

Hells Canyon Dam Veto By McKay Draws Storm; Ike To Stick To Private Firms

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Eisenhower administration has decided to sidetrack public in favor of private development of a big Western water project and congressional reaction ranges from approval to "turn the rascals out."

Secretary of the Interior McKay, making the announcement yesterday, said the Eisenhower administration will allow private enterprise to develop hydroelectric power wherever possible so long as it does not interfere with "proper development of natural resources."

McKay told a news conference he has decided to set aside, at least for the present, plans for a \$60 million federal dam at Hells Canyon along the Oregon-Idaho border. The department, he said, will no longer oppose a substitute proposal by the privately owned Idaho Power Company to build for \$23 million dollars the first of three dams on the Snake River in the same area.

The Federal Power Commission (FPC) has the actual say as to whether the power company can go ahead.

McKay's Democratic predecessor, Oscar L. Chapman, had actively opposed the utility's application to FPC on the ground it would block the Hells Canyon project forever. McKay, turning his decision "part of the policy of this administration," said the Interior Department would give the commission all available information and abide by its decision.

Asked if he was considering abandoning the idea of a federal project at Hells Canyon, he replied, "Could be."

Even if Congress should authorize the Hells Canyon dam, the secretary said, "in view of the efforts to balance the budget, it appears doubtful that appropriations for the work could be justified now."

He added that each similar case in the future should be considered "on its own merits." His decision had been widely regarded as a key-stone of the administration position in the public vs. private power debate, but McKay said he did not regard his action as fixing a policy.

Approving McKay's action, two Republican senators, Gordon of Oregon and Dworshak of Idaho, emphasized that the FPC still had the obligation to look into the case and decide it in the public interest. Gordon said the development simply meant the Interior Department now will not be a "special pleader." Dworshak said if the Idaho Power Company application were granted, Congress could still consider government development of one of many other "sites for multipurpose projects in the upper river area."

But Sen. Morse (Ind-Ore) interpreted the decision as "further proof" of his contention that "the Eisenhower administration would be a tool of American monopolies." "Never was it more appropriate to say that in the next election the people should 'turn the rascals out,'" he declared.

Sen. Jackson (D-Wash) said the department had "abdicated its responsibility" for developing "a multipurpose project involving matters directly under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, to wit: irrigation and power. . . . The people of the Northwest are not interested in fence sitters when we are faced with the most critical power shortage in our history."

McKay indicated he didn't regard such matters as the responsibility of his agency. He gave reporters a copy of a letter to the FPC which said the Interior Department had decided "the granting of licenses for the electric plants on the rivers of the U. S. is the primary function of and responsibility of the FPC and not this department."

McKay told the news conference that:

1. The private company is ready to go ahead with construction, while his department has no assurance Congress would vote money for federal development and is not even sure that the appropriations "could be justified now." In any case, power from the private development would be available seven or eight years before the big government project could be in operation. Therefore, he said, the department would be playing "dog in the manger" if it stood in the way.

2. The decision was prompted in part by the administration's desire to hold expenditures down so the budget can be balanced and taxes reduced.

3. The decision does not set policy, except to reverse former Secretary Chapman's action. Costs are so huge, he added, that there is a place for federal development of multi-purpose projects as well as for private power projects.

4. McKay discussed the matter at a cabinet meeting and with 11 Western governors who had lunch with him. Gov. Howard Pyle of Arizona, present at the news conference, interjected at this point that while the governors had expressed no objection in this case, they felt each should be weighed separately.

5. If FPC turned down the power company's application, the Interior Department would restudy the Hells Canyon project, probably sending Congress information and leaving the decision to it.

