

keep the profits which they have not earned." Unless they speak out, Carter told the American people, the oil companies would "have more influence on the Congress than you do."⁶⁷

The appeal by Carter for the end of "excessive Federal Government controls" over petroleum reiterated a theme he had advanced two years earlier, but gradual decontrol of oil would have little immediate efficacy in alleviating the increasingly severe shortage of gasoline. As lines formed at service stations in California in early May, tempers flared and sporadic violence broke out. Ironically, one of the few areas in which the Department could provide relief was in the more rigorous enforcement of existing price regulations. "Strike force" teams of auditors from the Department's Economic Regulatory Administration swept down on refiners and individual service stations, searching for gasoline ceiling price violations and mandating on-the-spot price rollbacks when violations were found. Such small victories, however, did little to stem growing congressional antagonism toward the Department.

Two House subcommittees held hearings to explore the real cause of gasoline shortages and to find out if the Department's regulations had actually made shortages worse. Economic Regulatory Administrator David J. Bardin testified that they indeed had. "I daresay if Congress had mandated a similar control system for milk," he noted, "we now would have milk shortages around the country."⁶⁸

Although eager to find scapegoats, Congress was in no mood to follow the administration's lead in resolving the energy crisis. In May Congress killed the administration's standby gasoline rationing plan, and of the three mandatory conservation measures Carter submitted in March only the proposal to restrict temperatures in buildings was approved. Undaunted by these defeats, Carter, standing on the White House roof in front of a large solar collector, announced on June 20 an ambitious program to increase the Nation's use of solar energy. The President's proposals included a solar development bank for home improvement loans to install solar energy systems,



Gasoline lines stretch as far as the eye can see in Rockville, MD, June 16, 1979.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy