

PRESIDENT OF SIX COMPANIES "EAGER TO GO"

Says Work Will Get Under Way Within 36 Hours From Now.

SAN FRANCISCO, March 11. (Special) — "Ready, no not ready, eager!" This was the declaration made here today by William H. Wattis, president of the Six Companies, Inc., successful bidder on the great Boulder dam project when asked if his concern was ready to proceed with the work following the announcement that Secretary Wilbur had formally affixed his signature to the contract which authorized his company to go ahead.

"We're not loafing one hour, when the time is limited by a contract which charges us \$3,000 per day for each day beyond that limit."

And the head of this greatest of American construction concerns, thrown together to handle the greatest engineering project of a decade—this man who seems a General Goethals, or Hill, or the Huntington-Crocker-Stanford-Hopkins "Big Four" all rolled into one little man, leaned back in his chair to contemplate this monumental project whose construction head he is.

"WE'LL BE STARTING work within thirty six hours," he declared, Frank T. Crowe, one of the best engineers in the land, is in Las Vegas now, or will be some time today, to start the ball rolling, and we'll be on our way."

Wattis, a slight, white-haired man, with a quick expansive smile, is at present resting in a local hospital undergoing treatment, but "I'll be out of here soon, and believe me boys, I'm going to be in on this job."

An incredible sort of man, calmly floating a \$50,000,000 syndicate and eagerly leaping into the biggest engineering project continental America has ever seen—while in a hospital under treatment for cancer.

—THAT'S WILLIAM H. WATTIS of San Francisco and Ogden, Utah—president of the Utah Construction company, builders of railroads and most everything else, and

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president of the Six Companies, Incorporated, builders-elect of the stupendous \$165,000,000 Boulder Dam project.

Wrapped in a bathrobe, puffing blissfully on a cigar from the ready box at his side, he discussed this newest of his staggering string of ventures, this government project which has stirred the imagination of the whole world.

SAID WILLIAM H. WATTIS:

"Now, this dam is just a dam. It's no different from any other dam. It hasn't got a thing that the O'Shaughnessy dam, which we built, hasn't got." He exhaled a cloud of smoke, looked at the ceiling, and added: "There's just more of it, that's all."

He elaborated on this amazing theme, that the building of the Boulder dam is no occasion for fuss and feathers.

AND AS HE talked, he chuckled over the frequent jests that romped through his discussion and incidentally revealed that his concern had built the Western Pacific railroad from Salt Lake to Oroville, and numerous links of the Southern Pacific, and more dams than he could remember, and had done millions of dollars of reclamation work for the government.

He went on:

"People call this a dam, when, really, they ought to call it a tunnel. There's a real job—those diversion tunnels. We've got to dig way down below the river bed and put in four tunnels that are 4,000 feet long and 50 feet around. That's something. But this dam—well, it goes up higher and it reaches further back, otherwise it's the same little dam we threw up in a dozen places."

HE TALKED of other phases of the problem, and became downright enthusiastic over a "real nasty little job" that will receive first consideration. That is the building of seven miles of railroad, along the narrow gorge, to haul "mud and muck" from the tunnels and bring back gravel for concrete.

"We've got to lay that track, and furnish locomotives and heavy cars at our own expense. It's all dead outlay—expenses we've got to meet before we can even begin work." With a grin, he added: "You can see where a contractor has to have a few dollars before he can be a contractor."

WHICH LED HIM to a discussion of the origin of the Six Companies. For a moment his persistent jollity deserted him, as he commented ironically on "false" reports of the syndicate's inception.

These reports credited the entire syndicate scheme to a sudden and simultaneous inspiration of two member firms.

"**THAT DOESN'T EVEN** begin to be the truth," he declared vehemently. "That's as far away from the truth as could possibly be. My company began figuring on this thing when the Boulder dam bill was passed. We didn't know where we were then—didn't have any details to work on. But we were figuring."

"Then Morrison and Knudsen, of Boise, got in touch with us, and Frank T. Crowe, who had worked for both of us, and for the reclamation bureau, was brought in to organize details. Then MacDonold & Kahn approached us, and gradually the others came in. Any other story is—well, I know where

it comes from."

HIS QUIPS BEGAN flying as usual a moment later. He remarked that the idea of a syndicate was possibly born of the joint work now being done by the Utah Construction company and the W. A. Bechtal company on the Western Pacific extension between Bieber and Keddie.

"We knew it was too big a job for any one concern to handle," he declared. "It involves a lot of money—more money than any contractor has a right to have."

"We all agreed to prepare separate bids. Some of us did. Some of us ran around the corner, some place, and came back with what looked like a bid. Then our experts harmonized them."

HE WAS TOLD of reports that the "harmonized" bid had been pared, approximately \$1,000,000—by the syndicate representatives that carried it to Denver.

"They ought to be ashamed of themselves," he commented, drily. "Here we've already tossed away \$5,000,000,"—the difference between the Six Companies' bid and that of the nearest competitor.

"No," he added, "I don't think so. Did that report say anything about those representatives playing pinochle or poker on the way up there? That's my guess as to what they did. As a matter of fact, they didn't leave here with any definite bid. Merely a low figure and a high figure, with leave to do their best with them."

Wattis patiently answered questions concerning details of the huge job; he wasn't so sure what the company is going to do about the model city built at Boulder City—which they could use or not, but had to pay for just the same; he was sure that a camp would be established right on the job; he thought 4,000 was a good estimate of the number of men that would be used.

He didn't know just how the workers would be hired; there would be three shifts employed, of eight hours each; it would be main-

ly a "machinery job" as distinguished from a "labor" job; he would transport men from Boulder City to the site by—well, that's a detail that shouldn't worry a newspaperman.