

President Trump's inaugural address: USAPP experts react

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On Friday January 20th, 2017, Donald J. Trump was sworn in as the 45th President of the United States. We asked USAPP's expert contributors to give their rapid reaction to President Trump's inaugural address. Read the inaugural address [here](#).

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Remarkably pessimistic, remarkably despondent

Thomas Leeper – *LSE Government*

Trump closed his inauguration speech by saying “together we will make America great again” in an apparent attempt to bring together the millions of Americans that voted for him and the millions more that voted for his opponent. The optimistic line concluded a speech that was remarkably pessimistic, remarkably despondent about the country he now leads, and remarkably tone deaf to the political divisions resulting from the 2016 election.



His speech made promises to restore greatness to a nation that is already great and to bring economic protectionism to consumers that will be harmed by the rising prices that accompany it. He promised to reduce crime below its historically low levels. He promised to buy American products and hire American workers, despite notoriously and consistently failing to do so himself. His speech was false promises to achieve goals that are already fulfilled by the existing reality that they inaccurately describe. He will claim responsibility for an economy already brought out of recession and for enhancing a military that already outshines the rest of the world. I hope he succeeds.



Early in Trump's speech, he referenced "the forgotten men and women" of America, a term originated by 19th Century libertarian thinker William Graham Sumner. Sumner wrote that "the State cannot get a cent for any man without taking it from some other man, and this latter must be the man who has produced and saved it. This latter is the Forgotten Man." Trump is going to unburden the American man by disengaging the United States from the world that it leads, closing its borders to block off steadily declining immigration levels, and put "American first," whatever that means.

Sumner elaborated that this forgotten man "needs no improvement in his condition except to be freed from the parasites who are living on him." Trump's speech described Washington and "other countries" as the parasites harming the forgotten man, but said nothing about the unparalleled wealth of his cabinet members or his administration's pending plan to gut a popular policy that brought health care to millions of previously uninsured Americans.

I hope Trump succeeds to "make America great again." And I know that he will, because America is already great. It's only a question of what harm his administration will bring.

Trump's speech echoes the rhetoric of sixty years' worth of Anti-American sentiment from poorer countries around the world

Dan Cassino – *Fairleigh Dickinson University*

The major theme of President Trump's inaugural address is that middle class Americans have been disenfranchised by globalization, that "the wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed all across the world." Moreover, as he says, the establishment has been celebrating its victories, but the people haven't been sharing in the wealth. In essence, he argues, American integration into global markets has been a sucker's bet for many Americans. What's fascinating about this is how he is echoing the rhetoric of sixty years' worth of Anti-American sentiment from poorer countries around the world.



When scholars look at economic integration between states, certain patterns become immediately evident. In general, raw goods flow from less developed states, and are sent to more developed states to be processed, before

reaching market in the most developed states, flowing from what's often called the periphery, to the semi-periphery, and finally to the core. While this relationship isn't necessarily exploitative, in practice, the lion's share of the profits from the sale go to the more developed states: Starbucks is making a lot more from your cup of coffee than the farmer who grew the beans, or the plant that processed them. Similarly, it's much better to be in the business of designing iPhones than in the business of manufacturing them, and either is probably preferable to mining for rare earth metals.

As the world has become more economically integrated, leaders in the less developed states have pointed out the seeming inequity of the relationship, calling for a more just distribution of the gains resulting from their labor and resources. As the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez put it at the opening of the G-15 summit in 2004,

Instead of wealth globalization, there is poverty wide spreading. Development has not become general, or been shared. To the contrary, the abyss between North and South is now so huge, that the unsustainability of the current economic order and the blindness of the people who try to justify continuing to enjoy opulence and waste, are evident.

The similarity to how Trump talks about how American workers have been left behind while corporations and politicians in the cities have prospered is odd, until you realize that they're both making the same argument. Both Trump and Chavez are saying that the gains from economic globalization are not being shared fairly, that they are resulting in unsustainable inequality, and that a new political order is necessary to correct the inequity. The only thing that's different is the context in which the argument is being made: Chavez is talking about inequity on the level of nation-states; Trump is talking about inequity within a state.

