

Houston Objectivism Society



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Newsletter

Linda Abrams at March Meeting

The next meeting will feature performances by Linda Abrams, an HOS member residing in Los Angeles.

Linda is the founder of *Past Times with Good Company*, a non-profit educational corporation, whose travelling troupe of "living history" performers offers highly authentic presentations from several eras.

I have enjoyed seeing Linda perform twice before, for Objectivist audiences at The Thomas Jefferson School in San Diego in 1991 and at the Texas Objectivist Societies Conference last year in Austin.

At our meeting, Ms. Abrams will perform a selection of poetry by Berton Braley and possibly some historical presentations.

The meeting will be held on Saturday, April 17 at 6:30 pm at the apartment clubhouse of Brian and Dawn Phillips. Gate 7, the most northern one, may not be accessible, but the two most southern gates, 11 and 12, nearest Bellaire, are. If the gates are closed, the access number is **new**: #5145.

Videos at February Meeting

Chuck Earls was scheduled to present his Valuation theory for the February meeting, but unforeseen complications delayed his work. Instead, attendees watched two interviews of Ayn Rand and listened to five minutes of the Rush Limbaugh radio show of February 22, during which Limbaugh read approvingly from John Galt's speech.

Limbaugh first noted that he had a problem with Ayn Rand's atheism, then read a passage from Galt's speech dealing with sacrifice. He commented about how applicable Rand's observations were to the Clinton administration, called several of Rand's identifica-

tions profound and fervently recommended *Atlas Shrugged* to his audience, which consists of listeners to about 420 radio stations. Limbaugh is characterized by typical conservative negatives--religious, in opposition to abortion and often buffoon-like--but, in contrast to conservatives since Reagan, he challenges the morality of the welfare state and is sometimes astute in criticizing liberals.

The membership of HOS then viewed an interview of Ayn Rand made by the University of Michigan and available from Second Renaissance Books. The interview took place after the publication of *For the New Intellectual*, in 1961, and is called *Ayn Rand and the "New Intellectual"*. Of local interest, Janet Wich, an HOS member, tracked down this video a few years ago while attending the University of Michigan.

A second interview of Ayn Rand was then watched, from the Tom Snyder show of 1979.

Tall in the Straddle

by
Jeri Eagan

Political favoritism is not a new phenomena, and with increases in government regulations and complex taxation, it would be expected to increase. But recent actions by Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen demonstrate a level of corruption which exceeds even the most cynical expectations.

To create the appearance of support for Clinton's proposed economic plan, Bentsen is blackmailing oil companies. He has made it clear that those who do not support the plan will be publicly chastised and characterized as the "special interests" that the President warned would attempt to stand in his way. The irony of Clinton's use of the terms "special interest" is that he is able to endow the words with a negative connotation by implying that the bearers of the title are somehow seek-

ing political favor. He then applies the terms to those who are rightfully protecting their own interests against additional harm, such as a new tax burden. Being against any aspect of the plan is being portrayed as being against a reduction in the federal deficit and therefore the welfare of all Americans.

(It should be noted that the authors of *The Federalist* would most likely view the oil companies not as "selfish special interests" but as patriotic, selfish "minorities" in this context. [The term "minority" was originally economic in basis, not racial.] James Madison, et al., viewed written protection of rights as only "parchment protections" against the usurpation of rights by the majority. Accordingly, they envisioned the protests of economic groups as the substantive protector of everyone's rights, in their role as selfish defenders of *their* rights. The Constitution diffused power to a variety of institutions, all of which were meant to exercise that power in a nearly veto-like manner on major initiatives. The Senate, on the advice of John Adams, was specifically designated as the agent of stability, with its six-year terms, and as the defender of the rich, by means of its membership being elected by State representatives, rather than by the populace. Thus, "gridlock" was seen not as subverting the general welfare, understood by the founding fathers in a non-collectivist way as everyone's rights, but as its ultimate protector. When Clinton brands what he calls "special interests" as unpatriotic, he is attacking not only their rights but the protecting mechanism of the founding fathers and their conception of the role

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of government.)

The "stick" being used by Bentsen is the "enemies list" of non-complying "special interests", which is not unlike the one Nixon used, and which Bentsen described previously as reprehensible and undemocratic. Once considered a "longtime friend" of the oil industry, Bentsen is revealing his true colors, as a statist and a liberal, now that he has a powerful position in the Administration.

