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HURRICANE RECOVERY

The House unanimously passed House Bill 47, Disaster Recovery Act of 2025 – Part I. Among other things, this \$500 million Helene relief bill would allocate \$140 million to rebuild homes, \$100 million to rebuild bridges and roads, \$55 million to help small businesses and \$150 million to help farmers. The bill is now over to the Senate, but there's little indication of how they plan to proceed with the House version or if they'll push for major revisions. Senate leader Berger mentioned earlier this month that the Senate could either take up the House bill or propose their own version.

TAX RELATED BILLS

The House Commerce and Economic Development Committee heard two bills this week that would reduce taxes on tips, overtime pay, and gambling losses. House Bill 11, No Tax on Tips, Overtime, Bonus Pay, was heard, proposing a deduction of up to \$2,500 for tips, bonuses, and overtime income—similar to a federal proposal by President Trump. Rep. Adams raised concerns about potential abuse of the tax break, asking, "Have you figured out all the different ways that this could be gamed?" Bill sponsor Rep. Harry Warren acknowledged the challenge, stating, "Nobody has," but noted that about 20 states and Congress are exploring similar legislation. An estimate on the bill's impact on state tax revenue is still pending.

Another proposed bill would allow an income tax deduction for gambling losses. Rep. Paré argued that gamblers should not be taxed on winnings when they ultimately broke even or lost money. "Even though there's gambling in the title, this is not a gambling bill — so this is a fair tax bill," she explained, pointing out that federal law allows loss deductions, but state law does not. Both bills were for discussion only. The House Commerce and Economic Development Committee is set to vote on the gambling bill next week; however, House Bill 11 has not been calendared as of now.

AG/RESTRICT CHALLENGE TO PRESIDENTIAL EXECUTIVE ORDERS

The Senate Judiciary Committee debated Senate Bill 58, a proposal that would limit the North Carolina attorney general's ability to challenge presidential executive orders. This marks the second time the Republican-led Legislature has attempted to restrict Democratic Attorney General Jeff



NORTH CAROLINA COLLEGE OF EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS



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Jackson's actions. In December, lawmakers passed Senate Bill 382, which prevents him from taking legal positions that contradict the General Assembly in litigation. Bill sponsor Sen. Moffitt acknowledged that attorneys general from both parties have historically opposed executive actions from presidents of the opposite party. "I'm not exactly sure that we can purify the role of the attorney general in our state, much less in other states," he said. "This is an attempt to do so." Jackson has successfully challenged four of former President Donald Trump's executive orders, involving birthright citizenship, a federal funding freeze, medical research cuts, and data access for the Department of Government Efficiency. Sen. Lisa Grafstein defended Jackson's actions, arguing that the courts and attorney general's office are functioning as intended. Sen. Amy Galey countered, questioning whether taxpayer-funded litigation should be used as a "policy weapon." Senate Bill 58 received a favorable report and was sent to the Senate Rules Committee for further review.

DMV COMMISSIONER RESIGNS

DMV Commissioner Wayne Goodwin announced his resignation last Wednesday, just before addressing the Joint Appropriations Committee on Transportation. "While my professional plans this morning may come as a surprise to some folks ... I've been truly mulling this decision in earnest for quite some time," he said, confirming he will remain in his role until a successor is appointed. During his three-year tenure, the DMV faced criticism from legislators, particularly over miscommunication with license-issuing vendor Idemia. Lawmakers even discussed privatizing the DMV in response to ongoing concerns. Goodwin emphasized the need for continued adaptation as North Carolina's population grows, projecting 11.7 million residents by 2030. Despite increasing demand, the number of driver license offices has only slightly risen since 2003, contributing to service backlogs. Efforts to address these issues included hiring over 400 employees to reduce a high vacancy rate, which had been 30% in early 2022. Temporary positions remain difficult to fill, with a 75% vacancy rate. Goodwin noted that average wait times at the DMV have improved, dropping from 38 minutes in 2018 to 26 minutes in 2024. A major factor in reducing delays was tackling appointment no-shows—down from 34% to 9% after implementing reminder texts. "That was causing a huge domino effect for the rest of the day everywhere," he said. Additional strategies include expanding office hours and launching self-service kiosks, which have processed over 21,000 transactions. Meanwhile, PayIt, the state's online service for vehicle registration renewals and tax payments, reported 5.6 million transactions last year and now allows customers to request crash reports.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT LOANS

