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California 2020 Proposition guide

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Proposition 14: Stem cell research

The basics

What would Proposition 14 do?

Have California continue funding stem cell research, by borrowing up to \$5.5 billion.

Prop. 14 would generate the money to keep open the state's own stem cell agency, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, and expand its research capacity. That would include dedicating \$1.5 billion for Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, stroke, epilepsy, and other brain and central nervous system diseases. The rest of the money would go for other research, medical training, building new research facilities and expanding treatment access.

The state would sell investors bonds worth \$5.5 billion, and taxpayers would then pay back that money, with interest, over the next 30 years. Estimated cost: \$7.8 billion.

Why am I voting on this?

It may seem like eons ago in political years, but in the early 2000s a political war had erupted over embryonic stem cell research.

Think of the stem cells that make up human embryos are blank slates - uniquely useful to researchers, they haven't yet differentiated to form vastly different parts of the body. To maintain a cell supply, scientists must destroy lab-created human embryos, typically produced for in-vitro fertilization. Pro-life advocates likened this to abortion, leading then-President George W. Bush to ban federal funding for research using new embryonic stem cells.

Touting possible cures for diseases from Parkinson's to paralysis, Californians opted in 2004 to fill the federal void by borrowing \$3 billion to create California's own stem cell agency. Now that money is drying up. Without a fresh infusion, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine will cease to exist.

Supporters say

The institute's stem cell research has led to clinical trials, biotech jobs, and research toward treatments or cures for ailments affecting half of California families. The primary beneficiaries of the institute's grants are University of California labs and hospitals. The state also has collected royalties on successful stem-cell developments, and would continue to do so on future breakthroughs.

Opponents say

We gave it a try, but funding stem cell research didn't lead to the kind of life-saving cures voters hoped for in 2004. The federal government no longer bans federal dollars from supporting embryonic stem cell research, which was the reason California got

involved in the first place. Plus the institute, one of the few state agencies not overseen by the Legislature, has had issues in the past with conflict of interest.

Who's for it:

úUniversity of California Board of Regents

úThe Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research

úThe Latino Cancer Institute

úSickle Cell Disease Foundation of California

úGov. Gavin Newsom

úCalifornia Institute for Regenerate Medicine Board of Directors

Who's against it:

úJeff Sheehy, board member of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine

Proposition 15: Business property taxes

The basics

What would Proposition 15 do?

Hike property taxes on big businesses, raising billions for schools and local governments.

Now, owners pay property taxes based on the price they originally paid for that real estate - typically a lot less than what it's worth today. If this measure passes, property taxes for many large businesses would be elevated to the property's current, probably higher, market value. That would net \$6.5 to \$11.5 billion - 60% for cities, counties and special districts, and 40% for schools and community colleges.

Not (directly) affected: homeowners, and businesses with under \$3 million in California property. Farm land would be exempt. An analysis by the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office wasn't able to determine whether the buildings and other improvements on that land would be too.

Why am I voting on this?

Back in 1978, California voters famously passed Proposition 13 - a huge permanent tax cut for landowners. It amended the state constitution to reset property taxes based on the purchase price of a home or business, and capped how much the tax could increase each year after that.

To strip businesses of this protection, a majority of voters must approve Prop. 15 - amending the constitution again.

Supporters say

Prop. 13 has provided a massive break to some of the state's larger businesses. If this passes, a small fraction of those would pay the vast majority of the higher taxes. All that money would go to cities, counties and school districts - and these days, they could really use it.

Opponents say

It would be senseless to pass one of the biggest tax increases in California history in the middle of a cataclysmically bad recession. And while small businesses are technically exempt, large landlords may end up passing the costs to some of their tenants and customers.

Who's for it:

Joe Biden and Gov. Gavin Newsom
California Teachers Association
California Democratic Party
Mark Zuckerberg

Who's against it:

California Chamber of Commerce
California Retailers Association
Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association
California NAACP

Proposition 16: Restoring affirmative action

The basics

What would Proposition 16 do?

Restore affirmative action in California - meaning universities and government offices could factor in someone's race, gender or ethnicity in making hiring, spending and admissions decisions. The practice has been illegal in California since 1996, when voters approved another proposition that banned affirmative action. Prop. 16 would reverse that vote.

