01:42] At 8.30 pm that evening, Elon Musk posted on X, "[Consistent with](#)⁹ President @realDonaldTrump's instructions, all [federal](#) employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week. Failure to respond will be taken as a [resignation](#)¹⁰."

[00:02:05] This was just over a month into the establishment of DOGE, the Department of Governmental Efficiency, and was one of its most [controversial](#)¹¹ acts.

⁵ show or tell something that was secret

⁶ kept secret by the government

⁷ short, simple lines of text, often shown with a dot before them

⁸ a quick look

⁹ matching or in agreement with

¹⁰ an act of quitting or leaving a job or office

¹¹ causing a lot of argument or disagreement

[00:02:16] To some, it was a perfectly fair request. These were [federal](#) employees, people whose salaries are paid by taxpayers, so they should be [answerable](#)¹² to the public. And this was hardly a difficult question to answer: list five things they did that week.

[00:02:35] To others, it was a [crude](#)¹³, [politically-charged](#)¹⁴ request, an act of [intimidation](#)¹⁵ [dressed up](#)¹⁶ as [accountability](#)¹⁷, less about measuring productivity and more about reminding people who held the power.

[00:02:51] And there was immediate confusion among [federal](#) employees, the government workers who received the email.

[00:02:59] Should they respond?

[00:03:00] What would happen if they didn't?

¹² having to explain or take responsibility

¹³ simple and not polite, rough

¹⁴ strongly connected to politics and likely to cause argument

¹⁵ making people feel afraid

¹⁶ made to look nicer or different than it really was, disguised as

¹⁷ responsibility for actions and being ready to explain them

[00:03:03] Some heads of [federal](#) agencies instructed their employees not to respond, others instructed them to respond, others to respond, but to their direct manager, not to the original email.

[00:03:18] Later that week, it was reported that around 1 million [federal](#) employees had responded to the email, but that still left around 1.5 million who had not.

[00:03:32] One of those who did respond was the White House Press Secretary, Karoline Leavitt. She proudly declared that she had responded, saying, “I do five things in about 10 minutes, and all [federal](#) workers should be working at the same [pace](#)¹⁸ that President Trump is working and moving. We have a country to save, and we want this [federal](#) government to be responsive to the needs of the American people.”

[00:04:00] The message was clear: to “Make America Great Again”, lazy [federal](#) employees needed to pick up the [pace](#), and the waste and inefficiency that had been [tolerated](#)¹⁹ under previous administrations, both Democratic and Republican, was no longer going to [cut the mustard](#)²⁰.

[00:04:20] America needed to be saved, and everyone had to [pull their weight](#)²¹.

¹⁸ speed of activity

¹⁹ allowed without stopping it

²⁰ be good enough

²¹ do their fair share of work

[00:04:26] Now, before we get to the question of how much waste and inefficiency there is thought to have been, and some theories about the motivations behind the organisation set up to [combat](#)²² it, we must go back to the start, to well before January 20th, the day that Donald Trump was [inaugurated](#)²³ for his second term.

[00:04:49] In fact, we need to go all the way back to before Trump even became the Republican nominee for the 2024 election.

[00:04:59] In September 2023, when multiple candidates were still [vying for](#)²⁴ the Republican nomination, a fundraising dinner was held at a former Facebook executive's Silicon Valley mansion.

[00:05:15] It was a \$50,000-a-head [fundraiser](#)²⁵, raising money for the campaign of the former healthcare entrepreneur, Vivek Ramaswamy.

[00:05:26] Elon Musk was one of the guests. As the evening went on, Musk started [musing on](#)²⁶ the idea of radically reducing the size of the [federal](#) government.

²² fight against it

²³ officially admitted as or named president

²⁴ competing strongly to get it

²⁵ an event to collect money for a cause or person

²⁶ thinking deeply about it

[00:05:40] He had bought Twitter a year earlier and had embarked on a [radical](#)²⁷ cost-cutting mission, [culling](#)²⁸ more than 80% of the staff.

[00:05:52] Despite the cries from critics that this would be the end of Twitter, that Musk didn't have the relevant experience with consumer software or social media to make it a success, Twitter — since rebranded as X — didn't die a painful death.

