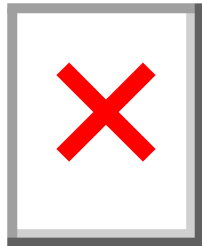


From: POLITICO Playbook <politicoplaybook@email.politico.com>
Sent: Mar 01, 2025 16:30:27.000000000 UTC
Subject: Zelenskyy's bleak morning after
To: jperperian@cityofmelrose.org <jperperian@cityofmelrose.org>

Mar 01, 2025

[View in browser](#)



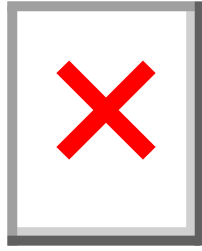
BY **ADAM WREN**

Presented by the Coalition for Medicare Choices

With help from Eli Okun, Garrett Ross and Bethany Irvine

Happy Saturday. It's 59 degrees in the District, but the high will drop to 39 tomorrow. We warned you last weekend about Fool's Spring. **Drop me a line:** awren@politico.com.

■ **DRIVING THE DAY**



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy took to X to do some thinking this morning. | Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA

One day after the disastrous Oval Office meeting heard around the world, Washington and Europe are still reeling.

This morning, after Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** offered a testy defense of his war-torn country when responding to Vice President **JD Vance** — who asked him “have you said thank you once?” — Zelenskyy took to X to do some thanking.

“We are very grateful to the United States for all the support,” Zelensky said in a blitz of [posts](#) that appeared to be aimed at cleaning up the mess. “I’m thankful to President Trump, Congress for their bipartisan support, and American people. Ukrainians have always appreciated this support, especially during these three years of full-scale invasion.”

Early this morning, Zelenskyy also [outlined](#) the rough terms of the deal he’s still seeking to secure, saying he was ready to sign the minerals

agreement as “the first step toward security guarantees.

“But it’s not enough, and we need more than just that. A ceasefire without security guarantees is dangerous for Ukraine,” he wrote.

In Washington, the shocking showdown has left Trump’s most ardent backers relishing the confrontation — perhaps the signal moment of MAGA’s America First foreign policy doctrine — and has internationalists apoplectic.

“This guy isn’t just trying to save his country — he’s the finger in the dike for the rest of Europe,” one State Department official [said of Zelenskyy](#) to our Nahal Toosi and Amy Mackinnon. “First, we extort him, then we intentionally try to embarrass him.”

There appears to be no immediate redo in the offing: Zelenskyy departed the U.S. and headed back overseas late Friday.

A few takeaways are emerging from the fog of diplomatic war:

STATE OF PLAY: To put it mildly, the immediate outlook for salvaging a deal is ... *bleak*. But this isn’t over, Capitol Bureau Chief and senior Washington correspondent Rachael Bade learned overnight for her latest [revelatory and newsy Corridors column](#).

No meetings are currently on offer. But, but, but: Trump is still the deal-hungry player he always has been.

Two senior White House officials told Rachael that Trump meant it when he said the door is not closed and that when Zelenskyy is ready to talk peace, he should come back. “He still wants a deal,” one senior administration official said.

WAS IT ALL A TRAP? The White House is furious about Trump critics suggesting without evidence that the entire episode was a “premeditated trap laid by Trump and Vance intended to sink the U.S.-Ukraine alliance once and for all,” Rachael writes.

Ukraine-friendly members of Congress prepped Zelenskyy ahead of time, Rachael notes. That counsel went out unheeded once Vance started talking about how diplomacy was the way to deal with **Vladimir Putin**.

“Everyone was giving him the same advice, which was get the deal done, don't play games and be very appreciative of everything that Trump and the administration have done,” said a person familiar with Zelenskyy’s conversations with GOP senators. “Lead with, ‘Thank you for everything that you've done,’ and get the deal done.”

VIEW FROM 30,000 FEET: There is a larger project unfolding amid the chaos. “What Mr. Trump really wants, one senior European official said this week before the blowup, is a normalization of the relationship with Russia,” [writes](#) The New York Times’ David Sanger in a news analysis. “If that means rewriting the history of Moscow’s illegal invasion three years ago, dropping investigations of Russian war crimes or refusing to offer Ukraine long-lasting security guarantees, then Mr. Trump, in this assessment of his intentions, is willing to make that deal.”

Have no doubt: Russia, our Giselle Ruhiyyih Ewing writes in a larger stepback, [celebrated the meeting](#).

A message from the Coalition for Medicare Choices:

Protect Medicare Advantage: 34 million seniors are counting on it.

