No energy solution?

By William Lasser

Jimmy Carter's energy program has been described as giving "full authority," the implication being that the plan will upset all the interest groups in the country equally, so that none of them will have the heart to attack it. While calling for sacrifices in what is to be the "moral equivalent of war," the plan is also ruled out anybody very much. In attempting to reconcile these irreconcilable goals, the President has created a program which is all shell and no substance, and which will never even begin to solve the nation's energy crisis.

The result is that the Administration has to sell to the Congress and the public anoint that is both unpopular and unsuppressible. By stressing the need for inconveniences and hardships, Carter has made it even more difficult for election-conscious legislators and luxury-conscious voters to accept.

The President's first task is to get the program through Congress into law. In order to accomplish this, the Administration has emphasized the interdependence of each part of the package, the argument being that it could not be balanced that tampering with any one part would ruin all of it. Such a strategy is helpful in two ways; first, it gives Carter some leverage in dealing with the many forces acting on Capitol Hill, and second, it gives him a chance to blame Congress later if an unevenly-modified package turns out to be unsuccessful.

He receded his $50 rebate plan and changed his mind on some of the water projects in an effort to placate the oil and gas lobbies and the shrunken Congress. The energy package is all shell, in a very kind of New England, prompting speculation that the President never even enlisted the services of Speaker Tip O'Neill, who just happens to be from Massachusetts.

This expression of regional deference is only a small example of the kinds of constraints facing the President in the formulation of his policy. Carter and the Administration have tied by what the Congress will accept, what the people will obey and what their special interests will oppose. Economic considerations were of the utmost importance—while it will not help the economy, Carter insists his plan will not least hurt it too.

The key issue, which the President's program confronts only rhetorically, is that as a nation we use too much energy. Specifically, we could cut our consumption down in two ways: by reducing home heating and gasoline use. The Carter proposal, using tax incentives, encourages Americans to find new homes, which will be better in every case. But with respect to automobiles, the fuel, the proposal, despite a melange of statements and curves, falls short of what is necessary.

Given that America is one of the energy, there is one obvious answer: rationing. If the government restricted the total amount of gasoline which could be consumed, then that divided figure among all Americans in some equitable manner, consumption would decrease automatically. Increased taxes would be unnecessary, as oil reserve could be easily built up, and our problems would be solved.

But the American consumer would not accept rationing, and will not until the crisis is crystal clear and unavoidable. To take away the free use of our cars would be to deny us what we perceive as our God-given right to drive. The resulting protest and illegal activity would be reminiscent of Prohibition.

So instead, Carter proposes a "gas-guzzler" tax and an increasing gasoline tax on gasoline. The idea is that a more effective "rationing" gas, by making it very unreasonable to drive. But Carter refused to impose a high tax, saying that he "must have been influenced by the effectiveness of nickel and dime tax increases. Even these taxes will be refunded to the people on a per capita basis, (and hence regressively) which Americans as pleased as they were by George McGovern's unfortunate plan to give everyone $1,000 and then tax it back.

There has been no coordinated resistance to the President's package: the Republicans, enjoying one of the benefits of being out of power, have criticized the proposal without coming up with an alternative. Perhaps this is because there is no legitimate answer. What we must really do is to figure out which gas has which price. The fact that the turns of the century, a trend towards spreading out, towards the suburbs, getting further and further away from each other, and using more and more energy.

Our energy troubles can be traced back to the invention of the internal combustion engine in the 19th century, to the automobile as one of the first things that would create jobs—and to the automobiles that have been produced since then.

Neither free nor the government have emphasized the other a bureaucratic obstacle between themselves and their goals. Bexley is an ad hoc mystery, having no elected house officers, and no need for the petty bureau- several times, almost as if Bexley was moron Dorman enroll as well. I need something else to do is to those people who can do it.

Let me emphasize that the two individuals who attended the Dorman meeting and voted for the Bexley project were empowered in any way nor way were they accepted by the house. Anything they do is on their own initiative and does not reflect the feelings of Bexley Hall in any way.

Bexley is still gathering its status symbols, hoping to find inner contentment through outer popularity and by fulfilling the needs of the community's worth—the people—getting good grades to please our parents and grad schools. In this way we evade the issue of growing up. We are adults; we know that we have accepted responsibilities to ourselves. Ultimately each of us is alone. That can be frightening, but in fulfilling our potential as people, we could know no more joy than satisfaction.