

Energy Department, but his comments failed to strike a responsive chord with the electorate. The public continued to believe that there was no real energy crisis and that energy shortages were temporary. The public also thought that the problems had been created by Arab oil producers, the major oil companies, the Federal Government, or all three. With a Republican president and a Democratic Congress, there was no easy way for either party to exploit the energy issue.⁴¹

On January 7, 1977, Ford presented his last energy message to Congress. Cautioning against the dangers of a greatly expanded federal role in energy, he also warned the Nation of the high cost of delay in solving the energy problem. Ford emphasized the complexity of the issue and the difficult and extensive choices that had to be made. Besides underlining the interdependence among the United States and other consumer nations, he outlined the conflicting objectives that had to be balanced to achieve long-term equilibrium between energy supply and demand. The most difficult problems were reconciling politically popular low consumer prices with adequate and secure energy supplies and balancing environmental objectives with energy production and use. Ford also predicted that Americans might have to adjust to limited economic growth and development and also be willing to take greater environmental risks with energy technologies. Among the legislative matters he reviewed, Ford again specifically asked for the establishment of an Energy Independence Authority "to assist private sector financing of new energy facilities." Four days later, Ford submitted his energy reorganization proposal to Congress, recommending the creation of a Department of Energy.⁴²

The winter of 1976-1977 turned bitterly cold. As the thermometer plunged to record lows, electric utilities responded to record demands. Natural gas supplies in New England fell critically short. In several states, plants and businesses closed or curtailed working hours, affecting over 200,000 workers. Thousands of school children received extended or unscheduled winter vacations. The Nation shivered, perhaps as much from this new energy uncertainty as from the weather. Following Carter's inauguration, Americans waited to see what the new President would do.