

National Energy Strategy that became the “template” for the Energy Policy Act of 1992. Watkins concluded that under his watch the Department had achieved a “Level 2” of excellence, with a grade of C+ or B-. The new secretary of energy, he observed, would “inherit a Department that has become one of the finest in all of government.”<sup>232</sup>

Environmentalists and the “special interest groups,” as Watkins termed them, were not so charitable. The Military Production Network, an alliance of groups primarily local and regional concerned with weapons complex issues, complained that the production-first, secrecy-oriented culture still prevailed. Watkins, the umbrella group contended in its December 1992 report, “Rhetoric v. Reality,” “was not able to fundamentally reform the Department of Energy.” Following four years, the report stated, “tangible results are minimal.” Mismanagement, failure to control contractors, and wasteful spending still characterized the Department.<sup>233</sup>

A different perspective was expressed by Comptroller General Charles Bowsher, head of the General Accounting Office. He noted that Watkins’ self-grading of C+/B- was “reasonable.” The Department of Energy had been an agency “in really big trouble,” Bowsher observed, but Watkins had “really started to tackle some of the problems.” Before Watkins could even begin to consider policy issues, the comptroller stated, he had to solve the management problems. Bowsher added that the Department was not yet where it should be and the new administration would have to “work hard” to move forward from Watkins’s accomplishments.<sup>234</sup>

Ironically, Watkins never carried out many high-priority missions facing him when he became secretary of energy. His most urgent task had been to resume the full-scale manufacturing of nuclear weapons. To do this, he needed to restart plutonium milling at Rocky Flats, open WIPP, build a plutonium separator in Idaho, and began producing tritium again.

None of this happened, and at the close of Watkins’ tenure the Department was not capable of producing nuclear weapons.

What did happen was that the end of the Cold War and major arms reduction agreements completely reoriented priorities. “World events have changed things tremendously,” Watkins observed, “and actually helped me in a situation that would have been really something.” Had the need to produce nuclear warheads not abated, he noted, President Bush would have had to use emergency powers to override safety regulations and environmental laws to allow production to resume at facilities that would have been “safe enough, but not at a desirable level.” The end of the Cold War, however, eliminated the “produce or else” mandate that had driven the Department’s nuclear weapons complex for over forty years.<sup>235</sup>