An example of how Prop. 16 might work: Back when California did allow affirmative action, state offices set goals for how many contracts they awarded to women-owned and minority-owned businesses.

What it wouldn't do: create racial quotas in university admissions. The U.S. Supreme Court banned those in 1978.

Why am I voting on this?

More than two-thirds of state lawmakers - motivated by racial inequities highlighted by the police killing of George Floyd, a black man in Minneapolis - voted to put this measure on the November ballot.

Essential to the argument of reinstating affirmative action is the concern that Black, Latino and Native American Students have seen their access to the University of California harmed. The data on the matter is complex, giving fodder to both opponents and backers of Prop 16 to select the data that best fits their arguments.

Since affirmative action was banned, the sheer number of Black and Latino students admitted as freshmen to the UC has quadrupled. But while Black and Latino students make up 60% of California's high school enrollment, they comprise just 28% of UC freshmen admits in 2019.

Getting into a UC has gotten tougher for all applicants, but Black, Latino and Native American students have seen their admissions rates plunge more than white and Asian American applicants. Some advocates warn that reinstating affirmative action invariably would mean a decline in Asian American enrollment.

Supporters say

What's past shouldn't be prologue. California is far more diverse than it was in the mid-1990s, when a Republican governor backed propositions to banish affirmative action and deny undocumented immigrants access to public services. Structural racism exists and

to preach a color-blind philosophy is to be blind to the impacts of racism. Instead, for example, principals should be able to specifically seek to employ qualified Latino teachers in a school where most teachers are white but most students are Latino. Public universities should be able to consider a student's race as one of numerous admissions factors, including grades and school work. As for the growth in Latino admissions at the UCs, that's good news, but affirmative action could have led to those increases much sooner.

Opponents say

Allowing schools and government offices to make decisions based on race, ethnicity or sex is its own kind of prejudice. Equal rights mean everyone is treated equally. The claim that America is systemically racist is a false narrative that "fuels racial paranoia, division and hatred." The state already has made strides in diversity. And it's legal now to give preference to students who really need it - those who grew up in low-income families. As for who gets into the public universities, the fault lies with inadequate K-12 schooling.

Who's for it:

California Community Colleges and the California State University
Gov. Gavin Newsom

University of California

Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce

Who's against it:

Californians for Equal Rights

Chinese American Civic Action Alliance

Students for Fair Admissions

California Republican Party

Proposition 17: Letting parolees vote

The basics

What would Proposition 17 do?

Allow people on parole in California to vote.

The prop also would allow parolees to run for office if they're registered to vote and haven't been convicted of perjury or bribery.

California now prohibits state prisoners and parolees from voting.

People serving their sentences in county jails can vote, unless they're transferring to a state or federal prison, or they're serving time for a parole violation. Sixteen other states and the District of Columbia allow people to vote once they've finished their prison sentences. Vermont and Maine let people vote while still in prison.

Why am I voting on this?

The Legislature, by a two-thirds vote, approved placing this amendment to the state constitution on your ballot.

Supporters say

Civic engagement will lead to fewer parolees committing other crimes; it allows them to help remove the stigma of their past.

People who complete their prison sentences deserve the right to participate in a democracy.

Opponents say

Parole is an opportunity for violent offenders to prove they've been rehabilitated. Voting is a right that offenders should receive once they demonstrate they have been rehabilitated; not before.

Who's for it:

League of Women Voters in California

Gov. Gavin Newsom

Californians for Safety and Justice

Democratic Assemblymember Kevin McCarty of Sacramento, who introduced the constitutional amendment

Who's against it:

Crime Victims United of California

Election Integrity Project California

Proposition 18: Voting at age 17

The basics

What would Proposition 18 do?

Allow 17-year-olds to vote in primary and special elections if they will be 18 and eligible by the next general election.

Currently, voters must be 18 to participate in any local, state or federal election. This constitutional amendment would also pave the way for 17-year-olds who qualify to vote under this proposition to seek office, because the law says only registered voters can run for elected positions.

