Taking the Pi for a Walk Through the AWS Greengrass

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Introduction

The Raspberry Pi was originally intended to be an affordable, educational platform. First widely released in 2012, the Pi has wildly exceeded expectations with over 23 million units sold.

Back in 2012, my team at Wazee Group presented me with a Raspberry Pi as a gift for the winter holiday season. The Pi was a much-appreciated gift as it guided me back to my programming roots with single board computers. I was very impressed (and still am) with the features of the Pi and the extremely low cost. It truly must be the best value in the history of computers.

Not only has it become a stable in the computer education domain, the Pi is one of the most popular platforms for Internet of Things (IoT) solutions. A client of Wazee Group, Patrick Conroy, used the Pi to host a micro-service that automated the operations of a packaging machine. After thousands of hours of operation and millions of packages later, the Pi has performed flawlessly.

Unfortunately, not all of the Pi implementations that I have seen have been as impressive as Patrick's. Luckily, none of these are in mission critical situations. To assist others who are considering using the Pi as an IoT platform, I wanted to provide a consolidated step-by-step guide that configures a blank Raspberry Pi to send a message to a service within the AWS cloud in a secure, reliable, and widely acceptable fashion.

This guide intentionally relies heavily on the AWS IoT examples. I wanted to take the user to the first usable milestone in the AWS examples. The result of the guide will provide a seamless starting place for the additional AWS examples.

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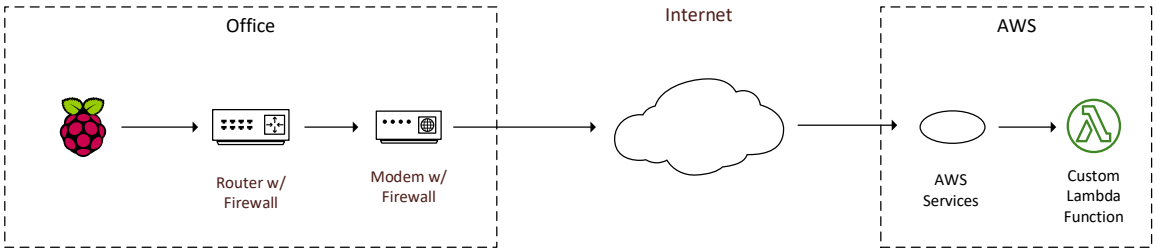
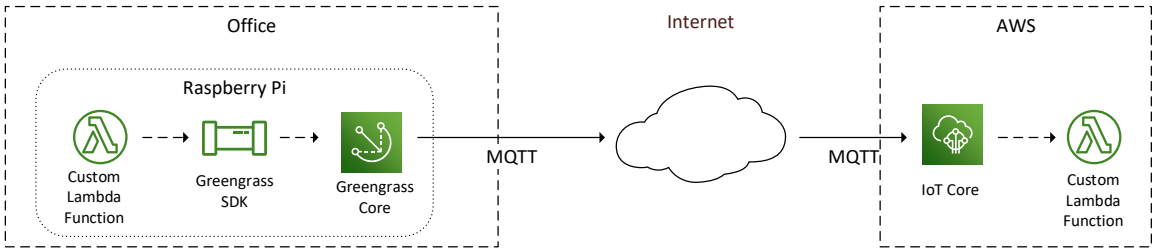
Overview

My mission was simple…I wanted to send a message from a Raspberry Pi to a Lambda function hosted in the AWS cloud. The environment is both typical and straightforward. The Pi would be sitting behind a router with all of the inbound ports closed. The router, in turn, would be behind a cable modem with all of the inbound ports closed. A diagram of the environment is shown below:



After researching the options provided by AWS, I decided to use their IoT Greengrass service. My solution could be defined in the following diagram. A Python script would be deployed as a Lambda function along with the Greengrass SDK. This function will publish a message through the SDK to the Greengrass Core software. The Core service will send the message to the AWS IoT Core service via the MQTT messaging framework. Once the message is received, a Lambda function inside the AWS cloud would be executed.



MQTT

One of the cornerstones of the Greengrass service is the MQTT messaging system. MQTT (i.e. MQ Telemetry Transport) is a publish/subscribe communication protocol that is widely used in the Internet of Things domain. MQTT was invented by Dr Andy Stanford-Clark of IBM, and Arlen Nipper of Arcom in 1999.

The reason that I like MQTT is that is allows secure, bi-directional communication based on connections made with the MQTT broker. This means that I do not have to alter my firewall settings or open ports on my modem and router.

In the Greengrass implementation, the MQTT is encapsulated within the service and remains largely unnoticed.

Next Steps

To realized the solution, this document covers the following steps:

1. Describe the hardware and present the associate costs.
2. Install the Raspbian operating system on the Pi.
3. Configure the Raspbian OS.
4. Secure the Pi for development and testing.
5. Configure Raspbian for the Greengrass software.
6. Install the Greengrass Core on the Pi.
7. Deploy and execute a Python Lambda function on the Pi.

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Hardware

In 2012, my team at Wazee Group gave me a Raspberry Pi Model B as part of our winter holiday celebration. It was an amazing unit and I spent several hours working with it. However, for this effort, I wanted to upgrade to the latest Pi hardware. Instead of obtaining a turn key kit, I purchased the following components from both Amazon and a local Best Buy.

1. Raspberry Pi 3 Model B+ - $34.99

2. CanaKit - Power Adapter for Raspberry Pi 3 – Black - $10.82

3. STEADYGAMER - 32GB Raspberry Pi Preloaded (NOOBS) SD Card | 3B+ (Plus), 3B, 2, Zero Compatible with All Pi Models - $22.99

4. KuGi Raspberry Pi 3 Model B case PC Protective Case with 2x Heatsinks for Raspberry Pi 3 Model B+, Raspberry Pi 3 Model B, Pi 2 Model B & Pi Model B+ - $7.50

The total cost was $76.30. Not bad for an extremely impressive package. Here's a picture of my system.

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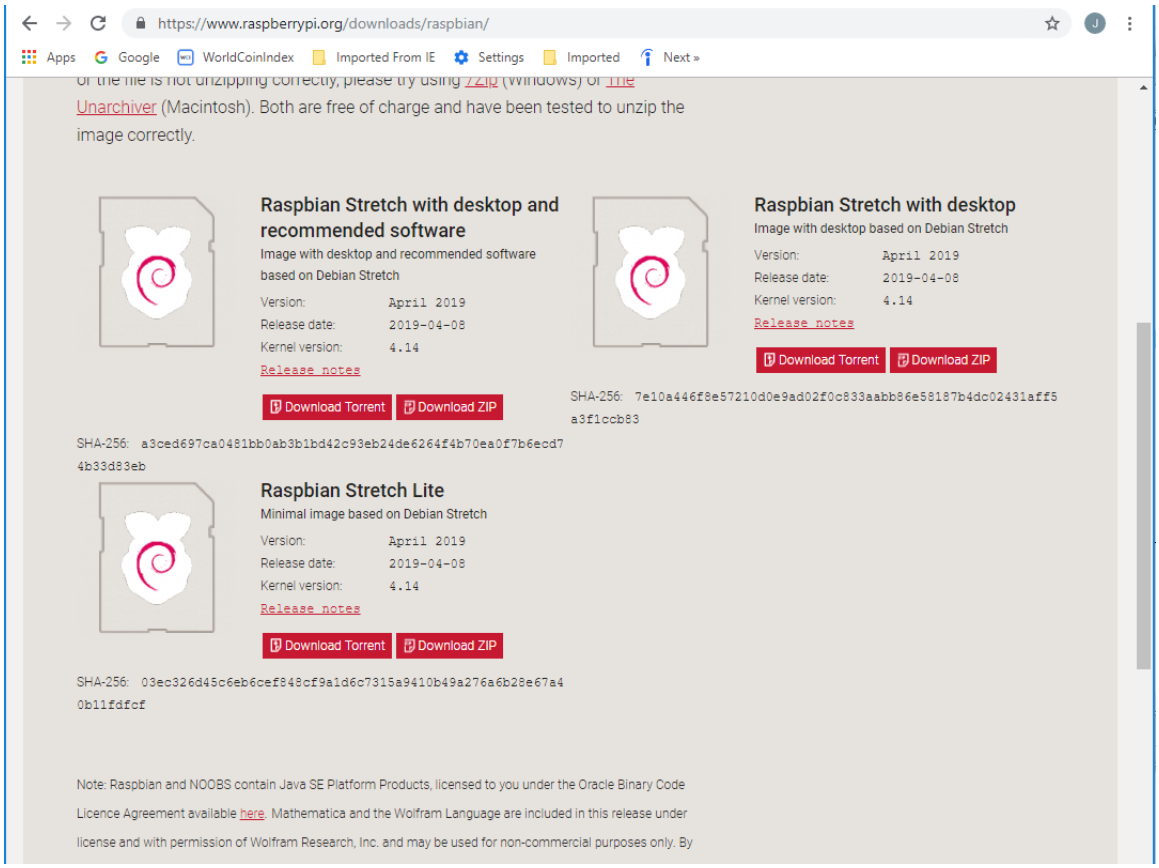
Installing Raspbian on the Pi

After installing Pi board into the case but before connecting the power supply, I downloaded the latest release of Raspbian operating system from the following website:

https://www.raspberrypi.org/downloads/raspbian/

This link currently goes to the following page.

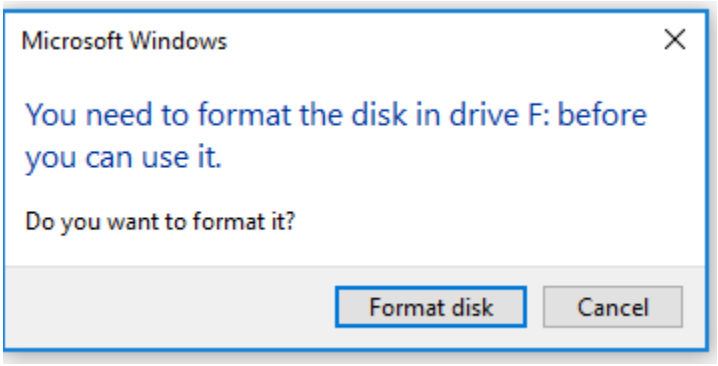


I selected the ***Raspbian Stretch with desktop and recommended software*** option on this page. This option downloaded a 2 GB file named “2019-04-08-raspbian-stretch-full.zip”

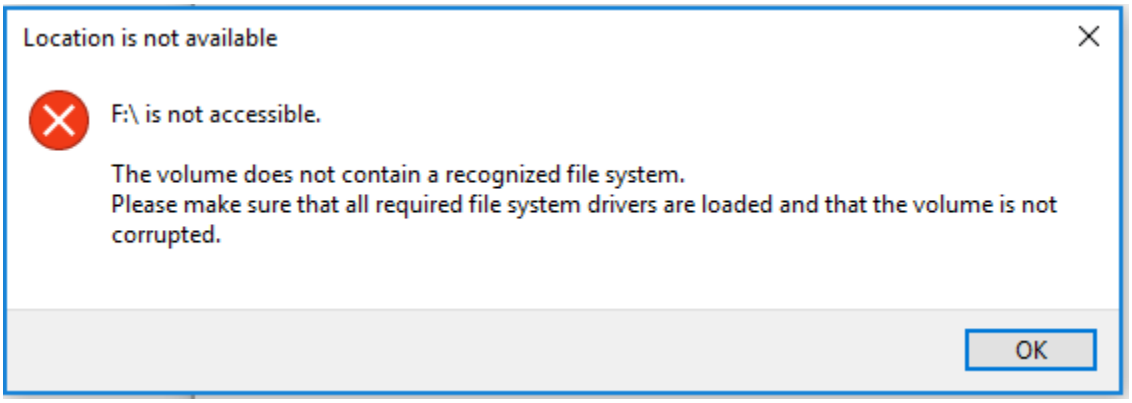
Using the 7-Zip application on Windows, this file unzipped to a “2019-04-08-raspbian-stretch-full”directory with a single file named “2019-04-08-raspbian-stretch-full.img”.

My laptop has a built in SD card reader so I downloaded the open source SD writing application called Etcher (https://www.balena.io/etcher/).

I placed the micro-card into the adapter and inserted the adapter into the reader. Windows showed the following message:



Press ***Cancel***.

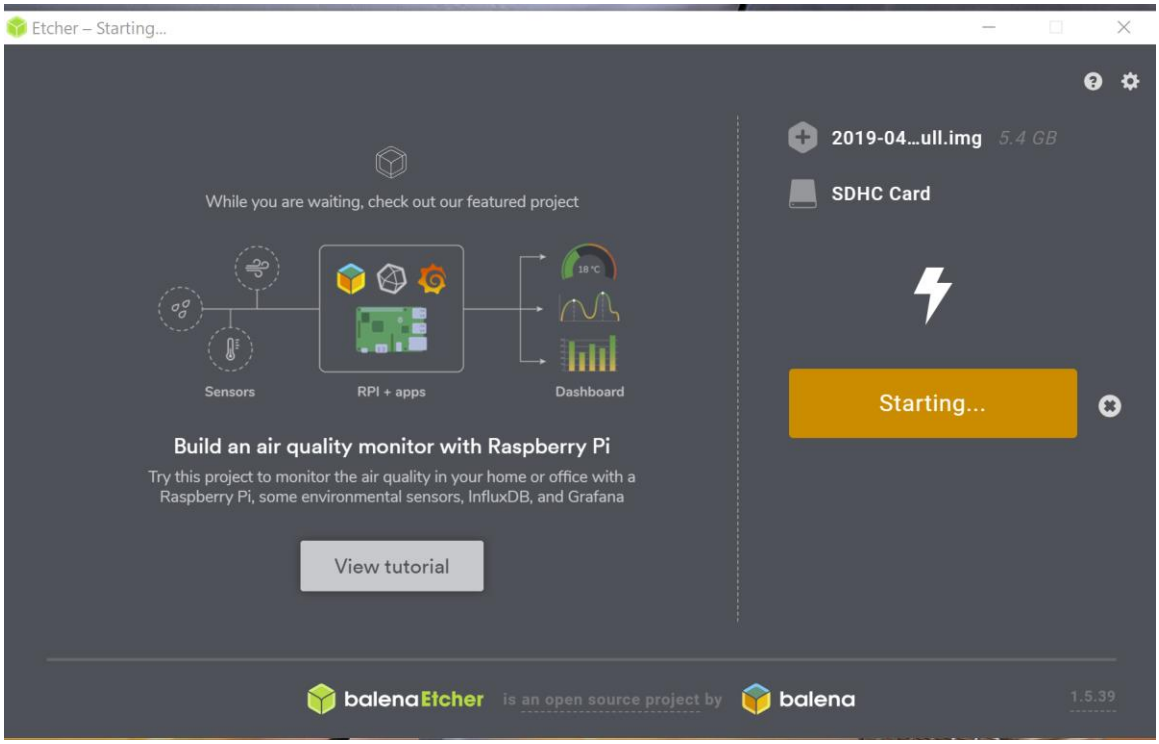


Press the ***OK*** button.

Open the Etcher application.

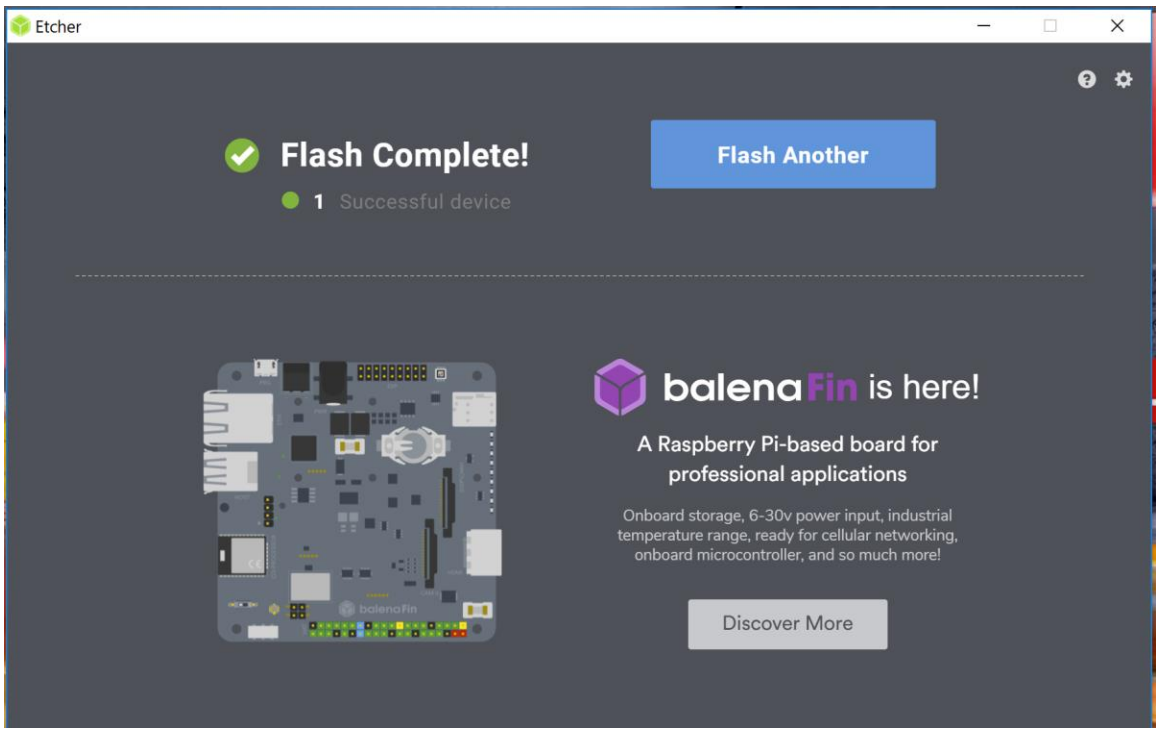
Select the image (i.e. the “2019-04-08-raspbian-stretch-full.img” file).

Press the ***Flash!*** button.

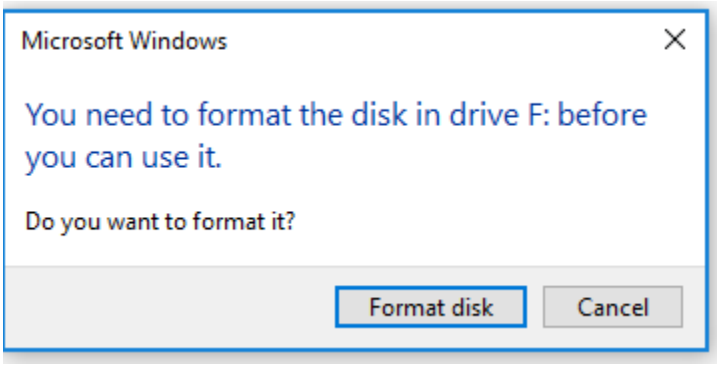


This takes a few minutes.

