

TREASURER'S ADVANCE AUTHORISATION BILL 2009

Second Reading

Resumed from 18 March.

MR A.J. CARPENTER (Willagee) [12.06 pm]: What we are dealing with in this bill is the Treasurer's application to this house for an additional appropriation of \$1.2 billion to take the government through to the end of the financial year. It is interesting to look at the background of this application for an additional appropriation. The original appropriation in the 2008-09 budget was \$14.6 billion: for capital, \$2.8 billion, and for recurrent, \$11.8 billion. The original Treasurer's advance sought an amount of \$437 million, which represents about three per cent over and above the original budget appropriation. To go from a figure of \$437 million to \$1.2 billion is close to a trebling of the original appropriation. It is not unusual for a Treasurer to request the Parliament for an increase in the appropriation. However, as has been commented on in this debate, the quantum that is being sought by the Treasurer in this Treasurer's advance is quite exceptional. It therefore requires some exploration by us, and some explanation from the government, as to why this appropriation is necessary and why the Treasurer and the government are in this position.

What we are looking at here is effectively the expenditure side of the budget rather than the revenue side of the budget. In the first two quarters of this financial year, there was an increase of almost \$530 million on the revenue side of the budget. That means that we are in fact tracking very closely—at 5.6 per cent—the budget projection of a 5.5 per cent increase in revenues that had been made for the first two quarters of the last financial year. Therefore, as I understand it from the figures that have been provided in the *2008-09 Government Mid-Year Financial Projections Statement*—the midyear review—and by the Treasurer to this house, projected revenue is pretty much on track. That is on the revenue side of the budget. What we are dealing with in this bill is the expenditure side of the budget. I wanted to make those remarks in the initial phase of my speech, because much of this debate has concentrated on the global financial crisis and what is happening on the revenue side of the budget.

This bill is about the expenditure side of the budget. An election was held between the passage of the last budget and now, as at the end of the second financial quarter. Revenue is pretty much on track but an election was held. To meet its election commitments, the government has had to commit to spending very large amounts of money. This situation is very much of the government's making. It is not related generally to the global financial crisis but it is a direct result of what the government has done during the first half of the financial year. The increase from a three per cent appropriation in the original Treasurer's authorisation to nearly nine per cent is a threefold increase in the amount of money the government is seeking. Considering the situation that we are in, I find it interesting to listen to the explanations of ministers about what is or what is not happening to their budgets. In large part, the government committed to a three per cent efficiency dividend across government expenditures to fund its election commitments. The government is clearly struggling to find the three per cent efficiency dividend. Yesterday the Minister for Health said in the chamber that he would not find that three per cent efficiency dividend from his budget in this financial year. He gave us an explanation that all senior bureaucrats provide to their ministers, which is that it cannot be done this year but will be done in the out years. It is remarkable that the Minister for Health should have accepted that explanation when, in his own words, he condemned the former Labor government because we allowed a "blow-out", I think was his term, in the number of administrative employees employed by the Department of Health. I think he said that there had been a 12 per cent increase in the number of administrative staff in the Department of Health and he characterised that as a failing. If he thinks that was a failing, he should get to work and find the savings. No doubt that information was provided to him by one of the superfluous bureaucrats that he talked about. A bureaucrat—one of the 12 per cent numerical increase in bureaucrats—provided him with the information that led him to believe that he could not make the three per cent efficiency dividend saving. If the Minister for Health were serious about doing his job, he would find the savings that he and his government committed to, but he has not done that. What is more, he has quite blatantly told Parliament that he would not do it.

Yesterday in Parliament the Minister for Police praised the success of his efforts to force the Commissioner of Police to reopen three country police stations. The police commissioner, as is his responsibility and right, made the decision last year to close those three police stations, among several others, to better utilise the financial resources available to the police department. He has been forced to reopen them, but at what cost? At the same time as those discussions were going on between the Minister for Police and the police commissioner, the police commissioner was asked to find a three per cent efficiency dividend from the police department. The Commissioner of Police has been heavily criticised, I think unfairly, by the government for his efforts to identify the three per cent efficiency dividend savings in his budget. The Minister for Police, rather than help the Commissioner of Police find the three per cent efficiency dividend, has actually forced the commissioner to

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spend money by reopening country police stations that the Commissioner of Police had previously closed. How much is that costing and from where will the staff be drawn to staff those country police stations? We need an explanation for that. I wonder, for example, whether those extra police will be drawn from the allocation that we made when in government of additional police in the area dealing with child abuse because of the increased number of child abuse cases that will be reported as a result of the mandatory reporting requirements of child abuse cases. I think we allocated funding for 20 or 25 additional officers to deal with the expected increase in the demand for police attention in that area. The Minister for Police has provided no explanation about where the funding has come from for his successful pressure on the Commissioner of Police to reopen those three country police stations. Yesterday the Minister for Agriculture and Food told the house that the government had been successful in re-establishing the stock squad. Again, where is that being funded from, what is the cost associated with it and where are the officers coming from? The government must provide an explanation about why those sorts of increased expenditures are being forced on departments in the face of the demand that departments find a three per cent efficiency dividend. The government has provided no explanation. That demonstrates the government's inability to deal properly with the issues that it is confronting.

