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The Musk Oval meeting you haven't read about

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13–16 minutes

Welcome to POLITICO's West Wing Playbook: Remaking Government, your guide to Donald Trump's unprecedented overhaul of the federal government — the key decisions, the critical characters and the power dynamics that are upending Washington and beyond.

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HAPPENING NOW: In the latest sign that **ELON MUSK** is the most *special* of special government employees, White House press secretary **KAROLINE LEAVITT** announced today that he would attend tomorrow's Cabinet meeting.

Musk [inserted](#) himself in Speaker **MIKE JOHNSON**'s efforts to pass a budget resolution with loads of administration spending priorities, potentially gumming up President **DONALD TRUMP**'s sweeping domestic policy agenda.

When one of the GOP holdouts on Johnson's resolution, Rep. **THOMAS MASSIE** of Kentucky, posted to X Monday night that "if the Republican budget passes, the deficit gets worse, not better," Musk replied: "That sounds bad."

It's likely to be a topic of discussion as House Republicans are meeting

with Trump at the White House — just as this is arriving in your inbox.

FINALLY, AN ANSWER: After weeks of questions about who is formally leading DOGE, a White House official granted anonymity to speak openly confirmed to West Wing Playbook that **AMY GLEASON**, who served as a digital services expert at U.S. Digital Service during Trump's first term, will serve as acting administrator. Gleason most recently served as chief product officer at Russell Street Ventures, a health care firm in Nashville.

The White House has long argued the head of DOGE is not Musk. During a hearing in Washington on Monday, Justice Department lawyers could not answer questions about who was in this role, when asked by Judge **COLLEEN KOLLAR-KOTELLY. BRADLEY HUMPHREYS**, the government's attorney, [had no answer](#) for her.

BACK TO DON AND ELON'S MEET-CUTE: Musk has been a consistent presence in the Oval Office during the first month of Trump's second term.

But even as Musk held court in the Oval earlier this month, clad in his black Make America Great Again cap, it was not his first time there.

And the tenor of that *very first* meeting — five years ago nearly to the day — did not at all match the bro-y bonhomie that Fox News' **SEAN HANNITY** captured in his primetime sitdown with the two men last week.

Here are the details, according to a person in the meeting, reported here for the first time:

Shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic began in the United States in 2020, Musk traveled to Washington to meet with Trump about building a Tesla gigafactory in Mexico instead of Texas — a plan Trump had caught wind of and had invited Musk to the West Wing to discuss.

Before the meeting, Musk and an associate met with Trump's son-in-law,

JARED KUSHNER, and then were hosted by **TIM PATAKI**, who served as assistant to the president and the deputy director of the White House Office of Public Liaison. A person who was within earshot of Musk — who West Wing Playbook granted anonymity to describe a private conversation — later recounted that Musk called Trump “a fucking moron” behind his back while in the White House.

“We walk into the Oval, and he kind of looks around, and he’s looking around,” this person in the room said. “He’s like, ‘Gosh, I tell you. I mean, I was just in China and man, their palaces just make the White House kind of look more like an outhouse.’”

Trump, this person said, fumed, as National Economic Council Director **LARRY KUDLOW** and four of his staffers stood by silently. (Kudlow did not return a request for comment.)

In the meeting, Trump claimed to own two Teslas in his car collection. But there was a problem suggesting the president was not fully familiar with how the cars work: When Tesla’s supercharging network came up, Trump seemed perplexed, as Musk and a colleague explained the technology.

But the two did find common ground on at least one topic. With the pandemic bearing down on the world, this person in the meeting said, “they talked a little about Covid, and both of them were equally dismissive of Covid and just how it was basically the flu, and people are freaking out for no reason, and all that stuff.”

A White House spokesperson did not return a POLITICO request for comment — and an email to X’s press contact went unanswered.

Musk, it’s easy to forget, served on three Trump advisory councils in 2017: the Manufacturing Jobs Initiative, the Strategic and Policy Forum, and a business advisory group focused on infrastructure. And the

relationship wasn't easy.

When Trump announced he would pull out of the Paris Climate Accords on June 1, 2017, Musk had had enough. “Am departing presidential councils. Climate change is real. Leaving Paris is not good for America or the world,” he tweeted.

Later, [in 2022](#), Trump went after Musk and provided [photo evidence](#) of the Oval meeting: “When Elon Musk came to the White House asking me for help on all of his many subsidized projects, whether it’s electric cars that don’t drive long enough, driverless cars that crash, or rocketships to nowhere, without which subsidies he’d be worthless, and telling me how he was a big Trump fan and Republican, I could have said, ‘drop to your knees and beg,’ and he would have done it...”

Musk had embarked on a deal to buy Twitter, and Trump seemed upset over Musk saying he was too old to run for president again. “Elon never told me he only voted for Democrats. In fact, he told me he voted for ‘Trump’, and would do so again. Now he’s going to pay a big price for signing a bad contract for a bad company,” Trump [posted on Truth Social](#).

That Musk later became Trump’s biggest financial backer — giving \$288 million to his 2024 presidential bid — and then one of his closest advisers, is the latest example of how both men make decisions and build relationships based on a *real politik* calculus. And how both see themselves as engaging in a transactional relationship.

MESSAGE US — West Wing Playbook is obsessively covering the Trump administration’s reshaping of the federal government. Are you a federal worker? A DOGE staffer? Have you picked up on any upcoming DOGE moves? We want to hear from *you* on how this is playing out.

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