In Regulatory Bargaining and Public Law, Professor Rossi explores the implications of a bargaining perspective for institutional governance and public law in deregulated industries such as electric power and telecommunications. Leading media accounts blame deregulated markets for failures in competitive restructuring policies. However, the author argues that governmental institutions, often influenced by private stakeholders, share blame for the defects in deregulated markets. The first part of the book explores the minimal role that judicial intervention played for much of the twentieth century in public utility industries and how deregulation presents new opportunities and challenges for public law. The second part of the book explores the role of public law in a deregulatory environment, focusing on the positive and negative incentives it creates for the behavior of private stakeholders and public institutions in a bargaining-focused political process. Regulatory Bargaining and Public Law presents a unified set of default rules to guide courts in the United States and elsewhere as they address the complex issues that will come before them in a deregulatory environment.

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Regulatory Bargaining and Public Law

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Theories of economic regulation modulate between optimism – associated with those who view regulators as benignly pursuing the public interest or other civic-minded goals – and pessimism – most commonly associated with the public choice school, which sees regulators as captured by the powerful private firms they are charged to regulate. These accounts of regulation focus mainly on regulation’s substance, rather than the process by which it is enacted and its ability to promote stability in government policy for the operation of markets and the decisions of investors. Yet, whatever account is best in the abstract, regulatory law has failed utterly to examine the evolution of regulation and how it interacts with changes in technology, economic conditions, and political preferences. Examining regulation and regulatory law through the lens of bargaining sheds light on the institutional role courts can play, particularly given the new issues that arise in deregulated, or competitively restructured, markets.

Under the regime of natural monopoly regulation, predominant in the twentieth century, public and private interests converged in ways that were often (to the extent the public interest account of regulation is correct), but certainly not always (as public choice reminds us), welfare enhancing. Natural monopoly regulation, which represents a contract of sorts, was plagued with its own problems; however, it provided a relatively stable legal system for more than 50 years. The stability of cost-of-service rate making largely limited renegotiation to the firm-specific rate-making process, working to minimize the incentives for regulated firms to attempt to influence government ex ante (i.e., prior to the formulation of a public decision) outside the regulatory agency. Against this backdrop, traditional doctrines of regulatory law purported to protect investors and consumers. In fact, for most of the twentieth century, courts played a modest role in regulated industries. Courts engaged in judicial review...
of regulatory agency decisions, but by and large agency decisions were not upset by the judiciary, which routinely deferred to the expertise and political accountability of regulators. Regulators were largely seen as facilitating a convergence between private and public interests, particularly where they regulated only a handful of firms on an ongoing basis.

Deregulation has many benefits. It is often touted for its propensity to allow private and public interests to converge through price mechanisms. At the same time, many criticize deregulation for falling short of this goal. In an electric power market with price competition, for instance, firms may face strong pressures to abandon their traditional service obligations in favor of higher-paying (and hence, more profitable) customers, leading to a divergence between public and private interests in market decisions.

Less examined is how deregulation may present new tensions between public and private interests in the regulatory process and for public law. With deregulation, the firm-specific rate hearing is no longer the norm for the adoption and implementation of deregulatory policies, inviting a much less focused and less predictable type of private influence on the regulatory process. As regulators look to alternative mechanisms for the implementation of deregulatory policies, such as general legislation, rulemaking, and standard tariffs, government potentially shares some blame with private firms for any welfare-reducing divergence between private interests and the public interest. Just as the traditional regulatory process may have responded disproportionately to the strongest interest groups, the process by which deregulatory policies are formulated and implemented may invite policy makers to respond disproportionately to new interest groups, possibly leading to the enactment of economic policies that thwart, rather than enhance, the overall welfare effects of competition. For instance, given the dual-jurisdictional system for regulating electric power in the United States, firms have strategic ways to escape the jurisdiction of state or federal regulators, taking advantage of gaps or jurisdictional overlaps in regulatory enforcement. In contrast, cost-of-service regulation provided ways of coordinating these gaps between regulatory authorities and evaluated firm-specific conduct more carefully – backing this up with enforcement in the setting of the firm’s rates – thus minimizing (but certainly not eliminating) the divergence between private and public interests.

In expanding the range and degree of potential divergence between public and private interests, deregulation challenges policy makers and courts to reevaluate many of the traditional public law doctrines that frame the process for defining and implementing the rules in competitive
markets. This book sets out to advance this project. In contrast to the pre-
dominant accounts of public choice theory and public-interested regula-
tion, the book draws on government relations bargaining as a mechanism
for assessing regulatory law. Contract-based approaches to regulation
analogize to a legalistic (judicially enforced) contract, drawing primarily
on judicial authority to compensate or deter renegotiation by a regula-
tory agency. In contrast, this book embraces a broader understanding of
the regulatory contract as a starting point for its method. Drawing on
the literature from the law and economics of corporate governance and
contracts, an “incomplete contracts” approach is presented in the insti-
tutional setting of economic regulation. This approach isolates incentives
and welfare states associated with contract renegotiation. In contrast to
legalistic contracts, which emphasize judicial enforcement of contracts,
the government relations bargaining approach highlights the insurance
implications of regulation and its renegotiation. This approach is sup-
plemented with a comparative institutional analysis, which evaluates the
institutional setting for governance of deregulated markets; it does not
limit its analysis to the decisions of a single regulator but pays attention to
alternative institutions, including courts, the legislature, and state versus
federal regulation.

