

Mimi Pickering:

This episode features speakers from the January 12th ReImagine Appalachia Strategy Summit, including comments from Ohio Valley mayors who have developed a Marshall Plan for redeveloping our region. ReImagine Appalachia is a broad coalition of thought leaders and organizations from West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Together they've developed a policy blueprint that outlines a vision for vibrant Appalachian communities where everyone is paid enough to support themselves and their family, Future generations can put down roots, and everyone has clean air to breathe and water to drink.

The goals of the summit were to look at the political landscape of the region and the nation as we head into 2021, and to discuss how to move forward to achieve a 21st century sustainable Appalachia and shared prosperity in the region. We hear first from Jacquelyn Bonomo, President and CEO of PennFuture, who welcomed the virtual audience and introduced ReImagine co-chairs, Amanda Woodrum from policy matters, Ohio, and Steve Herzenberg, Executive Director of the Keystone Research Center.

Jacquelyn Bonomo:

Thank you, everyone. So let's get to it. Our most consequential election has just taken place and as a result, the states of Appalachia's Ohio River Valley, West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Kentucky, now concentrate the most critical block of United States senators and congresspeople in the nation. All of you, the residents, workers, and voters of our states, hold sway and power over these elected. Real power that must be activated now if the promise of a new future for Appalachia and the country is to become a reality.

Jacquelyn Bonomo:

ReImagine Appalachia is putting forth the policies, investment opportunities, and making the case for green good paying jobs that will allow our region and everyone here to blossom. For over 200 years, Appalachia gave, and the rest of the country and the world happily took or extracted from us. But no longer is the region's outlay of grit, work ethic, sacrifice, spirit of problem solving and innovation, that has always marked the region enough. We believe the time has come for a new deal to be struck between all levels of governments and the people of our region, and we are calling for massive investments in Appalachia.

Jacquelyn Bonomo:

The groups, individuals, and founders who make up the ReImagine Appalachian coalition, have been working in earnest for the last 16 months or so, on the pieces of this blueprint vision campaign platform. Call us what you will, but we believe we have in hand, a compelling and achievable vision at a scale that can truly transform. An emerging body of research that's producing data that substantiates our vision as the right one for our communities, workers, economy, and environment and a plan to achieve all this. And that's what you'll be helping us refine today, and of course, adding to that, with all your new and great ideas. So thank you again for being here.

Jacquelyn Bonomo:

At this time, I'd like to introduce ReImagine Appalachians co-chairs, Amanda Woodrum, senior researcher at Policy Matters, Ohio, and Steven Herzenberg, Executive Director of the Keystone Resource Center. Over to you Amanda and Steve?

Amanda Woodrum:

Thanks, Jackie. So our goal is to secure Appalachians place at the national climate table and ultimately, to secure a new deal that works for us in this region. Appalachia, or coal country, has long than a political stumbling block to national climate solutions, but Reimagine Appalachia has the solution. The bottom line, we need a federal climate infrastructure program for Appalachia, developed by the people of Appalachia. One that creates hundreds of thousands of good union jobs in Appalachia, one that comes with both community and labor standards to make sure that the jobs created in union jobs, that co-workers are given priority for the work that needs to be done, and that we're creating pathways for black workers, women, and other people of color into those new jobs. To be sure, Reimagine Appalachia is taking our work to Washington in 2021, and we will need your help.

Steven Herzenberg:

Thank you, Amanda. The problems that this campaign seeks to address have been with us a long time, but are also urgent. Long term, the reversal of fortunes of working people in our region since the late 1970s has been nothing short of astounding. In the four decades before that, the bottom 90% in our four states enjoyed increases in inflation adjusted average income of at least three times in Pennsylvania, which started with higher incomes to as much as five times in Kentucky. In the past 40 years, the bottom 90% has seen no increase in its average income in these four states and big parts of our region have remained mired in persistent poverty. Short term, our region, or nation sorry, has lost 10 million jobs since February of last year, and our four states, one million. And we also face the accelerating ravages of climate change.