The North Carolina Department of State Treasurer has approved \$73 million in zero-interest loans for 98 local governments affected by Helene, providing financial relief while they await federal reimbursement for disaster recovery. Local governments must vote to accept the funds before receiving them. The loan program, approved by state lawmakers in December, was developed with input from organizations such as the North Carolina League of Municipalities and the state Association of County Commissioners. In January, Treasurer Brad Briner appointed Jeff Poley, a bond lawyer, to oversee its implementation. "We had a big goal on a short deadline, and we are excited to announce that help is on the way," Briner said, crediting Poley and his team for their quick work in launching the program. The state expects to receive less than \$16 billion in federal disaster aid—well below its \$25.5 billion request. Since the storm struck on Sept. 27, lawmakers have allocated \$1.1 billion in relief across three bills and are considering another \$500 million. Gov. Stein has also requested additional federal assistance. The cash flow loans are calculated based on damage assessments submitted to the N.C. Department of Emergency Management and must be repaid within five years. Some funds are being held for municipalities that missed the

initial Feb. 14 deadline, with Poley assisting them in completing their applications.

The approved areas and funding amount are below:

Buncombe County: \$8,449,310.49
Chimney Rock: \$7,704,265.19
Henderson County: \$4,197,972.83
Yancey County: \$3,680,783.49
Town of Lake Lure: \$3,423,122.89
Mitchell County: \$2,887,431.29
Spruce Pine: \$ 2,831,869.38
Asheville: \$2,791,793.35
Burnsville: \$2,171,710.97
Madison County: \$1,601,939.25
Hendersonville: \$1,172,005.34
Biltmore Forest: \$1,028,198.10
Black Mountain: \$705,703.37
Woodfin: \$664,983.59
Weaverville: \$599,887.30
Old Fort: \$573,328.01
Haywood County: \$418,064.90
Fletcher: \$168,013.10
Hot Springs: \$143,221.87
Mills River: \$133,954.35
Brevard: \$35,863.36
Flat Rock: \$14,650.07
Marshall: \$5,869.40
Mars Hill: \$2,637.01

STATE AUDITOR UPDATE

State Auditor Dave Boliek is seeking to expand his office by over one-third, requesting 65 additional employees beyond its current 161 full-time positions. In a presentation to legislators, he outlined plans to bolster his agency with two new teams: investigations and rapid response. The rapid response team would handle urgent requests, preventing staff from being pulled away from ongoing audits. He also aims to upgrade technology by incorporating data analytics and artificial intelligence. His office has already developed a Helene recovery dashboard, which he envisions as a model for sharing real-time data with taxpayers instead of waiting for traditional reports. Boliek's campaign pledge to audit the DMV is "fully underway," with the first report expected within six weeks. Additionally, his office will undergo an internal audit by an external accounting firm. He plans to collaborate with the House Select Committee on Government Efficiency, which was formed to identify waste and mismanagement.

NC HOUSE FORMS ITS OWN DOGE

Rep. Torbett and Rep. Kidwell have been appointed by Speaker Hall to lead the new Select Committee on Government Efficiency. The committee's goal is to examine state and local government operations for waste, duplication, mismanagement, and violations of constitutional rights. The idea for the committee arose after a discussion where Rep. Torbett suggested a zero-based budgeting approach to align state government spending more effectively. The committee will also involve input from the state auditor for access to government operations and audits. Hall said in the release that, "Unnecessary government bloat and waste," hurts taxpayers and the

committee will aim to, "restore state and local governments across North Carolina to their proper, limited roles." Torbett explained that the committee will focus on aligning expenses with the relevant departments and reviewing justifications for outdated programs that no longer deliver effective results. The committee will also examine HR practices to ensure merit-based hiring. Torbett reassured that successful programs would remain unaffected.

