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Playbook: Day 99

By JACK BLANCHARD | 04/28/2025 06:13 AM EDT



Planned

With help from Eli Okun, Garrett Ross and Bethany Irvine



POLITICO Playbook Daily Briefing

April 28, 2025: Trump nears a historic benchmark

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With help from Eli Okun, Garrett Ross and Bethany Irvine

Good Monday morning. This is Jack Blanchard, soaking up the glory of a 20th league title an awful long way from home. The best bit? My dad took my seat on the Kop yesterday ... a mere 61 years after the first time he saw us win the league.

AND NOW ... THE HANGOVER: Half of D.C. is waking up with a sore head this morning after a sun-drenched White House Correspondents' Dinner weekend wound up in style. This was your Playbook author's exhausting debut on the scene (yes I am "that British guy," thanks for asking) and it was certainly an experience. Even without the Clooneys and the Trumps and the Obama mic drops and all the rest.

Some reflections:

- · Congrats to my old colleague Eugene Daniels for a tour de force in the toughest journo gig in town.
- · And props to Alex Thompson of Axios for addressing the gigantic, Biden-shaped elephant in the room.
- · Robert Albritton has the most beautiful house, the British Embassy has the most beautiful gardens ... but the United Talent Agency has the most beautiful people.
- · Fish with steak? Why?
- The French Ambassador's thing (chic, decent tunes, great food) is better than the Swiss Ambassador's thing (too big, too loud, lines too long). Sorry,
- · But the best party of all was blatantly the MAGA one that very few people (Dasha Burns among them) got invited to, with all the caviar and expensive tequila and whatnot.

Trump should honestly just turn up. Maybe in 2028. That speech would be quite something.

In today's Playbook ...

- Trump hits Day 99 with a mass media blitz.
- Congress is back and reconciliation talks are revving back up.
- Canada goes to the polls, with Trump's shadow looming over the election.

DRIVING THE DAY

PARTY LIKE IT'S 99: Donald Trump this morning embarks on a headline-grabbing media blitz ahead of his 100th day in office tomorrow. The president has a series of set-piece interviews and events lined up to mark the big occasion, hoping to convince America that his first three months back in the White House have been not just consequential but a triumph. Time magazine (last Friday), the Atlantic (this morning) and ABC News (tomorrow night) are among the outlets to have bagged "100 day" interviews, and there will surely be a Fox News thing as well.

And then get ready ... for an endless stream of "100 day" retrospectives from Trump critics and cheerleaders alike. (AP has already had an early stab at the ups and downs; Bloomberg says the "breakneck speed" of Team Trump's approach has been the biggest feature.) At least we can all agree it hasn't been dull

FIRST, READ THIS: In the last few minutes, the Atlantic dropped its big interview/profile on Trump 2.0, as previewed by the president himself on Truth Social the other day. Staff writers Ashley Parker and Michael Scherer interviewed Trump twice for the piece along with "dozens of top advisers, senior aides, allies, and adversaries," the Atlantic says. "Are they capable of writing a fair story on "TRUMP"?" the president pondered on Thursday, thus making the progression from talking about himself in the third person to ... talking about himself in the third person with all-caps and quote marks.

How they landed the interview: "[A]t 10:45 on a Saturday morning in late March, we called him on his cellphone. (Don't ask how we got his number. All we can say is that the White House staff have imperfect control over Trump's personal communication devices.) The president was at the country club he owns in Bedminster, New Jersey. The number that flashed on his screen was an unfamiliar one, but he answered anyway. 'Who's calling?' he asked." Amazing.

On media owners opposing Trump: "'You know at some point, they give up,' he said, referring to media owners generally and — we suspected — [Washington Post owner Jeff] Bezos specifically. 'At some point they say, No más, no más.' He laughed quietly."

The killer quote: Interestingly, Trump is happy to contrast his disruptor-in-chief position now with the in-fighting of his ill-fated first term. "The first time, I had two things to do — run the country and survive; I had all these crooked guys," he told The Atlantic. "And the second time, I run the country and the world."