The "carrot" being dangled to encourage oil companies to say that they support the plan is that they will be allowed to determine the details of the application of Clinton's proposed tax on energy. The interest of oil companies are not all alike. The companies vary in the portion of revenues derived from different products--oil, natural gas, gasoline, etc.--as well as the extent of their production, pipeline and refinery operations. So where the tax is imposed and which products are exempt can indeed make a dramatic difference to a company's competitive position. Bentsen has invited the oil companies which support the plan to come to the White House to explain their preferences but is giving the cold shoulder to those companies which do not.

The entire oil industry will be hurt, since they will not likely be able to pass on this tax any more successfully than they have been able to increase prices to cover the significant costs of complying with environmental regulations. But companies which are compliant will suffer less. The government, by its nature unable to create value, can only offer less of a punishment as an incentive and call it a "reward".

The purported reason that Bentsen is playing hardball with oil companies is to show Congressmen in oil producing states that Clinton's plan has some support among the oil industry. He is obviously counting on these Congressmen to evade the fact that the alleged support was obtained through blackmail.

It is interesting that the government is so concerned about the appearance of support from its victims. I am reminded of the situation in *Atlas*

Shrugged where the government wants Rearden to sign over the rights to his metal after they have already expropriated it. It is also like the Soviet gulag, where much emphasis was placed on obtaining fake confessions from innocent prisoners. Thugs in government need the moral sanction of their victims. This becomes a way of seeming to obtain legitimacy.

And what easier target than the oil industry. A "broad-based energy tax" is claimed to be one that can simply be passed on to "consumers". Since all individuals and all businesses consume energy, it appears to be a "fair" tax shared by a large number of people. But you will note that Clinton is particularly careful not to allow the tax to be assessed at a point where it can be itemized on a "consumer's" bill. Better to hide the fact that if prices do rise, it will be the result of taxes. Better to let the public believe it is the greedy corporations trying to make "obscene profits". A tax on energy is also a way to appease environmentalists by suggesting that it will encourage conservation.

How have oil companies responded to this blatant threat? The oil industry is not the monolith which it is often portrayed to be in the media. Just as all Blacks or all farmers do not hold the same values and philosophies, oil companies are also distinguished by the philosophies of their leaders who establish policies. Some, like Arco and British Petroleum, known for their "progressive" pragmatism and willingness to pursue "partnerships" with the government, have jumped on the Bentsen bandwagon right away to curry favor. If these companies honestly believe that Clinton's economic plan is good, they are altruists, willing to sacrifice their company's long term interests. If they don't agree but are pretending to do so, their integrity suffers, as well as their credibility on future issues.

Other companies, such as Shell Oil, are trying to play the futile game of sitting on the fence. On the one hand, they praise Clinton's plan with such descriptions as "bold" and "far-reaching", but then attempt to smuggle in some softened honesty with statements

like "we would prefer to see more cuts on the spending side". In any compromise between good and evil, we know which will always win.

Providing cause for a slight ray of optimism, some companies, such as Mobil and Exxon, have had the courage and the relatively principled policies to publicly oppose Clinton's plan. Mobil has been most vocal. One of their vice-presidents recently spoke before a large group of industry executives. He called the energy tax proposal "bad policy" and urged the industry to fight to kill it. He pointed out the negative effect it would have on all sectors of the economy and on the competitiveness against foreign rivals. This is a far cry from opposition to taxes based on fundamental moral principles, but it is encouraging nonetheless.

Interestingly, the oil industry's major associations, the American Petroleum Institute and the National Petroleum Refiners Association, have both been actively opposing Clinton's plan. With the anonymous shield of the group, oil companies are doing what they should do individually: defending their rights. As it is, however, the compromises of companies as individual entities undermines that defense. No lesson was learned by the way Oliver North, as a lone individual, gained public support by displaying integrity to his moral principles. \$

Zoning History and Update

by
Dwyane Hicks

Houston is the only American city with a population greater than 100,000 that does not have a comprehensive municipal zoning plan. Two efforts to zone Houston have failed in the past, in 1947 and in 1962, because of non-binding referenda in which voters rejected zoning.