In a real way, Trump is reflecting the inconvenient truth about economic integration. The major cities of the core – New York, London, San Francisco, Tokyo and the like – have become so integrated that they have far more in common with each other than they do with the less developed areas in their own countries. A New Yorker might well feel more at home in London or even Beijing than in Tulsa. Chavez is saying that Venezuela is being exploited by the United States and the European Union; Trump is saying that the Midwest is being exploited by New York and Washington.



Nor are the two men necessarily wrong. In America, corporate profits increase as middle class jobs have become scarcer. A Pew study from 2016 found, for the first time, that the majority of Americans belonged to the upper or the lower class, with less than half in the middle class. Within the United States, the net outflow of wealth from the middle class has been the result of policy decisions on corporate governance and redistribution programs. The irony of Trump's argument is that globally, the patterns he's decrying are the result of a concerted effort on the part of the United States to create, starting in Bretton Woods, and sustain the existing global economic system.

Trump is far from the ideal messenger for this argument, but the mere fact that he's making it is part of his appeal. No one questions that globalization has been beneficial for the United States as a whole, even as great swathes of the country have been left behind, in the same way that globalization has created wealth in the world as a whole, even as whole continents have been left behind. It's no accident that the cities and coasts in America, the areas that most benefit from globalization, voted overwhelmingly for Trump's opponent. One of the main tenets of globalization is that despite all of the rhetoric about them, borders matter less and less, and so the divide between the core and the periphery now seems less about borders between nations, and more about the divisions within America itself.

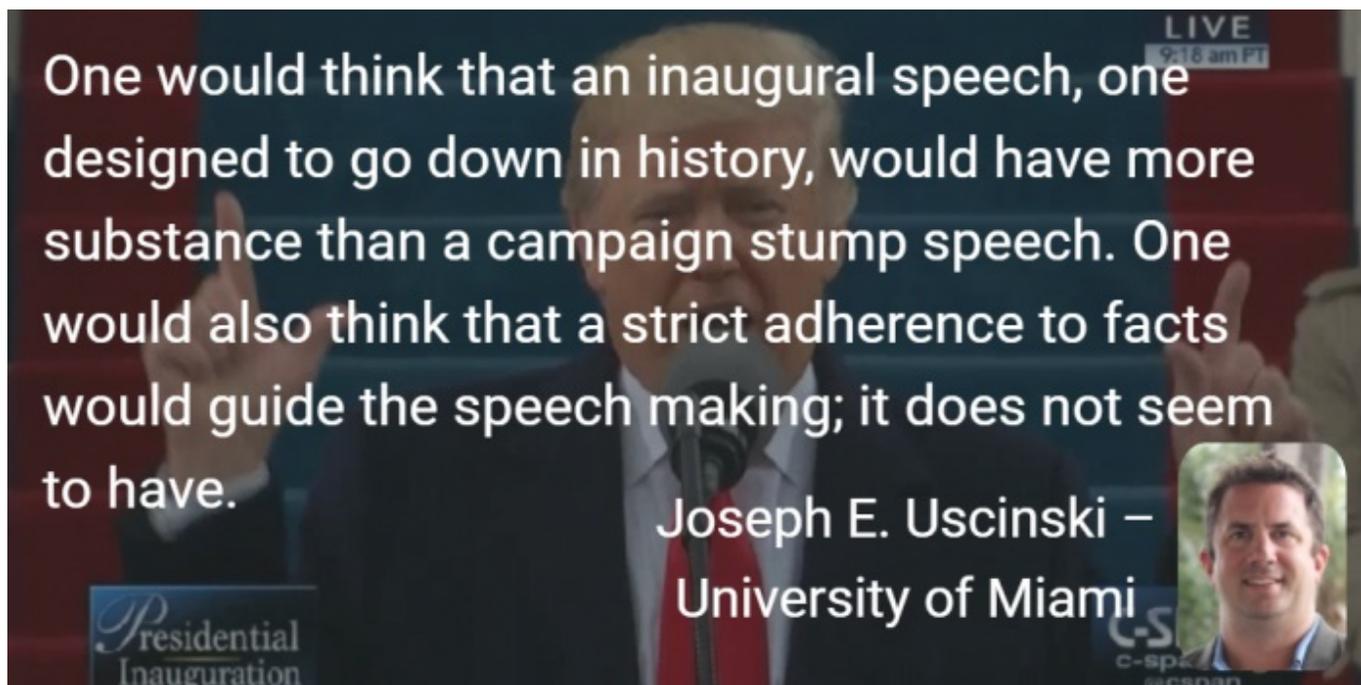
Much of Trump's rhetoric could have been pulled from a Bernie Sanders speech

