

Sen. Morgan Reports...

As President Carter told the American people on television recently, the effort to meet this country's energy needs is one of the most pressing problems we face.

In that television appearance he proposed several steps which his administration believes are necessary to meet this growing crisis, and the matter now has reached the Senate for debate and action.

The first major element in the President's energy package should have been given Senate approval by the time this is read. All energy matters will be handled by one Department of Energy, instead of 91 agencies which have had a hand in energy policy. Other elements of the package remain to be debated.

The two key components of the plan are conservation and coal. Better insulation of public and private buildings, including homes, would be required to stop waste, and coal would replace natural gas in industrial plants where such a substitution is feasible. Industries who are told to switch would be given tax breaks to cushion the expense and some tax inducement would be given home owners to better insulate their homes.

Incentives to seek out more energy would be offered. The price of interstate gas will be increased and so would the price of newly found oil, an effort to make search for these products more attractive to oil and gas companies. A crash program on finding better methods of using solar and geothermal energy would be instituted and safer way to employ nuclear power would be sought.

Under the Carter program, cars which get low mileage on a gallon of gasoline would be taxed and cars which use fuel efficiently would be rewarded by rebates. Voluntary conservation by car users would be asked for, but if the demand for gasoline keeps climbing, instead of slowing down by 1980, then an extra tax on gasoline is proposed. This would be five cents the first year and five cents every year thereafter for 10 years.

Some of these proposals will have problems in the Senate.

There will be strong lobbying by automobile manufacturers against the tax on "gas guzzlers." Rebates to small car owners will have troubles because the chief beneficiaries would be the makers of foreign brands.

The oil and gas companies will fight the plan to place any limits on what they can charge, even though the limits have been raised sharply. The \$1.75 price of interstate gas which has been proposed is far above the present ceiling, but the companies want complete decontrol and will not settle willingly for anything short of that.

The plan to tax gasoline will face opposition, even though it gives the public until 1980 to show that we, as a nation, can practice conservation as they do in other countries. There will be arguments that imported oil should be taxed instead and that the retail tax would add to inflation.

It should be an interesting debate and certainly it is a very crucial one. As a nation, we simply cannot continue a situation in which six per cent of the world's population uses 36 per cent of the world's energy.



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