Steven Herzenberg:

Our solution, as Amanda laid out, is the Reimagine Appalachia framework. As the job studies our campaign commissioned, and to which we released last October show, the investments in our framework would create half a million jobs in just Ohio and Pennsylvania. In terms of the stars aligning with this campaign and its vision, the phrase, "Is it better to be lucky than good?" We think it's best to be lucky and good. And we're feeling at this moment, that we gathered together today, the much larger we to which those in today's summit connect is pretty good. We said from the start of this campaign, that the 99% are unified in terms of the long term vision. Almost everyone except the Koch brothers once shared prosperity, and to avoid ravaging the places we call home, and global environmental Armageddon.

Steven Herzenberg:

We said from the start, that the hard part of this campaign is how we get there. We think we've been through the hardest part of how we get there, doesn't mean the rest will be easy. But we think the awareness of and support for Reimagine Appalachia is growing among all our key communities, local communities, labor and environmentalists, elected officials and frontline groups, business and economic developers. As Amanda said, we want your help today to map out our action plan for this year, help us get some wins and have some fun, and put our blessed region and blessed the country on a path to a brighter future, on a path to a new deal for us.

Mimi Pickering:

That was Steve Herzenberg and Amanda Woodrum. Roxanne Brown, United Steel Workers International vice president at large, spoke on a panel about policy priorities for 2021 and avenues to achieve them.

Roxanne Brown:

As a manufacturing union and as a union that is very intimately familiar with the Ohio Valley, and what's happened in the Ohio Valley from the '80s, and the level of loss that our membership has seen and the communities have seen, and what those losses have meant not just for our members' families, but really the community. Devastating, right? And we fast forward here to 2021, when we should really be talking about the manufacturing strength of the United States and these industries that quite literally built this country, that as Colin said, "The seat of many of them were really in the Ohio Valley, in Appalachia." We're not there, that's not the conversation. And we have a lot of hope that what President Elect Biden has laid out in the bill Build Back Better plan will reap some really good and powerful fruit.

Roxanne Brown:

What we have seen unfortunately, over the last few months especially with COVID, manufacturing was struggling pre-COVID but significantly has struggled as a result of COVID. And our union in particular, saw about 50,000 jobs that were lost during that period of time, and some of them have not come back in communities in Appalachia, but other communities across the country that just can't afford those types of losses, they can't sustain those types of losses. And so, as we look into the work of this next administration, I think that word that I just use, sustain, is what's at the forefront of our minds as the steel workers. There's a massive economic crisis, which we all know. There's a massive climate crisis, which we all know.

Roxanne Brown:

And so much of our work over the last 40 years, because neither of these crises are new, has been meshing the two, to try to figure out how policies can achieve what we would like on both of those fronts going forward. And it gives me a lot of hope that House and Senate Committees have actually built, as they're looking at infrastructure, have actually built climate into the work of those committees. So today, if you're talking about infrastructure, you're not just talking about roads and bridges, but you're actually talking about resilience, and how communities can stand up in the face of climate crises, right? You're talking about how you can look at communities in Appalachia and harness the skill set that still does exist in some of these communities, despite the fact that we have lost so many jobs, there is still a skill set.

Roxanne Brown:

Like we lost the Ormet facility in Ohio back in 2014, where about a thousand steel workers were laid off. A lot of those folks still have to go to other places to find other jobs, but there's still a lot of folks there that have the skills that we need to build out the componentry for a lot of the clean energy texts that we want to see. We want to harness that power, we want to tap into the universities, the community colleges, where we can actually foster not just the research and development, but the job training, right?

Roxanne Brown:

There's so much that is needed in the way of upskilling the workers who are in communities and people who are in communities, to make the stuff that we all know is going to be necessary as we're looking into this growing economy that we have ahead of us. But I think for us, the lowest hanging fruit, and this is something that Colin and I have talked about for a very long time, is really the infrastructure. It's the meat that was left on the table by this current administration. He came in making a lot of promises about these massive infrastructure packages that really yielded no fruit. And it's one of the only places

where there really is bipartisan support. Because everyone knows what a failure of a dam can mean for a community, or what the failure of a bridge could mean for a community, or what lack of access to broadband, especially now when so many of us need to have that capacity at home, is lacking.