[00:06:10] A [flood](#)²⁹ of advertisers did leave, and it has had [its fair share of](#)³⁰ growing pains, but it actually has more active users now than it did before Elon Musk bought it.

[00:06:24] Musk [theorised](#)³¹ that he could [embark on](#)³² the same extreme cost-cutting measures at a governmental level.

[00:06:33] And just think of the savings to be made.

²⁷ very different from usual, extreme

²⁸ reducing the number of people by removing them

²⁹ a very large number

³⁰ more than enough of them

³¹ suggested the idea

³² start (something new or difficult)

[00:06:37] Twitter might not have been the most efficient company, but it was surely much more efficient than any government. And the numbers were **vastly**³³ different: Twitter had 8,000 or so employees, the federal government had around 3 million.

[00:06:57] It was a different scale, a less efficient and vastly larger beast, and all of these savings could be passed right back to the American people.

[00:07:09] This wasn't a political challenge, a question of persuading congressmen and women to support the cuts at a political level.

[00:07:17] It was a technological challenge, he said. Give me access to the systems, let me in, and I will find the waste and cut it.

[00:07:28] Now, Musk never officially supported Ramaswamy, and early the following year, he **dropped out**³⁴ of the Republican nomination race and officially **pledged**³⁵ support to Donald Trump.

[00:07:42] On July 13th, 2024, the same day as the attempted assassination, Elon Musk publicly tweeted out his support for Donald Trump's presidential campaign. As you will remember, Musk ended up becoming Trump's largest financial backer, spending \$290 million to help Donald Trump win re-election.

³³ greatly, by a very big amount

³⁴ quit or left before finishing

³⁵ promised formally

[00:08:07] This isn't the time to [speculate](#)³⁶ about his motivations for this, but before long, the two men appeared to be [joined at the hip](#)³⁷.

[00:08:17] And one of Trump's campaign [pledges](#)³⁸ was to bring in Elon Musk to lead a task force aimed at reducing government spending.

[00:08:29] This was, in many ways, a continuation of his earlier [pledge](#)³⁹ to "[drain](#)⁴⁰ the [swamp](#)⁴¹", but now it seemed less politically-motivated, more about using taxpayer money more efficiently and for American interests rather than targeting career politicians.

[00:08:50] And sure enough, Trump was re-elected, and on his first day in office, he signed an Executive Order establishing the Department of Governmental Efficiency - DOGE, for short.

³⁶ guess about it without knowing all the facts

³⁷ very close or always together

³⁸ serious promises

³⁹ a serious promise

⁴⁰ remove or clear

⁴¹ a wet, muddy area; here, it means a place full of problems or corruption

[00:09:03] As you might know, the acronym DOGE is somewhat of a joke. Doge was an early internet meme—a picture of a Japanese shiba inu dog with some text on it—and there was even a cryptocurrency called Dogecoin, which was the first “meme coin”.

[00:09:22] After Musk and Trump **floated**⁴² the idea of a “government efficiency commission,” a user on X suggested the acronym “DOGE,” and that was it.

[00:09:33] It might have seemed like a joke, a **flippant**⁴³ idea created at a dinner party and **hastily**⁴⁴ turned into reality, but there was a lot of planning that went into it.

[00:09:46] The first question was about how to structure this department, or commission.

[00:09:53] A government clearly isn't like a company with a CEO, who can create and **dismantle**⁴⁵ departments and positions **at will**⁴⁶. There are systems of checks and

⁴² suggested

⁴³ not serious

⁴⁴ done very quickly, without care

⁴⁵ take apart or break up

⁴⁶ whenever they want

balances, laws in place to prevent a [rogue actor](#)⁴⁷ from coming in and making [sweeping](#)⁴⁸ changes that are not in the best interests of the country.

[00:10:13] So Musk and his team had to get creative.

[00:10:19] Instead of creating an entirely new department, which would have been [fraught with](#)⁴⁹ legal and political issues, they took an existing department, renamed it and expanded its [remit](#)⁵⁰.

