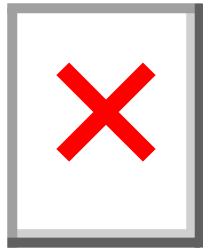


From: POLITICO Playbook <politicoplaybook@email.politico.com>
Sent: Apr 24, 2025 10:01:58.000000000 UTC
Subject: Trump demands peace. Putin bombs Kyiv.
To: jperperian@cityofmelrose.org <jperperian@cityofmelrose.org>

Apr 24, 2025

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BY JACK BLANCHARD



Presented by

With help from Eli Okun, Garrett Ross and Bethany Irvine



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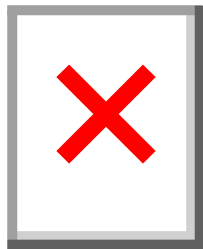
Good Thursday morning. This is **Jack Blanchard**, headed toward the weekend filled with the joys of an all-American spring. The blooms are out in D.C., the sunshine is warm, the temperature's perfect. And it won't get any hotter than this, right?

BILLIONAIRE'S ROW: Start your day with this [buzzy morning read from POLITICO's Michael Schaffer](#) on why Amazon boss **Jeff Bezos** gave up his dream of being king of the Beltway — from the shifting sands at the Washington Post to his abandoned Kalorama mansion. “It’s hard to remember now,” Michael writes, “but there was a time when people in Washington were positively giddy about Jeff Bezos’ new mansion on S Street.” Now, a neighbor says: “My guess is he’s there four or five nights a year.”

And speaking of departing billionaires ... [Here's Donald Trump](#) talking about **Elon Musk** in the *past tense* last night. Truly, politics is a brutal business.

In today's Playbook ...

- **Donald Trump** and **Marco Rubio** push for a peace deal in Ukraine ...
- ... as **Vladimir Putin** launches his deadliest attack on Kyiv in months.
- Plus, a handy GOP tipsheet for the Dems — check it out.



President Donald Trump speaks with reporters as he participates in a ceremonial swearing-in of Paul Atkins as chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission, in the Oval Office of the White House on April 22, 2025, in Washington. | Alex Brandon/AP

UKRAINE ON THE BRAIN: The current and former heads of NATO are in Washington this morning for high-stakes talks on Ukraine. It comes with Trump’s big peace plan hanging in the balance — and with **Vladimir Putin** still launching deadly drone attacks on Ukrainian civilians.

The details: President **Donald Trump** will host Norwegian Prime Minister **Jonas Gahr Støre** at the White House, along with his compatriot **Jens Stoltenberg**, an experienced “Trump whisperer” who was head of NATO for a decade before stepping down last fall. NATO’s *new* general-secretary **Mark Rutte** is also in town, and will hold high-level talks at the Pentagon and Foggy Bottom with Secretary of State **Marco Rubio**, Defense Secretary **Pete Hegseth** and national security adviser **Mike Waltz** — almost an entire Signal group of NatSec officials, in fact.

Where we're at: Trump — who promised to end this war on “Day 1” — is [getting antsy](#) at the lack of progress as he heads toward Day 100, which [he'll mark with a major rally](#) in Michigan next Tuesday night. Trump's team last week pitched a detailed plan to Kyiv and Moscow setting out America's terms for peace. Vice President **JD Vance** made clear yesterday the U.S. is ready to walk away if it's not accepted.

What's on the table: Trump is said to be offering Putin permanent control of the 20 percent of Ukraine he's seized through his illegal invasion, including all of Crimea. The deal also reportedly grants Putin another long-term strategic aim: a pledge that Ukraine will never be permitted to join NATO. In return, Ukraine — or what's left of it — would be given security guarantees enforced by European (but not American) military forces, and support with the reconstruction of its cities. Kyiv is deeply unimpressed.

The problem: Trump is presenting this as a kind-hearted effort to end three years of horrific war in a land far from American soil. But to European eyes, Trump is rewarding Putin's murderous aggression with multiple strategic wins. And European diplomats fear it will buy an ailing Russia time to regroup, re-arm and ultimately finish the job. Memories of the failed appeasement of **Adolf Hitler** do not fade easily.

