

Can Trump turn government off?

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2025/03/24/can-trump-turn-government-off/>

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The thing about government is that it is meant to outlast any political administration and even us. It is meant to be permanent, the bedrock on which we build the country, an economy and even an identity. What happens when a politician treats it as peripheral to the point that it is expendable? Can we survive that?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmtQuqw_cHk&si=eISeg7eFsL1FhJae

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=48sje-185b74c-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

Can Trump turn the US government off?

It sounds like an absurd idea, doesn't it? And yet he's threatening to do it.

The latest of the many moves that he's undertaken to challenge the role of the US government is to threaten to literally close down the Federal Social Security Department. The reason why is that quite reasonably and in accordance with the Constitution, that Department is currently refusing to hand over to Elon Musk and his

various operatives all the information on every single person who claims a benefit in the USA. And by all the information, I mean everything from, well, their age, their date of birth, their address, their social security numbers, their entitlement to work, their work history, their car registration plate number, and you name it, everything else, including a lot of personal financial information, of course, as well.

Musk has not been able to prove to a US Court why he needs his information. There is nothing that he has been able to say that suggests that he will be able to make better decisions about the future of social security in the US as a consequence of getting this information.

But he wants it anyway. And so we must assume, I think, as the court does, that there must be some ulterior motive for Musk demanding this, which might not be entirely appropriate for a government official to have. But the response has been to threaten to shut down social security, and let's be clear what that means.

It means that Americans with old age pensions won't get them.

It means very large numbers of people who get state support because they're on low income or anything else, including the food stamp programme, which is incredibly important to prevent poverty in the USA, will be threatened. This is a deliberate act by the world's wealthiest man on some of the poorest people in the country in which he lives.

But it's not the first time, of course, that Trump has threatened to close down the government.

He has cut off USAID almost entirely.

He has fundamentally reformed US foreign policy, including by literally demanding that people overseas come back home.

He is threatening the education programme that is run by the federal government by literally demanding that the Federal Education Department be closed.

He's threatening US universities with being closed or face massive cuts, and in one case, \$400 million of cuts have already been imposed - sufficient to dramatically upset the finances of the university in question and simply because some of its students had threatened to support the cause of Palestinians who are subject to a genocide.

What else has he done? Well, he's obviously threatening the rule of law, and he's threatening in that process to also throw out those judges who oppose him. In other words, he's also threatening to turn off the law.

Is this viable? Can we have a government that says if we don't like something, we'll just turn it off as if it is weaponising the people it's meant to serve as the tool in its own

programme of advancing the personal interests of those in government?

We have never seen anything quite like this before in what was previously a democracy, and I used the words 'previously, a democracy' with care there, because I do no longer think that that is what we can describe the USA as.

But let's just stand back for a moment and think about what we think government should be.

We think it should be permanent. It has existed throughout our lives.

We think it should survive from one political administration to another, and in countries like the UK, it is deliberately set up to do that because the vast majority of people appointed to work within government are not political appointees, and that is meant to provide the stability that guarantees that government continues even if the particular administration in office changes.

We see the government as the bedrock of our country, of our economy, to some degree, even our culture, for which it does become a form of guarantor by providing support for the arts and everything else.

It helps provide our identity, of course, because the government exists to defend the state, which many of us will identify with because we live in it.

All of these things are seemingly key to what we understand government to do, but now we have Trump treating government as if it is peripheral. He's suggesting that it's take it or leave it: "I can run social security or not as the mood takes me, and if somebody is hurt on the way, who cares?"

All of this is totally unknown. Can we, quite literally, survive this approach to government, and could we survive it in the UK if it was done here?

We have no idea if the USA is going to survive this approach, but this is also of relevance in the UK because we know that Nigel Farage is one of the biggest fans of Donald Trump that there is, and we know that his Reform Party is riding pretty high in the polls in this country right now.

Rightly or wrongly, people believe it's got the answers to what we need, and we know that he, too, hates many of the programmes that government runs, including many in education and many in social security. Would he decide that it was also appropriate to simply turn government off if he got into office because he is, after all, demanding that government cuts of an enormous scale take place?

Is that what is going to happen?

I ask this because I think we need to think about the consequences of current actions.

The US government has not closed down as yet. I know that, but I also know that there is risk that it might.

So, we need to understand what government is all about.

We need to understand what it delivers.

We need to talk about those things.

We need to realise how important government is in our lives, and I promise you it is.

Even if you think it has nothing to do with you, it will with regard to your children.

It will with regard to your elderly relatives.

It will with regard to the protection it provides to your property, which you don't even think about, of course, until something goes wrong.

It will, with regard to some very basic things. You might say, health and safety is the curse of humankind, but I promise you, in the UK, we drive on the left for a good reason - because that way we aren't hit by people who are driving on the wrong side of the road. And I'm aware that in most other countries where this video will be watched, you drive on the right, but it is the simple rules that are put in place by government that protect us from harm.

All of those things - can we do without them?

Can we do without education?

Can we do without the medical care that is supplied in the USA by the US Federal government?

One-quarter of children in that country are dependent upon the government for their medical support.

Can we do without defence, and so on?

We have to ask these questions and understand that government exists for a reason, and if it has a cost, that's because it's worth it.

So how much are we willing to pay to have the security, the stability, the continuity, the identity, that government provides to us. I suspect that when we sit back and think about it, we are going to realise we get not a bad deal from government overall when we count the value of those services supplied.

So please talk about this issue, share this video, talk about what else is coming up in the media around these points, and whatever it is that you come to a conclusion about,

be sure to share it because unless we talk politics at this moment, and unless we talk about the value of government, we're not going to have one. And that is really worrying.