

Oct. 21, 2003

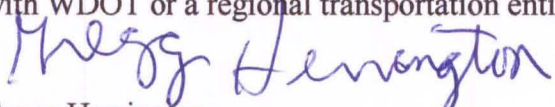
Don Wagner  
Southwest Region Administrator  
Washington Department of Transportation  
PO Box 1709  
Vancouver, Wash. 98668-1709

Dear Don:

Thanks again for your counsel when we talked last week on the phone. I am intrigued about prospects for working in the transportation arena and the possibility of something developing, perhaps as early as this winter. I would appreciate it if you would keep me in mind, but I probably will call you from time to time. Thanks, too, for keeping my inquiry confidential.

I'm enclosing printouts of a few stories I have done at The Columbian on highway-related issues and events. I believe they indicate both my interest in the topic and my ability to approach the subject from different points of view, including history, motorists, politicians and two little brothers who helped the governor blow up a hillside at 192<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.

I think my interest as well as my skills and knowledge of the community would be a good fit with WDOT or a regional transportation entity. Thanks again, Don.

  
Gregg Herrington  
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**By GREGG HERRINGTON**  
**Columbian Staff Writer**

It would change the face of Vancouver like nothing before or since, but the decision was left to engineers, bureaucrats and government officials operating pretty much outside of the public spotlight.

The selection of the eventual Interstate-5 freeway route through town was announced with little fanfare in the late 1940s as a done deal. But two decades later, when Interstate 205's route was picked, things were different. Times had changed.

The two route selections and the public's changing role in such matters account for one of Clark County's biggest political stories of the century.

For the first half of this century, the selection of highway

routes here was pretty much the domain of insiders such as military engineers, the state Highway Department and other government officials, often with comment from select interest groups such as the Washington Good Roads Association.

In the following 20 years, spurred perhaps by the anti-Vietnam war activism of the '60s, the public learned not to watch from the sidelines as government did its business. When the I-205 route was being picked, the people, it seems, realized the decision would change everything from where subdivisions and stores would be built to school boundary lines to their commute time.

Until the mid-1950s, all the cars, trucks and buses traveling between Portland and Seattle, and points between, motored through downtown Vancouver. Northbound vehicles rumbled off the Interstate Bridge and up Washington Street to 18th, later renamed McLoughlin Boulevard. There, traffic swung east one block past The Holland restaurant

and then turned north up Main Street and on out of town.

In the first full two-year state budget after World War II, the Highway Department in 1947 got \$820,000 to begin acquiring property for a new "freeway" to get around downtown, connecting the Interstate Bridge with Highway 99 through Hazel Dell. The word freeway was so unusual The Columbian often put it in quotes. It would be the first limited-access highway project in the state.

"The gigantic project ... is aimed at providing a smooth flowing pattern of traffic ... accentuating by a broad thoroughfare Vancouver's position as the southern gateway to the state of Washington," The Columbian reported.

### **Credit to Hansen**

Robert Schaefer, a Vancouver attorney and himself a former state legislator, says much of the credit for beginning Washington's Interstate 5 work in Vancouver belongs to Julia Butler Hansen, a Democratic state representative from Cath-

lamet who later became congresswoman from Southwest Washington. She served in the Legislature from 1939 to 1960 and was an authority on highway legislation.

"We were probably the only state in the union that started its interstate system other than working out from the biggest city in the state," Schaefer said. "The reason was Julia Butler Hansen's political clout. She was able to convince the Highway Commission that the system should start from Vancouver and go north. That meant that with every subsequent appropriation, we were at top of the priority list."

### **No public input**

The Highway Department picked the route for I-5 with virtually no public discussion, at least by today's standards. The route went slightly northeast from the bridge up West Reserve Street on the eastern edge of downtown, then between J and K streets.

The downtown freeway, then four lanes, opened on

March 31, 1955, and merged with Main Street at about 49th Street. There the route reverted to busy Highway 99. It would be several more years before the freeway through Hazel Dell was built, diverting traffic from the 99 strip.

## Another bridge

It wasn't long before talk turned to the need for another freeway and Columbia River bridge somewhere to the east.

