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The Managerial Moralist:
The Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter, 1977 - 1981

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Abstract

Elected President on 2 November 1976, Jimmy Carter, was little known outside Georgia and was the first politician from the deep South to be elected since the Civil War and with the briefest record of public service since Woodrow Wilson. He presented himself as an outsider, not part of the Washington establishment, who would bring back an ethical, competent government. However, his devastating electoral defeat to Ronald Reagan in 1980, the worst for an incumbent since 1932, set the seal on what was widely regarded as a failed presidency. Carter's much praised humanitarian record since he left office in 1981 has not prompted any serious re-evaluation by historians.

This study dissects Carter's domestic policies, re-evaluating the unresolved questions relating to Carter's character and ideology and to put his presidency in the proper historic context. I will begin by reviewing the relevant historiography, the important issues of the decade and his early political life, including his triumph in 1976. I will then seek to address Carter's leadership by analysing how his administration was organised, and exploring the key domestic policy issues, principally the economy, energy, health, welfare, labour and his approach to the social changes that dominated America in the 1970's. I will conclude with his failed attempt to be re-elected in 1980. In conclusion I will comment on Carter's overall effectiveness as a leader and how he should be ranked against other modern Presidents. This thesis is based on a wide range of sources including extensive use of collections from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the *Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, oral history transcripts, published papers and numerous other primary and secondary sources covering political, economic and social issues.

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Introduction

Presidential biographers and political historians have been harsh in their judgement of the Carter Presidency. Most have regarded him as a failure both in terms of his skills in the role and his ability to deliver on his key programmes. The few who have taken a revisionist position have not disagreed that he had significant failures but sought to put these in the context of the difficulties he faced which they argued were beyond his control. If his reputation as President could not be revised some have sought to unravel the enigma of his character and identify the basis of his ideology and beliefs in a wider context.

The early historians of the Carter Presidency condemned his leadership and overall effectiveness, with some even questioning his character.¹ Whilst Haynes Johnson in *The Absence of Power* (1980) and Burton and Scott Kaufman in *The Presidency of James Earl Carter* (2006) acknowledged the difficulties he faced, they argued that Carter's failure was one of leadership style. He failed to articulate a vision for America and provide a coherent agenda that could deliver significant change. His administration's poor relations with Congress, the press and even Washington as a whole, were viewed as avoidable. He failed to build relationships with key Washington insiders that were essential to him achieving success. His advisors lacked insider

¹ Clark Mollenhoff, *The President who Failed. Carter out of Control* (London: MacMillan, 1980). Peter Meyer, *James Earl Carter. The Man and the Myth* (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews and McMeet, 1978). Laurence Shoup, *The Carter Presidency and Beyond Power and Politics in 1980's* (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1980). Robert Shogan *Promises to Keep, Carter's First One Hundred Days* (New York: Crowell, 1977).

knowledge and political expertise.² They characterised Carter as a mediocre President who, despite having an understanding of the will of the electorate, lacked the political know-how to carry the country with him.³ Some, like William Leuchtenberg in *The Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to Barack Obama (2009)*, viewed Carter's failure as inevitable as he did not take the opportunity to build upon the traditional Democratic coalition but tried to distance himself from his natural constituency.⁴ Kenneth Morris, in *Jimmy Carter: American Moralist (1996)* argued that Carter failed because he created a view of public morality that ultimately was too pessimistic for the public he was trying to influence. He tried to give personal moral leadership but was unable to support that with a vision to inspire the electorate.⁵ The deficiencies in Jimmy Carter's character were the subject of several articles and biographies. In a 1983 *Presidential Studies Quarterly* article, Barbara Kellerman argued that Carter's introverted nature hampered his ability to build key relationships. He acted always as the outsider. Even within his administration's decision-making process he played a solitary role with his focus being on study rather than discussion.⁶ To Betty Glad, in *Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House (1980)*, Carter was a traditional politician who argued for change but did little effective to achieve it. He lacked a coherent plan and he hedged his positions when pressed. She argued that he did not act for the public good and used public relations for

² Haynes Johnson, *In the Absence of Power. Governing America* (New York: Viking, 1980) and Burton Kaufman & Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

³ Ibid.

⁴ William Leuchtenberg, *In the Shadow of FDR. From Harry Truman to Barack Obama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁵ Kenneth Morris, *Jimmy Carter: American Moralist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

⁶ Barbara Kellerman, 'Introversion in the Oval Office' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol 13 (Summer 1983): 383-399.

his own ends. Also, he did not take criticism well nor did he learn from mistakes, both of which damaged his administration.⁷

The most critical of the scholars were those who studied the office of the Presidency in general. Fred Greenstein's *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to George W Bush* (2004), John Burke's *Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice* (2000), James Pfiffner's *The Modern Presidency* (2008) and Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power and Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (1990)⁸ studied the key factors that made for successful presidencies. They argued that effectively presidents required a core set of skills such as being a good communicator, having a strategic sense, being persuasive, having managerial skills, self-discipline and emotional intelligence.⁹ Measured against these criteria, except for self-discipline, all these writers found Carter wanting. His inability to persuade the public over energy and economic policy, his poor relations with Congress and the national press and his inability to articulate a coherent vision for his administration were all characteristic of a failure of leadership. Those that focussed on organisational issues criticised Carter's management style. They highlighted specifically his failure to select staff with experience of Washington and to appoint a chief of staff until much later in his administration. They argued that his belief in cabinet government

⁷ Betty Glad, *Jimmy Carter. In Search of the Great White House* (New York: W Norton, 1980).

⁸Fred Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to George W Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) John P Burke, *Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000) James Pfiffner, *The Modern Presidency* (Boston: Wadsworth Engage Learning, 2008) and Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents. The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

⁹ Greenstein, *Presidential Difference*.

resulted in policies that failed to consider not only the political realities but often the views of Carter himself.¹⁰

Revisionists' view of the Carter Presidency did not really challenge the concept that Carter was an unsuccessful president. Their argument was in effect a plea for mitigation that given the problems he faced it would have taken someone with the skills of a Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) to succeed.¹¹ In the *Press and the Carter Presidency (1989)*, Mark Rozell argued that a more favourable view of Carter started in 1989. This was driven by recognition of Carter's work after 1980 in comparison with the ethics of Ronald Reagan's Presidency. Rozell argued that the press never really believed Carter's moral stance as president but his good works after office changed their view.¹² Revisionists highlighted his achievements as the 1976 election victory, his record on the environment (particularly the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980), and his success in the Middle East. Erwin Hargrove, in *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and Politics of the Public Good (1988)*, argued that Carter was forced to tread a path between what were often irreconcilable positions by promoting what he believed to be the ideal, comprehensive solution. Whilst criticising Carter's political skills, his inability to set priorities and husband political resources, Hargrove described him as a 'policy politician' who avoided politics. However, in representing the public interest, he had no natural constituency, so he had to build support for each proposal on an ad hoc basis. To Hargrove, Carter was prescient in trying to move the Democratic

¹⁰ Ibid and Burke, *Presidential Transitions*.

¹¹ Stuart Eizenstat, 'President Carter, the Democratic Party, and the Making of Domestic Policy', in Herbert Rosenbaum and Alex Ugrinsky, eds, *The Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter* (Westport: Greenwood, 1994), 15.

¹² Mark Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency* (Boulder: Westview, 1989).

Party to a more neo-liberal stance by supporting equality, social justice whilst linking it to fiscal responsibility and efficient government. However, this approach required an economic recovery to fund reform which Carter was unable to achieve. Hargrove argued that Carter recognised the issues that were critical for the future of the Democratic Party and that many of these would subsequently be identified by Bill Clinton. He was therefore ahead of his time but as a president in transition to a more conservative era, he lacked the skills to change the fortunes of his party.¹³ John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency. A Re-evaluation (1993)*, argued that Carter was a 'post liberal' who sought to adjust liberalism to a new age, and although many of his policies were incomplete they set the scene for legislation in the future.¹⁴ In *The President's Agenda: Domestic Policy Kennedy-Clinton (1999)*, Paul Light argued that Carter did reasonably well with Congress, given its make-up. Criticism of him overloading his legislative agenda was therefore unfair as much of the programme had been initiated by Congress itself.¹⁵

The historian Carl Biven stated in *Jimmy Carter's Economy: Policy in the Age of Limits(2002)* that Carter's economic policy, even though it was perceived as a failure, was a reasonable response to the conditions at the time and that his economic record compared favourably with the Reagan administration.¹⁶ Abernathy, Hill and Williams reasoned in *The Carter Years: The President and Policy Making (1984)* that Carter was

¹³ Erwin Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and Politics of the Public Good* (London: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

¹⁴ John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

¹⁵ Paul Light, *The President's Agenda: Domestic Policy Choice from Kennedy to Clinton* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

¹⁶ W Carl Biven, *Jimmy Carter's Economy: Policy in the Age of Limits* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002).

a victim of the 'Age of Limits' in that he was the first modern Democratic President to operate where there was limited economic growth. This made it very difficult, if not impossible, to fund social programmes.¹⁷ Mark Rozell stated that although Carter did have a honeymoon period which lasted until the Bert Lance affair in September 1977, he always suffered in the eyes of the press by being compared with the activism of such previous Democratic Presidents as FDR, John F Kennedy (JFK) and Lyndon B Johnson (LBJ). Carter did not help himself by refusing to articulate simple messages to the public; everything was complicated and as a result confusing. However, Rozell believed that Carter made changes in 1978 which improved the internal organisation of the White House. This learning from mistakes paid dividends with the public but this was not picked up on by the press.¹⁸ Julian Zelizer's *Jimmy Carter (2010)*, a more recent biography, was more positive about the Carter Presidency in highlighting his achievements, particularly in foreign policy and his political campaigning in 1976, but he did not ignore his failure to build relationships and support for his policies.¹⁹

Some authors have tried to view the Carter Presidency from a different perspective. Charles Jones in *Trustee President: Jimmy Carter and the United States Congress (1988)* believed that Carter should be evaluated against the concept of a Trustee President. He submitted that Carter believed a president acted as the representative of the public good and was therefore not bound by the views of Congress or any special interest. The advantage of this approach was that it turned on its head criticism of Carter's failure to deal effectively with Washington because in effect the

¹⁷ M Glen Abernathy, Dilys M Hill, and Phil Williams, *The Carter Years: The President and Policy Making* (London: Frances Pinter, 1984).

¹⁸ Rozell, *Press and the Carter Presidency*.

¹⁹ Julian Zelizer, *Jimmy Carter* (New York: Times Books, 2010).

traditional approach of working with key interest groups was not relevant. It also could be used to help explain the Carter antipathy to special interests, his relations with Congress and his leadership style. Carter believed that Congress should support him because he had studied an issue carefully, had public support and was unaffected by special interest. His administration was therefore designed to deliver the policies that the public needed whatever the political consequences. Congress's role therefore was simply to pass legislation in the public interest. In Jones's view the success of a Trustee President was dependent upon finding time to study, the political judgement of his close aides and finding a mechanism for establishing the public will.²⁰ Identifying the views of the people outside of an election was gained directly through Carter's Town Hall meetings, home visits and 'phone in's'. This was supplemented by his pollster Pat Caddell's data and staff member Midge Constanza's work with interest groups.²¹ Trusteeship thus became a means of explaining Carter's approach to governing in that he focussed on doing what he believed was right, whether it was deliverable or not. Whilst Jones may have provided an explanation of Carter's failure to deliver on his goals it did not consider that proactive attempts to gain the public view had largely stopped by 1978 when his administration, in recognition of its failings, became more open to working directly with Congress and interest groups.

Whilst most writers have continued to argue that Carter could have been successful but ultimately failed in virtually all aspects of the role, Stephen Skowronek in *The Politics that Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton (1997)*

²⁰ Charles O Jones, *Trustee President: Jimmy Carter and the United States Congress* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

²¹ David Craik, *US Presidents and Public Opinion: The Carter Presidency*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, (Keele: University of Keele, 2005).

argued that Carter's ability to achieve anything substantial was severely restricted. He submitted that presidential elections went in cycles and the Carter Presidency was in a transition between the end of the liberal era which started with Franklin Roosevelt and the beginning of a new conservative one which was to begin with Ronald Reagan. To Skowronek, Carter was a 'disjunctive' president unable to break away from old and ineffective liberal policies to a new conservative paradigm. He therefore was forced to steer clear of ideology and focus on improving the efficiency of government with an emphasis on competence but without any radical change. Ultimately, he failed because the middle ground on which he stood had no firm constituency.²² This approach goes some way to explaining the issue with which historians writing on Carter had consistently struggled – his ideology.

Most Carter scholars have sought to classify him in ideological terms, but it is striking, given the range of options put forward, how little consensus there is on the subject. The press and his Republican opponents believed that Carter was attempting in 1976 to be all things to all men and generally failing to satisfy any of the groups.²³ Even some Democrats believed that he had no ideology but constantly shifted positions for political expediency. Mark Shields, Congressman Morris K Udall's advisor, quipped that Carter 'had more positions than the Kama Sutra.'²⁴ Some biographers, like Glad, based their critique on a psychoanalytical approach whilst others, such as Carter's speech

²² Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics that Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), 365-66.

²³ Dom Bonafede, 'The Carter White House: The Shape is there but no Specifics' *National Journal*, 25 December 1976.

²⁴ Shogan, *Promises to Keep*, 43.

writer James Fallows, criticised him from a liberal perspective.²⁵ In *Kennedy vs Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party's Soul* (2010), Tim Stanley argued that Carter was a conservative in charge of a liberal coalition. Stanley strongly argued that a liberal programme led by Ted Kennedy would have won the election in 1980. Instead the electorate rejected Carter's form of conservatism.²⁶

There have been some counter arguments that suggest Carter's ideology was influenced by President Harry S Truman and that their styles were very similar.²⁷ There is some doubt about this because although Carter did suggest during the election that Truman was his role model, when he had an opportunity to spend time with Truman's long-term aide Clark Clifford, he did not ask one question about Truman or his administration.²⁸ So if not liberal was he a conservative? His Attorney General Griffin Bell was in no doubt that Carter's Administration had a conservative agenda but it was sabotaged by liberals inside his Executive and in Congress.²⁹ Burton and Scott Kaufman argued that most of his policies were conservative but that he failed to articulate any overall conservative vision.³⁰ Many of these arguments were based on an assumption of the inevitable rise of conservatism in the 1980s. This also underpinned a view that Carter was an early New Democrat, a forerunner of Bill Clinton. Stuart Eizenstat, Carter's domestic policy advisor, argued that Carter was a neo-liberal who embodied a belief in

²⁵ Glad, *In Search of the Great White House*, and James Fallows, 'The Passionless President' *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1979): 75-81.

²⁶ Tim Stanley, *Kennedy vs Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party's Soul* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

²⁷ Reo Christenson, 'Carter and Truman. A Reappraisal of Both' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol 13 (Spring 1983): 313-23.

²⁸ Clark. Clifford, *Counsel to the President* (New York: Random House, 1991), 620.

²⁹ Griffin Bell, and Ronald Ostrow, *Taking Care of the Law* (New York NY: William Morrow, 1982).

³⁰ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*.

'social justice for [the] disadvantaged with fiscal conservatism.'³¹ Iwan Morgan, in his 2004 article, drew a comparison between Carter's economic policy and that of President Bill Clinton. There were clear parallels with the emphasis on fighting inflation over unemployment, balancing the budget and support for monetary over fiscal policy. Clinton's approach had strong echoes of Carter's when he said, 'The change we must make isn't liberal or conservative, it's both and it's neither.'³² Others argued that Carter was following a form of populism. His friend Charles Kirbo described Carter's approach as "correcting evils and inefficiencies and developing a system of fairness among the various elements of society"³³This approach saw government intervention as a means of change and often involved a direct appeal to people over party and interest groups.³⁴ Some have suggested that Carter was not driven by ideology or policy goals but heavily influenced by his engineering and technical background. He was much more motivated by the method rather than the outcome. He was focussed on a process that was comprehensive, delivered by experts with no political input. He believed that this would produce policies that were uniform, simple to operate, predictable and that would support the public good.³⁵ Kenneth Morris followed a similar non-ideological argument suggesting Carter was developing a Presidency based on his Christian beliefs. This motivated him to steer clear of politics by 'doing the right thing' whatever the consequences.³⁶

³¹ Eizenstat, 'Democratic Party and the Making of Domestic Policy', 8.

³² Iwan Morgan, 'Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and New Democratic Economics' *Historical Journal* Vol 47 (December 2004): 1015-1039.

³³ Elizabeth Drew, *American Journal. The Events of 1976* (New York: Random House, 1976), 489

³⁴ Eizenstat, 'Democratic Party and the Making of Domestic Policy', 6-7.

³⁵ Jack Knott, & Aaron Wildavsky, 'Jimmy Carter's Theory of Government' *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) Vol 1 (Winter 1977): 46-67.

³⁶ Morris, *American Moralist*.

The improved public image of Jimmy Carter arising from his post-presidential achievements has not prompted any re-evaluation of his administration. The revisionist impulse in the historiography could best be described as more apologetic than revisionist and had largely fizzled out by the mid-1990's. In Douglas Brinkley's case an interest in Carter's post-presidency resulting from personal interviews with Carter caused Brinkley to abandon plans for a Carter biography, despite having written eleven chapters, and to write about his post-presidency.³⁷ It is possible that Carter's subsequent achievements have reinforced the image of a good man out of his depth as President. Was it a failure of leadership as many historians believed? All of this leaves several unanswered questions about Carter's legacy as president. Could he be described as such a failure when so many of the policies he attempted to implement also proved beyond that of his successors, as argued by the revisionist writers? How precisely should he be rated in comparison to other modern presidents? What was his ideology? Ideology or a set of beliefs is critical to understanding the behaviour of presidents. It drives their approach to the office and the policies that they carry out. Did Carter adhere to any specific ideology or was he, as Charles Jones believed, behaving as a 'Trustee President'?³⁸ In addition what was the impact of his character on this? How far did his faith, his background as an engineer and his attitude to politics affect his presidency? Whatever their approach, historians have not successfully addressed this aspect of the Carter Presidency.

³⁷ Douglas Brinkley, *Unfinished Presidency; Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House* (New York: Penguin, 1998), viii.

³⁸ Jones, *Trustee President*.

James Earl Carter was born in 1924 and brought up in a farming community in Plains, Georgia. His father, Earl, was a peanut farmer and a community leader whilst his mother, Lillian, had been a nurse. He was educated in Georgia, but he left home when he joined the Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1943, graduating three years later. He married a local woman, Rosalynn Smith, in 1946, starting the most long lasting and influential relationship of his life. He served in various postings around the country before qualifying to command a submarine as a full lieutenant. He later joined the fledgling nuclear submarine programme under Captain Hyman Rickover. The illness and subsequent death of his father in 1953 forced him to resign from the Navy to return to Plains to manage the family business. During the next nine years Carter successfully developed his business and, following the footsteps of his father, became influential in his local community. Carter represented a growing breed of southern businessman focussed on promoting economic and social reform. At this early stage in his career he was a Democrat and spoke strongly in favour of racial tolerance and integration. At one point his business was boycotted by the local white Citizens Council because he refused to join them. In 1962 he successfully ran for the Georgia Senate and was re-elected in 1964.³⁹

There were three key influences on Jimmy Carter's adult life, the first of which was his wife. Carter's marriage to Rosalynn has been the main relationship of his life. She ran his home and business whilst he was away campaigning and when he ran both for Governor and President, she became a very effective campaigner on his behalf. Carter discussed decisions with her and arranged for her to sit in on cabinet meetings

³⁹ Gary Fink, *Prelude to the Presidency. The Political Character and Legislative Style of Jimmy Carter* (Westport: Greenwood, 1980).

and she has remained throughout their marriage his co-partner and main supporter. A second influence on Carter was his superior in the Navy, Hyman Rickover. Carter quoted him heavily throughout his presidential campaign. His campaign biography *Why Not the Best?* was a direct quote of Rickover's.⁴⁰ The training Carter received as a nuclear engineer was reflected in his approach to problems. His obsession with being right as a substitute for being political was a hallmark of Rickover's training and decision making.⁴¹ The third and probably the most important influence on Carter was his faith. In 1966 following electoral defeat he became a 'born again' Christian. His religious beliefs were reflected throughout his political career in his determination to do the 'right thing' and in his speeches which were laced with moral themes. His faith gave him peace and detachment but also influenced a political element to his campaign. His critique of interest groups had a strong element of 'driving money changers from the temple of Washington'.⁴² It also brought its disadvantages, some arguing that the drive for a moral argument in dealing with the nation's problems was a turn off for a public used to optimism and a political elite expecting to bargain.⁴³ Despite political disadvantages, Carter remained upfront about his beliefs. His campaign speeches in which he described who he was continued to finish with an affirmation of his Christian faith despite the numerous attempts of his advisor Stuart Eizenstat to delete it from earlier drafts.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best? Presidential Edition* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1977).