Estimated cost: Between \$200,000 and \$1 million at the county level every two years. Statewide one-time costs are expected to be hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Why am I voting on this?

The Legislature, by a two-thirds vote, placed this constitutional amendment on your ballot. It was the sixth time state lawmakers had considered the idea, but the first time it has reached voters. Nationwide, at least 19 states and Washington D.C. allow 17-year-olds who would be eligible for the next general election to vote early.

Supporters say

Allowing teens who would be first time voters in an election cycle to participate from the beginning could increase interest and voter participation among youth. It's a simple way to raise the voices of young voters. Many of them already work and pay taxes and they are allowed to join the military so voting if they are eligible makes sense.

Opponents say

Seventeen-year-olds are still kids. Biologically their brains are not yet fully developed, they can't enter into legal contracts, and they still need parent permission for certain activities. These high schoolers may be unduly influenced by teachers or school positions on issues, and many have no real world experience with paying bills, renting or buying a house, or holding down a job.

Who's for it:

California Association of Student Councils

Gov. Gavin Newsom and Secretary of State Alex Padilla

California League of Conservation Voters
California School Boards Association
Who's against it:
Election Integrity Project California
Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association

Proposition 19: Portable property tax break

The basics

What would Proposition 19 do?

Give Californians 55 or older a big property tax break when buying a new home. To fund that new tax break, it would curtail a separate tax break Californians may receive on homes inherited from parents and grandparents.

Typically when Californians buy a new home, their property taxes shoot way up. That's because property taxes here are based mostly on the value of your home when you bought it - not its current market value. Baby Boomers who bought that bungalow down the street right after Woodstock are paying way less in property taxes than the tech yuppies who bought an identical bungalow last year. This prop would allow the Boomer couple to buy a new house anywhere in the state and retain relatively low property taxes. Also under current law, a Californian who inherits a Malibu estate can rent it out on Airbnb yet still pay property tax locked in at the parents' rates. Under this prop? If adult heirs want to keep their artificially low property tax bill, they'll need to live in their inherited digs.

New revenue from closing the inheritance tax break could generate billions for schools, local governments and the state. A big chunk would go to firefighters.

Why am I voting on this?

Because Realtors really, really, really want you to pass it. They floated a very similar initiative two years ago, which California voters rejected overwhelmingly. But that initiative didn't close the inheritance tax break, so according to a nonpartisan analysis, it would have cost local governments billions.

In the broader sense, you're voting on this because almost any change to property taxes in California has to come through a constitutional amendment, which requires a ballot measure. The Realtors and firefighters' union, two powerful state interest groups, convinced lawmakers to put this one on the 2020 ballot.

Supporters say

Prop. 19 will incentivize seniors stuck in oversized homes to downsize, freeing up inventory in the state's ridiculously expensive housing market. Closing the inheritance tax break will provide a budget boost to local governments and state firefighting efforts, at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has depleted public coffers.

Opponents say

This is a giveaway to Realtors, who are twisting public policy to boost their commissions. Plus, adult children should have the right to do whatever they want with the property they inherited - without facing a crushing tax burden.

Who's for it:

California Association of Realtors

California Professional Firefighters

Gov. Gavin Newsom and the California Democratic Party

California Nurses Association

Who's against it:

Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association

Sen. Patricia Bates (R-Laguna Hills)

Proposition 20: Crackdown on crime

The basics

What would Proposition 20 do?

Increase penalties for certain property crimes and repeated parole violations - and make it more difficult for some convicted felons to qualify for early parole and release from prison.

Specifically, Prop. 20 would:

Give prosecutors new flexibility to charge some property crimes of more than \$250, such as "serial shoplifting" and car theft, as felonies rather than misdemeanors.

Increase penalties for former inmates who violate the terms of their supervised release three times, making it more likely that they will be sent back to jail or prison.

Require law enforcement to collect DNA samples from people convicted of certain misdemeanors - including shoplifting, forgery and illegal drug possession - to be stored in a state database.

Double the number of felonies that disqualify prison inmates from being able to apply for early parole consideration.

Why am I voting on this?