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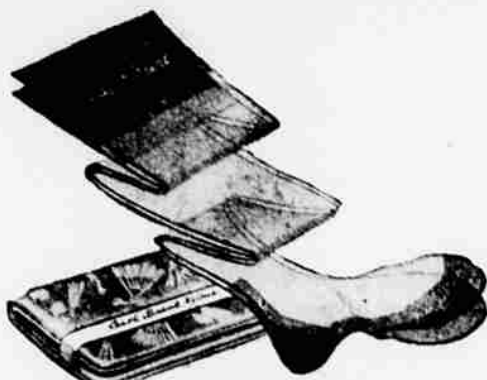
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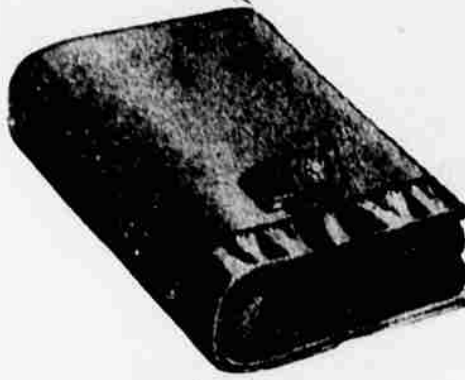
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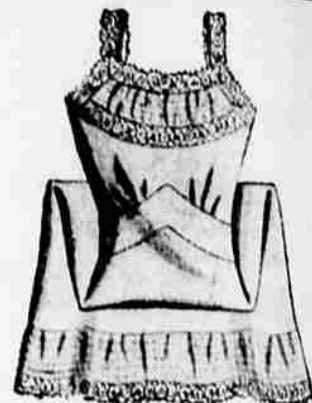
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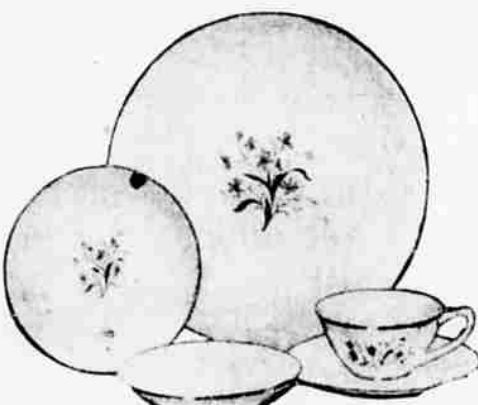
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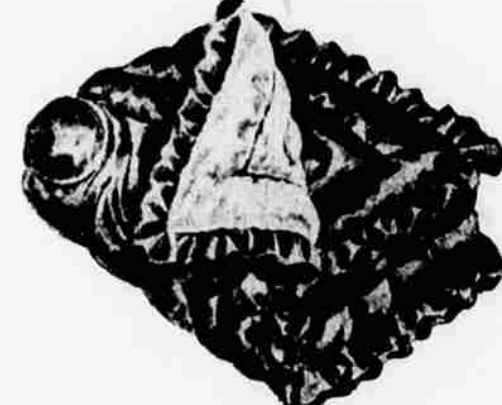
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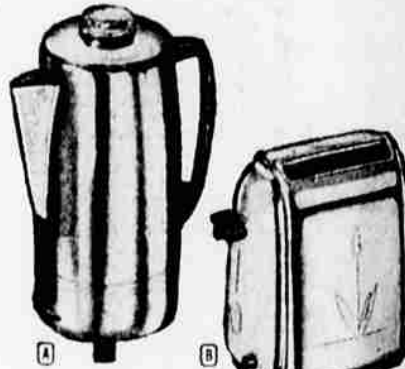
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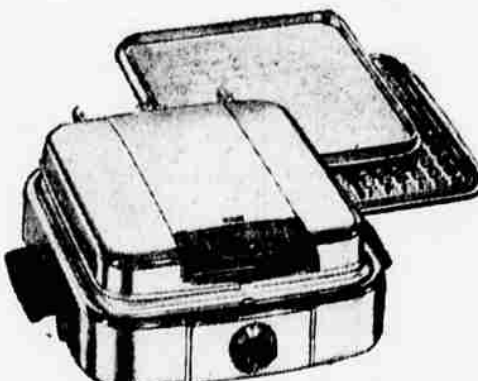
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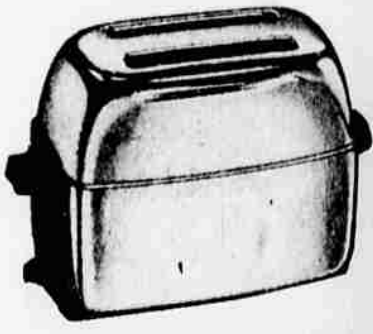
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