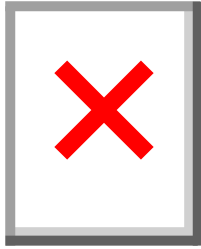
Over half of America’s seniors choose Medicare Advantage because it provides them better care at lower costs than fee-for-service Medicare. With their coverage and care on the line, seniors are watching closely to see whether policymakers keep the bipartisan promise to protect Medicare Advantage by ensuring this vital part of Medicare is adequately funded.

Learn more at <https://medicarechoices.org/>

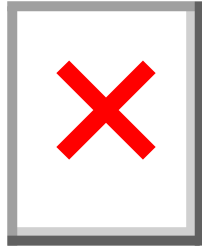
AFTERNOON READ — [“This Texas County Voted Republican for the First Time in a Century. They Like What They See,”](#) by David Siders for POLITICO Mag: “[A]s I walked around town and the fairgrounds — all riding boots and camo jackets, parents ducking out of the rain and ribbon-carrying children eating gushers and potato swirls — people suggested to me that [Elon] Musk’s crusade was not only a pragmatic pursuit, but a righteous one. ... The Trump supporters here had not necessarily expected

such an aggressive effort to dismantle government. But they were embracing the idea now.”

A message from the Coalition for Medicare Choices:



9 THINGS THAT STUCK WITH US



Elon Musk reiterated his demand that federal employees justify their existence in a late-night email yesterday. | Francis Chung/POLITICO

1. DOGE DAYS AREN'T OVER: Thought the drama around **Elon Musk's** “five things” email was over? Think again.

The tech billionaire and DOGE overseer reiterated his demand that federal employees justify their existence in a late-night email yesterday with the subject line, “What did you do last week? Part II,” [POLITICO's Danny Nguyen and Holly Otterbein report](#). Public-sector employees across multiple departments, including State, Energy, IRS and Veterans Affairs, reported receiving the email from OPM, which “came four hours after the end of the business day and asked employees to reply with ‘approx. 5 bullets describing what you accomplished last week and cc your manager.’”

The note comes after federal workers received a similar missive last week, and confusion abounded whether they were required to submit their work or face termination. While “OPM also revised its privacy rules to clarify that response to the email was voluntary,” both Trump and Musk “have

previously threatened federal workers with the possibility of termination if they do not respond,” Danny and Holly write.

More Musk reads: [“What 130-day cap? Musk is ‘here to stay’ in the Trump admin, adviser says,”](#) by POLITICO’s Jake Traylor and Dasha Burns ... [“Government AI, defending DOGE and more: Takeaways from Elon Musk’s three-hour interview with Joe Rogan,”](#) by Danny and POLITICO’s Ali Bianco ...

2. THE TARIFF SHERIFF: Donald Trump is set to impose punishing 25 percent tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico as soon as Tuesday. And with Canadian PM **Justin Trudeau** set to step down in a few days, his successor will inherit increasingly worse relationships marked by tariff tensions and annexation threats, [NYT’s Ian Austen’s reports](#): Relations between Washington and Ottawa are the worst “since the trade war of the Great Depression ... Arguably they are nearing a nadir not seen since the 19th century.” On the ground in the Great White North, Trump’s calls for annexation are being met with a wave of patriotism: “[Canadian] flag makers who, during what is normally a dead sales period, are now scrambling to meet a surge in demand for maple leaf flags.”

Mirror, mirror: Back in Washington, Treasury Secretary **Scott Bessent** urged Canada to follow suit with Mexico in adopting tariffs against Chinese goods in an [interview with Bloomberg Television](#) yesterday: “I think it would be a nice gesture if the Canadians did it also — so in a way, we could have fortress North America from the flood of Chinese imports that’s coming out of the most unbalanced economy in the history of modern times.”.

How to (not) succeed in business?: [NYT’s Daisuke Wakabayashi, Alexandra Stevenson, Danielle Kaye and Eli Tan](#) are out with a look at how U.S. small business are coping with the uncertainty around the looming Chinese tariffs and a potential rise in production costs: “Many companies said they would have to raise prices to offset the expense if they had not already. Some spoke of a feeling of business paralysis.”

