Idiot Musk got DOGE's mission backward Lutnick says

Story by Ben Berkowitz

Elon Musk got DOGE wrong by focusing on firing people instead of on slashing government waste, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick tells Mike Allen in the premiere episode of "The Axios Show."

- To the extent DOGE keeps functioning, Lutnick said, its cuts will be aimed at costs, not headcount.

Why it matters: With Musk no longer in the White House, and his relationship with President Trump in tatters, officials are more willing to criticize the slash-and-burn approach to government that reduced headcount but didn't save much money.

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What they're saying: "I thought Elon got caught up in other people's objectives," Lutnick says, prioritizing shrinking the federal workforce instead of targeting waste.

- "The government, I'm sure it could be 10% smaller. I'm sure it could be 15% smaller. And let the cabinet secretaries go in, study their place and make the proper cuts."

Zoom out: Lutnick said Musk's mistake was seeing the success of slashing headcount at Twitter after he bought the social media platform, and assuming he could do the same thing just as quickly in government.

- "The focus should have been on cutting the waste, fraud and abuse, and the people you could do over time," Lutnick said.
- "I thought he got that backward."

Zoom in: DOGE is largely out of the spotlight now, though still operating, albeit without Musk and many of his allies. Lutnick said its mission will concentrate now on spending cuts, not layoffs.

- "DOGE is still pursuing that waste, fraud and abuse and I think it'll be effective. Less effective than I would've hoped, but I think it's still going to be effective in cutting the waste, fraud and abuse," Lutnick said,

What to watch: How much DOGE can actually save over time.

- Musk's initial estimates of $1 trillion to $2 trillion per year are long in the rear-view mirror; DOGE's current estimated savings to date are just over $200 billion, though many dispute even those numbers.