Hal Zimmerman, a former Camas weekly newspaper publisher and Republican state legislator, remembers a proposal in 1958 for a two-lane bridge across the river from Camas via Lady Island to Troutdale, Ore. It had the active backing of the Port of Camas-Washougal and other east county interests.

By the early '60s, the route for a proposed I-5 bypass had moved near the top of the political agenda in both states and this time the public wasn't left out of the process. As possible routes were debated in various forums and bistate committees, there was one given: It

could not cross through Portland International Airport.

One option was past the airport's west end, along Northeast 33rd Avenue in Portland. It would have hit the Washington shore near Vancouver's present day Marine Park. The route would have been up present-day Blandford Drive to McLoughlin Heights. The other option was east of the airport, probably at about 111th Avenue on the Oregon side, hitting the Washington shore somewhere east of Ellsworth Road.

Today it would be suicide in most cases for a politician to support a freeway through his or her jurisdiction. But in the early '60s, some Vancouver and Clark County officials pushed for the Blandford route, including the late Ken Teter, a county commissioner.

## Opposition mounts

But momentum changed. On the Washington side, civic leaders in Camas and Washougal collected at least 3,000 signatures on petitions urging the

bridge be built east of the airport.

In Vancouver, the Blandford route began to draw opposition from various factions, including Glen Whitfield, an influential real estate agent, and a group headed by much-admired longtime Vancouver physician Dr. John Harrison. Vancouver merchants complained that the western option would make it easier for shoppers to skip downtown and get to Portland's Lloyd Center, then the only major shopping mall in the metro area.

The decision was Oregon's to make, in consultation with Washington and with final approval from the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads. Oregon had the edge in the process because more people lived on that side.

Several factors were at play, including displacement of more Portland residents and businesses along the western route than to the east. In October 1964, with support from civic and business leaders in Camas, Washougal and Gresham, Ore., the easterly route was picked. The I-205 Bridge,

named for Oregon political and civic leader Glenn Jackson, opened on Dec. 15, 1982.

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ADDRESSING A COM-  
MUTER HEADACHE  
PLAN AFOOT TO EASE I-5  
JAM

By GREGG HERRINGTON  
Columbian staff writer

Politicians to Portland-bound motorists: The Interstate 5 bottleneck at Delta Park, where three lanes suddenly become two and morning traffic backs up into Vancouver, is finally on the federal government's fix-it list.

Without fanfare, a \$2 million appropriation for preliminary design and engineering on the project was added to the 2001 federal budget in December.

The appropriation was unheralded as the public, press and politicians apparently were preoccupied with everything from the Florida recount to

Christmas shopping to upcoming football bowl games.

The publicity void was filled Monday. Politicians and transportation officials from both sides of the Columbia River gathered for a photo opportunity along Interstate 5 in North Portland to let everyone know about the \$2 million and what happens next.

The project was part of an earlier study, but this new money is for specific drawings and engineering.

If all goes well, a third southbound lane will be open in 2007, give or take a year.

The engineering money means cash for actual freeway-widening work is almost certain to be approved when Congress writes its next long-range transportation plan in 2004, said U.S. Rep. Brian Baird, D-Vancouver.

Baird arranged Monday's event to tout the budget item and thank U.S. Sens. Patty Murray, D-Wash., and Ron Wyden, D-Ore., for their help as members of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

"This puts (the widening

project) on a high-priority list," said Baird.

I-5 is three lanes southbound across the Interstate 5 Bridge, past Jantzen Beach Shopping Center and for about 0.2 of a mile past the Interstate Avenue-Delta Park exit.

Then, it suddenly narrows to two lanes for nearly a mile, contributing to slowdowns in the area every weekday morning.

"I believe this project is ready to go" and will contribute to "rapid, safe transportation of goods" and make life easier for commuters, Baird said, repeatedly thanking Oregon officials for their help.

"It's a joy finally to see the project moving forward," said Don Wagner of the Washington Department of Transportation's Vancouver office.

Vancouver Mayor Royce Pollard said Monday's event helps build political wherewithal for the next step: getting construction money.

"This creates energy," he said. "I believe it's headed down the track. We have the momentum of all the leaders in

the region."

Kay Van Sickle, the Oregon Transportation Department's regional manager, said the design work has already begun and "is a more involved project than just adding a lane."