⁴¹ Peter Bourne, *Jimmy Carter. A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to the Presidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 77.

⁴² Patrick Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter. The Campaign of 1976* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 93-94.

⁴³ James A Speer, 'Jimmy Carter was a Baptist President', in Rosenbaum, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 88-92.

⁴⁴ Stuart Eizenstat, Interview *Miller Center University of Virginia*, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/jimmy-carter>, 4-5.

Clark Clifford, in his autobiography, used Winston Churchill's quote about Russia to describe Jimmy Carter as 'a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.'⁴⁵ According to one source, he 'may have been the psychologically most complicated presidential candidate this century.'⁴⁶ This complexity had consequences both for his staff and the public. Hamilton Jordan, his closest aide, was forced to admit about Carter during the 1980 campaign that 'the American people still do not have a clear picture of who he was.'⁴⁷ The outward image of calm was coupled with a certain ruthlessness, particularly with the press. Some believed that journalists like James Wooten of the *New York Times* were on a Carter enemies list.⁴⁸ His National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote of the famous Jimmy Carter smile being in fact three smiles, including the one to hide his anger.⁴⁹ Carter himself encouraged this uncertainty about him by refusing to be categorised by the media. In his first major national speech to the National Press Club, in 1974, he described himself as 'a Farmer, an Engineer, a Businessman, a Planner, a Scientist, a Governor and a Christian.'⁵⁰ This description which he used throughout the campaign conspicuously steered clear of ideology. There was also no mention of being a Southerner which was a key element of his campaign. He also, unlike every other major presidential candidate, did not emphasise his military service except in the context of being an engineer. He was an ambitious politician, confident in himself and his political strategy. He believed in rational policies based on intense study and

⁴⁵ Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, 618.

⁴⁶ Leo P Ribuffo, 'Jimmy Carter and the Selling of the President 1976-1980', in Rosenbaum, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 144.

⁴⁷ Frye Gaillard, *Prophet from Plains* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 15.

⁴⁸ Meyer, *Man and the Myth*, 146-48.

⁴⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of a National Security Advisor* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1983), 21-22.

⁵⁰ Address Announcing Candidacy for the Democratic Presidential Nomination at the National Press Club, 12 December 1974, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77821>

analysis that would result in comprehensive solutions. He pushed himself hard to understand complexity; as a Georgian Senator he prided himself on reading every draft of a bill.⁵¹ This approach, he believed, would be enough to persuade the electorate that correct legislation was being proposed without any political lobbying. He believed that he could explain his policies to the electorate without simplifying issues or creating slogans or themes to sell the 'message'. He was comfortable both with complexity and contradiction which he viewed as reconcilable and he wanted legislators to think in the same way.

Jimmy Carter, both in campaigning for and being governor, demonstrated many of the policies he was to support and traits he was to exhibit as president. After an unsuccessful campaign for governor in 1966, he ran again in 1970. He was a ruthless campaigner in the Democratic primary against the liberal former governor Carl Sanders. He repositioned himself to the right in running a populist campaign contrasting himself in television adverts with Sanders' alleged urbanity, aloofness and liberalism. He avoided controversial issues like Civil Rights but emphasised growth and improved efficiency in government. He argued for reform in education, criminal justice and above all else the state government. Whilst he steered clear of radical change as governor, he recognised the importance of symbolism. Although he avoided Civil Rights as an issue throughout his campaign, he used his inaugural speech in 1971 to announce that the 'time for racial discrimination is over.'⁵² This seemed a radical statement but to Carter it was recognition of what was reality and it was time for the south to move on. He

⁵¹ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 1-12.

⁵² *Governor Carter's Inaugural Address*, 12 January 1971, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jimmycarterlawday1974.htm>

followed this up with the symbolic gesture of hanging Martin Luther King's portrait outside his office in the state capitol. As governor he divided the function of political advice and policy development between his personal staff and his commissioners and their staff; a model he was to follow in the White House. Carter wanted his time as governor to be seen as a symbol of his competence but also, he believed that his record in Atlanta demonstrated how he could manage Congress in Washington. Gary Fink described Carter's general treatment of the Georgian Assembly as unthinking neglect.⁵³ His legislative success rate was as high as 90% but he was never popular in the Assembly.⁵⁴ However, in the passing of government reform, Carter demonstrated a range of effective strategies and skills from use of patronage, threats on pet projects as well as individual lobbying.⁵⁵ Government reform may not have been a controversial issue, but it had no natural constituency among the Georgia electorate. So, Carter worked very hard to establish an advisory committee to raise awareness and to lobby state officials and members of the Assembly.⁵⁶ He worked with business leaders and interest groups such as Common Cause and League of Women Voters to increase political pressure.⁵⁷ He received great personal credit for the passage of this legislation. His tenacity coined a new phrase about him when he was likened to a South Georgia turtle pushing a log out of the way.⁵⁸ It also gave Carter confidence that he could succeed in passing similar reform legislation in Washington. Many of the traits of the Carter presidency could be seen in his governorship with his emphasis on efficiency,

⁵³ Fink, *Prelude to the Presidency*, 177.

⁵⁴ Bert Lance Interview, *Miller Center*, 14.

⁵⁵ Fink, *Prelude to the Presidency*, 35-42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 75.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 92.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 117.

comprehensive solutions, avoidance of radical change, his attraction to symbolism and his abhorrence of special interests. Although he always staked out unyielding positions, he was prepared as governor to compromise.⁵⁹ He could be stubborn but was able to craft an astute compromise, for example over the proposed 'William Calley Day' which he replaced with 'America's Fighting Man's Day' which left both his liberal and conservative supporters content on the sensitive issue of Vietnam.⁶⁰ However, these successes did not make him popular. Bert Lance, a close friend and Georgia Commissioner, characterised his chances of re-election if he was stood again in 1974 as very poor given that he had 'inflicted enough serious damage on himself that he was not viable' as a candidate.⁶¹

Carter's early political years gave few consistent clues as to his ideological leanings. His aides Jody Powell and Hamilton Jordan were fiercely loyal to Carter but had no strong political views themselves whilst friends Bert Lance and Charles Kirbo were apolitical. Carter himself conspicuously avoided mentioning his ideology. When cornered on this issue early in the 1976 presidential campaign he said, 'I never characterise myself as a conservative, liberal or moderate and this is what distinguishes me from them.'⁶² He deliberately avoided any mention of ideology during elections but adjusted his position depending on the opponent, a pattern he continued to follow in the presidential election in 1976. He was often linked with the new breed of Southern Liberal politicians. This was reinforced by his stance on Civil Rights and integration. There is no doubt his beliefs were strongly felt. He stood up to the White Citizens Council and

⁵⁹ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 1-12.

⁶⁰ Glad, *In Search of the White House*, 205.

⁶¹ Lance, Interview Miller Center, 25.

⁶² Shogan, *Promises to Keep*, 30.

argued for integration within his church. His stance politically was, however, more nuanced. He always linked support for Civil Rights and integration with a defence of the south's record and argued that it was time to move on. He also stepped very carefully around the conservative segregationist George Wallace. He never directly attacked Wallace, supporting him on bussing and speaking at Wallace Appreciation Day but he refrained from endorsing him in as a presidential candidate in 1972.⁶³

There was little evidence of strong liberal leanings despite the emphasis on reform and good government. The symbolic launch of his presidential campaign from FDR's home in Warm Springs, Georgia was less about reviving the old New Deal coalition and more about better TV coverage and avoiding the traditional union Labour Day launch.⁶⁴ There were, however, some strong indications in his early career about his attitude to politics. According to his aide Stuart Eizenstat, Carter saw a sharp separation between the politics of campaigning and the politics of governing. He certainly enjoyed the former but found the latter, dealing with politicians and interest groups, as 'tawdry'.⁶⁵ However for a politician who found at least some of the process distasteful he was by 1976 getting rather good at it. He came to believe that he could transfer his methods and success as governor and as a campaigner directly to the White House.

The 1970's was a period of profound change in America which impacted on the effectiveness of the presidency. The decade saw severe damage to American prestige abroad and loss of public confidence at home. This was a result of two major events: the

⁶³ E Stanley Godbold, *Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter. The Georgia Years 1924-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 227-28.

⁶⁴ Leuchtenburg, *Shadow of FDR*, 177-78.

⁶⁵ Eizenstat, 'Democratic Party and Domestic Policy', 5-6.

Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. America's military intervention to prevent what was perceived as a communist takeover of South Vietnam by its neighbours to the North resulted in failure and a humiliating withdrawal in 1973. Although technically war had never been declared, this was viewed by Americans as the first time that the country had lost a war. The conflict had polarised opinion and resulted in violent protest, political division and ultimately the toppling of Democratic President Lyndon B Johnson in 1968.⁶⁶ The Watergate scandal revealed attempts by the administration of Richard M Nixon to damage his political opponents in a series of illegal acts, including breaking into the Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate building in Washington. Nixon's subsequent attempts to cover this up resulted in his resignation from office in 1974.⁶⁷ The loss of public confidence in political institutions, politicians in general and particularly the Presidency was dramatic. This was reflected in the decline in voting in national elections which dropped to the lowest since 1948.⁶⁸ The level of public disaffection also increased with a poll in 1975 indicating that 69 percent people felt that over the previous ten years America's leaders had lied to them.⁶⁹ The nature of reporting in newspapers and on television also changed. News had become more immediate with a focus on investigation and reporters were sceptical in dealing with government information usually provided by White House staff. In this journalist were aided by

⁶⁶ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1984).

⁶⁷ Stanley Kutler ed, *Watergate: The Fall of Richard M Nixon* (New York: Brandywine Press, 1996).

⁶⁸ Peter N Carroll, *It Seemed like Nothing Happened. The Tragedy and the Promise of the 1970's* (New York: Holt Pritchard and Rinehart, 1982), 206-11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 235.

sources from expanded congressional staffs and leaks from low-level aides in the government, often reflecting different views to the White House.⁷⁰

In response to both Vietnam and Watergate, a revitalised Congress moved to end what was termed the 'Imperial Presidency' by restricting presidential powers to wage war, amend budgets and limit campaign fund-raising. Changes to the political infrastructure were not confined to the presidency but impacted on Congress and political parties. Supreme Court decisions resulted in the enforcement of more geographically equitable congressional districts. The redrawing of these district boundaries resulted initially in an increased turnover of congressmen with most members in each House having less than six years' experience.⁷¹ Those congressmen with more stable majorities had become less likely to need presidential favours. Their success became based on delivering services for their own constituencies and they began to acquire more staff to do this. There were also significant changes in congressional governance as reforms resulted in the creation of 165 committees and sub committees/special task forces. President Johnson had said that he had to deal with just six politicians in the House and four in the Senate who were Leaders and Committee Chairmen to ensure his legislation was passed.⁷² In addition congressional chairs were now elected by the party caucus and so were less dependent on presidential patronage. This democratisation process was continued with the two main parties, particularly the Democrats. Rule changes prompted by the Fraser-McGovern reform of party rules in

⁷⁰ Rozell, *Press and Carter Presidency*, 4.

⁷¹ Eric Davis, 'Legislative Reform and the Decline of Presidential Influence on Capitol Hill' *British Journal of Political Science* Vol 8 (October 1979): 465-477.

⁷² Comments by James C Free, in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 318.

1971 sought to broaden the base of the party and increase participation at election conventions. It increased the number of delegates from women's and minority groups whilst reducing the participation of ex officio members from state party organisations.⁷³ Complexity created by these new party rules and the new federal campaign funding made it simpler for individual states to run primary elections rather than appoint delegates.⁷⁴ The abolition of the unit rule in primaries meant that the result was no longer winner take all for delegates. This potentially gave any new candidate the opportunity to maintain momentum and gain media attention by garnering delegates in the early primaries. This was a strategy Carter was to follow successfully in 1976.⁷⁵ In the convention itself the new rules reduced the participation and the influence of national and state party leaders over their fragmented state delegations. These changes were not without their disadvantages. As governor, Carter nearly failed to attend the 1972 Democratic Convention as he only just beat a local black college student by 15 votes in a state delegate election.⁷⁶

There were other profound changes in both parties that occurred during the 1970's. The traditional Democratic New Deal coalition was continuing to fragment. The Republican Party was beginning to make inroads in the south as Civil Rights legislation had damaged Democratic support. The traditional liberal support in the north-eastern states was being undermined by economic decline with industries moving to the southern and western states. The Republican Party was becoming increasingly under the

⁷³ Nelson Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 34-5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 54-59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 61.

⁷⁶ Leslie Wheeler, *Jimmy Who? An Examination of Presidential Candidate Jimmy Carter: the man, his career, his stands on the issues* (New York: Barron's Woodbury, 1976), 96.

influence of conservative pressure groups. These initially focussed on local protest, for example against property tax in California which resulted in the Proposition 13 Ballot in 1978. However, this concern over inflation on middle-class incomes developed into wider resentment against government spending, especially on welfare which conservatives felt unfairly benefitted minority groups. Similar protests at the local level resulted in twelve states between 1978 and 1982 restricting state government spending.⁷⁷

During this period there was a revival in interest in religion with the number of Americans who highlighted the growing role of faith in their lives tripling.⁷⁸ Evangelical groups became a significant part of the conservative lobby. Leaders like Pat Robertson, James Robinson, Jim Bakker and Jerry Falwell had an estimated 100 million followers, and it was Falwell who established the 'Moral Majority' which grew to two million supporters and campaigned for pro-God and family policies.⁷⁹ As a political force, conservatives within the Republican Party campaigned in 1974 against President Gerald R. Ford's choice of Nelson Rockefeller, a liberal and divorcee, as Vice President. They subsequently formed an effective lobby group with business to defeat pro-labour legislation like the Common Situs Picketing bill and campaigned against the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion and school bussing whilst supporting the continuation of capital punishment. Conservatives initially coalesced around Ronald

⁷⁷ Bruce J Schulman, *The Seventies. The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001), 212.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 121-22.

⁷⁹ Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 33.

Reagan's attempt to oust Ford in 1976 but supported their fellow evangelical, Carter, in the 1976 election.

The 1960's saw the most successful period for the US economy in terms of growth both domestically and trade abroad. Liberal economists such as Walter Heller became symbols of the belief that the economy could be managed to achieve economic growth, low unemployment and inflation. This New Economic Policy followed by Heller's successors became part of successive administrations' economic orthodoxy throughout the 1960's and into the 1970s. However, by the late 1960's President Johnson's attempt to fund his Great Society reforms and the Vietnam War caused the economy to overheat and resulted in increased inflation. A decline in productivity and increased competition from abroad resulted in a fall in economic growth coupled with major inflation (known as stagflation) and higher unemployment. Successive administrations struggled to strike the right balance of policies to control stagflation. The current orthodoxy came under challenge from economists such as Milton Friedman who argued that controlling inflation should be the priority and that this could be defeated by control of the money supply whilst growth could be stimulated by deregulation. The inability of economic advisors to resolve these challenges meant that each new administration faced the decision on whether to stimulate the economy to fix a recession or impose fiscal restraint to reduce inflation. Whichever option was followed had serious political consequences and most administrations after 1968 found it difficult to follow a consistent line. As a result, US financial indicators continued to deteriorate. The dollar

fell in value in relation to a basket of major currencies by 60 percent between 1967 and 1980 whilst middle-class family income failed to grow for ten years after 1973.⁸⁰

During this period of economic turmoil there was one sector of the American economy that continued to grow: a cluster of states in the south and west known as the Sunbelt. The growth of the Sunbelt originated in World War Two when the government invested in defence industries in the region and this continued in the 1950s and 1960s through the award of defence contracts as a result of the Cold War and investment in infrastructure such as highways. The boom in cheap housing after 1945 and the development of air conditioning made the south and west a more attractive proposition for young families from the big cities in the north east. Incentives were provided to move South including a favourable state tax regime and 'Right to Work' laws which discouraged unions. This form of economic 'boosterism' under the leadership of Dale Bumpers, Terry Sanford and other southern politicians resulted in new industries flooding into the south and west. By the 1970's the economic success of the Sunbelt states helped start to change the negative image of the south, particularly in the north where racial tension caused by riots in the late 1960s and the issue of school bussing in the 1970s had resulted in a more sympathetic view. The migration of professionals to the south and west not only provided a natural constituency for the Republicans (GOP) but also increased the political importance of states like Florida, Texas and California whose increased representation amounted to 20 percent of the total electoral college

⁸⁰ Daniel Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis of the 1970s. The Crisis of Confidence Speech of 15 July 1979* (Boston: Bedford/St Martins, 2005), 5.

vote.⁸¹ This was matched by an electoral decline in the north-eastern states which were a natural constituency for the Democrats.

The 1970s also saw major social change. The Civil Rights Movement shifted focus from promoting political reform and integration to agitating for economic and social equality. The US economic decline disproportionately affected blacks in terms of unemployment, urban decline and the squeeze on welfare budgets. All of this resulted in a growth of pressure groups representing all minorities, Black, Hispanic, Native American and other minorities as well as women's and environmental groups. Most of these found their home in the Democratic Party and under the new delegate rules they had a major voice at the party conventions. There was also a dramatic rise in interest groups during this period. For example, nearly 2000 business lobbying groups were established during the 1970s.⁸² In total the number of lobbyists rose from 2000 after World War II to over 15,000 in 1978, spending \$2 billion.⁸³ The catalyst of social change resulted in the increase in the lobbying of politicians, parties and Congress but the fragmentation of these groups, many of whom were single issue, made it more difficult to build the coalitions necessary to bring about legislative change.

If the 1970s saw important changes in America, not all of these were accepted by the public at large. They had a major impact on the effectiveness of the presidency and was consequently cited by some revisionist historians as an argument for a more sympathetic view of the Carter Presidency. However, it was equally fair to say that

⁸¹ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 151.

⁸² Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, 21-22.

⁸³ Jerry Jasinowski, *The First Two Years of the Carter Administration: An Appraisal' Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol 9 (Winter 1979): 11-15.

Jimmy Carter was able to make some of those changes work in his favour when campaigning to become president. His simple style, candour about religion, the 'I will not lie to you' promise, all helped to create a calm persona that harked back to a simpler time of a stable America that aimed at a more conservative electorate.⁸⁴ The impact of these changes became more problematic when he was in office and had to implement his programme. Carter's belief in 'doing the right thing' had to be weighed against a sceptical press, a more difficult Congress and a wide range of competing interest groups.

