MA Senate Approves Bill To Designate Gender As 'X'

By Bob Salsberg
The Associated Press

A proposal to allow Massachusetts residents to designate their gender as “X” instead of male or female on driver’s licenses and birth certificates has been approved by the state Senate.

The 39-1 vote sends the measure to the House. The lone vote against the bill was cast by Sen. Donald Humason, a Republican from Westfield.

If it becomes law, people would have three options for designating gender on driver’s licenses and other forms of state identification: “M” for male, “F” for female and “X” for a nonbinary designation.

Under a late addition to the bill, residents would also be allowed to request that their birth certificates be amended to include a gender-neutral listing.

Democratic Senate President Karen Spilka says many people do not fit neatly into traditional gender categories.

The Coalition to Ban Conversion Therapy held a Community Bill Signing Ceremony last week to celebrate passage of legislation to ban conversion therapy for minors.


We’re just a few weeks away from the Pride Month that marks the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, and children’s book authors are stepping up to offer age-appropriate histories of this pivotal event and its impact.

Gayle Pitman’s The Stonewall Riots: Coming Out in the Streets (Abrams; out May 14th) is aimed at middle schoolers and up. It is organized around 50 representative objects, including the “Statement of Purpose” from the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian civil rights organization. It concludes with a timeline of the Stonewall Riots and an essay by its author, Rachel Blau.

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SCOTUS to take up LGBT job discrimination cases

By MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Supreme Court is taking on a major test of LGBT rights in cases that look at whether federal civil rights law bars job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The justices said Monday they will hear cases involving people who claim they were fired because of their sexual orientation and another that involves a funeral home employee who was fired after disclosing that she was transitioning from male to female and dressed as a woman.

The cases will be argued in the fall, with decisions likely by June 2020 in the middle of the presidential election campaign.

The issue is whether Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits sex discrimination, protects LGBT people from job discrimination. Title VII does not specifically mention sexual orientation or transgender status, but federal appeals courts in Chicago and New York have ruled recently that gay and lesbian employees are entitled to protection from discrimination. The federal appeals court in Cincinnati has extended similar protections for transgender people.

The big question is whether the Supreme Court, with a strengthened conservative majority, will do the same. The cases are the court’s first on LGBT rights since the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy, who authored the court’s major gay rights opinions. President Donald Trump has appointed two justices, Neil Gorsuch and Amy Coney Barrett.

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Conversion
Continued from page 1


Arline Isaacson, Co-Chair of the Coalition to Ban Conversion Therapy for Minors said:

“We are deeply grateful to legislative leaders for bringing this important bill up for a vote so early in the legislative session. This new law will protect LGBTQ youth in Massachusetts from undergoing cruel and abusive medical treatments that often lead young people to despair, depression, substance abuse and suicide. This law will save lives.”

The community signed bill will hang in Rep. Khan’s office and eventually end up at The History Project, the LGBTQ archives for Massachusetts.

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Those awful, scary people over there
Democrats are bringing Robert’s Rules to a gunfight

by Richard J. Rosendall | rosendall@starpower.net
contributing writer

The bees at Lafayette Square are familiar to me. They have buzzed around me before, curious but not hostile. When they approached again the other day, I greeted them like the bird woman in the original Mary Poppins, saying how glad I was they had not been wiped out by pesticides. I mention the bees as an example of our need to coexist with others. This appears to be a foreign concept to Trump supporters. Take Franklin Graham. Please.

Graham tweeted on April 24, “Mayor Buttigieg says he’s a gay Christian. As a Christian I believe the Bible which defines homosexuality as sin, something to be repentant of, not something to be flaunted, praised or politicized. The Bible says marriage is between a man & a woman—not two men, not two women.”

Graham conveniently passes over lots of Biblical barbarity. Besides which, America is not governed by the Bible. Meanwhile, Graham eagerly backs President Seven Deadly Sins. Like Mayor Pete, many LGBT people are Christians who use the Bible not as a bludgeon but a source of reflection. Scolds like Graham resemble a man who cuts “The Last Supper” into tiny squares, rearranges them into something monstrous, and attributes the result to da Vinci.

