

VETERANS AND SENIORS COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
MINUTES

A meeting of the Veterans and Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York, on May 4, 2015.

Members Present:

Legislator Steven Stern - Chairman
Legislator Tom Barraga - Vice-Chair
Legislator Sarah Anker
Legislator Al Krupski
Legislator Tom Muratore

Also In Attendance:

Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory - 15th Legislative District
Jason Richberg - Chief Deputy Clerk
Debbie Harris - Aide to Legislator Stern
Catherine Stark - Aide to Legislator Krupski
Bill Shilling - Aide to Majority Leader
Tom Ronayne - Director of Veteran's Services
Holly Rhodes-Teague - Director of Office for the Aging
Patrick Donohue - Project 9 Line
Sue Fitzpatrick - Greater Long Island Running Club
Matthew Linton - Captain/U.S. Army
John Davis - Staff Sergeant/U.S. Army
Rick Brand - Newsday
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Gabrielle Severs - Court Stenographer

Minutes Transcribed By:

Denise Weaver - Legislative Aide

*(*The meeting was called to order at 12:35 P.M. *)*

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to our Committee on Vets and Seniors. I'm going to ask everyone to please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Barraga.

(*Salutation*)

Please remain standing and join us in a moment of silence as we keep all of our brave women and men fighting for our freedoms overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

(*Moment of Silence Observed*)

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Welcome everyone and thank you for joining us today. I do have some cards as a part of our public portion. So the first card that I have is Patrick Donohue.

MR. DONOHUE:

Hello. Push, cool. Hey, how you guys doing today? It's an honor to be here, thank you for having me. I guess we're here to speak about the marathon and Project 9 Line, both of which I'm very excited to speak about today. Let me explain to you what Project 9 Line is. Our mission statement's actually nine words, it's really cool: empowering veterans with reintegration through art, entrepreneurship and love and that encompasses a lot of things. And the reason we started Project 9 Line was because I believe there's a lot of great help out there, some of those organizations that help represented here today and they do a lot of great work. My take on it is like what next? You know, what about when they housed, they get well and they get better, then what, so we're trying to fill that -- that gap in because I feel like something is missing in the veteran community and we have probably the best veteran community in the country here in Suffolk County straight from the top on down the chain and we're very fortunate to have that.

So the VA saved my life and while I was there getting better we formed Project 9 Line. To date, we have had five very successful events, two musical concerts, two art shows and a comedy show. One of those concerts was the first ever in the whole world veterans' music festival. We had 30 veteran musicians on five stages all day, all night, performing their music, their originals, some of them speaking about their experiences they had overseas, and it was very -- it was very much a touching moment for everyone there. Almost 200 veterans attended, as well as a few hundred other people, civilians that came to support, which is awesome.

We're currently running almost ten workshops that are all free for our veterans that include free horseback riding for veterans and their families, free marathon training, free fitness training, free guitar lessons, free song writing, free stand-up comedy workshop. Right now we're in the process of building an organic farming initiative with another great organization that's building right now, it should be up and running in a few weeks. Also we're launching an -- an outdoor upscale art market for the veterans to be able to sell their wares to the public, it's going to be really cool. All this is free to the veterans by the way.

The marathon: What a great, great thing for Suffolk County and for the local veteran community. I love it. The only thing actually I don't love is now I've committed to run in it and I'm a little -- little scared about that, but I think I can do it, so I'm going to do it.

Also a few days before our signature event, which is Vet Stock, which is -- this year could be a lot bigger than last year and, like I said, there's no other event like it in the world where the veterans actually take the stage. The things we're trying to fulfill, you know, like the then what, is communication and purpose. I feel like veterans need to be able to communicate, whether it be their issues or their day-to-day things with the community and with the other veterans as well as find purpose, find a mission because I feel -- I believe that's what's lacking, we get home from overseas, and very demanding over there, very rewarding at the same time, and then we come back to -- to this place, America, which is a great country we live in and it's kind of not as active. So we're trying to fulfill that need. The marathon fits right into that because we run a lot in the Army. Obviously, all the branches, and I just love how Suffolk County has -- has taken it upon themselves to really put a lot of awareness out there to the veteran community and for Project 9 Line and for the veterans. It's really awesome.