AND THEN WATCH THIS: In what can only be described as a punishment beating for the hungover press corps, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt has called a televised briefing at the ungodly hour of 8:30 a.m. this morning. Her special guest will be border czar Tom Homan, and it's pretty clear what Team Trump wants to talk about today: the president's success in cutting illegal border crossings so dramatically in less than three months.

why not? As "promises made, promises kept" go, it's a biggie, whatever you think of the methods.

But what about deportations? "President Donald Trump's first 100 days weren't marked by splashy headlines declaring 'mass deportations' or images of millions of people being forcibly removed from the country as he promised," POLITICO's Myah Ward reports this morning. "Instead, Trump and his top aides have been waging war on already-fragile due process in the immigration system," hoping to "permanently alter the country's treatment of immigrants and expand presidential power."

Speaking of which: The press will doubtless want to ask Homan and Leavitt about various immigration stories that bubbled up over the past weekend. They included the removal from America of several small children who hold U.S. citizenship but traveled with their undocumented mothers who were being deported. ... Massive immigration raids in Colorado and Florida. ... The arrest on Friday of Judge **Hannah Dugan** in Wisconsin on charges of obstruction following an attempted ICE arrest. ... Not to mention the various ongoing legal cases surrounding Trump's use of the 1798 Alien Enemies Act to push through deportations.

Obviously: Leavitt will be more than happy to answer them all. The White House believes if it's talking about immigration, it's winning. Expect to hear plenty more on this today and through the week — not least at Trump's big 100-day rally in Macomb County, Michigan, tomorrow night.

But here's the problem: Trump is *not* winning, if standard measures of public opinion are your yardstick. A flurry of weekend opinion polls (CNN; ABC) show his approval rating is the lowest in decades for a president at this point in their tenure. But as my POLITICO colleague **Dasha Burns** tells me on this morning's Playbook Daily Briefing podcast (listen to us here!), the White House is supremely relaxed about this. They don't trust polls. They knew tariffs would be painful. Plus Trump, as far as we know, is not seeking reelection.

But but: This New York Times poll tracker still displays starkly how things started to go wrong in the public's mind right after — surprise, surprise — "Liberation Day," when the president unveiled his massive "reciprocal" tariff plan and instantly sent the stock markets, bond markets and U.S. dollar into a spin.

On that front: What Trump urgently needs is a trade deal or two to reassure the markets those now-paused "reciprocal" tariffs are not coming back. Tellingly — and depressingly for Europe — the front-runners are all Asian countries, with Japan, India and South Korea most likely to get out in front. (Japan's trade negotiator **Ryosei Akazawa** is in D.C. later this week, per Reuters.) The expectation is Trump will announce "agreements in principle,"

which allow him to back away from the "reciprocal" tariffs without losing face (in his own mind, anyway) — even with the hard yards of actually negotiating trade deals still to come. Bloomberg has more on that.

Other stuff to watch for: Ukraine is the other big story likely to move in the coming days following Trump's extraordinary face-to-face talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, on Saturday morning — which produced by some margin the most extraordinary political picture your author has ever seen: part "West Wing," part Dan Brown, part James Bond.

In essence: Trump now wants Ukraine to sign a critical minerals deal with the U.S. and for Russia to stop the bombing. His patience is wearing thin. Speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press" yesterday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said: "This week is going to be a really important week in which we have to make a determination about whether this is an endeavor that we want to continue to be involved in."

Speaking on Air Force One last night, Trump said he believes Zelenskyy is prepared to give up Crimea — illegally annexed by Russia in 2014 — to end the war. "I think he understands the picture, and I think he wants to make a deal," Trump said. He once again saved his ire for Russian President **Vladimir Putin**, describing himself as "surprised and disappointed" at the continued missile attacks on Ukraine's cities.

Where Trump is today: The president has a private lunch with VP JD Vance before hosting Super Bowl champs the Philadelphia Eagles on the South Lawn at 4 p.m. After that, he's in the Oval Office signing executive orders.

Coming attractions: Trump's next 100 days will involve more "torpedoes under the water," a White House official tells Reuters.