Joseph E. Uscinski – *University of Miami*

Donald Trump's campaign was built largely on conspiracy theories and red-meat populism. Trump's inaugural speech was little different. He implicated the nation's political class in a conspiracy to sell-out the American people to global and foreign interests. (We could have watched the Alex Jones Show and gotten the same thing.) Throughout Trump's campaign, he repeatedly spread conspiracy theories and engaged in conspiratorial rhetoric, and if you add up all of his conspiracy theories (even the bizarre ones), they boil down to one thing: the political class acts against the interests of the people.



But this does not set Trump apart from his partisan opponents: much of his rhetoric could have been pulled from a Bernie Sanders speech. In particular, Trump's stands against free trade and globalization, and his support for massive government infrastructure spending. In terms of their use of conspiracy theorizing, Trump and Sanders' campaigns were very much the same. Both thought a small group of people were conspiring against the American people: for Trump it was the political class, for Bernie it was the dreaded "one percent." Even Democratic New York Senator Chuck Schumer's introductory speech echoed the conspiracy; the only difference is that he blamed the wealthy for our country's woes; Trump blamed politicians.



It is still hard to know what President Trump will actually do while in office. If his inaugural address is to give us an indication, he will likely spend a lot of money on infrastructure. He also seems determined to enact tariffs, or at least threaten to do so repeatedly on Twitter.

One would think that an inaugural speech, one designed to go down in history, would have more substance than a campaign stump speech. One would also think that a strict adherence to facts would guide the speech making; it does not seem to have. For example, I am unaware of “carnage;” and crime is largely down over the last few decades.

While this could have been the moment for Trump to calm fears and send a positive message, this speech will go down as a missed opportunity. His lines were about as deep as the paving on the driveway, and his view of reality is about as real as reality television.

Trump throws down the gauntlet in his inaugural address

Jenny Tatsak – Walsh College

President Donald J. Trump’s inaugural address was true to the tone and tenor of his campaign rhetoric. Like past inaugural speeches, our new President described his vision for America. This “America first” vision did not pledge unity to heal the deeply fractured electorate, protesting his presidency in Washington D.C. and around the US, Trump’s inaugural address served as a rhetorical gauntlet for the political establishment and his detractors.



Although he began by thanking the former Presidents in attendance and used inclusive language like “us” and “we,” President Trump did not mention his opponent or her supporters. He did not make conciliatory assurances of compromise and consensus. Instead, he took aim at the political failings of the past. He blamed the Washington establishment for the plight of struggling families. He warned, “This American carnage stops here and it stops right now.”

Trump’s speech had a populous appeal targeted at those feeling forgotten by the political process. He likened his election as returning power to the people. Trump explained American jobs and protected borders as integral in

achieving his vision and its promises of wealth, strength, safety, and greatness.

The off-the-cuff remarks, we have come to expect from Donald J. Trump, were missing from this inaugural address. The tangents, so unlike the Washington establishment he criticizes, were missing from this first speech as President. Instead, his delivery appeared rehearsed and “on script.”

Despite his more “presidential” delivery, the combative language and rampant attack of policies and policy makers of the past remains. President Trump set the tone for this presidency with an unconventional inaugural address that makes clear he will not play the political game as usual.