The current effort to zone Houston began a couple of years ago when Kathy Whitmire, privately an opponent of zoning, was mayor. Houston Councilman Jim Greenwood spearheaded the zoning movement, backed by the

chairs of a few civic association presidents of affluent residential neighborhoods and a few of the city's most prominent developers, notably Gerald Hines. Greenwood expected to ride the issue into the mayor's office, although in 1984, Greenwood was an opponent of zoning: "There are lots of other problems zoning would create," said Greenwood. "People with investments in land they've already purchased for a particular type of development could lose a great deal of money." (Houston Chronicle, Sep 29, 1984)

In order to eclipse Greenwood's political base, Whitmire established the Land Use Strategy Committee, which would hear testimony in hearings and report to Whitmire with a recommendation. Although supporting some restrictions, their recommendation was negative in regard to zoning, to which Whitmire responded by endorsing zoning!

Meanwhile, Greenwood decided not to run for mayor, while Sylvester Turner and Bob Lanier challenged Whitmire on the basis of the crime issue and, in Lanier's case, on his opposition to a city rail plan (mass transit). In the election, Whitmire came in last, and Lanier won the runoff election.

Although neither of the original exploiters of zoning for election purposes were mayor after this election, the rest of the City Council had jumped on the bandwagon during the process, and Lanier is a weak supporter of zoning.

During this period, Brian Phillips chaired the Ad Hoc Committee for the Defense of Property Rights, producing and distributing a pamphlet, "Zoning vs. Freedom" and additional flyers on various issues connected with zoning. Warren Ross co-wrote the pamphlet with Brian, and HOS members contributed to the cost of this effort. In addition Brian testified before City Council, gave speeches to civic organizations and wrote an editorial which was published in the Houston Chronicle. This was the only intellectually worthy and principled attack on zoning which was presented in Houston.

During the same period, two other individuals testified against zoning,

Barry Klein and Meredith James. Klein is an ex-realtor and ex-Libertarian, who now makes a living as a consultant to pro-freedom causes. He began this career by successfully fighting mass transit, and he embraces a somewhat non-ideological, empiricist approach to campaigns. Meredith James is a retired real estate appraiser who was a leader in the 1962 effort to reject zoning by referendum.

In 1992, the effort to zone Houston was proceeding, with city government preparing a 200-page ordinance and city maps with each property zoned according to one of four classifications. Klein and James attracted the attention of Al Hartman, a developer of strip shopping centers, who provided his offices and the initial financing to support the formation of the Houston Property Rights Association (HPRA). The initial goal of this organization was to gather 20,000 signatures for a petition calling for a referendum on zoning.

During the November 1992 election, 13,000 signatures were gathered with prepared voter register forms provided by a company specializing in this work for different causes. Yours truly delivered these forms, delayed in their production, through the night prior to the election to 13 precinct volunteers, thus making possible the gathering of about 3000 signatures. In addition HOS members Martha Beaudry, Gary Bratz and I gathered signatures at the polls and in shopping malls at later dates.

HPRA meets weekly on Fridays for lunch at a Holiday Inn at 610 West and Richmond. Over the past few months, attendance at meetings has grown from about five people to one hundred. While perhaps ten of the attendees are motivated primarily by ideology, the rest have been stimulated predominantly by the projected effect of zoning on their interests. Many small businesses will be closed, property previously purchased for the purpose of commercial development has been resolutely zoned "single-family residential", a small factory has been split down the middle with two zoning classifications and citizens of such bohemian districts as

the Montrose area are finding that the varied nature of their neighborhoods will not be "acceptable" in the future. There are home owners who have discovered what they will not be able to do with their backyards, home owners who run businesses out of their homes, many realtors and appraisers who see zoning as a financial disaster, leaders of churches who have become aware of restrictions and Black leaders who are aware of how zoning can be used. As Dr. George Reisman notes in his pamphlet *Capitalism: the Cure for Racism*:

