



February 20, 2025

Senator Mark Kelly

SR-188 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Ruben Gallego

317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative David Schweikert

166 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Eli Crane

307 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Yassamin Ansari

1432 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Greg Stanton

207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Andy Biggs

464 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Juan Ciscomani

461 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Raúl Grijalva

1203 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Abe Hamadeh

1722 Longworth Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Paul Gosar

2057 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Members of the Arizona Congressional Delegation,

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) is the backbone to keeping elections safe, and it safeguards far more than ballots alone. CISA's responsibilities span all levels of government IT infrastructure, securing financial, medical, faith-based, educational, and criminal data from potential threats.

Protecting these systems is a duty entrusted to us by American citizens, which is why I write with deep concern over federal actions that undermine our collaborative efforts and threaten to dismantle the security framework that protects our most sensitive information. If CISA's capacity is eroded, it exposes not only election infrastructure but also opens the door for foreign adversaries like Russia, China, or Iran to prey on public-sector vulnerabilities and gain access to crucial government data. We cannot hand over the "keys to the kingdom" by weakening our primary federal cybersecurity agency.

This symbiotic relationship between states and the federal government is crucial to modern Americans who depend on laws that protect Personal Identifying Information, such as HIPAA, ensuring every individual retains the right to control how their own data is used.

1700 W. Washington St., FL 7, Phoenix, AZ 85007

www.azsos.gov

Following my February 10 letter to the White House, I learned of a 19-year-old with a record of advertising hacking services being appointed to a senior adviser role at CISA. This insider threat has a history of collaborating with cybercriminals and would not pass a routine background check; yet now he has access to confidential data that impacts states across the nation. It's letting the fox into the henhouse. As we prepare for Arizona's next election cycle, we must ensure that we do not compromise the robust security measures our offices have hardened together.

CISA, as the operational lead for federal cybersecurity, is central to these efforts. They collaborate with our office to bolster election integrity through security trainings, exercises for law enforcement and the media, professional development engagements, and direct county support. Now they are reportedly being blocked from engaging with election offices and participating in upcoming conferences, effectively dismantled when we need them the most. Yet CISA's importance extends well beyond elections. When a financial or healthcare database is breached, or a malicious actor seeks to access any government IT system, CISA's expertise stands between our data and those with nefarious motives.

States already manage elections at a fiscal disadvantage due to inconsistent federal funding. Reliable collaboration with federal experts is critical for local governments to validate budget requests and secure the necessary resources for safeguarding voter data, patient records, and financial services. CISA's no-cost cyber and physical security assessments have proven invaluable in updating best practices for counties, and our "Tiger Team" initiative leverages their services to deploy advanced protection tools. Now that these experts are forced to stop, the entire network of state and local government IT systems, including elections, hangs in the balance.

Criminal foreign interference remains a pressing concern. Any insider threat at CISA or attempt to downgrade its role jeopardizes all critical infrastructure systems. Undermining the only agency tasked with a unified response to cyber threats leaves us vulnerable to hostile powers that are quick to capitalize on openings in our defenses. We need your leadership to ensure that CISA, and other federal partners, remain fully empowered and funded to protect our critical infrastructure, including medical, financial, educational, faith-based, and election systems, so we do not give foreign adversaries free rein to exploit our most sensitive data. Congress must act to prevent the dismantling of our IT and cybersecurity protections.

Sincerely,



ADRIAN FONTES

Arizona Secretary of State



February 10, 2025

VIA EMAIL ONLY

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President,

Last Friday, I was shocked by reports over recent developments at the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) where multiple seasoned officials, including Arizona's election security advisor, have been placed on administrative leave. This decision undermines the integrity of Arizona's election security at a time when our enemies around the world are using online tools to push their agendas and ideologies into our very homes.

Previously, CISA's no-cost, in-house cybersecurity services assisted the election administrators across Arizona's 15 counties to build and maintain hardened IT systems essential for securing voter information and ballots. These services have significantly advanced our state's security capabilities without straining local budgets.

The sidelining of these key personnel is akin to dismissing National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) staff ahead of hurricane season or kneecapping the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) while managing thousands of active flights. Such actions jeopardize our immediate security posture, ignore a bipartisan priority, and shift an undue financial burden onto state and local administrations. If these layoffs signal a broader shift in strategy, it is essential that state and local election officials are promptly informed about how election security will be maintained and what resources will be allocated.

The Arizona State House Appropriations Chairman's recent [remarks](#) about willingness to cut services for children with disabilities due to budget constraints underscores the untenable position in which such federal adjustments leave us. If our federal and state governments both withdraw financial support for election security, the national security implications could be dire.

I urge you to reconsider these decisions and to reaffirm the federal government's commitment to securing our elections. It is imperative that we collaborate transparently to maintain public confidence in the electoral process and to ensure the continuity of the critical infrastructure that underpins our democracy.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and to explore avenues for reinforcing our nation's election security framework.