Attitudes about crime and criminal justice have whipsawed over the last 40 years in California. In the 1980s and 90s, voters and elected leaders repeatedly enacted measures to crank up penalties. The "Three Strikes" law of 1994 is the most notable example.

But as mass incarceration led to prison overcrowding, Californians began to have second thoughts. Six years ago, Californians passed Prop. 47, knocking many felonies down to misdemeanors. Two years later they passed Prop. 57, creating new opportunities for inmates to apply and qualify for early release from prison. The pendulum has swung.

Law enforcement unions, conservative prosecutors, crime-minded legislators and some retailers concerned about shoplifting say it's swung too far and they've put Prop. 20 on the ballot.

Supporters say

Californians made a mistake when they rolled an array of property crimes from felonies down to misdemeanors. It's triggered a predictable increase in car thefts and shoplifting. Prop. 20 would correct that mistake.

Likewise, Californians went too far when they voted to create opportunities for "non-violent felons" to apply for early release from prison. California law only specifies 23 offenses as "violent felonies" - and child abuse, domestic violence, hate crimes and aggravated assault are not on that list. They should be.

Opponents say

California already tried the "lock `em up and throw away the key" strategy. It didn't cut crime, it exploded the state's prisons budget and it tore apart countless families. That's why voters have consistently backed reforms that give all but the most serious offenders a chance to rehabilitate themselves. This year, with more focus than ever before on how the penal system disproportionately harms Black and Latino Americans, is no time to revert back to a tired, failed approach.

Who's for it:

Democratic Assemblymember Jim Cooper

Republican Assemblymember Vince Fong

California Retailers Association

Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert

Who's against it:

Gov. Gavin Newsom and the California Democratic Party

ACLU of California

California Teachers Association

Chief Probation Officers of California

Proposition 21: Rent control

The basics

What would Proposition 21 do?

Allow cities to pass rent control measures on almost all rental housing, as long as it's more than 15 years old.

Renters got a break last year, when the state enacted a law capping annual rent increases at around 8%. But another, older state law doesn't let cities enact their own, stricter rent control laws for single-family homes or rental housing first occupied in the past 25 years. Nor can cities prevent landlords from raising the rent on new tenants to market rates.

There are still a few exemptions built into Prop. 21. For example, cities still wouldn't be able to cap rent increases by "mom-and-pop landlords," who own no more than two small properties such as single-family homes or condos.

If the measure passes, cities and states may lose revenue in the "high tens of millions per year," according to an analysis by the Legislative Analyst's office, because landlords will pay lower property taxes.

Why am I voting on this?

Prior to 1995, cities and counties could enact their own rent control laws - and several did. Then, state lawmakers passed the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act to curb that power.

As the cost of rent in California has skyrocketed, tenant advocacy groups have now twice tried to roll back the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act as a way to let cities protect their affordable housing stock.

You might remember voting on a very similar measure in 2018 - it went down in flames as 59% of Californians voted against it. But the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, which co-sponsored the 2018 campaign and whose president Michael Weinstein has increasingly

waded into California's housing battles, has brought it back. So what's new this time? While the measure has been tweaked a bit, the context has changed drastically. Though Prop 21. won't help people from being evicted because they're late on rent due to the pandemic, advocates hope that the financial shock triggered by the coronavirus pandemic will make people more eager to protect renters.

Supporters say

This would let cities pass limits on rent increases to protect California families who are one rent hike away from being driven out of their neighborhoods by corporate landlords. This will stop more homelessness and gentrification.

Opponents say

It would make it less profitable for builders to construct more housing, affordable or not, at a time when California has a massive housing shortage. It would also decrease revenue for city and state governments, already cash-strapped by the pandemic. Plus, Californians already made up their mind in 2018.

Who's for it:

Michael Weinstein, president of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation
California Democratic Party
Eviction Defense Network
Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders

Who's against it:

California Apartment Association
Gov. Gavin Newsom
Essex Property Trust and Prometheus Real Estate Group
California Seniors Advocates League

Proposition 22: Gig worker benefits

The basics

What would Proposition 22 do?

Exempt gig companies like Uber and Lyft from a new state law requiring them to treat workers as employees.