GENERAL INTEREST BILLS

House Bill 134, Prohibit Misbranding of Certain Food Products, would prohibit the misbranding of certain food products (require the label of any manufactured-protein food product that contains an identifying meat term to also contain in at least 20-point font or the size of the surrounding type, whichever is greater, and in close proximity to the name of the product, an appropriate qualifying term).

House Bill 135, Misbranding/Cell-Cultured Meat/Env. Assess., would prohibit the misbranding of certain food products; prohibit community colleges, universities, and public schools from purchasing certain food products; and establish an environmental investment assessment on certain meat, poultry, egg, and dairy products and analogous products.

House Bill 142, Implement Zero-Based Budgeting, would require the implementation of zero-based budgeting for the State budget by the 2031-2033 fiscal biennium.

House Bill 144, Elect SBE/Superintendent as SBE Chair, amend the Constitution of North Carolina to elect members of the State Board of Education, make the Superintendent of Public Instruction the Chair of the State Board of Education as an ex officio member, and require that vacancy appointments be filled as provided by law.

House Bill 145, Funds for Diabetes Research Institute/UNC-CH, would appropriate \$50 million to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to develop a diabetes research institute.

House Bill 149/Senate 112, School Financial Flexibility Pilot Program, create a pilot program to allow more financial and hiring flexibility for certain school districts.

House Bill 153/Senate 192, Increase Vehicle Safety Inspection Fee, would increase the fee for performing a vehicle safety inspection.

House Bill 154, Reclaim State Assets from NCInnovation, would dissolve the relationship between the State and NCInnovation and require NCInnovation to return State funds and assets.

House Bill 156/Senate Bill 218, Increase Access for Small Employers/Insurance, would increase small employer access to stop loss, catastrophic, and reinsurance coverage.

House Bill 162, Local Gov't Applicants/Criminal History Check, would provide that counties and cities shall require criminal history record checks for applicants for employment if the position being filled requires the applicant to work with children in any capacity.

House Bill 166, Allow ERPOs to Prevent Suicides & Save Lives, would authorize the issuance of an extreme risk protection order to restrict temporarily a person's access to firearms if there is evidence that the person poses a danger of physical harm to self or others and require a court to

order the seizure of any firearm, ammunition, or permits that a defendant fails to surrender after the issuance of an emergency or ex parte domestic violence protective order.

House Bill 167, Firearm in Unattended Vehicle/Safely Store, would prohibit leaving a firearm in an unattended motor vehicle unless the vehicle is locked and the firearm is secured or otherwise safely stored.

House Bill 168/Senate Bill 154, would enact the North Carolina Crown Act to create a respectful and open world for natural hair.

House Bill 171, Equality in State Agencies/Prohibition on DEI, would eliminate Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in State and local government and clarify the penalty provisions of the State Budget Act and Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act.

House Bill 174, Marriage Equality Act, would affirm and protect marriage equality in North Carolina to codify the right of all individuals to marry, regardless of sex, gender, or sexual orientation, ensuring equal treatment under the law in the State of North Carolina.

House Bill 175, Const. Amend./Marriage Equality, would amend the North Carolina Constitution and repeal a constitutional provision that recognizes marriage between one man and one woman as the only domestic legal union that is valid or recognized by the State.

House Bill 178, Budgeting Accountability and Transparency, would introduce greater accountability and transparency into the budget process by amending the State Budget Act to increase public notice and participation and by removing legislative confidentiality for certain communications to or from legislators requesting budget provisions or funds made.

House Bill 180, Fiscally Responsible & Sustainable Budgeting, would require the legislative and executive branches to collaborate on long-term budget assessments that measure ongoing budget sustainability utilizing a current services baseline to ensure fiscal responsibility.

House Bill 181, Tax Relief for Working Families Act, would reenact the earned income tax credit.

House Bill 186, The Stars and Stripes Commitment Act, would schedule recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of the school day and require recitation of the Pledge at State Board of Education and governing body meetings.

House Bill 188, Automatic Renewal of Contracts, would amend the requirements for certain automatically renewing consumer contracts.

House Bill 193, Firearm Law Revisions, would allow a person with a valid concealed handgun permit, or who is exempt from obtaining a concealed handgun permit, to possess or carry a handgun on educational property owned, used, or operated by a private school and provide additional protections from restrictions on use for relocated law enforcement shooting ranges.