[00:10:34] The United States Digital Service, or USDS, was created in 2014 under Barack Obama, and was intended to, and I'm quoting directly, "deliver better government services to the American people through technology and design."

[00:10:54] The Executive Order signed by Trump on his first day in office renamed it as the United States DOGE Service, which [conveniently](#)⁵¹ meant it could still have the same [initials](#)⁵²: USDS.

⁴⁷ a person who does things in a dangerous or dishonest way

⁴⁸ very large, affecting many things

⁴⁹ full of

⁵⁰ area of responsibility or power

⁵¹ in a way that was easy or helpful

⁵² the first letters of the words in the title

[00:11:10] And within the renamed and reorganised USDS sat DOGE: the Department of Governmental Efficiency.

[00:11:20] Now, it still isn't completely clear what the difference between the USDS and DOGE is, and there are several other agencies that sit under or alongside it. In the interests of simplicity, I'll call them all DOGE going forward.

[00:11:39] And DOGE had big plans.

[00:11:43] In late October of 2024, shortly before the election, Elon Musk had claimed that he could cut the [federal](#) budget by at least \$2 trillion, around one-third of its total.

[00:12:00] Importantly, \$2 trillion is higher than the discretionary spending budget.

[00:12:07] Now, to explain why this is important, in the United States, [federal](#) government spending is split into three categories: mandatory spending, discretionary spending, and interest on government debt.

[00:12:25] Mandatory spending refers to the money that the government is [obligated](#)⁵³ to spend on its citizens, including programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

⁵³ forced to do it because of rules or law

[00:12:36] Interest on government debt is the interest the US government pays on its [bonds](#)⁵⁴, which it is [obliged](#)⁵⁵ to pay to maintain faith in the US dollar.

[00:12:46] Discretionary spending is the only category that is “optional”, which can be increased or decreased by Congress. This includes things like defence, foreign aid, transportation and education.

[00:13:03] Mandatory spending is around 60% of the total, discretionary spending is 27%, and the remaining 13% is interest on government debt.

[00:13:15] Together, it makes up almost \$7 trillion per year, and there was Musk claiming he could [trim](#)⁵⁶ this to more like \$5 trillion.

[00:13:28] Now, there were few people who would claim that the US government was this [slick](#)⁵⁷, well-oiled machine that was as efficient as it could be. Of course, there was waste, of course, there were people who weren't working particularly hard.

[00:13:42] Perhaps there were some people who weren't doing any work at all.

⁵⁴ official papers saying the government owes money and will pay it back

⁵⁵ made to do it because of law

⁵⁶ cut down or reduce

⁵⁷ smooth and efficient

[00:13:47] We're talking about millions of people, a [vast](#)⁵⁸ bureaucracy, a government. A little waste was to be expected.

[00:13:56] But to say that 30% of government spending was wasteful, especially given that such a large amount of government spending is mandatory, with the money going to people the government is legally required to give it to, that seemed extreme.

[00:14:15] But Elon Musk, even to his greatest critics, had an established [track record](#)⁵⁹ of pushing through change that was thought to be impossible, whether it was Twitter, mass-market electric cars or reusable rockets.

[00:14:32] And almost immediately, DOGE got to work.

[00:14:37] It was purposefully kept small, with teams of one team lead, one engineer, one HR specialist and one lawyer. These DOGE teams were placed within [federal](#) agencies, but instead of a traditional, consultant-led approach, the problem of increasing efficiency was attacked from a technical [angle](#)⁶⁰.

[00:15:04] Most often, DOGE employees were not previously [federal](#) workers, and instead were highly talented, and often very young, computer programmers.

⁵⁸ very big

⁵⁹ history of what he had done in the past

⁶⁰ a particular way of looking at the problem or situation

[00:15:16] They were embedded within government agencies, given access to government computer systems, and allowed to get to work.

[00:15:26] The [hypothesis](#)⁶¹ was that by using AI and technical [wizardry](#)⁶², DOGE would be able to identify wasteful spending in a way that previous [federal](#) systems would not.

[00:15:40] This huge [fraud](#)⁶³ and waste that some people thought was going on within the US government would have nowhere to hide; it would be identified, stopped, and the savings passed back to the American taxpayer.

