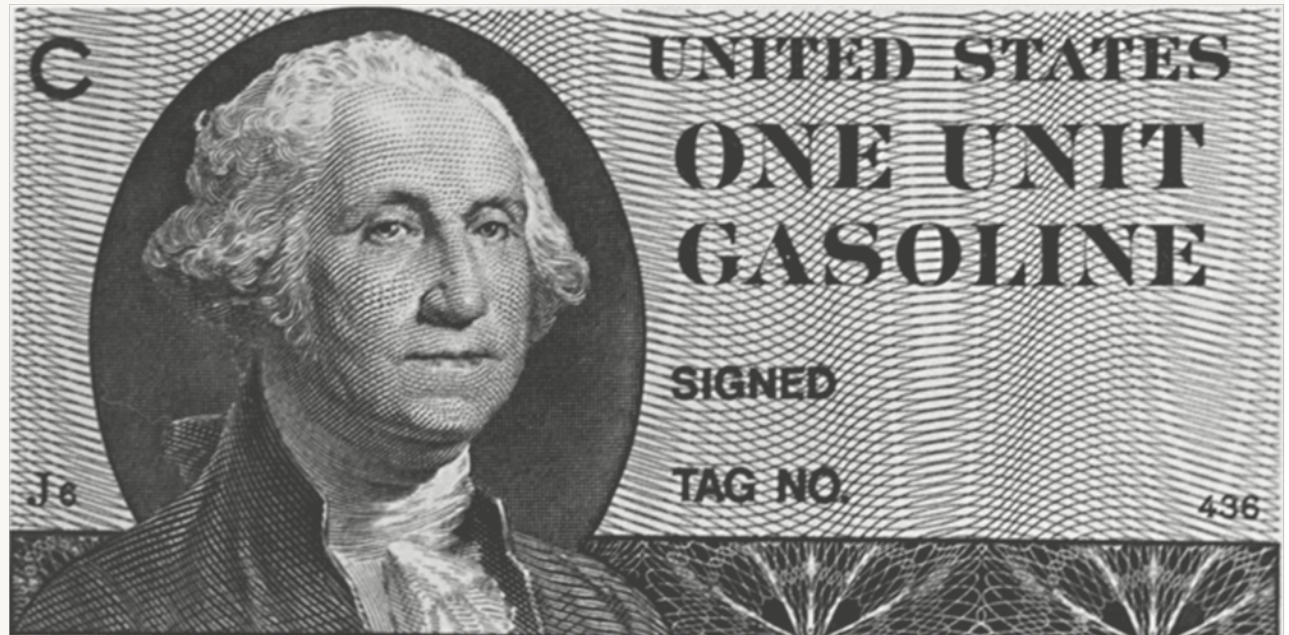




The Moral Equivalent of War

Energy Rhetoric during the Carter Years



Presentation outline

1. Concept of the rhetorical presidency and methods of historical-rhetorical research.
2. Carter's National Energy Plan and his persuasive techniques in selling it to Congress and the public.
3. Political and rhetorical factors that determined fate of the plan.
4. Lessons we can learn from both his energy policy formation and his rhetorical methods.

The rhetorical presidency

- *Richard Neustadt (1960)* - corrected notion of "separate powers" to separate institutions with shared power. Rhetoric is key: "presidential power is the power to persuade."
- *Jeffrey Tulis (1987)* - presented theory of "second constitution," where presidents assume continual rhetorical leadership of popular opinion.
- *David Zarefsky (2002)*- shows how ceremonial speeches are used for policy promotion and how rhetorical invention is used to enhance leadership. Example: "going public."

Historical-rhetorical methods

- ▣ Reconstruction of political events during the period in question.
- ▣ Analysis of presidential speeches and public announcements that were key to the period.
- ▣ Examination of behind-the-scene connections between policy formation and policy expression within the technical and public spheres.

Prelude to Carter

■ Nixon

- ★ First to give speech solely on energy (1971)
- ★ Presided over 1973 OPEC Oil Embargo
- ★ First to use “energy independence” as a national goal
- ★ First to propose windfall profits tax on oil companies.



■ Ford

- ★ 1974-1975 world-wide recession led to drop in oil prices.
- ★ Inflationary price spirals followed close behind.



Carter's early months

- Few early clues that energy would be a top priority.
- National Research Council study influenced Carter to focus on conservation.
- Shortly after Carter took office, severe natural gas shortages developed in Northeast and Midwest.
- Carter delivered February fireside chat after Congress passed emergency natural gas legislation.

Fireside chat

February 2, 1977



Energy plan's architect



Carter's energy plan

Ultimate goal: reduce dependence on foreign oil

- ▣ Contained 113 separate initiatives focused on:
 - ★ Reducing demand through conservation and efficiency
 - ★ Maximizing use of domestic energy sources
 - ★ Balancing costs and benefits among various stakeholders
- ▣ Controversial components included:
 - ★ Wellhead tax on domestic oil to reach par with world prices
 - ★ Stiff taxes on industrial uses of oil and natural gas
 - ★ Authority to increase gasoline tax 5 cents per year through 1989 if consumption exceeded targets

Promoting the plan

- Carter and advisors launched a major marketing blitz, including extensive briefings, wide press coverage, and speeches by the President and cabinet.
- Only one aide, Jack Watson, advised against such a move, recommending instead slow, backstage diplomacy.
- Strategy amounted to “going public” *before* having exhausted backstage politicking and diplomacy.

