



U.S. President Donald Trump dances after speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference, CPAC, on Feb. 22, 2025, in Oxon Hill, Md. (AP/Jose Luis Magana)



by Michael Sean Winters

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@michaelswinters](#)

**[Join the Conversation](#)**

February 26, 2025

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Darn. Weren't you looking forward to reading the responses from employees at the CIA who received the email from Elon Musk telling them to explain what they did the previous week or risk losing their job? I was dying to know which secret agents they contacted, whose phone they tapped, and which foreign leaders were having an affair.

Then some bureaucrats — you know, the agents of the "Deep State" — rebutted Musk's request, saying that responses were "optional." Party poopers. Conspiracy theorists the world over were deeply, deeply disappointed.

Then President Donald Trump jumped into the fray and cleared things up. During a press availability with French President Emmanuel Macron, [Trump said](#) he supported Musk's demand. "What he's doing is saying, 'Are you actually working?' " the president said. "And then, if you don't answer, like, you're sort of semi-fired or you're fired, because a lot of people aren't answering because they don't even exist."

So, maybe we will get those CIA secrets after all?

During Trump II, anyone committed to sanity has to view confusion within the administration as a good day. It tends to be preferable to clarity.

Trump's team at the United Nations was certainly clear on Monday. The U.S. on Feb. 24 joined Russia, Belarus, Iran, North Korea and 12 other nations friendly to Moscow in opposing a resolution that acknowledged a most obvious fact, that Russia invaded Ukraine. Truth can be so inconvenient.

The Trump administration was also clear about its intent to shutter the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). [Two thousand staffers](#) were fired and many more were put on administrative leave. The BBC reported that the earlier round of cuts at USAID already resulted in the closing of 1,100 communal kitchens in war-torn Sudan. "People are screaming from hunger in the streets," one of the organizers of one emergency aid station told the BBC.

Advertisement

People who are [literally starving to death](#) are not the kind of people Trump or Musk deign to consider when they are looking to cut spending to justify tax cuts for rich people like themselves. I mean, really, think of the burden of being a billionaire. They deserve some love too. I am waiting for [JD Vance to jump in with some theological defense](#) of the USAID cuts. Didn't Jesus say, "The poor you will always have with you"?

There was a time when conservatives understood that there is a cost to disrupting society. On May 9, 1770, Edmund Burke introduced a series of resolutions on behalf of the Whig Party, criticizing Lord North's decision to repeal most of the taxes levied against the American colonies, but leaving the duty of tea in place. During this famous speech, Burke said:

If ever there was in all the Proceedings of Government a rule that is fundamental, universal, invariable it is this that you ought never to attempt a measure of authority you are not morally sure you can go through with. For by doing otherwise, you risque the whole stock and fund of Government at a single cast of Chance. ... All is lost.

That is the voice of conservative governance. But Burke was concerned with principle and Trump and Musk are concerned only with striking a pose.

If there are any true conservatives left in today's Republican Party, they should stand up to the chaos and the diminution of the moral source of governmental authority that Trump's haphazard approach to government has unleashed. Unfortunately, the fear they will be primaried has wedded itself to the GOP's animus toward government, and they sit silently while the president robs them of the authority the Constitution assigns to the Congress.

And where are the Democrats? It is no good saying that the American people made their bed and they must now lie in it. That posture would be permissible were not real harm to real people being visited upon the nation by Trump's recklessness.

Every day, leaders of the Democrats should be highlighting those who are being harmed: children with cancer whose clinical trials have been ended, the elderly in nursing homes who rely on [Medicaid to pay for their care](#), the [starving people of Sudan](#) whose food aid was eliminated, the special needs child in school, the

struggling single mother who depends upon the Affordable Care Act to cover the costs of giving birth, the brave fighters in Ukraine.

This is a dark time for our nation. The only thing to do when it is dark is to shine a light on the darkness.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)