The view from inside NATO: “Did Putin write this for him?” one NATO official responded when asked for their reaction yesterday by POLITICO's Robbie Gramer and Eric Bazail-Eimil. Another diplomat responded via text message with an 'exploding head' emoji, [the pair report for NatSec Daily](#).

What will Trump make of this?: Putin's determination to push on with his murderous attacks on Ukraine, which are making the U.S. president's pleas for a ceasefire look increasingly ridiculous. Overnight, Russia launched a massive missile attack on Kyiv, blowing up residential apartments and killing or injuring dozens of civilians in what was one of the worst attacks on the Ukrainian capital in the *entire war*. They're still digging through the rubble for bodies as this newsletter goes out. [The pictures are as bad as you'd imagine](#).

So the first big question: *How will Trump respond to that?* He's got all morning to stew over his [Truth Social feed](#) before facing the press in the Oval Office at **1:05 p.m.** alongside Støre and Stoltenberg. Can he really claim this was another Russian “[mistake](#)”?

The second big question: Are the U.S. and Ukraine still signing that much-delayed critical minerals deal today? Trump had suggested as much at the weekend — but that was prior to yesterday’s Truth Social attack on Zelenskyy. In private, Trump “has vented to aides that the negotiations were harder to conclude than he hoped,” [WSJ’s Alex Ward and Max Colchester report](#), “directing most of his anger at Zelenskyy for not readily agreeing to the most recent U.S. proposal.”

View from Ukraine: Zelenskyy was certainly making [conciliatory noises on social media](#) last night — while also posting a 2018 statement from Trump’s then-Secretary of State **Mike Pompeo** saying America would never recognise Russian ownership of Crimea. [The WSJ reports](#) Ukrainian officials “are worried that Trump ... might blame Kyiv for a breakdown in talks and refuse to provide further military aid.” Zelenskyy hopes to speak with Trump at **Pope Francis**’ funeral on Saturday.

But regardless: The truth is, all these meetings with European big-hitters may prove way less consequential than a private summit happening in Moscow tomorrow, [per WaPo’s Siobhán O’Grady, Steve Hendrix and Adam Taylor](#). Trump envoy **Steve Witkoff** is being dispatched for another round of face-to-face talks with Putin, and the U.S. peace plan is obviously top of their agenda. It’s hard to know how that will play out.

“I think we have a deal with Russia,” Trump told White House reporters confidently last night.

But yesterday’s comments from senior Russian officials — [per a write-up from the Institute of the Study of War](#) — sounded pretty unequivocal in rejecting European peacekeepers in Ukraine. And plenty of observers think Putin is just stringing Trump along.

So let’s... offer more concessions? Blowing up MAGA world last night was a POLITICO story on the prospect of the U.S. lifting sanctions on Russian energy as part of a future peace deal. “The White House is debating whether to lift sanctions on Russia’s Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline and potentially other Russian assets in Europe as part of discussions on ending the war between Russia and Ukraine, five people familiar with the discussions told POLITICO,” [my colleagues Ben Lefebvre and Felicia Schwartz report](#).

War of the words: Their story said Witkoff has been the chief proponent of the idea, but received significant pushback from Rubio. Witkoff and Rubio have now issued a strongly worded denial describing the report as a “work of fiction.” “Neither of us have had any conversations about lifting sanctions on Russia as part of a peace deal with Ukraine,” they said.

Hmmm. Thing is, Witkoff literally told Bloomberg News in a TV interview last month that “everybody’s open” to the idea of lifting sanctions on Russia as part of a peace deal. *So who exactly did he mean?* “First and foremost ... we want to get to the ceasefire,” Witkoff said on March 19. “I think after that, everything else will be a detail — *sanction relief and all the other things that go with a full-on peace treaty.*” [Watch the clip for yourselves.](#)

And after that... watch this: MAGA world influencer **Ben Shapiro** has a sitdown interview with Zelenskyy airing today. [Here’s the trailer on YouTube.](#)

A message from The National Association of REALTORS®:

A new survey shows Americans overwhelmingly back real estate provisions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. A massive 91% support preserving homeowner tax incentives like the mortgage interest deduction. 83% back the 20% tax break for small businesses and independent contractors, and 61% favor raising SALT limits. Real estate fuels 18% of U.S. GDP, with each home sale creating two jobs. Support for homeownership is a win for the economy and the middle class. [Learn more.](#)

NOTES FROM THE WILDERNESS

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW: At **9:15 a.m.**, the DNC and the Association of State Democratic Committees are due to make what they’re hyping as a “major announcement to help turbocharge Democratic power across the map.” Joining DNC Chair **Ken Martin** and ASDC President **Jane Kleeb** at the rollout is former DNC Chair **Howard Dean**.