House Bill 202, Defense Against Porch Pirates Act, would create the offense of larceny of mail.

House Bill 211, The Kelsey Smith Act, would authorize the provision of call location information to law enforcement under certain emergency circumstances.

House Bill 213, Post NC Veterans' Benefits, would amend the labor laws to require employers to post notice of veterans' benefits.

House Bill 214, Faithful Article V Commissioner Act, would enact the Faithful Article V Commissioner Act to (i) clarify the scope of authority of commissioners and committees representing the legislature of this State at interstate conventions, (ii) provide for enforcing limits on such authority, (iii) provide methods of selecting and replacing commissioners to conventions, and (iv) prescribe an oath to be taken by interstate convention commissioners.

House Bill 217, Driver Educ./18 Yrs & Older & Unlicensed, would require a course in alcohol and drug abuse awareness for persons eighteen years and older that are not licensed.

House Bill 218, Emergency Info on DMV Applications, would require the Division of Motor Vehicles to request emergency contact information on drivers license applications and renewal applications.

House Bill 222, C.O.O.P.E.R. Accountability Act, would enact the Close Out Operations Provide Emergency Relief Act (C.O.O.P.E.R. Act), appropriate funds for disaster recovery, impose auditing, reporting, and monitoring requirements, and revise the Office of Recovery and Resiliency responsibilities.

House Bill 234, Little Federal Model NC Edition, would amend the North Carolina Constitution to provide that each senator represents two counties, permit the General Assembly to revise the Senate districts from time to time, and require that the State is composed of one hundred counties.

House Bill 235, Fraudulent Deeds, would penalize the filing of fraudulent deeds and conveyances, establish a process to enable a victim of a fraudulent deed filing to remove the fraudulent recording from the record, and require tax certification prior to recording certain instruments.

House Bill 236, Remember 9/11 with Freedom Flag, would designate the freedom flag as a symbol of the state's continued remembrance of the lives lost due to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and authorizing the freedom flag to be displayed on September 11 of each year.

House Bill 244, Depoliticize Government Property Act, would provide that only certain governmental flags may be flown or displayed on property owned or leased by the State or a political subdivision of the State.

House Bill 246, Liam's Law, would increase the penalties for reckless driving or street racing that causes serious injury or death and increase the penalties for hit and run offenses that result in death.

House Bill 248, Live/Work Exemption for One-Family Dwellings, would exempt certain owner-occupied, single-family dwellings with permitted business uses from the live/work requirements of the North Carolina Building Code.

House Bill 251, Disaster Response Funding/Nondiscrimination, would prohibit discrimination on the basis of political affiliation in the provision of State disaster recovery assistance.

Senate Bill 58, AG/Restrict Challenge to Presidential EOs, was amended in the Senate Judiciary Committee to add to the types of actions the Attorney General is prohibited from taking to include

filing an action that would result in the invalidation of an executive order issued by the President of the United States.

Senate Bill 105, Continuing Care Retirement Communities Act, would enact the Continuing Care Retirement Communities Act, as recommended by the Department of Insurance.

Senate Bill 107, Judge Joe John Nonpartisan Jud. Elections Act, would reenact nonpartisan judicial elections, make conforming statutory changes relating to reenactment of nonpartisan judicial elections, and reestablish public financing for judicial campaigns. Identical to House Bill 129, summarized in the February 10, 2025, Legislative Report.

Senate Bill 110, North Carolina Work and Save, would create and appropriate funds for the Small Business Retirement Savings Program.

Senate Bill 120/House Bill 207, Remove Barriers to Labor Organizing, would provide labor organizations with the unabridged right to enter into labor agreements and repeal restrictions on labor organizing by public employees.

Senate Bill 123, Flags at Every School, would require and fund the display of the United States and North Carolina flags on public school grounds and in every public school classroom.

Senate Bill 124/House Bill 177, Reduce Barriers to State Employment, would reduce barriers to State employment by reviewing requirements for a 4 year college degree for certain positions and evaluating other experiences as qualifications.

Senate Bill 126, Zero-Based Budgeting, would require the use of zero-based budgeting for State agencies on a rotating basis.

