

Top Social Security official exits after clash with Musk's DOGE over data

Yet another top career staffer is leaving the administration amid a disagreement over a request by Elon Musk's team for sensitive government information.

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The acting commissioner of the Social Security Administration left her job this weekend after a clash with billionaire Elon Musk's U.S. DOGE Service over its attempts to access sensitive government records, three people familiar with her departure said Monday.

Michelle King, who spent several decades at the agency before being named its acting commissioner last month, left her position Sunday after the disagreement, the people said.

President Donald Trump appointed Leland Dudek, a manager in charge of Social Security's anti-fraud office, as acting commissioner while Frank Bisignano, the president's nominee for permanent commissioner, is vetted by the Senate, according to three individuals who spoke on the condition of anonymity to talk candidly. A public announcement is expected this week. Dudek had posted positive remarks on social media about DOGE's efforts to cut costs and search for fraud in federal agencies, according to two of the individuals.

"President Trump has nominated the highly qualified and talented Frank Bisignano to lead the Social Security Administration, and we expect him to be swiftly confirmed in the coming weeks," White House spokesman Harrison Fields said in a statement. "In the meantime, the agency will be led by a career Social Security anti-fraud expert as the acting commissioner. President Trump is committed to appointing the best and most qualified individuals who are dedicated to working on behalf of the American people, not to appease the bureaucracy that has failed them for far too long."

In selecting Dudek, Trump bypassed dozens of other senior executives who sat higher in the agency's leadership hierarchy, touching off alarm in and around the agency, which has already faced years of budget and staffing difficulties. "At this rate, they will break it. And they will break it fast, and there will be an interruption of benefits," said Martin O'Malley, the Social Security commissioner under the Biden administration and a former Maryland governor.

"It's a shame the chilling effect it has to disregard 120 senior executive service people," O'Malley said. "To pick an acting commissioner that is not in the

senior executive service sends a message that professional people should leave that beleaguered public agency.”

White House officials have said that Musk’s associates are being properly vetted before they are appointed to official roles in the agencies they are helping scrutinize.

Administration officials have also been skeptical of career employees’ efforts to guard federal data, maintaining that political appointees should also be able to access it, particularly if necessary to root out wasteful or erroneous spending.

On Fox News on Monday evening, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said she had been fighting “fake news reporters” who had been trying to “fearmonger” about Social Security payments. Leavitt said Trump had directed Musk only to identify “fraud” in the program, and that seniors’ retirement benefits would be protected.

The Social Security Administration is responsible for managing pension payments for more than 70 million American seniors and manages significant troves of personal data, including those related to Americans’ work and pay history, and where they live. It was not immediately clear precisely which data the Musk associates wanted or the exact circumstances leading to King’s departure.

Musk’s associates had already sought access to records that are typically closely held across the federal government, prompting disputes with senior officials across numerous agencies. The highest-ranking civil servant at the Treasury Department recently resigned after refusing to grant DOGE access to the Bureau of the Fiscal Service, which manages more than \$5 trillion in annual payments. On Sunday, The Washington Post reported that DOGE is [seeking access to a heavily guarded system at the Internal Revenue Service](#) with detailed financial information about every taxpayer, business and nonprofit in the country, and Musk’s associates have also sought access to sensitive information at the Labor Department.

“What I know is that DOGE wanted access to SSA’s sensitive files — the same way they’re trying to do at Labor and Treasury — and the acting commissioner wouldn’t give it, and she was replaced,” said Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works, a left-leaning group, citing conversations with several current officials at the agency.

Musk has increasingly turned his attention to Social Security in recent days, arguing that the program is rife with fraud and erroneous payments without offering evidence for his claim.

King, a career staffer, has worked at the agency since 1994, according to the agency’s website. She has also held senior positions in its Office of Retirement and Disability Policy and the Office of Budget, Finance and Management. King could not be immediately reached for comment.

The Social Security Administration's records include all Social Security numbers, comprehensive medical records for those who have applied for disability benefits, bank information, earnings records and more, Altman said. "There is no way to overstate how serious a breach this is," she said.