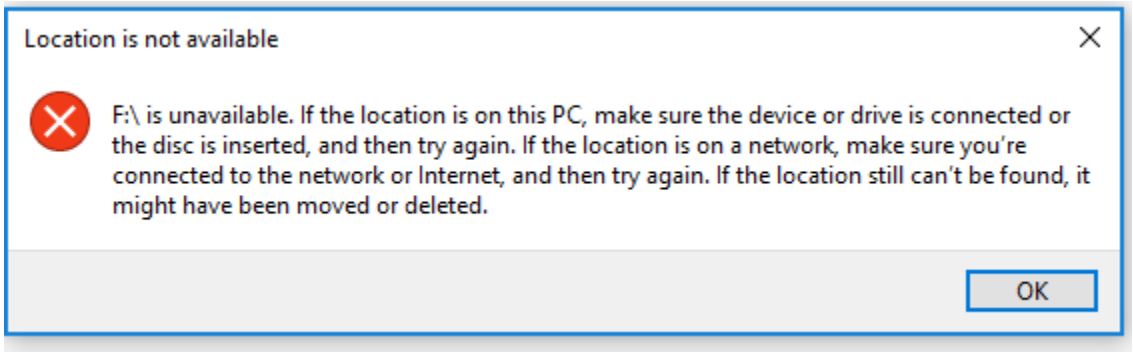
After flashing the image, Etcher will perform a validation check. This will also take a few minutes.



If Windows shows the following message, press the ***Cancel*** button.



If Windows shows the following message, press the ***OK*** button:



Close the Etcher application.

Remove the SD adapter from the reader.

Remote the micro-card from the adapter.

Ensure the power supply is disconnected from the Raspberry.

Insert the micro-card into the Pi.

Connect the video monitor, keyboard, and mouse to the Pi.

Connect the power supply to the Pi.

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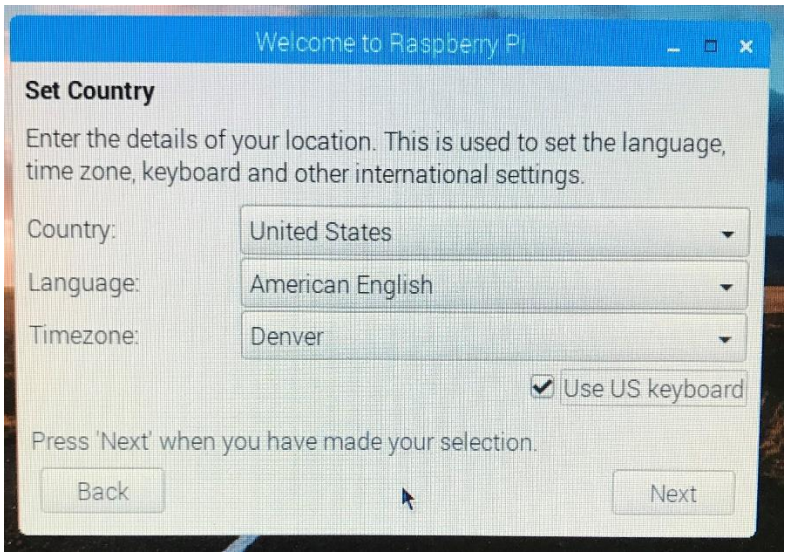
Initial Raspbian Configuration

After the Pi powers up, the following message should appear:

Press the ***Next*** button. The following dialog should appear:

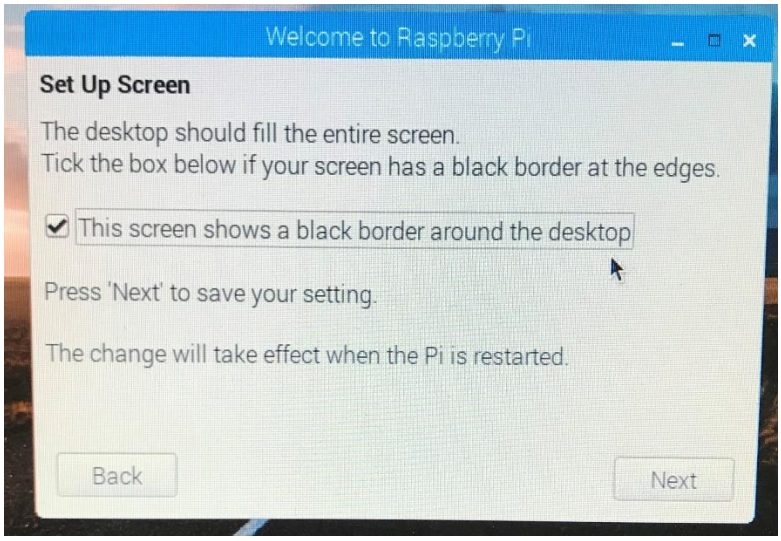


Set the values for your scenario. Press ***Next***.

The ***Change Password*** dialog will appear. Enter the new password for the default 'pi' user.

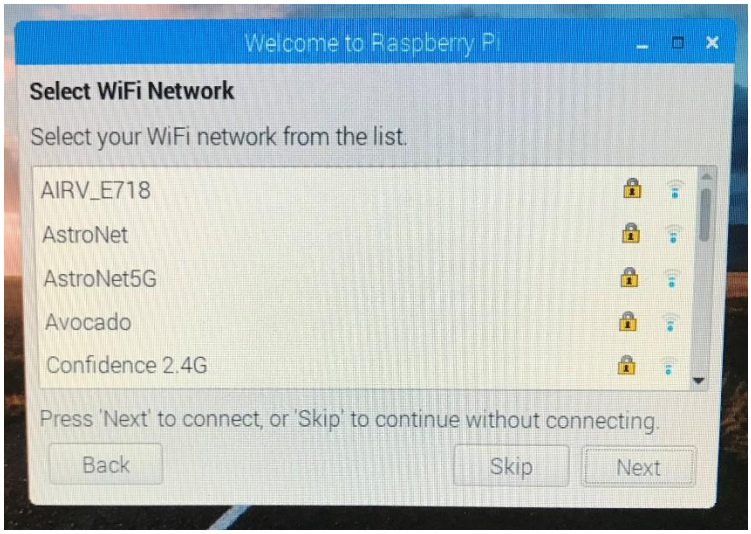
Confirm the password and press the ***Next*** button.

The ***Set Up Screen*** dialog will appear.



Press the ***Next*** button.

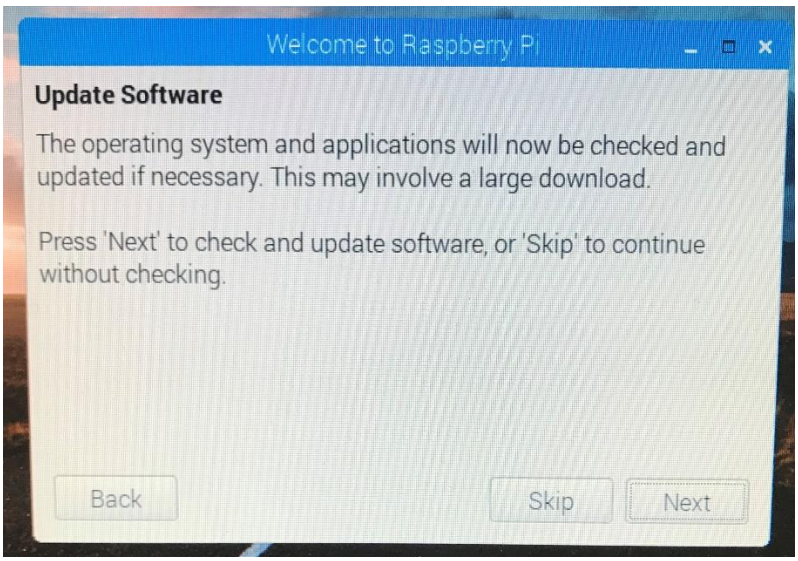
The ***Select WiFi Network*** dialog will appear. Select your network. You should select the same network that your computer uses.



Press the ***Next*** button.

The ***Enter WiFi Password*** dialog will appear. Enter the value for your network and press the ***Next*** button.

The ***Update Software*** dialog will appear.



Press the ***Next*** button.

This can take several minutes.

When the update is finished, the ***Setup Complete*** dialog will appear. Click the ***Restart*** button.

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No Pi for You!

This section describes a few techniques to increase the security of your Pi. It is not an all-inclusive set but represents reasonable precautions for a lab-based platform. For production releases, please research and evaluate additional safeguards.

Enable SSH

The first step is to enable the SSH interface. After the Pi has restarted from the previous section, the SSH interface can be enabled. This allows a user to remoted login to the Pi.

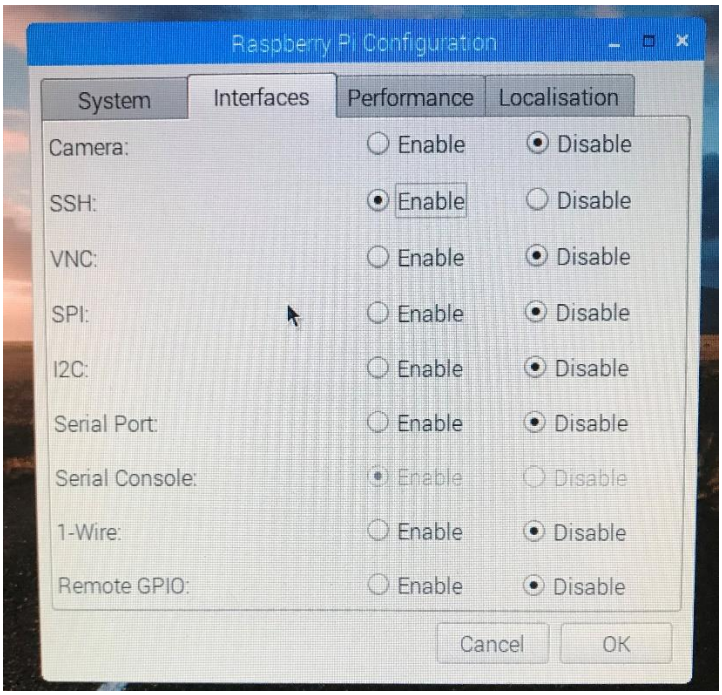
On the Pi desktop, click on the raspberry icon in the menu bar.

Click on the ***Preferences*** item.

Click on the ***Raspberry Pi Configuration*** item

The ***Raspberry Pi Configuration*** dialog will appear.

Click on the ***Interfaces*** tab.



Click on the ***Enable*** option for the SSH interface.

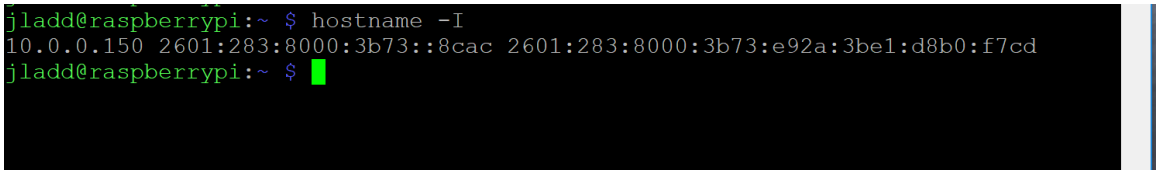
Ensure that all of the other interfaces have the ***Disable*** option select. The lone exception is the Serial Console which cannot be disabled.

Click the ***OK*** button.

To obtain the IP address of the Pi, open a terminal window and enter the following command:

```
hostname -I
```

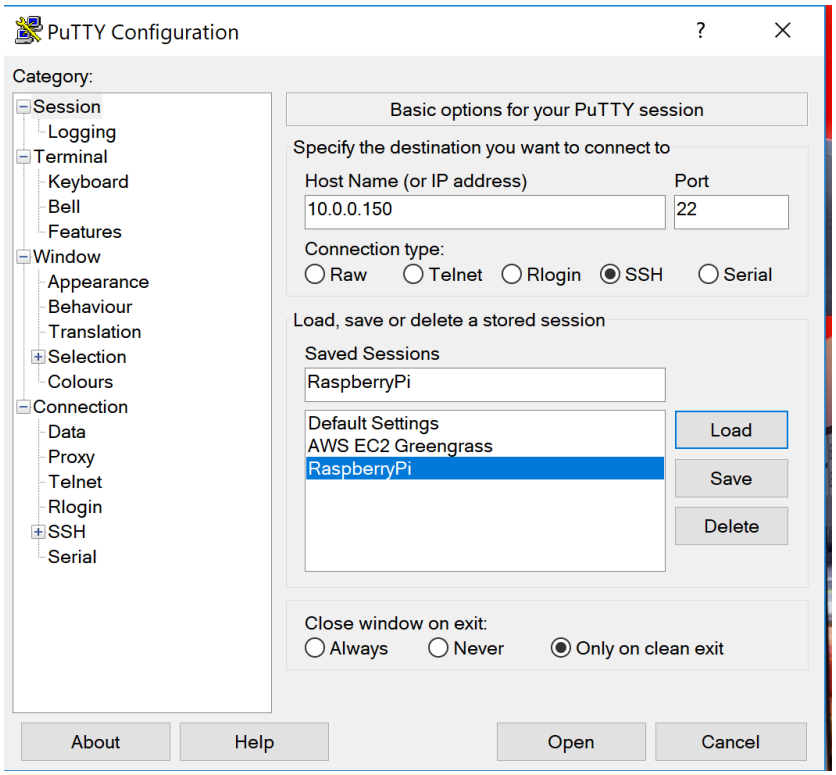
For my platform, the information is:



Download an SSH client application. I have used PuTTY for several years. Its available at the following link.

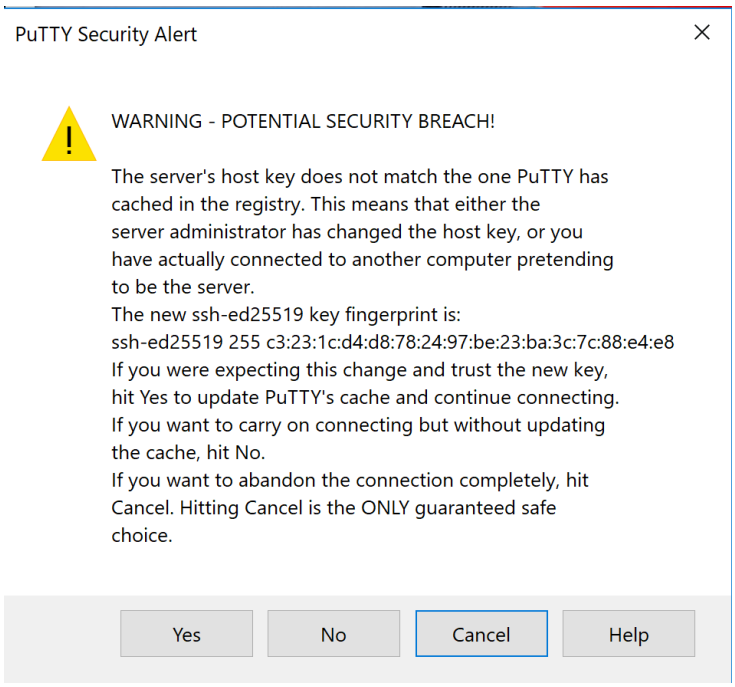
https://www.putty.org/

After installation, create a new session in PuTTY that will connect to the Pi:



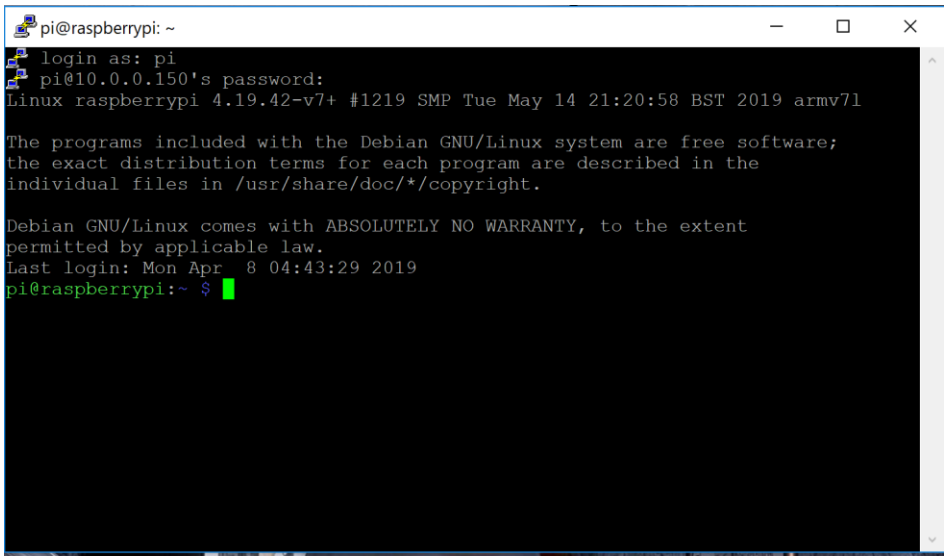
Enter your information and press the ***Open*** button.

You will probably receive the following message:



Press the ***Yes*** button.

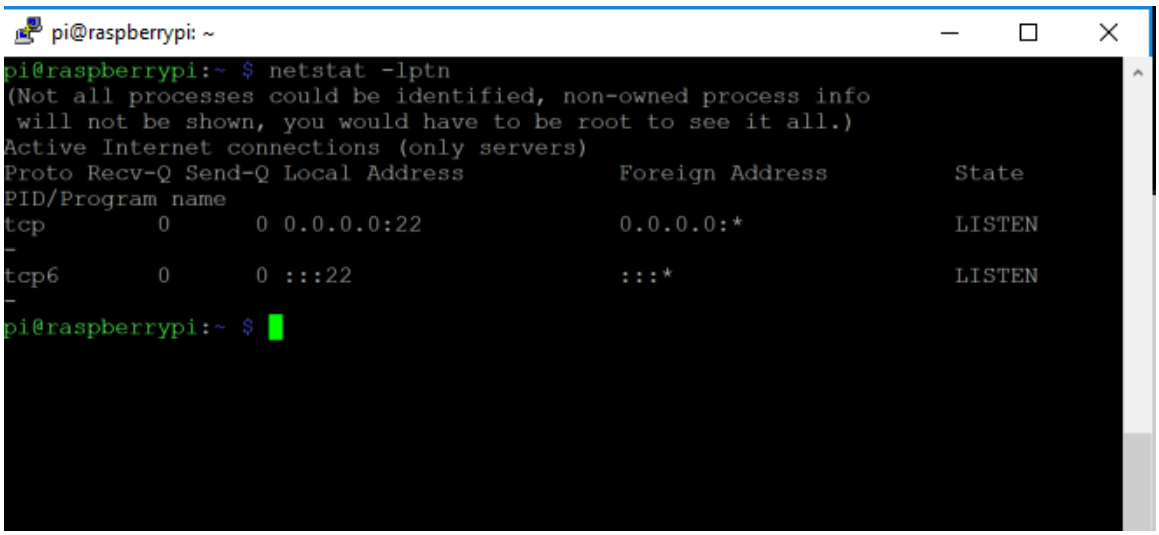
An SSH terminal windows will appear.