In addition, zoning laws—a clear infringement of the rights of property owners and thus a violation of the principles of capitalism—have the effect of excluding blacks from areas in which they might otherwise be able to live. By such means as prescribing minimum sizes for home-building lots and prohibiting high-rise apartment buildings, zoning laws artificially raise the costs of housing in the areas to which such restrictions apply. The requirement that a building lot be of a certain minimum size, such as an acre or a half-acre, obviously makes the costs of land acquisition far higher than is dictated by the technology of construction. The prohibition of high-rise apartment buildings also increases the land cost per unit of housing, for the shorter the building, the fewer the apartments over which the cost of the land can be spread. Because of their lower level of income, blacks are the group relatively most affected by zoning laws. For they can least afford to buy homes or rent apartments at an artificially increased cost. It is they, therefore, more than any other group, who are excluded by zoning laws. In this way, zoning laws bear a major portion of the responsibility for the existence of racially exclusive neighborhoods.

And in 1962, the Houston Black community was a major factor in defeating zoning.

Last year, the population of Houston was fairly apathetic and ignorant about the issue of zoning. The delaying tactic by HPRA of calling for a referendum has indirectly publicized the zoning issue and undermined the assertion by advocates of zoning that it is widely supported by Houstonians. In response to the petition drive referendum, presentation of the plan to City Council was delayed in order to schedule additional hearings for "public input". All voices would be heard, and everyone's interests would be "protected". But the hearings merely accentuated the inherent conflict of collectivized property:

when some commercial interests were able to negate their residential classification, representatives of homeowners complained that zoning officials were caving in and emasculating zoning. Commercial interests unable to persuade zoning officials belied the idea that "Houston-style" zoning was fair.

Increased awareness about the nature of zoning has mushroomed attendance of HPRA meetings, brought further protests at hearings, multiplied the number of businesses collecting signatures for a referendum and influenced a group of prominent citizens, led by former Gov. John Connally, to urge Mayor Lanier to reject zoning and/or call for a referendum. (Unfortunately, this same group pragmatically suggests that individual measures implementing many of the same negatives as zoning be adopted. This, instead of capitalism, is their idea of a responsible alternative.)

During the past debate about zoning, advocates have relied on the results of an old poll which suggested, in a controversial way, that 71% of Houstonians favored zoning. But the results of the same poll, for the present period, were released last week by the Houston Post, and that figure was down to 54%.

Meredith James reports that the same process of growing unpopularity for zoning occurred in 1962. And Bernard Siegan, author of *Economic Liberties and the Constitution*, reports that zoning has never been adopted by a public vote.

Last week, Klein announced that the signature drive would soon be complete. As a result, Councilman Greenwood, the leading proponent of zoning, changed his position and announced his support for a referendum. Greenwood's capitulation recognizes the less than universal support for zoning asserted earlier, but it also allows him to attempt to substitute, via a City Council vote, a weaker version of the referendum. This is motivated by the fact that HPRA's petition adds to the City Charter the requirement that present and future attempts to zone be accompanied by presentation to the public of the

plan, followed by a six-month period for debate prior to a binding referendum. In addition, any existing plan would be nullified.

All protagonists now agree that a referendum of some kind will occur, probably in November of this year. Thus, the advocates of zoning must now convince a majority of Houstonians of its appeal instead of the sixteen pragmatic statist on the City Council.

Almost all of the HPRA members are incapable of providing the intellectual ammunition required in this battle. But helping in that regard is the fact that the pamphlet written by Brian Phillips and Warren Ross, "Zoning vs. Freedom", is being distributed at HPRA meetings. In addition, I and others will be making speeches to civic organizations. (If you would care to volunteer for this activity, you are welcome and needed, and you will get help with your speech.) But in addition, there is a need for letters-to-the-editor over the remaining year. If you think that such letters are inconsequential, you are wrong, especially in this issue, where every published letter will be photo-copied and distributed in meetings held weekly by organizations on both sides of the issue. And even if your letter is not published, it will put additional pressure on editors to publish others on the issue.

The Houston Post is pro-zoning, while the Houston Chronicle has been calling for a referendum. Many community papers have opposed zoning. All these newspapers need to hear your principled voice--Objectivists are virtually the only advocates who speak in such terms. \$

Focused Pamphleteering

by
Warren Ross

In our last issue we gave a very brief introduction to some of the projects we've been considering in the HOS Executive Committee. We wish to thank all the members who returned questionnaires with a number of excellent ideas (and comments on our ideas)

regarding future projects. We will present the results of that survey in the next newsletter. From time to time, we may expand on one or more of the projects in short articles to summarize the benefits and the method of implementation. In this article, I'll discuss the focused pamphleteering project.

