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That’s a fact that should worry anyone who believes vested interests shouldn’t have a place at the centre of decision making.   Chris Hipkins’ newly appointed Chief of Staff, Andrew Kirton, started in the role just one day after finishing with corporate lobbying firm Anacta, where his role included lobbying the Labour government over political decisions. In other countries, such shifts would be illegal due to the glaring potential for conflicts of interests and corruption. In New Zealand, it is so commonplace that it is generally not even reported on.   **New evidence on lobbying**   Fortunately, yesterday RNZ investigative journalist Guyon Espiner launched a series of exposés about the role of lobbyists in government. Today he reveals Andrew Kirton’s lobbying of the government on behalf of alcohol companies. Espiner details how, six weeks after Kirton was employed to run the Beehive, Hipkins announced he was ditching a proposed reform that would introduce recycling obligations on drinks manufacturers – something Kirton had lobbied against on behalf of alcohol industry players. See Espiner’s story today: [**Prime Minister’s chief of staff Andrew Kirton led lobbying firm that fought against reforms now binned by Chris Hipkins**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=f2d8ed433d&e=33257ad5dd).     Espiner publishes some of the attempts Kirton made to push what his clients wanted in terms of watering down the proposed reforms.   The Prime Minister’s Office has responded to Espiner’s story by denying that Kirton had any involvement in the decision to add the recycling initiatives to Hipkins’ policy bonfire. However, according to Espiner, “RNZ asked whether Kirton told the Prime Minister which clients he had lobbied for and what conflicts of interests he had declared but those questions were not addressed.”   Today’s story also looks at two other lobbyists who worked as Chief of Staff for Jacinda Ardern during her time as Prime Minister. GJ Thompson was Ardern’s Chief of Staff in 2018, and his clients now include the Brewer's Association. Neale Jones – briefly the Labour Chief of Staff in 2017 – now lobbies for Countdown on alcohol sales regulations.   Espiner’s stories show a disturbingly close relationship between major vested interests and the policy process.   **“Mate, Comrade, Brother” – cosiness in New Zealand government**   Espiner’s first exposé in the series, published yesterday, was about how government agencies such as Pharmac, Transpower and Landcorp are hiring lobbyists to manage the media and the flow of information to the public – see: [**Lobbying firms earning hundreds of thousands from contracts with government agencies**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=c5a1114b6d&e=33257ad5dd).   Espiner reveals that universities are also a major user of lobbyists, with Massey University paying Neale Jones’ lobbying firm a retainer of $6900 each month just to be on their books. Massey has paid former Labour MP Clayton Cosgrove “nearly $64,000 since 2020” for his company’s lobbying services. The University of Auckland use the lobbying firm Sherson Willis. That firm is also employed by AUT, who also use a second lobbying firm, Thompson Lewis, which is owned by GJ Thompson and which employs another former Beehive Chief of Staff, Wayne Eagleson – who was the righthand man to both John Key and Bill English from 2008 to 2017.   Other government agencies are paying large amounts to these lobbying/PR firms. For example, according to Espiner, “In March 2020 Transpower agreed to pay Thompson Lewis up to $50,000 a year, based on a retainer of $6000 a month, and for crisis projects nearly $2000 a day.”   **Manipulation of the media and public**   The main focus of Espiner’s story from yesterday was on the lobbying and PR work of leftwing political commentator David Cormack, who co-owns the government relations business Draper Cormack. Cormack, who regularly appears as a commentator on TV and radio, also works for Pharmac, advising them how to navigate select committee processe and manage their dealings with the media.   Espiner uncovered “300 pages of communications with Draper Cormack”, showing how Cormack was advising the government agency to manipulate the media. Most controversially, he devised a strategy in which some media outlets and journalists would be given preferential treatment because they were perceived as friendly to Pharmac, and other outlets would be refused access to information.   Advance copies of Pharmac reports were “given to journalists from Stuff and Newshub”, with journalists perceived to be less friendly having to wait a day. Today FM broadcaster Rachel Smalley, and TVNZ Breakfast host Indira Stewart were singled out as negative towards Pharmac.   Lobbyists and communications advice was aimed at preventing information getting out to the public, especially through manipulation of the processes around the Official Information Act used by journalists to hold officials and politicians to account.   