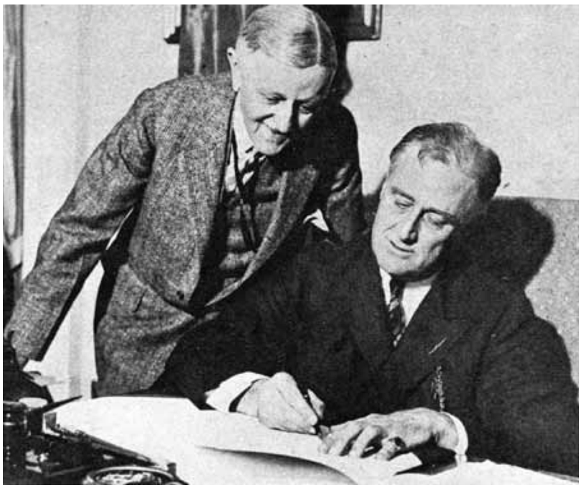
Franklin Roosevelt's Hundred Days Program

FDR passed or implemented by Executive Order 15 significant pieces of legislation, in the first 100 days of his administration, beginning March 4, 1933. The most outstanding of these are described here.

March 9: The Emergency Banking Act. The first measure FDR pushed through was the reform and reorganization of the bankrupt U.S. banking system. When the President took office, there were bank holidays due to runs on deposits all around the country. Scenes like that in front of the American Union Bank were commonplace, as banks were forced to shut their doors. FDR moved to shut down *all* the banks, while coming up with a policy for an orderly reopening. The Emergency Banking Act was rushed through Congress in approximately eight hours.



The Emergency Banking Act was the first measure of the Hundred Days, pushed through on March 9, 1933. President Roosevelt is shown in this photo signing the bill, as Treasury Secretary Woodin looks on.

After five days, most of the banks reopened.

March 29: The Securities Act of 1933, a bill for regulating the sale of investment securities in interstate commerce, is introduced. In his message to Congress, Roosevelt continued his attack on the corrupt financial practices of the private banking houses and securities brokerages and the commercial banks which dealt in securities. The message, which met with virulent attacks by the banking community, said:

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Bank runs were taking place around the country, as FDR took office. Here, depositors line up at the American Union Bank in New York City, following the 1929 Crash.

"Of course, the Federal Government cannot and should not take any action which might be construed as approving or guaranteeing that newly issued securities are sound in the sense that their value will be maintained so that the properties which they represent will earn profit. There is, however, an obligation upon us to insist that every issue of new securities to be sold in interstate commerce shall be accompanied by full publicity and information, and that no essentially important element attending the issue shall be concealed from the buying public. This proposal adds to the ancient rule of *caveat emptor,* the further doctrine 'let the seller also beware.' It puts the burden of telling the whole truth on the seller. It should give impetus to honest dealing in securities and thereby bring back public confidence."

The bill gave the Federal Trade Commission power to supervise issues of new securities, required each new stock issue to be accompanied by a statement of relevant financial information, and made company directors civilly and criminally liable for misrepresentation.

March 31: Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC was devised to deal with the areas of forestry, prevention of soil erosion, flood control, and similar projects, while employing as many as 250,000 people by the early Summer of 1933.

FDR called for the program on March 18. The Emergency Conservation Work Act was introduced on March 27, was signed by the President on March 31, and began the recruitment of young men by April 7. The first CCC Camp was opened on April 14.

Recruitment centers were set up by the Department of Labor, and, in coordination with the Departments of the Army, Agriculture, and the Interior, the enrollees were

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The Civilian Conservation Corps employed as many as 250,000 people by the early Summer of 1933. Here, workers from the CCC camp in Marsing, Idaho, work at the Gem Irrigation District Pumping Plant.

transported to camps around the country, and put to work. The criteria called for young men between the ages of 17 and 25, who were in reasonable health and unmarried, and whose families were on relief. They would be paid $30 a month, $25 of which would be sent to their families, while the youth were given room, board, clothing, and tools at the CCC camps. The enrollment period was six months, although youth could re-enroll for additional periods, up to two years in total.

April 19: Abandonment of the Gold Standard. FDR's first action on gold occurred on March 5, when he suspended all transactions in gold, and gave authority over any such matters to the Secretary of the Treasury. On April 5, he had issued an Executive Order against hoarding of gold.