The global financial crisis will impact heavily on the revenues of this government for the out years of the budget and beyond. This particular issue is not related to that situation directly; it is related explicitly to the government's expenditure patterns since it came to office. Last week in the chamber the Premier conceded that there had been a \$3.7 billion increase in spending and spending commitments since the new government came to office in the face of the circumstances with which it is confronted. It is remarkable that that should take place on the one hand and on the other the government is requiring its departments to find a three per cent efficiency dividend, yet it shrugs its shoulders and laments the fact that its efforts have been unsuccessful.

I come back to the point I made last week when I spoke on the issue of financial management, and I make it directly again today. It is inconceivable to me that the most senior ministers of the newly elected government took holidays within the first two or three months of coming to office. It is absolutely inconceivable that the Treasurer in particular took a week's holiday just two weeks after the new government had been sworn in following eight years in opposition. It speaks volumes about the government's approach to government and why it is failing so badly in its efforts to find the three per cent efficiency dividend. That is one of the characteristics of the Treasurer regarding the situation that he faces today. He has not done the necessary work. Not only did he take one week off—

Mr T.R. Buswell: Four days.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: One working week. Only a few weeks later, he took a further four weeks off—four weeks' holiday!

Mr T.R. Buswell: Three and a half.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: That action by a new Treasurer would have to be unmatched in the history of government in Australia. A brand-new Treasurer and a brand-new government in a circumstance that the Treasurer describes as threatening the financial stability, success and strength of the state and the state's AAA credit rating took, in effect, five weeks' holiday within the first four months of coming to office. A series of other ministers—senior government ministers at that—took lengthy holiday periods at the same time. There has been some discussion about the Minister for Environment's inability to do her job. Businesses all over Western Australia that must rely on the minister's ability to do her job in a timely way have commented on it. She is struggling. Nevertheless, she took off from 10 January to 31 January to go on holiday. The Minister for Planning took off two weeks in January and the Minister for Mental Health, in effect, took off 17 days in January to go on holiday. The Leader of the National Party took off three or four weeks.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Three or four weeks?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Three or four weeks—from 20 December to 11 January; is that not correct, Leader of the National Party? Did the minister not take off from 20 December to 11 January?

Mr P. Miles: Brendon, you had Christmas day off.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: He had more than Christmas Day off.

Mr J.J.M. Bowler: I had five weeks.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The member might as well have had five months off but he did not. He is not a minister and he does not carry the responsibilities that ministers do. I guarantee the member for Kalgoorlie that if he had been a newly appointed minister in a newly appointed government, he would not have had five weeks off, because if he had and if I had been the Premier, that would have been the last five weeks' holiday he would ever enjoy as a minister. It is absolutely outrageous.

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The approach of this government towards the people who populate positions in this government reminds me of the approach that some of the participants took in the French invasion of Egypt in 1798. They were led by Napoleon. In this case those opposite are being led by the new Premier. The overwhelming majority of the people in that invasion group had no idea where they were going and they had no idea what they were going to do when they got there. When they got there, they hated it; they hated the experience. They did not know where they were going, they did not know what they were going to do when they got there and when they did arrive, they just wanted to go back home again. They found it particularly difficult to deal with the Bedouin and the tactics that the Bedouin used to upset the tranquillity of the invasion force, but I will not go into that on this occasion. They found the experience very unpleasant. Those opposite as a group in government did not know what they were going to do when they got into government. They had no idea what to do when they got there and in large part they still do not. For some of them, the sooner the experience of ministerial authority ends, the better for themselves and everybody else because they do not enjoy it, they do not know what they are doing and they are not up to the job. It is for some elements of those reasons that we are confronted with this situation today.

What did the Treasurer do to try to rein in spending in his first six months in the job? A total of \$3.7 billion has been added to the government's expenditure profile in its first six months in office. Now the Treasurer has come to the Parliament seeking an extension of the Treasurer's authorisation, which, as a matter of principle, I have no objection to. There is a reason we have a Treasurer's authorisation account. Under normal circumstances, it is quite reasonable for the Treasurer to ask for that extension.