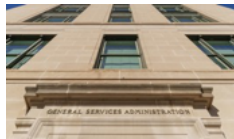
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "Adrian Fontes". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

ADRIAN FONTES
Secretary of State



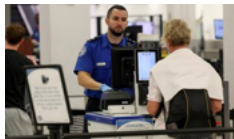
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[Longtime GSA employee quits rather than give Musk ally access to Notify.gov](#)



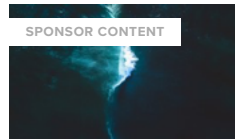
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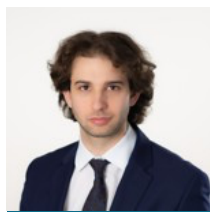
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DOGE employee Edward Coristine lands at CISA with DHS email

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Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk speaks during an executive order signing in the Oval Office at the White House on February 11, 2025. Edward Coristine, a staffer in Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, was recently given physical access to CISA. ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES



By **David DiMolfetta**,
Cybersecurity
Reporter,
Nextgov/FCW

FEBRUARY 19, 2025 07:03 PM ET

A handle dubbed "Rivage" was reportedly tied to Coristine, and used to discuss and solicit hacking activities with a cybercrime syndicate known as The Com.

[CISA](#) [CYBER DEFENSE](#) [LEADERSHIP](#)



Edward Coristine, a 19-year-old staffer in billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency with a [reported history](#) of interacting with hacking groups, has been given physical access to building facilities at the Cybersecurity and

Infrastructure Security Agency.

Coristine is listed with a DHS email address and has been seen inside CISA, according to a person familiar with the matter and a directory image viewed by *Nextgov/FCW*. It is not clear what systems he had access to. CISA and DHS did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Various media reports have tied Coristine to interactions with cybercriminals. A report from independent cybersecurity journalist Brian Krebs [linked Coristine](#) to a cybercrime syndicate known as The Com. In conversations with the cybercrime community, he allegedly used the handle "Rivage" and frequented interaction hubs that facilitated hacking activities.

Coristine was [fired from a company](#), Path Networks, after leaking internal firm secrets to a competitor, Krebs and Bloomberg News [also reported](#). The decision to place Coristine in CISA means he is now embedded in an agency that contains U.S. intelligence on worldwide cyber threats.

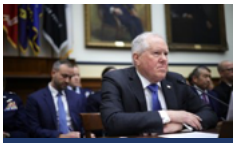
In early February, Wired [reported](#) that a Telegram handle linked to Coristine had solicited a hacking service in 2022. The payload requested was a distributed denial-of-service attack, used to overwhelm a server with bot traffic that causes it to crash.

Coristine was a former intern at brain implant startup Neuralink, another Musk-owned company. Coristine and another DOGE worker, Luke Farritor, are listed in internal State Department directories, *Nextgov/FCW* [previously reported](#).

In recent days, the cyber agency has laid off around 130 employees, including those hired under a new Cybersecurity Talent Management System program, designed to lure top technical talent from the private sector by offering them higher salaries. It also paused election security activities and put staff focused on countering mis- and disinformation on administrative leave. [N](#)

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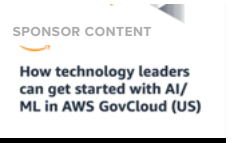
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Trump Dismantles Government Fight Against Foreign Influence Operations

The Trump administration has reassigned or forced out several dozen government employees who had been working to fight foreign interference in U.S. elections at multiple agencies, according to current and former officials.



By **Steven Lee Myers, Julian E. Barnes and Sheera Frenkel**

Feb. 20, 2025 Updated 12:24 p.m. ET

The Trump administration is targeting government officials who had been flagging foreign interference in U.S. elections, despite continuing concerns that adversaries are stoking political and social divisions by spreading propaganda and disinformation online, current and former government officials said.

The administration has already reassigned several dozen officials working on the issue at the Federal Bureau of Investigation and forced out others at the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, part of the Department of Homeland Security, they said.

The cuts have focused on people who were not only combating false content online but also working on broader safeguards to protect elections from cyberattacks or other attempts to disrupt voting systems. In last year's election, the teams tracked and publicized numerous influence operations from Russia, China and Iran to blunt their impact on unsuspecting voters.

Experts are alarmed that the cuts could leave the United States defenseless against covert foreign influence operations and embolden foreign adversaries seeking to disrupt democratic governments.

Arizona's secretary of state, Adrian Fontes, a Democrat, warned in a letter to President Trump that the cuts were comparable to shutting down the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ahead of hurricane season.

“This decision undermines Arizona’s election security,” he wrote, “at a time when our enemies around the world are using online tools to push their agendas and ideologies into our very homes.”

Mr. Trump and other officials have said that in the guise of fighting misinformation and disinformation, the government had infringed on free speech rights of Americans. Tricia McLaughlin, an assistant secretary at D.H.S., said that the cybersecurity agency “is undertaking an evaluation of how it has executed its election security mission with a particular focus on any work related to mis-, dis-, and malinformation,” and that while that is continuing, personnel who had worked on those issues “have been placed on administrative leave.”