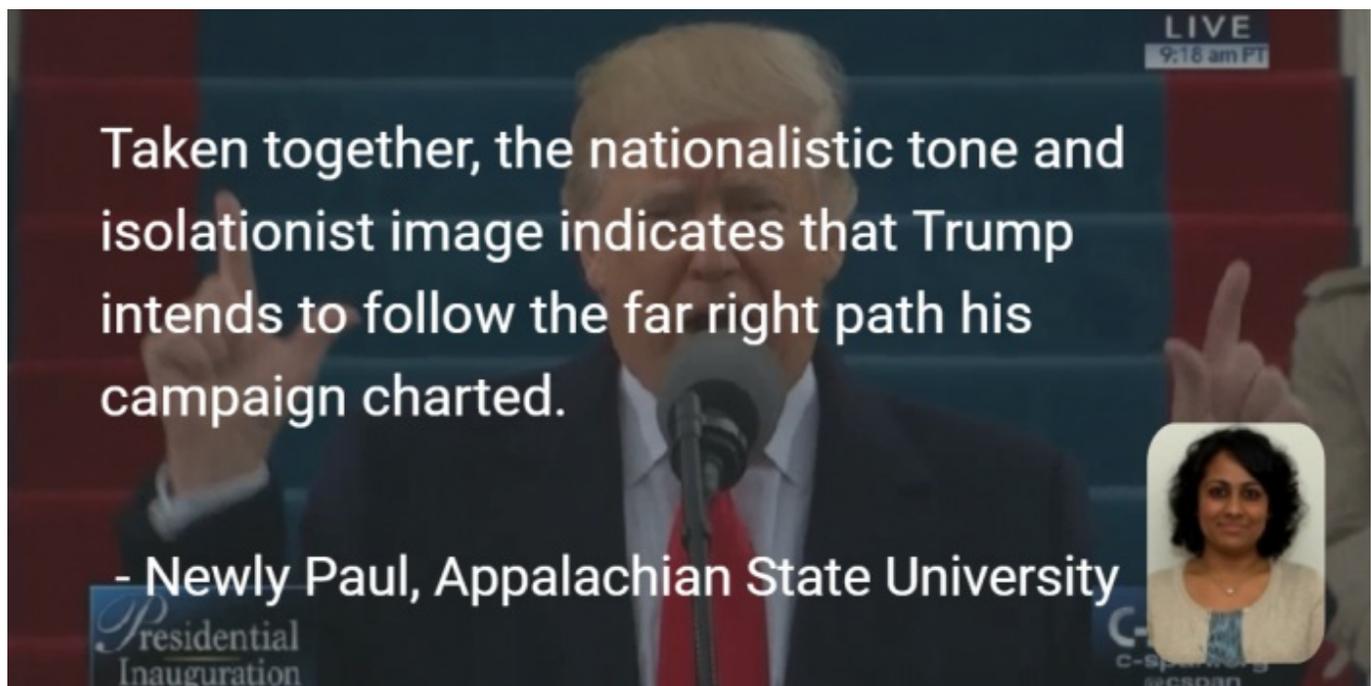
Trump inauguration speech highlights the tone and priorities of his presidency

Newly Paul –*Appalachian State University*

Donald Trump painted a bleak, dark picture of the United States at his inauguration speech in Washington D.C. on Friday. He described an American landscape of “carnage” with people suffering from poverty in inner cities, “rusted-out factories” and “crime and gangs and drugs” decimating lives. The dark imagery was in sharp contrast to inauguration speeches of the past that struck hopeful tones and aimed to unite people after what was usually a bitter and divisive campaign season. Instead, Trump’s speech was similar to his campaign rhetoric and addressed the groups—mainly blue collar workers—and the topics—mainly immigration and outsourcing of jobs—that had propelled him to a surprise victory in November.



Trump’s speech was heavily populist and nationalistic in tone. He painted his victory as the people’s victory, and said that his administration would transfer wealth and power from Washington back to the people. In saying this, he was referring to his campaign promise of “draining the swamp,” though the fact remains that his [cabinet is the richest in US history](#) and his office has been encumbered by [numerous conflicts of interest concerns](#) that remain to be addressed.



His speech also struck a very isolationist image of America in the world. He painted America as a beleaguered nation, whose generosity and wealth has been exploited by the rest of the world. He particularly singled out

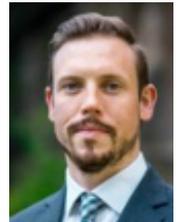
America's manufacturing sector, military strength, lack of border protection, crumbling infrastructure, and a weakened middle class – blaming globalization for Americans' lack of progress. In mentioning these issues, he reiterated his campaign promises, implying that these areas would be the top priorities of his administration. Taken together, the nationalistic tone and isolationist image indicates that Trump intends to follow the far right path his campaign charted.

In a striking omission, the inauguration speech made no mention of the environment, despite [2016 being the hottest year](#) on record. Trump also ignored gender equality and social justice issues, despite receiving endless criticism on the campaign trail for his sexist and racist attitude.