Roxanne Brown:

And so we will be pushing very significantly. I think what you can expect to see from our union, as we go into this year, into this 117th Congress, is a very strong and strategic push for infrastructure, for a massive infrastructure investment. Colin already talked about the big bill from the house that will likely come at the end of February. But we're going to be driving a lot of the work around support for that policy, but also infrastructure banks, stronger domestic sourcing policies. Because we want to make sure that if we're using taxpayer dollars to build out these systems, whatever they are, water, energy, transportation, whatever it is, we want to make sure that the components that are being used are sourced here domestically, and they're made by American workers.

Roxanne Brown:

Because we can't get back to a point where we're talking about the might of domestic manufacturing unless we actually have domestic manufacturing capacity, right? Which takes me to, I think my final point before I close out here, because hopefully we can get some questions, is as you do this work, you definitely want to talk about the jobs that are to come. We definitely want to talk about the jobs that we want to create but we have to be very respectful about the jobs that exist currently, and the industries that can be very helpful to the clean energy economy. And I appreciate the work that Reimagine has done to work with unions, and unions like mine, energy and industrial unions, whose members on average make anywhere between 75,000 and 150,000, depending on who you're talking to.

Roxanne Brown:

You talk to one of my oil workers, they're making 150,000 plus. You talk to one of our steel workers, they're making 75,000 plus, you talk to some of our folks who haul coal on the barges there in the Ohio Valley and they make about 80, \$85,000. And so as we're thinking about jobs, we have to be respectful of the jobs that are there that are actually sustaining families and communities, and figure out how we can bring these jobs into the new economy, not necessarily eliminate them, but help to bring them into the new economy. So that's one thing that I would definitely flag and caution for years as we have these conversations.

Mimi Pickering:

The strategy summit ended with a panel with Ohio Valley mayors, who are among the seven mayors who have developed what they're calling, "A Marshall Plan for Middle America." And they've also endorsed the Reimagine Appalachia blueprint. Leslie Marshall, Associate Director for the Center for Sustainable Business at the University of Pittsburgh, provided an overview of these two plans.

Leslie Marshall:

Very excited to be invited to just give a brief overview of these two plans as we move forward. And we've been working in parallel through the Center for Sustainable Business, working in parallel with pretty much Appalachia for about the last six months or so on these two projects. So, I've been asked to speak a little bit to how with the Marshall Plan for Middle America and Reimagine Appalachia blueprint intersect. So both the MP for me, as we call it, and the Reimagine Appalachia blueprint, understand this moment is an opportunity to tackle the interrelated challenges of climate change, economic collapse,

and widening gaps in social and economic well being, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic, though they are rooted in persistent and historic inequities across our region.

Leslie Marshall:

Both aim to spur massive investment in reimagining and rebuilding our regions so that we can lead as a hub for innovative, equitable and sustainable development, be known worldwide for having a diversified resilient economy. Both see national conversations about a federal stimulus package as a potentially catalytic force for change, rebuilding our economy by rebuilding our infrastructure, and creating new jobs along the way, dignified work for those in our community. The MP4MA, and the Reimagine Appalachia blueprint are really two complimentary visions for a more equitable and sustainable future for our region. But to get a little bit more specific about the MP4MA, it's a nonpartisan effort to envision a strategy for cross sectoral collaboration to drive public and private investment in more equitable and sustainable economic development, that will transform our region and lay the foundation for us to be that global leader in cleaner energy resources and circular economy practices. So it's an effort really to identify all the pieces of the puzzle, all the stakeholder groups that have a role to play in helping us realize that transition.

Leslie Marshall:

And this includes identifying areas of historic strength, as well as opportunities for innovation improvement. So I'm going to highlight just a few key points from the MP4MA roadmap, though I'm sure the mayor's will elaborate more in just a few moments. So some key points that come out of the analysis. Our estimates suggest that we need 60 billion per year over the next 10 years in public and private investments in energy efficiency, and renewable energy supply expansion, to meet the IPCC targets for climate change reduction, which includes having our carbon emissions by 2030 and getting to net zero by 2050. And if implemented successfully, these investments could create an average of 410,000 new jobs annually. And that's at a time when we stand to lose up to 100,000 jobs in fossil fuel related industries over the next 10 years.

Leslie Marshall:

The same time, we're looking at the potential to reduce household energy costs, and create more equitable routes for participation, co-creation and ownership in our region's economy. So the MP4MA also emphasizes the extent to which our communities around the region are already making this transition, more sustainable economic practices are emerging right here in upper Appalachia. This isn't something that only exists on the coasts in California or in New York. For example, the largest solar array in the country is in southern Ohio, right outside of Cincinnati. And that's the kind of impact and scale that we can see across our region just right here. And we emphasize that these examples exist alongside examples of projects that still need funding, where catalytic investment can help scale these projects for a much broader impact. And we want to get really creative about the kind of financing that we're talking about. So we talked a little bit more about the need for economically targeted investments, using city pension funds and so on, to reinvest in our communities. And I'm sure you'll hear more in just a few moments.

Leslie Marshall:

But in short, both the MP4MA and the Reimagine Appalachia blueprint, share the vision that if we're intentional about laying the foundation for making these investments, about working across sectors, about taking seriously the expertise of people's lived experiences, about putting in place policies that

enable more equitable participation in decision making, about reforming institutions so that those who have been historically marginalized or excluded from access to benefits while also ensuring the brunt of environmental, social, and economic harms, we take all of that seriously, and develop an intentional, coordinated and collaborative response, that we can build a future that is more equitable and sustainable for all.

Mimi Pickering:

Erika Strassburger, Pittsburgh City Council member moderated the panel. Huntington, West Virginia Mayor Steven T. Williams, and William Peduto, Mayor of Pittsburgh, respond to her question.

Erika Strassburger:

So the first question I'd like to pose to the mayor's here with us today is, why was it important for you to be part of this panel? And perhaps you can speak to any ways that this work that we're discussing here today, that we've been discussing since 1:00 PM today, is already happening in your cities or in your regions?

Steven T. Williams:

One reason that it's important for me to be a part of this, is just the name of this group, Reimagine Appalachia. What we've been attempting to do for the last eight years is to reimagine Huntington, to live people's expectations that we can compete with anybody in the world, that if we set our mind to do something that we can accomplish it. And the one thing that I think that we need to understand in Appalachia is just a very basic tenant of competition around the world. If you first identify what you do that is unique to your community, you don't have to compete with anybody else. Now, it's not to say that we're not operating in a worldwide market, but the fact of the matter is, our competition are not our local communities.

Steven T. Williams:

My competition is not Youngstown, it's not Pittsburgh, it's not Athens. It's on the other side of the world. And we have to prepare ourselves in order to be able to do that. And as we Reimagine Appalachia, we reimagine Huntington, we reimagine Athens, we reimagine Youngstown, and Pittsburgh, as we reimagine each of our communities, then we're able to lift up this region. And I fully believe that we don't give ourselves enough credit. Once again, and I do believe that what Pittsburgh has done has proven is that you can be a leader on the world stage and take care of your neighborhood.

Steven T. Williams:

And that's the those are the values that we have in Appalachia, and as we Reimagine Appalachia, we don't lose our values, and we don't lose who we are. And that's what I wanted and I felt it's necessary to be a part of this and to be a part of the Marshall Plan, to make sure that we have a partner at the federal government, that we're not flyover country, but we have been a forgotten part of the nation, and simply remind the federal government is that if we're going to move forward and lead our economies, then we need to have a federal partner as well.

Erika Strassburger:

Thank you, Mayor Peduto.

William Peduto:

Yeah. And thank you, Erika, our councilman, for leading this discussion. When I think about why I'm here today, it's to endorse Reimagine Appalachian. We have worked together as mayors to put together an economic development strategy that's based around renewable energy, green technology, and the rebuilding of communities that are even outside of our cities. Areas that have been hard hit from the transfer from fossil fuels, that are going to be even harder hit over the next 10 years simply because of where the world is moving. And we have an opportunity to rely upon those committees and those individuals whose families have a long history of building America to rebuild America for the 21st century.

William Peduto:

I'm here to support the mission and the statements of Reimagine Appalachian as a grassroots leader, of being able to build a consensus that we can work on that represents our region. Speaking with a member of Congress in the past two weeks from Ohio, and understanding what's happening in Washington. As we look at a state like Pennsylvania that has 18 Congress members, or will have 18 Congress members, and half are Democrat, half a Republican, we're up against Los Angeles that has 20 members of Congress, just Los Angeles. And if we can't pull together as local leaders, and work together on an economic development strategy, how can we expect our members who represent us in Washington to do so.