[00:15:56] However, almost immediately, the [controversy](#) started.

[00:16:01] At the start of February, reports emerged that DOGE had gained access to the Treasury Department's payment system, which handles everything from Social Security checks to tax refunds.

[00:16:14] This [raised alarm bells](#)⁶⁴.

[00:16:17] Democratic lawmakers, like Senator Elizabeth Warren, warned that giving an unelected group like DOGE access to such sensitive information was a recipe for disaster.

⁶¹ idea or theory

⁶² great skill, like magic

⁶³ cheating to get money or advantage

⁶⁴ made people feel worried or afraid

[00:16:29] What if there were errors? What if the data was misused?

[00:16:35] After all, Musk's companies, like SpaceX and Tesla, have billions in government contracts.

[00:16:44] Critics, including unions and consumer advocacy groups, [cried foul](#)⁶⁵, arguing that this was a massive conflict of interest.

[00:16:54] A lawsuit was filed on February 3rd, alleging that DOGE's access to the Treasury's systems [violated](#)⁶⁶ [federal](#) privacy laws.

[00:17:03] And then there were the [layoffs](#)⁶⁷.

[00:17:06] DOGE didn't just want to modernise technology; it wanted to [shrink](#)⁶⁸ the federal workforce dramatically.

[00:17:15] By April 2025, DOGE claimed to have saved \$150 billion through a combination of contract cancellations, [grant](#)⁶⁹ terminations, and workforce reductions.

[00:17:30] But these cuts came at a cost.

⁶⁵ said it was wrong or unfair

⁶⁶ broke (a law or rule)

⁶⁷ the act of ending workers' jobs

⁶⁸ make it smaller

⁶⁹ money given by the government for special purposes

[00:17:34] For example, the Department of Health and Human Services saw 20,000 positions [slashed](#)⁷⁰, including roles at the National Institutes of Health, which funds critical medical research.

[00:17:48] One analysis estimated that these cuts could lead to a \$10 billion loss in economic activity and 44,000 jobs across the country.

[00:18:00] After all, these were 44,000 people, enough to fit a football stadium, who were now out of work, might now depend on the government for assistance, and be [radically](#)⁷¹ cutting down their own discretionary spending on all the sort of stuff that keeps the American economy driving forward.

[00:18:20] The United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, was hit even harder, with most of its programmes [gutted](#)⁷², [disbanded](#)⁷³ completely.

⁷⁰ cut by a large amount

⁷¹ in an extreme or complete way

⁷² wiped out, destroyed

⁷³ ended or broken up

[00:18:33] Critics pointed out that these cuts weren't just about [trimming fat](#)⁷⁴; they were [dismantling](#)⁷⁵ programs that supported [vulnerable](#)⁷⁶ populations, both at home and abroad.

[00:18:45] By May of 2025, some estimates linked DOGE's foreign aid cuts to 300,000 deaths, mostly children.

[00:18:56] To this, the reaction of Musk and Trump can be [summed up](#)⁷⁷ as "well, it shouldn't be up to the American taxpayer to pay for all this stuff."

[00:19:06] Like it or not, Trump won the election on an America-first [mandate](#)⁷⁸, and this was nothing if not America first.

[00:19:16] And alongside this, there were plenty of examples of [federal](#) government spending that [raised a few eyebrows](#)⁷⁹, even to Trump's greatest critics.

⁷⁴ cutting away waste or unneeded parts

⁷⁵ taking apart or breaking up

⁷⁶ weak and easily hurt

⁷⁷ expressed in a short way

⁷⁸ direction or authority

⁷⁹ surprised or shocked some people

[00:19:26] Funding for a transgender medical clinic in India, \$20 million to create a Sesame Street show in Iraq, or even the discovery that the US Air Force had been charged \$1,300 per reheatable coffee cup by Boeing.

[00:19:47] DOGE's website proudly displayed a "Wall of Receipts," listing thousands of terminated contracts and [grants](#)⁸⁰, with savings they claimed reached \$205 billion by August 2025, a savings of \$1,273.29 per taxpayer.