A message from Planned Parenthood Federation of America:

1 in 4 people have visited a Planned Parenthood health center for expert, affordable care, including birth control, wellness visits, cancer screenings and more.

But lawmakers who oppose reproductive health are targeting Planned Parenthood. They want to take away the health care millions of patients rely on — especially those with low incomes.

Planned Parenthood won't stop fighting for the care people need and deserve.

We need you in this fight. Visit http://ImForPP.org to learn more.

MEANWHILE ON THE HILL

RECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES: Congress returns from a two-week break today, with Republicans ready to begin budget markup for their massive reconciliation bill. But with the voting numbers tight and the spending details still to be hammered out, the centerpiece of Trump 2.0's legislative agenda ill very much up in the air. Speaker Mike Johnson will head up Pennsylvania Avenue to meet with Trump at 2 p.m., the White House said. "Big Six" tings with congressional leaders and administration officials will also recommence this week, POLITICO's Benjamin Guggenheim reports. Follow the latest in POLITICO's Inside Congress newsletter.

The plans: The first crucial question is how much money in costs and savings each committee comes up with at the markup sessions kicking off tomorrow. The latest bill, unveiled by Armed Services, calls for bolstering defense spending by \$150 billion, in a concession to the Senate, per Inside Defense's Tony Bertuca. Financial Services Republicans will huddle this afternoon ahead of their own Wednesday markup, per Punchbowl's Laura Weiss and Brendan Pedersen.

But but: Competing interests and ideologies abound within the GOP. Republicans from high-tax states will meet with GOP leaders about the state and local tax deduction Wednesday. The White House is growing concerned that House plans to make changes to food aid could hurt low-income Trump voters in red states, POLITICO's Meredith Lee Hill scooped. Moderates are planning to make a real stand against drastic cuts — especially to Medicaid, CNN's Sarah Ferris and Lauren Fox report. And as talk swirls about possibly raising taxes on the wealthy, the Heritage Foundation gave Playbook a statement publicly opposing the idea for the first time.

"Congress needs to get its fiscal house in order," said Richard Stern, director of the Grover M. Hermann Center for the Federal Budget, "but it must do so by tightening its own belt, not by forcing American taxpayers to tighten theirs."

The upshot: "There are rampant doubts that Johnson's ambitious timeline is feasible," POLITICO's Jordain Carney reports this morning. Johnson has already changed his original Memorial Day deadline from passing the bill through both chambers to passing it just through the House. WSJ's Olivia Beavers breaks down all the different groups of Republicans that could give Johnson a headache.

The loyal opposition: House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) held a sit-in on the Capitol steps for much of yesterday, another high-profile effort to demonstrate vociferous Democratic opposition to Republicans' undivided control of government, per CBS. Their livestreamed focus was the budget plan, which Booker said placed the country at a "moment of moral urgency" over its "cruel" cuts.

Also happening today: The Senate will take a procedural vote on **David Perdue's** nomination for ambassador to China at **5:30 p.m.** ... The House Rules Committee at **4 p.m.** will tee up repeals of Biden administration waivers approving California policies, including a ban on gas cars — even though

the Government Accountability Office and the Senate parliamentarian have said they *can't* be repealed using the Congressional Review Act. Watch this space.

Not happening today: Washington is still waiting for the House to fix the problem it created and restore D.C.'s budget.



THE GREAT WHITE NORTH

DECISION TIME: It's Election Day in the Canadian campaign that Trump upended. Polls close across the country from 7 to 10 p.m. Eastern time, and our Ottawa Playbook colleagues have a rundown of everything you need to know. Though opinion polls have tightened a fair bit in the final days, the incumbent Liberals still appear to have a narrow edge on the back of anti-Trump nationalism: 338Canada projects a 3-point popular vote win and 62-seat advantage.

Horror show: The final day of campaigning was shadowed by an attack in Vancouver that left at least 11 dead at a Filipino festival, per Reuters.