Focused pamphleteering is sending pamphlets or essays to professionals, journalists or political leaders who are most likely to benefit from or most interested in the specific issue dealt with by the pamphlet. The advantage of such an approach is twofold: 1) The recipients are already associated with the field or knowledgeable about the issue dealt with by the essay and hence are highly motivated to read it, especially if it has a thought-provoking title (e.g. "Philosophy: Who Needs It?", "Capitalism: The Cure for Racism", "Medicine: The Death of a Profession"). 2) The second benefit is depth. Short articles or letters to the editor cannot possibly deal with a subject in enough depth to make a convincing case. They can point the way, lead a reader to someone's works (e.g. the writings of Ayn Rand), or make a single point clearly. However, to deal with any complex issue, a more lengthy written development is required. This is precisely the benefit of the pamphlet.

The Founding Fathers understood these advantages, and pamphlets were everywhere in the early colonial days. As Bernard Bailyn says in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, "It was in this form--as pamphlets--that much of the most important and characteristic writing of the American Revolution appeared...The pamphlet had peculiar virtues as a medium of communication...It was spacious enough to allow for the full development of an argument--to investigate premises, explore logic, and consider conclusions...And yet pamphlets [of a medium length] were seldom ponderous; whatever the gravity of their themes or the spaciousness of their contents, they were always essentially polemical, and aimed at immediate and rapidly shifting targets; at suddenly developing problems, unanticipated arguments, and swiftly rising, controver-

sial figures. The best of the writing that appeared in this form, consequently, had a rare combination of spontaneity and solidity, of dash and detail, of casualness and care."

When sending pamphlets to professionals (doctors, engineers, businessmen), another benefit is achieved. These people (or the best of them) are typically what one might call "prospectors", that is by virtue of their attitude towards knowledge and technology they are always on the lookout for new ideas, new explanations and new ways of doing things. That's why they are successful in their careers. Thus, pamphlets that provide them with a new approach, a new way of looking at an issue or new information that they had not obtained through other channels, may be of special interest to them. They may have a predisposition to reading such pamphlets (this is not to say that some pamphlets you send out won't go unread or end up in the trash). If you send the pamphlet with a short cover letter explaining its contents concisely and providing motivation for reading it, there is a higher likelihood that it will be read.

George Reisman has made a special effort to further this medium of communication. Not only has he written many excellent pamphlets but he has also offered them through The Jefferson School at prices (\$1.00 per pamphlet for orders of more than 50) that make large-scale pamphleteering financially feasible for individuals and regional Objectivist clubs. In his offering letter, Dr. Reisman calls these pamphlets "intellectual bombshells" that can help you "fight to change our culture" and "spread our ideas outside our own ranks."

In an effort to enhance HOS members' participation in this project, we have acquired the following pamphlets for your use (simply call me at 468-2256 with your request--your cost is our cost, \$1.00 per pamphlet):

Education and the Racist Road to Barbarism.
Freedom of Opportunity, **Not** Equality of Opportunity.
Freedom.
Capitalism: The Cure for Racism.
The Toxicity of Environmentalism.

With many copies available right here in Houston, you can be assured of immediate availability in case you need to make a rapid response to an event or a newspaper article you read. We plan to reorder and keep a permanent stock of pamphlets according to member needs. Currently we have 10 to 20 copies of each of the above titles. If you need more than that, contact The Jefferson School.

Finally, I will close with two successful examples of focused pamphleteering. During the Rushdie affair, in which pro-Iranian terrorists were intimidating book publishers not to publish Rushdie's book, Leonard Peikoff, Harry Binswanger and others published an essay in the New York Times articulating the principles involved and urging politicians to take a stronger, principled stand against such naked coercion. There is evidence that many Objectivists sent a copy of this ad to politicians and to President Bush. I sent the Rushdie letter to the President and to my Congressmen and Senators. I also sent a copy to Britain's Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. I received an appreciative and sympathetic response from Senator Phil Gramm, who said that he will support the build-up of U.S. government anti-terrorist activities, including intelligence and armed forces deployment. (Then-Senator Lloyd Bentsen did not reply to my letter.) I also received an acknowledgment from 10 Downing Street in which Prime Minister Thatcher expressed thanks for the essay. The British government official who wrote the reply for Mrs. Thatcher stated that "the views you expressed have been noted," not an enthusiastic response but an indication at least that principled views reached the highest councils of government in Britain.