The inclusion of Dean perked up ears on the Playbook team, given he was elected to lead the party after 2004 — i.e. *the last time* the party lost the popular vote in the presidential election. Could the DNC revive something akin to Dean’s controversial “50-state strategy?” Back then, Democratic

poobahs preferred to funnel resources into a select few battleground races rather than disbursing it across deep-red areas of the country in hopes that they might one day yield fruit, as Dean wanted to do. It's the kind of question Dems are wrestling with as they look ahead to 2028.

Today's big announcement: Martin is expected to unveil a proposal to change the DNC's rules to effectively force newly elected Vice Chair **David Hogg** to make a choice: Give up your threat to primary Democratic incumbents, or relinquish your leadership position with the DNC, [as NOTUS' Katherine Swartz and Alex Roarty scooped](#). The proposal comes after Leaders We Deserve, a group Hogg co-founded, [pledged to spend \\$20 million](#) to defeat "asleep-at-the-wheel" Dems in primaries in safe-blue seats, enraging many incumbents. **More from [POLITICO's Elena Schneider](#)**.

Generational change is in the air: Sen. **Dick Durbin** (D-Ill.)'s confirmation yesterday that he will not seek a sixth term in 2026 comes "just as many in the party have grown more eager — and more vocal — about ushering in younger Democratic leadership," [POLITICO's Jordain Carney, Nick Wu and Lisa Kashinsky report](#). His departure opens up three prized spots: His leadership position (Durbin was the minority whip), his seat as the top Dem on the Judiciary Committee, and the chance to represent deep-blue Illinois in the Senate. While Sen. **Sheldon Whitehouse** (D-R.I.) is seen as a shoo-in for the Judiciary slot, the jockeying has begun for the other two posts.

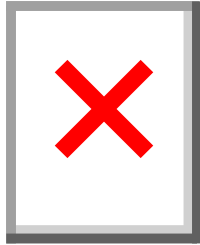
In line for the whip: Hawaii Sen. **Brian Schatz**, 52, is "making calls privately about the race," Jordain & co. report. Also in the mix: Minnesota Sen. **Amy Klobuchar**, who is currently the no. 3 Senate Dem. And don't count out Maryland's **Chris Van Hollen**, who is "garnering fresh speculation about his own ambitions" amid his handling of the **Kilmar Abrego Garcia** ordeal.

And in Illinois ... Among the names considering a run, [via the Chicago Tribune's Rick Pearson](#): Reps. **Raja Krishnamoorthi**, **Robin Kelly** and **Lauren Underwood**, Lt. Gov. **Juliana Stratton** and state Treasurer **Michael Frerichs**. Playbook can report Kelly is expected to make an announcement to run for Durbin's seat *very* soon.

More to come? Many House Dems expect a wave of older members to follow with their own retirements in the months ahead, [Axios' Andrew](#)

[Solender reports](#). Longtime Democratic Rep. **Jan Schakowsky** is planning to announce on May 5 that she won't seek reelection after 14 terms in the House, [POLITICO's Nicholas Wu and Shia Kapos scooped](#).

A message from The National Association of REALTORS®:



A new national survey shows overwhelming support for pro-housing policies in TCJA. [Learn More](#).

FIRST IN PLAYBOOK: SOMETHING BORROWED: POLITICO's

Dasha Burns has something this morning that Democrats will want to read in order to know the best lines of attack Republicans have at their disposal. Last week, [we brought you Democratic strategist Doug Sosnik's take](#) on the challenges for the left as the party looks toward 2026 and 2028. This week, Republican pollster **Chris Wilson**, the CEO of Eyes Over, shares an “alternative” framework. [Read the slide deck](#)

The big picture: Wilson & co. focus on real-time data on what is and isn't working. Based on that, here are some takeaways ...