When those loud cry “religious freedom” are silent about that of non-Christians, they show they are not about freedom, but supremacy. This is not an abstraction for me. I loved and was loved by a Muslim. Our last night shines in my memory. He arose just before dawn, unrolled his prayer mat, put on his kufi hat, knelt, and prayed. Then he put the things away and returned to bed. Give me my sin again, as Romeo said.

If you would not be judged by the worst of your kind, do not judge another by the worst of his. We build a society with many small acts of recognition and respect. It is not monochromatic. Blind hacks and fanatics use fear and ignorance to pull us apart.

Presumptuous people who claim God speaks to them tend not to mean it in Wile E. Coyote’s mystical sense of “letters from God dropped in the street,” but literally. Oddly, the voices in their heads never seem to tell them anything they don’t want to hear.

If one of these frauds got Jesus on the line, imagine Him saying, “Child, would you mind reading the Gospel?” They deserve a rebuke for the contrast between their noxious emissions and the teachings of the Nazarene carpenter’s son.

Massachusetts Judge Shelley M. Richmond Joseph was indicted April 25 for helping an unsee ROSENDALL, page 6

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narration focuses on the people in its neighborhood, and Christopher’s evocative illustrations capture their diversity of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Sanders, an author and teacher, describes the evolution of the Greenwich Village neighborhood from a haven for immigrants to a gathering place for artists and musicians, “a place where being different was welcomed.”

At the same time, the Inn observes, “Others were not as accepting,” and “loving someone like yourself” or “wearing the wrong clothes” could lead to arrest. Sanders deals in an age-appropriate way with the violence of the riots, mentioning shooting, broken windows, and some unspecified fires, but focusing on the feeling of outrage and resistance more than physical altercations between people.

He ends by explaining some ways that things have changed because of Stonewall—two men or two women who love each other can marry, and LGBTQ people celebrate freedom and equality each June—even though the movement “still has further to go.”

A few final pages offer further details about the Inn and Uprising, a glossary, additional reading suggestions, a selection of photographs, and a Q&A interview with LGBTQ activist and Stonewall participant Martin Boyce.

While the story is simplified for younger readers, it is no less moving for it. Place this alongside Sanders’s earlier Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag, Pitman’s Sewing the Rainbow: A Story About Gilbert Baker, and her When You Look Out the Window: How Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Built a Community as essential works of LGBTQ history for elementary school children.

Another picture book out recently is Stonewall: Our March Continues, by Olivia Higgins, illustrated by Tess Marie Vosevich Keller, which tells the tale of the Stonewall Uprising through the eyes of young LGBTQ people in the 1960s seeking community in New York City.

Its an engaging approach, but parents or teachers may need to explain that there are different people telling different parts of the story—the undifferentiated first-person narrative may be confusing here. Young readers might also need adult guidance so they are not scared by the line, “My parents demand that I change or leave home forever.”

Higgins shows her experience as an inclusive-schools educator with a thoughtful set of discussion questions at the end for readers of various ages, from the simple, “Where do you feel most comfortable to be yourself?” to the more complex, “What are some of the current challenges facing LGBTQ people both in the United States and around the world?”

As parents and educators seek Stonewall-related books in the coming months (and beyond), the 2015 middle-grade book Stonewall: Breaking Out in the Fight for Gay Rights, by Ann Bausum (Viking) is worth noting, as it will likely come up in book lists and searches. Bausum writes captivating and often lyrical scenes about the Uprising and its era.

Unfortunately, however, she mentions by name a number of mostly White gay men but overlooks pivotal transgender activitists of color Sylvia Rivera and Marsha Johnson. Some of her phrasing around transgender identities, too, is confusing, especially for young people who may first be encountering such terminology. Use this book with care; Pitman’s feels like a more balanced retelling.