Since January, state law has required former contract workers in many industries to be classified as employees and offered benefits such as overtime pay, health care, paid sick leave, unemployment insurance and workers' compensation. If this measure passes, companies that employ drivers through apps - among them, Lyft, Uber, DoorDash and Instacart - would instead keep workers classified as contractors and be able to offer narrower benefits, including pay at least 120% of minimum wage, health care subsidies and accident insurance.

Benefits under Prop. 22 would be tied to drivers' "engaged time" completing passenger routes, excluding any wait time on apps between rides. The measure also includes consumer safety changes such as more driver background checks and zero tolerance for drug or alcohol violations.

Why am I voting on this?

Gig companies were a primary political target of the new law, but they've fought state and city attorneys over whether they should

have to comply. A Superior Court Judge ruled in August that Uber and Lyft must immediately switch to treating drivers as employees. That prompted the app companies to threaten "hundreds of thousands" of job cuts and the suspension of operations in California until voters decide the fate of Prop. 22. A shutdown was averted by an appellate court ruling, but that could change before Election Day with more court dates on the horizon.

The stakes are high in this bitter dispute between business and labor. If this proposition passes, any amendments would require a 7/8 supermajority - a longshot in the Legislature.

Supporters say

This is a business necessity for gig companies to continue offering drivers work on flexible schedules - and consumers on-demand rides at low prices. It's also just a backdoor way for labor groups to try to unionize app drivers. Uber has said that up to 76% of its 209,000 California drivers could be cut if the company is forced to comply with the state's stricter law, and that rider prices would increase 25-111% across the state.

Opponents say

Gig companies undermine job stability and exploit drivers, so their warnings about job cuts are overstated and designed to get regulators to back off. The pandemic is a prime example of why gig workers need the stricter state law, which gives them protections like paid sick leave and unemployment insurance. That's a surer bet than relying on government intervention such as the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program made available to drivers through federal relief measures.

Who's for it:

Uber, Lyft, Instacart and Doordash
California Chamber of Commerce
California Police Chiefs Association
California NAACP

Who's against it:

The Democratic presidential ticket: Joe Biden and Kamala Harris
Service Employees International Union
California Teachers Association
Gig Workers Rising, a driver advocacy organization

Proposition 23: Kidney dialysis clinic rules

The basics

What would Proposition 23 do?

Require kidney dialysis clinics to have at least one physician present during all operating hours, and to report infection data to the state. It also would require that operators get approval from the state's health department before closing a clinic, and prohibit clinics from discriminating against patients based on insurance type.

Why am I voting on this?

The number of people with kidney failure who require dialysis treatment continues to grow; about 80,000 Californians depend on it. That also means a boom in the dialysis industry.

A powerful labor union, Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West, has targeted these companies. Two years ago, the union introduced a ballot initiative that would have essentially limited clinics' profits. After a very expensive battle, voters ultimately sided with the dialysis companies. The union said it would be back, so this is round two.

Supporters say

Kidney patients deserve better treatment than what they receive from many dialysis clinics, and these high profit companies haven't invested enough in patient safety. The removal of people's blood during dialysis treatment puts enormous strain on people's bodies and leaves them vulnerable to medical crises. So having a licensed physician on site at all times -not just sometimes - means that during emergencies, a physician can respond immediately.

Opponents say

The proposition is unnecessary, as clinics already report infection data to the federal government. They also already have the necessary medical staff to keep patients safe, including a medical director. But adding physicians around the clock would only increase costs for clinics, pushing them to reduce hours or possibly close. What this is, at heart, is a union ploy to pressure clinics and organize dialysis workers.

Who's for it:

Service Employees International Union United Health Care Workers
California Labor Federation
California Democratic Party

Who's against it:

DaVita
Fresenius Medical Care
California Medical Association
California State Conference NAACP

Proposition 24: More data privacy

The basics

What would Proposition 24 do?

Change California's data privacy law:

By letting you tell businesses to limit the use of sensitive data, such as your exact location, health information, race and religion

By prohibiting businesses from holding onto your data for longer than necessary

By allowing the government to fine companies up to \$7,500 for violating children's privacy rights

By creating a new state agency to enforce the privacy law, investigate violations and assess penalties

By reducing the number of businesses that have to comply, making it apply only to companies that buy or sell data of at least 100,000 households a year

Why am I voting on this?