Jimmy Carter's presidential bid appeared to the Washington press as coming out of nowhere, but it was a product of meticulous long-term planning which took advantage of reforms to the political system that came into force in 1972. Within ten years many of these reforms were reversed, so Carter took advantage of a unique set of circumstances to help him get elected. He made the decision to run nearly four years before the election and he never wavered in his belief that he would win. He was supported by a level of detailed planning provided by his aide Jordan that left nothing to chance. Carter used the two years whilst still governor both to widen his experience and build a network of contacts across the country. He initiated and led trade delegations abroad to build up his foreign policy experience.⁸⁵ In 1973 he joined an influential think tank called the Trilateral Commission, which enabled him to broaden his experience in foreign policy and gain several high-profile contacts; some twenty of these later joined his cabinet.⁸⁶ It was one such contact, the President of Pepsi Cola,

⁸⁴ Carroll, *It Seemed like Nothing Happened*, 187-88.

⁸⁵ Jules Witcover, *Marathon – Pursuit of the Presidency 1972-76* (New York NY: Viking, 1977), 114-15.

⁸⁶ Biven, *Policy in the Age of Limits*, 17.

who persuaded *Time* magazine to put Carter and not other Southern Governors on its cover in 1971.⁸⁷ He used his appointment as Chair of the Democratic Campaign Committee to gain contacts by campaigning for Democratic candidates in the 1974 midterm elections and raise his profile across the country. Jordan and other Carter aides joined the Democratic National Committee, and advisor Peter Bourne joined the Drugs Abuse Prevention Group, to gain important experience in Washington. The 1974 Democratic National Convention and subsequent mid-term elections were used to recruit future campaign workers.⁸⁸ To help establish this network after these elections Carter wrote not only to the winners to congratulate them but also the losers to solicit their advice.⁸⁹ These contacts once made were maintained. Mark Siegel, the Executive Director of his campaign, told the *Washington Post*: 'At every wedding, birth and funeral in a Democratic family there were flowers from Jimmy.'⁹⁰ People like Margaret 'Midge' Constanza, who Carter campaigned for in 1974, became key supporters in 1976. Experience gained during this campaign was extensively used by Carter and Jordan to build the Carter campaign book for his presidential bid.

Carter entered the primaries with certain disadvantages. He was a relatively unknown southern governor with no major national backers, limited funding and no Washington experience. Carter was helped by being able to follow a detailed campaign plan put together by Jordan. It established a centrally run campaign based in Atlanta with little party interference, which carefully managed his scarce resources.⁹¹ There was

⁸⁷ Bourne, *Plains to the Presidency*, 201.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 255.

⁸⁹ Gregory Domin, *Jimmy Carter – Public Opinion and the Search for Values 1977-1981* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003), 16.

⁹⁰ Witcover, *Marathon*, 118.

⁹¹ Garland Haas, *Jimmy Carter and the Politics of Frustration* (London: McFarland, 1992), 46.

also an effective media strategy that helped raise the candidate's profile. The early national coverage of Carter on the cover of *Time* magazine⁹² and his later speech at the National Press Club in 1974 were the exception as his campaign team used the local press to raise Carter's profile during the primary races. He was also helped by a dearth of national rivals, who either did not run (Edward M Kennedy), withdrew from the race early (Walter Mondale) or simply followed the wrong tactics. As a result, at no point did he have a consistent challenger throughout the primary campaign and so his opponents failed to gain any momentum. Carter on the other hand utilised the new electoral rules in the acquisition of delegates through primaries to maximise his advantage.⁹³ Following Jordan's detailed planning, Carter used limited funding to establish momentum in the early primaries, and this enabled him to gain federal campaign funding. This was not without risk. Joel McLearly, Carter's National Finance Director, admitted that there was no campaign structure beyond the Florida primary, which Carter had to win.⁹⁴ Jordan's strategy was to build momentum and increase media attention early by defeating the conservative George Wallace in the South. Jordan's plan was to target Wallace's constituency and counter his populist appeal by being better qualified and a more responsible alternative.⁹⁵ He identified eighteen key journalists/opinion formers for Carter to woo. These individuals worked for national organisations, but many were southern born who wanted someone other than Wallace to succeed.⁹⁶ Carter's defeat of Wallace in Florida was helped by the more liberal

⁹² Dixie Whistles a Different Tune, 31 May 1971, *Time*.

⁹³ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 11-12.

⁹⁴ Pilsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 204.

⁹⁵ Witcover, *Marathon*, 110-14.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

candidates staying away. This enabled Carter to take more conservative positions and help focus media attention on Wallace's health (he had been shot in 1972).

Carter's success was not just about campaign strategy. As a candidate he tapped into the anti-Washington sentiment across the country. He stood as an outsider, a new face with a track record as a governor and above all else someone who could be trusted. He was also an excellent, resilient campaigner with a strong personal touch. This was highlighted on the Iowa campaign trail when talking to small groups at factory gates or on farms.⁹⁷ There is no doubting Carter's achievement in gaining the Democratic nomination given his lack of national status and major supporters. However, his primary campaign was not flawless. He lost nine out of the sixteen primaries he took part in and often when Carter visited a state to campaign his poll ratings went down.⁹⁸ The Democratic Party reforms had increased the importance of primaries which favoured Carter as an early starter, so even a defeat in New York was quickly matched by a success in another primary in Wisconsin.⁹⁹ Jordan's detailed planning coupled with Carter's tireless campaigning ensured he arrived at the convention in New York with his nomination secured. The convention and the subsequent campaign would prove a further test of Carter's political skills. Walking through the delegates at the convention to make his acceptance speech turned out to be the zenith of his campaign. His speechwriter Patrick Anderson commented, 'if he had gone home and stayed there, he might have won by a landslide. Unfortunately, he campaigned.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid, 212.

⁹⁸ Drew, *American Journal*, 271.

⁹⁹ Jones, *Trustee President*, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 65.

Once the presidential campaign proper started, Carter persisted with the strategies that had brought him success. He continued to stand as an outsider from Washington focussing on his own character ('I would never lie to you') and symbolic acts such as launching his campaign against Ford at FDR's home in Warm Springs. Carter also sought to maintain his campaigning strategy by relying on the network of volunteers (dubbed 'the Peanut Brigade') that he had built up during the primaries, but these groups tended to bypass the state party apparatus. The campaign was still run centrally by a small team in Atlanta. This was mainly to keep control of limited campaign funding. However, it resulted in organisational failings. This included many unanswered calls to party officials causing resentment that continued into his administration. The campaign team were slow to engage the key players in the Democratic Party. As head of his party, Carter needed its support and to campaign on behalf of local candidates, but this weakened his stance as a candidate who was an outsider.

Carter steered away from controversial policy issues by straddling the positions of both parties. The team under Jack Watson who were developing issues for Carter was kept separate from the campaign team until much later in the election.¹⁰¹ He only sought to be radical on non-controversial issues that did not define him ideologically like government reorganisation and ethics. These reforms were linked to creating a government 'as good as its people'¹⁰² and resonated with the public disquiet arising from Watergate. President Ford's campaign and the newspapers highlighted Carter's 'fuzziness'. All this increased pressure on Carter to change his approach, particularly as his poll lead, initially 35 points, had started to evaporate alarmingly. As the campaign

¹⁰¹ Morris, *American Moralist*, 229.

¹⁰² Jimmy Carter, *A Government as Good as its People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977).

progressed Carter was forced to move away from general themes towards specific campaign commitments that were very much in line with traditional New Deal values. He did try to reassure the public about his perceived vagueness on issues in his famous interview with *Playboy Magazine*, in September 1976. He argued that because he was not an ideologue, he tried to analyse each question individually. 'I've taken positions that to me are fair and rational and sometimes my answers are complicated.'¹⁰³ He further sought in the same interview to reassure the public about his religious beliefs as a 'born again' Christian and its potential impact on his presidency. Unfortunately, whilst his answers were both honest and thoughtful the article will forever be remembered for his use of language at the end of the interview. Phrases like 'lusting in his heart' and 'screwing around' grabbed the headlines.¹⁰⁴ This language shocked his conservative supporters and reinforced an image of strangeness with the rest of the electorate. As a result, his lead in the polls was cut by ten points within a single day.¹⁰⁵

The three televised debates were an opportunity for both candidates to promote their agendas. The debates proved to be highly popular with the electorate, with approximately half of American households watching the first debate and over 90 % watching at least one of the three.¹⁰⁶ Carter acknowledged in the first debate that this was an opportunity to establish in the minds of the electorate exactly where he stood on issues. His acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention earlier in the campaign had continued his anti-Washington theme but had not focussed on specific policies

¹⁰³ 'Jimmy Carter: Candid Conversations with the Democratic Candidate for the Presidency' *Playboy Magazine*, November 1976.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Downer Crain, *The Ford Presidency. A History* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), 272.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 272-275.

other than vague commitments on cutting government waste, tax reform and reducing unemployment.¹⁰⁷ Whilst the debate did not by any means cover all his commitments it did enable him to articulate the key ideas of his campaign. These included the reduction of unemployment to three percent supported by increased economic growth, controlled inflation and a balanced budget by 1981. He proposed reform of the tax system which he labelled a disgrace, including tax cuts for the middle and lower incomes but also the closing of tax loopholes. He called for reform of the government structure such as the reduction in the number of agencies. He made further commitments on the introduction of zero-based budgeting (ZBB)¹⁰⁸ to government finances, the pardoning of Vietnam draft evaders and almost as an aside comprehensive energy policy.¹⁰⁹ There is some discussion among political analysts about the impact of these debates on the result. Whilst it was generally accepted that the overall result of the three debates was a draw, it did give Carter a national platform to articulate policies that he would later seek to implement.

By the end of the campaign Carter had taken 51 positions and made 186 pledges, most of which were aligned to the party platform including health, welfare, childcare and social security reform as well as housing subsidies.¹¹⁰ This was in addition to his commitment to restructure the federal government and reform energy policy. This was

¹⁰⁷ Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York City, July 1976, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25953&st=&st1=>

¹⁰⁸ Zero-based budgeting is a means of budgeting in which all expenses must be justified for each new period.

¹⁰⁹ Presidential Debate, 23 September 1976, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29404&st=&st1=> .

¹¹⁰ Michael G Krukones, Campaigner and President: Jimmy Carter's Campaign Promises and Presidential Performance in Rosenbaum, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 141.

significantly more than any of his three presidential predecessors.¹¹¹ It secured him support during the campaign from key constituencies that enabled him to win in major industrial states. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) support alone provided 120,000 campaign workers, made ten million calls and sent out eighty million pieces of literature.¹¹² Carter was prepared to compromise when necessary; his public embrace of Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago ensured his support in Illinois although it damaged his image for probity.¹¹³ As the presidential campaign progressed these more liberal commitments made Carter appear less of an outsider, more a mainstream politician. This damaged him in the polls as the gap between himself and Ford continued to close. Yet Carter did not seek to link the commitments of his campaign to an appealing overall theme. Walter Mondale, his running mate, wanted speechwriter Patrick Anderson to do this for Carter but Anderson was unable to persuade him. Carter continued to campaign on himself, his character and his overall competence which he believed were in line with the voter's need for an efficient, honest government.¹¹⁴ In the end the result on 2 November 1976 was closer than many had predicted. Carter beat Ford 50 to 48 percent in the popular vote. Given Carter's control of the southern states, Ford needed to win six of the eight so-called battleground states; he won five. Carter won the Electoral College 297-241.

Historians have argued that being elected president was Jimmy Carter's greatest political achievement. He demonstrated supreme confidence that he would win right

¹¹¹ Light, *President's Agenda*, 98.

¹¹² Kandy Stroud *How Jimmy Won. The Victory Campaign from Plains to the White House* (New York: William Morrow, 1977), 432.

¹¹³ Drew, *American Journal*, 476-77.

¹¹⁴ Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 99.

from the start. This was backed by remarkably detailed campaign planning and an energetic' effective campaigning style. He fed off the 'national psyche'¹¹⁵ by appealing to voter's deeper needs for honesty and efficiency in government in the wake of the Watergate scandal. However, it still turned out to be a very close election given that he had a 35 percent lead at the time of the Democratic Convention. Voter scepticism of both candidates was summed up by the acerbic William Loeb of New Hampshire's *Manchester Union Leader* headline in announcing the result as 'Shifty beats Stupid'.¹¹⁶ Commenting on his victory Jimmy Carter may have said that, 'I owe special interests nothing. I owe the people everything.'¹¹⁷ This was not how those Democratic interest groups, or a Democratic Congress saw it. This would become a limit on the incoming president's room for manoeuvre in trying to deliver on his campaign commitments.

One caveat: it should be noted that whilst this thesis covers Carter's major domestic policies it is not exhaustive. So certain issues, including deregulation, consumer affairs and urban reform, are not explored in depth. In deciding which policies to focus on, several factors were taken into consideration. His economic policies and energy reform were chosen because Carter himself had identified these as critical during his election campaign and transition to the presidency. To Carter providing solutions to two of the country's most complex problems would demonstrate his promise in the 1976 campaign of competence. In order to explore a major theme of this study, the effect of ideology on Carter's presidency, chapters have been included on his approach

¹¹⁵ Schulman, *Seventies*, 124.

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Moore, and Janet Fraser eds, *Campaign for President: Managers Look at '76. Proceedings of a Conference on the 1976 Presidential Campaign Decision Making* (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing, 1977), 5.

¹¹⁷ Carter, *A Government as Good as its People*, 165.

to health, welfare and labour policy, key liberal priorities. On a similar ideological theme, the Culture Wars chapter reviews the major social movements of the 1970s linked to race, the environment, gender and religion, all of which buffeted his presidency and influenced his administration's policy agenda. The thesis is completed by an analysis of the 1980 election. This reflected Carter's attempt to win a second term by maintaining the political middle ground in the face of a conservative shift in American politics. The election reflected not only a popular verdict on Carter's domestic policies, which were unravelling during the campaign, but on his leadership, his ideological stance and his vision for America. In addition to exploring Carter's domestic policies in depth this thesis will start by analysing his leadership style and how he sought to organise his administration in order to deliver the promises he made during his presidential campaign.

Chapter One

Organisation and Communication

For a new president to become successful, he must master several roles. He is required not just to become the nation's leader, but he must have or acquire skills that will make him an effective legislator, efficient head of his administration and its communicator-in-chief. A president is often defined ideologically by his political friends, opponents, and by a proactive press. Once such a label is established expectations are set along with the policies it is assumed would be followed. Jimmy Carter, however, did not accept any ideological badge refusing to be categorised either a conservative or a liberal. Yet he was not afraid of labels and throughout his campaign went out of his way to define himself in terms of the roles he had played in his past. 'I am a Farmer, an Engineer, a Businessman, a Planner, a Scientist, a Governor and a Christian.' ¹¹⁸ These roles had a profound influence on him personally and on his presidency. This chapter seeks to explore the key components of his presidency: how he managed his administration, implemented his legislative programme, dealt with the media and how he communicated with the public. The way Carter tackled these roles is critical to understanding the development of his policies which will be discussed in later chapters.

In the 1970's politicians were defined by their party allegiance and whether they were conservative or liberal. Although candidates were generally reluctant to make a commitment in case it alienated a section of the electorate, it was usually

¹¹⁸ Address Announcing Candidacy for the Democratic Presidential Nomination at the National Press Club, 12 December 1974, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77821>

straightforward for the press or political opponents to provide the 'appropriate' label. So, it was with Carter, despite his attempts to rule out any ideological bias. As the presidential campaign progressed his espousal of key policies of the Democratic Party created an expectation from liberals in the party that he would support their agenda in office. This was a fundamental misunderstanding of Carter. His personal stance against segregation was genuine but the assumption by northern politicians that he was liberal on *all* issues was simply wishful thinking. In a similar vein his professed link to traditional liberal Democratic leaders like Harry Truman was not substantiated by evidence.¹¹⁹ His commitment to many liberal issues in the election was largely driven by the need to secure core Democratic Party support. Carter acted as if ideology did not matter, backing liberal legislation in some instances, and conservative in others, pleasing neither side. This frustration was reflected in the press, often in the form of cartoons.¹²⁰ Democrats like Senator Moynihan were just bemused. He told a Carter aide, 'the problem with your boss is that he is conservative on domestic issues and liberal on foreign policy issues and he ought to be the other way around.'¹²¹ Suggestions by some of his staff such as Les Francis from congressional liaison, that he was a precursor of New Democrat Bill Clinton, socially liberal but strong on defence and fiscally conservative, only demonstrated the benefit of hindsight. Some of the measures he sought to implement could be categorised, many could not, and often his proposals divided the country regionally. This lack of ideology was reflected in the White House with Landon Donovan, one of Jordan's staff, commenting that he could not remember any ideological debate whilst he was

¹¹⁹ Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, 620.

¹²⁰ Press Cartoons, Jody Powell Subject Files, Box 56, *Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (JCPL) Atlanta GA ,30307-1498*.

¹²¹ Eizenstat, 'Democratic Party and Domestic Policy', 6.

there.¹²² Carter was often on the opposite side of the argument from the liberal majority in his party. He recognised this anomaly when he said, 'In many cases I feel more at home with conservative Democratic and Republican members of congress than I do with the others, although the others, the liberals, vote for me more often.'¹²³ Carter did take what could be seen as ideological positions on some issues, but he never talked about them in those terms.

So, if he did not want to be defined by political ideology did the answer lie in the influence of his character? Historians who have studied the question of presidential character¹²⁴ have focussed mainly on negative aspects of presidential behaviour, for example the infidelities of John Kennedy, Bill Clinton and the psychology of Richard Nixon. Jimmy Carter, whilst lacking their vices, is an extremely complex man. His campaign speechwriter Patrick Anderson described the enigma of Carter as, 'Our hope, our despair, leader and loose cannon. Machiavelli and Mr Rogers.'¹²⁵ Carter himself did not see this complexity. He told *Time Magazine*, 'I don't think that I am that complex. I am pretty much what I seem to be.'¹²⁶ He ran his presidential campaign on the issue of his character. He defined himself to the electorate not ideologically but in terms of whom he was and the roles that he had played. These meant something to him and helped define not just who he was but how he sought to achieve his goals. Before

¹²² Hamilton Jordan Interview, *Miller Center*, 30.

¹²³ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York, Bantam,1982), p.102.

¹²⁴ David Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall,1977) and Robert Wilson ed, *Character Above All: The Presidents from FDR to George Bush* (New York: Simon & Schuster,1995)

¹²⁵ Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 2.

¹²⁶ Man of the Year: Hello I am Jimmy Carter and..., *Time Magazine*,3 January 1977.

exploring his performance in his presidential roles, a review of how he defined himself and the impact of this on his presidency is required.

A president's religious background had not been a controversial issue since the election of the Roman Catholic John F Kennedy in 1960. Since then presidential candidates have downplayed their religious convictions during campaigns. The 1976 election, in the wake of Watergate, changed all that. Carter always emphasised that he was a 'born again' Christian and that it had a daily impact on his life. He rejected attempts by aide Eizenstat to delete his frequent reference to this in his 'I am' speech.

¹²⁷ As president he continued to teach Sunday school and was happy to talk about his personal faith at press conferences. Carter refused however to tap into the potential political support that being an evangelical Christian could bring. In 1976 34 percent of the population claimed to be 'born again.'¹²⁸ The growing political power of the evangelical movement saw Carter as their natural champion. But he came from a liberal Baptist tradition based around an altruistic social agenda whilst the evangelical movement was becoming more conservative. By the end of the decade Carter had become alienated from a movement that switched its support to Reagan in the 1980 election. By 2001 the Carters had left their Church's hierarchy (Southern Baptist Convention) mainly over women's rights.¹²⁹ Whilst Carter was open about his faith, he argued that it would not impact on his presidency: 'I've been very careful not to

¹²⁷ Eizenstat Interview, *Miller Center*, 4-5.

¹²⁸ Sean P Cunningham, *American Politics in the Post War Sunbelt: Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 174.