I'm not really sure what else I'm supposed to speak about but I'm more than happy to share any insight that this veteran has who is a Suffolk County veteran born and raised with you guys.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

First of all, thank you, thank you for being with us today. Of course, thank you for your service and for all the great things that you're doing. Tell us more about Project 9 Line. Where -- where do the -- many of the activities, where are they held, what type of an outreach effort do you make to have veterans and their families become aware of your services and engage in participation and then I'm sure my colleagues would agree when we ask the question what -- what do you think we can and should be doing to be of assistance to you.

MR. DONOHUE:

Well, that's a very good question, actually, because I think that's another thing that's lacking that we're trying to build upon is being able to reach the veterans, you know, out of the 145,000 veterans that reside here only about 30,000 of them are in the VA system so even that's really lacking. But also it's very hard to find the veterans who are the most in need. They're not out and about, they're not -- they're not coming out of their houses, some of them, you know, and -- I know that from my personal experience and today is not so for me, I am well due to these things that I'm involved in, cause to be honest, I take part in all this stuff, you know, it's really cool.

And so being able to reach veterans is something that the County could really assist on, I don't know how, if I knew how I'd already be implementing it, but so we're open to ideas. And what's great about Project 9 Line is anyone can bring us an idea of some kind of skill, trade or trait that they could teach veterans and we could bring it to life. So it's very personal. You know, that could be a veteran or a civilian can bring that to the table and we can make it happen. And that's a great thing, you know, it's very personal people -- people like to get involved with things that they personally love and we can -- we can fulfill that for them and they can help veterans and possibly save a life in the process, which is really an amazing thing and we've been able to do that pretty -- pretty successfully so far.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Is there a website for the organization?

MR. DONOHUE:

Yes, Project9Line.org.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And are there any materials that we might be able to distribute to those that -- that might be in

need of the information?

MR. DONOHUE:

Sure, I got a book-bag full of fliers today as well as brochures that explain who we are and what we do. And I'll tell you where we get our name from, cause to be honest, a lot of people call us Project 9 and I -- sometimes I take it a little personal, depending on my mood, because it's not that, it's Project 9 Line and the reason that's our name is because the military protocol in combat, when you take a casualty to help your friend to save his life, is called the 9-line, a 9-line medevac. There's nine specific pieces of information, in order, so the guy on the other side knows to send you, how to send it and all the important info. So we're that here, there's no reason that should stop here. So although we don't provide a lot of services, I know where to get to them and I'm more than happy to help you get there to get to them.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right, very good. So, yes, maybe before -- before you leave today we can get some of that information to Debbie.

MR. DONOHUE:

That would be great.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And she'll -- that all of us get it so that we can utilize it within our -- within our offices and districts.

MR. DONOHUE:

Thank you so much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you for being with us today.

MR. DONOHUE:

Pleasure. Thank you so much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Next is Sue Fitzpatrick.

MS. FITZPATRICK:

Hi, thank you for, again, for having us here to speak to you. I'm Sue Fitzpatrick, I'm the Director of Development from the Greater Long Island Running Club and we are working in conjunction with Suffolk County and putting on the Suffolk County marathon. We're very excited about this race. We received a great response from the -- from the communities about the race. It's taking place on September 13th, 2015. The course is starting and ending in Heckscher State Park. It's continuing down Montauk Highway going to Patchogue and turning around and coming back. The full marathon will be going all the way out there, the half marathon will be going through St. John's campus and then we're taking a little detour through Bayard Cutting Arboretum. So it's going to be showing off great parts of Suffolk County.

