

# THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

# BULLETIN

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of SCHENECTADY COUNTY, NEW YORK

JUNE 2008

## JUNE EVENT

*Join us for our Annual Dinner*

*at the Turf Tavern in Scotia*

Wednesday, June 11 at 5:30 pm

*Dinner choices:* baked scrod, chicken florentine or vegetarian delight (\$25)  
*salad, dessert & coffee/tea*

*Call Connie 393-7061 with your preference.*

*Meeting Agenda:* Election of Board Members, Votes on Budget & Bylaw Updates  
*(We need you for a quorum.)*

*Speakers:* Schenectady County Election Commissioners Brian Quail and Art Brassard

### Students Inside Albany

Students from across New York State attended "Students inside Albany" Sunday April 27 through Wednesday April 30 at the Hampton Inn and Suites in the heart of downtown Albany. All educational programs occur on-site, except for shadowing experiences with legislators and a tour of the New York State Capitol, which are a short walk from the hotel. All costs of the program are covered by the League of Women Voters of New York State Education Foundation, Inc. and conference sponsors. Schenectady was proud to be represented by Parvatie Sukhram and Madison Fletcher--both in the front row-- and Zagreb Mukerjee--two rows directly behind Parvatie.

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**Mission Statement:** The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization. We encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government. We work to increase the understanding of major public policy issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy.

President: Joanne Tobiessen.....393-0477    Vice-President: Connie Young.....393-7061    Newsletter Editor:.... 346-7006

## Annual Report from the Finance Committee 2007 – 2008

Athena Pagnotti, Finance Committee Chair

Committee Members: Athena Pagnotti, Joanne Tobiessen, Vicki Bremer, and Sonia Rubenstein.

During the 2007-2008 business year, the finance committee conducted two successful fund raising events and secured three underwriters for its various programs. A total of \$2,490.00 was raised for the chapter's Operating Budget, and a total of \$3,155.00 was raised for our Education Fund. A grand total of \$5,645.00 was raised for the business year.

The first campaign ran November 2007 and focused on potential supporters of the Schenectady LWV. With input from member Karen Johnson, \$1,835.00 was raised from this effort with contributions heavily earmarked for the operating fund. Included in this sum, was a partial underwriter (at \$500) for the *Leader Spark* program.

The next major campaign was our chapter's annual fund drive, conducted during the month of February 2008. This effort raised a total of \$2,810 with contributions being almost evenly divided between the two funds. Many members contributed generously to both funds, with the operating fund yielding slightly more contributions in total. During this season, but separate from the annual fund drive, two underwriting contributions were secured at \$500 each, earmarked for the "*Who's Who*" publication.

The breakdown of funds raised is as follows:

Total contributions for the chapter Operating Fund:	\$ 2,555	
Contributions for the Education Fund:	\$ 1,720	➤ {Total raised for Ed Fund: \$3,155.00}
Total underwriting support going to the Education Fund:	<u>\$ 1,500</u>	
Total Funds raised for the year:	\$ 5,775	

### Conclusions/Observations:

1. Funds raised were greater towards the local (non tax-deductible) operating fund, which may indicate our patron's enthusiasm to sustain our efforts at the local level.
2. Our first year's effort to secure underwriters for our various programs has identified the need for a greater network to be employed by directors/members in identifying potential supporters.

### Recommendations:

1. Assemble a "working committee" of 4 chapter members to assist with the administrative efforts of the fund raising committee.
2. Conduct the Chapter's Annual Fund Drive in late November/December or early January to avoid conflict with the NYSLWV annual fund campaign – which was issued late January 2008.
3. Continue to encourage board of directors and members to assist in identifying potential underwriters for our various programs.

### Acknowledgements:

1. Thank you so much to our local members and concerned citizens who supported our fund drives and gave generously to both the local operating and education funds.
2. A special thank you to the finance committee members, and chapter members - Elizabeth Allen and Connie Bailey, for your administrative assistance with our fund raising campaigns.
3. The SCLWV is very proud to acknowledge underwriting support from Dr. Balasubrahania, Stanley Skubis, Esq, and Vincy's Printing.
4. Another special thank you to Betsy Forkas for her efforts in securing an underwriter for the "*Who's Who*" publication.