[00:20:10] To many Americans, this was refreshing, a government finally taking a [hard](#)⁸¹ look at where their tax dollars were going, and, most importantly, acting to fix it.

[00:20:22] Indeed, a March 2025 NBC poll found that 46% of voters thought DOGE was a good idea in principle.

[00:20:33] But the critics weren't having it.

[00:20:36] They argued that DOGE's savings were [wildly](#)⁸² [exaggerated](#)⁸³.

[00:20:41] Firstly, the \$2 trillion figure that was [floated](#) in the days before the election was reduced to \$1 trillion shortly after DOGE was established, then to \$150 billion by April 2025, a reduction of more than 90%.

⁸⁰ amounts of money given by the government for a special purpose

⁸¹ strong or firm

⁸² in an extreme way

⁸³ made to sound bigger or more important than they were

[00:21:00] And there were claims that it would actually have a negative effect; there wouldn't just be no savings, it would end up costing the country money.

[00:21:10] Independent analyses, like one from the Internal Revenue Service, warned that DOGE's cuts to tax enforcement could actually increase the [federal deficit](#)⁸⁴ by hundreds of billions, as the IRS would [struggle](#)⁸⁵ to collect revenue.

[00:21:27] In other words, these cost "savings" would be more than [offset](#)⁸⁶ by losses in tax revenue, meaning the country lost, not saved money.

[00:21:39] And then there were the accounting errors and "creative" savings calculations.

[00:21:45] Journalists uncovered billions of dollars in [miscounting](#)⁸⁷, with some "savings" tied to contracts that had already been cancelled before DOGE even existed, and other "savings" accounting for the absolute maximum that could possibly be spent, and the real number almost always coming in much lower.

[00:22:07] And then there was what we can characterise as "The Musk Factor".

[00:22:13] If DOGE was controversial, its leader was even more so.

⁸⁴ when the government spends more money than it gets

⁸⁵ have difficulty handling it

⁸⁶ balanced or cancelled

⁸⁷ counting wrongly

[00:22:19] Elon Musk, the billionaire behind Tesla, SpaceX, and X, was the face of DOGE, even if he was officially just a “special government employee”, technically only allowed to work 130 days a year.

[00:22:35] His involvement was a [double-edged sword](#)⁸⁸.

[00:22:39] On one hand, his reputation as a [disruptor](#)⁸⁹ gave DOGE [credibility](#)⁹⁰ among those who wanted [radical](#) change. He wasn't a career politician; he was a modern-day Thomas Edison —a tech genius and entrepreneur who had run wildly successful companies. If anyone was up to the challenge, it was him.

[00:23:02] On the other hand, Musk's involvement raised [red flags](#)⁹¹, [tainting](#)⁹² the project.

[00:23:08] His businesses rely heavily on government contracts; SpaceX alone has deals worth billions with NASA and the Department of Defence.

⁸⁸ something that had both good and bad results

⁸⁹ a person that changed industry in a big way

⁹⁰ people's belief that he could be trusted

⁹¹ warning signs of danger or problems

⁹² making it seem dirty or bad

[00:23:18] Critics pointed out that Musk's access to [federal](#) systems could benefit his companies while [harming](#)⁹³ competitors. He was, after all, being given [unfettered](#)⁹⁴ access to government systems, something that was perhaps worth hundreds of billions to his companies.

[00:23:39] By April 2025, just a few months after DOGE was established, the [cracks](#)⁹⁵ were starting to show.

[00:23:47] Protests erupted across the country, with [chants](#)⁹⁶ of "Elon Musk has to go" heard outside Tesla [showrooms](#)⁹⁷.

[00:23:55] In Manhattan, demonstrators waved signs reading "No Trump, No Musk, No Fascist USA."

⁹³ causing damage to

⁹⁴ not controlled or limited

⁹⁵ problems or weaknesses

⁹⁶ repeated shouting of words or phrases by a crowd

⁹⁷ large rooms where products were shown to customers

[00:24:03] There were organised [boycotts](#)⁹⁸ of Tesla, Musk's electric car company. Sales dropped dramatically, most [prominently](#)⁹⁹ in Europe but also in the US, and this was followed by a crash in the share price.