Right now the registration is going great. We have about 460 people currently registered for the full marathon and we have 643 registered for the half marathon. Of those we have veterans that are also running and we are giving them a discount for the entire series through the -- through the day of the race. We have 22 registered to do the full and 37 to do the half and as Tom Ronayne pointed out, that represents right now about 5% of the total registrants of 1100. And we have

about 10%, he said, of veterans in Suffolk County so it's a good representation so far of who is running so far and we're hoping to get a lot more registrants. And, as I said, the registration is a flat rate for them so they may wait to sign up but we're hoping to get a 10% rate of veterans running in the race. We're hoping to have a total registration of about 2500 to 5000 registrants. And all the proceeds are going to go directly to expand and enhance the veteran services to Suffolk County veterans, much like Patrick's organization so we're hoping to have a big response and that we're going to be able to help provide a lot of services to the veterans.

We also are going to be having an expo or a Taste of Long Island afterparty taking place where we're going to be highlighting various restaurants and local organizations, local breweries, wineries so we're hoping to get a big response to that people coming to that Taste of Long Island to get an idea of what it's like to be here on Long Island -- local businesses, and to encourage everyone to -- to visit them especially in Suffolk County.

In addition to our race, we're also having a veterans' race series. We're trying to encourage everyone to participate in other veterans' events that are taking place, races taking place on Long Island and if they participate in all of the events they're going to be getting a special challenge coin, which are being designed by Tim Scherer who's involved with the Corporal Chris Scherer race. So we want to try to recognize people and give them a little idea to what it -- what everything is in being involved with the veterans.

Now I'm also the coordinator of volunteers and I'm hoping that we'll either see you, all of you there running, participating maybe as a volunteer or just showing up and showing your support at the race on September 13th. So hopefully if you want to visit website all that information is there, it's suffolkmarathon.com. So if you visit that website you'll see how you can register or how you can also contact me to volunteer. So thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. A quick question for you, the Taste of Long Island event or events, that's going to be held where?

MS. FITZPATRICK:

It's going to be held at Heckscher Park where the race begins and ends.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay, very good. Anybody? Any questions? All right. Good. Thank you so much for being with us today.

Okay. Captain Matthew Linton.

MR. LINTON:

Legislators, Ladies and Gentlemen. Microphone's not necessary, I guess, but I just wanted to say thank you for the opportunity to come out here, talk about a great opportunity coming up. Everyone that has spoken, talking about some of the organizations that are here besides the race itself, I just wanted to talk about how the United States Army, specifically the USAREC, which is our recruiting command, is partnering with this race to be connected to the community and to work towards the same goals that everyone in this room is concerned with. As you are all concerned with, you know, the youth, with citizenship, looking at how we're connected in the community, how we're engaged and as we go forward from there for us specifically with those that are serving currently, just as we had a moment of silence at the beginning of this -- this event right now, we are all tied to that and fully aware of the fact that we are a nation at war, we're a nation that faces

many different challenges around the world and yet we're stronger for it and because we all work together at the smallest level in our families and the communities to come together and then we are also very concerned and focused on providing for those that have served and that come home and as your community is just a great representation of how a County can support, through Tom Ronayne, it's veterans and that it ties into this race then to be an opportunity to be a -- a springboard to communicate with one another to start the dialogue to communicate with what is ongoing in the community, how we can be better connected to one another and how we can support one another and bring it back together.

Something that we're very excited for the United States Army is in our partnership, the chance to come out and talk about what the Army is right now so that way everyone better understands the young men and women returning and their service because the stories from Vietnam are not the stories from my generation. They are similar, there are many things that transcend generations, there are many things that consistently are part of the experience when you leave home, when you learn new -- new skills, when you meet new people, when you go around the world and meet new cultures but there is unique things to how we interact due to the ability for instant communication back home that is different than, say, the generations before. And it's an opportunity for us in the Army to showcase the skills that we have and how we're setting up our soldiers for success for the young men and women that you're sending, you know, from your community to join my ranks and how we're -- we're setting them up for success not only currently serving in the military but then with the actual technical, vocational tradecrafts to serve them well as they go beyond.