This nearly milelong stretch is mostly elevated, on an overpass above Columbia Boulevard, railroad tracks and a large freight container and truck yard.

Van Sickle said the entrance ramps must be especially long to enable trucks to reach freeway speed before entering the travel lanes.

The cost will be \$20 million to \$30 million, she said, compared to about \$5 million to add a single lane the same length at grade level and without complications.

Assuming Congress does appropriate construction money in 2004, work could start almost immediately and take two to three years, said Ron Scheele, spokesman for the Oregon Transportation Department.

GREGG HERRINGTON covers state and local issues and may be

REST STOP DOES BRISK  
BUSINESS ON HOLIDAY  
WEEKEND

By GREGG HERRINGTON  
Columbian staff writer

RIDGEFIELD - On a weekend marking the unofficial opening of the summer travel season, the freeway rest stop north of Vancouver was a busy but laid-back place Sunday.

There were four middle-aged Harley-Davidson riders returning from a bikers' gathering in Eastern Oregon, three women headed home with a new puppy, a young man nearing the end of a two-day Los Angeles-to-Seattle drive, and plenty of families with kids.

For a couple of New Yorkers just in from "Ory-gone," the Gee Creek stop on northbound Interstate 5 on Sunday wasn't just for a break.

It was also the place to make

a big decision:

Should they visit Mount St. Helens from the west side, or the east?

"We've got 10 days to see the West Coast," said Chris Partisano, from Albany, N.Y., traveling with her brother, Steve. Other than her trip by plane to Seattle for a conference 20 years ago, neither of the Partisanos had seen the Northwest until now.

"We rented a car in San Francisco, drove through the Napa Valley and up through the Redwoods, then came up the coast in Ory-gone," Chris said with a distinctive New York accent. "It's all beautiful. The Redwoods were wonderful."

Before flying home from Seattle on Friday, they intend to see Mount St. Helens, Mount Rainier and the Olympic Peninsula.

So, early Sunday afternoon they were checking brochures and asking about the relative merits of seeing St. Helens via state Highway 504 from the west, or from Windy Ridge and Forest Service Road 25 on the east.

After considering the time of day, their need to find a motel and the advice of bystanders, they hit the freeway for Castle Rock and the western route, with its visitors centers and spectacular views along Highway 504.

As they pulled out, two Seattle-area couples arrived on two motorcycles.

They had spent the weekend at the annual Memorial Day weekend bikers' rally and campout at Fossil in Eastern Oregon.

This year, as usual, the gathering drew more than 1,000 people, said Charles Frost, riding his 1988 Harley-Davidson.

"It's always a good weekend," he said. "We camp out at the fairgrounds there. They have bands at night, bike games during the day, and the women's mud wrestling. Can't forget that wrestling."

Frost and his riding partner, Pam Linley, and another couple traveling with them, said the campout and 700-mile round trip were nothing but fun.

"We go every year and see a lot of old friends," Frost said.

"People come from Idaho, California, Nevada ..."

A few yards away, Winston, an 8-week-old Lhasa Apso puppy, was playing on the grass with his new owner and two friends who were making the Seattle-to-Corvallis round trip in one day to pick up the pooch from a breeder.

"The trip has been great," said Connie Butler as she entertained Winston. Not much traffic today. Everybody will be on the road tomorrow."

Another motorist, Scott Kieffer of Seattle, was headed home to Seattle from Los Angeles.

That much driving in two days is no problem, he said, but he was hungry for news of the Seattle Mariners.

Told he could pick up Sunday's game on a Vancouver station, he turned and headed for his car.

Watching the people come and go Sunday, and offering refreshments, were teen-agers from Vancouver's New Hope Center Youth Group.

Like other charitable groups that staff the rest stops,

the youths charged nothing but accepted donations from grateful travelers.

One couple getting cookies and coffee weren't going to win any prizes for driving long distances Sunday.

Marilyn and Ed Young are from nearby La Center. They drop by the rest stop every so often, they said, just to people watch.

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## MONUMENTAL DREAM TAKES SHAPE

By GREGG HERRINGTON  
Columbian staff writer

LEWIS COUNTY - Gospodor's Monument Park, 15 miles south of Chehalis on Interstate 5, is not just another roadside attraction.