3. IMMIGRATION FILES: A recent ICE memo details how the White House is pushing immigration officials to identify immigrants who would qualify for accelerated removal from the U.S., [WaPo’s Nick Miroff and Maria Sacchetti scoop](#). The new directive could mean that “more than 1 million

migrants who were admitted” under Biden’s tenure could face expedited removal without a court hearing. **More details ...**

- **Who’s included:** Migrants who may qualify for rapid removal could include those who “crossed the border illegally, were waved into the country on parole or with a notice to report to immigration authorities, and have not applied for asylum ... Immigrants who arrived legally through a port of entry also may be targeted if they lacked immigration documents or misrepresented themselves,” per the memo.
- **A new precedent:** While Trump made a similar attempt to expedite removals during his first term, “advocates said the Feb. 18 ICE memo goes even further than the expansion into the interior because it targets people who arrived via parole, most of them legally, even if they have been in the United States longer than two years.”

4. DEEP IN THE HEART: HHS Secretary **Robert F. Kennedy Jr.** spoke out about the growing measles outbreak in Texas as the Lone Star State continues to battle an outbreak of the deadly virus: “I recognize the serious impact of this outbreak on families, children, and healthcare workers,” Kennedy [wrote in a post on X](#). The secretary also laid out several steps the agency has taken to address the outbreak, noting “HHS had provided lab support to track the virus, offered technical assistance to local public health officials and updated federal advice on doctors offering vitamin A to manage measles cases,” [WSJ’s Liz Essley Whyte, Brianna Abbott and Joseph Pisani report](#).

RFK Jr.’s comments came after he seemingly dismissed the measles threat earlier this week, telling reporters at Wednesday’s cabinet meeting that an outbreak was “not unusual” and that “we have measles outbreaks every year.” Texas officials confirmed the first measles death in the U.S. in a decade — a school-aged child in Lubbock who was unvaccinated.

What we know so far: 146 cases have been reported in West Texas since early this year, [The Texas Tribune’s Stephen Simpson, Terri Langford and Eleanor Klibanoff report](#): “Five of the 146 infected in Texas so far were vaccinated and the remainder were unvaccinated or their vaccination status was unknown.” Yesterday, Austin health officials also announced the city’s first measles case in 24 years, though it’s considered unrelated to the West Texas outbreak.

5. ON DEFENSE: Defense Secretary **Pete Hegseth** confirmed yesterday that the White House has authorized U.S. commanders “to approve some strikes against enemy combatants without high-level approval,” [WaPo’s Dan Lamothe reports](#): “The decision marks a throwback to President Donald Trump’s first administration, when he loosened battlefield restrictions and said he would not tie the hands of U.S. troops operating in hostile areas.”

More military moves: A week after Trump’s unprecedented ousting of Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair **C.Q. Brown**, the president is once again shaking up the Pentagon by forcing out Army Lt. Gen. **Telita Crosland**, the head of the military’s health agency, [Reuters’ Idrees Ali and Phil Stewart scoop](#): “[A] current and former official ... said Crosland had been told that she must retire. She was not given a reason why.”

The local angle ... [“As Trump Overhauls the Military, Fort Bragg and Its Neighbors Brace for Change,”](#) by NYT’s Eduardo Medina: “The prospect of big change at Fort Bragg is bound to be felt in the larger [Fayetteville, North Carolina] metro area, which is filled with veterans and active-duty military families.”

6. DEM DATA DRAMA: A near-disaster could have crippled Democrats’ massive database of voter information last summer, spurring an “extraordinary intervention” from party officials as they scrambled to make it to Election Day, [NYT’s Shane Goldmacher scoops](#). After a private company who handles the voter database warned they could not handle the intense amount information being input and downloaded in their system, several DNC engineers and campaign operatives stepped in to keep it afloat last summer: “Had it collapsed, the party’s entire get-out-the-vote operation could have been temporarily crippled, forcing canvassers to work with pen and paper instead of smartphones, and leaving campaigns effectively blind.”

“The episode, which has not been previously reported, has deepened concerns at the party’s highest levels about its singular dependency on a for-profit company whose majority owner, a private equity firm, has imposed layoffs in recent years to slash costs,” Goldmacher writes.

7. THE \$80 MILLION DOLLAR CAPER CONT’D.: In a new court filing Trump’s legal team is arguing “FEMA did not violate protocol by clawing back \$80 million from a municipal Citibank” in New York City earlier this month, [POLITICO’s Joe Anuta reports](#). The clapback comes after NYC

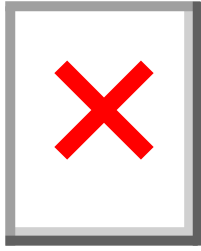
Mayor **Eric Adams** filed a lawsuit arguing the federal government illegally repossessed funds that were earmarked for immigration service without notice. Instead, federal officials claim they “merely paused the aid” in order to investigate if it was being used to “indirectly prop up a violent Venezuelan gang known as Tren De Aragua.”