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## Young People and Health Care by Kenneth Falcon

[Article for LWV of Schenectady County Newsletter]

In politics today, one of the most salient issues is that of the disaffected American youth; they are not voting in numbers that we would like them to, nor are they taking an active interest in politics. The youth ought to be educated about and voting on the issue of health care. This is important because not enough young people are insured, and insurance from their parents will only last so long. In today's job market, insurance is not guaranteed by employment, in large part because the average employer would not want to insure new employees. Health care without insurance is sub-par and expensive, and therefore all people (including, if not especially, young people) need insurance. The best approach to achieve the goal of health care for every American would be a tiered single payer health care system.

Young people are disproportionately represented among Americans without health insurance, with more than half of all 18 to 24 year olds, and more than forty percent of those ages 18-34 lacking coverage.<sup>1</sup> Many young people believe that they will be covered under their parents health insurance plans, but in many cases this is not so. More often than not, insurance plans stop coverage of dependent children on their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, with an exception being given to full-time students. Once a student leaves college or graduate school, losing "full time student" status however, many plans drop the student in question from coverage within one month of graduation.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-five states have passed laws that extend coverage beyond this date, but they have not gone far enough. Young people need insurance, as they participate in high-risk physical and social activities, such as sports, fast driving and drinking, and constitute 4% of the population currently suffering from chronic medical conditions.<sup>3</sup> Health care without insurance is sub-par at best. Moreover, the uninsured are a full twenty five percent more likely to die prematurely than those of the same age who are insured.<sup>4</sup>

In today's job market, insurance is certainly not guaranteed by employment. There are many reasons for this, but one influential factor is the rising cost of health insurance premiums. Employees of small employers and firms are particularly susceptible to not having insurance offered to them, with a steady decline in the numbers of employers offering coverage (from 69% in 2000, to 60% in 2005).<sup>5</sup> Premiums rose at one of their *lowest* recent rates from 2004-2005 at more than nine percent. Since 2000, insurance premiums have risen 73%, inflation has risen by 14%, and wages by only 15%.<sup>6</sup> When the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act ("COBRA") was passed, many hailed it as a great way to insure the recently unemployed. This law requires that an employer offer eighteen months of insurance coverage to recently terminated employees equal to the coverage they received as employees. Many opposed the passing of this act, and the insurance lobby made insuring employees unattractive to the average American employer by their alteration to the policy. In forcing the American employer to continue paying for the coverage, instead of the ex-employee, they passed the burden of debt collection on to the American employer. Because of this, employers are reluctant to offer insurance to new employees, for fear of their having to pay the insurance company premiums, and collect payment if that new employee doesn't end up fitting the position well.

I believe the solution to this problem is a single payer system, with basic coverage guaranteed to all. If all Americans were forced to be insured at a basic level by the government, they would be safe in case of catastrophe, and able to move up to the next "tier" of coverage upon being diagnosed with any condition that might require consistent medical care. A single payer system (the government or an agency of the government being the single payer) would reduce administrative waste by reducing billing errors (by using standard paperwork where now there are thousands of forms), and thereby reduce the overall cost of health care.

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<sup>1</sup> Families USA. *One In Three: Non-Elderly Americans Without Health Insurance, 2002-2003*, June 2004 <[www.familiesusa.org/assets/pdfs/82million\\_uninsured\\_report6fdc.pdf](http://www.familiesusa.org/assets/pdfs/82million_uninsured_report6fdc.pdf)> (accessed March 3, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures. "The Changing Definition of 'Dependent': Who is Insured and For How Long?" <<http://ncsl.org/programs/health/dependentstatus.htm>> (accessed March 3, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. "Health Data for All Ages" <[http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/health\\_data\\_for\\_all\\_ages.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/health_data_for_all_ages.htm)> (accessed March 3, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Families USA.