[00:24:18] Musk was forced to [intervene](#)¹⁰⁰, and in April, he announced that he would be leaving DOGE to focus on Tesla.

[00:24:27] By the start of May, he was officially gone.

[00:24:31] Now, although its creator, and the man most associated with it, is no longer involved, DOGE is still active, and its official [mandate](#) runs until July 2026.

[00:24:46] So, what does the future hold for DOGE?

[00:24:49] As of September 2025, although it is not in the news as much as earlier in the year, it's still an important question.

[00:24:59] President Trump could extend DOGE's [mandate](#) with another executive order, and there's talk of states like Oklahoma and Texas launching their own DOGE-inspired initiatives.

⁹⁸ refusals to buy or use something from it, as a protest

⁹⁹ in a way that was very easy to see

¹⁰⁰ step in to stop or change what was happening

[00:25:12] Even some European leaders have expressed curiosity about the concept, wondering if a similar approach could work across the Atlantic.

[00:25:21] But the road ahead is far from [smooth](#)¹⁰¹.

[00:25:25] The organisation is still [plagued](#) by legal battles.

[00:25:29] And as for public opinion, it remains split.

[00:25:33] Younger Americans especially [disapprove](#)¹⁰² of DOGE, and older, especially Republican-leaning voters, support it.

[00:25:43] For its supporters, DOGE is a bold experiment in making government leaner and more accountable, a chance to finally [tackle](#)¹⁰³ the [bureaucracy](#)¹⁰⁴ that's been slowing America down.

¹⁰¹ without problems or difficulty

¹⁰² think it is wrong or bad

¹⁰³ deal with

¹⁰⁴ a system of government with many rules and officials

[00:25:56] For its critics, it is a **reckless¹⁰⁵ power grab¹⁰⁶**, one that risks **dismantling** vital services, **eroding¹⁰⁷** public trust, and furthermore, one that looks like it will even cost, not save, the country money.

[00:26:11] Whether it is a **stroke of genius¹⁰⁸** or a spectacular **misstep¹⁰⁹**, one thing is certain: DOGE has **sparked¹¹⁰** a conversation about what government should be, who it should serve, and how it should be run.

[00:26:26] And that conversation, love it or **loathe¹¹¹** it, isn't going away anytime soon.

[00:26:33] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on DOGE.

[00:26:37] I hope it's been an interesting one and that you've learnt something new.

[00:26:41] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

¹⁰⁵ not caring about risks or dangers

¹⁰⁶ taking power in a forceful or unfair way

¹⁰⁷ slowly wearing away or weakening

¹⁰⁸ a very smart or clever idea

¹⁰⁹ a mistake

¹¹⁰ started or caused

¹¹¹ hate strongly

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #570
DOGE | Elon Musk's Quest to Shrink the US Government

[00:26:45] What do you think of DOGE? Do you think it's a fantastic idea and that every country should follow its example, that it was a terrible, [politicised¹¹²](#) [plot¹¹³](#), or somewhere in between?

[00:26:56] For the members among you, you can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:27:05] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:27:11] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

¹¹² connected to politics

¹¹³ secret plan

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Plagued	badly affected or troubled by it for a long time
Controversy	public argument or disagreement
Loathed	strongly hated
Federal	relating to the national government of a country (not local or state)
Disclose	show or tell something that was secret
Classified	kept secret by the government
Bullet points	short, simple lines of text, often shown with a dot before them
Glance	a quick look
Consistent with	matching or in agreement with
Resignation	an act of quitting or leaving a job or office
Controversial	causing a lot of argument or disagreement
Answerable	having to explain or take responsibility
Crude	simple and not polite, rough

Politically-charged	strongly connected to politics and likely to cause argument
Intimidation	making people feel afraid
Dressed up	made to look nicer or different than it really was, disguised as
Accountability	responsibility for actions and being ready to explain them
Pace	speed of activity
Tolerated	allowed without stopping it
Cut the mustard	be good enough
Pull their weight	do their fair share of work
Combat	fight against it
Inaugurated	officially admitted as or named president
Vying for	competing strongly to get it
Fundraiser	an event to collect money for a cause or person
Musing on	thinking deeply about it
Radical	very different from usual, extreme
Culling	reducing the number of people by removing them

