

How SpaceX became the MyPillow of government contractors

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The best political convictions money can buy.

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It really has been something to watch Elon Musk turn SpaceX into the MyPillow of rocket companies, hasn't it?

Christ, I guess I have to list off all the depressing stuff from the past few months: [the Trump rally](#), the [creepy assassination](#) comments, the even creepier [comments about impregnating Taylor Swift](#), [spreading hurricane misinformation on X](#) (and thus hindering relief efforts), claiming [his own child](#) was “killed” by the “[woke mind virus](#),” that kind of thing. I have seen a lot of people suggest this is political radicalization, and sure, maybe it is. But I can't help noticing a sick business logic, too.

Musk has figured out he can leverage the culture wars to his advantage

I have never accused Musk of being [anything other than self-interested](#). As I see it, his only real politics are: Elon Musk should get to do whatever he wants, forever. And his latest political outbursts strike me as being clearly connected to his money. He's come to the same conclusion as Donald Trump, which is that it's particularly easy to grift Republican voters, and there are lots of rewards and very few consequences for doing so. Donny, these men are nihilists.

On the face of it, it might look stupid for a businessman to alienate one of the major US political parties. Musk has a long history of taking subsidies from local, state, and federal governments. His

business SpaceX is built essentially on agency contracts in the heavily regulated aerospace industry. But I'm guessing Musk has figured out he can leverage the culture wars to his advantage.

Those of you familiar with SpaceX may recall its litany of lawsuits against the government. For instance, in 2005, [the company alleged that Boeing and Lockheed Martin](#) had engaged in anticompetitive behavior meant to keep SpaceX from letting its Falcon 9 compete in government contracts. (The Falcon 9 didn't have its first launch until 2010.)

And in 2014, Musk sued the US Air Force [over a \\$11 billion sole-source contract](#) awarded to the United Launch Alliance. (The Falcon Heavy wouldn't have its first launch until 2018.) [SpaceX got concessions](#), dropping the suit after the Air Force agreed to speed up its efforts to certify SpaceX to launch military satellites — and making more launches available for SpaceX to compete on.

These suits got Musk what he wanted

Now I personally, as a woman familiar with the linear concept of time, find these suits odd. How could SpaceX compete using a rocket it hadn't yet launched? Sure, the [“indefinite delivery / indeterminate quantity” contracts existed](#) for the Falcon I, but that wasn't what SpaceX was suing over. And yet, these suits got Musk what he wanted: more possible government contracts. In fact, such suits have been [as much a hallmark of SpaceX](#) as its rockets.

If you are the kind of person who uses lawsuits to get what you want, you may have made note of the fact that Donald Trump [appointed 200 federal judges](#), including “nearly as many powerful federal appeals court judges in four years as Barack Obama appointed in eight,” as Pew Research puts it. In 2021, more than a quarter of active federal judges were Trump appointees. Let's not pretend that's insignificant; if it were, the Federalist Society wouldn't exist. If Musk supports Republicans, they'll keep appointing judges who believe things that favor Musk — and he might even get lucky and get some blatantly partisan judges, who'd support him because of his affiliation.

Consider Texas, which has taken a real interest in Musk's affairs. During Musk's Twitter acquisition, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton announced [an investigation of Twitter bot numbers](#) — an investigation that neatly aligned with the argument Musk was making to try to get out of buying the social media company. Of course, there's also the [Texas judge who owned Tesla stock](#) and greenlit a Musk-backed lawsuit against Media Matters for America. (The judge in question is known for [his politically conservative rulings](#).)

But wait! There's more. In 2020, SpaceX was awarded almost \$900 million in rural broadband subsidies from the FCC under Trump. But in 2022, the Biden-era FCC rescinded that funding since

“the applicant had failed to meet its burden.” Two Republican FCC commissioners objected, and [now a Republican House Oversight Committee chair is probing the FCC’s decision.](#)

Does this sound cynical? I suppose

Culture war issues are meant to motivate a largely apathetic voter base that doesn’t especially give a shit about government appropriations. They have been [used historically by Republicans](#), starting with Barry Goldwater, in order to enact specific financial policies that have largely hurt lower-class Americans. It seems Musk has paid enough attention to this particular historical quirk to decide the culture war can help him, too.

Does this sound cynical? I suppose. Sincere, coherent political beliefs are largely the province of the bourgeoisie and nerds who paid attention in government class. The Elon Musks of the world are interested in power. Not everything Musk says is necessarily calculated or politically beneficial — his partisan allegiances have also extended to having friendly conversations with [mask-off white nationalists](#) and reposting theories that [women are incapable of thought](#). Crucially, however, there are no negative consequences for these actions — only more attention, which seems to be his personal heroin.

Consider the rocket situation. For NASA, Musk is the only game in town besides Boeing, and he knows it. He also knows that [even if he publicly misbehaves](#) — smokes weed, for instance — [NASA will do nothing punitive](#). And I do blame the brain geniuses at NASA. Instead of having in-house rockets for launching our spy satellites, we’re now dependent on Boeing ([lol](#), [lmao](#)), [the United Launch Alliance](#) (a joint venture that includes... Boeing), and SpaceX. (Sure, Jeff Bezos’ also-ran Blue Origin exists, I guess, but come on.) By outsourcing its engineering, NASA put the national security apparatus at the whims of contractors gone wild.

And Musk’s gamble appears to be that being a visible Republican will benefit him more than being neutral, presumably because he assumes, probably correctly, that Democrats won’t punish him for this. So when it comes to, let’s say, [SpaceX’s environmental damage](#), [the safety record of Tesla’s “Full Self-Driving,”](#) and [working conditions for his employees](#), aligning with Republicans lets him suggest any examination of his behavior is politically motivated. Convenient, isn’t it?

You can see the ambition even with the social media platform formerly known as Twitter. By courting the right, [as he has unquestionably done](#), he has attempted to create a value proposition for [a company he has largely destroyed](#). The skew also gives him an excuse: if X dies, Musk can claim it wasn’t because it was mismanaged but destroyed by the radical left or whatever. Thanks to his friendly judges, he can even take those “radical left” critics to the cleaners in court!

Look, Musk's appearance at the Trump rally launched a thousand think pieces and the goofy photo that launched a thousand memes. But to talk about Musk's political convictions, you have to talk about the only thing he really believes in: money.