<sup>5</sup> Tobler, Laura. National Conference of State Legislatures. "Prognosis for the Uninsured," May 2006 <[http://www.ncsl.org/programs/pubs/slmag/2006/06SLMay06\\_PrognosisUninsured.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/pubs/slmag/2006/06SLMay06_PrognosisUninsured.htm)>.

<sup>6</sup> Tobler.

## **ANNUAL REPORT—ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

Nancy Peterson, Environment Committee Chair

This has been a very busy, active year for the Environment committee.

The goals which we set are:

- ❖ To study water resources with a focus on the aquifer, and work to protect the water resources of Schenectady County.
- ❖ To promote energy efficiency, renewable energy, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through “green” building practices.
- ❖ To increase public awareness of environmental issues through public information programs.

We presented six programs which were open to the public (our third goal). Four of these were on local energy issues:

### September—Clean Energy Forum

Barbara Blanchard and Joseph Suhrada, discussed what the City and the County are doing to promote energy efficiency and clean energy use.

### October—Dr. Steven Leibo

Revisiting “An Inconvenient Truth”—Dr. Leibo attended a special training with Al Gore to make local presentations about global warming issues.

### November—Step It Up

A follow-up to last April’s rally, this event featured local politicians and candidates speaking in the McChesney Room about global warming issues locally.

### March—Greening Schenectady

Our presentation on local energy efficiency projects was held in Proctors Robb Alley. Presenters included Phillip Morris, CEO of Proctors; William Sweet, VP of the Golub Corporation; William Connor, architect of the LEED certified Clifton Park Library; and Karen Villeneuve and Chris Reohr of NYSERDA.

We also presented two programs on local water resources:

### April—Jason Pelton—the Great Flats Aquifer

Jason Pelton, Schenectady County Groundwater Management Planner, presented a very informative Power Point about the Great Flats Aquifer as part of the lunchtime Science Series in the McChesney Room.

### May—Tuesday Lunch

The environmental version of the traditional Tuesday lunch, we organized a trip to the Aquifer Pump Station for a tour of the facility, followed by a picnic lunch and hike at the Great Flats Nature Preserve.

In the coming year we anticipate putting more effort into monitoring local governing bodies with authority over the aquifer and energy efficiency regulation. We are deepening our understanding of how our water supply is regulated. We established contact with the County Watershed Rules and Regulations Board. Our County Legislature recently adopted a set of resolutions promoting energy efficiency measures in Schenectady County. These resolutions look good on paper but will probably require serious monitoring.

Members of the committee include: Nancy Peterson, Carol Furman, Pat Rush, Ruth Bonn, Betsy Chase, Elaine Klein, Elmer Bertsch, John Middelkoop, Susan Spring-Meggs, Jan Elliott, Patrick Clear, Jeff Edwards.

TAKE ME TO VOTE & First Vice President's Annual Report  
Connie Young, First V.P. for Program

The Take Me to Vote Campaign had a successful 4<sup>th</sup> year. This campaign encourages the children to go to the polls with their parents and to see the democratic process in action. The new volunteers and schools participated enthusiastically.

We are beginning to prepare for the '08 election and the Take Me ToVote helpers are commencing their work. There are many small jobs to be done from counting and bagging tickets to the final delivery of maps and materials to the schools. All of the elementary schools in Schenectady County (13,000 students) receive maps of their respective polling places, tickets for the students to take to the polls, information about voting and an offer of a presentation. This year we can additionally offer an actual voting machine on which the students may practice. Please call Connie Young at 393-7061 to volunteer.

The Gazette will again print the student tickets for us and Time Warner will provide funds for the plaques for the schools with the highest percent of participation. Last year Hillside Elementary School in Niskayuna had a return rate of 31%. Glendaal ,St Joseph and Craig Schools were not far behind. Please join us, our democracy depends on the participation of the next generation.

As the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of Program, I have had a hand in planning and organizing many of the monthly meetings as well as many of the Tuesday Lunches. The topics of the meetings relate to the issues that are in the forefront of the League's policies. The various committees plan and schedule speakers who will address topics that are of interest to us. Health Care, Immigration, the Environment and the topic of Bullying among school girls are specific issues that have been addressed at our recent meetings.