8. PERSONNEL PROBLEMS: [“Trump's top prosecutor in DC demotes several supervisors who handled politically sensitive cases,”](#) by AP’s Alanna Durkin Richer, Eric Tucker and Byron Tau:

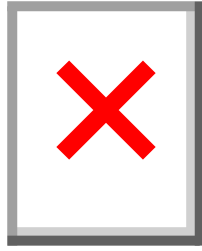
“Among those being reassigned include several prosecutors who handled or oversaw politically sensitive cases involving the Jan. 6 riot and Trump allies **Peter Navarro** and **Steve Bannon**. ... The prosecutors were informed in an email that they were being reassigned to work on misdemeanor cases or moved to the Early Case Assessment Section, which evaluates new cases and handles early court proceedings.”

9. TAKE ME OR LEAVE ME: [“Education Department to staffers: Quit by Monday and get \\$25K in cash,”](#) by POLITICO’s Rebecca

Carballo: “Employees have until Monday at 11:59 p.m. to make a decision. ... Most department employees are eligible. A few exceptions include those that are using disability retirement, received a student loan repayment benefit in the last 36 months or [were] awarded a retention bonus in the last 12 months.”



CLICKER — “The nation’s cartoonists on the week in politics,”
edited by Matt Wuerker — [*17 funnies*](#)



Matt Wuerker

GREAT WEEKEND READS:

- [“Progressives Say They Want Clean Energy. They Held Up This Hydro Project for Years,”](#) by Marc Dunkelman for POLITICO Mag: “An effort to bring clean energy to Massachusetts has languished in red tape.”
- [“The Teacher in Room 1214,”](#) by NYT’s Emily Baumgaertner Nunn: “When a gunman killed two of her students, Ivy Schamis was the only adult in the room. Her journey through guilt and healing sheds light on the impossible role of American teachers.”
- [“In an Age of Right-Wing Populism, Why Are Denmark’s Liberals Winning?”](#) by NYT Mag’s David Leonhardt: “Around the world, progressive parties have come to see tight immigration restrictions as

unnecessary, even cruel. What if they're actually the only way for progressivism to flourish?"

— [“The End of Children,”](#) by Gideon Lewis-Kraus for The New Yorker: “Birth rates are crashing around the world. Should we be worried?”

— [“Rifling Through the Archives With Legendary Historian Robert Caro,”](#) by Chris Heath for Smithsonian Magazine: “Reams of papers, revealing how the scholar came to write his iconic biographies of Robert Moses and Lyndon B. Johnson, are preserved forever in New York. But his work is far from over.”

— [“This Russian Tech Bro Helped Steal \\$93 Million and Landed in US Prison. Then Putin Called,”](#) by Wired’s Noah Shachtman: “Reams of papers, revealing how the scholar came to write his iconic biographies of Robert Moses and Lyndon B. Johnson, are preserved forever in New York. But his work is far from over.”

TALK OF THE TOWN

Babydog Justice has her [official headshot](#).

FIRST IN PLAYBOOK — Over 100 current Presidential Management Fellows from the last three classes have released an open letter demanding Congress protect the PMF program after a Donald Trump executive order eliminated it last week. The letter, which is co-signed by 114 current fellows, noted the order weakens the administration’s “aim to build a government that is efficient, merit-based, and staffed by highly qualified individuals.”

“Despite its small size, the PMF program delivers an outsized return on investment, and eliminating it won’t save taxpayer dollars — it will waste them,” the group writes. “This is not about politics. It is about performance. It’s about ensuring the best and brightest continue working in public service to solve our country’s toughest challenges. We cannot afford to dismantle a program that delivers so much, so efficiently.” [Read the letter](#)

— The Alpine Group on Friday fired lobbyist **Courtney Johnson**, a principal at the firm and head of its health care practice, after she was [seen in a viral video](#) making racist comments, Daniel Lippman reports. Johnson had been at the top D.C. firm for more than two decades and was registered on

behalf of numerous companies including AWS, Amgen, Leidos and Lyft, according to recent lobbying disclosures.

“Following a thorough internal inquiry, Courtney Johnson's employment has been terminated, effective immediately, due to conduct inconsistent with company policies and standards,” the firm said in a statement to Playbook. “The views expressed are deeply offensive and inconsistent with our firm’s values and culture.” Johnson didn’t respond to requests for comment.