So something we're excited to bring out, we have a lot of different assets, which I actually have set up at Newfield High School right now, we'll bring out to the race is a giant tractor trailer that showcases those skillsets in addition to some of our marketing skills that in the recruiting command a component of communication is necessary to -- to better display and show what it is that we do for current serving and veterans and this -- this race itself will be a great chance for us to partner with you to better understand who your military is, who we are as an extension of the elected officials that make this nation what it is at the bedrock of our democracy, so.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you.

MR. LINTON:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thanks so much for being with us today. And -- yes, just introduce yourself to everyone.

MR. DAVIS:

My name is Staff Sergeant Davis. I along with {Caitlyn} are representing the Army here, kind of spearheading the Army movement to help us promote the race coming up in September and we're in a unique position where we have about 40 to 50 Army recruiters here on Long Island, we're tied into every school, business and community so we're in a unique position to be able to promote and educate people on the race coming up and also what it's doing for the community. So we're just here today to go ahead and say, hey, introduce ourselves and say we're excited about the race, excited to work with you, sir.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. Well, thank you and thank you to you both for -- for your service, for being with us today and for all that you do. Appreciate it. Okay. Everybody good?

Okay. I have no other cards. Is there anybody else that would like to address the Committee before we go to the agenda? All right. Seeing none, then Holly.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I just want to remind everyone the luncheon is next Thursday and it's over at Villa Lombardi at around noon so if you're able to make it we'd love to see. We are going to be honoring our senior of the year who is a gentleman from the Town of Southold, so Legislator Krupski's neck of the woods.

I also have a -- today on the agenda I know we have a lot of reappointments for our advisory board and our members our long-time -- long-time members of the advisory board, they've all done a great job over the years so I hope that you support them and I do know that we have one of our members here today, so, if you'd like to speak with him later. That's all I have.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. Anybody? Anything for Holly? All right, Holly, thank you.

Director Ronayne.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Good afternoon, Chairman, Members, thank you as always for your invitation to be here today. I'm actually very pleased, I'm happy to have been able to -- to listen to the speakers when they were addressing you regarding -- to the -- to the upcoming marathon. I think -- I think it's representative of the -- the type of support that we're seeing in community. There is a -- there is a buzz at this point about the marathon, I know that there are many folks in the veteran and nonveteran -- both veteran and nonveteran communities who are excited about this event and I very much agree with Captain Linton, I think that this is an opportunity for us as a County to showcase how we -- how we admire and respect and support our veterans and it provides a unique opportunity, again agreeing with Captain Linton, for other elements who don't ordinarily have an opportunity to, on a large public stage, to come out in -- in support -- in support of this type of an effort. So I'm very excited, I think that the -- the numbers are beginning to jell. As Sue had stated, we -- we're seeing about five and-a-half percent of the registrants at this point are registered as veterans. So that's just below our representation in the -- in the population, in the general population, and we are hoping that through continued advocacy through hearings such as this and through other efforts that we'll see that number tick up and if we can get 10% representation among the runners, participants in the race, I think that would really be a -- a terrific thing. We certainly will do everything within our ability to support -- to support that effort.

I wanted to remind, if I could, a couple of items that are coming up on our calendar. May 16, which is fast approaching, that is two Saturdays from now, is our annual Armed Forces Day ceremony, as always being held at the Armed Forces Plaza at the Dennison Building, 11:00 a.m. This year our keynote speaker will be Colonel Frank Kestler. Colonel Kestler, you may be more familiar with Colonel Kestler as the -- the father of Lieutenant Joe Theinert, Joe was the Army -- Army member who was killed, he was a resident of Shelter Island. Frank himself, Colonel Kestler himself, is a veteran of three deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, very interesting man, very accomplished. I look forward to hearing his remarks on May 16 and invitations have already been sent, I would look forward to seeing hopefully many of you also in attendance that day.

Another event that is fast approaching and I'm very excited about this, I've spoken about this previously but I do not believe I've been able to share fliers until now is the Joseph Dwyer Program annual Day of Wellness that we will be hosting on June 6. This will be taking place at Camp Pa-Qua-Tuck in Center Moriches, this is the same location where it was held last year. Really a

terrific event. It was very well received, again, by both the veteran and military family as well as the community at large.