¹²⁹ David L Holmes, *The Faiths of Post War Presidents: From Truman to Obama* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 162-66.

interrelate my Christian beliefs with my responsibilities as President.’¹³⁰ He said that he was personally against abortion but refused to change the law. This got him into trouble with his own staff and the evangelical movement who together represented both sides of the argument. He worked hard to normalise his faith in the mind of the public by arguing that being ‘born again’ was a typical experience for Christians.¹³¹ He was not always successful. A thoughtful interview about his faith became subsumed by arguments about the magazine he chose (*Playboy*) and his off-the-cuff comments which proved harmful to him during the election campaign.¹³²

His faith did provide him with a strong moral stance on all his political activities. His standard campaign speech replicated the introduction he gave on the door step when he was a missionary in Massachusetts in the 1960’s.¹³³ His speeches always had a strong moral tone and his aversion both to ceremony and interest groups reflected fundamental religious teaching. In government he ensured that his administration stayed ethical even at times at the expense of common sense. He unnecessarily vetoed Federal funding for a paved road in his home town¹³⁴ and refused to sanction a personal birthday celebration as part of a fundraiser.¹³⁵ Whether it was standing up to the White Citizens Council over desegregation in the 1960’s or his continued focus on doing the ‘right thing’ whatever the political cost, Carter’s religious beliefs had a major impact on

¹³⁰ President’s News Conference, 9 November 1978, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30140&st=&st1=> .

¹³¹ Randall Balmer, *Redeemer. The Life of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 41.

¹³² Carter Interview *Playboy Magazine*, November 1976.

¹³³ Holmes, *Faiths of Post-War Presidents*, 153.

¹³⁴ Bert Lance with Bill Gilbert, *The Truth of the Matter. My Life In and Out of Politics* (New York: Summit Books, 1992), 40.

¹³⁵ Rafshoon to Carter, 25 July 1978, Presidential Files, Staff Secretary (SS) Box 86, JCPL.

his presidency. This would become an issue when Carter the 'born again' Christian conflicted with Carter the politician.

Carter's experience as governor of Georgia shaped his view of government. This demonstrated to him what could be achieved in terms of reform and gave him first-hand experience of how the Federal Government operated. As governor he did not think that the Nixon Administration served Georgia well. He felt ignored by White House staff¹³⁶ and was particularly unimpressed with the performance of the Corp of Engineers on Federal Water Projects in his state.¹³⁷ This had a profound effect on both his attitude to government and his presidential campaign.¹³⁸ Carter's analysis of the role of the central government was in many ways similar to that of his great rival Ronald Reagan. Both saw the government as too big, inefficient and even corrupt but whilst Reagan saw government as 'the problem' that needed to be reduced if not eliminated, Carter saw it as a potential force for good. In his campaign he kept asking two questions: 'Can our government be honest, decent, open, fair and compassionate' and 'Can our government be competent?'¹³⁹ To Carter the answer was an unequivocal yes.

Carter was concerned about the influence of interest groups. He highlighted this in his 'Why not the Best' speech on 12 December 1974: 'The lobbyists who fill the halls of Congress, state capitols, county courthouses and city halls often represent well-meaning and admirable groups. What is often forgotten is that lobbyists seldom represent the average citizen.'¹⁴⁰ Carter held this view throughout his presidency; it had

¹³⁶ Jimmy Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 47.

¹³⁷ Carter, *Government as Good as it as its People*, 49.

¹³⁸ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 61.

¹³⁹ Carter, *Why Not the Best?*

¹⁴⁰ Address Announcing Candidacy for the Democratic Presidential Nomination at the National Press Club, 12 December 1974, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77821>

a strong moral dimension and affected how he operated politically in Washington. He saw interest groups as nothing less than a challenge to his vision of an effective government. 'Our commitment to these dreams has been sapped by debilitating compromise, acceptance of mediocrity, subservience to special interests and absence of executive vision and direction.'¹⁴¹ He entered the White House in the firm belief that he held a mandate *only* from the public.

His agenda was reformist but not radical, with an emphasis on good governance with policies that would demonstrate competence. Stuart Eizenstat, Carter's domestic policy advisor, outlined in a speech to the Washington Press Club what good governance meant. He talked about openness, efficiency backed by a substantial reorganisation, better targeting of government programmes and addressing long term fundamental issues.¹⁴² These policies were to be driven not by ideology, but a process derived from careful analysis of objective data by experts.¹⁴³ The assumption by the president was that good policy would be accepted by legislators because the proposed solutions would be well researched and objective. However, such success would be dependent upon how effective Carter would be in another one of his roles, that of politician.

As well as leading his administration Carter as a politician was the notional head of the Democratic Party. He had expertly used the electoral process to become president, but he was now expected to manage the political process to pass legislation and run the country. Carter drew a clear distinction between electoral politics and policy

¹⁴¹ Carter, *Government as Good*, 45.

¹⁴² Eizenstat Speech, 17 November 1977, SS Box 54, JCPL.

¹⁴³ Stephen Hess, *Organizing the Presidency* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 123.

making. He enjoyed the campaign trail but even there he felt uncomfortable in doing what was politically expedient. He was embarrassed by his own aggressive campaigning for governor in 1970 against Carl Sanders when he was described in *Macon Telegraph* as 'a good man whose high standards have been undermined by politics.'¹⁴⁴ This drive to succeed was also reflected in his later campaigning; so, whilst aspiring to higher moral standards he was still capable of political calculation. Carter could not have been president without being a good politician but, 'It was as if he didn't like politics and yearned to be above both politics and politicians.'¹⁴⁵ He certainly had few if any friends who were politicians and his relationships with senior members of Congress suggested he did not understand them. His Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Joe Califano, believed Carter had disdain for the political process.¹⁴⁶ To his aide Lloyd Cutler it seemed that 'Carter more or less had to fight himself to be a good politician.'¹⁴⁷ This led to criticism that he was not capable of delivering the necessary deals or husbanding resources to drive through legislation in a post-Nixon Congress. There was a naivety about him. He saw his successes as governor, such as the reform of Georgia's government, as being easily transferable to Washington.¹⁴⁸ He admitted later that, "I could ignore the people in Atlanta, who were the social, business and media leaders if I so chose with relative impunity and deal primarily with members of the legislature.'¹⁴⁹ He subsequently admitted that this was a mistake when operating in Washington. Carter saw his political power as being based on the people not on other politicians. He saw

¹⁴⁴ Balmer, *Redeemer*, 30.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Cronin, *State of the Presidency* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980), 216.

¹⁴⁶ Joseph Califano, *Governing America: An Insider's Report from the White House and the Cabinet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 40-41.

¹⁴⁷ Lloyd Cutler Interview, *Miller Center*, 18.

¹⁴⁸ Fink, *Prelude to Presidency*, 75-160.

¹⁴⁹ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 6.

himself as a citizen politician unaffected by interest groups, who did what was right for the country. He said on controversial issues, 'No country can afford men in the professions, in business or in politics that are more afraid of controversy than their conscience.'¹⁵⁰ He therefore focussed his administration on solving the country's most difficult problems whatever the political consequences. In stark contrast to his Democratic predecessor Lyndon Johnson, Carter did not understand how Washington politics operated or the consequences of ideological conflict. As a former engineer he fundamentally believed that all problems could be fixed.

Carter was very proud of being an engineer; it was one of the roles he always mentioned in his speeches. He described himself as being 'A trained engineer who prided himself on making technical judgements unburdened by ideology.'¹⁵¹ This also was reflected in his respect for his former boss Admiral Rickover whose opinions were taken seriously by his administration at Carter's request.¹⁵² He wanted solutions to problems that were comprehensive, uniform, simple and predictable. He admitted that because of this training he liked to be personally involved 'so I can know the thought processes that go into the final decisions.'¹⁵³ There is a revealing comparison here between Carter and another engineer in the White House, Herbert Hoover. Like Carter, Hoover sought technical solutions to problems but also like Carter was widely regarded as a failed president. It was a comparison that the press took delight in highlighting.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Carter, *Government as Good*, 25.

¹⁵¹ Ribuffo, 'Selling of a President', 144-45.

¹⁵² Labour abuses, 17 February 1977, SS Box 8 and Reducing Navy Hierarchy, 2 May 1977, Box 19, JCPL.

¹⁵³ Colin Campbell, *Managing the Presidency: Carter, Reagan and the Search for Executive Harmony* (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), 60.

¹⁵⁴ Andrew Melman, Jimmy Hoover, *New York Times*, 7 February 1979.

It was Carter the engineer who set the structure and the tone for the solutions he prescribed for the country's ills. In doing so he was undeterred by the technical or political complexity of the problem because he believed that all problems were fixable.¹⁵⁵ This philosophy which was reflected in Carter's legislative programme, revealed a lack of pragmatism on his part.

By the time of his election Carter had made many campaign commitments.¹⁵⁶ This in itself was not unusual but many of these largely liberal measures were forced upon him by his need to shore up support from his own party. New presidents were expected to utilise the period between their election and inaugural address to consult and establish a prioritised set of proposals that would turn campaign promises into concrete plans for legislation. Whilst Carter did consult widely during the transition, he displayed a marked reluctance both to prioritise his commitments and to provide an overall theme to sell to the electorate. He often referred to the religious philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr in his speeches. One of Niebuhr's most famous prayers was, 'God give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.'¹⁵⁷ Carter could not do this. He freely admitted that, 'Everybody warned me not to take on too many projects so early in the administration but it's almost impossible for me to delay something that I see needs to be done.'¹⁵⁸ His advisors, including Bert Lance,

¹⁵⁵ For influence of Carter the engineer see Jack Knott and Aaron Wildavsky article 'Jimmy Carter's Theory of Governing', 49-67.

¹⁵⁶ Ribuffo, 'Selling the President', 141 (Carter had 51 positions in campaign and 186 separate pledges)

¹⁵⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, Theologian (1892-1971).

¹⁵⁸ Carter, *Keeping the Faith*, 65.

knew this was a problem as it would create a legislative log jam in Congress.¹⁵⁹ However, attempts to limit presidential goals and delay some initiatives such as the Panama Canal Treaty to a possible second term fell on deaf ears.¹⁶⁰ The historian James McGregor Burns believed that as far as an agenda was concerned Carter had 'strategic myopia'.¹⁶¹

Attempts were made to develop a practical agenda. A systematic process to consult within the administration and with Congress started in April 1977.¹⁶² This was to become the first in a series of comprehensive plans over the next two years, led by Vice President Walter Mondale, to establish the administration's priorities. Objectives were broken down into 30, 60 and 90 day plans involving Carter's personal commitments and communications.¹⁶³ There were several reasons why ultimately these attempts failed. The complexity of the legislation and the difficulty in gaining support in Congress was one factor. Secondly, only Carter had the authority to delay any legislation and he was extremely reluctant to do so. Indeed, as the process developed those measures that had priority tended to increase.¹⁶⁴ 60 percent of proposed legislation that was sent to Congress had priority status, which resulted in many measures losing momentum.¹⁶⁵ As a consequence the agreed agenda was invariably too large. For example, the 1978 agreed agenda had 38 items on it.¹⁶⁶ This can be contrasted with President Kennedy's

¹⁵⁹ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 127-28.

¹⁶⁰ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 66-67.

¹⁶¹ Hedrick Smith, *The Power Game: How Washington Works*, (New York: Ballentine Books, 1988), 339.

¹⁶² Mondale note to Carter, 1 April 1977, SS Box 13, *JCPL*.

¹⁶³ Mondale to Carter, 27 March 1978, SS Box 69 and 3 January 1979, SS Box 102, *JCPL*.

¹⁶⁴ Eizenstat, *Congressional Weekly Report Vol XXXV 15 January 1977*, 85.

¹⁶⁵ Esther Peterson and Winifred Conkling, *Restless: The Memoirs of Labor and Consumer Activists* (Washington DC: Caring Publishing, 1995), 256.

¹⁶⁶ Agenda update, 9 January 1978, SS Box 58, *JCPL*.

focus on five 'Must Bills'.¹⁶⁷ Thirdly, Carter did not attempt to articulate his agenda's key themes which often resulted in confusion over administration priorities. His Communications Director Gerald Rafshoon tried to persuade Carter in the autumn of 1978 to promote bills to reduce waste and fraud¹⁶⁸ but this conflicted with the work of the vice president who wanted priority given to themes of inflation and compassion.¹⁶⁹ There was also dissent within the administration with members continuing to argue that the administration's agenda was overloaded. In November 1978, Jordan was expressing concern that the size of the agenda for the following year would not give the president enough time to build momentum for the 1980 election.¹⁷⁰ The White House, however, was more interested in the promotion of the volume of their legislation than its quality or cohesiveness. This was also reflected in Carter's speeches which were in effect a check list of achievements rather than a vision of the changes he was trying to accomplish.

To be effective and to project his power as president, Carter was dependent upon his own abilities and how well his staff and cabinet operated in supporting him. He therefore had to decide on the structure of his team, picking the right people and managing them day to day. Carter, like any other new president, had personal qualities that would help or hinder him as a leader. He was highly analytical, had excellent concentration and a passion for accuracy. His capacity for absorbing information became legendary; Carter wrote that he read 300 pages and 5/6 newspapers a day,

¹⁶⁷ James Giglio, *The Presidency of John F Kennedy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 99.

¹⁶⁸ Rafshoon to Carter, 10 November 1978, SS Box 97, JCPL.

¹⁶⁹ Mondale to Carter, 21 November 1978, SS Box 97, JCPL.

¹⁷⁰ Jordan to Carter, 21 November 1978, SS Box 52, JCPL.

helped by speed reading training he and his wife received early in his administration.¹⁷¹ The White House files are filled with Carter commenting on everything imaginable including the White House mail, staff grammar and even the subject of White House pens.¹⁷² The press picked up on this theme, questioning Carter's involvement in allocating use of the White House tennis court.¹⁷³ For Carter finding time to do 'homework' was a crucial element of the policy process because that gave him the detailed understanding of issues that would enable him to make the right decision. Critics of his administration argued that it was impossible for any president, even Carter, to be involved in that level of detail. Some of his cabinet found Carter's obsession with detail irritating¹⁷⁴ but others like Bert Lance did not see it as a disadvantage.¹⁷⁵ However, the increase in paperwork did cause problems. Carter's initial plan of working a 55-hour week with 15 hours reading had by April 1977 risen to 80 hours with 30 hours reading.¹⁷⁶ Carter recognised the problem and was regularly complaining to his staff who in response kept providing information on his work load¹⁷⁷ Carter admitted that although he had advice from Democratic congressional leader Tip O'Neill to cut back he could not do it.¹⁷⁸ Yet in the same month he complained to staff about not being consulted about an obscure issue on Indian fishing rights.¹⁷⁹ He wanted to be involved in everything. Carter exacerbated the problem because of his management style. He

¹⁷¹ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diaries* (New York: Picador, 2010), 24.

¹⁷² Carter to Rex Scouten, 5 March 1977, SS Box 10, Carter to Staff, 29 September 1977, SS Box 44, and Carter to Greg Schneiders 11 February 1977, SS Box 7, JCPL.

¹⁷³ James Fallows, 'The Passionless President', 75-81.

¹⁷⁴ Kenneth W Thompson, ed *The Carter Presidency: Fourteen Intimate Perspectives of Jimmy Carter* (Lanham, University Press of America, 1990), 122.

¹⁷⁵ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 126.

¹⁷⁶ Carter, *Diaries*, 39.

¹⁷⁷ Rick Hutcheson to Carter, April 1977, SS Box 14, JCPL.

¹⁷⁸ Carter, *Diaries*, 60.

¹⁷⁹ Carter Memorandum, 17 June 1977, SS Box 26, JCPL.

preferred communication on paper to face to face discussion¹⁸⁰ and as a result his aides like Jordan found writing memoranda was the most effective way of influencing him.¹⁸¹ This resulted in an increase in the volume of memoranda sent to him as, with the exception of his Press Secretary Powell and his wife, all his staff put their cases in writing knowing the prodigiously hard-working Carter would read them and send them back promptly. Aide Harrison Welford said 'the memos we send in sometimes come back with more comments than our original text. I don't know how long he can keep this up, but he has a passion for getting involved in the details of a lot of these decisions.'¹⁸² After his first-year, comments on internal White House and non-policy matters declined but the flow of paper to him did not.

If those were his key skills, what was his management style? Carter was not a natural manager of people; he was by nature solitary. He admitted that, 'When I am now in the White House in Washington, my greatest hunger is to be alone, away from the security officers, away from the press, and to be in the fields and woods again.'¹⁸³ Bert Carp, a member of the Domestic Policy Group, said that Carter rarely talked to aides below Eizenstat or cabinet secretary level and he believed that Carter did not really like having staff.¹⁸⁴ Even with people that he had worked with for a long time he rarely complimented them on good work but always criticised sloppiness.¹⁸⁵ In keeping with his complex character, the Jimmy Carter who berated Jordan for the poor organisation

¹⁸⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 56.

¹⁸¹ Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Years of the Carter Presidency* (New York, Michael Joseph, 1982), 42.

¹⁸² Harrison Welford, 'Staffing the Presidency; an Insider's Comments' *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 93 (Spring, 1978): 10-12.

¹⁸³ Thompson, *Fourteen Intimate Perspectives*, 214.

¹⁸⁴ Bert Carp Interview, *Miller Center*, 26 and 68-69.

¹⁸⁵ Eizenstat, 'Democratic Party and Domestic Policy', 5-6.

of his staff meetings¹⁸⁶ was the same person who bantered with Powell over an amusing article¹⁸⁷ and who wrote many warm personal notes to politicians, members of the public and even on occasion a journalist.¹⁸⁸ Whatever his abilities Carter entered the White House with limited governmental experience and a substantial list of campaign commitments. Carter recognised this: 'I have a substantial lack of experience and knowledge about the history of government here in Washington, the interrelationship among agencies, the proper division of authority and responsibility between Congress and the President.'¹⁸⁹ To overcome these disadvantages, he had to manage an effective transition to office, agree a working structure and pick a staff and a cabinet that would operate effectively.

Carter was the first presidential candidate to put significant resources into transition planning. He appointed Georgia lawyer, Jack Watson, as its leader with 50 staff, many of whom had Washington experience.¹⁹⁰ Carter heavily promoted the work of the team to the press.¹⁹¹ They worked on draft policies, established a talent advisory group which made 27 recommendations on appointments as well as advice on staffing structure.¹⁹² They operated in isolation from the campaign which unfortunately proved the team's undoing. When the election was over it was perceived that Watson's

¹⁸⁶ Carter to Jordan, 3 August 1979 Chief of Staff, Hamilton Jordan, Confidential Files, Box 37, *JCPL*.

¹⁸⁷ Powell to Carter, 21 July 1977 SS Box 35, *JCPL*.

¹⁸⁸ Carter to Sarah McClendon, 20 September 1977, SS Box 42, *JCPL*.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce Mazlish and Edwin Diamond, *Jimmy Carter. A Character Portrait* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 236.

¹⁹⁰ Carl Brauer, *Presidential Transitions: Eisenhower to Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 180-81.

¹⁹¹ Shogan, *Promises to Keep*, 14-15.

¹⁹² James W Riddlesperger Jr and James D King, 'Political Constraints, Leadership Style, and Temporal Limits: The Administration of Jimmy Carter', in Rosenbaum, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 357.

recommendations on White House structure, which included appointing a chief of staff and a raft of policies, were a threat to Jordan as campaign manager and Eizenstat who was head of the campaign policy team.¹⁹³ Carter was forced to arbitrate and found, not surprisingly, in favour of his campaign staff. This resulted in the rejection of virtually all the work done by the transition team and the potential advantages gained by early planning were lost. Carter did not even read Watson's proposals on White House organisation.¹⁹⁴ There were also delays in the appointments process caused by Carter's personal involvement and insistence that there was to be a woman and a minority candidate for each job.¹⁹⁵ Some major White House appointments were delayed right up until the inauguration. The role of the vice president was resolved quickly, however Walter Mondale, after the election, presented Carter with a detailed paper which not only defined a substantial role for himself but proposed the integration of his staff into the main White House structure.¹⁹⁶ Carter accepted his recommendations without amendment, paving the way for a significant role for Mondale in the new administration.