Flood	a very large number
Its fair share of	more than enough of them
Theorised	suggested the idea
Embark on	start (something new or difficult)
Vastly	greatly, by a very big amount
Dropped out	quit or left before finishing
Pledged	promised formally
Speculate	guess about it without knowing all the facts
Joined at the hip	very close or always together
Pledges	serious promises
Pledge	a serious promise
Drain	remove or clear
Swamp	a wet, muddy area; here, it means a place full of problems or corruption
Floated	suggested
Flippant	not serious

Hastily	done very quickly, without care
Dismantle	take apart or break up
At will	whenever they want
Rogue actor	a person who does things in a dangerous or dishonest way
Sweeping	very large, affecting many things
Fraught with	full of
Remit	area of responsibility or power
Conveniently	in a way that was easy or helpful
Initials	the first letters of the words in the title
Obligated	forced to do it because of rules or law
Bonds	official papers saying the government owes money and will pay it back
Obliged	made to do it because of law
Trim	cut down or reduce
Slick	smooth and efficient
Vast	very big

Track record	history of what he had done in the past
Angle	a particular way of looking at the problem or situation
Hypothesis	idea or theory
Wizardry	great skill, like magic
Fraud	cheating to get money or advantage
Raised alarm bells	made people feel worried or afraid
Cried foul	said it was wrong or unfair
Violated	broke (a law or rule)
Layoffs	the act of ending workers' jobs
Shrink	make it smaller
Grant	money given by the government for special purposes
Slashed	cut by a large amount
Radically	in an extreme or complete way
Gutted	wiped out, destroyed
Disbanded	ended or broken up

Trimming fat	cutting away waste or unneeded parts
Dismantling	taking apart or breaking up
Vulnerable	weak and easily hurt
Summed up	expressed in a short way
Mandate	direction or command
Raised a few eyebrows	surprised or shocked some people
Grants	amounts of money given by the government for a special purpose
Hard	strong or firm
Wildly	in an extreme way
Exaggerated	made to sound bigger or more important than they were
Deficit	when the government spends more money than it gets
Struggle	have difficulty handling it
Offset	balanced or cancelled
Miscounting	counting wrongly
Double-edged sword	something that had both good and bad results

Disruptor	a person that changed industry in a big way
Credibility	people's belief that he could be trusted
Red flags	warning signs of danger or problems
Tainting	making it seem dirty or bad
Harming	causing damage to
Unfettered	not controlled or limited
Cracks	problems or weaknesses
Chants	repeated shouting of words or phrases by a crowd
Showrooms	large rooms where products were shown to customers
Boycotts	refusals to buy or use something from it, as a protest
Prominently	in a way that was very easy to see
Intervene	step in to stop or change what was happening
Smooth	without problems or difficulty
Disapprove	think it is wrong or bad
Tackle	deal with

Bureaucracy	a system of government with many rules and officials
Reckless	not caring about risks or dangers
Power grab	taking power in a forceful or unfair way
Eroding	slowly wearing away or weakening
Stroke of genius	a very smart or clever idea
Misstep	a mistake
Sparked	started or caused
Loathe	hate strongly
Politicised	connected to politics
Plot	secret plan

Language spotlight

1. Cut the mustard

- **Meaning:** To be good enough or to do something successfully.
- **Synonyms:** succeed, perform well, measure up
- **Antonyms:** fail, fall short, not be enough
- **Examples:**
 - Many people doubted she could handle the new job, but she really **cut the mustard**.
 - His excuses didn't **cut the mustard** with the teacher — she still gave him detention.

2. Pull their weight

- **Meaning:** To do your fair share of work in a group.
- **Synonyms:** contribute, carry one's share, do one's part
- **Antonyms:** be lazy, avoid work, let others do everything
- **Examples:**

- In a team project, everyone needs to **pull their weight**.
- She's tired of her roommate never cleaning and not **pulling his weight** around the house.