What *is* working for Republicans: On tariffs, “messaging that emphasizes ongoing negotiations, concrete wins and a clear path to economic revival continues to land well. Voters respond positively when tariffs are framed as part of a broader strategy to rebuild American industry — not as an end in themselves.” ... On immigration, “Democrats’ focus on legal process and due process has failed to resonate. Republican messaging that highlights violent crimes committed by deported immigrants remains dominant, reinforcing the perception of a party committed to protecting American families.”

What *isn't* working for Republicans: On tariffs, “Democrats have found traction by portraying tariff policy as unstable and risky. Their messaging — linking tariffs to stock market turbulence and threats to retirement accounts — is eroding confidence among moderates and economically-minded voters.” “What’s not working is when tariffs are presented as the only solution — or when the messaging fails to show a clear goal,” Wilson tells Dasha. “Voters grow skeptical fast if there’s no light at the end of the tunnel.”

The biggest risk for Republicans ... “isn't the issues — it's the tone,” Wilson says. “Our data shows that voters are aligned with the GOP on border security, trade, and economic nationalism. But when the messaging turns punitive instead of solution-oriented, sentiment starts to erode. If Republicans lean too hard into grievance without offering a hopeful, forward-looking vision, they risk alienating persuadables and energizing opposition. The winning formula isn't just ‘what we're against’ — it's who we're fighting for.”

SOMETHING BLUE: Democrats are slated to bring one of their “People’s Town Halls” to Rep. **Richard Hudson’s** (R-N.C.) district later today,

hanging a lantern on the fact the NRCC chair has advised his fellow Republicans not to hold in-person town hall forums. Hosted [by the DNC, DCCC and Association of State Democratic Committees](#), the event will be led by Sen. **Chris Murphy** (D-Conn.) and Rep. **Maxwell Frost** (D-Fla.).

POLITICO IS BACK AT THE 2025 MILKEN GLOBAL CONFERENCE:

From May 4–7, California Playbook will deliver exclusive, on-the-ground coverage from the 28th Annual Milken Institute Global Conference. Get behind-the-scenes buzz, standout moments, and insights from leaders in AI, finance, health, philanthropy, geopolitics, and more. [Subscribe now](#) for your front-row seat to the conversations shaping our world.

BEST OF THE REST

FOR PETE’S SAKE: The drumbeat of Signalgate stories continues, as [WaPo’s Dan Lamothe reports](#) that Defense Secretary **Pete Hegseth** “directed the installation of Signal, a commercially available messaging app, on a desktop computer in his Pentagon office.”

The ‘convenience’ argument: Hegseth and his aides discussed “how they could circumvent the lack of cellphone service in much of the Pentagon and more quickly coordinate with the White House and other top Trump officials using the encrypted app,” Lamothe writes. But it was also “a work-around that enabled him to use Signal in a classified space, where his cellphone and other personal electronics are not permitted.”

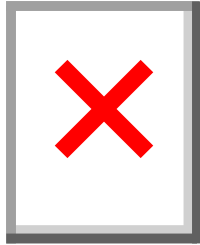
Restoring the warrior ethos: Elsewhere in the Pentagon, Hegseth reportedly ordered a costly remodeling of the “a room next to the Pentagon press briefing room to retrofit it with a makeup studio that can be used to prepare for television appearances,” [CBS News’ Jennifer Jacobs and Eleanor Watson reported](#). After CBS News reported the story yesterday, Hegseth [responded in a post on X](#): “Totally fake story. No ‘orders’ and no ‘makeup.’”

POLL POSITION: Trump’s job approval rating is 11 points underwater (44% approve, 55% disapprove) [in a new Fox News survey](#). While 55% of registered voters approve of his handling of border security, that is “the *only*

issue where his ratings are in positive territory.” He’s at -15 on taxes (38% approve, 53% disapprove), -18 on the economy (38% to 56%), -25 on tariffs (33% to 58%) and -26 on inflation (33% to 59%).

Meanwhile: In a new Reuters/Ipsos poll, just 37% of U.S. adults approve of Trump’s handling of the economy, while 57% disapprove, [Reuters’ Jason Lange reports](#). That’s down from shortly after his inauguration in January.