"Moral Equivalent of War"

April 18, 1977



Requesting sacrifices



Reasons for plan's problems

- ▣ Complex proposal developed in private
- ▣ Strong opposition from entrenched corporate interests
- ▣ White House dysfunctional management structure
- ▣ Poor relations with Congress
- ▣ Carter's ineffective rhetorical strategies

Opposing special interests

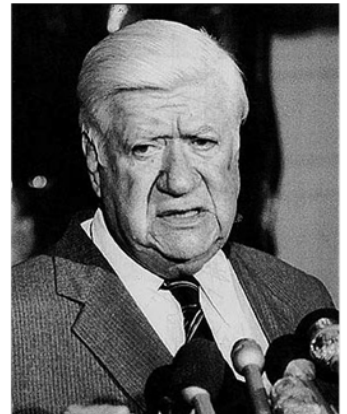
- ▣ Oil Companies
- ▣ Utilities
- ▣ Ralph Nader
- ▣ Energy Action

“Spokes of the Wheel” management



House passes plan in 3 months

- ★ House Speaker Tip O'Neill, D-MA consolidated deliberations into a single ad hoc committee instead of multiple ones.
- ★ Office of Technology Assessment report was also instrumental in confirming crisis nature of world energy outlook.
- ★ OTA report encouraged even more stringent measures.



Senate deliberates 18 months

- *Robert Byrd, D-WV* – Majority Leader and multi-term senator from coal state.
- *Russell Long, D-LA* – Finance Committee chair and advocate for oil industry.
- *Scoop Jackson, D-WA* – Energy Committee chair who empathized with Carter on opposition by special interests.



What survived?

- **Conservation** – utilities must provide customers with information about energy saving methods. Mandatory efficiency standards set for 13 home appliances.
- **Tax credits** – homeowners and business giving tax breaks for installing energy saving devices. Tax on gas guzzlers.
- **Utility rates** – state utility commissions required to implement energy saving rate structures and discontinue discounts for heavy users.
- **Coal conversion** - new energy plants required to shift away from oil and natural gas, with existing plants to switch by 1990.
- **Natural gas** – gradual deregulation of natural gas prices until 1985, when all price controls were to be lifted.

"Crisis of Confidence"

July 15, 1979

- Carter was supposed to deliver another speech on energy, but he cancelled it at last minute. One adviser wanted to declare OPEC "Enemy Number One."
- Camp David meetings over 10 days, including meeting with average citizens and political leaders.
- Not really one speech, but two – one on nation's lack of confidence and another on energy.
- Iranian hostages, increase in oil prices, long lines at gas pumps, and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

Carter's energy legacy

- Made energy a serious national political issue and first framed many of today's relevant topics.
- Was prescient in understanding long-term needs for comprehensive energy policy, but may have overreacted to energy events within his own era.
- Introduced alternative energy technologies into the nation's political imagination.
- Failed to connect conservation and shifts to new technologies to the political and economic will of the American people.

Carter's rhetorical strategies

- ▣ Did not believe in speechwriters and never developed a hierarchical sense of audience.
- ▣ “Went public” at inopportune times without thinking through the political ramifications.
- ▣ Mixed public/private rhetoric:
 - ★ In May 4 1977 private meeting with Congressmen, Carter backpedaled on moral seriousness of situation as outlined in his April speech.
 - ★ In October 1977 statements, after Congressional committee votes, Carter implied that Senate members were influenced by Big Oil at same time Schlesinger was privately negotiating compromise with oil companies.

Lack of practical reasoning

- Known as *phronesis* by the ancient Greeks, practical reasoning is the “collective reasoning process that is the basis for extrapolating public opinion” (Gerald Hauser).
- Basis for understanding how multiple publics use vernacular language to “express thoughts, beliefs, and commitments to which a significant and engaged segment of the populace holds attachments that are consequential for choices individuals are willing to make and actions they are willing to support in shaping their collective future.”

Potential of Obama years

- “There is an opportunity to address energy needs in a way that hasn’t been possible for decades. It almost feels like we’re picking up from where we were in the 1970s.”

-- Daniel

Yergin

- Obama’s knowledge of issues, rhetorical abilities, Congressional insider knowledge, and popularity with public bode well for progress on energy.

What is different today?

- ▣ Growing concern about climate change has made energy a persistent political issue.
- ▣ As happened in the early 1980s, oil prices have plummeted, threatening to remove energy issues from public attention.
- ▣ Faced with insolvency, the automobile industry is reengineering from gasoline engines to electric motors.
- ▣ Solar and wind technologies are much more mature.
 - ★ California and other states have set technical and regulatory examples of the efficacy of distributed generation.
 - ★ Obama's economic stimulus focuses on green jobs to soften the negative economic impact on renewable energy industry.

My advice to Obama

1. Don't develop your energy plan in private.
2. Get your speechwriters involved in policy formation—early.
3. Don't "go public" unless you really need to and you're certain what you want the American people to do.
4. Get the public involved in doing positive things, not limiting themselves.
5. Don't be in too much of a hurry, even in these urgent times.



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Fini