Change the SSH Port

See what ports are being used:

```
netstat -lptn
```

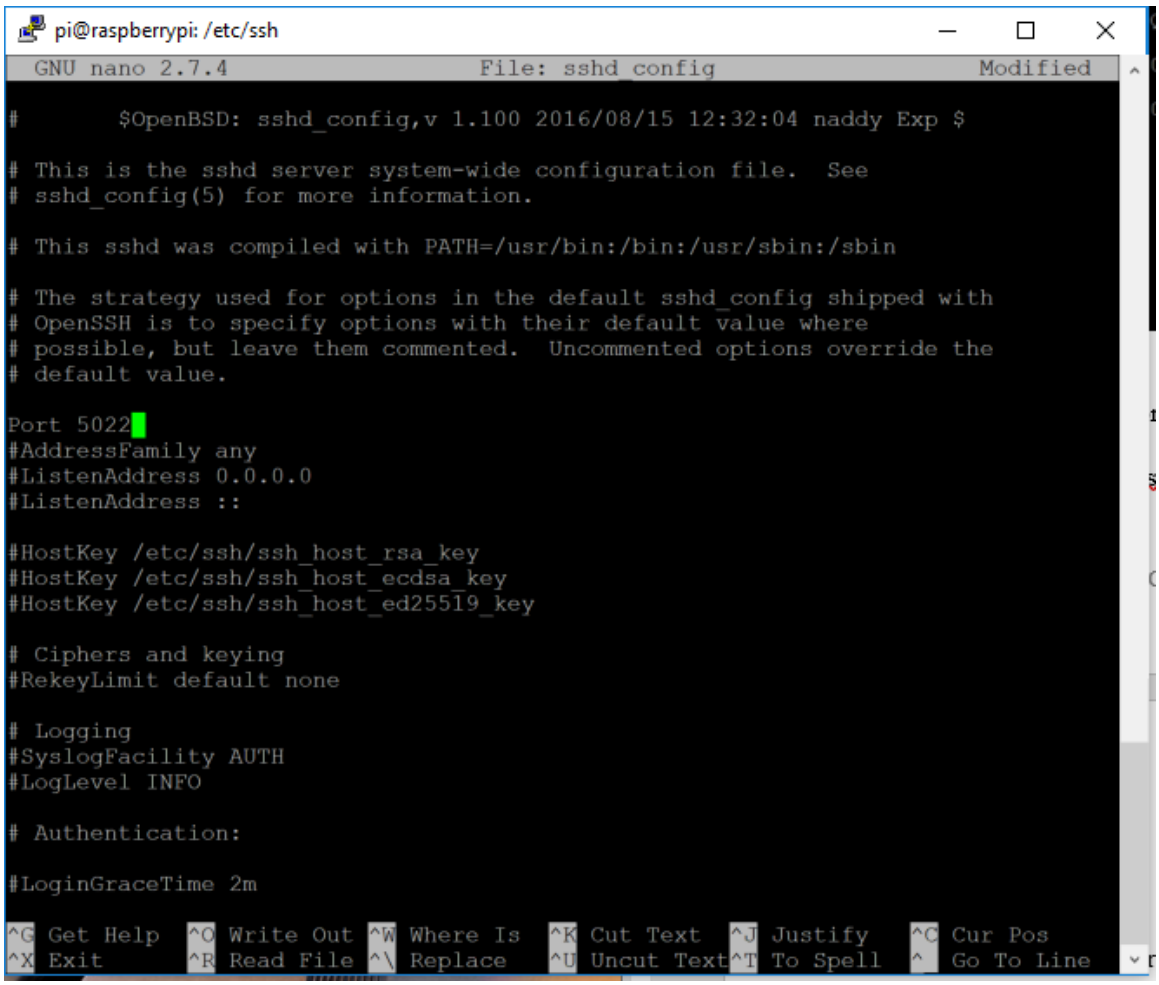


Change the SSH port:

```
cd /etc/ssh
```

```
sudo nano sshd_config
```

Uncomment the Port and change it to the new value. For my scenario, I used 5022.



Enter *Control-O* to write the changes to the file.

Enter *Control-X* to exit the nano editor.

The Pi must be restarted for the change to take effect.

Enter "`sudo reboot`" in the terminal window.

Once the Pi has rebooted, start a new session in the PuTTY application (with the new value for the port).

Remove the "pi" User from SSH Access

Most experts would recommend removing the default user, i.e. the "pi" account, from the system. However, I read that some of the applications and processes installed on Raspbian

require the "pi" user. As a compromise, I kept the pi user account but remove its access via the SSH interface. Before removing this access, create a new user that will have access via SSH.

To add a new user, enter in a terminal window:

```
sudo adduser <username>
```

In my scenario the command is:

```
sudo adduser jladd
```

You will be prompted for the new password and then asked to confirm the password.

Add the new user to the sudo group:

```
sudo adduser <username> sudo
```

In my scenario the command is:

```
sudo adduser jladd sudo
```

Ensure the change took effect by checking the permissions:

```
sudo su
```

If everything took effect, remove the pi user from SSH logins by invoking the nano text editor:

```
sudo nano /etc/ssh/sshd_config
```

Navigate to the end of the file and add the following:

```
AllowUsers <username>
```

In my scenario the line is:

```
AllowUsers jladd
```

Enter *Control-O* to write the change to the file.

Enter *Control-X* to exit the nano editor.

Enter the following to reboot the Pi:

```
sudo reboot
```

If you try to login via SSH with the pi user, the access will be denied.

If you try to login via SSH with the new user, you should have access.

Using MFA with Google Authenticator

Another security step is to configure the Pi to use MFA with the Google smart phone app. First install the Authenticator application on your smart phone.

In a terminal window on the Pi, enter:

```
sudo apt-get install libpam-google-authenticator
```

then:

```
google-authenticator
```

Enter the following command to invoke the nano editor:

```
sudo nano /etc/pam.d/sshd
```

Add the following text at the beginning of the file:

```
auth required pam_google_authenticator.so
```

Enter *Control-O* to write the change to the file.

Enter *Control-X* to exit the nano editor.

Now edit the sshd file. Enter the following command to invoke the nano editor:

```
sudo nano /etc/pam.d/sshd
```

Locate the line containing *ChallengeResponseAuthentication*. This option is set to "no" by default, change it to "yes".

Enter `Control-O` to write the change to the file.

Enter `Control-X` to exit the nano editor.

Enter the following to reboot the Pi:

```
sudo reboot
```

Now when a person tries to login to the Pi via the SSH interface, they will be prompted for the Google authenticator value first and, if successful, they will be prompted for the password for the user account. This approach avoids the situation where a hacker is guessing the password before encountering the Google authenticator challenge.

Require User Credentials with the GUI

The last recommended security step is to require user credentials when using the GUI. First open the terminal window or login via SSH.

Edit the configuration file for the desktop manager:

```
sudo nano /etc/lightdm/lightdm.conf
```

Disable the auto login option. Find the following line and comment it out.

```
auto-login-user=pi
```

becomes

```
#auto-login-user=pi
```

Enable the option to hide the list of users. Find the following line and change it:

```
greet-hide-users=false
```

becomes

```
greet-hide-users=true
```

Save the file and reboot. When the GUI appears, it will have a login screen.

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Configuring Raspbian for Greengrass

This section prepares the Pi for the AWS Greengrass code. First add a user and group for the Greengrass software. In a terminal window, enter the following commands:

```
sudo adduser --system ggc_user
sudo addgroup --system ggc_group
```

Enable hardlink and softlink protection at startup by editing a configuration file.

```
sudo nano /etc/sysctl.d/98-rpi.conf
```

Add the following lines to the end of the file:

```
fs.protected_hardlinks = 1
fs.protected_symlinks = 1
```

Enter *Control-O* to write the changes to the file.

Enter *Control-X* to exit the nano editor.

Enter the following to reboot the Pi:

```
sudo reboot
```

Enable and mount memory cgroups by first editing another configuration file:

```
sudo nano /boot/cmdline.txt
```

Append the following to the end of the line (NOT AS A NEW LINE)

```
cgroup_enable=memory cgroup_memory=1
```

Enter *Control-O* to write the changes to the file.

Enter *Control-X* to exit the nano editor.

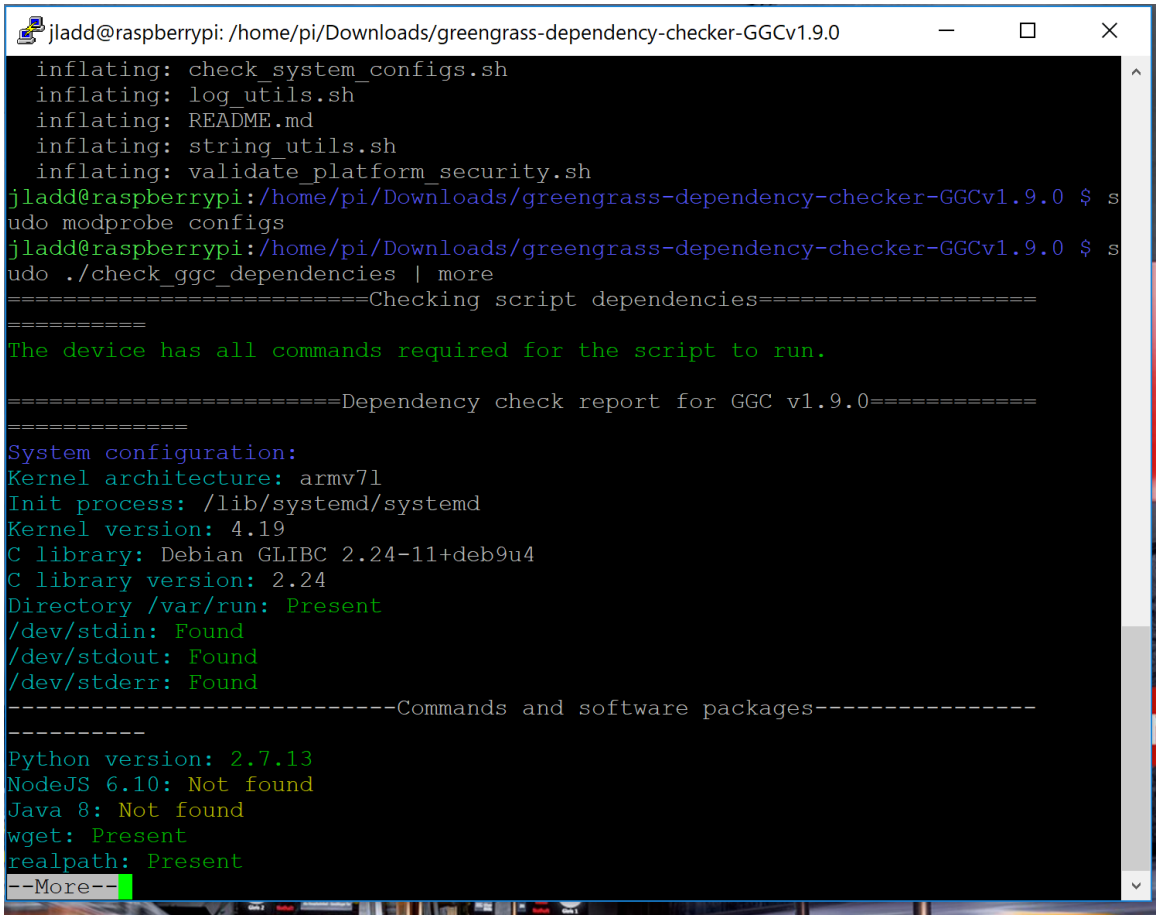
Enter the following to reboot the Pi:

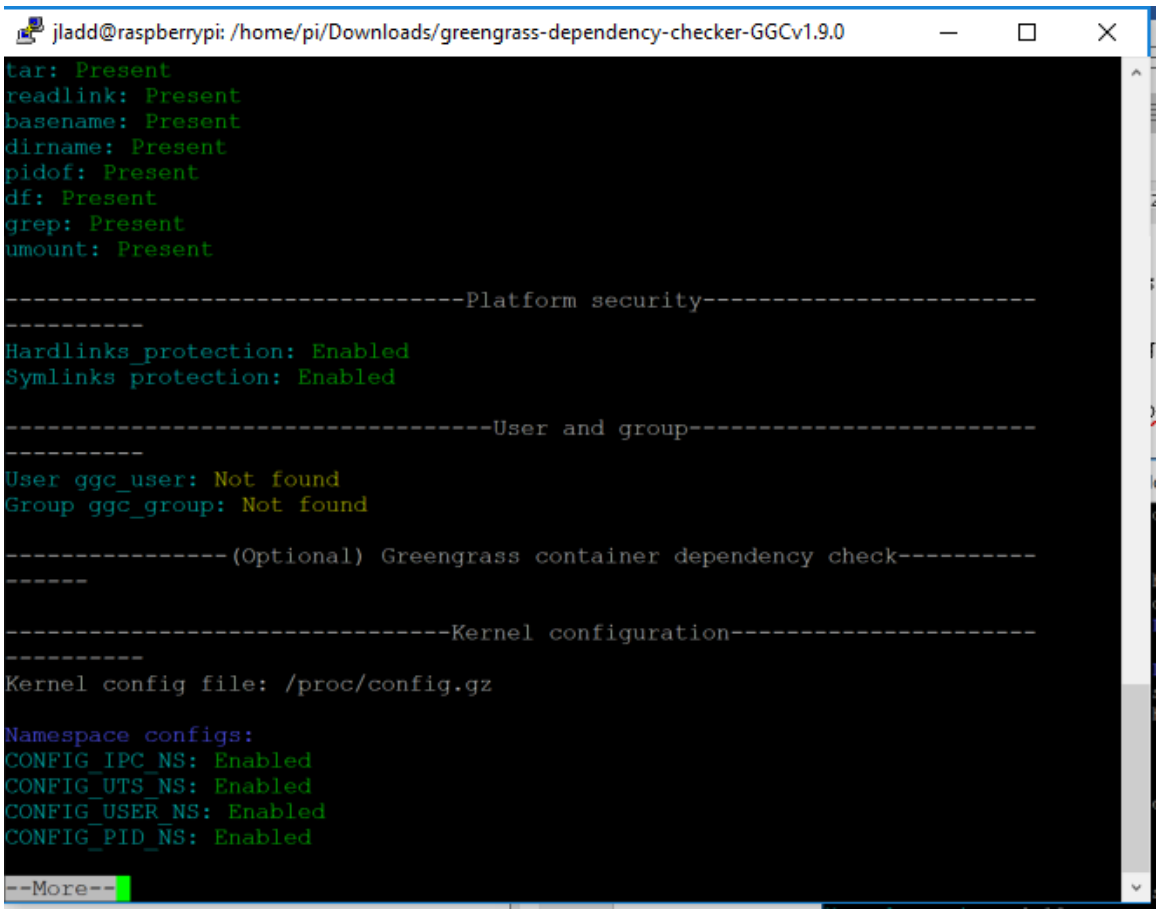
```
sudo reboot
```

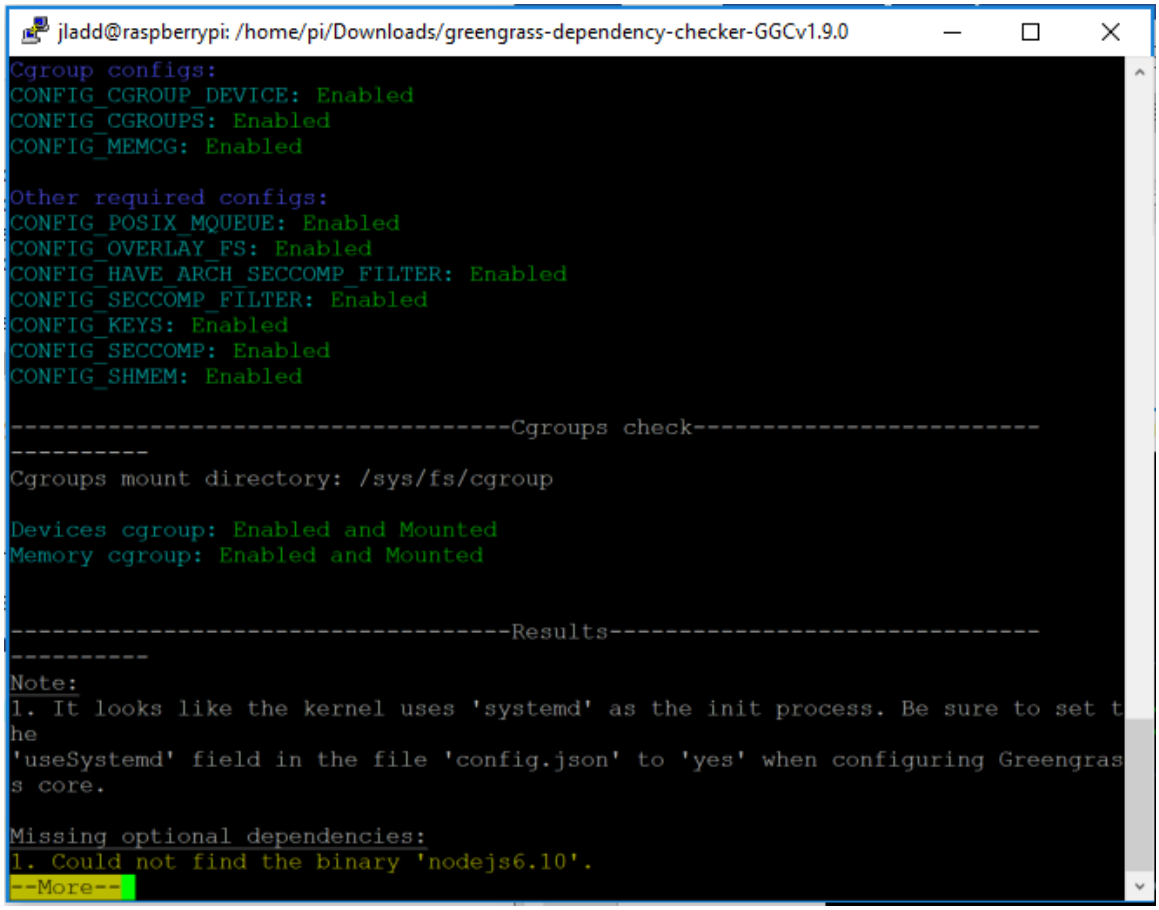
Time to check the dependencies for Greengrass. Download the validation program and execute it.

```
cd /home/pi/Downloads
sudo mkdir greengrass-dependency-checker-GGCv1.9.0
cd greengrass-dependency-checker-GGCv1.9.0
```