3. Joined at the hip

- **Meaning:** To be very close to someone and spend a lot of time together.
- **Synonyms:** inseparable, very close, always together
- **Antonyms:** distant, separated, apart
- **Examples:**
 - During university, they were **joined at the hip**, always studying and partying together.
 - Since their business started, the two founders have been **joined at the hip**.

4. Raised a few eyebrows

- **Meaning:** To cause surprise or mild shock.
- **Synonyms:** surprised, shocked, puzzled

- **Antonyms:** expected, unsurprising, normal
- **Examples:**
 - His decision to quit his high-paying job **raised a few eyebrows**.
 - Wearing trainers to the wedding definitely **raised a few eyebrows**.

5. Stroke of genius

- **Meaning:** A very smart or clever idea.
- **Synonyms:** brilliant idea, clever thought, inspiration
- **Antonyms:** foolish idea, mistake, error
- **Examples:**
 - Adding solar panels to the design was a **stroke of genius**.
 - The teacher's use of music to explain grammar was a **stroke of genius**.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. What was the purpose of creating the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)?
 - a) To fight climate change
 - b) To improve government services and reduce waste
 - c) To replace the President's Cabinet
 - d) To control local elections

2. What was one criticism of DOGE mentioned in the podcast?
 - a) It was too small to matter
 - b) It was created secretly without public knowledge
 - c) It had too many scientists in charge
 - d) It might be politically charged

3. How did people react to the DOGE announcement?
 - a) Everyone supported it immediately

- b) It was ignored by the media
- c) It created debate and disagreement
- d) It replaced the FBI

4. Why was the name “DOGE” considered unusual?

- a) It is also the name of a famous meme cryptocurrency
- b) It comes from an Italian word for “king”
- c) It was chosen randomly by a computer
- d) It means “dog” in another language

5. What image did Trump use when he promised to fight inefficiency in government?

- a) Building a wall
- b) Draining the swamp
- c) Cutting a cake
- d) Riding a wave

True or False

6. The Department of Government Efficiency was given unlimited power over all US agencies. (True/False)

7. The podcast mentioned that DOGE had support from younger Americans.
(True/False)

8. The idea of DOGE was partly compared to Elon Musk's style of running companies.
(True/False)

9. The podcast said DOGE solved most of the government's problems very quickly.
(True/False)

10. Some European leaders have shown interest in the idea of DOGE. (True/False)

Fill-in-the-Blank

11. A flood of advertisers did leave, and it has had its fair _____ of growing pains, but it actually has more active users now than it did before Elon Musk bought it.

12. There are systems of checks and balances, laws in place to prevent a rogue _____ from coming in and making sweeping changes that are not in the best interests of the country.

13. Reports emerged that DOGE had gained access to the Treasury Department's payment system, which raised _____ bells.
14. Critics, including unions and consumer advocacy groups, _____ foul, arguing that this was a massive conflict of interest.
15. Critics pointed out that these cuts weren't just about _____ fat.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does **plagued** mean in the context of the podcast?

- a) Decorated beautifully
- b) Constantly troubled by problems
- c) Celebrated in public
- d) Paid for by taxes

17. What does **fraught with** mean?

- a) Full of danger or problems
- b) Easy and safe
- c) Empty of meaning

d) Very exciting

18. What does **intimidation** mean?

a) Making someone feel scared to control them

b) Teaching someone carefully

c) Encouraging someone kindly

d) Talking loudly in a group

19. What does **reckless** mean?

a) Very careful and safe

b) Intelligent and wise

c) Slow and patient

d) Without thinking about risks or danger

20. What does **bureaucracy** mean?

a) A system with lots of rules and paperwork

- b) A new kind of political party
- c) A group of soldiers in government
- d) A fair and simple system

Answers

1. b) To improve government services and reduce waste
2. d) It might be politically charged
3. c) It created debate and disagreement
4. a) It is also the name of a famous meme cryptocurrency
5. b) Draining the swamp
6. False
7. False
8. True
9. False
10. True
11. share
12. actor
13. alarm
14. cried
15. trimming
16. b) Constantly troubled by problems
17. a) Full of danger or problems
18. a) Making someone feel scared to control them
19. d) Without thinking about risks or danger
20. a) A system with lots of rules and paperwork