

Electricity and The General Welfare

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

September 21, 1932

'Prevent Extortion Against the Public'

"Here you have four great Government power developments in the United States—the St. Lawrence River in the Northeast, Muscle Shoals [the Tennessee Valley Authority] in the Southeast, the Boulder Dam in the Southwest on the Colorado River, and finally, but by no means the least of them, the Columbia River in the Northwest [where the Grand Coulee and Bonneville Dams were built]. Each one of these, in each of the four quarters of the United States, will be forever a national yardstick to prevent extortion against the public and to encourage the wider use of that servant of the people—electric power."

Federal Power Act of 1935

The Act expanded the powers of the Federal Power Commission (now called the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission—FERC) to "regulate electric utilities' wholesale rates and transactions." It "establishes just and reasonable rates for the transmission and sale of wholesale electric power in interstate commerce. It also regulates permanent interconnections of electric utilities and promotes the adequacy of interstate electric power service."

Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935

The Act compelled the electric power companies to dissolve those holding companies which were simply employed as middlemen to increase speculative profits in energy sales.

Section 1: "Public utility holding companies and their subsidiary companies are affected with a national public interest, in that . . . their activities extending over many States are not susceptible of effective control by any State, and make difficult, if not impossible, effective State regulation of public-utility companies."

"The interest of consumers of electric energy and natural and manufactured gas, are, or may be adversely affected— . . .

- "When in any respect there is a lack of economy of management and operation of public-utility companies or lack of efficiency and adequacy of service rendered by such companies, or lack of effective public regulation. . . .

- "When abuses of the character above enumerated become persistent and widespread, the holding company be-

comes an agency which, unless regulated, is injurious to investors, consumers, and the general public; and it is hereby declared to be the policy of this title, in accordance with which policy all the provisions of this title shall be interpreted, to meet the problems and eliminate the evils as enumerated in this section, connected with public-utility holding companies which are engaged in interstate commerce or in activities which directly affect or burden interstate commerce; and for the purpose of effectuating such policy to compel the simplification of public-utility holding-company systems and the elimination therefrom of properties detrimental to the proper functioning of such systems, and to provide as soon as practicable for the elimination of public-utility holding companies except as otherwise expressly provided in this title."

Atomic Energy Act of 1946

"Declaration of Policy

"Section 1. (a) Findings and Declaration—Research and experimentation in the field of nuclear fission have attained the stage at which the release of atomic energy on a large scale is practical. The significance of the atomic bomb for military purposes is evident. The effect of the use of atomic energy for civilian purposes upon the social, economic, and political structures of today cannot now be terminated. It is reasonable to anticipate, however, that tapping this new source of energy will cause profound changes in our present way of life. Accordingly, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the people of the United States that the development and utilization of atomic energy shall be directed toward improving the public welfare, increasing the standard of living, strengthening free competition among private enterprises so far as practicable, and cementing world peace."

President John F. Kennedy

August 17, 1962

'We Will Build Infrastructure'

"The facts of the matter are that this dam [Oahu, South Dakota] and many more like it, are as essential to the expansion and growth of the American economy as any measure that the Congress is now considering. And this dam and others like it are as essential to our national strength and security as any military alliance or missile complex. . . .

"I don't want to see the United States second in space or in the development of its power resources. And I think it's most appropriate in this great decade that we light the entire country. I think our commitment is expressed by a distinguished Senator from my own State of Massachusetts, whose words are hung behind the Speaker's chair in the House of Representatives. He said: 'Let us develop the resources of our land, call forth its power, build up all its great institutions, and see whether we, in our time and generation, may not perform something worthy to be remembered.'"