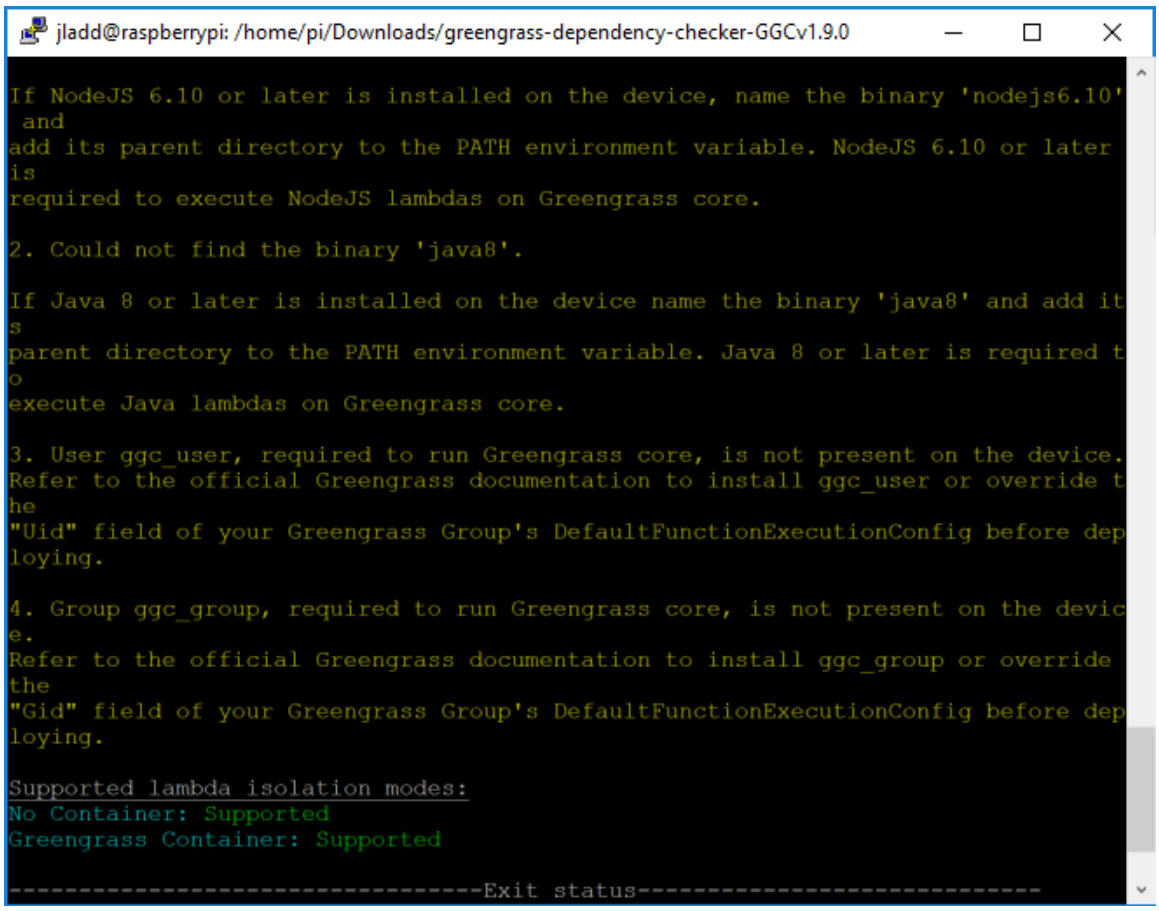
```
sudo wget https://github.com/aws-samples/aws-greengrass-samples/raw/master/greengrass-dependency-checker-GGCv1.9.0.zip

sudo unzip greengrass-dependency-checker-GGCv1.9.0.zip

sudo modprobe configs

sudo ./check_ggc_dependencies | more
```

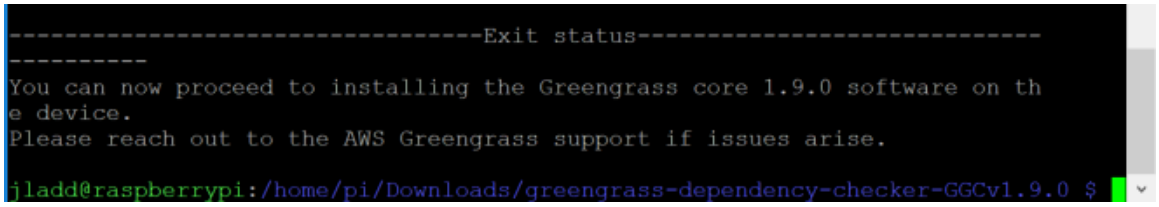






NOTE: You can ignore the warning message regarding Node.js and Java.





If everything looks okay, you are ready to install the Greengrass Core code in the next section.

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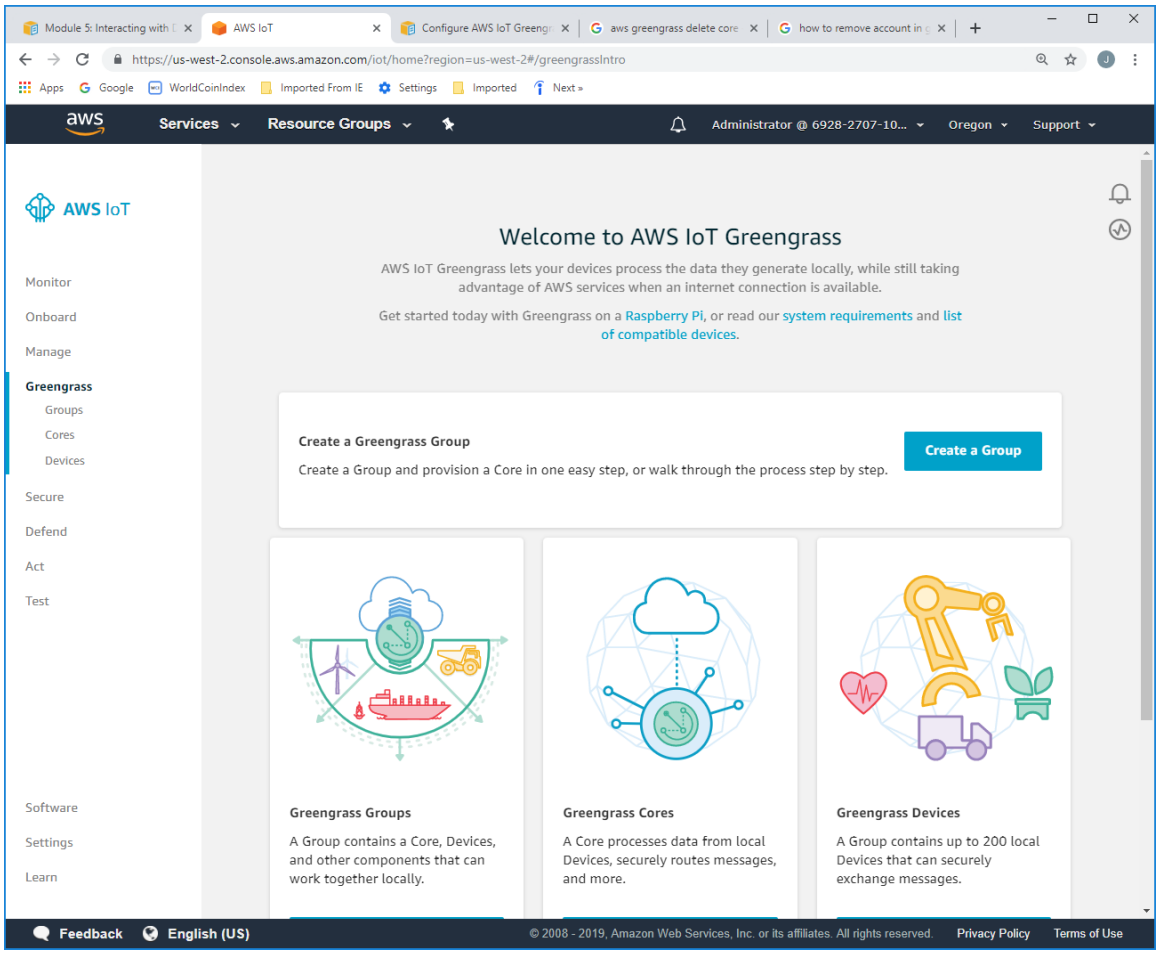
Installing the Greengrass Core

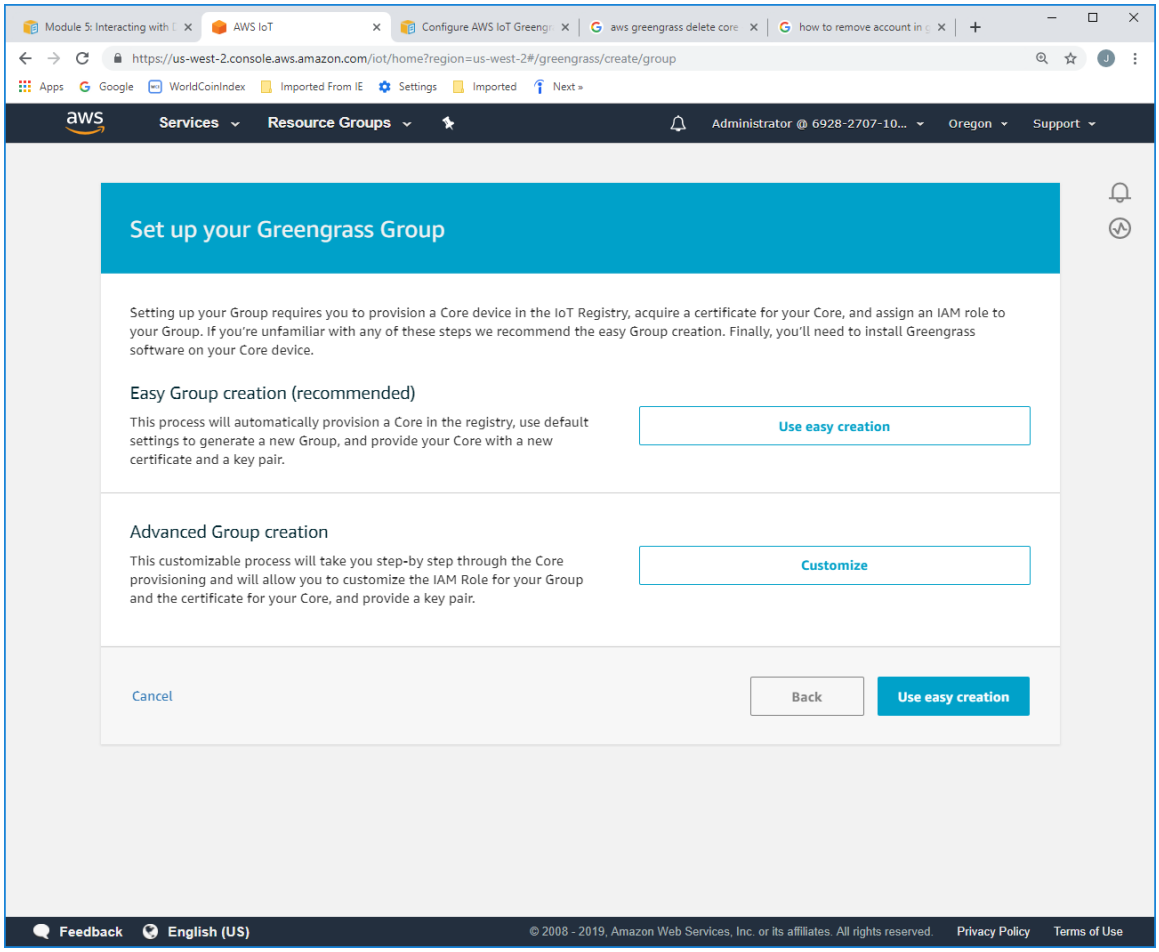
This section describes the steps needed to install the Greengrass Core software on the Pi. The first step is the create a Greengrass Group.

Login to ***AWS Console***

Select ***IoT Greengrass*** (under the ***Internet of Things***). The following page should appear:

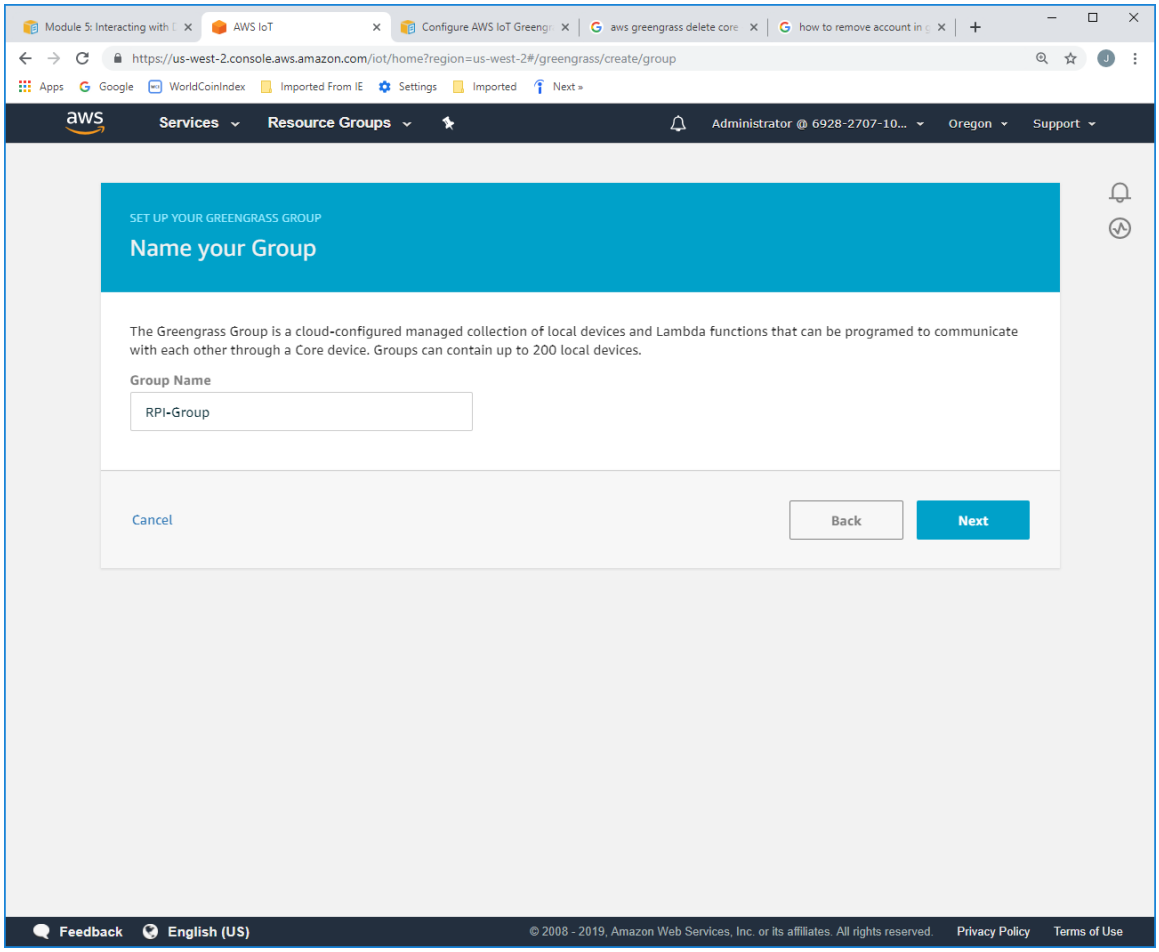


Click the ***Create a Group*** button.

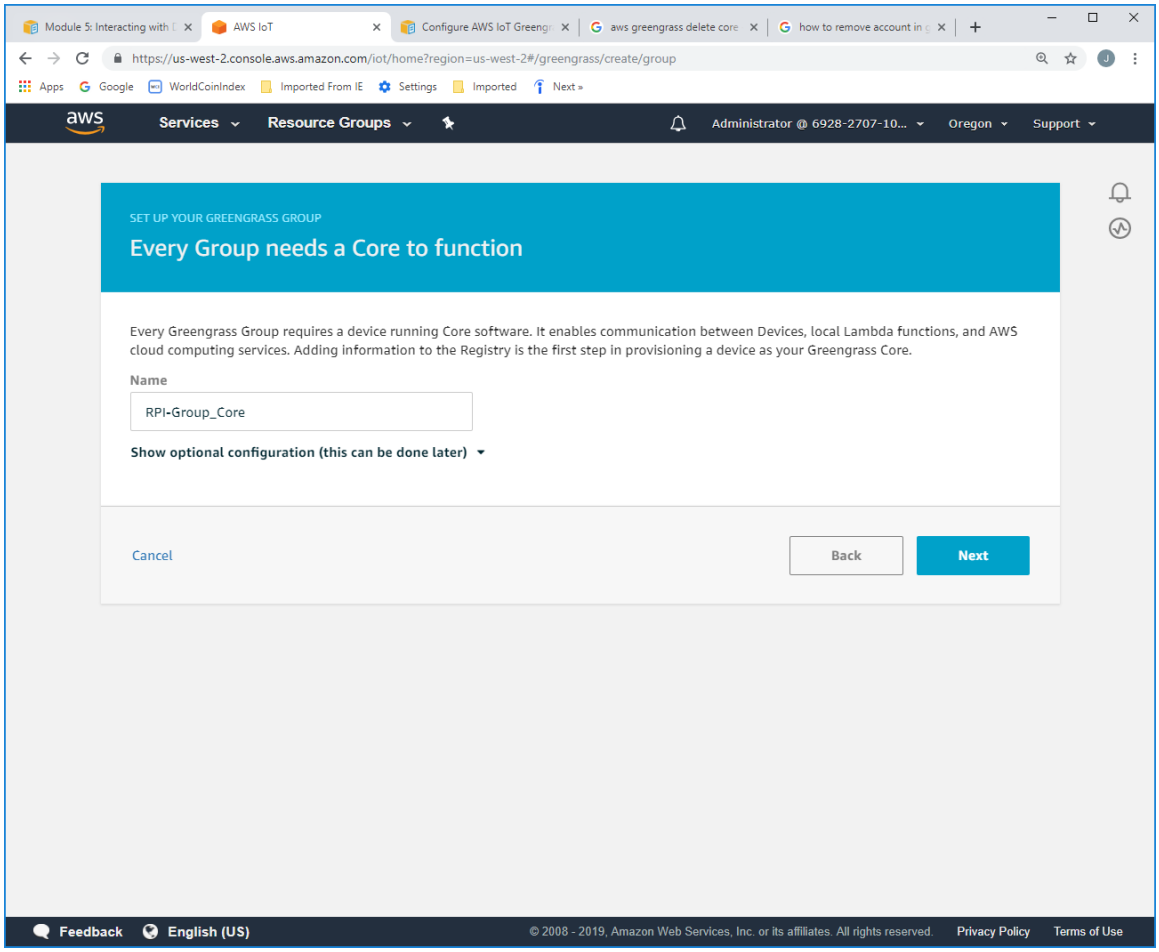


Click the ***Use easy creation*** button.