Our focus on the Day of Wellness is not entirely on accessing and providing services to our veterans. We really have an emphasis toward building communication -- building lines of communication with the family members and other loved ones of our veterans. So many of the veterans who we come in contact with come through us through those loved ones and family members. So the veteran themselves are not always the -- the point of contact for us. This -- this event allows us to introduce them not only to the availability of certain services, but also to provide alternatives to many of the traditional disciplines that we typically, almost by default, think of when we -- when we think about the services that veterans are receiving. Many of the things that we're doing within the day of wellness are things that we're doing on a regular basis in the community with great success. We have a big focus, as you are aware, on providing alternatives to the use of pain management medications and certain other things and we've been enjoying tremendous success through exposure of the veterans to things like Reiki, yoga, acupuncture, therapeutic massage, service animals. We have with us today, Robert Misseri, from Guardians of Rescue, Paws of War. The service and companion animal component has been hugely successful. These are things that many veterans, and I'll speak personally, would probably not be at the forefront of what we would be considering were it not offered to us sometimes more than once so while they're unconventional, nontraditional I should say, they have been very well received in the community. We look forward to enhancing and expanding our connections with the providers as well as the community to take advantage of the services and, again, I will pass out the -- I will make sure that the fliers are distributed to you. We invite you all to come out and see what -- see what we're going to be doing that day.

In addition to the services that I've already mentioned we'll be doing some other things that are more interactive such as fly fishing clinics and kayaking clinics. If it provides a resource and a means of an outlet for a veteran, we're happy to -- to make it available and I think this is a good forum for us to -- to accomplish that. So I'll see that these are distributed.

So much of what we are doing right now is only successful because of the great partnerships that we have in our community. And I just want to thank publically those who are in the room with us today as well as many of those who are not able to be here with us today, family members, Mr. O'Donnell is in the room. Mr. O'Donnell is the parent of a -- a combat veteran who experiences PTS and has found a place within the community to assist other veterans and I would say that one of the -- one of the themes that we tend to find amongst our family members and those who volunteer within some of our programs is that the volunteerism is as beneficial and as therapeutic for them as it is for the folks that they are serving and supporting.

I think that is what I have for the moment, I'm happy to take any questions.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Tom, I know that you participated with the Gold Star Mothers organization that was just with us in Suffolk County. Maybe you could just bring everybody up to date on -- on how that went, some of the things that went on here locally and -- and regionally as well.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The American Gold Star Mothers, as an organization, hosted their 2015 convention here in Suffolk County. Legislator Stern was -- was good enough to be able to join us at the -- the opening program and offered remarks. There were -- by the way, I thank you privately but I'd like to thank you publically, they were delighted to have had you in attendance and your words were -- were very

meaningful. We had approximately 30 families translated into just over 70 family members in attendance and then the -- the broader membership and supporters for the program the -- there were several events that Suffolk County worked very closely with the Gold Star Mothers organization to facilitate; one of them, and I think very significantly, was a -- a visit to World Trade Center site. The majority of the family members who were in attendance at this convention are the -- were the moms and dads of service members who have been killed since 9/11. They were all post 9/11 service members and you cannot extract the events of 9/11 at the World Trade Center from their sons, and in one case, their daughter's service. Most of these folks who are not from the Long Island area have not had a chance previously to visit the World Trade Center so by facilitating a visit to the World Trade Center site it really provided an opportunity for some of these people to -- one father used the word closure, that it allowed him to put closure on the events leading up to the loss of his son because he was finally able to visit the place that he considered to be hallowed ground and it helped him to understand the motivation that his own child felt for entering service and for going to war. They spent a couple hours in the museum. We were able to coordinate receptions for them on both ends. I will tell you that the County Executive's Office, the Suffolk County Police Department, FRES and a number of other County entities were directly involved in making this, I won't use the word success because I don't think this is a question of success, I think it's a question of appropriateness and I think that we -- we provided an appropriate and respectful level of recognition and service to this population while they were visiting us. When we arrived at World Trade Center we had arranged for a -- a very significant reception to meet these family members when they arrived and that was very emotional for many of them as well. The dinner, the banquet dinner that culminated the -- the convention, I could tell you that it was attended by about 300 individuals and a very moving -- a very moving program. It was very fitting, very appropriate. I'm delighted to say that the -- initially the dinner had been scheduled to take place at the Courtyard Marriott in Ronkonkoma and they outgrew that venue and were forced to move the dinner to East Wind in Wading River. And I think the fact that they outgrew that venue that there were such a number of people who felt it important to attend was very gratifying to see.