It's a traffic jam in the making.

Five- to 10-mile-long backups have evolved each of the past two Sunday afternoons as motorists slowed and gawked at three monuments placed atop pillars there on Aug. 8.

They honor three disparate causes and people: American Indians, Mother Teresa and victims of the World War II Holocaust.

The man with the idea,

money and passion for the park says there are more to come. Next up: a memorial to victims of drunken drivers.

Authorities are hoping that once freeway travelers get used to seeing the monuments, they'll keep their feet on the gas pedals as they pass.

But until then, motorists headed up or down I-5 any of the next few weekends - especially on Sunday afternoons and Labor Day - are likely to creep along at 5 to 20 mph.

The monuments are 61 miles north of downtown Vancouver, along the last remaining stretch of I-5 between here and Seattle that is only two lanes in each direction.

The state Department of Transportation and Washington State Patrol can't do much about the problem because the monuments are on private property and Dominic Gospodor of Seattle, who is paying the bills, went through all the required permitting processes and public hearings.

He, too, is hoping once motorists get used to the park, they'll stop slowing down, at

least when traffic is heavy.

## Signs go up today

Meanwhile, the state Department of Transportation will erect "No Parking" signs near the monuments, and the State Patrol plans to increase patrols.

"We weren't surprised at the backups," said John Halvorsen, president of Properties Plus, the Chehalis general contractor hired by Gospodor to erect the monuments.

"But we expect it to be short-lived," Halvorsen said Tuesday. "It's like when they put up those big outdoor TV-like screens along highways (showing advertisements). You have traffic snarls for a little while, then the frequent I-5 travelers get used to them."

Halvorsen predicted "Labor Day will be bad," but by the second or third weekend of September he believes the slowdowns will be history.

## Monuments at a glance

Gospodor, born to Polish immigrant parents 78 years ago

in North Dakota, seeks to honor history's do-gooders and victims.

Here are Gospodor's monuments at a glance:

\* Mother Teresa, the Catholic nun who died in 1997 after dedicating her life to helping the poor.

This is the dominant monument, standing 118 feet high, with a statue of Christ atop two spheres, his arms outstretched, 16 feet from fingertip to fingertip.

A chain saw-carved statue depicting Mother Teresa will go up this week, next to that pillar.

\* The monument to American Indians is topped with a likeness of Chief Seattle of the Duwamish Tribe and also is carved by chain saw. It is 75 feet, top to bottom.

\* The third monument, to World War II Holocaust victims, is a diamond-shaped fabrication, also 75 feet high. It is 20 feet across at the widest point.

Halvorsen said an Ohio firm is shipping an "eternal flame" to go atop it - a device with cloth,

colored lights and a weather-protected covering.

## More to come?

Gospodor said that if he can sell some of his real estate holdings in Alaska, where he was a developer, he hopes to finance monuments to woman's suffragist Susan B. Anthony, polio vaccine developer Jonas Salk, explorers Lewis and Clark, and William Seward, the U.S. secretary of state in the 1860s who bought Alaska from the Russians.

So far, Gospodor said, he has spent more than \$500,000 on his dream, including \$135,000 for the 10-acre parcel along I-5.

Some of that money was wasted on an early design that had to be redone because the engineer hadn't accounted for the possibility of high winds.

"People think I'm nuts, most of them anyway," Gospodor, who never married, said Tuesday. "I've taken a lot of gas over what I'm doing."

He said he has paid all the bills and "never taken a nickel

(in donations) from anybody."

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**LIST CONFIRMS IT: HIGHWAY 500 IS DANGEROUS**

Byline: By GREGG HERRINGTON, Columbian staff writer

By GREGG HERRINGTON  
Columbian staff writer

Highway 500 in Vancouver, a high-speed route interrupted by traffic signals, includes the second-most accident-prone stretch of state highway in Washington, according to a new "Top 10 Dangerous Roads" list.

One mile of the highway, which includes intersections at 42nd Avenue/Falk Road and 54th Avenue/Stapleton Road, was the site of 273 vehicle accidents from 1996 through 2000, most of them rear-enders.