A recent example of success was obtained by Dwyane Hicks. An Op-Ed piece appeared in the Houston Chronicle by a geologist who debunked the relationship between chloroflourocarbons (CFC's) and the ozone layer's thickness. The article also demonstrated that the environmentalists a) practice bad science and b) treat fundamental premises of the environ-

mental movement as religious tenets. Dwyane sent the author a copy of Dr. Reisman's pamphlet "The Toxicity of Environmentalism" and a cover letter. The author responded very favorably and thanked Dwyane for the material. Here was one example of an individual who was intellectually disposed to a rational position on environmentalism but may not have realized the important philosophical issues at stake. Dwyane's "bombshell" not only gave him the material to deepen his commitment to a rational position on this issue but also acquainted him with Objectivism.

These are just two examples. There are more that could be cited. But the achievements so far are nothing compared to the potential for this medium of cultural change. As Dr. Reisman says in his brochure, "When your contribution is added to that of several hundred or several thousand others--and there are that many of us now--it can help to make a very significant difference." Focused pamphleteering is a superb method of exploiting to the fullest written material that already exists, it takes relatively little original effort on the part of the sender, and its cultural impact, although difficult to measure, will undoubtedly be positive.

\$



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Brian Phillips Dawn Phillips

Announcements

\$ I want to thank Richard Beals for helping me with the reproduction of this newsletter over the past year.

\$ After the last newsletter, many readers asked me who currently owns the screenplay rights to *The Fountainhead*. When Ted Turner purchased the Warner Brothers library, rights to the screenplay were part of the package. Since then, Turner has optioned the rights for a limited time to James Hill, who is currently searching for a director.

\$ Dawn Phillips is the new HOS librarian, and we are instituting a new library policy: The library will be maintained at the Phillips residence, in the same apartment complex as our meeting room. To examine or use the library, contact Dawn at [redacted], between 9 am and 8:30 pm. After making an inventory of the library, we ask that you check if you have the following unaccounted-for items:

- Tape C video by Raymond Newman
- The Ominous Parallels* by Leonard Peikoff
- "The History of Western Philosophy" tape by Leonard Peikoff
- "My 30 Years with Ayn Rand" video by Leonard Peikoff
- "The Brain Drain" tape by Ayn Rand
- The Ayn Rand Letter* periodical by Ayn Rand.

\$ If you would like to have a deeper understanding of the Clinton administration, check out from the library, or purchase from Second Renaissance Books (\$19.95), Peter Schwartz's taped speech "The Politics of Pragmatism". It was given in 1987 and is very prescient.

\$ Dr. Gary Hull recently completed his doctoral dissertation in philosophy at Claremont.

\$ The Texas Objectivist Societies Conference has announced its call for Papers, Workshops, Art & Entertainment for the November conference. If you would like a copy of the announcement, call Dwyane Hicks at [redacted].

\$ Thursday evening, April 8, at 7 pm, in room 105 at Gearing Hall (one block north of Main Building), Dr. Harry Binswanger will speak on "*Buy American*" is *Un-American* at the University of Texas at Austin.

AI Truist & Friends by Dawn Phillips & Warren Ross



The next day, April 9, at 3:30 pm, in room 316 at Waggener Hall at U of Texas, Dr. Binswanger will address philosophy department faculty and graduate students on *Bridging the "Is"- "Ought" Gap: Morality from Facts*. Both events are open to the public at no charge, but the student Objectivist club at Austin will provide a contribution box at the door. There may be a reception Saturday morning.

For those travelling to Austin, you may be interested in viewing the art and attending the activities of *Values* at Dan's Place, 7507 Bender Dr., Austin, TX 78749. On Saturday night, a selection of light music will begin at 7:30 pm, followed by the movie *Fitzcarraldo* (West Germany, 1982, with English subtitles) at 8 pm. Call Yaron Brook at [redacted] or Dan Fordyce at [redacted] for more information.

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