



New Film 'SwitchOn' Spotlights Transformative Power of Energy

By [Robert Bryce](#)
May 15, 2020

Lyndon Johnson's first meeting with President Franklin Roosevelt didn't go well. It was June 1938. Johnson had joined the House of Representatives 14 months earlier and he needed Roosevelt to approve a federal loan for the Pedernales Electric Cooperative, a nascent outfit that aimed to provide electricity to the impoverished rural farms and ranches in Johnson's district in the Texas Hill Country.^[1]

But when Johnson met Roosevelt, the president was distracted and the meeting ended before the young Congressman was able to ask about the loan. Johnson then turned to a friend, Tommy Corcoran, who was one of Roosevelt's top advisers, and asked for another meeting. Corcoran agreed to do so and offered some advice: "show him what Austin will look like...Don't argue with him, Lyndon, show him." At his next meeting with Roosevelt, Johnson strode in with poster-size photos that showed the progress being made on the construction of the Buchanan Dam on the Colorado River, as well as images of long-distance transmission lines and an electrified rural home at night.

Roosevelt agreed on the spot. He instructed the Rural Electrification Administration to make a \$1.3 million loan to the Pedernales Electric Cooperative. Today, it is the [largest electric cooperative in the United States](#) and the Texas Hill Country is one of the fastest-growing regions in the country.

Johnson didn't argue for electrification, he showed Roosevelt what it meant. And that is the strength of Scott Tinker's [new feature-length documentary](#), *SwitchOn*. Among the most maddening aspects of the ongoing debate about energy policy, renewables, and climate change is that they lack a human connection. *SwitchOn* succeeds because it shows how electricity and clean cooking fuels nourish humans.

Before going further, I must disclose that I have known Tinker for years and consider him a friend. Thus, I won't pretend to be an unbiased reviewer. A few months ago, I saw an early cut of the film and gave my thoughts on how to make it better. Thus, I'm not a neutral reviewer. That said, I've seen a lot of bad films about energy, including most recently, Michael Moore's *Planet of the Humans*. I've also endured a myriad of terrible presentations about energy. *SwitchOn* goes beyond numbers and charts. It allows viewers to see what life is like in remote regions of the world that have little or no access to modern energy.