But in the ensuing weeks, pressure had been building up on the dollar from the European bankers, who were allied with the bitterly anti-Roosevelt Wall Street forces here in the United States. Acting through Morgan interests in Europe and the private U.S. banks, including Brown Brothers Harriman, the Bank of England launched an all-out assault on the dollar. Since the break with gold now appeared inevitable, the bankers' plan was to do it with the maximum amount of chaos, and to organize a counter-reaction that would ultimately reverse the policy, and hand Roosevelt a defeat.

On April 11, the first waves of the attack broke against the dollar. They grew in intensity over the next three days. The New York bankers asked, through the Fed, to lift the gold embargo, and be allowed to ship $10 million to Europe—to Holland and England. The New York agents of the British upped the ante: They asked for an additional $15 million in gold shipment licenses. Roosevelt ordered part of the request granted. But the requests kept escalating in an almost geometric ratio. And tons of gold were being shipped out of the country.

On April 19, the President called a press conference, and announced that, effective that day, he would not permit the "exporting of gold, except earmarked gold for foreign governments ... and balances of commercial exchange."

May 12: Emergency Farm Mortgage Act. The farm crisis, which had been ongoing for more than a decade, was a central focus of FDR's early emergency measures. The measures included the **Agricultural Adjustment Act** (May 12), which was an effort to raise prices for farm goods, the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, and the Farm Credit Act (June 16).

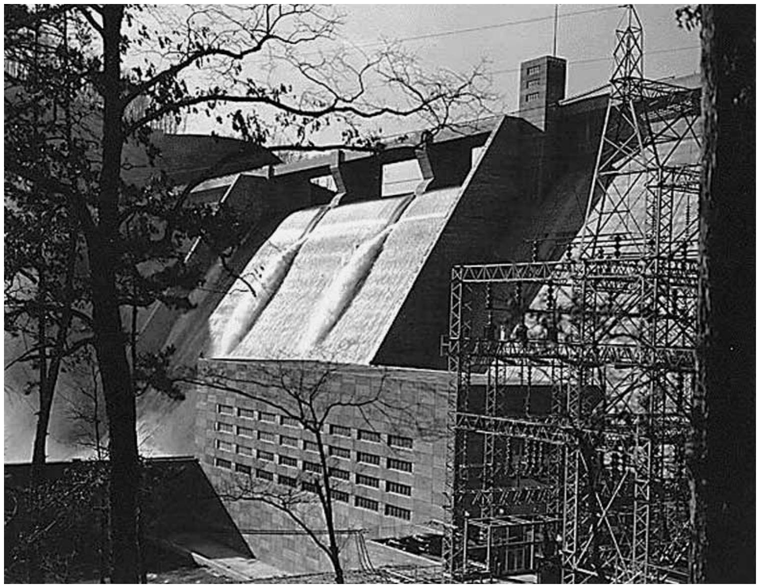
Farm foreclosures had devastated the countryside, and been the cause of considerable social unrest. In some instances, those evicted, including whole families, simply took to the road, with all their possessions on their backs.

Federal Emergency Relief Act. When FDR took office, misery was evident in every city. Lengthy breadlines could be seen winding through the streets, many of them run by private charities which gave away food, until it ran out.

The Federal Emergency Relief Act established a Federal Emergency Relief Administration, which was devised to address the fact that local governments had literally run out of money to aid the unemployed and the destitute. It was intended to provide a pool of money—$500 million—that could be disbursed in relief grants to states. In addition, it gave the Federal Relief Administrator, who would be New York's Henry Hopkins, broad supervisory power over the states' use of the grants—a provision that caused a total uproar among those who were still crazy enough to think that the Federal government didn't have to take charge of bringing the country out of depression.

The FERA funds were divided into two types. Half was to be disbursed to states as matching funds, with $1 being given out for every $3 of state money spent for relief during the preceding three months. This was a rather limited form of aid since, obviously, the poorer states would have spent less money for relief, and therefore would be eligible for less in matching funds. The other half was available to be given out wherever the states were unable to meet the requirement of $3 for $1.

FERA spent money for all kinds of necessities—food, clothing, fuel, shelter, and medicine. Administrator Hopkins, who went on to run job-creation programs later in the Roosevelt Administrations, said: "We can only say that out of every dollar entrusted to us for lessening of distress, the maximum amount humanly possible was put into the people's hands. The money, spent honestly and with constant remembrance of its purpose, bought more of courage than it ever bought of goods."



FDR Library

The Tennessee Valley Authority was a gigantic infrastructure project that transformed the lives and living conditions of hundreds of thousands of Americans in the region. Here, the Norris Dam in Tennessee, ca. 1937.