Mr P. Miles: It will pay for some of the school maintenance.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I am continually interjected upon by that member. What is his seat?

Mr P. Miles: I am the member for Wanneroo.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Is he not under investigation for something or other?

Mr P. Miles: No, not at all.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Are the police not interested in his activities—the Corruption and Crime Commission, something like that? Is that not the case? What is it about the Liberal Party, Wanneroo and corruption? Now I know who that member is; he is the member for Wanneroo.

We are dealing with a very serious issue. The Treasurer's application to the Parliament for an increase in his account will no doubt ultimately be agreed to. It would be inconceivable for it not to be, although in the meantime, the responsibility of other members of Parliament is to explore why it is necessary and why it could not have been averted. I do not think such an explanation has been provided.

It would be of some interest to me to get a comparison of the effort that has been made by this government in its first six months with the effort made by other governments around Australia historically to come to grips with the responsibilities that its ministers have undertaken. I am absolutely certain that this experience is unique in Australia's political history. I am absolutely certain that there has been no government in Australia's political history that, when elected to office, saw the bulk of its ministry head off on a holiday. I am certain that that has never happened before. It has obviously never happened in the context of the broader financial circumstances now impacting upon economies around the world. That impact is very, very unusual; it is probably unique in modern history as well. For the Treasurer of the day to take a week off, two weeks after being sworn into office —

Mr T.R. Buswell: Four days.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: —four days off to go camping, then four weeks off only a few months later in December—demonstrates an incapacity to meet the requirements and the challenges of the job.

Mr T.R. Buswell: I'll throw in the towel!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I am not asking the Treasurer to do that. He has to understand that when people behave in certain ways in public life, people make comment. Unfortunately, when people are in government, that commentary tends to be a little more concentrated and frequent than when they are not in government. If a minister takes the liberty of four weeks' holiday when he or she should be hard at work in his or her first few months in office, he or she has to expect people to comment on it. In fact, I imagine that there would have been a degree of disbelief and shock that such a thing could be allowed to occur. It has occurred. Today that very same Treasurer is seeking an extension of the Treasurer's authorisation account.

The Treasurer of Western Australia has to present himself as being, firstly, capable—I do not think he has done that yet—and, secondly, committed to the task, and he certainly has not done that yet. He also needs to be

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supported by other people in the government parties who have some understanding of financial, economic and Treasury matters, and be supported in that way by anybody in the chamber or by anybody who sits with him on the expenditure and economic review committee.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: We have a series of unique circumstances here. The Treasurer has emerged out of a unique background and brought forward this application to the Parliament. It is not the normal scope of an extension to the Treasurer's authorisation account that we might consider to be run of the mill, but a massive extension, a trebling, of the discretion that was provided to the Treasurer by the Parliament, without any real demonstration of a concerted effort to avoid its necessity.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Did any of that occur in July under your watch?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The member is in government.

Mr P. Miles interjected.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The member for Wanneroo may find the next four years more pleasant if he remains silent. He should not make himself a target. My special friend on the front row in the National Party is wandering into uncharted territory as well. The easy work is over for him. The hard work is about to begin. He will find that it is very hard. I will be interested to follow his progress. That is the situation that we have.

This government that is now in place, with its unique characteristics, inherited the best budget position ever handed to any incoming government not only in Western Australia's history but also probably in the nation's history. Never has there been a stronger financial position confronting an incoming government. I contrast it with the one we inherited when we came to government in 2001. We had a legacy of five deficits in eight years, the economy was shrinking and the public sector was out of control in its spending habits. We then had to embark upon a very difficult, but worthwhile, program of reining in the public sector, targeting its efforts and spending and making the efficiency savings that we had committed to, and we did it. It cannot be done by saying to principals around Western Australia, "Cut some money out of your budget. That's your responsibility." Ministers must take that responsibility.

We have a Minister for Education who is not used to responsibility or the accountability that goes with responsibility. Unfortunately for her, it is showing. She is not used to that experience. It will get harder for the ministers, not easier. Life will get harder and harder for them and the backslapping that goes with the easy photo opportunities, such as those that we saw in evidence on Tuesday, will become less frequent and less applicable. Each minister will find that the responsibilities of government have to be met and they must be made accountable for those responsibilities, just as this Treasurer must be made accountable for his efforts in the Treasury portfolio. He must provide us with information on why this additional allocation is required. I would like from the Treasurer a detailed explanation on how the government will meet its spending restraint challenge. Will major capital works programs be cancelled? Will major recurrent service programs be cancelled? Will there be some lame effort that across the board everybody is required to find a three per cent saving and then be criticised for not being able to do it, which, in effect, is what the Minister for Health did yesterday? Yesterday, in effect, the Minister for Health blamed the administrative staff of the Department of Health for being unable to meet the challenge of a three per cent cut. He characterised the administration staff in the health department as being unnecessary and providing no added value, yet he was not able to come up with an example of where he could make savings in that strata of employees in the health department. It is the product of a lazy mind; it is the product of a lack of application or a capacity to apply oneself to what needs to be done.