Senate Bill 129, Booking Photograph Privacy Act, would prohibit the release of booking photographs.

Senate Bill 134, Inclusionary Zoning/Workforce Housing Funds, would allow local governments to provide for inclusionary zoning and appropriate funds to the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency for the Workforce Housing Loan Program.

Senate Bill 153, North Carolina Border Protection Act, would protect the borders of the state by (i) requiring cooperation with federal immigration officials, (ii) ensuring state funds are being used for the benefit of persons in the state legally, (iii) creating additional incentives for local governments to comply with state laws related to immigration, and (iv) prohibiting UNC constituent institutions from becoming sanctuary universities.

Senate Bill 161, The Jenesis Firearm Accountability Act, would require the reporting of a lost or stolen firearm; provide a sales tax exemption for equipment designed to prevent unauthorized persons from accessing firearms; and require the Department of Public Safety to develop and implement an educational campaign to make the public aware of the requirement to report a lost or stolen firearm.

Senate Bill 162, Shared Parenting, would establish a presumption of joint custody and shared parenting.

Senate Bill 164, Theft of Temporary Housing During Emergency, would specify the punishment for entering the premises of another person without legal justification in a county located in an emergency area during a state of emergency and taking or damaging the person's temporary housing.

Senate Bill 191, CFSS Gun Prsnt. for Grade 7 and 9 Students, would require the Center for Safer Schools to develop a presentation on the consequences of gun use and require local school administrative units to provide the presentation to all students in grade seven and grade nine in public school units.

Senate Bill 195, Protect Campus Survivors Act, would exempt personally identifiable student disciplinary records at public institutions of higher education from the Public Records Act.

Senate Bill 199, Home Ownership Market Manipulation, would prohibit housing market manipulation and protect against artificial inflation by excessive home buying by entities purchasing homes for use as rental properties.

Senate Bill 200, Housing Support for Hurricane Impacted Areas, would appropriate \$150 million to the North Carolina Housing Trust Fund for Hurricane Helene Relief.

Senate Bill 211, Reenact the Earned Income Tax Credit, would reenact the earned income tax credit.

BILLS OF INTEREST

House Bill 139, Baby Boxes/Newborn Safety Device, would allow any qualified individual, as defined, to take temporary custody of an infant, without a court order, if the parent of the infant leaves the infant, without expressing an intent to return for the infant, in a newborn safety device. Each newborn safety device would have to possess an adequate dual alarm system connected to the appropriate facility and the facility would test the dual alarm system monthly to ensure the system is in working order. A newborn safety device could be installed at any of the following locations if the location is staffed continuously by individuals qualified under this section: (1) an emergency department attached to a hospital that provides emergency care to patients; (2) an emergency facility that provides emergency services; or (3) a social services office or local department of social services. **Introduced by Representatives Balkcom, Pickett, Potts, and Ward and referred to the House Judiciary 2 Committee.**

House Bill 160, Joel H. Crisp SUDEP Awareness Law, would direct the University of North Carolina School of Medicine's Area Health Education Centers to compile and disseminate information of sudden unexpected death in epilepsy information to health care practitioners and provide a corresponding report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services. **Introduced by Reps. Gillespie, Potts, White, Cunningham and referred to the House Higher Education committee.**

House Bill 164, Parental Consent to Release Child Autopsies, would require parental consent for the disclosure or release of child autopsy information compiled or prepared by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. The bill also provides that any person who willfully and knowingly discloses or releases confidential materials in connection with the death of a child is guilty of a

Class 1 misdemeanor. **Introduced by Reps. Balkcom, Campbell, Carson Smith, Stevens and referred to the House Judiciary 2 committee.**

House Bill 165, Child and Family Welfare Ombudsman Office, would establish the Child and Family Welfare Ombudsman Office within the Department of Health and Human Services. The Office would gather information through interviews and directly access case information within court and State databases. The Office would also disseminate and advertise information to parents on the rights of parents and seek to educate parents about State and federal laws. The Office would also investigate and attempt to resolve hindrances and issues for families or individuals seeking approval for licensure as a family foster home or therapeutic foster home and formulate a process for mediation between parties. **Introduced by Reps. Torbett and Loftis and referred to the House Appropriations committee.**