IN MEMORIAM — Shannon Oscar, a fundraiser, lobbyist and former Hill staffer, died this week at 50. She was principal at the Oscar Group and managing director of the American Subcontractor Association Subcontractor Legal Defense Fund, and was an Anne Northup, Fred Thompson and Wayne Allard alum. Her funeral is today. [Full obituary](#)

TRANSITION — Prentice Eager will be VP of data at Frontline Strategies. He most recently was the data director at the NRCC and is an RGA and RNC alum.

LEAP DAY BIRTHDAYS: Rep. **Ben Cline** (R-Va.) ... former Rep. **Bart Stupak** (D-Mich.) ... **Caitlin Kovalkoski** ... POLITICO’s **Kate Irby** and **Pamela King** ... **Enid Doggett** of INSPR Media ... **Craig Kennedy** ... Messina Group’s **Gabrielle Quintana Greenfield** ... **Allie White** ... **Eugene Volokh** ... Greenbrier Partners’ **Adrian Durbin**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY: Sen. **Deb Fischer** (R-Neb.) ... Reps. **Warren Davidson** (R-Ohio) and **Trent Kelly** (R-Miss.) ... **Giulia Giannangeli** of House Energy and Commerce ... **Maddison Stone** ... **Stephen Ezell** ... **Adam Brand** ... **Vanessa Cadavillo** ... POLITICO’s **Dasha Burns**, **Ali Taki**, **Tierra Perdue**, **Jasper Goodman** and **Liset Cruz** ... **Lorraine Woellert** ... **Vayl Oxford** ... NBC’s **Bridget Bowman** ... HUD’s **Kasey Lovett** ... **Meghan Milloy** ... Eisai’s **Elizabeth Brooks** ... **Elizabeth Rhee** ... former Sens. **John Breaux** (D-La.) and **Luther Strange** (R-Ala.) ... former Reps. **Carlos Curbelo** (R-Fla.) and **Randy Hultgren** (R-Ill.) ... **Howard Altman** ... **Jess McCarron** ... **Natalie Szemetylo** ... **Ryan Little** ... **Aaron Sherinian** ... **Lauren Vicary** ... Exxon Mobil’s **Mike Bloomquist** ... **Tom Jones**... **Brian Arata** of Rep. Glenn “G.T.” Thompson’s (R-Pa.) office ... **Ian Sbalcio** ... Herald Group’s **Wyatt Hamilton** ... **Rubí Martínez** of Climate Power

THE SHOWS ([Full Sunday show listings here](#)):

NBC “Meet the Press”: Speaker Mike Johnson ... Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.) ... Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.). **Panel:** Brendan Buck, Carol Lee, Stephanie Murphy and Julio Vaqueiro.

Fox News “Sunday Morning Futures”: Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick ... Speaker Mike Johnson ... Rep. Byron Donalds (R-Fla.) ... Vivek Ramaswamy ... Devin Nunes ... Mike Pompeo.

CNN “State of the Union”: Speaker Mike Johnson ... Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.). **Panel:** Rep. Suhas Subramanyam (D-Va.), Scott Jennings, Xochitl Hinojosa and Erin McGuire.

ABC “This Week”: Ukrainian Ambassador Oksana Markarova ... British Ambassador Peter Mandelson ... Chris Christie ... David Miliband. **Panel:** Donna Brazile, Rachel Scotta and Julie Pace.

CBS “Face the Nation”: Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent ... Sen. Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.) ... Rep. Mike Turner (R-Ohio) ... Rep. John James (R-Mich.) ... Kaja Kallas ... Anthony Salvanto.

NewsNation “The Hill Sunday”: Sen. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) ... Rep. Steven Horsford (D-Nev.). **Panel:** Josh Barro, Paul Kane and Julia Manchester.

FOX “Fox News Sunday”: Tulsi Gabbard ... Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.). **Legal panel:** Ilya Shapiro and Tom Dupree. **Sunday panel:** Susan Page, Richard Fowler, Doug Heye and Hans Nichols.

MSNBC “The Weekend”: Newark Mayor Ras Baraka ... New Mexico AG Raul Torrez ... Shernice Mundell.

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*Send Playbookers tips to playbook@politico.com or text us at 202-556-3307. Playbook couldn't happen without our deputy editor **Zack Stanton** and Playbook Daily Briefing producer **Callan Tansill-Suddath**.*

A message from the Coalition for Medicare Choices:

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Medicare Advantage outperforms fee-for-service Medicare in preventive care and supporting seniors living with chronic disease. Seniors in Medicare Advantage experience fewer readmissions, fewer preventable hospitalizations, lower rates of high-risk medications and better outcomes.

Learn more at <https://medicarechoices.org/>

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