Ministers must take responsibility. There is no sign yet that any of the government ministers are willing to accept their responsibilities. It was this government's decision to undertake a three per cent efficiency dividend. It is its decision on spending that has created the need for the Treasurer to come into this place with this bill. I will give one example.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Did any of your spending in July contribute to the TAA? You don't know. You were Premier at the time. How much did you ask for in the first five weeks of this financial year? You are telling us how bad we are. What was it when you were running the state—\$20 million?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The government is trying to find from this Parliament the authority to meet the increased spending and allocations that this government, not the previous government —

Mr T.R. Buswell: Is that how it works?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Members opposite are in government. If we were in government, which we are not —

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Mr T.R. Buswell: In the first five weeks of the financial year was any drawdown on the TAA made? You were in charge; tell us.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The Treasurer's account was, I think, \$437 million at that time. That was the capacity provided to the Treasurer at the time. It is only if that capacity is going to be exceeded that he would need to come back into this chamber and ask for more. That is what this Treasurer has done. The Treasurer, through the Treasurer's account, was provided with a \$437 million capacity during the passage of the last budget through this Parliament. It is lamentable that the current Treasurer cannot understand that basic concept. It is quite frightening that a person of such limited capacity and such limited dedication to the task is holding down this very senior position in government. It is quite frightening that we have a Treasurer representing Western Australia who, firstly, does not have the capacity to identify what needs to be done in the job; secondly, does not have the work ethic to do what needs to be done; and, thirdly, has no support from his own group.

It is quite remarkable that members on this side of the Parliament, both since the election and before the election, treated this Treasurer with such relative kindness.

Several members interjected.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The member for Vasse knows that it was nobody on this side of the chamber, either then or now, who raised the issues that caused him such embarrassment. Nobody on this side of the Parliament even raised those issues in the Parliament when they were raised publicly. It was political operatives like the person sitting next him, a person born into politics and whose only agenda is politics, who did him the damage. It was nobody on this side.

We are at the point at which the Treasurer's application for an extension of the account is before the Parliament. It will no doubt be passed with the passage of time. In the meantime, there is a legitimate requirement for the Treasurer to explain why it is necessary and what approach he is taking to avert further financial difficulties for the state.

DR J.M. WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove) [12.37 pm]: I will take the opportunity in addressing the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2009 to correct some comments that were made in this Parliament yesterday.

Yesterday the member for Pilbara made a blatant and disgraceful attack on Independents in this house. He misled this house and if he has sent his letter to the Corruption and Crime Commission, he has misled it. He attacked Independents in this house by saying that they had now been given extra resources, which he said is corrupt. It is commonplace that Independents in other Parliaments have additional resources. He made a blatant attack on Independents.

Yesterday the member for Pilbara said that Independents in this house had never been given additional support. He became a member in 1982. What happened in 1991? Was he in this Parliament in 1991 when Carmen Lawrence gave additional resources to Independents? Was that corrupt? Is he saying that the federal Parliament is corrupt because it gives additional resources to Independents? Is he saying that the New South Wales Parliament is corrupt because it gives additional resources to Independents? Is he saying that the Northern Territory Parliament is corrupt because it gives additional resources to Independents?

Members opposite know that as an Independent I work very hard, unlike party members who come into this place and vote according to how they have been told to vote.

Point of Order

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member for Alfred Cove is trying, from her perspective, to correct an assertion of corruption made in this Parliament. That is a very serious assertion, and she deserves the right to make her rebuttal of that with some degree of freedom of speech. She has been subject to incessant interjection from the moment she got to her feet.

Debate Resumed

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: What a hypocrite; he is such a hypocrite. It was a dishonest statement.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr M. McGOWAN: I acknowledge that all interjections are disorderly; therefore, I did not respond to the Premier's point of order, but when a member refers to another member as a hypocrite, that is considered to be unparliamentary and I ask her to withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): The member for Rockingham is quite right; that word has been used in the past and has been considered to be unparliamentary. It has also been used without causing a point of order to be raised. On this occasion, I think it would be advisable to withdraw the word "hypocrite".

