



February 5, 2025

Mr. Elon Musk  
Department of Government Efficiency  
Eisenhower Executive Office  
Building 1650 17th Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Mr. Musk,

Congratulations on your recent appointment to lead the Department of Government Efficiency. As the CEO of Open the Books, and as the former Communications Director to the late U.S. Senator Tom Coburn, I know first-hand how difficult it is to meaningfully reduce federal spending, and I know how valuable an outside perspective is to that daunting task. Thank you for lending taxpayers your valuable time and talent.

I'm writing to request that you work with our team at Open the Books to create a new transparency tool called "America's Checkbook" that would give individual Americans the opportunity to access the Treasury payment system in real time. Our request is based on a simple belief that the money in the Treasury payment system is the property of American taxpayers. Those funds belong to We the People, not any branch of government and certainly not an unelected administrative state. Individual Americans have the same right to access "America's Checkbook" as they do their own personal accounts.

President Trump gave DOGE an 18-month mission but the task of holding government accountable will continue far beyond July 4, 2026. Creating "America's Checkbook" now will put immense political pressure on future administrations to keep this tool active. Turning "America's Checkbook" off would effectively debank individual Americans and deny them access to a tool that allows them to see and evaluate how government is spending their money.

No organization is better equipped to partner with DOGE to create this tool. Open the Books was in part enabled by the "Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) of 2006," which I helped become law when I was an aide to Coburn. That law created USASpending.gov that put all government spending online for the first time. FFATA created an ecosystem of citizen activists and organizations who demand accountability every day on platforms like X. Open the Books' database of government spending now goes far beyond what we enabled through FFATA. We have created a "spending genome project" that is mapping government spending at all levels – federal, state and local. Our database is the most expansive in human history and we hope to work with you to give taxpayers new tools like "America's Checkbook."

The narrative that the Executive Branch (via DOGE) “gained access” to the Executive Branch’s payment system begs a troubling question: Who was in charge before? I have no doubt you could work with us to create “America’s Checkbook” in a manner that respects existing privacy and national security laws. When we worked to create USASpending.gov nearly 20 years ago, agencies gave us countless excuses as to why that would be impossible and how disparate government databases could not possibly be synchronized. Thankfully, Senator Coburn would not take no for an answer. Please continue channeling him by saying “yes” to transparency.

Our founders recognized how vital transparency is, so much so that they wrote it into the Constitution. Article 1, Section 9 states that a regular “account of the receipt and expenditure of all public money shall be published from time to time.” In today’s technologically advanced age, it’s a simple mandate: Every dime online. In real time. Open the books.

I have no doubt that “America’s Checkbook” will enhance the transparency standards and timeliness we created through FFATA. Why not allow taxpayers to set up their own “fraud alerts” or “low balance alerts” when their money goes to any purpose that they may find objectionable?

I could not agree more with your recent comment you made on your podcast: “America is a nation of builders. And we need to give the builders permission to build.”

We are asking for your permission, and partnership, to build a tool that will reinforce public support for not just your mission but our founders’ revolutionary commitment to transparency, self-determination and limited government.

Sincerely,



John Hart  
Chief Executive Officer  
Open the Books

cc:

Rep. Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House  
Sen. John Thune, Senate Majority Leader  
Rep. Jodey Arrington, Chair, House Budget Committee  
Sen. Lindsey Graham, Chair, Senate Budget Committee  
Hon. Matthew Vaeth, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget  
Hon. Russell Vought, Fmr. Director, Office of Management and Budget  
Rep. Pete Sessions, Co-chair, House DOGE Caucus  
Rep. Aaron Bean, Co-chair, House DOGE Caucus  
Rep. Gary Palmer, Member, House Committee on Oversight & Government Reform  
Sen. Joni Ernst, Chair, Senate DOGE Caucus