Children and young adults may not yet fully realize the extent to which they, their families, and their friends are benefiting from the movement that Stonewall catalyzed. The new books about Stonewall are a great way to help them do so and to inspire them towards their own acts of resistance and justice.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ parents.
Finding My Roots
by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contributing writer

Over the past decade, as I cruised through my fifties and lurched into my sixties, I’ve become interested in finding my roots and exploring my ancestors’ history.

After spending much of my young adulthood in therapy, unwinding the knots I developed growing up in my moderately dysfunctional but loving family, I find myself searching for more relatives—both dead and alive—as if by finding them I can gain some deeper understanding of my own identity.

My hunger for the past, and my search for blood ties has been fueled by the boom in genetic testing through sites like Ancestry.com and 23andme, Henry Louis Gates’ “Finding Your Roots” series on PBS, and the losses of my father in the late 1980s and my younger brother just last year.

Getting older—if one is granted that privilege—seems to involve a series of losses, particularly if one is from a lineage like mine, in which the family name Leblang literally means “long life” in German but men in my family often don’t reach old age.

The flip-side of aging, at least in my case, is a sense that time is precious; if something is on my bucket list I’m inclined to do it now rather than wait for some hazy future. So, this summer I am heading to Germany, Slovakia and Hungary in June to see my cousins in Hamburg and to connect with my ancestors in Eastern Europe, or at least to tread the ground they walked on in what is now the Slovak Republic, and in my grandparents’ day was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

A few years ago, when I sent off my saliva sample to the 23andme lab, I imagined myself carrying an exotic mishmash of Jewish and other European blood; I’d traveled in England, Ireland, Holland, Germany and parts of Eastern Europe and with the right clothing, I could almost always blend in with the locals.

But when I got my results six weeks later, (according to their admittedly imperfect formula,) I discovered that I was 97% Ashkenazi Jew, which was recently upgraded to 100%.

“Couldn’t you have just asked your mother?” one of my Jewish friends snarkily replied after I shared the results on Facebook. Initially I felt let down, as there were no deep secrets and no exotic roots to discover in my family tree.

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“Others may love you, I love you in yourself. Others may see a beauty in you that shall fade away sooner than their own years. But I see in you a beauty that shall not fade away. And in the autumn of your days that beauty shall not be afraid to gaze in the mirror, and it shall not be offended.

I alone, love the unseen in you” ~Kahlil Gibran

On this special day you will always be remembered,

Gary

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**Rosendall**

Continued from page 3

documented immigrant evade an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer. Elie Mystal writes, “The irony is rich. The same forces that refuse to hold the President of the United States accountable for his multiple documented acts of obstruction of justice are trying to punish this judge for her compassion.”

Henry David Thoreau wrote in Civil Disobedience, “Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.”

Men like Sen. Lindsey Graham and Rep. Jim Jordan want to turn the tables and investigate the investigators. Democrats fearful of fighting need reminding that the vandals will attack anyway.

We can mock Trump’s constitutional illiteracy in vowing to appeal an impeachment to the Supreme Court; but with his dictatorial instincts, stonewalling, incitements, witness intimidation, and Mitch McConnell helping him pack federal courts, our laughter may prove hollow.

While I was toasting friends at their wedding on April 27, white nationalists disrupted a book chat at Politics and Prose bookstore a few miles north—right down the block from Comet Ping Pong where Hillary was accused of running a child sex ring. The targeted author, Jonathan M. Metzl of Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment is Killing America’s Heartland, took it in stride. “In case anybody’s wondering what’s happening right now, they’re illustrating my point.”

We have nowhere to hide. Democrats who stay in a defensive crouch are bringing Robert’s Rules to a gunfight. Guess who wins?

Thoreau said, “Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence.”

The Stonewall anniversary is approaching. Time to rekindle our rebel spirit.

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist who can be reached at rosendall@me.com.