A message from The National Association of REALTORS®:



A new national survey shows overwhelming support for pro-housing policies in TCJA. [Learn More.](#)

First in Playbook: Behind that shift is, of course, the whipsawing tariff threats that have spooked investors and vaporized trillions in the markets. And that amounts to not just an economic problem, but a messaging one. “Trump has described his trade war as a bold effort to prioritize Main Street concerns, the fulfilment of a promise to an American working class hurt by decades of globalization,” [POLITICO’s Eli Stokols & co. write this morning](#). But for many Americans, that message is out of step with the lived reality of the trade war.

What *could* change the trajectory? “Some close to the White House believe the first trade agreements with other countries are in the offing, and that potential early-stage deals with Japan, India, Argentina, the United Kingdom and others will validate Trump’s approach and show Wall Street — and the country — that things are on the right track,” Eli and team write. Watch this space.

SCHOOL DAZE: As the White House continues its efforts to dictate policies in higher education, Trump signed an executive order yesterday that would change up the process for institutions to get accredited, [WSJ’s Sara Randazzo and Meridith McGraw report](#). “The order aims to use the accrediting system to combat what Trump views as discriminatory practices and ‘ideological overreach’ on college campuses, the White House said,” while putting “greater focus on intellectual diversity among faculty and student success.”

Also signed yesterday: Executive orders threatening to cut federal funds from schools that do not disclose money they receive from foreign entities ... new federal guidance on school discipline ... and a new White House initiative on HBCUs. “Taken together, the suite of Trump’s orders represent significant maneuvers to squeeze the finances of many higher education institutions and expand his already sweeping federal intervention into the country’s education industry,” [write POLITICO’s Juan Perez Jr. and Rebecca Carballo](#).

Coming attractions: As the Trump administration works to extract concessions from Ivy League institutions, alleging they’ve failed to quell

antisemitism on campus, a group of protesters “is planning to set up tent encampments on Columbia University campuses this week in protest of the war in Gaza,” [NBC News’ Matt Laviertes scooped](#).

IMMIGRATION FILES: The Justice Department is bringing its first terrorism case against an alleged high-ranking member of the Tren de Aragua gang in Colombia, [AP’s Alanna Durkin Richer And Eric Tucker report](#). As part of his immigration crackdown, Trump has designated the gang a foreign terrorist organization and an invading force under the 1798 Alien Enemies Act, which has been used to justify the deportation of alleged gang members to a notorious mega-prison in El Salvador.

Speaking of which ... Last night, federal U.S. District Judge **Paula Xinis** temporarily halted her order directing the government to explain what it’s done to return **Kilmar Abrego Garcia**, the Maryland resident illegally deported to the Salvadoran prison, [per AP’s Ben Finley](#). Xinis granted the Trump administration a seven-day, but “did not make any changes to the required daily status updates,” and she “didn’t explain her legal reasoning.”

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TALK OF THE TOWN

WHCD WEEK RUNDOWN: The White House Correspondents’ Association dinner is on Saturday, and Playbook has you covered as you plan out your social schedule through Sunday.

Today’s events include ... The Honoring International Women Journalists and Truth in Storytelling, reception starting at 4 p.m. ... The Washington Women in Journalism Awards Ceremony starting at 6 ... the Meridian Hill-White House Foreign Press Group’s 4th Annual Press Pass Party starting at 6:30 ... the Semafor Gala at the National Portrait Gallery starting at 7 ... **Crooked Media’s live taping of**

“Lovett or Leave It” at 8 ... and the **Status kickoff party** starting at 8:30.

Over the next few days, we’ll be sharing some of our best “spotted,” photos and behind-the-scenes details in our morning editions. And while members of the Playbook team will be fanned out across Washington this week, we need your help, too! If you spot something or someone noteworthy, **email us** at playbook@politico.com or [text us on Signal here](#). (Don’t worry, all tips will be anonymous.)