The speech signaled a sharp turn toward nationalism and perhaps isolationism

Brian Klaas – *LSE Government*

From a historical context, Trump's speech broke from a long line of uplifting, optimistic, and unifying messages that sought to bring the country together after a hard-fought campaign. Instead, his speech read very much like his campaign speech and offered little in the way of an olive branch to the majority of Americans who voted for someone else.



In substance, Trump signaled a sharp turn toward nationalism and perhaps isolationism. This too doubles down on campaign rhetoric and signals a sharp departure from key tenets of a bipartisan American consensus forged in the wake of World War II — with the United States shouldering the burdens and reaping the rewards of a global system it largely created.



Furthermore, Trump's first weekend in office continued to signal that there is no mythical "new presidential Trump," but more of the same. He gave a self-aggrandizing speech at the CIA; battled with the media over his lies about the inaugural crowd size; and then began doing damage control. This pattern of battling his many perceived enemies as he paints himself as the victim sometimes made for good campaign theatrics. But campaigning and governing are two very different things, and Trump will need to pick himself up from this rocky start if he wants to regain the trust and confidence of the majority of Americans.

President Trump's inauguration symbolises American elite's legitimacy crisis

Inderjeet Parmar – City, University of London

Amid massive protests in Washington, DC, across America and the world, on Friday, the United States inaugurated Donald J. Trump to the leadership of history's most powerful nation and empire. America and the world now look to be entering a disruptive period wrought by large-scale discontent at home and power redistributions and crises abroad.



In a line drawn straight from national mythology, President Trump declared America a light which would determine the course of the nation and world. In his hands that light may well set a torch to liberties and rights at home and established and volatile relationships alike in the wider world.

His speech was one of the most blunt, narrowly nationalistic, and rhetorically anti-elitist populist for almost 200 years. America for Americans, jobs for American workers, and down with the Washington DC, political establishment of both parties. Those parties were declared parasitic, un-American, leeches on the people.

His clarion call to make America great again was exclusive – a definition of interests that blamed the ills of America on *political* elites, foreigners and outsiders. Donald Trump, on behalf of the people, will rekindle democracy and the promise of America, restore the Dream.

Yet, we should be wary of drawing too many lasting conclusions: Donald Trump is a master of “truthful hyperbole”, of the flip-flop, the agenda-setting exaggeration that feeds media frenzies.

It is advisable to study President Trump's actions rather than treat his statements as definitive positions. Kicking “sand in your eyes” is one of his master ploys, throwing his trackers off the scent while his actions betray a rather different, behind-the-scenes, but mostly hidden-in-plain-view, political agenda.

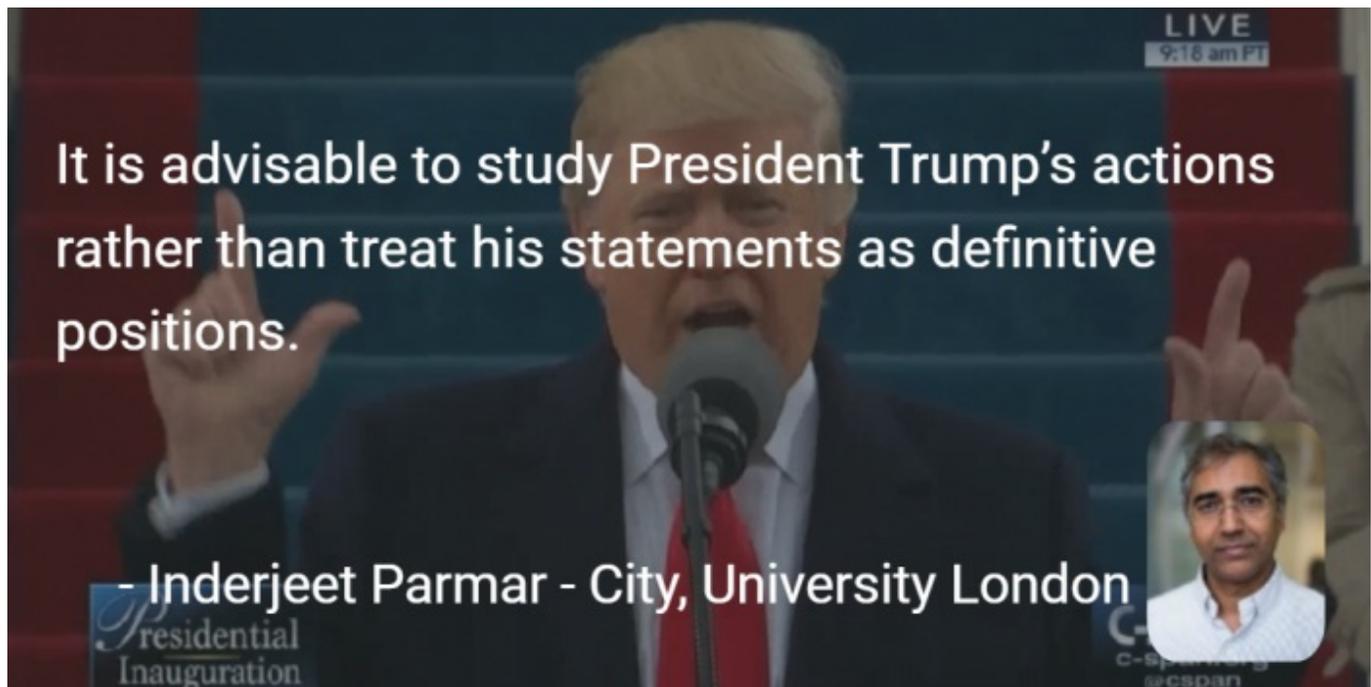
Notably missing from the list of ‘deplorables’, enemies of the people, were those Trump has appointed from that very political establishment and the sections of the American elite of which he is part and from which he has drawn so many of his other appointees to high office – those who dominate its political, military, economic, financial and media institutions.