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I think I can state that it is hypocritical.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The member for Alfred Cove should withdraw the word “hypocrite”.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: I withdraw the word “hypocrite”.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Alfred Cove.

Debate Resumed

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: It was hypocritical of the member for Pilbara to stand up in this house yesterday and object to this government’s providing me, as an Independent, with one additional research officer, one additional computer and one additional table, which I need because of the enormous extra workload I have. What about the additional staff and resources the parties get? Is that not corrupt? Independent members carry a great workload in this house. They look after their electorates and they have to cover all the legislation.

Several members interjected.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: Independent members do not go to sleep in the corridor and then walk into the chamber to see what side of the house their members are on and then sit down. They do not sit in the private members’ bar drinking alcohol and then walk in here and sit on one side of the house. I am an independent Liberal. Most of the time I support the Liberals.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, members! Can we have a little more control, please.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. The Labor Party knows that most of the time I supported the Liberal Party in opposition and, now, in government I am an Independent Liberal. Members opposite also know that I have crossed the floor and have voted with the Nationals and with the Labor Party.

Several members interjected.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I quite clearly heard the member for Albany call the member for Alfred Cove a member of the Liberal Party. That is purely untrue. I ask that that remark be withdrawn.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, whilst I did hear that, it is not unparliamentary use of language so there is no point of order.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I regard it as unparliamentary and I request the member for Albany withdraw that horrible remark about someone being a member of the Liberal Party.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you for that point of order. I do not think it is a point of order. Can we let the member continue with her presentation?

Debate Resumed

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: The member for Pilbara’s accusation was hypocritical. Extra resources were provided for Independent members in this house when the member for Pilbara was a member of the Carmen Lawrence government. It has been done also by other Parliaments. It is commonplace in Parliament. Independent members work harder than backbenchers work.

Several members interjected.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: They work harder than backbenchers work. I cannot go to sleep in the corridor and walk into the chamber to see which side I should sit on. I have to read legislation and make decisions about it.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! It is important that we let Hansard hear the debate, so can we please have a bit of quiet.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: As I was saying, I lobbied the Labor government for additional resources when I sat on that side of the house because of the extra workload that we as Independents have. We did not get the extra resources. In 1991, when it suited the Labor government, the Independents were given additional resources, but none has been provided by the Labor government for me even though I have an additional workload. Now I am

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in the same position as Independents in other Parliaments. I have been given probably fewer resources than other Independents have been given in other Parliaments because of what I believe was a responsible decision of this government to give me one research officer, one table and one computer. In calling that corruption, the member for Pilbara has misled the house and he has misled the Corruption and Crime Commission and I am not going to sit here as an Independent member and accept his statements.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Will you take an interjection?

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: No; the member had his turn to speak yesterday. I am responding to his comments today.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: The Labor Party is concerned about additional resources. I remember—how long ago was it; a year or two ago?—fighting for additional support in our electorate offices. We increased the support from 1.4 full-time equivalents to two staff. That decision was made by the previous government for members of this house. Was that corrupt? Was it also corrupt later on to give additional resources to Independent members in the upper house? That was not corrupt, was it? A deal was done to give them additional resources? That was not corrupt. They said they had an additional workload. They do not have the workload that I and the member for Kalgoorlie have in this house. We have the balance of power. I need that additional research officer so that I can adequately scrutinise the legislation and can come into this house and listen to the debate and decide how I vote based on informed decisions.

Point of Order

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: This debate has descended into such a state that it is completely impossible for anyone to hear what is going on. I suggest that people be asked to keep quiet.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I quite agree; I was about to say the same thing. Can we control the noise a little bit please.

Debate Resumed

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: This Parliament knows I do not usually get involved in personal attacks, but when personal attacks are aimed at me I will not sit down and just take them. If the member for Pilbara wants to throw stones, why does he not tell this house why he was sacked in the upper house as a minister? Was it something to do with a tender process?

Several members interjected.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: People in glass houses should not throw stones at members on this side of the house who have asked for additional resources so that they can do their job properly; so that I can do my homework and come in here and represent my community properly. I do not come in here and just go to one side of the house or the other as though I was in a flock of sheep. I listen to the debate, I do my homework and then I come in here and make a decision. The member for Pilbara misled this house yesterday. He has misled the Corruption and Crime Commission.

Point of Order

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I am being accused falsely by the member for Alfred Cove of misleading the house. I take a point of order to say that I am not attacking her; I am attacking the government for the corrupting process.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): There is no point of order. I ask members to control the noise level so that Hansard can cope. I invite the member for Alfred Cove to try again.

Debate Resumed

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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