Using a case study of electric power deregulation to draw general
lessons, the framework is applied to traditional doctrines of regulatory
law, including customer service obligations, the takings clause as a con-
straint on regulators, the filed tariff doctrine as a mechanism for limiting
ex post judicial enforcement, the dormant commerce clause and state
action immunity from antitrust enforcement, and regulatory federalism.
By isolating ex ante and ex post incentives and stressing the institutional
context for renegotiation, the framework reveals weaknesses these tra-
ditional doctrines of regulatory law present in a deregulatory era and
suggests ways courts might correct for them.

seem oxymoronic. A bargaining approach implies that government reg-
ulation will be replaced with market-based ordering, especially as indus-
tries are deregulated, leaving public law irrelevant to the bargaining pro-
cess. As is well known, though, deregulation is an extreme and somewhat
idealized concept. In this sense, “deregulation” is a term that can be crit-
icized on the same grounds as other commonly referenced media terms,
such as “serious comic,” or loaded political terms, such as “peace-keeping
force.” Yet, there is a point to simultaneously invoking bargaining in a
deregulatory environment and regulatory concepts and theories. As even
the most extreme market proponents are aware, deregulated markets rely heavily on regulation for implementation and oversight, especially where network facilities, such as electric power transmission lines, provide the primary means for market access for suppliers and customers. Further, as the book argues, regulatory bargaining entails much more than the negotiation of firm-specific regulation. Contractual relations abound in public law even where private firms are not an immediate party to anything approaching a legal contract. The government relations bargaining approach includes within its scope these relations, as well as more traditional regulatory contracts between the firm and the state. Public law retains relevance in framing these bargaining relations, even when markets are deregulated. Its role in this environment is the primary topic of inquiry within this book.
A scholarly book is not a short-term project. This one is several years in the making. Several individuals provided feedback to me along the way. Jim Chen, Dan Farber, Susan Rose-Ackerman, and Joseph Tomain provided extremely useful comments on a complete manuscript of the book. Bits and pieces of the manuscript have also benefitted from conversations with and comments by numerous individuals – far too many to name here – but I am particularly grateful to Robert Ahdieh, Rob Atkinson, Amitai Aviram, Scott Baker, Steven Bank, Barbara Banoff, Fred Bosselman, Mary Burke, Joel Eisen, Larry Garvin, Mitu Gulati, Adam Hirsch, Bruce Johnsen, Jonathan Klick, Kimberly Krawiec, David Markell, Greg Mitchell, Susan Rose-Ackerman, J. B. Ruhl, Mark Seidenfeld, Jacqueline Weaver, Phil Weiser, and Ellen Yee. Scott Baker deserves particular credit for encouraging me to think more broadly about regulatory law as a type of incomplete contract during the year he and I were colleagues at the University of North Carolina. I am also grateful to participants at workshops and conferences at Duke Law School, Emory Law School, University of Florida–Levin College of Law, George Mason University Law School, Georgetown University Law Center, University of Houston Law Center, University of Indiana–Indianapolis School of Law, University of Iowa College of Law, Marshall-Wythe School of Law at the College of William & Mary, University of North Carolina School of Law, Pepperdine University Law School, University of Richmond School of Law, University of San Diego School of Law, University of Southern California Law Center, University of Texas Law School, and Washington & Lee University Law School, all of which provided useful input and criticism on individual chapters.

As a young energy attorney in Washington, D.C., in the early 1990s, I was fortunate to work with a number of lawyers who understood
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the significance of the changes facing public utility industries. Earle O'Donnell and Robert O'Neil deserve particular mention for educating me about energy issues, as well as the practice of regulatory law. I may have gone into academia thinking I would escape the highly specialized world of energy law, but that was impossible. For the past decade, the American Bar Association Section on Administrative Law and Regulatory Practice has served as my main professional bridge to regulatory law practice and governmental agencies. Although my involvement with the Section has focused primarily on administrative law issues, many individuals from the Section have given me advice about this project, and my scholarship more generally.

I would not have been able to complete this book without the institutional support of Florida State University College of Law. Dean Don Weidner has always provided generous support for faculty research, even against precarious and declining state-based support for it. The institutional environment within the law school at Florida State University has also been more nurturing and supportive than any young scholar could expect. My on-site colleagues have tested my analysis, making the concepts, applications, and writing in the manuscript better over many discussions. My students patiently endured some discussion of the ideas in this book. Greg Goelzhauser provided diligent and thorough research assistance as I was preparing chapters.

To all of these people, thank you.

My inquiry into bargaining and regulation began with a series of law review essays and articles on public utility law and deregulation. Chapter 4 draws from an article on the duty to serve originally published in *Vanderbilt Law Review* in 1998.¹ Chapter 5 takes seed from a book review published in *Texas Law Review* in 1998.² It also draws from an article on deregulatory takings published in *Virginia Law Review* in 2000 (co-authored with Susan Rose-Ackerman),³ which was invited by the World Bank for a 1999 conference on infrastructure and investment in Rome, Italy. Chapter 6 owes much of its analysis to an article on the filed tariff doctrine published in *Vanderbilt Law Review* in 2003.⁴ Portions of this

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article were submitted as expert testimony on behalf of California public power interests in the PG&E bankruptcy, but this article was prepared in advance of my involvement in those proceedings. The framework idea and California example in Chapter 1 were laid out in a book review published in *Michigan Law Review* in 2002, and this review also inspired me to address the issues raised in Chapter 7 (although I also reject some of my earlier analysis in Chapter 8).\(^5\) I am grateful to these journals for allowing me to test drive the ideas I more fully elaborate on in this book. Although these chapters draw on some of my earlier works and extend them in new directions, particularly within a bargaining framework, much of the chapters – as well as the rest of the book – consist of entirely new material.

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