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Nevada becomes 10th state to offer gender-neutral licenses

LAS VEGAS (AP)—Nevada is joining a handful of states by offering gender-neutral driver’s licenses and ID cards.

The state Department of Motor Vehicles announced this week that it will allow residents to choose gender “X” on their license or ID instead of an “M” for male or “F” for female.

DMV Director Julie Butler says the agency is committed to being inclusive and understands some people don’t identify as either male or female.

The National Center for Transgender Equality says Nevada joins nine other states and the District of Columbia in offering the gender-neutral licenses and cards.

State officials say a gender change to a license or ID must be made in-person at a DMV office.

Landslide win for lesbian former police chief as Tampa mayor

TAMPA, Fla. (AP)—Tampa’s openly gay former police chief has been elected mayor in a landslide victory.

Voters elected 59-year-old Jane Castor in a runoff against 76-year-old retired banker and philanthropist David Stratz.

Castor said her victory with more than 73% of the 53,144 votes cast on Tuesday sends “a rallying message that Tampa is a positive community.”

Castor is Tampa’s first openly gay mayor-elect. She had come within 2 percentage points of winning the March 5 general election.

Stratz spent nearly $5 million on his campaign. He told his supporters it’s now time to rally around the new mayor. Both are Democrats.

Castor succeeds outgoing Mayor Bob Buckhorn in the non-partisan office.

Michigan adoption agency reverses LGBT policy

By DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP)—A major faith-based foster care and adoption contractor for the state of Michigan said Monday it will place children in LGBT homes, reversing course following a recent legal settlement.

Grand Rapids-based Bethany Christian Services is responsible for about 8% of Michigan’s more than 13,000 foster care and adoption cases involving children from troubled households.

“We are disappointed with how this settlement agreement has been implemented by the state government. Nonetheless, Bethany will continue operations in Michigan, in compliance with our legal contract requirements,” the nonprofit said in a statement, confirming a policy change that was first reported by WGVU-FM.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Democrat, announced the settlement last month was first reported by WGVU-FM.

Nessel said the settlement says the law does not apply if agencies are under contract with the state.

In a lawsuit, St. Vincent said it fears the state will not renew its contract in October because of the local nonprofit’s religious beliefs and practices.

“St. Vincent said it fears the state will not renew its contract in October because of the local nonprofit’s religious beliefs and practices.”

As a private attorney, Nessel—who is a lesbian—successfully fought to overturn Michigan’s ban on gay marriage.

On April 11, Bethany’s national board of directors voted to change the policy. It applies only in Michigan, not to its operations in other states. The policy change also does not impact private adoptions, according to Bethany.

A 2015 Republican-enacted law says child-placement agencies are not required to provide any services that conflict with their religious beliefs. But Nessel’s settlement says the law does not apply if agencies are under contract with the state.

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The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for about 8% of Michigan households for religious reasons if it has accepted them for referral from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Lansing-based St. Vincent Catholic Charities challenged the deal in federal court last week, alleging violations of the U.S. Constitution and the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Of the faith-based agencies known to not serve LGBT couples or individuals in Michigan, Bethany does the most work for the state. The nonprofit was handling 1,159 cases as of February. Catholic Charities had 404 cases, or 3%, while St. Vincent had 80, or less than 1%.

State human services department spokesman Bob Wheaton said the agency was pleased it will “be able to continue its long-standing partnership with Bethany in providing services to children and families.”

Nessel tweeted over the weekend that having more adoption agencies not discriminate results in “more children adopted into loving, nurturing ‘forever’ homes. Thank you to Bethany Christian Services.”

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“Jussie Smollett. Two months ago, the ‘Empire’ actor was attacked by two Trump supporters who turned out to be Nigerian weightlifters. But then, Jussie was arrested for working with them to fake a hate crime. But then, the charges were dropped for no reason. And then, Jussie said the brothers really did attack him, but they were in whiteface. And now, the story’s starting to get weird...I don’t know who’s writing ‘The Jussie Smollett Story’, but they deserve a raise.”