House Bill 182, Revise Laws on Domestic and Child Abuse, would allow a judge to issue a permanent no contact order against a defendant convicted of certain violent offenses. The bill also provides that it is felony child abuse for any person providing care to or supervision of a child less than sixteen years of age to commit or allow the commission of a sexual act upon the child. In addition, the bill provides that a parent or any person providing care to or supervision of a child less than sixteen years of age inflicts physical injury on the child or deprives the child of necessary food, clothing, shelter, or proper physical care is guilty of a Class B2 felony. **Introduced by Reps. Blackwell, K. Hall, Stevens, and Schietzelt and approved by the House Judiciary 2 committee and will next be considered by the House Rules committee.**

House Bill 197, Local Communicable Disease Programs/Funds, would provide \$25 million in recurring funds to local health departments for communicable disease prevention and other key local health department services. Half of the funding would be divided based on population and half based on individual local health department needs. **Introduced by Reps. White and Potts and referred to the House Appropriations Committee.**

House Bill 219, Counties/Franchise Ambulance Service, would repeal the law that authorizes counties to franchise ambulance services and provide that county officials must not be required to approve modifications in the level of care provided by EMS providers that are not owned or operated by a city in the county or the county responsible for the emergency management system. **Introduced by Rep. Pless and referred to the House Emergency Management and Disaster Recovery Committee. The NC College of Emergency Physicians is opposed to this bill.**

House Bill 229, Medicaid Rates/Ambulatory Surgical Centers, would appropriate funds to adjust rates for services provided by licensed ambulatory surgical centers so that these services are reimbursed at a rate of at least 95% of the Medicare Ambulatory Surgical Centers fee schedule. **Introduced by Reps. Potts, White, Reeder, Campbell and referred to the House Appropriations Committee.**

House Bill 242/Senate Bill 177, Add Psychiatric Hospitals to Medicaid HASP, would include freestanding psychiatric hospitals as hospitals that are eligible to receive payments under the Medicaid Healthcare Access and Stabilization Program. **Introduced by Reps. Lambeth, Potts, White, and Reeder, and Sens. Hise, Burgin, Sawrey and Rhyne.**

Senate Bill 115, General Assembly Appointments, appoints persons to various public offices upon the recommendations of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives as follows: Ryan D. Holden of Johnston County is appointed to the 911 Board

for a term expiring December 31, 2028, to fill the unexpired term of Earl W. Struble. **Effective:** February 27, 2025, except as otherwise provided.

Senate Bill 155, Social Work Interstate Licensure Compact, would create an interstate compact for the practice of social work. **Introduced by Sens. Corbin, Hise, Burgin and referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee.**

Senate Bill 160, Respiratory Care Modernization Act, is identical to House Bill 71, summarized in the February 18, 2025, Legislative Report. **Introduced by Senator Burgin and referred to the Senate Rules Committee.**

Senate Bill 171, Modernize Reg/Master's Level Psychologists, would allow master's level psychologists to practice independently without the supervision of a licensed psychologist if they have 3,000 hours of postgraduate degree experience in the delivery of psychological services under the supervision of one or more qualified licensed psychologists within a time period of at least 24 consecutive months and less than 60 consecutive months and submit an application for independent practice. **Introduced by Sen. Burgin and referred to the Senate Rules Committee.**

Senate Bill 181, Increase Funding for Mobile Crisis Units, would provide \$2 million in recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services, for to support the addition of five new mobile crisis teams with a focus on providing services to the areas of highest need. **Introduced by Senator Grafstein and referred to the Senate Rules Committee.**

Senate Bill 190, Physician Assistant Compact, would create a physician assistant compact similar to the other interstate compacts that North Carolina has adopted for various health providers. The compact also would include North Carolina in the PA Licensure Compact Commission and allow North Carolina PAs the opportunity to practice in other states that have adopted the compact and PAs from other states the opportunity to obtain a privilege to practice in North Carolina. **Introduced by Sens. Hise, Hollo, and Galey and referred to the Senate Rules Committee.**

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