In establishing how his staff were to operate in the White House, Carter was driven by one major concern: access. He did not want intermediaries between himself and any of his advisors because 'they fractured his concept of comprehensive policy making.'¹⁹⁷ He therefore replicated a similar model of decentralised staffing to the one he had operated as governor. This was the 'spokes of the wheel' model with key aides being given access to the president both face to face and by memorandum. Carter's

¹⁹³ Bourne, *Plains to the Presidency*, 358.

¹⁹⁴ Burke, *Presidential Transitions*, 37.

¹⁹⁵ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 29.

¹⁹⁶ Eizenstat to Carter, December 1976, SS Box 3, JCPL.

¹⁹⁷ Knott and Wildavsky, *Theory of Governing*, 53.

ability to absorb information would, he believed, prevent confusion in the policy process. From his viewpoint, it maximised his personal control because his aides worked closely under his direction and therefore only the president knew everything.¹⁹⁸ Carter did not look at the White House in organisational terms. To him his staff were not there to help him with the business of government but to be more a family unit to support him.¹⁹⁹ He was always more comfortable dealing one to one with staff he knew and trusted; he never liked staff meetings.²⁰⁰ He was very concerned that if he implemented the chief of staff role as an alternative, he would be replicating the maligned structure under Nixon and this would not sit well with his image of open government. Carter may have said that he did not want a 'Sherman Adams in his office'²⁰¹ but it was being seen to have a 'Bob Haldeman' that really worried him. In addition, the natural choice for the chief of staff role was Jordan who was his key advisor and was unwilling and lacked the administrative skills for the role.²⁰² Finally, having no chief of staff gave him a sense of being in control and he was supremely confident in his ability to deal with ten direct reports as well as cabinet members, the vice president and his wife. He said that, 'Unless there is a holocaust I'll take care of everything the same day it comes in.'²⁰³

The success or failure of White House staff structure was invariably linked to the effectiveness of Carter's concept of cabinet government. His main assumption was that cabinet departments would initiate policy and manage subsequent legislation. This

¹⁹⁸ Lance Interview, *Miller Center*, 41-42.

¹⁹⁹ Alonzo McDonald Interview, *Miller Center*, 106.

²⁰⁰ Bourne, *Plains to the Presidency*, 272.

²⁰¹ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 8-9. Note: Sherman Adams worked for Eisenhower, Bob Haldeman for Nixon both as chief of staff.

²⁰² Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, 31-32.

²⁰³ Michael Nelson ed, *The Presidency and the Political System* (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc, 1988), 163.

would, in theory, limit the role of White House staff but even at an early stage there were concerns expressed about the impact of honouring a campaign pledge for a 20 percent cut in staff in April 1977.²⁰⁴ The later head of the Office of Management of the Budget (OMB) James McIntyre believed these cuts caused huge disruption.²⁰⁵ Carter himself recognised that even from his viewpoint things were not working. He complained about too much paper and after attempts at reform he still felt that he was not getting enough time to study.²⁰⁶ A more serious problem was how the political consequences of policy decisions were being addressed. According to Jordan the only place where politics and policy came together was with the president and that proved far too late in the process to prevent mistakes.²⁰⁷ Failure to consider properly the political ramifications of policy decisions made by the cabinet departments became a problem. The Department of Health's launch of an anti-smoking campaign had major political consequences for Carter in North Carolina where Governor James Hunt was a key supporter. Eizenstat, who headed up the Domestic Policy Group (DPG), urged Carter to ensure that White House staff played a coordinating role in ensuring policies developed by the cabinet did not conflict. A more coordinated approach was finally agreed at the Camp David Domestic Summit in May 1978 where staff concerns were raised, and changes made. Eizenstat got his way and the DPG started to play a role as coordinator and honest broker on papers sent to Carter through the process of Presidential Review and Decision Memoranda.²⁰⁸ Jordan started running meetings of

²⁰⁴ Robert Lipshutz to Carter, 31 March 1977, SS Box 13, JCPL.

²⁰⁵ James McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 6.

²⁰⁶ Cabinet Minutes, 6 June 1977, SS Box 24, and Carter to Tim Kraft, 5 December 1977, SS Box 54, JCPL.

²⁰⁷ Jordan Interview, *Miller Center*, 33.

²⁰⁸ Eizenstat to Carter, 2 September 1977, SS Box 40, JCPL.

policy staff to improve coordination across the administration, but Carter continued to maintain that a chief of staff was unnecessary.²⁰⁹ Whilst approving these changes Carter did not appear to be very active in the debate. There was a consensus that the reforms brought improvements both in coordinating policy and managing the political consequences.²¹⁰ The development of Anne Wexler's outreach role and her use of 'Task Forces' were also regarded as major successes. This approach, which brought together cabinet departments, White House staff and external support for individual policies, had its signature success with the passing of the Panama Canal Treaty bill.²¹¹ However, all parties in the White House were keen to maintain the facade that the cabinet government remained the way the administration did business. This continued until July 1979.

As presidential candidate Carter argued that his administration was going to be both ethical and efficient. As part of this approach to open government, he would re-establish cabinet government. White House staff were to have a restricted role in advising him and he reinforced the point by cutting his staff by 20 percent. It would be his cabinet who would develop and implement his policies and increase efficiency by improving services.²¹² Carter sought to replicate his experience as governor where he developed a close working relationship with cabinet members, but the size of the task prevented such close relationships developing. Carter's belief in cabinet government did not extend to collective responsibility. Despite the large number of meetings, fifty-nine in the first two years, there was no collective discussion or debate on issues in cabinet.

²⁰⁹ Carter to Staff, 24 January 1978, Chief of Staff, Box 37, JCPL.

²¹⁰ Landon Butler Interview, *Miller Center*, 6.

²¹¹ Anne Wexler Interview, *Miller Center*, 5-6.

²¹² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 66.

Meetings quickly deteriorated into ‘show and tell sessions.’ Cabinet members were however given a wide range of discretion. They were expected to run their own departments with no interference from the White House and they could be free to have the final say on appointing their own staff.²¹³ As to the policies they were to follow, at Carter’s request, Cabinet members were given copies of all his major speeches²¹⁴ but otherwise they were left to their own devices. Carter believed that ‘the staff and Cabinet Officers would prefer to have minimal participation by me until the final decision point is reached.’²¹⁵

Carter’s relationships with individual members of the cabinet were cordial but not warm. Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland said it was nearly three years before he and his wife were invited to dinner at the White House.²¹⁶ While many cabinet members had complaints about White House staff none had any about Carter personally. All at various times were asked about how easy it was to gain access to him and none had complaints on that score. He picked individuals from a range of backgrounds with only two, Cecil Andrus at the Department of the Interior and Bergland at Agriculture, representing any sort of interest group. Ray Marshall at Labour was picked against the direct advice of George Meany, head of the AFL-CIO. Carter described his cabinet appointments in terms of geographic diversity.²¹⁷ He was also one of the first presidents to try to appoint women and minority groups throughout his administration. In terms of ideology the Carter cabinet represented a range from the liberal Secretary

²¹³ Gene Eidenberg, *Jimmy Carter Library Exit Interview Project, JCPL*, 13.

²¹⁴ Eizenstat Interview, *Miller Center*, 27.

²¹⁵ Carter, *Keeping the Faith*, 35.

²¹⁶ Thompson, *Fourteen Intimate Perspectives*, 122.

²¹⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 49.

of Labor to the conservative Attorney General, Griffin Bell. Most were picked for their administrative skills rather than innovation²¹⁸ and only one was a friend, Bert Lance, who was chosen to head up the Office of Management of the Budget (OMB). James Schlesinger was picked as his special advisor on energy because Carter got on with him despite reservations from his team.²¹⁹ Given his later sacking in July 1979 one would assume that the relationship between Joseph Califano, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), and Carter would have been difficult but despite substantial policy differences they were on cordial terms. There were numerous examples of Carter writing notes of praise and support for Califano's work at HEW.²²⁰ Califano did receive criticism from the president but as Carter himself admitted, it was the relationship between Califano and Mike Blumenthal, the Secretary of the Treasury, with White House staff that proved critical in the eventual decision to sack them in July 1979.²²¹ This area of conflict signified the unravelling of Carter's attempt at cabinet government.

There were problems with the operation of cabinet government from the outset. The degree of independence given to each member of the cabinet resulted in frequent conflict with the White House. The situation was made worse by the president's failure to give specific guidance on the broad policy issues that he asked the departments to resolve. Also, there was no analysis of the political implications of any policy until after the proposal reached Carter's desk. He assumed that a comprehensive solution would naturally win support²²² but his staff were fighting political fires from his first day in

²¹⁸ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 31-32.

²¹⁹ Phil Walden to Carter, 18 December 1976, SS Box 1, JCPL.

²²⁰ Carter to Califano, 27 January 1978, SS Box 60, JCPL

²²¹ Carter, *Diaries*, 344

²²² Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 65-67.

office. Cabinet members were appointing individuals into departmental positions without consulting the relevant member of Congress. After prompting from Mondale, Carter instructed his cabinet to check any appointments with Jordan,²²³ but the complaints persisted. There were also problems over communication, with each department issuing conflicting messages on policy. Carter wrote a personal note to the cabinet in April 1977 requesting one lead spokesman on major issues²²⁴ but this was not fully implemented until the following year when Rafshoon was appointed. Cabinet members were accused of leaking to the press and there was often counter leaking from White House staff.²²⁵ Press comments forced Carter on more than one occasion to deny in public that he was unhappy with certain cabinet members.²²⁶ Discontent from White House staff culminated in a highly critical personal memorandum from Jordan to Carter. He listed the cabinet's failures, including inability to notify the White House of decisions, systematic leaks to the press, not responding to Congress, and lack of support for presidential policies. Jordan named Transport Secretary Brock Adams, as well as Califano and Blumenthal, as being disloyal. He further suggested that the whole cabinet was working against Carter's policy on the budget.²²⁷ The consequence of this and a decline in the polls was the Camp David Domestic Summit of May 1978. Carter agreed to White House staff demands to give them a major role in coordinating policy and handling the political issues arising out of cabinet policies. This was not the death of cabinet government, but it curtailed the power of individual secretaries to act independently. It

²²³ Mondale to Carter, 11 February 1977, SS Box 7, *JCPL*.

²²⁴ Carter to Cabinet, 27 April 1977, Powell, Box 39, *JCPL*.

²²⁵ Jordan Interview, *Miller Center*, 26-27.

²²⁶ Copy of Post Article, 6 April 1977, Chief of Staff, Box 33, *JCPL*.

²²⁷ Jordan to Carter, April 1978, Chief of Staff, Box 33, *JCPL*.

did not stop the leaks or suggestions that staff were deliberately trying to undermine members of the cabinet and so mutual mistrust continued.²²⁸

Carter's insistence on cabinet government had a negative effect on the White House staff but to many in the Washington press the problem was not the structure but the quality of his staff. Journalists and politicians often cited the Georgians as lacking experience of working in Washington as a problem.²²⁹ Once these opinions formed they were very difficult to shift. This was particularly true of Frank Moore and his congressional liaison team.²³⁰ Even the more positive cabinet members like Bergland regarded the administration as 'loaded with honest amateurs.'²³¹ Others questioned staff competence. Both Clark Clifford, a Washington insider brought in to advise Carter, and Attorney General Bell blamed the Bert Lance resignation on poor staff work.²³² Lance was forced to resign over financial irregularities from his time as president of the National Bank of Georgia. Carter did not meet with his senior staff team in the first two years, preferring to work individually with people he trusted.²³³ He was criticised for appointing Georgians to six of the nine special assistants' posts. What really mattered to Carter was not that they were from the same state but that they had personal experience of working with him. Eizenstat may well have had experience of working in Washington for Hubert Humphrey but as Carter said, 'he didn't really have those four years of experience and training within state government to know exactly how I did

²²⁸ Califano, *Governing America*, 410.

²²⁹ *President's News Conference*, 30 November 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30222&st=&st1=>

²³⁰ Jon R Bond and Richard Fleisher, 'Carter and Congress: Presidential Style, Party Politics, and Legislative Success', in Rosenbaum, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 287-91.

²³¹ Thompson, *Fourteen Intimate Perspectives*, 121.

²³² *Ibid*, 75 and Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, 628.

²³³ Bourne, *Plains to the Presidency*, 372.

things.²³⁴ Some did recognise that there was a shortage of DC experience and tried to bring in ‘wise men’ on an ad hoc basis. Discussions were held with senior figures, notably Clark Clifford and Averell Harriman, but this was not sustained.²³⁵ To the press, however, much was made of the Georgian influence and some of this criticism smacked of regional prejudice with the high-profile Jordan and Powell on one occasion described by speechwriter Patrick Anderson as ‘a couple of raw boned, narrow eyed South Georgian thugs.’²³⁶

Carter saw himself as a leader who was taking on Washington and believed he had the skills to evaluate the options and make the best decision. The only real friend he had in the administration was Bert Lance and he made no new friends whilst he was president²³⁷ He did bring with him into the White House two close associates, Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell. As press secretary, Powell saw Carter daily, but he had no influence on policy. Jordan’s role, at least initially, was vague given Carter’s rejection of the chief of staff model. He focussed mainly on the appointments process but his access through memoranda was important and unlike other staff members he was sufficiently confident of his relationship with Carter to be critical of the operation of the White House and Carter personally.²³⁸ Carter’s major source of advice within the administration was Bert Lance. Over and above access to Carter’s office, Lance had a weekly lunch with the president as well as regular games of tennis. He was able to use his influence for example to tone down Carter’s performance at budget meetings, where

²³⁴ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 19.

²³⁵ Eizenstat Interview, *Miller Center*, 21.

²³⁶ Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 68.

²³⁷ Kellerman, ‘Introversion in the Oval Office’, 383-389.

²³⁸ Jordan to Carter, April 1977, Chief of Staff, Box 34, *JCPL*.

his detailed knowledge often intimidated staff²³⁹ and to abandon plans to save energy by turning off the lights on the Lincoln Memorial.²⁴⁰ Lance said that he and long-term supporter Charles Kirbo were Carter's only two sources of candid advice.²⁴¹ This was not quite accurate given Jordan's influence but with Kirbo visiting Washington infrequently, the resignation of Lance in September 1977 due to alleged financial irregularities in his bank dealings was a personal blow to Carter. He acknowledged at his press conference that he did not believe that Lance could be replaced.²⁴² Lance had credibility both within and beyond the administration and was seen as a fixer. Carter lost the option of saying 'talk to Bert about that.'²⁴³ His departure also curtailed the influence of the OMB because while his successor, Jim McIntyre, was trusted for his mastery of the detail but he lacked Lance's political skills. When Lance resigned the only personal advice that Carter continued to receive was from his wife, Rosalynn. The role of fixer was mainly taken up by his Vice President Mondale. He had a regular weekly lunch with the president and was to play an influential role firefighting on Carter's behalf. As Carter ran into trouble with Congress, he used Mondale as a bridge builder to facilitate deals for example on the Water Projects and the Farm Bill.²⁴⁴ A measure of how Carter valued Mondale was his swift response to articles in the press suggesting that his vice president was losing influence. He called journalists from the *New York Times* and *LA Times* to deny this.²⁴⁵ Carter's wife remained his political partner throughout his term in office. The indications of how he valued her role came in her trip to South America on his behalf,

²³⁹ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 112-13.

²⁴⁰ Lance Interview, *Miller Center*, 27.

²⁴¹ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 98.

²⁴² Lance to Carter, 21 September 1977, SS Box 43, JCPL.

²⁴³ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 103.

²⁴⁴ Eizenstat to Carter, 22 March 1978, SS Box 68, JCPL.

²⁴⁵ Carter, *Diaries*, 109.

her sitting in at cabinet meetings and her involvement with issues like mental health and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). There were also signs of her influence on wider issues. Rafshoon stated that she was influential in him returning to the White House.²⁴⁶ and Lance believed some aides, particularly Rafshoon and Caddell, took proposals to Rosalynn first to get her political judgement before talking to Carter.²⁴⁷ Some judged her to be the most influential president's wife since Edith Wilson²⁴⁸ but no archival evidence is currently available that confirms this other than the word of Carter and his aides.

In terms of morale one of Carter's more experienced staff, Anne Wexler, believed that the White House was the 'least turf conscious place she had ever worked.'²⁴⁹ There were, however, tensions between the domestic policy and OMB leadership. Jim McIntyre thought Eizenstat's team represented the views of the interest groups they used to work for.²⁵⁰ Whilst accepting OMB's technical competence, Eizenstat thought that they were politically naive. This was illustrated in an early draft of a note that Eizenstat wrote to Carter which contained a strong critique of the role of the OMB on policy matters.²⁵¹ He subsequently deleted the criticism, perhaps conscious of Carter's strong views on internal bickering.²⁵² More seriously some of this disagreement spread into fundamental areas of policy. The administration's increasing emphasis on fighting inflation was undermined by leaks from White House staff.²⁵³ Carter's attempts to

²⁴⁶ Rafshoon Interview, *Miller Center*, 11.

²⁴⁷ Lance Interview, *Miller Center*, 54.

²⁴⁸ Myra Gutin, 'Rosalyn Carter in the White House', Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 518-40.

²⁴⁹ Anne Wexler Interview, *Miller Center*, 63.

²⁵⁰ McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 98-99.

²⁵¹ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 52.

²⁵² Draft note Eizenstat to Carter, 20 September 1978, Eizenstat, Box JCPL.

²⁵³ McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 11.

distinguish his personal views on abortion from his neutral public stance were undermined by an open rebellion led by Midge Constanza, his aide for public liaison, who organised a petition of White House staff.²⁵⁴ The main cause of tension in the White House arose out of the failure of Carter's attempt at cabinet government to deliver a coherent policy development process. Initially cabinet secretaries and their staff could largely ignore White House staff but as they became aware that their policies required support across the administration, the role of Eizenstat in coordination became important. The Camp David Domestic Summit of May 1978 formalised that policy decisions would be reviewed by White House staff. This increase in their power resulted in most cabinet secretaries being relegated to a lower level of authority.²⁵⁵ After identifying major problems with the original cabinet government model, reforms did bring about improvements in White House efficiency. Yet, tensions and problems persisted until the cabinet government approach was abandoned in July 1979 and a chief of staff appointed. (See Chapter Seven). The new structure and the appointment of three experienced 'outsiders', Lloyd Cutler, Hedley Donovan and Alonzo McDonald, further improved the effectiveness of the White House. Whether an earlier implementation of this change would have significantly improved the administration's record seems unlikely given the serious problems Carter faced when dealing with Congress.

One of the main challenges for Carter was to ensure that his key legislation passed Congress. To succeed he needed to have clear legislative goals, the skills to build

²⁵⁴ Califano, *Governing America*, 65-66.