On the next page, enter the name of your Greengrass group.



Click the ***Next*** button. The following page should appear:

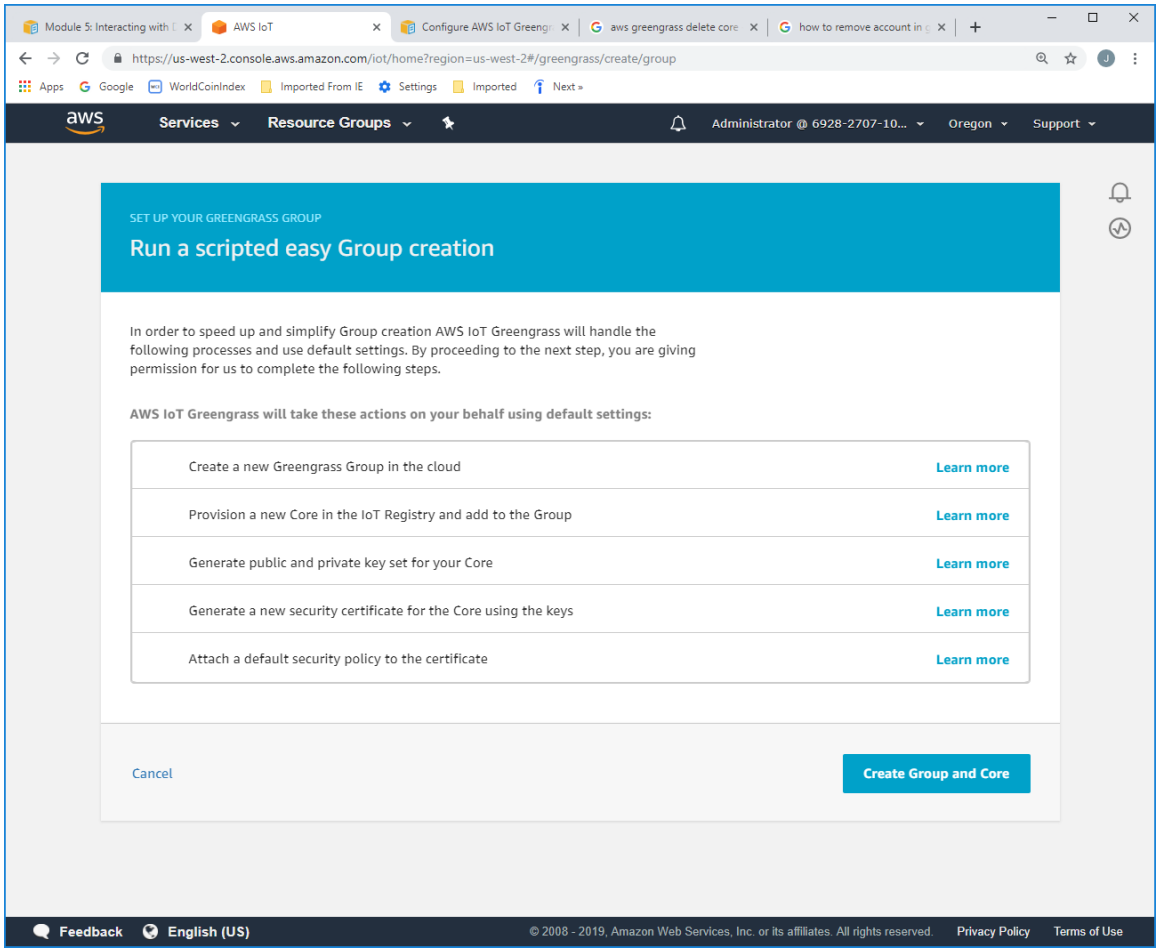


Every Greengrass group requires one device to run the Core software. Enter the name of the device to host the Core software for the new group.

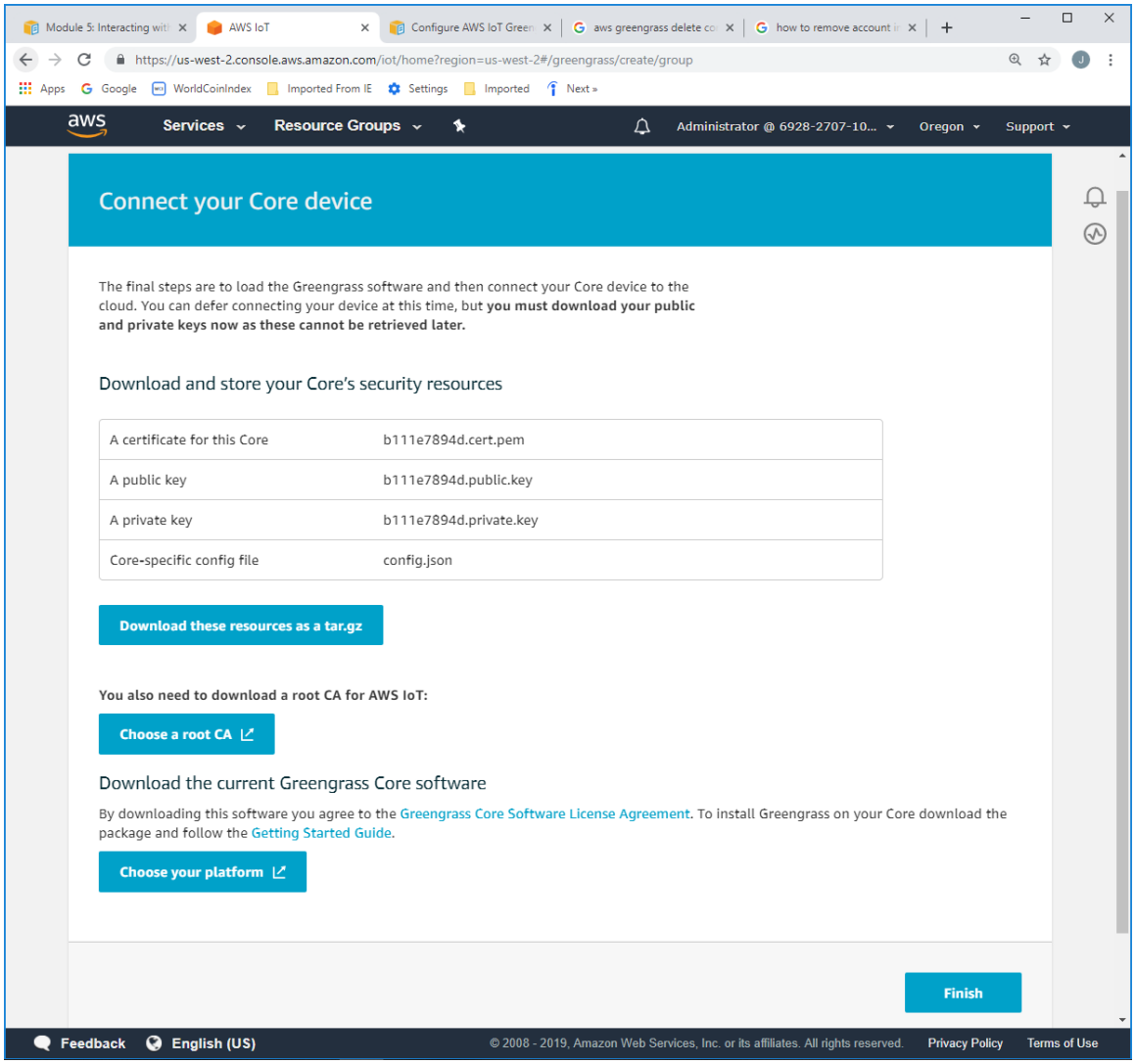
Press the ***Next*** button.

The next page describes all of the provisioning steps that will be automatically executed for the new group and core. This is one of the benefits of using the Greengrass service.

Press the ***Create Group and Core*** button.



Once the processing is completed, the following page will be shown:



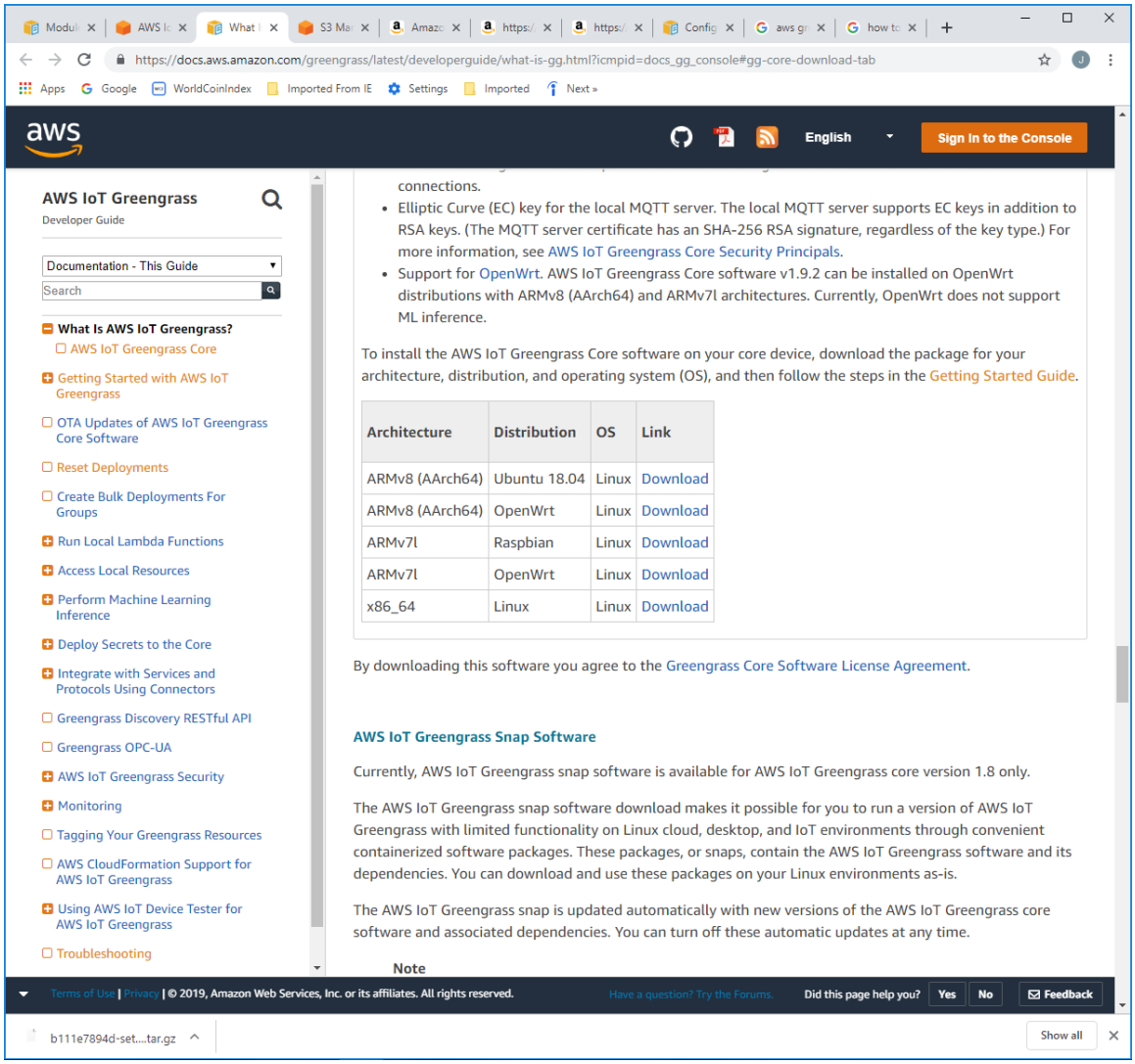
Click the ***Dowload these resources as a tar.gz*** button.

The file *b111e7894d-setup.tar.gz* was downloaded. This file will be used later on.

Don't worry about the ***Choose a root CA*** button. The CA file will be downloaded later on.

Click the ***Choose your platform*** button.

The following page will be show:

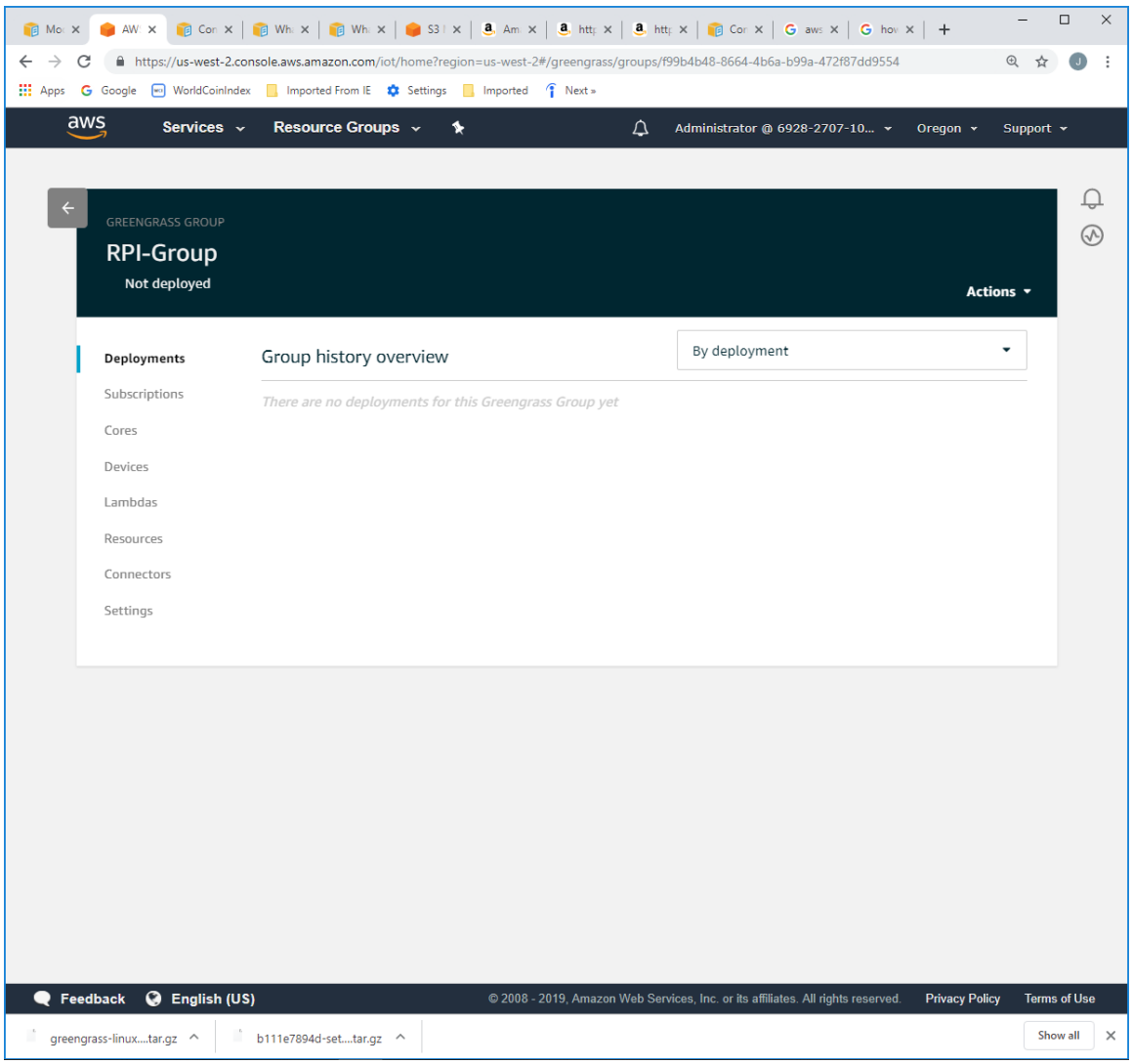


Click the ***Download*** link for the Raspbian distribution.

The *greengrass-linux-armv7l-1.9.2.tar.gz* file is download.

Return to the ***Connect your Core device*** page and click on the ***Finish*** button.

The following page should appear:



If you have been following this section closely, you downloaded two .gz files to your computer. We need to copy them to our Pi. You can use tools like WinSCP or PuTTY pscp. Another approach is to upload them from the computer to a S3 bucket and then download them to the Pi. This is approached that I used.

In the ***AWS Console***, click on the ***S3*** link under the ***Storage*** category.

Click on the ***Create bucket*** button.

Enter the bucket name.

Click the ***Next*** button.

Click the ***Next*** button.

Click the ***Next*** button.

Click the ***Create bucket*** button.

The new bucket should appear in the S3 buckets list.

Click on the newly created bucket.

Click on the ***Upload*** button.

Click on the ***Add files*** button.

Select the two .gz files.

Click on the ***Upload*** button.

The two files have been uploaded to the S3 bucket. Now let's download them to the Pi.

Login to the Pi console.

Open the web browser.

Login to the ***AWS Console***.

In the ***AWS Console***, click on the ***S3*** link under the ***Storage*** category.

Click on the newly created bucket.

Check the box on the first file.

Click on the ***Download*** button.

After the file has download, close the dialog box.

Check the box on the second file.

Click on the ***Download*** button.

After the file has download, close the dialog box.

Open a terminal window on the Pi.

The files were downloaded to the */home/pi/Downloads* directory.