William Peduto:

When we talk to them, they're thankful for the work that is being done. And we need, as mayors, the grassroots support, and the support of a group like Reimagine Appalachia. I think that both groups can work together in order to be able to create mission which will work for the betterment of this region over the next 10 years. There is no doubt that this government, federal government, will be working to pass a new infrastructure bill in the course of the early second quarter of this year. And we should have a voice in what it looks like. It shouldn't just be determined by the areas of this country, where basically the wealthiest districts have the chairmanships, and where the areas like ours are left behind, we should have our voice out in front of what that infrastructure bill should look like. And in order to be able to make sure that we get that support from our senators on both parties, and our members of Congress. We need that support of an organization like Reimagine Appalachian.

Erika Strassburger:

Here is Huntington, West Virginia Mayor Steven T. Williams, followed by William Peduto, Mayor of Pittsburgh.

Steven T. Williams:

Erika, you asked support to the mayors need to do. First of all, I think every one of my colleagues would say is that we have an obligation to lead. Don't just be talking, but we've got to pull parties to the table and make sure that their voices are being heard. Mayor Peduto pointed out that in each of our each of our cities, that we have universities that we're able to rely upon. Frankly, we have to be able to rely upon and call upon our anchor institutions. It's the universities, the hospitals, those other institutions that bring a matter of brainpower to the table to be able to make sure that there is an energy to be able to do something, but we also need to reimagine just what we're doing.

Steven T. Williams:

Huntington is right on the Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia border, along the Ohio River Valley. Huntington isn't in the coalfields, but it has benefited from the coal economy over 100 years. We had some entrepreneurs that were audacious enough to reimagine how our community would respond in an energy economy. So what did they do? Is they created the Coalfield Development Corporation, not to develop coal, but to take out of work coal miners and teach them other skills that they would be able to utilize to be able to take care of their families and also to be able to build their own future. And one of the companies that they created, of the many companies, was a company called Solar Holler, where these coal miners are being certified on solar panel installation on homes and businesses, and they're doing that throughout Southern West Virginia.

Steven T. Williams:

The ARC that Mayor Peduto pointed out, the Appalachian Regional Commission, frankly that's a partner that just continues to give to us, and one thing that I have been so impressed with the last three years, is that ARC has a leadership institute where they take individuals within each of the communities of the 13 states that make up the Appalachian Regional Commission, and they come together over a year's period. And I've had opportunity to be able to come and meet with them and there is a brilliance in that room, an absolute brilliance in that room, that I have absolute faith that these individuals are going to step up and be able to lead.

Steven T. Williams:

Well guess what It's something very similar to what we have right here. Through Reimagine Appalachia, all of the individuals who are participating in this, just think, all of us come together and then when, from old football parlance, we break the huddle and go out and then run the place. It's amazing what we'll be able to take full advantage of. So yes, we need a federal partner, but I'd be remiss to say that we need to take full advantage of the philanthropies that are in our region to be able to step forward. It's amazing what we've been able to do in Huntington with the different philanthropic groups local in our community throughout the state of West Virginia to be able to step up, and as a result, we're receiving investment from the Appalachian Regional Commission for high speed broadband in our community, the governor has come in and has matched to \$2.5 million grants on them.

Steven T. Williams:

The power grants that are being brought into each of our communities in Appalachia are a goldmine for us to be able to move forward, but as Mayor Peduto pointed out, we don't have to compete against one another for \$500,000 grants. We're talking about billions of dollars coming into our communities to be able to transform our area. So what do mayors have to do? The mayors have to have the vision, articulate that vision, and go and make sure that we're doing what we can to be able to build consensus around that vision. But that vision comes from the community.

William Peduto:

So I'll close with just an observation, and then also I want to be able to at least answer a couple of the questions from chat. The first part is, I'm old enough to remember the last steel mill in Pittsburgh, and the battle that went on down in Hazelwood when the mill was proposing to reopen. It was a battle where people, probably to this day still don't talk to each other, between the environmentalists and labor unions, between the Sierra Club and the steel workers. And from that came out one very positive outcome, and that was the BlueGreen Alliance, a partnership between and created between the steel workers and the Sierra Club that worked on an agenda, a common agenda for good jobs, green jobs.