²⁵⁵ Shirley Anne Warshaw, 'The Carter Experience with Cabinet Government' in Rosenbaum, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 381-82.

support in Congress and the country as a whole, and an effective congressional liaison team. Carter started his term of office with perceived weaknesses in all these areas. He inherited a Congress with a Democratic majority but one that was fractious with a new leadership and a complex structure of 165 committees and sub committees²⁵⁶ that would make passing any but the simplest legislation difficult. His mandate from the electorate was perceived to be limited and his non-ideological style meant that he had no natural constituency within the legislature on which he could rely. Consequently, Carter had to build support for every major piece of legislation. This would make him dependent upon his skills and the quality of staff around him to succeed. Not even his greatest supporters would claim that Carter was a successful legislator in the Johnson mould. He made mistakes but, as Bergland argued, part of the reason why Carter could not control Congress was that Congress could not control itself.²⁵⁷

A critical factor in legislative success was how well relationships with members of congress were managed. It is here that Carter's role as a politician was crucial. Once the campaign was over Carter did not believe that politics had a role in government. Zbigniew Brzezinski, his national security advisor, commented that 'Carter made hardly any effort to disguise his disdain for domestic politics.'²⁵⁸ He spent on average 30 hours a week in meetings with members of Congress, but this was regarded as not enough.²⁵⁹ Eizenstat commented on dealing with Congress that, 'You have got to like dealing with politicians ... and it just takes enormous energy,'²⁶⁰ but Carter neither liked nor

²⁵⁶ Comments by James Free in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter* 318.

²⁵⁷ Bob Bergland Interview, *Miller Center*, 39-40.

²⁵⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 521.

²⁵⁹ Kraft - Time Study, 2 June 1977, SS Box 24, *JCPL*.

²⁶⁰ Eizenstat Interview, *Miller Center*, 96-97.

understood politicians. He emphasised that congressional constituencies were also his, as president, which challenged members of Congress on their own ground.²⁶¹ He refused to accept that he owed Congress a debt from the election²⁶² and he believed that they should back his proposals because he had studied the issue and, unlike Congress, was unaffected by special interests.²⁶³ Carter did accept that he lacked Washington experience but there seemed to be little effort to adjust to his new environment. He continued to assume that Congress would behave like the Georgia legislature and he remained confident that he could manage them as well as he had when he was governor. Attempts by senior legislators in Washington to argue for Carter to pay them more attention had the same outcome as in Georgia.²⁶⁴ Carter was always prepared to meet members of Congress, but it was usually in large numbers²⁶⁵ and he appeared to lack affinity with them or understand their viewpoint. Senator J Bennett Johnson of Louisiana said that Carter 'didn't have any friends who were in Congress who you'd think of as being warm and friendly. He just didn't have any kind of relationship with anybody.'²⁶⁶ Some meetings with Senators Adlai Stevenson III of Illinois and Harrison 'Jack' Schmidt of New Mexico, for example, resulted in some fairly scathing comments from Carter.²⁶⁷ Another attempt at relationship building became almost comical when

²⁶¹ President's News Conference, 29 May 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32406&st=&st1=>

²⁶² Greenstein, *Presidential Difference*, 128.

²⁶³ Charles O Jones, 'Carter and Congress: From the Outside In' *British Journal of Political Science* Vol 15 (July 1985): 269-298.

²⁶⁴ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 27-28.

²⁶⁵ Interview With the President Question-and-Answer Session With a Group of Publishers, Editors, and Broadcasters, 24 June 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7726&st=&st1=>

²⁶⁶ Robert Mann, *Legacy to Power. Senator Russell Long of Louisiana* (New York, Paragon House, 1992), 360.

²⁶⁷ Carter, *Diaries*, 251 and SS Box 48, 28 October 1977, JCPL.

Rafshoon persuaded Carter to play Senators Lloyd Bentsen of Texas and Ernest 'Fritz' Hollings of South Carolina at tennis. Rafshoon's expectation was that the game would be followed by drinks and political discussion. Carter finished the game and left them there, assuming this was all that was required.²⁶⁸ When he gave an important speech at Notre Dame University he failed to mention the local Democratic congressmen in the audience.²⁶⁹ Although Carter was conscientious in making calls to congressmen at the request of his staff, he was reluctant to do so. Jody Powell was stated, 'It's the damndest thing about him. He went all over the country for two years asking everybody he saw to vote for him for president, but he doesn't like to call a congressman and ask for his support on a bill.'²⁷⁰ Carter was not totally lacking in political guile. He could sometimes be pragmatic and when as governor his reform bill was going through, he ordered that no liberal measures be put forward so as not to antagonise conservative supporters of the bill.²⁷¹ He was also prepared to compromise to get legislation through but he was extremely reluctant to do deals related to other policies.²⁷² The exceptions being his successful intervention with the Senate to pass the Panama Canal Treaty and he ensured Congressman Mo Udall of Arizona's support for Government Reform by appointing one of Udall's friends to the Civil Aeronautics Board.²⁷³ However he vetoed funds for a nuclear carrier sponsored by Senator Henry 'Scoop' Jackson of Washington despite needing his support on the Energy bill.²⁷⁴ When Pennsylvanian Congressmen threatened

²⁶⁸ Eizenstat, *White House Years*. 678-79.

²⁶⁹ Brinkley, *Unfinished Presidency*, 5-6.

²⁷⁰ Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York, W W Norton and Company, 2010), 210.

²⁷¹ Bourne, *Plains to the Presidency*, 213.

²⁷² Les Francis, *Jimmy Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 10-11.

²⁷³ Johnson, *Absence of Power*, 253-54.

²⁷⁴ Speer, 'Carter was a Baptist President', 102-5.

to vote against all his legislation unless he approved their choice for a US Attorney role in Philadelphia, he told them 'to go to hell.'²⁷⁵ Carter was driven by his need to do the right thing over political expediency. This would make his relationships with members of Congress problematic.

Carter needed the support of senior members of Congress if his legislative programme was to succeed. He said that he did not expect problems because his party had a majority.²⁷⁶ He was disabused of this by his first meeting with Democratic Chairman of the Government Operations Committee Jack Brooks of Texas over Government Reform in January 1977.²⁷⁷ To succeed he needed to be guided through the complexity of Congress. Frank Moore, Carter's assistant for congressional liaison, advised Carter weeks before the Inaugural that he 'must decide early your first initiatives and work with the leadership prior to January in making them feel they are part of it.'²⁷⁸ For Carter the leadership referred to was House Speaker Thomas P. 'Tip' O'Neill and Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd.

Tip O'Neill was a liberal congressman from Massachusetts and new to the position of Speaker. Carter and O'Neill developed an effective working relationship. This was despite some ideological differences on the economy and a fractious relationship between O'Neill and Carter's staff, particularly Jordan. Carter in his diaries talked of O'Neill as a personal friend whose loyalty he valued despite O'Neill's natural support for Teddy Kennedy.²⁷⁹ This relationship was reflected in a number of warm personal notes

²⁷⁵ Carter, *Diaries*, 75.

²⁷⁶ Democratic majorities: House 292-143 and Senate 62-38.

²⁷⁷ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 7-8.

²⁷⁸ Frank Moore to Carter, December 1976, Plains File, Box 41, *JCPL*.

²⁷⁹ Carter, *Diaries*, 183.

from Carter.²⁸⁰ O'Neill ensured that key measures passed the House, including the Energy bill and he also influenced Carter's compromise on the Water Projects.²⁸¹ O'Neill had no illusions about Carter's failures with Congress but he later said that, 'I miss Jimmy Carter. With his intelligence and energy and his tremendous moral strength, he would have been a great leader.'²⁸² No such sentiment was ever likely to be expressed by Senator Robert Byrd.

Byrd made it clear from the start that his first loyalty was to his state, West Virginia, then to the Senate and finally to Carter.²⁸³ Carter was prepared to defer to Byrd on the tactics he employed to get his legislation passed but it did not always work as Byrd often gave way to the will of the committee chairmen. Frank Moore's team were always conscious of the need to massage Byrd's bruised ego when he felt that he was not getting the attention he deserved.²⁸⁴ To Byrd, however, Carter did not treat the Senate with due respect. He believed, with some justification, that Carter and his advisors still thought they could treat the Senate as if it was the Georgia legislature. He was unhappy about Carter's reversal of his decision in April 1977 on the \$50 tax rebate which was taken without proper consultation or warning. Disturbingly for the administration, such decisions made Byrd question whether it would be wise for the Senate to support such policies if the president was going to undercut them by changing his mind.²⁸⁵ There were arguments with Byrd over the administration failing to consult

²⁸⁰ Carter to O'Neill, 1 October 1979, Susan Clough File, Box 42, *JCPL*.

²⁸¹ John Farrell, *Tip O'Neill and the Democratic Century* (Boston, New York: Little Brown, 2001), 460-61.

²⁸² *Ibid*, 329.

²⁸³ Frank Moore Interview, *Miller Center*, 76.

²⁸⁴ Moore to Carter, 23 August 1977, Frank Moore, Office of Congressional Liaison, Box 19, *JCPL*.

²⁸⁵ Dan Tate to Carter, 18 April 1977, SS Box 15, *JCPL*.

him properly on local issues and appointments.²⁸⁶ These were similar to disputes with Tip O'Neill but Byrd's anger and threats to withdraw support from key legislation were more direct.²⁸⁷ Byrd, unlike O'Neill, fundamentally disagreed with much of the legislation that Carter sent to the Senate, but he did play a key role in helping Carter on some issues such as the Clinch River Reactor, the Korean Amnesty and auto pollution.²⁸⁸ However, Byrd did not prove an effective champion of the administration in the Senate as O'Neill was in the House.

Carter's failure to influence key members of Congress was a product of his inexperience and his attitude to making deals with politicians. Due to his national mandate he expected that a Congress led by his own party would follow his lead and accept his proposals. He believed that his experience as governor would be sufficient to deal with any issues. But Congress was both proud and jealous of its own prerogatives and had an agenda of its own. The success or failure of any legislative programme was dependent upon the ability of the White House to mobilise support. This was more difficult for the administration because of the complex committee and sub-committee structure and the fragmented nature of the political factions. In addition, the Carter administration's predilection for comprehensive solutions placed increased strain on the legislative process. To be successful therefore Carter needed an effective congressional liaison team.

²⁸⁶ Moore to Carter, 28 October 1980, Frank Moore, Box 37, JCPL.

²⁸⁷ Tate to Carter, 9 October 1978, SS Box 95, JCPL.

²⁸⁸ Glad, *In Search of the Great White House*, 421.

Frank Moore made recommendations to Carter during the transition about the role his team should play.²⁸⁹ Nearly all of them were ignored and in general the president expressed little interest in how Moore's team operated.²⁹⁰ In the Carter White House congressional liaison officials were to have no influence on policy development as that was to be the remit of cabinet official departments and their own liaison staff. Moore initially only had seven people compared with HEW which had 40 and Commerce, 30 staff.²⁹¹ Moore's team were picked for their ability to serve the president not support Congress. Hence, they were organised under specific policy areas. This was against the advice of President Kennedy's congressional liaison, Lawrence J O'Brien, who recommended that staff be aligned to build relationships with members of Congress.²⁹² Moore did benefit from daily access to the president and had Carter's backing whether it was fending off criticism or conscientiously making calls to key congressmen.²⁹³ Moore's prime role was to keep Carter informed of congressional views whilst at the same time maximising the president's independence.²⁹⁴ However, the structure soon ran into problems. Moore's very appointment was perceived as a negative signal to Congress given his lack of experience of Washington. His staff were overwhelmed by the legislative programme and a backlog of politically sensitive appointments. Their focus on policies resulted in issues raised by individual congressmen being mishandled.²⁹⁵ Attempts to devolve work to cabinet departments failed because congressmen felt fobbed off. They wanted access to the president and, if not him, either Jordan or Moore.

²⁸⁹ Moore to Carter, December 1976, Plains Files, Box 41, *JCPL*.

²⁹⁰ Moore Interview, *Miller Center*, 29-30.

²⁹¹ Jones, 'Carter and Congress', 269-298.

²⁹² Moore Interview, *Miller Center*, 7.

²⁹³ Jones, 'Carter and Congress'.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁹⁵ Jones, *Trustee President*, 118.

The president was not inclined to talk to congressmen, and Jordan had agreed with Carter that he would step back from dealing with Congress.²⁹⁶ To Moore this was simply a numbers issue; the president's commitment to 20 percent cuts in White House staff made the situation worse.²⁹⁷ There was also criticism of the lack of legislative experience within the White House.²⁹⁸ But this was not reflected in the administration as a whole because liaison staff working in ten out of the eleven government departments were led by staff with congressional experience.²⁹⁹ The gradual move away from cabinet government resulted in increased resources and improved credibility for Moore's team. The recruitment of the experienced Bill Cable as House Liaison in May 1977 and Dan Tate as lead for the Senate in the following year³⁰⁰ resulted in a better understanding of Congress. The team also became important members of the task force approach to legislative challenges. Used successfully for the Panama Canal Treaty bill, this became the norm as a means of managing important legislation in the second half of the administration. This approach under Anne Wexler's outreach team brought together the relevant cabinet departments, the press office, members of Moore's staff and departmental liaison to deliver key legislation. This was a recognition that with no natural coalition in Congress all major pieces of legislation required specific planning to enable passage. This coupled with regular Tuesday meetings between Carter and the Democratic leadership ensured that there was a more coordinated approach as his presidency unfolded.³⁰¹

²⁹⁶ Moore Interview, *Miller Center*, 16 and Jordan, 21.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 33.

²⁹⁸ *Washington Star* Article, 21 February 1977, SS Box 5, *JCPL*.

²⁹⁹ *Congressional Weekly Report* xxxv no. 9, 26 February 1977: 361-63.

³⁰⁰ Jones, 'Carter and Congress'.

³⁰¹ *Congressional Weekly Report* Vol 3, 3 February 1979: 195-200.

This transition did not happen quickly and as a result there were avoidable errors at the start of his administration. Even before he began in the role, Moore had a reputation for ignoring queries from congressmen. This was due to an initial misunderstanding about his role in the campaign,³⁰² but this was made worse by the continued failure of his staff to deal with congressional requests.³⁰³ There were several high-profile mistakes over appointments and the award of government grants. This was often caused by decisions made by cabinet departments but nevertheless Moore got the full force of congressional anger. During the first year there were a series of high profile complaints by Senators James O. Eastland of Mississippi, Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, William D. Hathaway of Maine and the Chair of Ways and Means committee Albert C. Ullman of Oregon.³⁰⁴ In addition Califano quoted Congressman Daniel D. Rostenkowski of Illinois, Chief Deputy Whip and one of the Democratic leadership team, about Moore stating that, 'Every time he comes up here he costs us votes.'³⁰⁵ The most serious falling out was with Tip O'Neill who found out from the newspapers that one of his key supporters Bob Griffin, had been removed from the General Services Administration. Moore was banned from the Speaker's offices and Carter had to placate O'Neill and force Moore to apologise.³⁰⁶ This incident was less Moore's fault than the administration's inability to coordinate its actions. For whatever reason, members of Congress felt neglected. As a senior congressman put it, 'Two classes of people who don't want to be ignored, beautiful women and politicians. If you

³⁰² Moore, *Jimmy Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 6-7.

³⁰³ Moore Interview, 2-3k calls a day, *Miller Center*, 5-6.

³⁰⁴ Moore to Carter, 26 March 1977, SS Box 13, Tate to Moore, 29 July 1977, SS Box 34, Tate to Jordan, 29 September 1977 SS Box 45, and Carter note, 20 June 1977, SS Box 26, *JCPL*.

³⁰⁵ Califano, *Governing America*, 148.

³⁰⁶ Farrell, *Tip O'Neill*, pp. 514-16 and Carter, *Diaries*, 209.

ignore them, you must be doing it on purpose because it is so obvious to everyone they are singular people. They don't care for that kind of treatment.'³⁰⁷ The frustration was not always one way. The Democratic leadership often blocked attempts by Carter to replicate tactics that had worked for him in Georgia. O'Neill and Byrd vetoed attempts by Carter to engage with the GOP even when there was a natural constituency of support on specific legislation.³⁰⁸ To the Democratic leadership an invitation to key senators to discuss the energy bill, without consulting them, demonstrated ignorance of protocol but to the administration it was attempting to get the job done.³⁰⁹

Despite these problems Moore's team did provide a flow of important information to Carter. This took the form of weekly reports on congressional activity, which Carter continued to read and comment on assiduously.³¹⁰ They also provided briefings for when the president met members of congress which provided political and personal guidance to enable him to maximise his effectiveness.³¹¹ Moore worked hard to persuade a reluctant Carter to spend more time in different environments with legislators to put across the administration's goals³¹² but also, Moore admitted, to educate Carter himself.³¹³ The introduction of more experienced staff and the realignment of the team won more plaudits. The move of Moore's team to the West Wing in 1978 also brought a more important benefit by integrating them with senior

³⁰⁷ William F Mullen, 'Perceptions of Carter's Legislative Successes and Failures. Views from the Hill and Liaison Staff', *Presidential Studies Quarterly Vol 12* (Fall1982): 522-533.

³⁰⁸ Cabinet Minutes, 7 February 1977, SS Box 5, JCPL.

³⁰⁹ Barber, *Race for the Presidency*, 437.

³¹⁰ Moore Legislative Report, 18 March 1978, SS Box 68, JCPL.

³¹¹ Moore to Carter, 1 June 1977, SS Box 23, JCPL.

³¹² Moore to Carter, 30 March 1977, SS Box 13, JCPL.

³¹³ Moore Interview, *Miller Center*, 72.

White House staff.³¹⁴ In the run up to the Camp David Domestic Summit Moore and his team conducted a review with the Democratic whips following the failure to pass the Consumer bill. The criticism moved beyond that of Moore's team to the whole administration approach to Congress.³¹⁵ Many of the recommendations were endorsed by the president and implemented. Coordination improved, and the Democratic leadership were consulted more frequently. In October 1978 Senator Byrd was moved to say that he had never seen such achievement and harmony between President and Congress in 27 years.³¹⁶ Yet, the question of Carter's perceived attitude to Congress remained an issue, particularly after his decision early in his administration to take on Congress over the water projects.

Carter's attempt to cut back on government investment in water projects demonstrated the key themes of his domestic presidency. It highlighted his determination to do the right thing, fight special interests, reduce waste in government and to protect the environment. It was also seen as an early test of his administration's competence and his ability to stand up to Congress. For many members of Congress, it was a direct attack on their patronage because they used such projects to help their constituents. There was however no universal support for such investment. Many of the projects were not financially viable and there were often major environmental concerns. Carter believed that he had the support for his actions of the American people (as he was fulfilling a campaign promise) and Democrats in Congress,³¹⁷ key GOP leaders,

³¹⁴ Carp Interview, *Miller Center*, 70.

³¹⁵ Moore to Carter, February 1978, Chief of Staff, Box 34, *JCPL*.

³¹⁶ Carter, *Diaries*, 252.

³¹⁷ Senators to Carter, 14 February 1977, Eizenstat, Box 315, *JCPL*.

the OMB, the Water Resources Council and the Council of Environmental Quality.³¹⁸ So Carter expected a Democratic Congress to fall into line, but he underestimated the political impact of his proposals. Senator Russell Long of Louisiana, Chair of the Finance Committee, was baffled by Carter's actions because to Long the president 'was asking for a fight when he didn't have the votes to win to begin with.'³¹⁹ The proposal affected congressmen across the political spectrum and many of them held key committee and sub-committee positions. Carter received little advice about the political consequences of his decision. Only Secretary of Interior Andrus raised it as a potential issue.³²⁰ The announcement was due on 21 February 1977 but it was leaked beforehand with affected congressmen being misinformed by the newspapers that their projects were cancelled (as opposed to postponed).³²¹ No attempt had been made to warn these congressmen with Moore being quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that he did not know that it was tradition to tell congressmen in advance³²²

The reaction on Capitol Hill was immediately hostile with congressional committees holding up key legislation and appointments. Carter and his team made various attempts both at compromise and 'hanging tough,'³²³ but many of the proposed cuts were reinstated as Carter was forced to accept a compromise brokered by

³¹⁸ Paul E Scheele, 'President Carter and the Water Projects: A Case Study in Presidential and Congressional Decision Making' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol 8 (Fall, 1978): 348-354.

³¹⁹ Mann, *Legacy to Power*, 341.