Change to that directory.

```
cd /home/pi/Downloads
```

Decompress the software. The first will create a */greengrass* directory

```
sudo tar -xzvf <os file name> -C /
```

In my scenario the line is:

```
sudo tar -xzvf greengrass-linux-armv7l-1.9.2.tar.gz -C /
```

This will decompress the security resources in a */greengrass/config* folder.

```
sudo tar -xzvf <security file name> -C /greengrass
```

In my scenario the line is:

```
sudo tar -xzvf b111e7894d-setup.tar.gz -C /greengrass
```

Download the appropriate ATS root CA certificate.

```
cd /greengrass/certs/
```

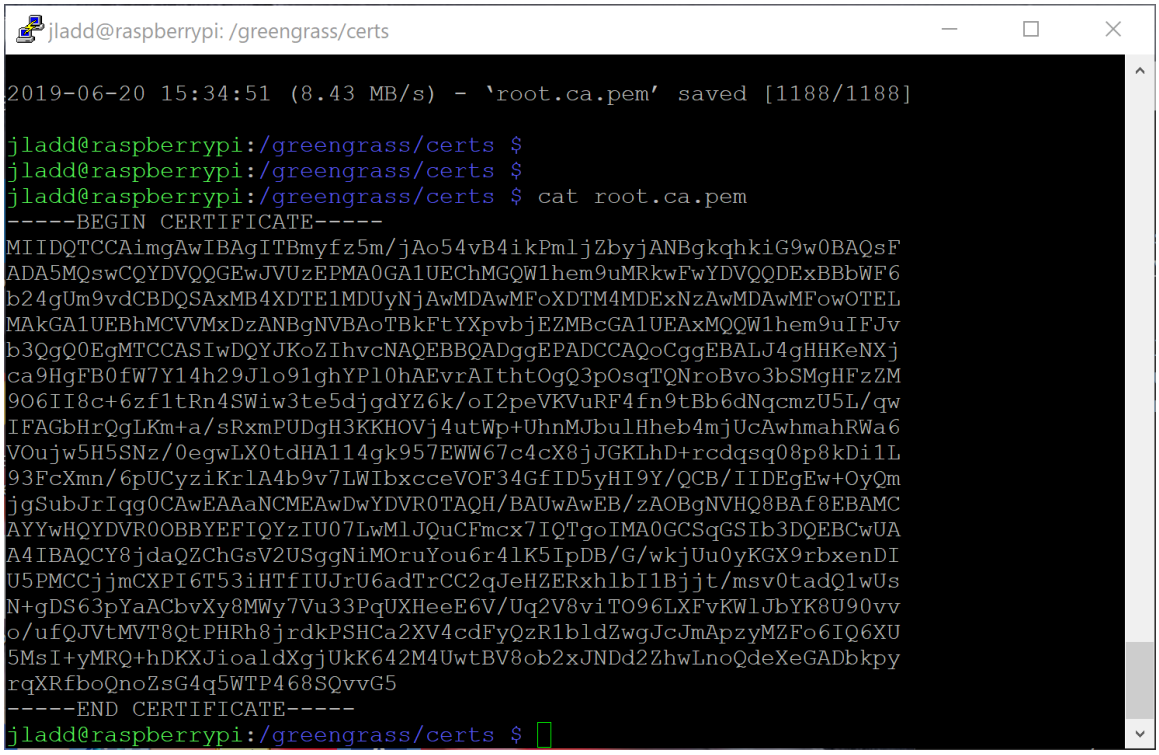
(The following text should be treated as a single line command)

```
sudo wget -O root.ca.pem
      https://www.amazontrust.com/repository/AmazonRootCA1.pem
```

Execute the following command to confirm:

```
cat root.ca.pem
```

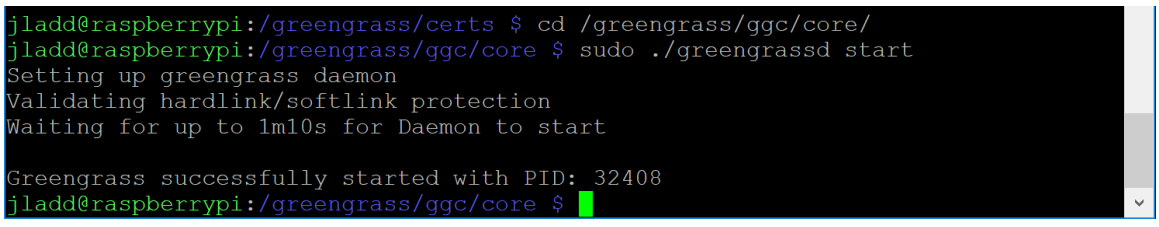
The results from the command should appear as:



Start the Greengrass server.

```
cd /greengrass/ggc/core/

sudo ./greengrassd start
```



To confirm that the software is running, execute the following command:

```
ps aux | grep PID-number
```

In my scenario the line is:

```
ps aux | grep 32408
```

```
jladd@raspberrypi:/greengrass/ggc/core $ ps aux | grep 32408
root     32408  0.9  1.4 899560 13436 pts/1    Sl   15:39   0:00 /greengrass/ggc
/packages/1.9.2/bin/daemon -core-dir=/greengrass/ggc/packages/1.9.2 -port=8000 -
connectionManager=true -cloudSpooler=true -shadow=true -shadowSync=true -tes=tru
e -deviceCertificateManager=true -secretManager=true
jladd    32684  0.0  0.0   4372   548 pts/1    S+   15:41   0:00 grep --color=au
to 32408
jladd@raspberrypi:/greengrass/ggc/core $
```

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Deploying a Lambda Function to the Pi

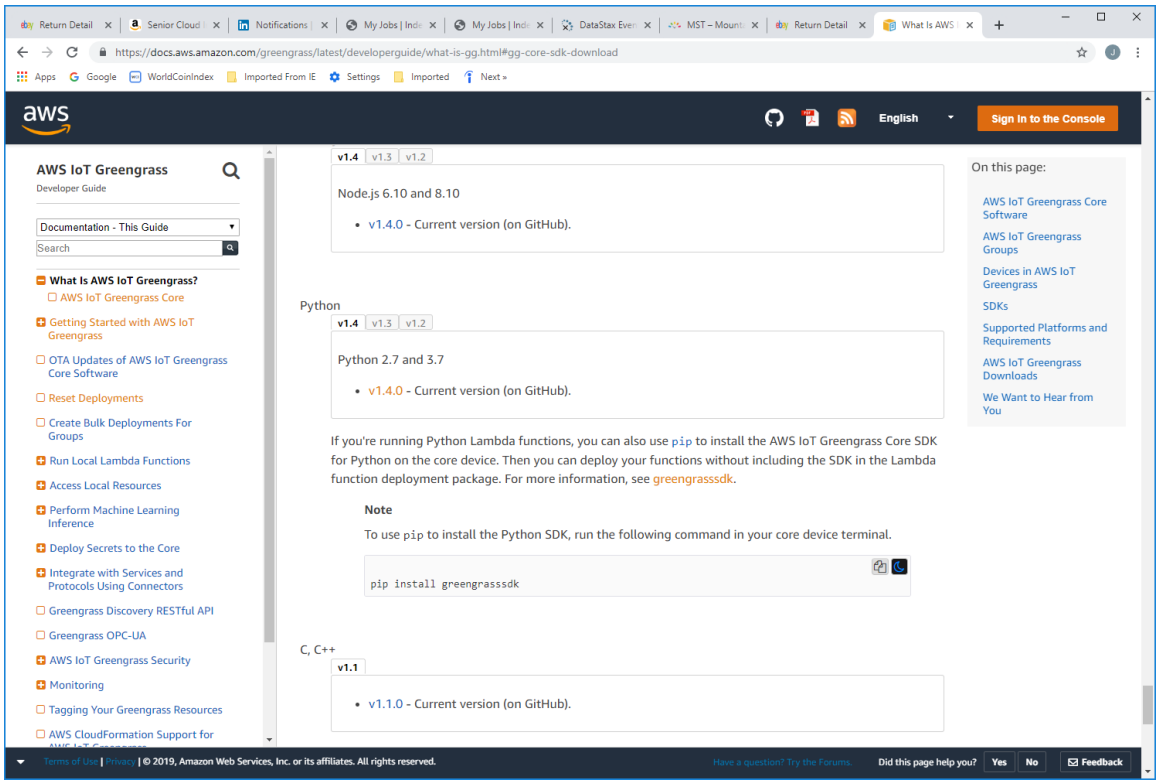
This section deploys a Python Lambda function to the Pi. The Greengrass SDK and a Python script file will be combined into a zip file and then deployed to the Pi via the Greengrass console.

First, let's download the SDK to your computer.

Navigate to the download page located at the following link:

https://docs.aws.amazon.com/greengrass/latest/developerguide/what-is-gg.html#gg-core-sdk-download

Navigate to the section of the page that looks like the following:



Click on the *v1.4.0* link in the *Python* section.

On the GitHub page, download the zip file.

The *aws-greengrass-core-sdk-python-master.zip* file is downloaded.

Extract all of the files in the zip file.

The top-level folder is *aws-greengrass-core-sdk-python-master* with subfolders of *examples* and *greengrasssdk*.

The first example file is that we will use is the */examples/greengrassHelloWorld.py.*

Here is the code:

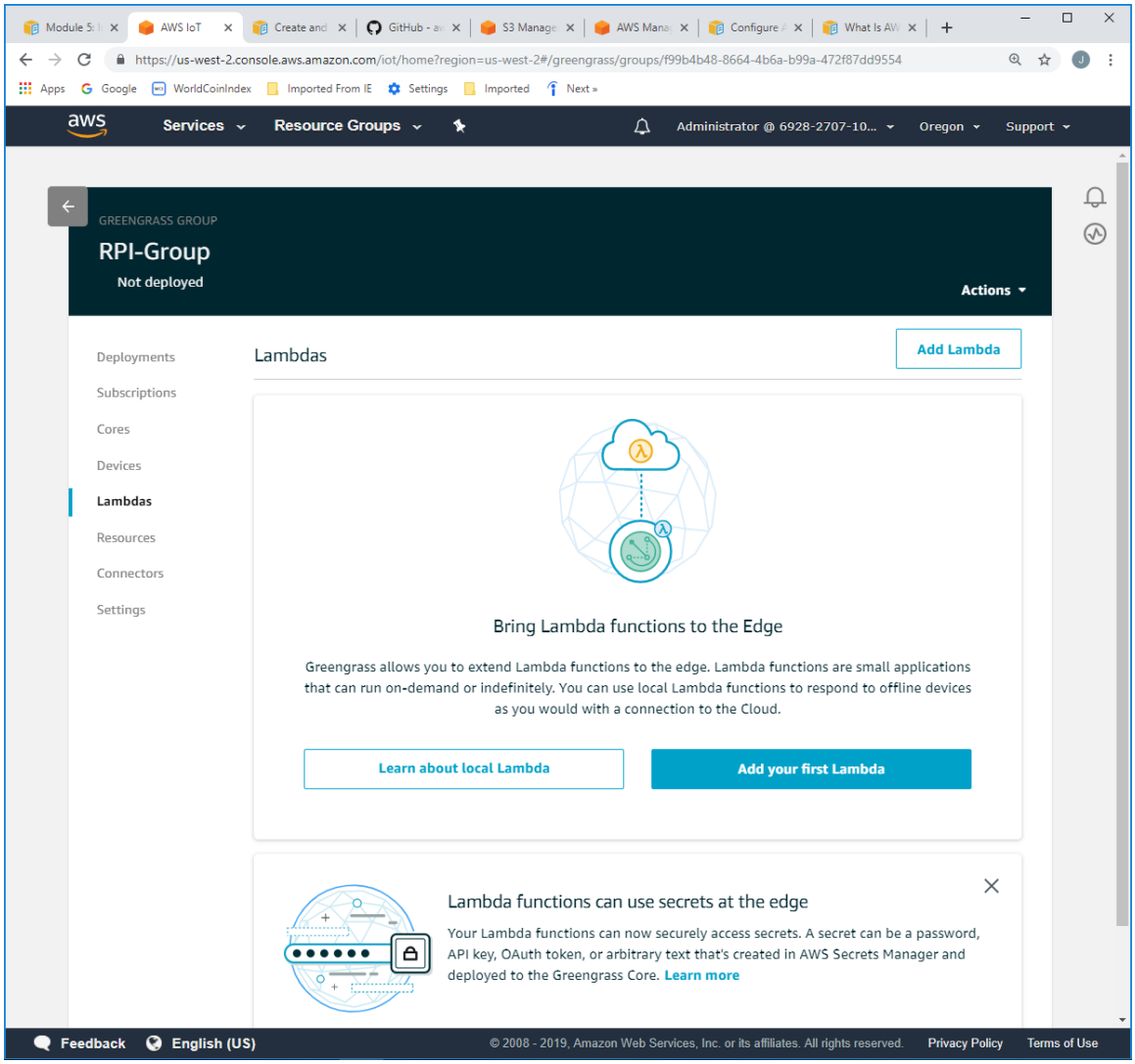
```
#
# Copyright 2010-2017 Amazon.com, Inc. or its affiliates. All Rights Reserved.
#

# greengrassHelloWorld.py
# Demonstrates a simple publish to a topic using Greengrass core sdk
# This lambda function will retrieve underlying platform information and send
# a hello world message along with the platform information to the topic
# 'hello/world'. The function will sleep for five seconds, then repeat.
# Since the function is long-lived it will run forever when deployed to a
# Greengrass core.  The handler will NOT be invoked in our example since
# the we are executing an infinite loop.

import greengrasssdk
import platform
from threading import Timer

# Creating a greengrass core sdk client
client = greengrasssdk.client('iot-data')

# Retrieving platform information to send from Greengrass Core
my_platform = platform.platform()

# When deployed to a Greengrass core, this code will be executed immediately
# as a long-lived lambda function.  The code will enter the infinite while
# loop below.
# If you execute a 'test' on the Lambda Console, this test will fail by
# hitting the execution timeout of three seconds.  This is expected as
# this function never returns a result.

def greengrass_hello_world_run():
    if not my_platform:
        client.publish(
            topic='hello/world',
            payload='Hello world! Sent from Greengrass Core.')
    else:
        client.publish(
            topic='hello/world',
            payload='Hello world! Sent from '
                    'Greengrass Core running on platform: {}'
                    .format(my_platform))

    # Asynchronously schedule this function to be run again in 5 seconds
    Timer(5, greengrass_hello_world_run).start()

# Start executing the function above
greengrass_hello_world_run()
```

```
# This is a dummy handler and will not be invoked
# Instead the code above will be executed in an infinite loop for our example
def function_handler(event, context):
    return
```

Create a zip file (`hello_world_python_lambda.zip`) that includes the */examples/greengrassHelloWorld.py* file and the *greengrasssdk* folder.

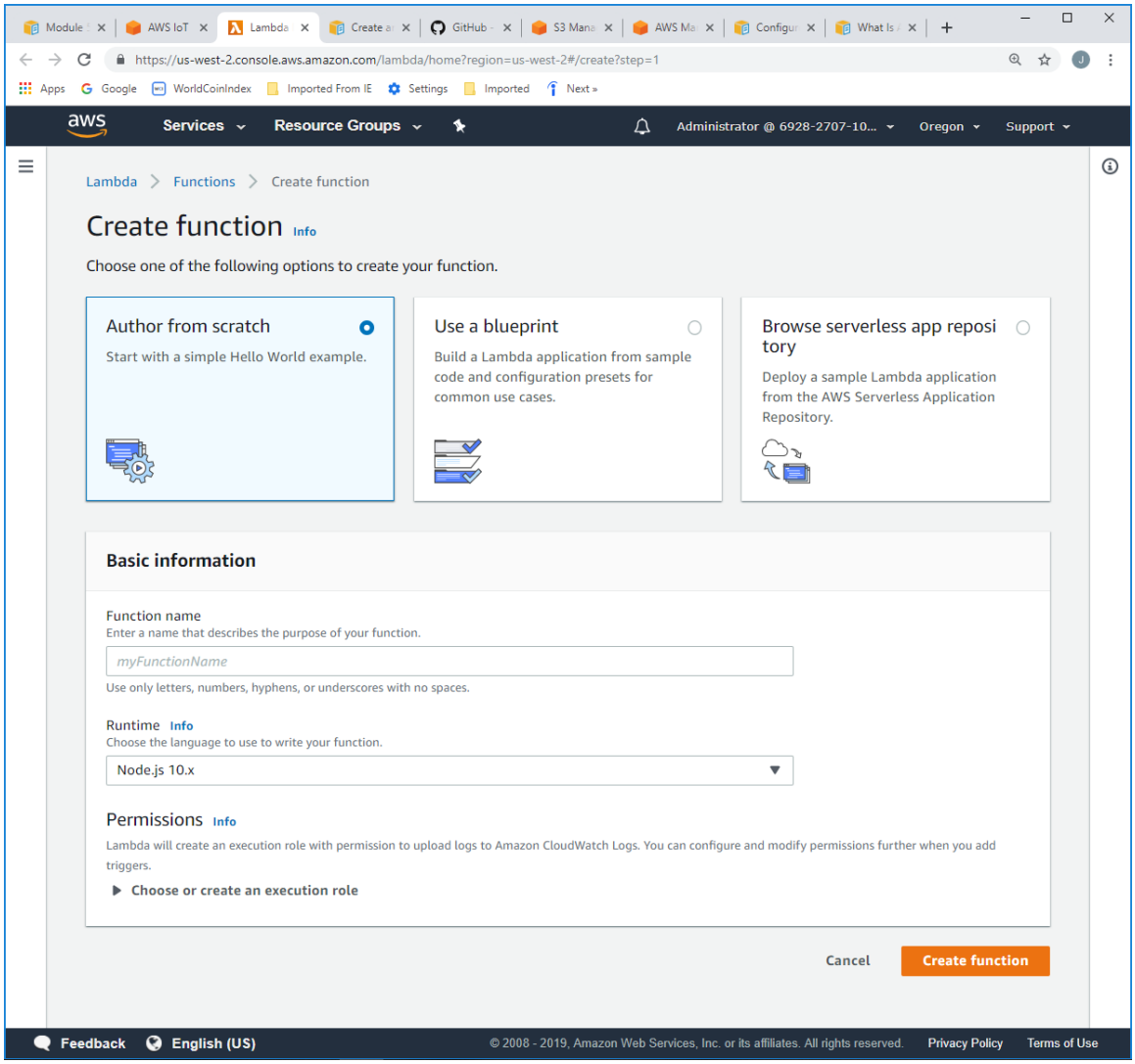
Navigate back to your Greengrass group (i.e. in my example this is the **RPI-Group**) page in the ***AWS Console***.

Click on the ***Lambdas*** link.



Click on the ***Add Lambda*** button.

Click on the ***Create new Lambda*** button.