— Trevor Noah’s take on the latest twists and turns in the Jussie Smollett’s story—which we’ll cover later in this column.

Last week, I told you all about disgraced former Representative Aaron Schock’s same-sex lip-lock at Coachella (video can be found on BillyMasters.com). Along with the clip of him rummaging around in his dance partner’s shorts, there was also a photo of him with a group of very hot shirtless men. We told you that two of those guys were a notable West Hollywood personal trainer and his boyfriend. All I knew about the other couple was that they were wearing fancy pants. They’ve now identified themselves as Will Rossi and Rob Massi, who use hashtags #gayboyfriends and #tiscoouple. Well, they’re shocked that they’ve been dragged into this scandal. “Will and I wanted to take a photo with our friends at Coachella, to celebrate our last day there. Being polite, we allowed Aaron—who was basically a stranger to us and someone we just met—to include us in their photo.”

Of course, this isn’t some gigantic group photo. It’s a photo of five hot shirtless guys. And Schock, “basically a stranger”, is in the center. When I take photos with a small gathering of friends, I rarely invite strangers to get in the center. Well, there was that one time in Chicago…and he didn’t stay a stranger for long. “We would not have allowed Aaron to join the photo, nor would we have associated with him if we had more knowledge of his beliefs and past actions. For our own political ignorance, we are deeply sorry.” From this part, it sounds like they barely knew the hot shirtless guy’s name at the time. Not that I’m blaming them—it seems perfectly reasonable to me.

Elsewhere in Jersey, Whitney Houston’s longtime “friend” Robyn Crawford is writing a tell-all. Up until now, Robyn has said precious little about her relationship with Nippy. “A Song for You: My Life with Whitney Houston” sure sounds like it could change that. The press release says, “With warmth, candor, and an impressive recall of detail, Robyn gives readers insight into Whitney’s life and career. From countless sold-out world tours to her epic rendition of the US national anthem to the set of ‘The Bodyguard’, her tempestuous marriage, and the birth of her only child, Robyn was there.” That’s a good place to start, but will she deliver? The book drops November 5th.

On to Jussie Smollett. Since I know you’re not watching “Empire” anymore, I can tell you that his character got married last week. For these last two episodes of the season, he’ll be on his honeymoon. While no official decision has been made about whether the show or Jussie will be back next season, his co-stars have banded together and issued a statement asking that Smollett be rehired. “We understand the past months have been difficult to process—sometimes the headlines brought more confusion than clarity, yet we now have a conclusion to this ordeal.” The letter continues: “Through out ‘Empire’s five seasons working with Jussie and watching how he has conducted himself throughout this traumatic event, we have come to know not just the character Jussie portrays, but also truly come to know Jussie’s personal character. He is kind. He is compassionate. He is honest and above all he is filled with integrity.” I dunno about all THAT! The letter also says, “He is also innocent and no longer subject to legal uncertainty with the criminal charges against him having been dropped. We are confident in his lawyer’s assurance that the case was dismissed because it would not have prevailed.”

Of course, Jussie’s legal problems are far from over. The City of Chicago is suing him for the cost of the investigation. And now those hot Nigerian brothers are suing Jussie’s lawyers in federal court for defamation. They claim that Smollett paid them “a sum of money to stage the attack to benefit himself” and that he “directed every aspect of the attack, including the location and the noose.” They’re suing the lawyers because they “made these comments knowing they were untrue to distract from Mr. Smollett’s farce and to promote themselves and the Geragos & Geragos Law Firm. Statements indicating Plaintiffs criminally battered Mr. Smollett without his consent are patently false and defamatory, as Mr. Smollett originated, planned, and orchestrated the attack.”