OUT AND ABOUT — SPOTTED yesterday at day one of the Semafor World Economy Summit, held at the Conrad Washington D.C.: Kentucky Gov. **Andy Beshear**, Rep. **Jim Himes** (D-Conn.), **Stephen Miran**, **Steve Bannon**, **Andrew Ferguson**, **Sebastian Gorka**, **Iván Duque**, **Rachel Reeves**, **Jörg Kukies**, **Carlos Cuerpo**, **Valdis Dombrovskis**, **Éric Lombard**, **H.E. Doudou R. Fwamba Likunde**, Hon. **John Mbadi**, **Ken Griffin**, **Ted Sarandos**, **Stephanie Ruhle**, **Mary Barra**, **Liz Claman**, **Evan Spiegel**, **Kara Swisher**, **Liz Hoffman**, **Max Tani**, **Shelby Talcott**, **Burgess Everett**, **Dave Weigel**, **Ben Smith**, **Justin Smith**.

— SPOTTED yesterday at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce global summit: Ukrainian PM **Denys Shmyhal**, British Ambassador **Peter Mandelson**, E.U. Ambassador **Jovita Neliupšienė**, Maryland Gov. **Wes Moore**, Virginia Gov. **Glenn Youngkin**, Kentucky Gov. **Andy Beshear**, **Jens Stoltenberg**, **Mathias Cormann**, **Neel Kashkari**, **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, **Rich Lesser**, **Paul Donofrio** and **Karan Bhatia**.

TRANSITIONS — Kristina Costa has returned to Fenway as a senior adviser. She previously was deputy assistant to the president and director of the Office of Clean Energy Innovation and Implementation in the Biden White House. ... **Kent Landfield** and **Leonard Bailey** are now fellows at the Center for Cybersecurity Policy & Law. Landfield previously was chief standards and technology policy strategist at Trellix. Bailey previously held senior roles at DOJ and is a Georgetown and NYU law professor. ...

... **Caitlin Haner** has been named director for strategy and innovation at Saab. She most recently was a business manager at Microsoft. ... **Dan Roberti** is now a managing director at SKDK. He most recently was VP of comms and digital at the Anti-Defamation League. ... **Kate Bennett** is now

VP of external affairs and brand strategy at Invariant. She previously was a senior adviser.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY: Rep. **Mark Harris** (R-N.C.) ... **Mike Gwin** ... The Hill's **Al Weaver** ... **Abigail Tracy** ... **Andrew Kirtzman** ... **Erin DeLullo** ... **Zack Roday** ... **Clark Packard** ... **Ruth Guerra** ... **Terron Sims II** ... **Hillary Lassiter** ... POLITICO's **Griffin Taylor**, **Miranda Wilson**, **Daniella Cheslow** and **Ellie Borst** ... **Megan Sowards Newton** ... **Conner Prochaska** ... **Kathy Duda** ... **Stuart Chapman** of Thorn Run Partners ... **Megan Nashban Kenney** ... **Robb Walton** of BGR Group ... **Jameson Cunningham** ... **Megan Hannigan** ... GCI Health's **Luis Betanzo** ... Smithsonian's **Gabriella Kahn** ... former Reps. **Jack Kingston** (R-Ga.) and **Mike Garcia** (R-Calif.) ... **Aubrey Lopez** ... **Halee Dobbins**

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Playbook couldn't happen without our deputy editor **Zack Stanton** and
Playbook Daily Briefing producer **Callan Tansill-Suddath**.*

Correction: Yesterday's Playbook misspelled Warren Buffett's name.

A message from The National Association of REALTORS®:

A new survey shows Americans overwhelmingly back key real estate provisions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act—policies that expand homeownership and drive our economy. A whopping 91% support preserving homeowner tax incentives like the mortgage interest deduction. 83% back the 20% tax break for small businesses and independent contractors. And 61% want to see SALT deduction limits increased.

Homeownership is the main way Americans build wealth, with a homeowner's net worth 40 times that of a renter. But with a 4.7 million home shortage, millions of middle-class Americans are locked out of the American Dream.

NAR supports bold, pro-housing policies like fixing the home equity penalty, converting empty commercial spaces into homes, attracting private investment, and cutting red tape.

Real estate powers 18% of U.S. GDP, and every home sale creates two jobs. Let's expand supply, fuel growth, and build a new age of prosperity through homeownership. [Learn more.](#)

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