The problems with Carter's energy plan

By William Lasser

Why Jimmy Carter's energy policy won't work

1. People still think there's an energy crisis. This was surely true before Carter's "Voice of Doom" speech last Monday evening and there's no reason to believe that the situation has changed as will in the near future. The President's tactics of speaking loudly and carrying a big stick are not likely to change our fundamental energy attitudes of the citizenry. As long as we can buy all the gasoline we want, there's no perceived crisis.

2. People think there is a crisis but still are not motivated to conserve. Even those who agree with the President's statements are not likely to conserve. Why? Because under the Carter plan doesn't affect Americans where it really hurts — in the pocketbook. Besides, the "crisis" is an intangible one; unlike during World War II it might help to slow it down.

3. The gasoline tax is stiffly cosmetic. Raising gasoline taxes by five or even ten cents will make no difference to the American consumer. Prices jumped from around 35 cents to almost 65 cents within a year or so in the early 1970s and, except for a short period of declining consumption, it didn't make any difference. For a gas tax to work, it would have to raise prices at the pump by dollars, not cents.

4. The plan makes a great deal of assumption about the American's lifestyle is based on a presumption that energy supplies are limitless. Americans still take Sunday drives in the country, still alone on the morning to work. The Carter plan makes no attempt, however, to reverse the trend towards urbanization, the spreading out of America. The mass migration of Americans from the cities to outlying areas since World War II has brought with it significant increase in demand for gasoline. Gas tax revenues are supposed to be derived from the automobile. Until we change that focus, energy demand is bound to go up.

5. The plan will increase regional conflict. Carter has effectively pitted the Northeastern states, and especially New England, against the South. People from North to South, but it might help to slow it down.

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By Glenn Brownstein

We have been busy this past week about President Carter's "media blitz," how he used several devices to give maximum effect to his new energy proposal. In nine days. Despite charges of possible overreaction, it appears from the early returns that Carter's strategy has worked: Americans have some idea of how the new plan could affect them, and they are likely to be sympathetic to the President because of the proposal was presented.

Carter's timing was excellent. Historically, a president is never more popular than in his first three or four months in office. This favorable rating will decline over the summer whether Carter makes an unpopular decision or not, it always has. In addition, while Carter has been acclaimed as the most masterful manipulator of the media, there is a one enormous advantage television:

For all its shortcomings, TV is a way to reach millions of people instantly and more importantly, dwell. In William Porter's book, "Assault on the Media: The Nixon Years," he expressed a theory that appears to define Carter's media strategy.

"One of the standing convictions of any political leader is that the great mass of people will support him on any given issue if he only understands it: he could only reach them directly, bring the force of his personality and his persuasiveness to bear, he could lead anyone in the best sense of the word. The chief barriers to that clear transmission from leader to willing follower are the journalists who write down what they think is important and the public's acceptance, or in fact inaccurate his ideas. A primary objective of media strategy is thus to find the line of a way to by-pass those interpreters."

Let's examine the "blitz" piece by piece and see how Carter has succeeded in some extent in getting his message across and minimizing the influence of the press in transmitting it.

First there was the "Day in the Life of the American"

During President Carter's address to the nation on April 17, 1977, during a crucial period of his election campaign. According to the surveys, Carter's speech was "a triumph of a President." But the question is: How can a President have an overwhelming victory and at the same time be defeated? It was actually a victory for Carter because it was a victory for the President at getting nationwide exposure and support from the American people.

But the President's critics say that this was a "blitz" piece and that it is a "blitz" piece because it was a "blitz" piece. The President used a "blitz" piece to get his message across and to minimize the influence of the press in transmitting it.

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