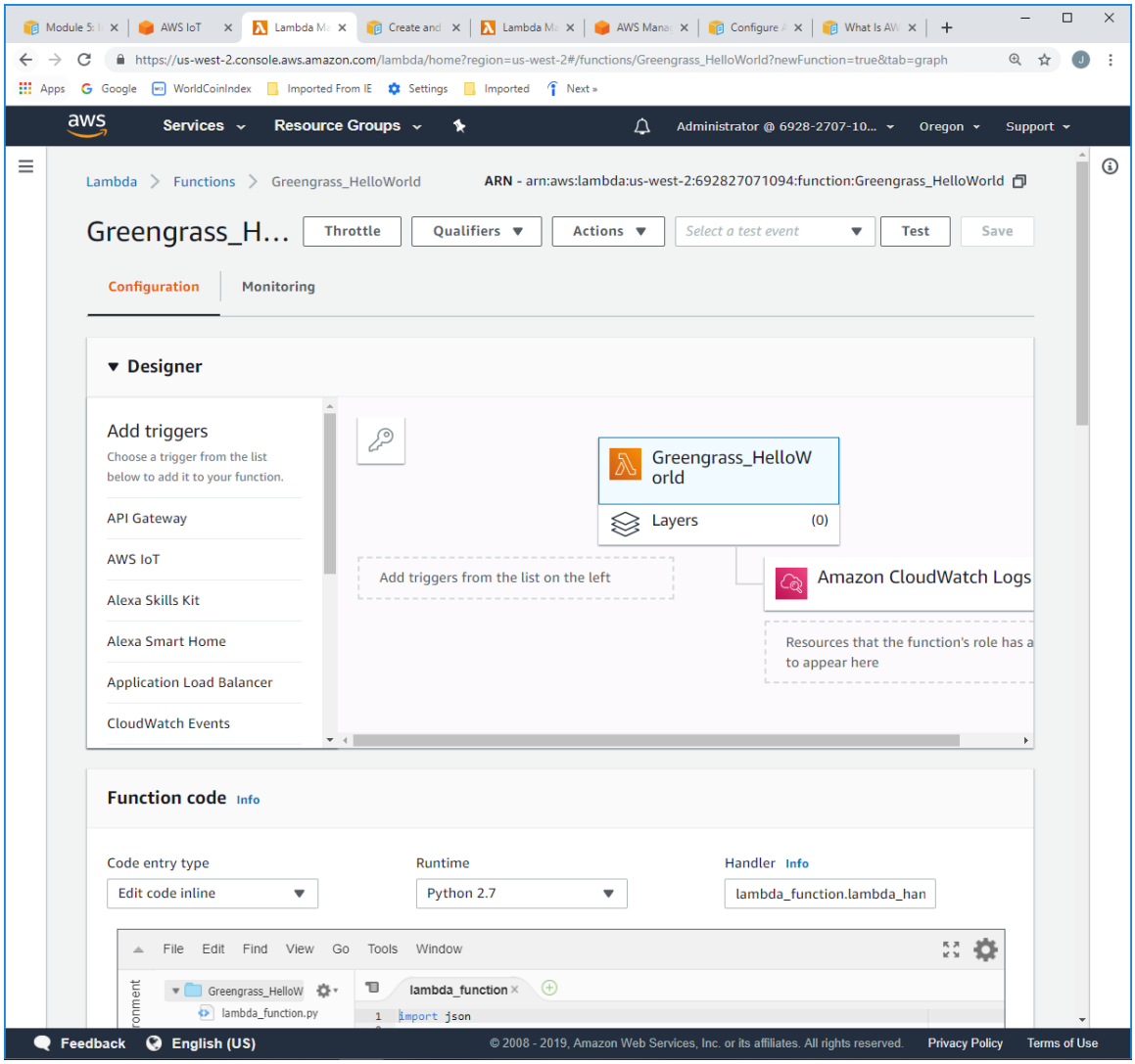


Select the ***Author from scratch*** option.

In the *Function Name* field, enter “Greengrass_HelloWorld”

In the *Runtime* field, select **Python 2.7**

Click on the ***Create function*** button.



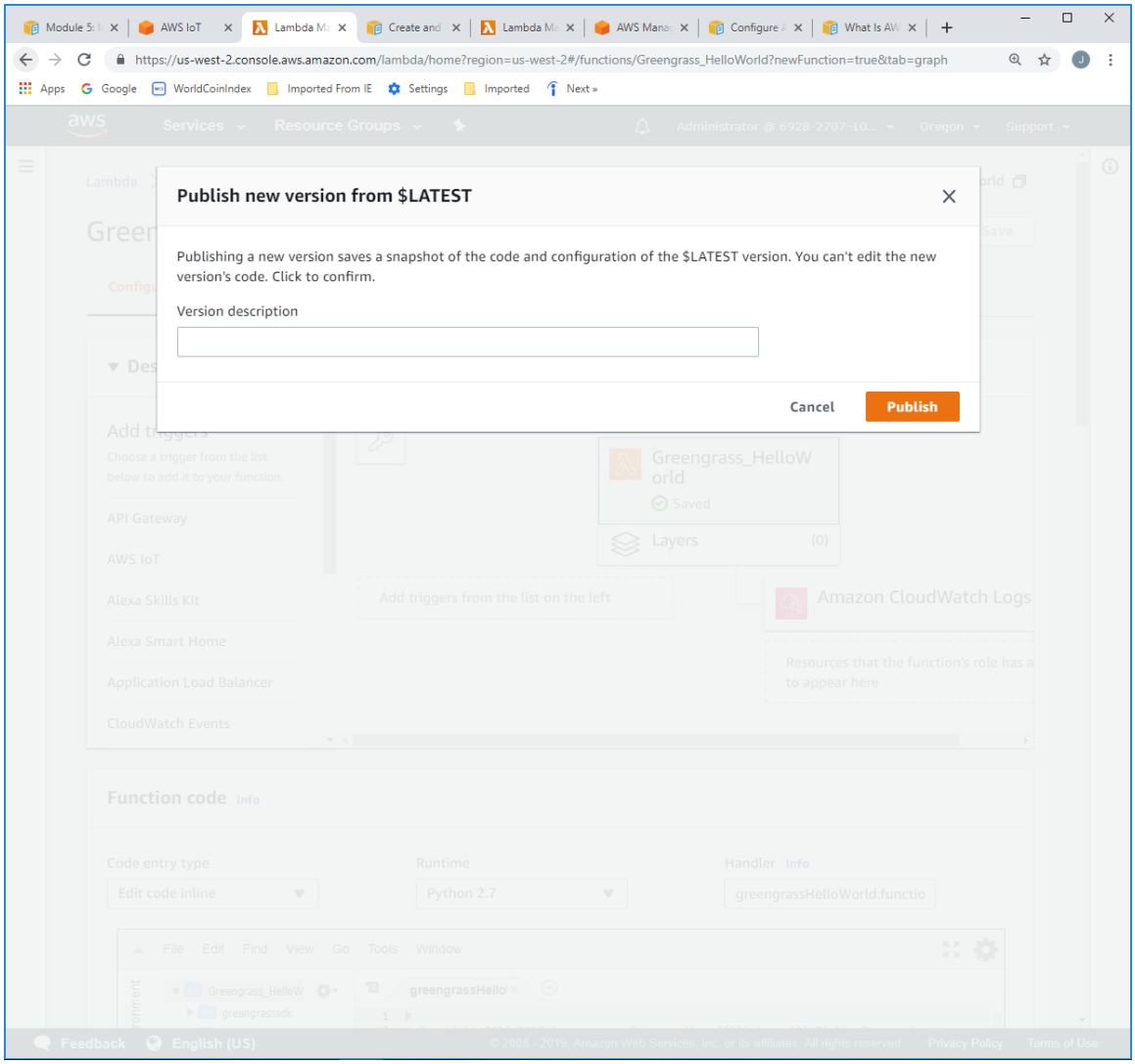
In the *Function code* section, select the ***Upload a .zip file*** option in the *Code entry type* field.

In the *Handler* field, enter "`greengrassHelloWorld.function_handler`"

Click on the ***Upload*** button and upload the *hello_world_python_lambda.zip* file.

Click on the ***Save*** button.

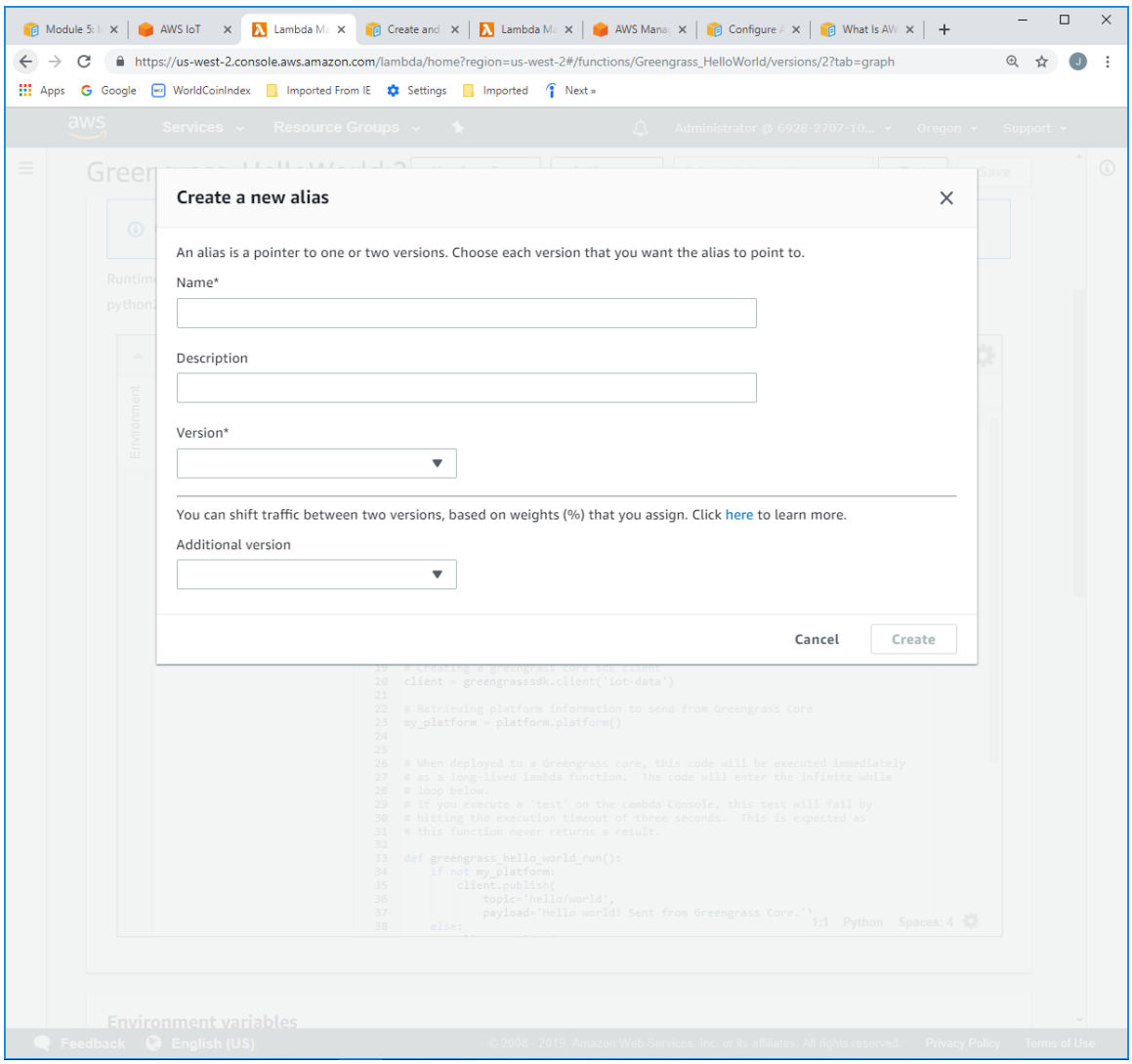
In the *Actions* field at the top of the page, select the ***Publish new version*** option.



In the *Version description* field, enter “First version”.

Click on the ***Publish*** button.

In the *Actions* field at the top of the page, select the ***Create alias*** option.



In the *Name* field, enter "GG_HelloWorld".

In the *Version* field, enter "1".

Click the ***Create*** button.

Navigate to the ***AWS Console***.

Select the ***IoT Greengrass*** link.

On the left side of the page, select ***Groups*** in the Greengrass section.

Click on the group that was created earlier.

Click on the ***Lambdas*** link.

Click on the ***Add Lambda*** button.

Click on the ***Use existing Lambda*** button.

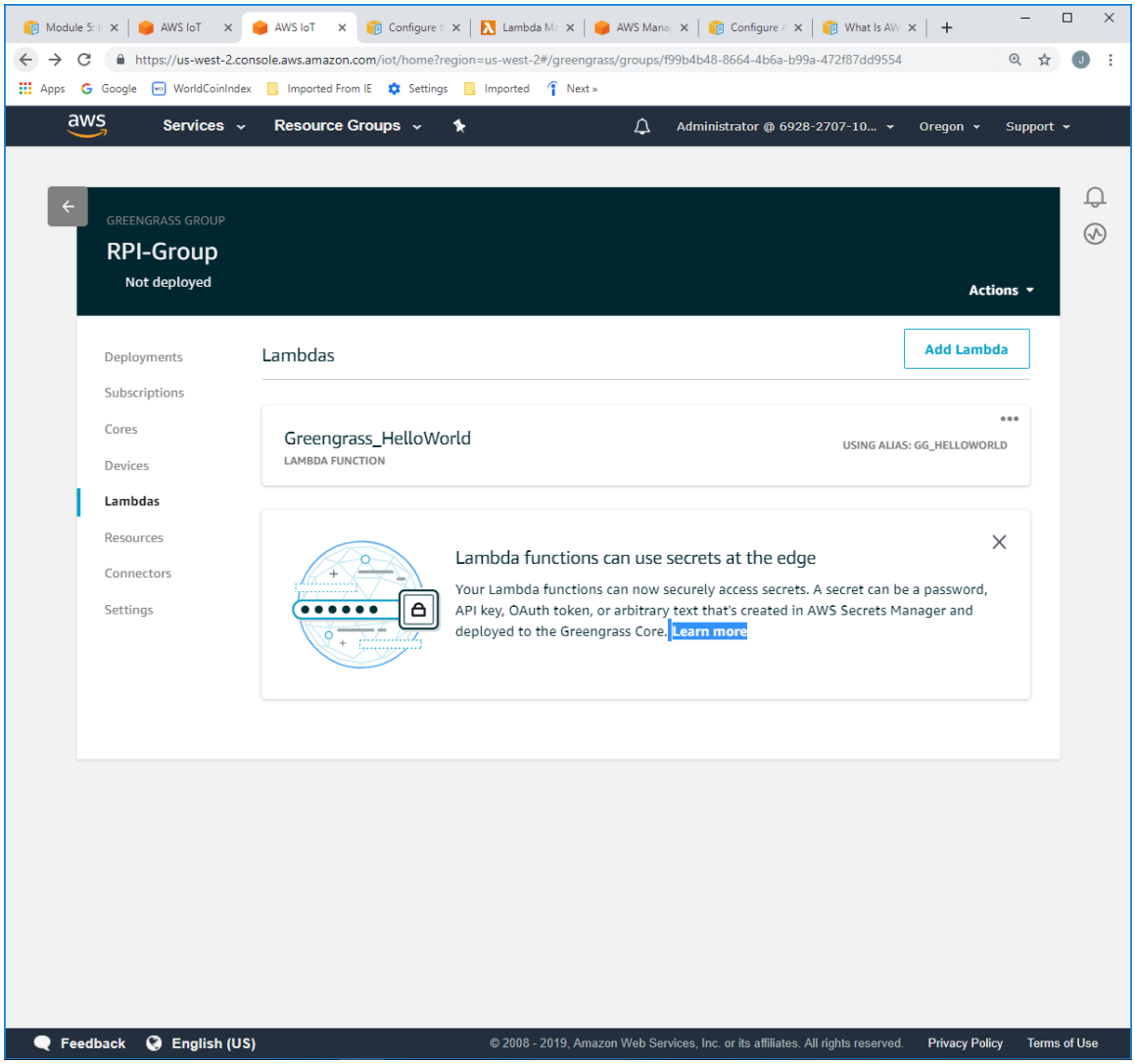
Select the ***Greengrass_HelloWorld*** item.

Click on the ***Next*** button.

Select the ***Alias:GG_HelloWorld*** item.

Click on the ***Finish*** button.

The list of Lambdas for the Group should appear.



Edit the *Greengrass_HelloWorld* function.

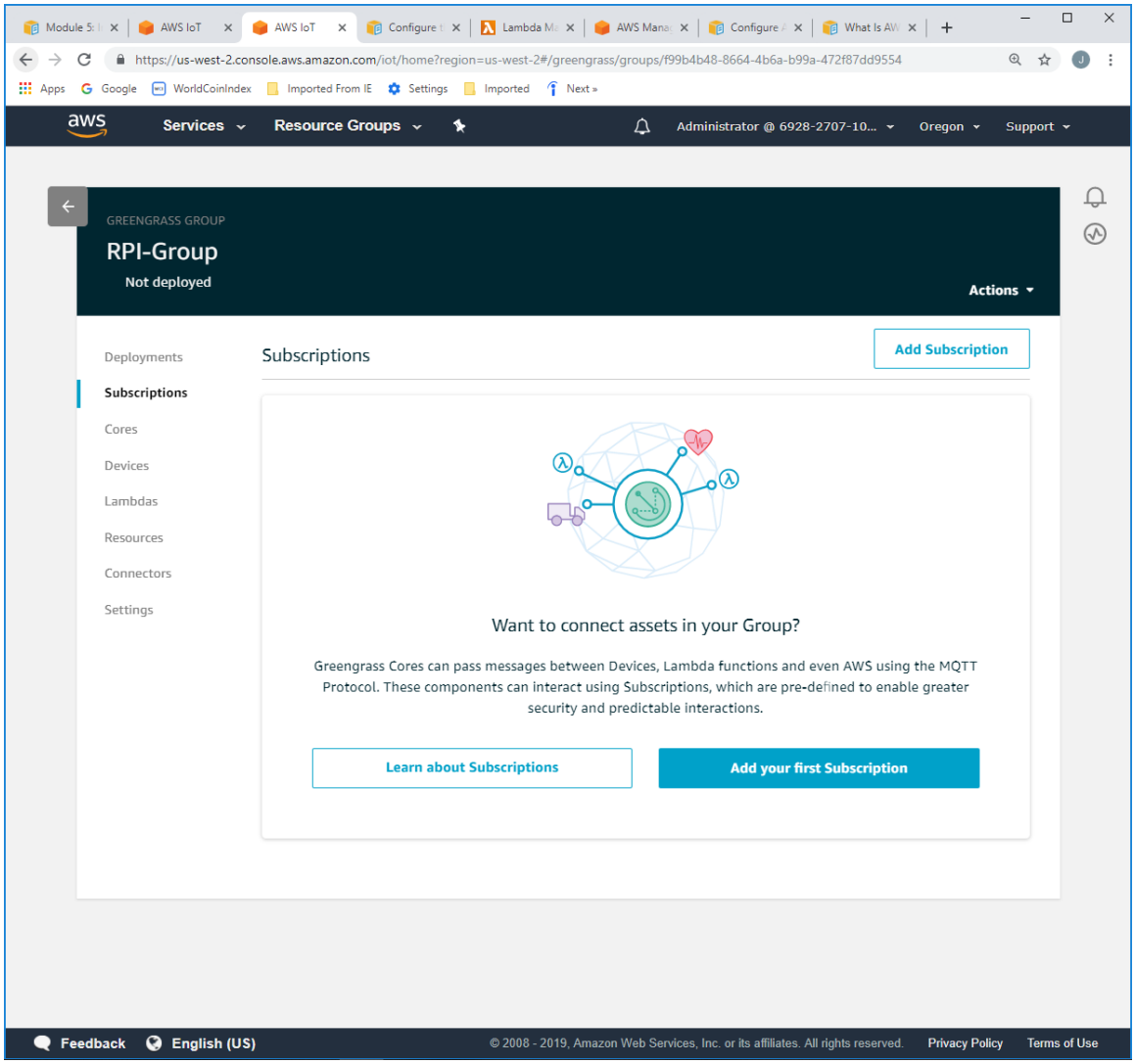
Set the *Timeout* field to 25 seconds.