³²⁰ Jeffrey K Stine, 'Environmental Policy During the Carter Presidency', in Gary Fink and Hugh Davis Graham eds, *The Carter Presidency Policy Choices in the Post New Deal Era* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 185-87.

³²¹ Scheele, 'President Carter and the Water Projects', 348-354.

³²² Scott A Frisch and Sean O'Kelly, *Jimmy Carter and the Water Wars. Presidential Influence and the Politics of Pork* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 1981), 73.

³²³ Carter to Powell, 25 February 1977, Powell, Box 39, JCPL.

O'Neill.³²⁴ This may have been the right decision, but Carter's staff were totally unaware of what in effect was a U-turn and therefore it damaged the president's and their own credibility.³²⁵ This was not the end of the issue as there were annual budgets to come which proved to be an opportunity for more legislative battles. Despite a much-improved performance from White House staff in dealing with the political realities,³²⁶ Congress continued to reinstate the cancelled projects. Lance argued that the Water Projects policy was Carter's worst mistake, as the negative effects lasted the rest of his term. He believed it 'doomed any hopes we ever had of developing a good effective working relationship with Congress.'³²⁷ The administration grossly underestimated the ferocity of the local and regional forces that they were taking on.³²⁸ The initial ham-fisted attempt in February 1977 made limited gains but at the cost of alienating key members of Congress and creating the impression that if pressure was applied, the president could be 'rolled' on legislative issues.

As Carter's popularity began to decline in late 1977 one of the major reasons given was his perceived inability to control Congress. He continued to insist that relations with Capitol Hill were good³²⁹ but his lack of understanding was evident as he continued to express surprise at the 'inertia of Congress.'³³⁰ Many of the problems centred on his attitude and his failure to treat Congress as a partner but most related to the sheer logistics of what his administration was trying to achieve legislatively. Many

³²⁴ Eizenstat to Carter, 20 June 1977, Eizenstat, Box 315, *JCPL*.

³²⁵ Eizenstat Interview, *Miller Center*, 61.

³²⁶ Eizenstat to Carter, 29 April 1978, SS Box 78, *JCPL*.

³²⁷ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 114.

³²⁸ Washington Post article, 9 January 1978, SS Box 91, *JCPL*.

³²⁹ Carter Interview, *ABC News*, 10 August 1977.

³³⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 105.

of the main bills put forward were extremely complex, as Carter himself recognised, often involving up to 17 committees and sub-committees. Mondale's review of Carter's agenda for 1978 highlighted the limited amount of 'floor days' available for new initiatives.³³¹ This workload imposed on Congress was a factor affecting the administration's success rate. The other issue was the lack of a consistent base of support. Attempts to build support with the GOP were vetoed by the Democratic leadership which forced Carter to rely upon an increasingly volatile Democratic Party.³³² Analysis by Les Francis of congressional liaison indicated an overall level of support for Carter's legislation of 68.5 percent amongst Democrats in the House but that varied amongst the regions with support in Texas as low as 29 percent.³³³ There were various attempts to quantify the administration's 'success rate' with Congress. The consensus suggested that after a relatively poor first year Carter's success rate was around 78 percent. Although this compared favourably with previous presidents, it did not consider bills withdrawn to avoid certain defeat or the importance of the legislation that failed.³³⁴ If Carter's legislative record was regarded in general as a failure this view was largely a result of expectation and public perception. For the former Carter admitted that one of the biggest mistakes he made was to build up expectations that he did not fulfil.³³⁵ Shaping public perception proved to be another serious challenge for the president.

³³¹ Mondale to Carter, 23 November 1977, Chief of Staff, Box 37, *JCPL*.

³³² Mullen, 'Perception of Carter's Legislative Successes and Failures', 522-533.

³³³ Francis to Carter, 18 July 1977, SS Box 32, *JCPL*.

³³⁴ Speer, 'Carter was a Baptist President', 107.

³³⁵ Don Richardson ed, *Conversations with Carter*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 28 December 1977, 148.

The ability of the modern president to communicate effectively with the public has been critical to the perception of their performance in the job. By the mid-1970's the communication channels used by the president had expanded to include national newspapers, press conferences, television (interviews and speeches), radio as well as various face-to-face meetings with the public. All of these were used by administrations to create an image of a successful president, to inform and on occasion persuade the public on critical issues. When Carter was elected he did not have a very clear image and the Washington press, who had mainly supported Ford, largely based their expectations on the style of previous Democratic presidents. Hence the press believed that Carter would present a vision to the country supported by a coherent agenda. He would work effectively with Congress and above all be a visible leader. Carter fulfilled very few of those expectations. He was criticised for his 'fuzziness' on issues. His attempt to address this and concern about his religious beliefs in the *Playboy* interview had failed spectacularly during the campaign. In addition, the press, generally more cynical since Watergate, were at best sceptical over Carter's statement 'to never lie' to the public and this, coupled with his obvious intelligence, became a challenge for them to catch him out.³³⁶ The media, particularly the Washington press, were negative about Carter throughout his term in office. Carter believed his administration only had one month of positive coverage in the media out of 48 and that was the first month.³³⁷ James Reston of the *New York Times* said that, 'The press was primarily responsible for destroying Carter's political reputation.'³³⁸ Mistrust existed on both sides as Carter's advisors were

³³⁶ Barry Jagoda Papers, Donated Historical Materials, Box 5, October 1976 JCPL.

³³⁷ Richardson, *Conversations with Carter*, 17 October 1997.

³³⁸ Harold Barger, *The Impossible Presidency. Illusions and Realities of Executive Power* (Glenview: Scott, Foreman, 1984), 127.

equally suspicious of the Washington press. This was particularly the case with Frank Moore who bitterly resented criticism in the *Washington Post* of his team almost as soon as they arrived.³³⁹ There was to be much criticism of the Carter administration's lack of understanding of Washington but many in the White House felt that part of this was due to regional prejudice.³⁴⁰ To the Carter White House some of the coverage around Lance's financial difficulties, seemed to reinforce this point.³⁴¹

Carter recognised that as president he was required to use his office to inform and influence the public and he believed that to carry out his mandate he needed to maintain contact with the people who had elected him. He was supremely confident in his intellectual ability, so he preferred this contact to be interactive where he could answer questions in an open and honest manner. He was at his most effective in campaigning, town hall meetings, radio phone ins, television interviews, and despite his reservations about the audience, press conferences. The editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Reg Murphy, by no means a Carter supporter, said of him that 'one to one, he's probably as convincing as anybody I've ever seen.'³⁴² He was much less effective in front of large audiences, especially on television. Early in his campaign, his friend, Charles Kirbo, insisted that Carter took a television test. He was told by the experts that the maximum time where he would be effective on TV was 5 minutes. Carter ignored this advice.³⁴³

³³⁹ Moore, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 8.

³⁴⁰ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 88-9 and Powell Interview, *Miller Center*, 84-85.

³⁴¹ 'Good Old Boy Network' article, 31 August 1977, SS Box 39, JCPL.

³⁴² Mazlish and Diamond, *Character Portrait*, 181.

³⁴³ Thompson, *Fourteen Intimate Perspectives*, 68.

His most regular and most important channel to the public was through the press and, unfortunately, he simply did not trust them. He believed that the *Washington Post* conducted a vendetta against Lance and that the 'so called Lance affair, was a DC only story'.³⁴⁴ In commenting on a *Newsweek* article, Carter wrote that the magazine was the 'worst violator of the self-initiated story.'³⁴⁵ By late 1977 Carter was commenting in his diary that, 'Distortions in the Washington press are absolutely gross,'³⁴⁶ and by the following year in a television interview with Bill Moyers he was talking about being surprised by the 'irresponsibility of the press.'³⁴⁷ Carter's defensive attitude hampered his staff's attempts to improve media coverage. Efforts to increase contact between the president and members of the media were met with resistance from Carter,³⁴⁸ culminating in his much-criticised refusal to speak at the Annual White House Correspondents Dinner in 1978. This was a major media event which the president always attended; Carter refused despite the efforts of his staff and Mondale to persuade him.³⁴⁹ His stubbornness as far as the press was concerned was a barrier to any media strategy his staff tried to implement. But he did not think that all the press were irresponsible. In discussions with editors he praised the work of the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine, and even praised the editorials of the *Washington Post*.³⁵⁰ He also continued to read the main newspapers and take notice of what they said. Articles, both 'good and bad,' regularly appeared in Carter's In-Box and, negative or not, he still

³⁴⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 131-33.

³⁴⁵ Carter to Maier, 3 November 1977, SS Box 49, JCPL.

³⁴⁶ Carter, *Diaries*, 130.

³⁴⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 125.

³⁴⁸ Powell to Carter, 17 January 1978, SS Box 59, and Rafshoon to Carter, 25 August 1978, Box 90, JCPL.

³⁴⁹ Carter, *Diaries*, 192-93.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 211.

demanded a response to the issues raised. For example, he demanded action be taken over an article in the *Washington Post* that reported that White House Staff numbers were going up at the time when 20 percent cuts were being implemented.³⁵¹ Any media strategy that his staff developed needed to consider not only Carter's prejudices but his strengths and weaknesses as a communicator.

In the 1970's the main communication channel with the public remained the press. The Washington-based press was crucial because it shaped the agenda of those other regional and state papers, which did not have DC-based journalists. His staff shared Carter's suspicion of the Washington press but equally he enjoyed and was an effective performer at press conferences, so the administration followed a dual strategy. Carter made a public commitment to hold news conferences every fortnight, but these events were opened to the journalists, editors and owners of newspapers across the country.³⁵² This attempt to reach a national audience was popular with those invited to the White House and Carter did receive a more sympathetic hearing. His standard press conferences were not confrontational, and he gave relaxed performances. It was what journalists reported afterwards that Carter thought was the problem. His administration did have a 'honeymoon' period with the press, backed by favourable polls and perhaps lasting as long as nine months until the Lance affair.³⁵³ However, by the end of 1977 Powell, Carter's Press Secretary, was recommending an emphasis on television for 1978 based on the assumption that fair treatment from the written press was unlikely.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ 'White House Staff Swells Despite Carter's Pledge to Make Deep Cutbacks', *Washington Post*, 31 March 1977, SS Box 13, JCPL.

³⁵² Powell to Carter, 25 February 1977, SS Box 9, JCPL.

³⁵³ Robert Locander, 'Carter and the Press. The First Two Years' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol 10 (Winter, 1980): 106-120.

³⁵⁴ Powell to Carter, 14 December 1977, SS Box 55, JCPL.

A second theme of the administration's media strategy was linked to the president's commitment to communicate with the public about his policies. This was called within the White House the 'People Programme'. Coordinated by one of his aides, Greg Schneiders, it covered a series of events from Carter's first fireside chat in February 1977, to town hall meetings, radio phone-ins and visits to people's homes.³⁵⁵ In addition, ordinary people were invited to White House dinners³⁵⁶ and the public were encouraged to write to him personally. He also asked his cabinet to go out and meet the people.³⁵⁷ This fitted in with Carter's image of himself as an open and honest president who listened and was answerable to the people. During the early phase of the programme the president was perceived as a breath of fresh air. David Broder of the *Washington Post* commented after the Clinton Town Hall event on March 1977 that, 'In his first two months as President Jimmy Carter has achieved a triumph of communication in the arena of public opinion. He has transformed himself from a shaky winner of a campaign into a very popular President whose mastery of the mass media has given him real leverage with which to govern.'³⁵⁸ For this strategy to be successful, however, direct communication with the public had to be not only sustained, which it was not, but also his staff needed to use public support for his policies to influence legislators. Although this approach was eventually adopted to gain public backing for the Panama Canal Treaty, it was not fully implemented until Anne Wexler replaced Midge Constanza as Special Assistant for Public Outreach in September 1978. This

³⁵⁵ Schneiders to Carter, 8 March 1977, SS Box 10, JCPL.

³⁵⁶ Glad, *In Search of the Great White House*, 409-11.

³⁵⁷ Cabinet Minutes, 21 March 1977, SS Box 12, JCPL.

³⁵⁸ Fallows, 'The Passionless President'.

established an outreach strategy that linked together all aspects of the administration's operations in a task force to support specific policies.³⁵⁹

A third element of the media strategy, which was perfectly in tune with Carter's style, was the administration's attempts to increase informality and reduce ceremony around the presidency. Best symbolised by his decision to get out of the car and walk to the White House with his wife at the inaugural, Carter calculated that this act would symbolise his closeness to the people who elected him. This was also reflected in his rhetoric, a plain and simple style of a man talking to his neighbour.³⁶⁰ This image helped him be a successful presidential candidate but became less beneficial as his term progressed as Carter soon discovered that once in office the public expected him to act as the leader of their country. Attempts to reduce ceremony and his informality were used as examples of him lacking leadership hence the need to be seen as acting 'presidential'.

A major problem for Carter was the message he was trying to communicate. The issues he wanted to address were by their nature complex and controversial. He had difficulty in explaining in simple terms the solutions he was offering to the public at a time when he faced increasing opposition. Another consequence was that Carter began to develop a reputation for indecisiveness. This was in sharp contrast to his image as governor as someone who was hard headed, stubborn, inflexible and opinionated.³⁶¹ The situation was not helped by confusion arising from Carter's policy of cabinet

³⁵⁹ Wexler, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 4.

³⁶⁰ Dan F Hahn, 'The Rhetoric of Jimmy Carter' *Presidential Studies Quarterly Vol 14 Campaign of 1984. The Contest for National Leadership (Part 2)* (Spring,1984): 265-288.

³⁶¹ Lance Interview, *Miller Center*, 7.

government. There was no one in the White House who was able to coordinate an overall message on policy with each department having its own Publicity Information Officers (PIO's) issuing their own statements.³⁶² Carter was also seen as the deliverer of bad news whilst he allowed cabinet members to give any good news to the public. Esther Petersen, his assistant for consumer affairs, contrasted this with Lyndon Johnson who insisted that any good news had to come through the White House.³⁶³ It was for these reasons the Rafshoon was brought in to oversee communication strategy in June 1977. His appointment can be seen as part of an attempt by Carter's advisors to improve coordination and control the message. Rafshoon was successful in ensuring that communication was more co-ordinated, and he worked hard to reduce the president's exposure to the media, particularly on television. He told Carter that 'you are running the risk of boring the people and you have 3 ½ years to go.'³⁶⁴ He also ensured that cabinet members became more involved in 'selling' the administration's policies.³⁶⁵ Always conscious of the president's image, Rafshoon was very concerned about jokes about Carter's indecisiveness on the Johnny Carson Show as it could indicate that criticism in the Washington press was going nationwide.³⁶⁶ He continued therefore to encourage a somewhat reluctant Carter to court newspapers from outside Washington.

³⁶² John Anthony Maltese, 'Rafshoonery': The Effort to Control the Communications Agenda of the Carter Administration' in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 437-38.

³⁶³ Esther Peterson, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 8-9.

³⁶⁴ Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, 213.

³⁶⁵ Rafshoon Interview, *Miller Center*, 8-9.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 14. (One such joke was Carson as Carnac the Magnificent who held up the envelope to his head, divined the answer inside as 'Yes and no, pro and con, for and against' then opened the envelope and said, 'Describe Jimmy Carter's position on three major issues.')

The staff who worked in the press and media offices of the White House were subjected to the least criticism from the press. This was surprising given Press Secretary Jody Powell's lack of Washington experience, but he was well regarded by the media who recognised that his history with and regular access to the president made his comments authoritative. The press office, unlike congressional liaison, was well staffed from the beginning and the media liaison office, based on Ford's operation,³⁶⁷ became highly successful in engaging with non-DC based media outlets.³⁶⁸ They also played an important role in the task forces being established to support key policy initiatives. There was an improvement in the information provided to the press about Carter's speeches, both formal and informal,³⁶⁹ as well as more effective planning of how the administration dealt with the media.³⁷⁰ However, partly because of Rafshoon's approach, the press came to believe that everything the president did was politically motivated and that was damaging to Carter.³⁷¹ The *Wall Street Journal* even suggested that Rafshoon had persuaded Carter to veto the Aircraft Carrier bill so the president could look tough to the public.³⁷² In addition Carter's television appearances became less appealing as the networks began declining to broadcast events like Town Hall Meetings.³⁷³ Carter and his aides remained convinced that the Washington media was biased against them. Powell stated, 'He received credit for almost nothing.'³⁷⁴ Journalist Hugh Sidey's comment after Carter lost the 1980 election that, 'Now maybe we'll have

³⁶⁷ Walt Wurfel, *Library Exit Interview Project*, 1-2.

³⁶⁸ Ray Jenkins to Watson, 19 December 1980, Plains Box 116, JCPL.

³⁶⁹ Rafshoon Interview, *Miller Center*, 27.

³⁷⁰ Rafshoon to Carter, 19 July 1978, SS Box 85, JCPL.

³⁷¹ Jenkins Interview, *Miller Center*, 22.

³⁷² Rafshoon, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 3.

³⁷³ Powell Interview, *Miller Center*, 78.

³⁷⁴ Brinkley, *Unfinished Presidency*, x.

a little class,'³⁷⁵ did suggest an anti-southerner prejudice. On the other hand, White House defensiveness did help create a negative reaction from the press. In addition, many of the negative stories in the Washington press came from members of Carter's own party in Congress and his White House staff.³⁷⁶

The ability to deliver an effective speech to a range of audiences both face-to-face and on television is another important communitive skill for a president. Until relatively late in the campaign Carter had written his own speeches and was not used to working with speechwriters. To be successful, most speechwriters must build a direct relationship with their president, Theodore C. Sorensen's relationship with President Kennedy being a good example. This did not happen with Carter as most of the speeches were developed in correspondence.³⁷⁷ He was also vague in specifying what he wanted because he was 'not used to transferring his thoughts to other people.'³⁷⁸ His insistence that other members of the administration should comment on a draft before he saw it was also unsatisfactory from the speechwriting viewpoint.³⁷⁹ Carter would often comment in detail on grammar and punctuation³⁸⁰ or he would reject the draft and end up writing the whole speech himself. Rafshoon said that, 'There are no speeches given by Jimmy Carter that aren't anywhere from 50 to 99 percent his.'³⁸¹ Furthermore, the messages Carter tried to convey were complicated and often controversial. As he said in his *Playboy* interview, 'I've taken positions that to me are fair and rational and

³⁷⁵ Wexler Interview, Miller Center, 60.

³⁷⁶ Rafshoon Interview, *Miller Center*, 13

³⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 20.

³⁷⁸ Fallows, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 8-9.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid*

³⁸⁰ Carter to Rafshoon, 5 March 1979 SS Box 115N, *JCPL*.

³⁸¹ Rafshoon, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 7.

sometimes my answers are complicated.’³⁸² Complexity was only part of the problem as Carter was reluctant to simplify or use any rhetorical device that added emotion to his argument.³⁸³ He refused to sugar-coat his message. Speeches often started with phrases like, ‘Tonight I want to have an unpleasant talk with you about a problem that is unprecedented in our history,’³⁸⁴ or, in a similar vein, ‘I want a frank talk with you about one of our most serious domestic problems.’³⁸⁵ There was also no underlying theme which would lift or inspire the public. One of his first speechwriters, James Fallows, argued that Carter ‘thinks he leads by choosing the correct policy, but he fails to project a vision larger than the problem he is tackling at the moment.’³⁸⁶ Criticism of Carter’s unwillingness to articulate a vision came to the fore during his presidency but he argued that the issues were too broad for slogans and that his speeches were aimed at building a relationship with the public not for the ‘entertainment of the press corps.’³⁸⁷ The closest his staff came to inserting a theme was the ‘New Foundation’ element of his 1979 State of the Union Address. This had been well received³⁸⁸ but when questioned about this new theme at a news conference, Carter squashed the idea and it was not further developed.³⁸⁹ This would prove a marked contrast with his Republican rival in 1980. Ronald Reagan’s message was simple, optimistic, embedded in a coherent vision for America and delivered by a master speaker.