Each year, members are invited to a Program Planning Potluck Meeting at which the agenda for the year is discussed and programs may be put together from those suggestions.

## **Working Group on Girls**

Joanne Tobiessen, President

A collaboration (since the fall of 2004) of the LWV and AAUW in conjunction with representatives from numerous agencies in Schenectady, including The Boys and Girls Club, Capital Region BOCES, Carver APPS, Girls Inc., Girl Scouts, Niskayuna School District, PFLAG, Safe House, Schenectady City School District, Sexual Assault Support Services of PPMH, and students from Union College and Schenectady High School. Our mission statement is “working together to put the spotlight on girls and educate the community about their needs, challenges, opportunities and successes.”

Last fall we published an update of our mentoring bookmark, with thanks to Girls Inc. and the Sexual Assault Support Services of PPMH for underwriting the printing costs. Twelve hundred bookmarks were distributed around the County to highlight mentoring and encourage volunteers to mentor through the locally listed programs.

We continued to focus this past year on the issue of bullying, learning more about it, speaking with a number of our school districts to understand what problems and solutions exist, and bringing together people concerned about bullying among girls. In the fall, we supported SCSD middle school programs for girls on bullying. Other valuable partnerships are occurring between our members working on projects of mutual interest that will benefit girls.

On May 14, 2008 we hosted our third community forum (this at the First Reformed Church in the Stockade) entitled ‘U R UGLY...When the Bully is a Girl.’ With articles in the Gazette and TU as well as community notes twice in the Gazette, we had about 80 attendees. The program began with lively, true-to-life skits on bullying among girls acted by students from the SHS Peer Mediation Program. Cathy Welling, BOCES Bullying Prevention Coordinator, gave examples and talked about the difference between bullying and teasing, the different types of bullying, how parents can recognize if their child is a bully or bullied and how to respond, as well as the importance of being an ‘up-stander’ rather than a by-stander. Jim Dillon, Principal at Lynwood Elementary School (GCSD) and author of ‘The Peaceful School Bus’ spoke about the successful program he has initiated to build community and address the issue of bullying on the school bus. Mary Ann McGovern, former Youth Aid Detective with the Niskayuna Police Department and now Program Coordinator through the Center for Community Justice’s Peer Mediation Program at Schenectady High School gave examples of cyber-bullying among girls and ways to respond. Extensive resources were available as well as a five page annotated resource list created by the WGG listing books, programs, web-sites, videos, etc. for parents, students and professionals. Refreshments were underwritten by the Golub Foundation.

At our next meeting, Monday, June 2, at 3pm at Girls Inc., we’ll discuss our focus for the coming year. In addition to the representatives from other agencies and organizations, our League members include: Maxine Borom, Gwynne DeLong, Karen Draper, Betsy Forkas, Julia Helfman, Helga Schroeter, and Joanne Tobiessen.

## **Fair Campaign Practices**

The purpose of Fair Campaign Practices for the Capital Region, Inc. (FCP) is to promote a climate in which candidates conduct honest campaigns. FCP encourages candidates to conduct campaigns openly and fairly, to discuss issues, to refrain from defamatory attacks on the character of their opponents, and not to use campaign materials that distort the facts.

Each League has been asked to add three hearing panelists to the pool of persons available to hear complaints during the primary and general election campaign seasons. Hearing pool panelists are respected community members who hear and adjudicate complaints of unfair campaign practices occurring within Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady Counties. Five persons usually sit on a hearing panel.

The current panelists who represent Schenectady County are: Joan Elliott, Helen MacDonald, Jim Miller, Gene Rowland, Faith Weldon, and Jean Wilkinson. Training for new hearing panelists is scheduled for June 10 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the LWVNYS offices at 62 Grand Street, Albany. Betsey Swan, coordinator and former president of FCP will conduct the training. If you are interested in serving as a hearing panelist or would like to recommend a community member, please contact: Julie Burgess at [rburgess1@nycap.rr.com](mailto:rburgess1@nycap.rr.com) or Joan Elliott at [isladecalma@msn.com](mailto:isladecalma@msn.com). They serve on the FCP board as directors representing the League of Women Voters of Schenectady County. The current president of the FCP is Joan Elliott.