None was a fatality, but the estimated cost to society was \$3.4 million per year, based on such factors as estimated repair costs, lost work time and

medical expenses.

The most dangerous mile of state highway, according to the recently compiled Department of Transportation list, is Highway 99 in King County near Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, at \$5.6 million per year. The highway at that point is also known as International Boulevard.

Vancouver's Highway 500 and a mile of state Highway 285 near Wenatchee are the only entries on the list outside of the Puget Sound area.

Highway 500 "should be a freeway, but we have signals out there," said Bart Gernhart of the state Department of Transportation in Vancouver. The speed limit on the highway is 55 mph.

"There are 40,000 cars a day in both directions using Highway 500," he said. "We are asking those drivers to take some kind of action - stop for lights, turn left, slow down, speed up. Any time you ask 40,000 people to do anything, there are chances a few won't do it right.

"If you eliminated those signals, most of those 40,000 driv-

ers would no longer have to make a decision. They would just drive straight through on their merry way."

In a recent two-year period on a stretch of Highway 500 including the "dangerous mile" plus the intersection at Northeast St. Johns Road, there were 185 accidents, 140 of them rear-enders.

### Ref. 51 would help

The state DOT and the Legislature have put a high priority on getting rid of the grade-level intersections on Highway 500 so they match the Thurston Way interchange near the mall. It has just been rebuilt, with Highway 500 crossing above Thurston Way.

Similar intersections are planned at Northeast 112th Avenue and at St. Johns Road as well as 42nd/Falk and 54th/Stapleton.

Referendum 51 on the Nov. 5 state ballot would provide \$23 million to construct the 112th Avenue interchange and would funnel \$1.3 million into design work and some property acqui-

sition at Falk and Stapleton roads.

Still, construction on those and the St. Johns intersection depend on future funding by the Legislature.

### WASHINGTON'S 10 MOST DANGEROUS ROADS

(Unless otherwise noted, the stretch of road is found in the greater Seattle area)

1. Highway 99 between South 170th and South 188th streets

2. Highway 500, Vancouver

3. Highway 99 from Denny Way to North 59th Street

4. Highway 167 interchange with highways 512 and 161

5. Highway 515 between Southeast 201st and Southeast 232nd streets, north of Kent

6. Highway 99 from South 139th to South 146th streets

7. Highway 285 near Wenatchee

8. Highway 9 from Snohomish to Lake Stevens

9. Highway 7 between South 38th and South 70th streets, Tacoma

10. Highway 512 between highways 16 and 167

## HILLSIDE COMES DOWN FOR ROADWAY

By GREGG HERRINGTON  
*Columbian staff writer*

With explosives planted in a hillside across the ravine, 6-year-old Robert Crismon shouted, "Fire in the hole."

Then Robert, his brother Jesse, 3, and Gov. Gary Locke pushed the handle of the old-fashioned detonating plunger.

A current shot through 4,000 feet of wire strung down the hillside, across the ravine and up the far hill.

A face of the bluff collapsed Thursday afternoon, sending up a cloud of dust and drawing oohs, aahs and applause from the brothers, the governor, state secretary of transportation, the mayors of Vancouver and Camas and a couple of dozen other VIPs.

They had gathered to celebrate completion of the interchange at state Highway 14 and Brady Road.

The event marked the end of the state's work there and launched the project's next phase:

Linking of the interchange to 192nd Avenue a mile and three-fourths to the north.

It will provide faster access to Highway 14 for residents, workers and businesses in the rapidly-growing Fisher Basin.

Now, the city of Vancouver is in charge, and Mayor Royce Pollard said it will be done by this time next year.

The Crismon brothers, who live nearby, were invited to join the fun because of the boys' fascination with the construction project.

Their dad, Gordon, said the boys visited the project often to watch the heavy equipment and wave to the workers.

On Robert's birthday, he brought brownies for the construction crew.

Locke, Transportation Secretary Doug MacDonald, Pollard, Camas Mayor Dean Dos-

sett, U.S. Rep. Brian Baird, state Sen. Don Benton and others took turns praising the project and the political effort that led to it.

"You'd never know it if you just listened to the talk shows," MacDonald said. "These jobs are getting done efficiently and on budget."

Locke also praised the efficiency of the workers, saying, "There's a new day in the Department of Transportation."