Some of the lobbyists detailed in Espiner’s series are also high profile political commentators and columnists. For example, David Cormack has written columns on politics – including about health policy and Pharmac – and regularly appears on TV and radio to give his analysis. Lobbyists do not usually disclose who their clients are so it is often impossible to know whose vested interests these lobbyists are pursuing in their political commentary roles.   Like Cormack, Neale Jones is used regularly by RNZ as a commentator, but does not disclose who his company is lobbying for. Likewise, Kris Faafoi has just been employed as a weekly politics columnist for Stuff, after leaving his Cabinet job to be a lobbyist last year. Such lobbyists use their media platforms to advertise their influence and win over corporate clients.   At the very least, if lobbyists are to be given such a large platform to influence political debate and policies, they should be required to disclose who their lobbying clients are.   **Time for a Royal Commission into Vested Interests**   There has historically been very little public interest and debate about the role of lobbying in New Zealand politics. But perhaps with Guyon Espiner’s RNZ series we will now see a lot more light shone on these activities. At the moment, it is very difficult to know how much impact lobbying has on government policies. In other countries there is much more regulation of lobbyist’s activities, and much of what goes on here – especially in terms of the revolving door of lobbyists going in and out of senior public roles, including in the Beehive – would be illegal.   We are used to being told that there is no corruption in New Zealand, and that everyone in the country has the same political power through the electoral process. But this is not true.   It’s time that we woke up to the role of vested interests in our political processes. The role of political donations, too. However, don’t expect that the politicians will initiate a reform agenda on this – it’s not in their interests.   Prime Minister Chris Hipkins has been in the media today defending his own use of lobbyists, as well as the lack of lobbying regulation. He admitted to RNZ’s Kim Hill that the Labour Government hasn’t done anything to tighten the rules, and it has no plans to. Hipkins is spinning the line that the public essentially has the same access to politicians as lobbyists. Explaining the close access that lobbyists currently have, Hipkins to decision-makers, Hipkins suggests this isn’t because they are lobbyists but simply because they happen to personally know those in power.   On whether lobbyists should be allowed to go in and out of the Beehive-lobbying revolving door, Hipkins merely says, “everyone is entitled to earn a living”, as if the integrity of the system of government means nothing.   The landscape of lobbying and political donations in New Zealand is the wild west, with politicians unwilling to clean it up. Surely the problem is now so extreme that politicians need to be forced to set up a Royal Commission into Vested Interests in Politics. | | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **Further reading on Lobbying**  Guyon Espiner (RNZ): [Prime Minister’s chief of staff Andrew Kirton led lobbying firm that fought against reforms now binned by Chris Hipkins](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=39136bd04d&e=33257ad5dd) RNZ: [Prime Minister Chris Hipkins responds to revelations chief of staff led lobbying firm](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=b616dc911f&e=33257ad5dd) Duncan Greive (Spinoff): [Guyon Espiner reveals the banal and bleak machinations of government lobbyists](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=61c77145b1&e=33257ad5dd) Liam Hehir (The Blue Review): [Let's end self-regulation for lobbyists](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=fea784866e&e=33257ad5dd) Rachel Smalley (Today FM): [I don't know what more I can do](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=de1a3cbe1b&e=33257ad5dd) Indira Stewart (1News): [On being called 'likely prejudice' by Pharmac](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=a04531bcec&e=33257ad5dd) No Right Turn: [This sounds familiar](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=b760a81e4d&e=33257ad5dd) | | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **Other items of interest and importance today**  **PARLIAMENT** Chris Trotter (Interest): [Te Pāti Māori are revolutionaries, not reformists](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=5b33688e29&e=33257ad5dd" \t "_blank) Jamie Ensor (Newshub): [Election 2023: Intelligence agencies warn 'violent rhetoric' towards politicians will 'almost certainly increase' leading up to election](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=6f5e4a08da&e=33257ad5dd) Dileepa Fonseka (BusinessDesk): [A Good Keen Median Man](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=731d3fad2e&e=33257ad5dd) (paywalled) Tess McClure (Guardian): [Coalition creaks as New Zealand Greens watch Labour dump climate policies](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=593d9c3a31&e=33257ad5dd) Bernard Hickey: [So what would be the point of a Green vote again?](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=7fbd49aaac&e=33257ad5dd) No Right Turn: [The Greens, Labour, and coalition enforcement](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=d35b407341&e=33257ad5dd) Dave Armstrong (Stuff): [With big names out, it's a three-horse race for control of Wellington Central](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=3f680f4efb&e=33257ad5dd) Bridie Witton (Stuff): ['Game on' in Wellington Central: Labour's Ibrahim Omer vs Greens' Tamatha Paul](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=68ed9a2ad7&e=33257ad5dd) Finlay Dunseath (Stuff): [Wairarapa rematch on as National attempts to dethrone Kieran McAnulty](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=384f310186&e=33257ad5dd) Anna Whyte (Stuff): [TOP launches $1.5b-a-year 'Teal Card' policy for under-30s](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=3e96dcde3c&e=33257ad5dd) Brent Melville (BusinessDesk): [TOP dangles $1.5b youth carrot, with a hook](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=e06d65503c&e=33257ad5dd) (paywalled)  **COST OF LIVING** Damien Venuto (Herald): [The Front Page: Why the cost of living will be critical this election](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=2a70bd74f0&e=33257ad5dd) Rob Stock (Stuff): [Cost of living crisis has 'totally upended' our money lives](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=ff0682725b&e=33257ad5dd) Thomas Coughlan (Herald): ‘[Fundamental’ changes to tax credit system could lift incomes of 350,000 families in Working for Families review](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=53aef18bfc&e=33257ad5dd) Michael Neilson (Herald): [WEAG welfare overhaul update, Govt defends $14.6b programme while anti-poverty campaigners say ‘woefully slow’](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=66bea24784&e=33257ad5dd)  **FOREIGN AFFAIRS** Pattrick Smellie (BusinessDesk): [Australia's nuclear subs raise the stakes for NZ](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=098bd87769&e=33257ad5dd) (paywalled) Thomas Manch (Stuff): [Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta heading to Beijing, China](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=1cfb51a4a6&e=33257ad5dd) Thomas Coughlan (Stuff): [Nanaia Mahuta heads to China for first ministerial visit since 2019](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=3a0155fed3&e=33257ad5dd) Dan Brunskill (Interest): [Foreign Affairs Minister Nanaia Mahuta will travel to China to reestablish face-to-face relationship with Beijing](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=d3d9c49b40&e=33257ad5dd) Tess McClure (Guardian): [New Zealand foreign minister to visit counterpart in China](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=764d7df54e&e=33257ad5dd) Mike Smith (The Standard): [The Drums of War – Again](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=1aef9f6f91&e=33257ad5dd) Sam Sachdeva (Newsroom): [The secret to success with India](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=4d8408f979&e=33257ad5dd)  **PUBLIC SERVICE** Phil Pennington (RNZ): [New public service pay guidance could ease restrictions](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=82a3a33206&e=33257ad5dd) Jenna Lynch (Newshub): [Public Service Commissioner says former Labour Minister Ruth Dyson's tweets were political](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=afc450d8c2&e=33257ad5dd)  **POLICE** Adam Pearse (Herald): [New Police Minister: PM outlines priorities for Ginny Andersen as she replaces Stuart Nash](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=7f789c22fd&e=33257ad5dd) Jenna Lynch (Newshub): [Who is new Police Minister Ginny Andersen? Not even Prime Minister Chris Hipkins seems to know her cops credentials](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=813a01b7e2&e=33257ad5dd) RNZ: [Ginny Andersen named new Minister of Police](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=22a0a38bb7&e=33257ad5dd) Thomas Manch (Stuff): [New Cabinet minister Ginny Andersen promoted to police minister](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=937fd91be6&e=33257ad5dd) Jamie Ensor (Newshub): [Chris Hipkins chooses Ginny Andersen to be new Police Minister after Stuart Nash resignation](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=5fffda31bc&e=33257ad5dd) 1News: [Akl shooting shows more officers needed on streets - Police Assn](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=af4388966a&e=33257ad5dd)  **EDUCATION, SCIENCE** RNZ: ['Kōkirihia' - plan to end streaming in Kiwi schools