And then there’s a gay angle. Around the time of the “attack”, one of the brothers spent the night at Jussie’s place. Jussie is gay, and the brother (Abel) plays the stand-in for Jussie’s love interest—which led to some sex rumors. In the suit, Abel (who suddenly goes by the name Bola) says that just a rumor of someone having gay sex could put their entire family at risk. “Same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Nigeria, which can result in 14 years of imprisonment. If the accused is married, the punishment is death by stoning.” Note to self—don’t do a laywer in Nigeria! Is it just me, or is Jussie’s life far more interesting than anything they’re writing on “Empire?”

Given their performance with Ariana Grande at Coachella, *NSYNC is considering a tour or residency in Las Vegas—without Justin. Look, I love me some JC Chasez and always felt he was the most talented singer in the group. But after hearing the Coachella set, I am unimpressed. The vocals sound shaky and not polished. I’m not ruling out Vegas, but I’m thinking maybe one of the smaller rooms—like The Orleans. Or perhaps The Flamingo, when Donny & Marie aren’t there. Top price, $75. Add another $75 if you want a meet and greet. Yeah, I’m in.

We started this column with a Noah, and now our “Ask Billy” question is about another. Gary in Florida says, “What do you know about Noah Centineo? I hear he’s got some nude videos out there. Please find them.”

First I had to figure out who Noah Centineo is. Apparently he was on the last three seasons of *The Fosters*. He’s also modeled for Calvin Klein undies and is currently in the Netflix release The Perfect Date, which was originally developed as a Zac Efron project about 10 years ago. As to the racy video, turn out there are two different clips of Noah pleasuring himself, which seems to me to be some of his best work—but I’m no expert. It’s certainly an extensive piece of work, as you’ll see on BillyMasters.com.

When we’ve got a gaggle of Noahs for you to gag on, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. This was a long one, so I will briefly remind you to check out www.BillyMasters.com—the site that always says it like it is. If you’ve got a question, drop a note to me at Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before I find any other videos to schook you. To my fellow Albanians, “Kristi ku ngjall”. To the Greeks, “Christos anesti”. And to everyone else, remember, one man’s filth is
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But then, talking with a friend who had spent years researching his French, Italian and Lebanese roots, I learned that I could find my “DNA relatives” through the website. Suddenly I had tens, hundreds, possibly a thousand cousins who shared some of my genetics, a cadre of blood relatives.

While I didn’t have the time and energy to contact most of them, I did email a few members of the Leblang family, who seemed to be distant relations of my paternal grandfather, the Hungarian/Slovakian Jew who died a few years before my birth and who—thanks to the proddings of his wife, my grandmother Nanny Frida—had the good sense to get out of Czechoslovakia in 1923, when the storm clouds of the coming Holocaust were still over the far horizon.

Through one of my newfound cousins who lives outside of Washington, DC, I learned that many members of my extended clan were gay, and suddenly I wasn’t so much of an outlier, as I’ve always been in my small immediate family.

Soon I was having long phone conversations with my cousin Nathan, a gay man in his seventies with whom I felt an instant connection, as if we’d known each other for years, rather than just a few weeks.

Back in Central Europe, little remains of the large Jewish community that existed in Kosice, Slovakia the city where Nanny Frida and Papa Ed lived before coming to the United States. But through some online research, I found a local named Peter who lives in Kosice and who helps descendants of Jewish emigrants who are searching for their roots in Slovakia.

Peter was able to find the death certificates for my grandfather’s parents and grandparents, and suddenly I was able to trace this lost side of my family back to the early 19th century. Soon I discovered that Nathan’s grandfather and my great-grandfather came from the same village in Hungary.

In June, I’ll journey to a nearby city in what is now Slovakia searching for our common ancestor, so that I can figure out exactly how I’m related to Nathan and his much-larger branch of my family.

In truth, Nathan and I are probably no closer than 3rd or 4th cousins. Still, there’s something in those blood ties I have with my cousins, and the closer ties I have with my immediate family that make me feel part of something bigger than myself, a feeling I crave as I get older.

Judah Leblang is a writer, teacher and storyteller in Boston. Find out more at judahleblang.com

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