William Peduto:

I was honored to be a part of that board of directors during that first year of the BlueGreen Alliance and to this day, it still works, to be able to find ways where labor and environmentalist can work together. They were the leaders of stopping the trade deal with Asia because of environmental impacts that would happen and how it would treat the workers. And what they support is fair trade. At that same time, we need to look internally at our own region, and find a way to be able to bring the labor unions and the environmentalists together. How do you turn a mine worker into an environmentalist? You put a paycheck in her hand. You allow her to see herself as a part of the future, and to be able to stay in her town where she was raised. And you allow her to see where her kids will be able to stay there too.

William Peduto:

That congressperson who I spoke to from Ohio, told me the story about the conversations that she has with people from the rest of the country. And her fellow members of Congress say, "Why would you stay in an area that doesn't have any jobs move?" Well, maybe we don't want to move. Maybe we want to stay here. So we're going to have to figure out a way to work together. And we're going to have to figure out a way that takes care of the communities that may not think the same way that we do, but to win them over by winning their hearts and their minds, that there is a place for them in the future.

William Peduto:

When we go into rural Pennsylvania, and we say, "We're going to turn you into coders." We are being tone deaf. They don't want to be coders. They build America, their parents build America, they want to build it again. When we go in and we promise that we're going to help to get investment, to bring manufacturing back to your town, and to make sure that that plant reopens, but it's going to be building something different, you're going to have a part of building a new America, a 21st century America, then we win them over. If we want to be able to defeat the build out a petrochemical industry throughout the Ohio Valley, we beat it out by showing that green hydrogen energy can be the way of our future throughout this entire region.

William Peduto:

We show the examples like Mayor Cranley in Cincinnati, with solar power, and the wind power that's being generated throughout all of West Virginia. And we say, and as Mayor Brown had said, and Mayor Patterson, we build it here. American steel being used, manufactured in different parts of our region, assembled in our region, and shipped out throughout the world. We have the opportunity right now, because of the overcapacity of gas, that the folks that came in to frack, frack too much. That's why we're seeing cracker plants move in, because they need to find somewhere to sell the gas to. And any incentive that is provided for that by the state, should be provided to create the green renewable type of manufacturing that we're talking about. And if we were to be able to provide that through an entire region, then we could watch the green hydrogen companies moving in into our area to set up and to be a part of the economy.

William Peduto:

I've made my own personal stand that I won't support any additional cracker plants. And I say that for the public health, and the environmental reasons, but I also say it for the opportunity costs and the economic reasons. As we saw Pittsburgh change to a 21st century economy, I worry about losing those companies, if we were to see more companies moving to the valley. And so I would ask everyone, to have a very simple request, that before another plant is built in this country, the Department of Energy

must conduct an environmental impact study, must conduct a public health impact study, and must conduct an economic study, before we even consider. It's no different than Burger King moving into your neighborhood, you wouldn't allow them to have three drive-ins without a traffic study.

William Peduto:

Why shouldn't we be asking these companies what the negative effects are, and not just the number of jobs that are being created for construction? I don't want to leave in that negative note. But I just wanted to be able to answer because I saw there are a number of questions in chat about my feelings on that. But I do want to say that there is an opportunity that if we can work together, the mayors of this region along with Reimagine Appalachia, then we can build out a common agenda based partly upon our economic development strategy and partly upon the mission of Reimagine Appalachia, that we can then bring it up the food chain to our state leaders in the four states, to our congressional leadership, and to our senators.

William Peduto:

I would love to see the day Mitch McConnell would vote against billions of dollars coming into Kentucky. I think we have an opportunity within this next six months to really have a plan that we can put together at the grassroots level that will get a lot of traction at the federal level.

Erika Strassburger:

Well, on that note, I want to say that we're facing dark times right now. But this panel and this summit today gives me hope that brighter days are ahead, and that we're going to plant the seeds for the tree that our children and our grandchildren will be able to find shade under and to find fruit from. And I want to thank you all, I want us all to give a round of applause.

Mimi Pickering:

That was Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto. And before him, Steve Williams, Mayor of Huntington, West Virginia. Both have been leaders in the creation of the Marshall Plan for Middle America. They hope that that plan as well as the ideas put forth in the Reimagine Appalachia blueprint will be supported with investment from the new administration in Washington.

Mimi Pickering:

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