unveiled](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=d953c2cf98&e=33257ad5dd) Charlotte Muru-Lanning (Spinoff): [The plan to end classroom streaming by 2030, explained](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=cfc2955c2c&e=33257ad5dd) Georgina Tuari Stewart (E-Tangata): [Is there such thing as Māori science? ‘It depends’](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=1327d460e2&e=33257ad5dd)  **CHILD WELFARE** Marty Sharpe (Stuff): ['Hardest decision of our lives': Foster parents return Moana to state care](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=3b4a1b2038&e=33257ad5dd) Heather du Plessis-Allan (Newstalk ZB): [The sad story of Moana shows that Section 7AA was a mistake](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=14e67e214e&e=33257ad5dd)  **HEALTH** Marc Daalder (Newsroom): [Is NZ ready for the next pandemic?](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=c22c453993&e=33257ad5dd) RNZ: [Covid-19 update: 11,171 new cases, 24 further deaths and 200 in hospital](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=48e29a43f9&e=33257ad5dd) Lynne Chepulis (The Conversation): [Pharmac prioritised Māori and Pacific patients for access to new diabetes drugs – did they get it right?](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=ab992593c1&e=33257ad5dd) Ian McCrae (BusinessDesk): [Bugger, I'm the new minister of health](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=c225284046&e=33257ad5dd) Katie Townshend (Stuff): [Dying man's fight with ACC to acknowledge delayed cancer diagnosis](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=9a776c06fe&e=33257ad5dd)  **DISABILITY** Te Aniwa Hurihanganui (1News): [Waitangi Tribunal told of abuse against Māori deaf community](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=aa0ae25eb8&e=33257ad5dd) Jame Pocock (Herald): [Hastings man with Down syndrome wants to show employers his value](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=07d66ff2cb&e=33257ad5dd)  **CYCLONE GABRIELLE** Thomas Manch (Stuff): [More temporary bridges to be built for cyclone-stricken communities](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=32ab2aebaf&e=33257ad5dd) RNZ: [More bailey bridges confirmed for restoring access after cyclone](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=f7f2f0bea0&e=33257ad5dd) George Heagney (Stuff): [Waka Kotahi eager to reconnect rural areas cut off by Cyclone Gabrielle](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=9d572fc6f7&e=33257ad5dd)  **FORESTRY** Andrea Fox (Herald): [Overseas investment watchdog probes East Coast forestry companies](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=32f1d01ff2&e=33257ad5dd) (paywalled) Matthew Rosenberg (Local Democracy Reporting): [Forestry company says it's not responsible for damage to Gisborne water pipeline](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=3c7ed0ae48&e=33257ad5dd) Brendon McMahon (RNZ): [Forest slash on West Coast radar](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=bf3d41c512&e=33257ad5dd) Susan Harris (Interest): [Carbon forestry won't take over all the good farming country](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=ef11a5e907&e=33257ad5dd)  **MEDIA** Gavin Ellis: [Media regulation: Time to shut up and get on with it](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=618d8697af&e=33257ad5dd) Daniel Dunkley (BusinessDesk): [Key Today FM executive Gurney resigns](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=57aee2810b&e=33257ad5dd) (paywalled) Herald: [MediaWorks’ Today FM radio boss Dallas Gurney quits](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=266ed21166&e=33257ad5dd) Maryana Garcia (Rotorua Daily Post): [Julian Wilcox awarded prestigious 28th Māori Battalion Scholarship](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=94f48fcb54&e=33257ad5dd)  **TRANSPORT** Bernard Orsman (Herald): [Government plans to cut Aucklanders’ driving in the city by a third to fight high transport emissions rate](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=b67d8bdf4d&e=33257ad5dd) Simon Wilson (Herald): [Time to stop this obsession with cycleways](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=219a13bd05&e=33257ad5dd) (paywalled) Suraya Sidhu Singh (Spinoff): [The utter folly of cutting public transport funding in the regions](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=6196dd6687&e=33257ad5dd) Samantha Gee (RNZ): [Travellers still dealing with ferry cancellations as Kaitaki repairs continue](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=40bfab195b&e=33257ad5dd) Sapeer Mayron (Stuff): [Auckland Mayor Wayne Brown says $145m road cone spend is 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interview revealed](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=838932600a&e=33257ad5dd) (paywalled) | | | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | 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