May 18: Tennessee Valley Authority Act. Unlike the other legislation passed during FDR's first 100 days, the TVA was a gigantic infrastructure project, which would take years to complete, and which would revolutionize the physical environment, and the lives of millions of Americans throughout decades to come.

The TVA incorporated, as an integrated package, hydroelectric power generation, flood control, irrigation, scientific agriculture, the fostering of manufacturing, eradication of disease, elimination of illiteracy, and the spread of electrification, to bring about a revolutionary change to a region. The Authority put an end to the flooding, and its attendant destruction.

The TVA also brought electricity to a huge swath of the country. In 1933, the average Tennessee Valley resident used, per capita, only 60% as much electricity as the average U.S. resident. But by 1939, the Valley had leapfrogged the rest of the country: The average Tennessee Valley resident had 125% of the national average of electricity use per capita. This miraculous change altered every feature of life. The TVA also lowered the price of electricity: In 1933, the average cost of a kilowatt-hour of delivered electricity was a little over 7 cents; by 1935, it was about 2.5 cents, a savings of 65%.

The TVA also fundamentally changed agriculture. It set up 15,000 "demonstration farms," where agronomists worked with farmers to apply scientific methods that incorporated increased fertilizer use (much of it produced by the TVA itself, and sold at low prices); increased electricity use, which enabled farmers to use all manner of farm implements; the use of tiering on mountainsides to lessen water runoff, etc. Between 1933 and 1943, the per-acre yields on the 15,000 TVA "demonstration farms" tripled. Farm-

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The Federal Emergency Relief Administration began to provide relief to the millions who were jobless, homeless, and hungry. Here, a bread line under the Brooklyn Bridge, early 1930s.

ers were brought from throughout the region to visit and study the methods of the demonstration farms, spreading the increased farm productivity throughout the Valley.

With flood control and increased electricity, the TVA brought manufacturing to the region, where it had scarcely existed before. Utilizing the electricity, aluminum plants were constructed there during World War II, to produce for military aircraft. In 1930, the Valley had four farm workers for every factory worker, but by 1960, it had two factory workers for every farm worker. This stunning shift in the composition of the labor force in only 30 years represented a rapid industrialization and modernization; and, at the same time, each farmer was more productive.

May 18: The Glass-Steagall Act is introduced into the House of Representatives by Henry Steagall (D-Ala.), and into the Senate by Carter Glass (R-Va.). Part of the Emergency Banking Act of 1933, the Glass-Steagall provision divested investment houses of their banking functions (i.e., bank separation), and established the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), whose protection was to apply only to commercial banks. Despite vociferous opposition from the banking community, the measure was passed on June 15, and signed into law the next day.

June 13: The Home Owners' Loan Act is passed, in order to refinance mortgages for distressed homeowners who had lost their homes or could not obtain financing through normal channels. It established the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, which ultimately helped one out of every five mortgaged urban homes in the country.

June 16: The National Industrial Recovery Act. The NIRA was introduced on May 17, under the theme of creating a "partnership" between private industry and government in bringing about an economic recovery. It had three Titles, which broke down as follows:

Title I declared a national emergency, under which there would be a partial suspension of anti-trust laws, in order to permit industries, in collaboration with the government, to draw up industry-wide codes setting certain standards on wages, prices, working conditions, and the like. The codes, according to FDR advisor Raymond Moley, were intended to be enforceable by the courts.

One of the most lasting and popular provisions of Title I was what came to be known as 7(a), the section which guaranteed labor's rights to collective bargaining, maximum hours, and minimum wages. It was under this provision that the leaders of U.S. labor, headed by United Mineworkers president John L. Lewis, ran a nationwide organizing campaign, under the slogan "The President Wants You To Join the Union!" The impact of this effort was such that it could not be reversed, even with the Supreme Court's 1935 decision to declare the NIRA unconstitutional.

Title II of the NIRA invoked the existence of the national emergency in order to create the Public Works Administration, whose administrator was authorized to spend a huge sum for that time—$3.3 billion—on large public works projects throughout the United States.

Title III was a funding provision for the NIRA. Tax issues being as sensitive then as they are today, and the public being inflamed by ongoing hearings exposing the tax scofflawing of J.P. Morgan and his Wall Street cohorts, the funding mechanism that passed was an increase in the income tax.

While the NRA industry code was eventually ruled unconstitutional, this measure had lasting effects in establishing a substantial public works effort, and in promoting the improvement of conditions for working people in all industries.