Trump's administration heralds a period of power for the most right wing American presidential administration in the past century, an administration packed with billionaires, Wall St bankers, and corporate heads, along with a corps of military chiefs to head the national security apparatus.

Make no mistake, there is coming a bonfire of regulations that have provided a small measure of protection for workers in factories and offices, for consumers and homeowners in relation to banks, for organised labour, among others. Energy corporations and banks will be free again to drill, mine, pollute, and invest ordinary people's savings in reckless casino-style wagers. “The business of America is business,” – a line from the Roaring 1920s presidency of Calvin Coolidge – which ended in an almighty global financial crash, the great depression and, indirectly, world war.

Clearly Donald Trump will govern from the Right, defining the interest of big business as national interests. But it is also crystal clear that the road to Trumpism was paved by liberal centrists attached to corporations, Wall St financial interests, market-led globalisation, and the Pentagon war machine.

Those Obama-Clinton liberals did little for the ordinary worker – Obama abandoned support for union collective bargaining rights as soon as he was safely in office in 2009 and increased the wealth of the rich and reduced the lives of workers, middle classes and of African Americans.



According to the Podesta emails publicised by Wikileaks, Donald Trump was the Clinton Democrats' preferred opponent, the ideal extremist so outlandish that he would pave the way to a Clinton coronation. Hence, they name-checked Trump in Clinton's speeches to make it appear that he was to be taken seriously.

Complementing that strategy, the Obama-Clinton-Podesta group side-lined and sabotaged the left challenge of Bernie Sanders, who had popular support for a change-agenda, leaving open just two realistic alternatives- the centrist but politically and intellectually bankrupt status quo (Clinton) and the left-sounding, ultra-nationalist, pro-worker but racist and misogynistic Donald Trump.

At a time when change was the only political option, the Obama-Clinton-Podesta cabal chose the status quo and lost out to their preferred opponent, a tragedy of Shakesperian proportions.

But the change candidate – now crowned emperor – is actually a hard-core right wing establishment member- a more virulently relentless establishment to be sure- more racist, sexist, parochial and warlike and, therefore, even more dangerous. He is certainly not for workers or middle class Americans who carried him to the White House.

If Sir Isaac Newton was right, then there will be an equal and opposite reaction: the protests that followed Trump's election, and the even larger ones that engulfed his inauguration, are set to continue throughout his presidency, now that the self-assigned man of the people is in the seat of power and must deliver on his promises to a sceptical public that gave him the lowest approval rating of any president-elect in American history.

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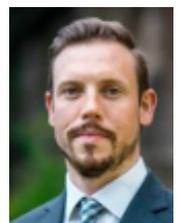
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