League members also can help by:

- following up with political candidates to ask them to sign a fair campaign pledge. (Candidates who sign the pledges are listed on the FCP web site.)
- assisting in tasks related to mailing FCP materials to the candidates.
- obtaining the list of political candidates from the county board of elections.

In the fall, the FCP will monitor New York's primary election campaigns for local, county, and state legislature races as part of a pilot project. It has previously operated only for the general elections. The primary election is September 9 and the general election is November 4.

## **League Helps MHAs with Petition Process**

The LWV of Schenectady County helped two municipal housing authorities with their petition requirements as part of a housing authority board delegate selection. MHAs are required to have the candidates for seats on their policy-making boards circulate petitions and gain signatures from tenants as part of the election process. For some years, the Schenectady MHA and the Amsterdam HA have asked the League to oversee their processes to assure that they conform with requirements. Each Authority pays the League for this service.

In March, Joanne Tobiessen and Joan Elliott reviewed petitions two candidates for Tenant Representative on the Schenectady MHA Board submitted to meet requirements. The seats were uncontested and both, after League Board action, were sent letters informing them that they were successful.

Joan Elliott and Linda Muralidharan reviewed petitions submitted in May for the Amsterdam HA election in its District II Garden Apartments. Again, the League verified the petitions as meeting the required process. No election was needed. Unfortunately, one seat on the board for the Tenant Representative from District I remains vacant since no one chose to circulate petitions to run for the seat.

The League has a committee that will look into whether it can help promote more civic involvement among MHA tenants, both as tenant representatives and in tenant association elections. The committee consists of: Kay Ackerman, Elmer Bertsch, Joan Elliott, and Linda Muralidharan. If anyone would like to join the committee, please contact Joan Elliott at 346-4414 or at [isladecalma@msn.com](mailto:isladecalma@msn.com). The League's involvement with the MHAs, attests to the League's standing as an impartial arbiter, and is an example of another way the League serves the community.

## **LeaderSpark Annual Report**

Mary Pritchard, Program Coord.

LeaderSpark was held for six four hour sessions on Sundays in October and November of 2007. We had eighteen teens-5 boys and 12 girls-from 6 different schools: Schenectady High, Schalmont, Mohonasen, Niskayuna, Scotia-Glenville and home schooled . Some areas covered were conflict resolution, leadership styles, interviewing, making a presentation, parliamentary procedure and writing a newspaper article. The sponsors of our program were Dr Balasubramanian, the YWCA, Adirondack Beverage, Stewarts, Wal-Mart, Price Chopper, and Dunkin Donuts.

The teens selected three representatives to attend “Students Inside Albany” in April 2008. They were: Madison Fletcher, Parvatie Sukhram, and Zagreb Mukerjee. The conference brings together high school students from across the state to learn about NY State government and how citizens can participate in the democratic process. Among the activities in which the students engage are interactive lectures, a tour of the capital building, observation of the Senate and Assembly and time spent shadowing their legislators.

The facilitators were Ruth Bonn, Joan Elliott, Maxine Borom, Maxine Brisport, Skip Darcy, Sandra Harrsen, Shirley Readdean, Dick Shave, Madelyn Thorne, Kathy McAuley, and Gene Rowland. Helen MacDonald served as recorder. Connie Young was our food coordinator. Alun Pritchard was our photographer and editor. The steering committee was Mary Pritchard , Ruth Bonn and Joan Elliott.

President's Column:

Greetings,

In reading this month's series of reports from our committees, I am impressed with all that we are doing thanks to our dedicated members and supporters. (We will continue with additional reports in the summer bulletin.) Enjoy finding out about it all.

Not only are we presenting numerous dynamic and informative programs for the community, we are also bringing people together to work on projects and form new coalitions on behalf of our community. One wonderful collaboration, thanks to Lynda Nichols' initiative, was with the Union College Political Science class, Women in Politics, taught by Professor Zoe Oxley, a member of our League.