Acting on one of Mr. Trump’s first executive orders, Attorney General Pam Bondi on Feb. 5 shut down a Federal Bureau of Investigation task force that had been formed after Russia intervened in the 2016 presidential election and reassigned several dozen officials and agents who had been involved, the officials said. The F.B.I. confirmed in a statement the agency “has fully complied” with Ms. Bondi’s directive to disband the task force.

CISA has also forced out more than a dozen officials who had been monitoring foreign influence operations targeting the nation’s elections. They were among the more than 130 positions eliminated in total at the agency, according to a department statement.

On Friday, an internal memorandum from the agency’s acting director, Bridget E. Bean, announced the suspension of funding for a program that coordinated election security on the federal, state and local levels.

Even before Mr. Trump returned to the White House, Republicans on Capitol Hill had refused to renew the mandate for the State Department’s Global Engagement Center, the most prominent government agency fighting propaganda from Russia and China. It shut down in December. Many of its staff of 125 have since been reassigned, while others have left or not had their contracts renewed, officials said.

In recent years, many Republicans have been skeptical of warnings about disinformation campaigns. They accused Democrats of demonizing political views with which they disagreed as “Russian propaganda,” and they viewed warnings

about “disinformation” as a way to pressure social media companies to censor speech supporting Mr. Trump’s views.

In one of his first major foreign policy speeches as vice president, JD Vance said that the Biden administration had “bullied social media companies to censor so-called misinformation.”

Vice President JD Vance departs a Senate Republican Caucus luncheon on Capitol Hill after meeting with senators on Thursday. Kenny Holston/The New York Times

Republican supporters of Mr. Trump had telegraphed many of the administration’s steps ahead of his election. But the breadth and speed of the efforts to abolish the teams put in place to fight malign activity online have surprised those involved, including engineers at companies like Google and Meta, who have for years regularly exchanged information with government officials, including during Mr. Trump’s first term.

CISA has already removed a “Rumor v. Reality” page on its website, which had provided tips to dispel disinformation about the reliability of the voting process. The internal memorandum from Ms. Bean, first reported by Wired, said that the agency would also conduct a review to correct “any past activities identified as past misconduct by the federal government related to censorship of protected speech.”

The new director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, has made repeated promises to depoliticize the spy agencies. American officials briefed on her plans say that will include a review of the work done by the office’s Foreign Malign Influence Center, which was established by Congress in 2022.

Attorney General Pam Bondi swears in Tulsi Gabbard, nominee to be director of national intelligence, in the Oval Office this month. Eric Lee/The New York Times

That office, along with the F.B.I. and the cybersecurity agency, regularly disclosed foreign influence operations during last year's presidential campaign, including one from Iran that targeted Mr. Trump, which officials said was trying to prevent his re-election. Many of the officials involved with the efforts to warn the public about foreign influence campaigns at the time emphasized that the work was nonpartisan, and that they had avoided calling out Americans who amplified foreign narratives because of the right to free speech.

A recent report by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish research organization in Washington, credited the government effort for blunting the impact of foreign influence ahead of November's election by informing voters, for example, that numerous videos being spread online were created by Russia and showed fake people.

"The U.S. government should continue to treat foreign malign influence as a national security issue," the report said, calling for the agencies to receive "the proper funding to continue their work."

Instead, the new administration has followed the recommendations of Project 2025, the conservative blueprint for restructuring the federal government from which Mr. Trump sought to distance himself during the presidential campaign and has now embraced.

Project 2025 called for the closing of the election security unit at CISA, as well as the F.B.I.'s task force. Republicans in Congress and several states have also waged a legal and political campaign against what they claimed was a sweeping “censorship industrial complex” under the Biden administration.

“I think that they may have drunk their own Kool-Aid in terms of believing that there is this kind of censorship industrial complex that all these people were involved in,” Lawrence Norden, a vice president at the progressive Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, said, referring to the officials now shutting down the teams. “I’m not sure that they fully understand who everybody is and what they do.”

Lance Hunter, a professor at Augusta University in Georgia, said that eliminating defenses against foreign influence campaigns would leave the United States more vulnerable to them.

“Foreign influence operations are often conducted to attempt to increase the appearance of government ineffectiveness and instability in the country,” he said. “They are also carried out to disrupt elections and increase division and polarization in the country.”

During his visit to Europe last week, however, Mr. Vance belittled the idea that a foreign adversary like Russia could sway an election in a strong democratic nation, referring to accusations that resulted in Romania overturning the first round of voting in its election.

“If your democracy can be destroyed with a few hundred thousands of dollars of digital advertising from a foreign country,” Mr. Vance said, “then it wasn’t very strong to begin with.”

Adam Goldman and Robert Draper contributed reporting from Washington.

Steven Lee Myers covers misinformation and disinformation from San Francisco. Since joining The Times in 1989, he has reported from around the world, including Moscow, Baghdad, Beijing and Seoul. More about Steven Lee Myers

Julian E. Barnes covers the U.S. intelligence agencies and international security matters for The Times. He has written about security issues for more than two decades. More about Julian E. Barnes

Sheera Frenkel is a reporter based in the San Francisco Bay Area, covering the ways technology impacts everyday lives with a focus on social media companies, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Telegram and WhatsApp. More about Sheera Frenkel