So, again, it was a very special event I can tell you that some of the other things that we assisted with, you know, the mechanical and the nuts and bolts behind the scenes, there was an awful lot of gratitude and gestures of appreciation for the support that they received here in Suffolk County and I can promise you that they've gone back to their respective communities wherever they may be and they're sharing -- they're sharing their stories because most of them would agree that they had not attended a convention quite like the one that was held in here in Suffolk County and I thank you all for the roles that you each played in that.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you. Legislator Anker.

LEG. ANKER:

Yeah, I have to give a shout-out to Michele McNaughton, she's the President of the American Gold Star Mothers, and what a beautiful memorial ceremony. And I just wanted to mention too that the music component, I believe it was a Centereach choir, ladies choir -- or just choir. Right?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

LEG. ANKER:

And then the Emerald Police -- Emerald Bagpipe Band.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

That was the Suffolk County -- Suffolk County PD Pipe and Drum Band.

LEG. ANKER:

What a beautiful ceremony. So, and again, I want to thank you and thank all those folks who put this event together. I just went to the memorial service and it was so much more happening and I'm sure everybody will appreciate the help and the assistance. Thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you. And I should mention that Legislator Muratore, Legislator Anker, Legislator Stern were all able to attend various components of the program and that, again, receiving acknowledgement from this level of government was very meaningful to -- to these families. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right. Director, as always, thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. Going then to introductory resolutions.

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

We have a series of reappointments. Beginning with **IR 1317 - Approving the reappointment of Jeanmarie Brand as a member of the Senior Citizens Advisory Board. (Co. Exec.)** Again, these are all reappointments so there was no requirement for them to appear here at Committee. So I'll make a motion to approve.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Legislator Barraga. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstention? **IR 1317 is approved. (VOTE: 5-0)**

IR 1318 - Approving the reappointment of Chestene Coverdale as a member of the Senior Citizens Advisory Board. (Co. Exec.) Same motion, same second, same vote. **APPROVED (VOTE: 6-0 - P.O. GREGORY INCLUDED IN THE VOTE)**

IR 1319 - Approving the reappointment of Carolyn Gallogly as a member of the Senior Citizens Advisory Board. (Co. Exec.) Same motion, same second, same vote. **APPROVED (VOTE: 6-0 - P.O. GREGORY INCLUDED IN THE VOTE)**

IR 1320 - Approving the reappointment of Gene Pritz as a member of the Senior Citizens Advisory Board. (Co. Exec.) Mr. Pritz is here with us today. We say hello and thank him for his continued service. Same motion, same second, same vote. **APPROVED (VOTE: 6-0 - P.O. GREGORY INCLUDED IN THE VOTE)**

IR 1321 - Approving the reappointment of Elizabeth Eggleton as a member of the Senior Citizens Advisory Board. (Co. Exec.) Same motion, same second, same vote. **APPROVED**

(VOTE: 6-0 - P.O. GREGORY INCLUDED IN THE VOTE)

IR 1322 - Approving the reappointment of Christine Shiebler as a member of the Senior Citizens Advisory Board. (Co. Exec.) Same motion, same second, same vote. APPROVED
(VOTE: 6-0 - P.O. GREGORY INCLUDED IN THE VOTE)

There being no other business before the Committee, we are adjourned.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1:08 PM

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