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Plaskett Attacks Musk's Role in DOGE, But Wasteful Spending Findings Tell a Different Story

While Plaskett raised concerns about DOGE's access to federal payment systems, the initiative has exposed wasteful USAID spending, including \$43 million for a gas station in Afghanistan and \$335 million for a failed power plant project.

Federal / **Published On February 07, 2025 06:19 AM /**

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Elon Musk.

Democrats on the House Ways and Means Committee, including V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, held a press conference on Thursday titled "Taxpayer Privacy After Musk Meddling." During the event, Plaskett voiced concerns over the Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE) access to sensitive federal data.

She questioned the role of Elon Musk, stating, "Why Elon Musk a special government employee, whatever the hell that means. That's a new term that's come up, who has nothing, was never elected to anything, is an outside billionaire consultant and those of faith department have access to the most sensitive federal payment systems and confidential tax information of millions of Americans now they have access to much more extensive than they've even disclosed to the public."

Contrary to Plaskett's comments, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has stated that DOGE's access to the Treasury's payment systems is strictly read-only — a statement that has been made clear several times in recent days by multiple officials of the Trump administration. Mr. Bessent said the intent of the read-only access is solely for analyzing fund allocations. This measure aims to enhance transparency and ensure efficient use of taxpayer money.

Plaskett's targeting of Musk's role in the initiative, stating that he was "never elected to anything," fails to recognize that Musk was directly appointed by President Donald Trump, who was elected by the American people and tasked him with leading DOGE to identify and eliminate wasteful government spending. The White House has defended Musk's role, stating that his leadership in government efficiency is part of a broader effort to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly.

DOGE, under the leadership Musk, has identified several instances of wasteful spending within the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Notable findings include:

- Allocation of \$1.5 million to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Serbia's workplaces and business communities.
- Expenditure of \$70,000 for the production of a DEI-themed musical in Ireland.
- Investment of \$2.5 million in electric vehicles for Vietnam.
- Funding of \$47,000 for a transgender opera in Colombia.
- Support of \$32,000 for a transgender comic book in Peru.
- Provision of \$2 million for sex change procedures and LGBT activism in Guatemala.
- Allocation of \$6 million to fund tourism initiatives in Egypt.

These expenditures have raised questions about the agency's financial oversight and prioritization of resources.

In response to these revelations, Senator Joni Ernst has accused USAID of "willful sabotage of congressional oversight" and financial mismanagement. She highlighted contentious expenditures, including \$1 million for the Wuhan lab and \$9 million in aid that allegedly reached terrorists. Ernst criticized USAID for obstructing oversight and misleading her staff, suggesting the agency intentionally abused security systems and misrepresented data transparency. She has called for a thorough investigation into USAID's financial practices.

DOGE's efforts have brought significant attention to potential inefficiencies and mismanagement within federal agencies. The initiative continues to advocate for transparency and accountability in government spending.

President Donald Trump ordered the General Services Administration to terminate all media contracts following backlash over federal funds being used for news outlet subscriptions. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt confirmed the cessation of these payments.

Republican lawmakers have universally expressed support for DOGE's mission. Senator John Kennedy praised the initiative's efforts to eliminate government waste, stating, "It's about time we had someone with the guts to tackle the rampant inefficiencies in our federal agencies." Similarly, Senator Ernst, leading the Senate DOGE Caucus, introduced the "DRAIN THE SWAMP Act," aiming to decentralize federal agencies by relocating a portion of their workforce outside Washington, D.C., to promote efficiency and reduce bureaucratic bloat.

Other instances of U.S. AID waste:

Afghanistan:

- **Gas Station in Sheberghan:** A highly criticized project where the U.S. Department of Defense, through USAID, spent nearly \$43 million to build what has been called "the world's most expensive gas station" in Sheberghan, Afghanistan. The cost was 86 times higher than a similar station in Pakistan, with no clear demand or infrastructure for natural gas vehicles in Afghanistan.
- **Counter-Narcotics Efforts:** Despite spending around \$8 billion since 2001 on counter-narcotics programs, Afghanistan has continued to be a global leader in illicit opium production. These efforts have been largely ineffective, with opium production actually increasing in some years.
- **Unsustainable Projects:** USAID has been involved in projects that have either been abandoned or never utilized effectively, like:
 - A \$335 million diesel-fueled power plant that did not meet expectations.
 - A \$3 million cold-and-dry storage facility in Helmand that went unused due to lack of local business utilization.
 - An \$8.4 million project aimed at eradicating poppy fields but failed to significantly impact heroin production.
- **Marriott Hotel Project:** An attempt to build a Marriott Hotel complex in Kabul, costing \$60 million, resulted in an unfinished, uninhabitable structure that now requires ongoing protection costs due to its proximity to the U.S. Embassy.

Other Notable Instances:

- **General Oversight and Fraud:** SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction) has highlighted numerous instances where funds were misused due to corruption, poor planning, and lack of oversight. This includes funds that ended up supporting the Taliban through taxation or by directly funding ghost workers (non-existent employees on payroll).
- **Failed Schools and Clinics:** Billions in aid have gone to build medical clinics without basic utilities or schools without students, many of which were part of USAID projects criticized for lack of follow-through or sustainability.