Canada's big decision: Trump's tariffs and threats to America's northern neighbor have transformed an election that looked like it could be a Conservative blowout just months ago, AP's Rob Gillies reports from Toronto. In Quebec, many moderates are setting aside the Bloc Québécois to side with Liberals against Trump, WSJ's Alyssa Lukpat and Paul Vieira report from Montreal. (Indeed, a Mark Carney victory could make conservative Alberta the hotbed of Canadian secessionism instead, POLITICO's Nick Taylor-Vaisey reports from Edmonton.)

Why Carney took the lead: The new PM has met the moment as a former central bank leader who can make a somber pitch to Canadians on the economy and geopolitics, POLITICO's Victoria Guida reports. In global financial circles, he was known "as strategic and cerebral, with an instinct for working the room." Just as crucially — and in a key difference from Joe Biden amid Kamala Harris' campaign — unpopular PM Justin Trudeau left office and largely vanished from politics, allowing Liberals to put the focus on Trump, as POLITICO's Mickey Djuric reports.

First in Playbook: Ontario Premier **Doug Ford** tells POLITICO's Jonathan Martin that "it's the tariffs, stupid" — and he sounds a bit baffled as to why his fellow Conservative **Pierre Poilievre** didn't run a more Canadian-chauvinist campaign similar to Ford's successful snap reelection this year.

Upset watch: Could Poilievre still surprise? Liberals' polling lead isn't insurmountable, and after almost a decade in power, they're asking voters for more at a time of historic anti-incumbent sentiment around the world. If Conservatives come out on top, you can expect intense discourse about rising populist conservatism among young men.



POLITICO IS BACK AT THE 2025 MILKEN GLOBAL CONFERENCE:

From May 4-7, California Playbook will deliver exclusive, on-theground 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

THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS: "The group chats that changed America," by Semafor's Ben Smith, was the story making all the buzz on social media last night. Smith lifts the lid on a "sprawling network of influential private chats that began during the fervid early days of the Covid-19 pandemic" and "revolve primarily around the venture capitalist Marc Andreessen and a circle of Silicon Valley figures." These now-deleted chat groups "are the single most important place in which a stunning realignment toward Donald Trump was shaped and negotiated, and an alliance between Silicon Valley and the new right formed." Must read.

WHAT PETE HEGSETH IS WATCHING: Fired defense official Colin Carroll discussing life inside the Department of Defense under Pete Hegseth's leadership with Megyn Kelly last night. He describes "a tale of two Petes" — one version of Hegseth who "crushed it" in key meetings with GOP colleagues; another who became "agitated" and too focused on "weird details" following the Signalgate scandal. Asked, gently, if Hegseth is OK, Carroll replied: "Yeah, I honestly — I don't know. I'm not sure."

LITTLE ROCKET MAN RETURNS: The Trump administration is considering reopening talks with North Korea, Axios' Barak Ravid and Dave Lawler scooped. Officials have "quietly been holding discussions and consulting outside experts" to game out potential paths for a Trump conversation with **Kim**

Jong Un.

99 PROBLEMS BUT A PRITZ AIN'T ONE: As Trump's 100th day approaches, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey and New York Gov. Kathy Hochul will join forces tomorrow night with a live, virtual town hall on the MeidasTouch network. The four Democratic governors will discuss their efforts to resist Trump and take questions from 8 p.m.

2028 watch: Pritzker was — where else? — in New Hampshire last night, declaring that Democrats must step up more aggressively and resist Trump "everywhere and all at once," POLITICO's Kelly Garrity reports.

SCHOOL TIES: The leaders of almost a dozen prestigious schools have banded together in private to defend against Trump's attacks, WSJ's Emily Glazer, Douglas Belkin and Juliet Chung scooped, noting: "The group's aim is to avoid the fate of some top law firms, where one deal led to others following suit."

QUITE A MOMENT: On "60 Minutes" last night, CBS correspondent **Scott Pelley** called out the channel's owner Paramount for actions that led to executive producer **Bill Owens'** resignation, implying its corporate bosses hope to curry favor with Trump to get a merger approved. "Paramount began to supervise our content in new ways. None of our stories has been blocked, but Bill felt he lost the independence that honest journalism requires," Pelley said on air. "No one here is happy about it." **More from POLITICO's David Cohen.**

SCOTUS WATCH: The Supreme Court today will hear arguments in a case that could change the threshold for lawsuits over disability discrimination, USA Today's Maureen Groppe previews. Tomorrow, the justices will take on a case stemming from a wrongful FBI raid, which centers on when people can sue law enforcement over mistakes, AP's Sudhin Thanawala and Lindsay Whitehurst report from Atlanta.