Set the *Lambda lifecycle* to ***Make this function long-lived and keep it running indefinitely***.

Click the ***Update*** button.

Now create a subscription within the group.

Click on the ***Subscriptions*** link.



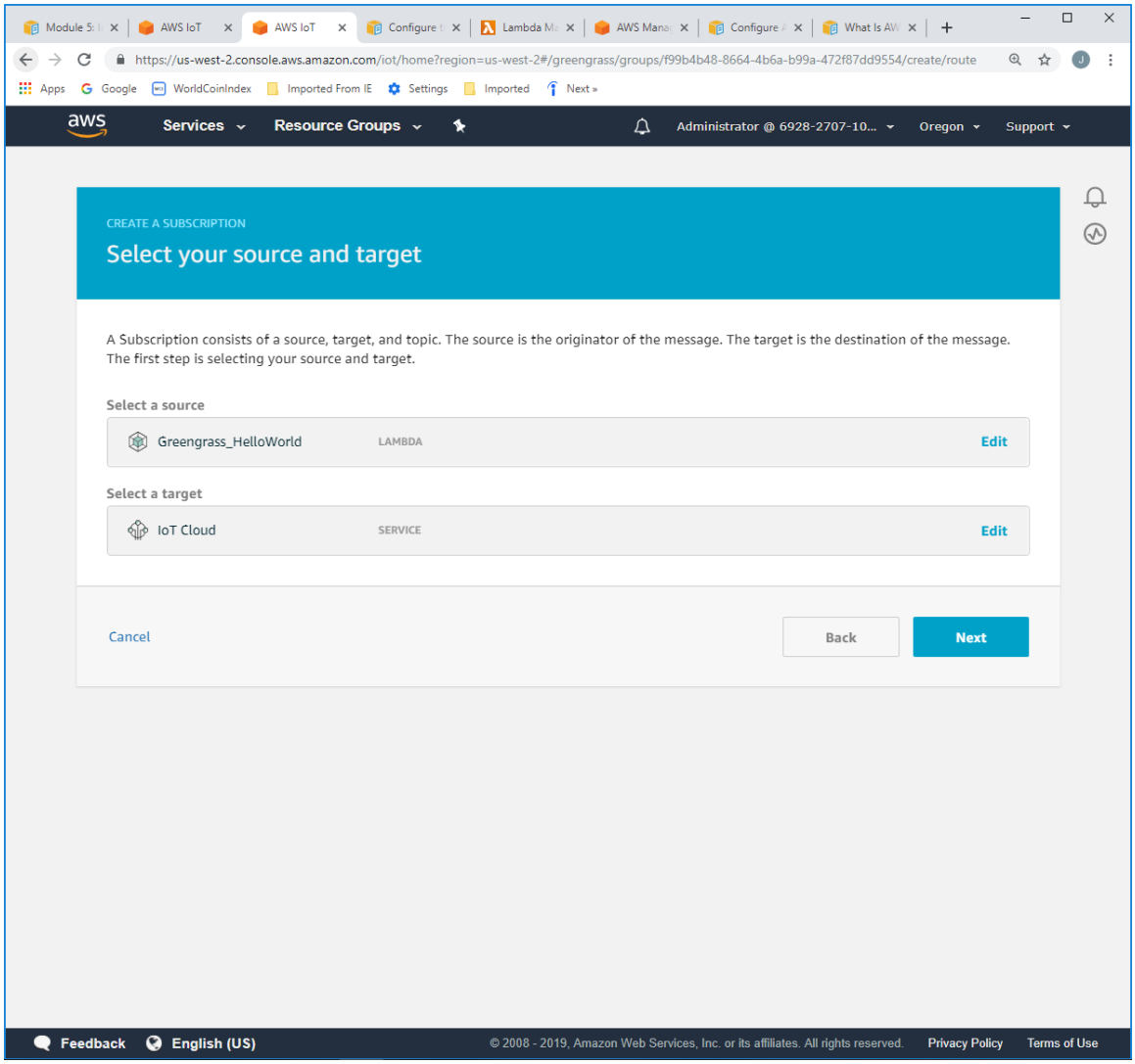
Click on the ***Add Subscription*** button.

In the *Select a source* section, click on the ***Lambdas*** link.

Select the *Greengrass_HelloWorld* item.

In the *Select a target* section, click on the ***Services*** link.

Select the ***IoT Cloud*** item.



Click on the ***Next*** button.

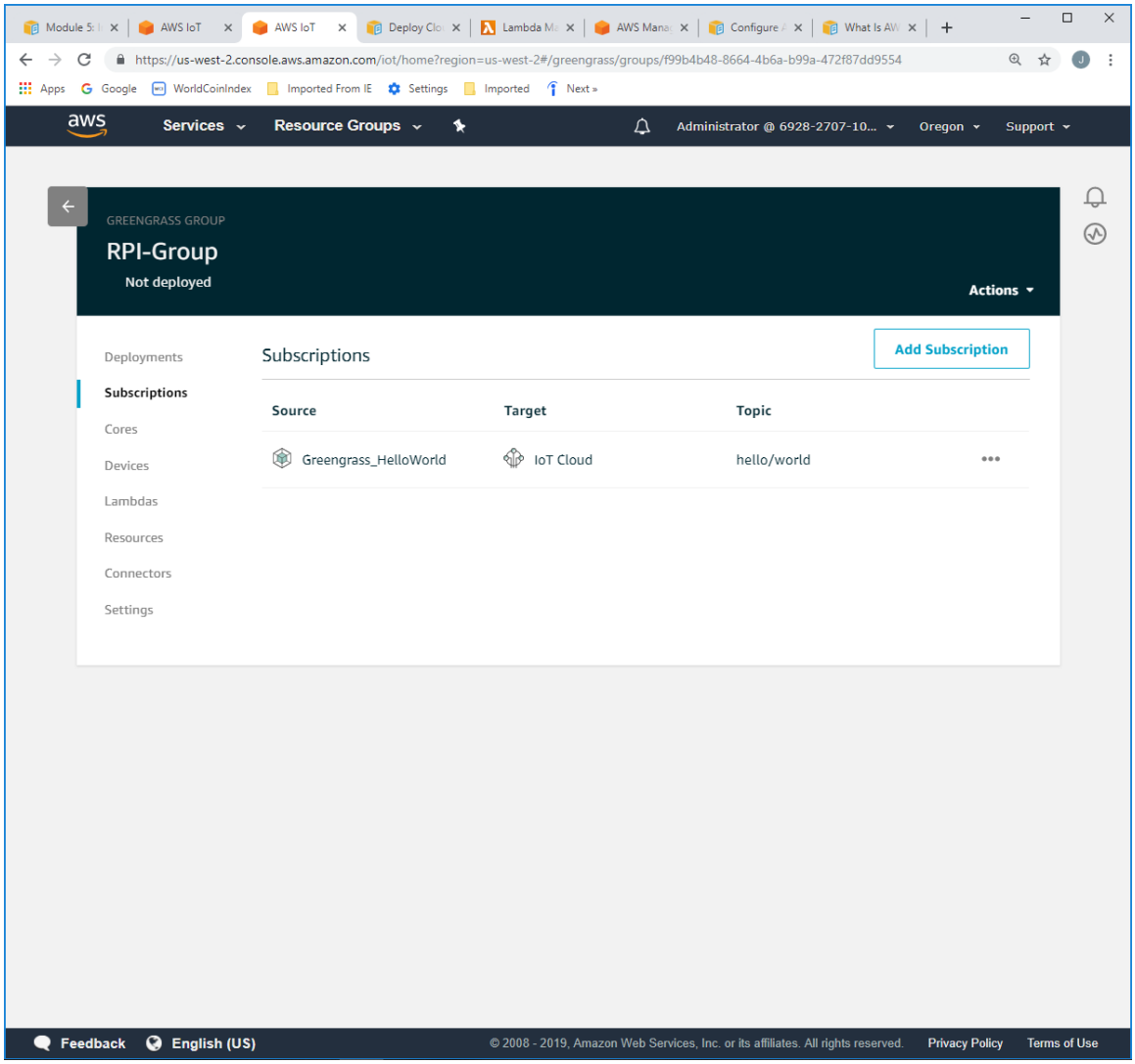
In the *Topic filter* field, enter “hello/world”

Click on the ***Next*** button.

Click on the ***Finish*** button.

Deploy the Lambda function and subscription configuration to the Pi.

Navigate back to the Group page.



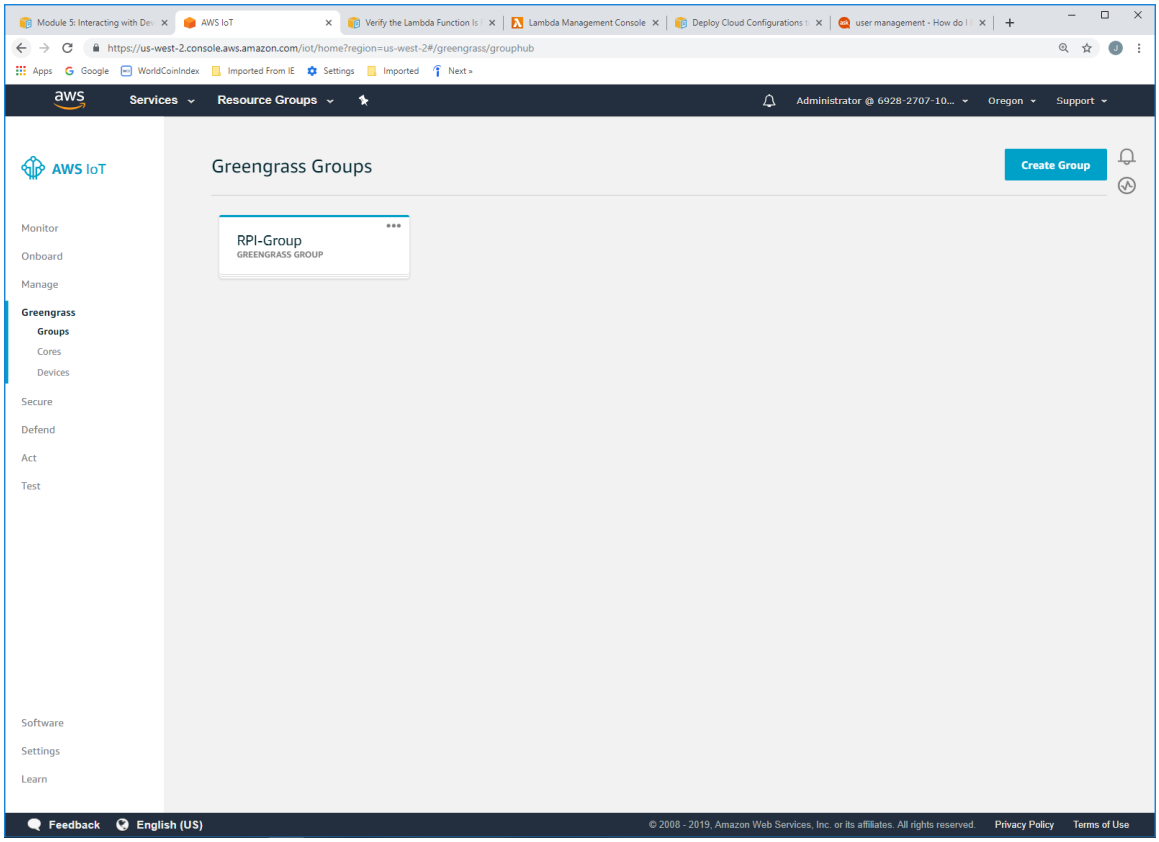
In the *Actions* field, select the ***Deploy*** option.

Click on the ***Automatic detection*** button.

After a few seconds, the status for the deployment will change to ***Successfully completed***.

Now let's test the lambda function.

Navigate to the main AWS IoT page.



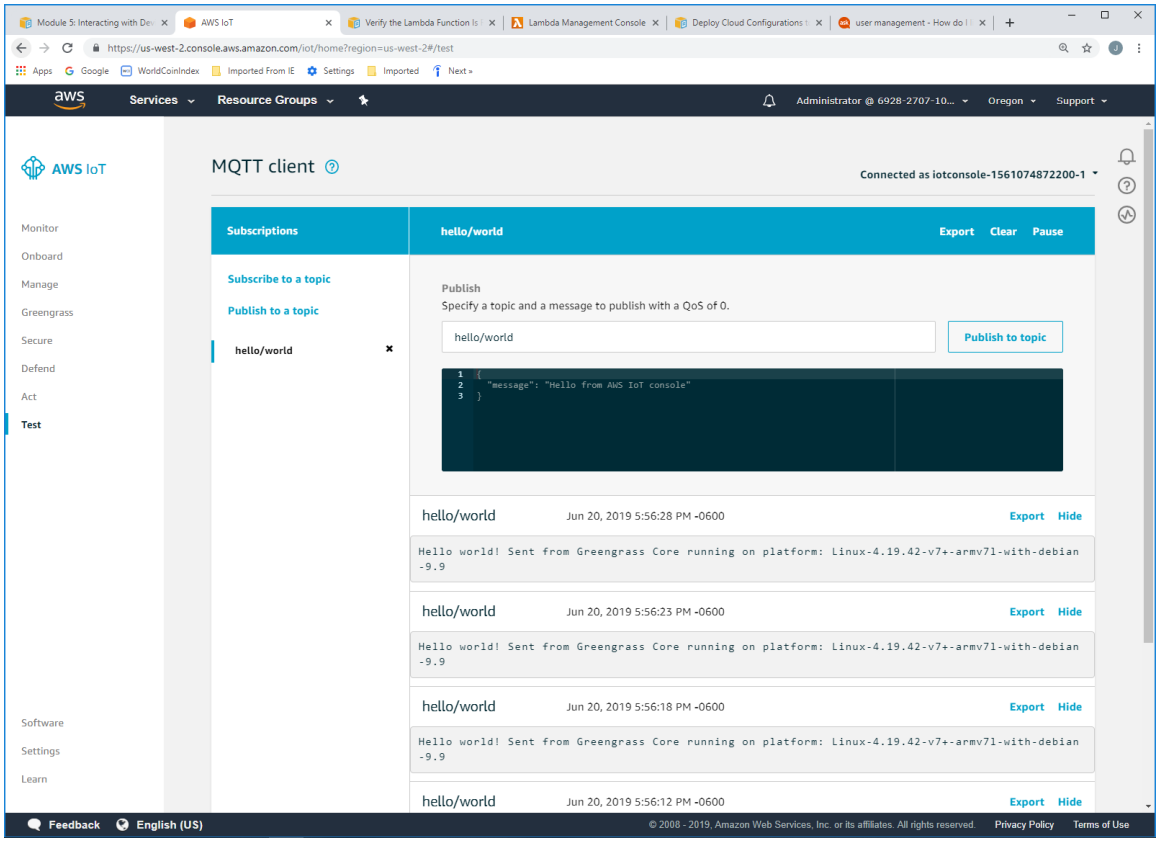
Click on the ***Test*** link.

In the *Subscription topic* field, enter “hello/world”

Set the *MQTT payload display* to ***Display payloads as strings***

Click on the ***Subscribe to topic*** button.

You will see the messages sent from the Pi (see the screenshot below).



Terminate the subscription by click on the ***x*** by the ***hello/world*** label.

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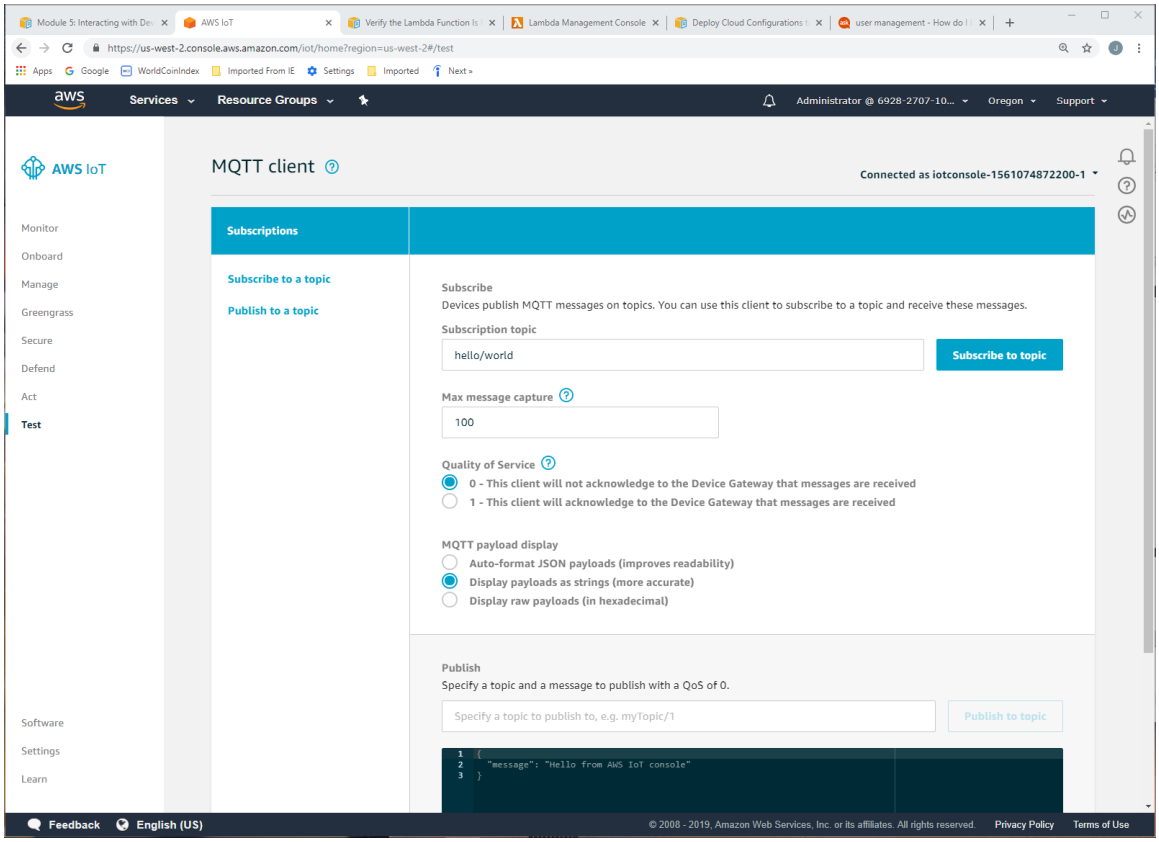

Conclusion

By following the steps in this document, you were able to configure a Pi to send a message to the AWS IoT service. This is really the end of the beginning. You can continue with the examples and tutorials on the AWS website to gain further knowledge regarding the AWS Greengrass and IoT services.