After meeting with some of our members at the beginning of the term, students did research and wrote reports which Zoe delivered to us on: the Integrated Domestic Violence Courts; Union College Students' Opinions about Civic Groups and the League of Women Voters; a Proposal for Comprehensive Sex Education; a recommendation to the League on the Implementation of a Female Candidate School; and Health Care Reform with a report on Engaging Young People in the Health Care Debate. Students reportedly enjoyed the application of their studies to real life and the opportunity to contribute to the League's work. We hope to work with faculty and students in other departments in the future.

As we come to the end of this program year, we look forward to seeing you at our Annual Dinner and Meeting, held this year on June 11<sup>th</sup> at the Turf Tavern in Scotia. In addition to our meeting (for which we need a quorum of members), we will be hearing from the Board of Election Commissioners Arthur Brassard and Brian Quail about how we can work together to educate voters about the new voting machines and increase citizen participation in the election process. Give Connie a call (393-7061) to make your reservation now. I hope to see you there!

Joanne

PS: Save the date: on September 10th we are having a luncheon meeting at the Stockade Inn to kick off our year and learn from a state representative from Vermont about the National Popular Vote Compact.

#### VOTER SERVICE COMMITTEE REPORT

Linda Ward, Voter Service Chair

The LWV was most visible during last November's election season when we held four Candidates' Forums for local and county elections. We received assistance for these from AAUW. Forums took place in Rotterdam, Glensville, Niskayuna, and Schenectady. In addition, a video-tape of each forum was shown a number of times on SACC-TV during the weeks prior to the election. Thanks are given to all members of the League and AAUW who helped make the forums successful.

Prior to the election, we distributed 3,000 copies of the Voters Guide, Parts I and II, published by the LWVNYS. Many thanks to all members who helped distribute this information to the public. Other voter service activities continued during the past year: registration of voters under the able leadership of Elaine Klein; the Take Me to Vote program coordinated by Connie Young and volunteers from the League; continued distribution of the Who's Who,; and oversight of the tenant association elections for the housing units of the MHA.

In the spring, the League held a brainstorming session for members about "getting out the vote." Seventeen members participated in this discussion. As a result, two new committees have been formed. One committee, headed by Joan Elliot, will focus on increasing tenant participation in tenant elections at the MHA. The other committee, headed by Carol Furman, will review comprehensive information from the Board of Elections with a goal of improving availability of information to voters and increasing the percentage of registered voters who actually vote. Participation by League members in Voters Services activities is always welcomed and encouraged.

SCHENECTADY

Kay S. Ackerman  
Virginia Adler  
Cornelia Bailey  
Faye Bailey  
Diane and Gabe Basil  
Ruth E. Bergeron  
Elmer F. Bertsch  
L. Ann Bish  
Vicki Bremer  
Julie Burgess  
Doris Clark  
Almy D. Coggeshall  
Anne B. Coggeshall  
Mr. & Mrs. Bruno  
DePaoli  
Joan and John  
D'Orazio  
Marion Epstein

*With* HEARTFELT

COUNTY LWV

Judy Fitzmaurice  
Jacqueline Foster  
Carol Furman  
Gail George  
Neil and Jane Golub  
F. Julia Helfman  
Analine Hicks  
John and Cornelia Hume  
Karen B. Johnson  
Nancy Johnson  
Sharon Jordan  
Fred & Catherine Kindl  
Percy King  
Dr. & Mrs. Richard  
Lange  
Pat MacKinnen  
Mary A. Martino  
Denise McGraw

THANKS *to*

SUPPORTERS

John McKinney  
Mr. & Mrs. Richard  
McMahan  
Judy & John  
Middelkoop  
Malinda Myers  
Lynda Nichols  
Nancy J. Peterson  
Shelia Randall  
Mr. & Mrs. David D.  
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Nancy D Snyder  
Paul Sorum

2007-8

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Dorothy Thompson  
Joanne Tobiessen  
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Irene Uzgiris  
Sally Van Schaick  
Mary Werner  
Connie Young

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