San Francisco real estate developer Alastair Mactaggart began advocating for consumer privacy a few years ago, after a Google engineer he met at a dinner party told him Americans would be

shocked by how much the company knows about us. Mactaggart successfully pushed the Legislature to pass a landmark data privacy law in 2018. Now he says it needs some changes, so he drove the effort to put Prop. 24 on the ballot.

Supporters say

The existing privacy law doesn't have enough teeth. Updates in Prop. 24 would create a system to enforce the privacy law and triple fines on companies that violate kids' privacy. They would give consumers more control over their most personal data, allow you to shield your precise location from tracking, and give you more ability to sue companies if your email and password are stolen or hacked. Passing this proposition will make it harder for lobbyists to change privacy laws in the Legislature.

Opponents say

California's data privacy law is very new - it just went into effect this year - so we should see how it plays out before changing it. Some of the updates in Prop. 24 would hurt consumers - delaying a rule that allows workers to find out what information employers collect about them, making it easier for businesses to charge you more if you don't let them sell your data, and allowing tech companies to grab your data when you leave California. This proposition is the pet project of one man, and lacks backing from a broad coalition of privacy advocates. In fact, some of them oppose it. (Tech companies are surprisingly quiet about this measure; the Internet Association and California Chamber of Commerce criticized it in a legislative hearing but have no formal position on it.)

Who's for it:

Alastair Mactaggart and his wife, Celine (creators of a group called Californians for Consumer Privacy)

Common Sense Media (a group that promotes safe use of media and technology for children)

Consumer Watchdog

Alice Huffman, president of the California NAACP

Rep. Ro Khanna, Democrat of Fremont

Who's against it:

American Civil Liberties Union

Public Citizen

Consumer Federation of California

Dolores Huerta, labor organizer

The Orange County Register Editorial Board

Proposition 25: Abolishing cash bail

The basics

What would Proposition 25 do?

Transform how people get out of jail while awaiting trial - making California the first state to replace cash bail with an algorithm.

Today, rich Californians can afford cash bail, while poorer people either pay bail bond companies or wait for trial in jail. This measure, if passed, would uphold a 2018 law that sought to eliminate cash bail and replace it with an algorithm to assess a person's risk for not appearing at trial - the higher the risk, the less

likely they are to be released.

Not affected: People accused of crimes outside the state court system.

Why am I voting on this?

In 2018, former Gov. Jerry Brown signed a law that would have replaced cash bail with a risk-based algorithm. Superior courts would have to create new pretrial assessment divisions- this is pretty much how federal courts already work. Opposition, led by the bail bonds industry, challenged the law almost immediately. Prop 25 is the statewide showdown: Will voters choose to move away from cash bail? And is this the right alternative?

Supporters say

The cash bail system is inherently classist, racist and unfair. People with generational wealth can pay their way out of jail while awaiting trial. Poorer people in the exact same legal circumstances, with the same statistical likelihood to appear - or not appear - for trial cannot afford to pay their way out. The bail bonds industry is designed to exploit this problem and these people.

And hey, maybe the accused will put money back into the economy instead of spending it on bail.

Opponents say

This one is a little tricky. There are two sides to the opposition and they are starkly different.

The bail Industry: We shouldn't switch something that's working for an alternative that is no better, and potentially more costly. Not only that, but it could lead to more people going free before trial and then committing more crimes.

Civil rights advocates: Cash bail is fundamentally flawed. But while algorithms can pitch you a song or sell you a toaster, they shouldn't be used for release decisions. The factors considered for release will still lead to people of color being held for trial at disproportionate rates. Prop. 25 is further from the existing problem, but no closer to the solution.

Who's for it:

Service Employees International Union

California Democratic Party

California Medical Association

Gov. Gavin Newsom and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon

Who's against it:

California State Conference of the NAACP

California Peace Officers' Association

California Bail Agents Association

Human Rights Watch

Information provided by CalMatters. <https://calmatters.org/>
CalMatters is a nonprofit, nonpartisan newsroom committed to explaining California policy and politics.

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