It was the second highway interchange grand opening of the day.

The entourage had arrived from a gathering just outside the J.C. Penney's store at the mall, where they celebrated the completion of the state Highway 500 interchange at Thurston Way.

That was the Transportation Department's first "design-build" project. A single contract was let for the job rather one for the design and another for the construction.

In the end, Locke said, the project was finished a year faster than it would have been, thus disrupting shopping at the

mall for only one Christmas season last year's.

Earlier Thursday, standing in the cold outside the Vancouver Amtrak depot, Locke, former U.S. Sen. Slade Gorton, the head of the state firefighters association, an environmentalist, union and business leaders and others made a pitch for Referendum 51 on Tuesday's statewide ballot.

Putting his hand on Locke's shoulder, Gorton, a Republican, looked at the Democratic governor and said the campaign for Referendum 51 "is an unprecedented partnership."

Referendum 51, he said, "promises the people of Washington that what they pay for is what they will get."

Locke said its passage would help the state's economy in the short term by putting highway construction crews to work, and in the long term by making transportation more efficient throughout the state.

But John Healy of the No on 51 campaign called local media even as the Locke-Gorton contingent was in town, saying the measure is unwise.

"It provides start-up money for a series of enormous projects not yet fully planned" that will require additional gas tax increases later, he said.

Healy said it spreads the money too thinly while putting nothing into Seattle's earthquake-endangered Alaskan Way Viaduct and the Highway 520 floating bridge over Lake Washington.

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Nickel gas-tax increase takes  
effect Tuesday

**By GREGG HERRINGTON**  
**Columbian staff writer**

Motorists in Washington have less than three days – until midnight Monday – to save a nickel a gallon on gasoline.

On Tuesday, the state levy on gasoline and diesel fuel goes up 5 cents a gallon.

Annual gross weight registration fees for trucks – but not most pickups – will go up 15 percent and the sales or "use" tax on new- and used-car purchases will increase 0.3 percent. That's another \$60 on a \$20,000 vehicle.

The tax and fee increases were approved this spring by the Legislature and Gov. Gary Locke to pay for transportation improvements statewide.

The additional revenue will

go for some high-profile work in Clark County during the next several years, including two projects due to begin before the end of August:

\* Widening of Interstate 5 between the Northeast 99th Street and Northeast 134th Street interchanges.

One "through lane" will be added to the existing two lanes. Further, the auxiliary (outside) lanes near those two interchanges, for cars entering and leaving the freeway, will be extended the full distance.

\* Building a new interchange at state Highway 500 and Northeast 112th Avenue/Gher Road, just east of Interstate 205.

The boost in gasoline and diesel taxes at midnight Tuesday will bring the state's levy on a gallon from 23 to 28 cents.

Federal tax adds another 18.4 cents a gallon on gasoline and 24.4 cents on diesel.

### **Dealers: It won't hurt**

A couple of local car dealers don't expect the 0.3 percent increase in new- and used-car

sales taxes to deter shoppers.

"I don't see any impact that will hurt too bad," said Bob Kuzma of Art Kuzma Motors in Hazel Dell.

Most of Kuzma's customers want vehicles for \$15,000 or less, he said. The additional state levy – technically a "use tax" – on a \$15,000 car would be \$45.

At the Bill Copps dealership in downtown Vancouver, owner Mike Coy said sales of Cadillacs, Pontiacs, GMCs and Suzukis there average about \$30,000, which would mean an additional \$90 in state use tax.

Coy noted that the tax is applied only to the difference between the new-car price and a trade-in. A customer getting \$8,000 in trade on an old car and buying a \$30,000 new car will pay the tax on the \$22,000 difference.

The increase "shouldn't impact us one way or the other," Coy said.

### **Big-truck fees higher**

The annual gross weight registration fee for trucks

weighing more than 10,000 pounds goes up 15 percent in August.

Even the largest pickups weigh less than 8,000 pounds.

The state Department of Licensing this week began mailing renewal notices, showing the higher fees, to nearly 6,000 truck owners with registrations expiring in August.

A long-haul truck and trailer combination would typically be licensed at 80,000 pounds, the department says. A truck that size would pay an additional \$224 a year in registration.

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