ANNALS OF INFLUENCE: "Weight-loss craze sparks a DC lobbying bonanza," by POLITICO's Lauren Gardner and Daniel Lippman: "[P]harma companies are mobilizing to ensure the craze for highly effective anti-obesity drugs keeps spreading. The Trump administration is under heavy pressure to decide how widely available the medications should be, and whether Medicare should cover them."

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TALK OF THE TOWN

Saquon Barkley of the Philadelphia Eagles hung out with Donald Trump ahead of his team's White House visit at 4 p.m. today.

RTS BLINK — "D.C. and Commanders Set to Announce Deal Bringing the Team Back to RFK Site," by NOTUS' Reese Gorman and k Alfred

OUT AND ABOUT — SPOTTED at the POLITICO/NOTUS White House Correspondents' Dinner brunch yesterday at Robert and Elena Allbritton's residence: DNC Chair Ken Martin, Rep. Gabe Amo (D-R.I.), Jason Isaacs, Anthony Fauci, Kaitlan Collins, David Chalian, Kasie Hunt, Rick Klein, Dana Bash, Alex Burns, Anita Kumar, Peter Baker, Heather Podesta, Charlotte Klein, John Harris, Jonathan Greenberger, Goli Sheikholeslami, Joe Schatz, Ben Smith, Roy Blunt, Adrienne Elrod, Julie Pace, Kelly O'Donnell, Matt Shay, Ari Melber, Michael Grynbaum, Josh Dawsey, Barbara Peng, Audie Cornish, Eugene Daniels, Sam Feist, Mark Ein and Andrea Mitchell. Pics via Yassine El Mansouri for POLITICO ... Another pic ... Another ... Another

- SPOTTED at WaPo's first ever invite-only WHCD brunch at Ned's Club D.C.: Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), William Lewis, Suzi Watford, Matt Murray, Johanna Mayer-Jones, Vineet Khosla, Vladimir and Evgenia Kara-Murza, Jason and Yegi Rezaian, Natalie Allison, Cleve Wootson, Cat Zakrzewski, Dave Jorgenson, Rachel Tashjian, Ava Wallace, Sally Jenkins, Robin Givhan, Debra Tice, Danish Ambassador Jesper Møller Sørensen, Jordanian Ambassador Dina Kawar, Jake Denton, Sagnik Basu, Sam Feist, Steve Thomma, Tammy Haddad, Andrea Mitchell, Stephen Labaton, Rebecca Blumenstein, Daisy Veerasingham, Julie Pace, Tom Hale, Jummy Olabanji, Mark Ein and Zac Moffatt.
- CNN hosted its annual WHCD brunch yesterday at British Ambassador Peter Mandelson's residence, where Mark Thompson, Mandelson and Reinaldo Avila da Silva welcomed guests with a slushy bar, mini CNN-imprinted tea sandwiches, English sausage rolls and music from DJ Dimmy. Mandelson's dog, Jock, greeting guests with a tennis ball and games of fetch. SPOTTED: Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Reps. Nicole Malliotakis (R-N.Y.), Gabe Amo (D-R.I.) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.), Canadian Ambassador Kirsten Hillman, Swiss Ambassador Ralf Heckner, Irish Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason, EU Ambassador Jovita Neliupšienė, Jake Tapper, Kaitlan Collins, Abby Phillip, Wolf Blitzer, Dana Bash, Pamela Brown, Sara Sidner, David Leavy, Sam Cornale, Rob Placek, Carolyn Quinn, Corinne Day, Ryan Wrasse, Phil Rucker, David Chalian, Bobby Flay, Andrea Mitchell, Kara Swisher, David Urban, Bob Costa, Eugene Daniels, Jacqui Heinrich, Josh Dawsey, Leigh Ann Caldwell, Scott Jennings, Weijia Jiang and Luther Lowe, Tom Nides and Virginia Moseley, Shayne Coplan, Joel Kaplan, David Ginsberg, John Rizzo, David Rhodes, Senay Bulbul, Daniel Koh, Spencer Garrett, Reema Dodin, Elizabeth Falcone, Caitlyn

Stephenson, Niamh King, Olivia Igbokwe, Michael Moroney, Josh Blumenfeld, Sam Feist, Keenan Austin Reed and Michael Reed, Ryan Williams and John McCarthy.

— SPOTTED at Substack's "New Media Party" on Saturday night at the Line hotel: Rep. Maxwell Frost (D-Fla.), Andrew Sullivan, Ari Melber, Barbara Starr, Catherine Herridge, Cenk Uygur, Chris Cillizza, Cindy McCain, David Hogg, Deja Foxx, Dylan Byers, Elise Labott, Emily Horne, Eugene Robinson, Jeff Stein, Jennifer Rubin, Jessica Reed Kraus, Juju Chang, Meghan McCain, Mehdi Hasan, Rick Wilson, Savannah Chrisley, S.E. Cupp, Sean Spicer, Shadi Hamid, Steve Clemons, Tara Setmayer, Taylor Lorenz, Tina Brown, Vicky Ward, Yamiche Alcindor, Catherine Valentine, Michelle Jaconi, Ben and Ashley Chang, Emily Miller and Vivian Salama.

— SPOTTED at Sean Dugan's birthday party at Garden District: Kaitlan Collins, Jeff Zeleny, Josh Dawsey, John McCarthy, Andy Flick, Jeff Solnet, Joe Milby, Vaughn Hillyard and Devan Cayea, Evan Hollander and Eli Yokley, James Adams, Nate Evans, Eli Aguayo, Alex Tureman and Lauren Gillis, Allie Malloy, Matt Moore, Sam Wright, Brennen Cain, Kansas state House Minority Leader Brandon Woodard and Patrick Menasco.

FIRST IN PLAYBOOK — Democracy Forward is adding **Jodie Morse** as chief program and strategy officer and senior counselor, **Brian Netter** as legal director, **Pooja Boisture** and **Cynthia Liao** as senior counsels, and **Christine Coogle** as senior staff attorney. They all previously worked at the Justice Department.

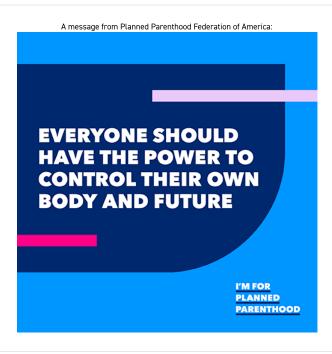
TRANSITIONS — **Josh Davidson** is now a VP at the Tarrance Group. He previously was a VP at American Viewpoint. ... **Bryce Segat** is now comms director for Rep. Lance Gooden (R-Texas). He previously was press secretary for Rep. Marlin Stutzman (R-Ind.) and is a Darrell Issa and House Judiciary alum. ...

... Jeff Guittard is now comms director at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. He previously was senior manager of comms at the Beer Institute. ... Riley Pingree is now comms director for Rep. Tom Kean Jr. (R-N.J.). She previously was press secretary for Rep. Dan Meuser (R-Pa.)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY: Justice Elena Kagan ... Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.) ... former Secretary of State James Baker III (95) ... Zoe Garmendia ... Maurice Daniel ... Ed Pagano ... NYT's Karoun Demirjian ... POLITICO's Ben Weyl and Erin Peck ... Chris Wilson ... Carrie Hessler-Radelet ... Daniel Keylin of Sen. Thom Tillis' (R-N.C.) office ... Susan Katz Keating ... White House's Nikki Reeves ... Ben Garmisa ... NPR's Deepa Shivaram ... Mort Kondracke ... Joaquin Tamayo ... Josh Schwerin of Saratoga Strategies ... Kristine Kippins

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