³⁸² Carter Interview, *Playboy*, November 1976.

³⁸³ Gordon Stewart, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 10.

³⁸⁴ Address to the Nation on Energy, 18 April 1977,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7369&st=&st1=>

³⁸⁵ Anti-Inflation Program Address to the Nation, 24 October 1978,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30040&st=&st1=>

³⁸⁶ Fallows, ‘The Passionless President’.

³⁸⁷ Carter, *Government as Good*, 8.

³⁸⁸ Article, 20 January 1979, Speechwriters Subject Files, Box 29, JCPL.

³⁸⁹ President’s News Conference, 26 January 1979,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32801&st=&st1=>

The outcome was that his speeches came across as dry and uninspiring. James Fallows said that, 'You can't inspire people with a jigsaw puzzle.'³⁹⁰ Not all of Carter's speeches were underwhelming. After his presidency he said of his oratorical difficulties 'I have never been at ease with set speeches or memorized text ... I like to speak from a few notes, and the more I am embedded in an element of rigidity, the more uncomfortable I feel.'³⁹¹ When speaking off the cuff to new congressmen or in his speech at the memorial for Hubert Humphrey, Carter could be warm and witty.³⁹² He also could be passionate when attacking what he perceived as the unfair behaviour of interest groups, for example in his speech on justice on 4 May 1978.³⁹³ Criticism of Carter's speeches related not only to content but also to delivery. *New York Times* journalists Robert Novak and Rowland Evans described his style as, 'Allergic to all efforts at eloquence.'³⁹⁴ More famously, former Senator Eugene McCarthy dubbed Carter the 'Oratorical Mortician who inters his words and ideas beneath a pile of syntactical mush.'³⁹⁵ Carter was not receptive to coaching to improve his oratorical technique and Mondale believed that, 'Carter had contempt for orators.'³⁹⁶ James Fallows said that Carter refused not only to receive training but to practice - other than talk into a tape and listen back. Carter was concerned that any coaching would tarnish his unvarnished style, which may have been code for his southern accent.³⁹⁷ His reluctance to practise

³⁹⁰ Barber, *Race for the Presidency*, 435.

³⁹¹ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 57

³⁹² Humphrey Memorial Speech, 15 July 1978, SS Box 58, *JCPL*.

³⁹³ Eizenstat to Carter, 29 April 1978, SS Box 74, *JCPL*.

³⁹⁴ Hahn, 'Rhetoric of Jimmy Carter', 265-268.

³⁹⁵ William Leuchtenberg, 'Jimmy Carter and the Post-New Deal Presidency', in Fink and Graham, *Carter Presidency*, 10.

³⁹⁶ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 108

³⁹⁷ Fallows, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 13

was not finally overcome until Rafshoon persuaded him to do a video practice for his July 1979 energy speech.³⁹⁸

Jimmy Carter's inauguration was on 20 January 1977. It was remembered for Carter and his wife getting out of the car and walking hand in hand to the White House. This was a calculated act designed to symbolise the informality of his presidency. He was one of them and he would stay close to the people. His speech, which he wrote himself,³⁹⁹ was not so well remembered. He maintained the strong moral themes of the campaign with references to the Bible, faith and the moral strengths of both himself as president and the nation as a whole.⁴⁰⁰ Yet, he did not seek to inspire his audience. He said, 'I have no dream to set forth today but rather urge a fresh faith in the old dream.' There were no grand themes or programmes of action.⁴⁰¹ To Fallows it was a typical Carter speech with a list of thoughts that had no hierarchy or connecting themes.⁴⁰² He talked about a government that was 'competent and compassionate'. Whilst recognising that 'we cannot afford to do everything', he said he wanted his administration to be 'a government to be proud of.'⁴⁰³ He also talked about the social themes of equality of opportunity, the dignity of work and strengthening the American family. There was little specific about domestic policy and on the key subject of the

³⁹⁸ Rafshoon, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 9.

³⁹⁹ Fallows, *Carter Library Exit Interview Project*, 10.

⁴⁰⁰ Michael J Adee, 'American Civil Religion and the Presidential Rhetoric of Jimmy Carter', in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 79.

⁴⁰¹ Inaugural Address, 20 January 1977,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6575&st=&st1=>

⁴⁰² Fallows, 'The Passionless President'.

⁴⁰³ Inaugural Address, 20 January 1977,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6575&st=&st1=>

American economy nothing was said. However, to the electorate immediate action was expected from the new president as the economy was dipping into recession.

Chapter Two

The Economic Challenge

Carter's failed economic policy has been identified as one of the main reasons for his defeat to Ronald Reagan in 1980. Poor economic performance of presidents has been linked to their subsequent failure to be elected to a second term: Herbert Hoover in 1932, Gerald Ford in 1976 and George H Bush in 1992. Equally improved economic performance helped re-elect Ronald Reagan in 1984, Bill Clinton in 1996, and Barak Obama in 2012. Bill Clinton was famously told by his campaign team in 1992, 'It's the economy stupid,' but other than in time of war the economy has invariably been a key issue for presidential elections. Carter campaigned in 1976 for tax reform, controlled inflation without high unemployment, and free enterprise with minimal government intrusion,⁴⁰⁴ but above all he stood for competence. His government would be efficient and solve the problems left by the Ford administration. Unfortunately, the economic difficulties of the United States went far beyond the failures of one administration and would take all of Carter's resources to resolve them.

Carter inherited an economy that after a slow recovery in 1975 had stalled. Inflation was rising, and unemployment was at 7%. To most economists all the indicators suggested that there would be a recession in 1977.⁴⁰⁵ A fall in productivity masked underlying capacity issues in the economy resulting in much less room for stimulus

⁴⁰⁴ Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention, July 1976, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25953&st=&st1=>

⁴⁰⁵ Duane Windsor, 'Budget Strategy in the Carter Administration', in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 393 table 18.1.

measures than the experts believed.⁴⁰⁶ The stagnation in the world economy, external pressure on oil prices from OPEC (Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) and the financial crisis in New York City presented a picture of an economy in a parlous condition. Unfortunately for Carter he arrived in office at a time when the consensus amongst economists on how to address these problems had broken down. The prevailing economic theory of the 1960's espoused by prominent economists like Walter W Heller argued that it was possible to maintain a balance between economic growth and unemployment. Known as neo-Keynesians, Heller and his disciples such as Arthur Okun held key positions in all administrations from 1960 until Reagan's election in 1980. Okun and Charles Schultze, who became Carter's Chief Economic Advisor (CEA), maintained that it was possible using fiscal measures to maintain economic growth whilst holding unemployment and inflation down to 4 and 2.5 percent respectively.⁴⁰⁷ However by the 1970's such theories were coming under attack from economists like Milton Friedman who argued that the economy could be controlled only by adjusting the monetary supply. The neo-Keynesian economic models failed to take into account the decline in productivity with the result that any fiscal stimulus overheated the economy and increased inflation.⁴⁰⁸ By the mid-1980s there would be a new economic orthodoxy based around fiscal restraint, monetary policy to control inflation, deregulation and tax relief to stimulate growth. But in the 1970's, as Frank Morris, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, stated, 'It is probably fair to say that economic policy is now being made in at least a partial vacuum of economic theory.'⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Biven, *Carter's Economy*, 200-1.

⁴⁰⁷ Biven, 'Economic Advice in the Carter Administration', in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 616.

⁴⁰⁸ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 97.

⁴⁰⁹ Biven, *Carter's Economy*, 126.

As a result the solutions that Carter's experts recommended failed to deliver the forecast outcomes, particularly on inflation. Not all of this was due to a failure in policy, as external factors such as the OPEC oil price increases and the inability of Congress to implement fiscal restraint also had a detrimental effect on the economy. This uncertainty over policy was reflected in a factional conflict within the administration between the objectives of promoting growth and fighting inflation. This often resulted in Carter and his economic team seeking alternative advice from organisations such as the Brookings Institute. This included Joe Pechman on Tax Reform⁴¹⁰ and Arthur Okun on alternative policies on inflation.⁴¹¹ This air of uncertainty around economic policy was to continue throughout Carter's term in office.

Carter was not interested in theoretical debate over the economy. His speeches focussed on moral issues such as protecting the poor and reducing unemployment. His approach was based upon his experience as a businessman and governor and concentrated on reducing the fiscal deficit and balancing the budget. His support for Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) should be seen in this context. This was a discipline that ensured that all budgets were built from the ground up and not based on what had been spent the previous year. This fitted in with Carter's emphasis on good government, cutting waste and reducing regulation. He believed that by concentrating on small (micro) economic issues the big (macro) economic problems would be solved. His key advisor Charles Schultze thought Carter was a top rate micro economist but that his eyes just 'glazed over on macroeconomics.'⁴¹² Hence he was dependent on his economic

⁴¹⁰ Eizenstat to Carter, 22 June 1977, SS Box 27, JCPL.

⁴¹¹ Arthur Okun Speech to Brookings Institution, 6 October 1977, SS Box 49, JCPL.

⁴¹² Charles Schultze Interview, *Miller Center*, 70.

advisors for solutions and he became frustrated by their failure to agree. He referred to one meeting with economists as a waste of time as each one expounded his or her own theories.⁴¹³ As with all government policy Carter wanted his advisors to provide comprehensive solutions that he could study and implement. However, on the economy he found himself zigzagging between conflicting priorities of avoiding recession and fighting inflation. This made it difficult to build a political coalition as each faction had different solutions to the country's economic ills. Carter often managed to find money to support social programmes but his rhetoric on economic policy remained conservative which alienated both wings of the Democratic Party.⁴¹⁴

If Carter cut a frustrated figure on economic policy in general, he did believe that he could contribute personally to fiscal policy by encouraging reduced government spending. White House files are littered with Carter demanding cuts on a range of expenses from periodicals, staff travel costs and the selling of the presidential yacht.⁴¹⁵ This extended to interest in the budget where his understanding of the minutiae was such that it often intimidated Lance's team.⁴¹⁶ This degree of involvement did not last after his first year in office,⁴¹⁷ as he began to devolve more of the decision-making to his economic team. Carter did not always recognise the economic implications of his decisions. The development of a new energy policy without any input from his economic advisors nearly proved disastrous.⁴¹⁸ He did recognise his inexperience and continued

⁴¹³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 118.

⁴¹⁴ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 107.

⁴¹⁵ Hugh Carter to Carter, Periodicals, 8 February 1977, SS Box 7, Travel Costs, Note to Department Heads, no date, SS Box 90 and Sale of Yacht, Hugh Carter to Carter, 23 March 1977, SS Box 13, JCPL.

⁴¹⁶ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 112-13.

⁴¹⁷ Jim McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 42.

⁴¹⁸ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 48-49.

to ask basic questions about areas of personal concern on the economy.⁴¹⁹ This involvement contradicted Lance's view that Carter was not interested in economics⁴²⁰ but it did confirm that he neither mastered nor developed a coherent view of the subject. It is often argued that Carter was a fiscal conservative. However, this was based more upon his moral stance against waste and his view that government should lead from the front in making sacrifices than any economic ideology. All of this made Carter dependent upon the economic team he selected to advise him.

Carter's first appointment to his economic team was Charles Schultze as Chief Economic Advisor (CEA). Schultze followed a line of neo-Keynesian economists from the Brookings Institution who had gone into government. His practical background in economics appealed to Carter and they met at least once a week although this declined when inflation breakfasts were established in 1979.⁴²¹ His early appointment resulted in Schultze being influential in shaping the administration's initial policies. He provided Carter with regular written briefings on the state of the economy, and although Carter was frustrated with the failure of experts to improve the economic outlook, he rarely criticised his CEA. Schultze was frank with Carter about the financial situation, flagging his concerns early and often using his political judgement to persuade Carter to change course.⁴²² Schultze was grateful both for Carter's support against negative press coverage and his straightforwardness.⁴²³ Communication between Carter and his Secretary of the Treasury never reached the same level of trust. W. Michael Blumenthal

⁴¹⁹ Eizenstat to Carter, 3 June 1977, SS Box 24 and Blumenthal to Carter, 15 June 1977, SS Box 27, *JCPL*.

⁴²⁰ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 59.

⁴²¹ Schultze Interview, *Miller Center*, 14.

⁴²² Schultze to Carter, 27 December 1977, SS Box 57, *JCPL*.

⁴²³ Personal Note, Schultze to Carter, no date SS Box 53, *JCPL*.

had worked in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and held senior positions in industry. As treasurer he was chair of the Economic Policy Group (EPG), but he was criticised because he often failed to find a consensus. Whilst his personal relationship with Carter was cordial, relations with White House staff were poor. Blumenthal quoted their lack of support in his resignation letter in July 1979.⁴²⁴ The level of mutual suspicion often resulted in both sides leaking to the press. Lance argued that Blumenthal's jealousy of his access to Carter resulted in details of Lance's fraud case being leaked to the press by Blumenthal's staff.⁴²⁵ White House staff in the run up to the Camp David Domestic Summit argued that Blumenthal deliberately undermined Carter's position on tax reform by leaking to Congress in advance of the public announcement and circulated details of the New York financial rescue plan before Carter had approved it.⁴²⁶ Such infighting reduced Blumenthal's influence with the president but this did not restrict his access, and as late as March 1979 he was writing thoughtful memoranda to Carter on economic strategy. Some of his ideas were implemented after he resigned.⁴²⁷ After his presidency Carter acknowledged Blumenthal's difficulty with his staff and defended his record.⁴²⁸ Yet it was Carter's view that his successor, G. William Miller, was a more conciliatory and therefore effective figure.⁴²⁹

The third element in Carter's economic organisation was the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This was important to Carter for two reasons. Firstly, his friend Bert Lance had been appointed as its head, and secondly, even after Lance's

⁴²⁴ Carter, *Diaries*, 344.

⁴²⁵ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 108.

⁴²⁶ Briefing to Carter, no date, Eizenstat Box 257, *JCPL*.

⁴²⁷ Blumenthal to Carter, 14 March 1979, C of S Box 34, *JCPL*.

⁴²⁸ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 13-14.

⁴²⁹ Carter, *Diaries*, 345.

resignation in September 1977, the OMB was critical to delivering Carter's key commitment to fight inflation by eliminating the fiscal deficit by 1981. Lance's personal relationship with the president and his political skills did increase the OMB's prestige within the White House. This influence was limited by Lance's lack of technical expertise and an initial suspicion of many OMB staff because they were holdovers from the previous administration.⁴³⁰ Lance's departure weakened its influence but as the administration struggled to control inflation, Carter became focussed on fiscal restraint which made him a natural ally of Lance's successor, Jim McIntyre. McIntyre lacked Lance's political skills but he was technically capable, and Schultze argued that the OMB and himself represented the 'realistic hair shirts' of the economic team.⁴³¹ McIntyre felt that Carter's long-term commitment to a balanced budget was not shared by his administration and that his economic strategy with Congress was undermined by leaks from White House staff.⁴³² McIntyre's complaints about lack of support from agencies often prompted counter claims from Eizenstat that the OMB lacked the political skills to deliver on its programmes.⁴³³ This would become a recurring theme as the DPG gained more influence over economic policy.

All three organisations came together in the EPG (Economic Policy Group). Inherited from the Ford administration, it quickly grew to over twenty members, including cabinet representatives from Labor, State, and Commerce as well as the vice president and members of the NSC and DPG. This proved to be unwieldy with Carter receiving papers from individual departments but with no summary of issues from the

⁴³⁰ McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 56.

⁴³¹ Schultze Interview, *Miller Center*, 33.

⁴³² McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 44 and 24.

⁴³³ Draft memo to Carter, 20 September 1978, Eizenstat Box 155, *JCPL*.

short-staffed EPG.⁴³⁴ The president made the situation worse by insisting that Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Patricia Harris was added to represent inner cities, housing and minorities and as a concession to the black caucus.⁴³⁵ The EPG was initially jointly chaired by Schultze and Blumenthal at Carter's suggestion, but Schultze stepped down after six weeks, concerned about a conflict of interest with his role as CEA.⁴³⁶ Unfortunately Blumenthal proved to be an ineffective chair and within weeks alternative approaches were being discussed. The debate centred on the EPG's lack of resources and the unwieldy nature of the group. Blumenthal made proposals to centralise and give the EPG its own staff, so it could develop policy. This proposal was challenged by Jordan and Eizenstat who did not trust Blumenthal to oversee a centralised body.⁴³⁷ The final decision by Carter gave the EPG more power and established a smaller steering group comprising just the three key economic advisors. In addition, Eizenstat was given a wider role of policy coordination which enabled the DPG to oversee economic proposals sent to the president. The steering group disagreed on major aspects of policy for the first 18 months of the administration until it finally agreed to prioritise the fight against inflation but even then, this policy was challenged by cabinet members who were part of the main committee.⁴³⁸ The appointment of Miller as Secretary of the Treasury and EPG chair in August 1979 did improve coordination. Carter admitted that he did not feel well served by the EPG⁴³⁹ and late in his term in office felt the need to question its track record on forecasting.

⁴³⁴ Biven, *Carter's Economy*, 40-45.

⁴³⁵ EPG membership, SS Box 6, *JCPL*.

⁴³⁶ Schultze to Carter, 5 March 1977, Rafshoon Box 18, *JCPL*.

⁴³⁷ Jordan to Carter, 13 July 1977, C of S Box 37, *JCPL*.

⁴³⁸ McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 35.

⁴³⁹ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 19-20.

Carter's economic advice did not just come from the EPG. Following the recommendations of the Camp David Domestic Summit of April 1978, the Domestic Policy Group (DPG) became more influential in its advice on the political implications of economic policy. McIntyre resented the DPG's influence and argued that it represented interest groups and used its influence on Capitol Hill to undermine OMB policies on fiscal restraint.⁴⁴⁰ As head of the DPG, Eizenstat did represent a more liberal view on economic policy, highlighting the political consequences of fiscal restraint as the 1980 election drew nearer.⁴⁴¹ But he was by no means the only liberal who argued for alternative policies. Ray Marshall, as Labor Secretary, was also criticised by McIntyre as having a negative influence on Carter's policies.⁴⁴² As the economic situation deteriorated the administration cast its net wider for advice. As early as October 1977 a paper from economist Arthur Okun which argued for new policies to fight inflation, had been copied to Carter and was circulated to his economic team.⁴⁴³ This practice continued throughout Carter's term in office. Although Carter had a formal structure to advise him on economic policy, he continued to encourage direct communication from his individual senior advisors.⁴⁴⁴ This often hampered the ability of his administration to reach consensus.

The Federal Reserve (Fed) was established by Congress to control the banking system and specifically the money supply. Control of the money supply was one of the means available to government to reduce inflation, but it also had a consequence of

⁴⁴⁰ McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 98-99.

⁴⁴¹ Eizenstat to Carter, 1 March 1980, SS Box 152, *JCPL*.

⁴⁴² McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 53-54.

⁴⁴³ Okun Speech to Brookings Institution, 6 October 1977, SS Box 49, *JCPL*.

⁴⁴⁴ Carter to Schultze, Lance and Blumenthal, 25 June 1977, SS Box 27, *JCPL*.

increasing interest rates which damaged confidence and potentially could push the economy towards recession. The difficulty for any president was that the Fed was independent, and its chair could follow what policy he deemed appropriate. In practice presidents formed a relationship with each chair and sought to influence their actions indirectly. Carter established regular dialogue with his first chair, Arthur F. Burns, and his successor William Miller, seeking and receiving advice on economic policy and reassuring them on his administration's fiscal goals.⁴⁴⁵ Burns and later Miller followed a relaxed policy of monetary controls but there were times when the White House sought to influence the Fed to prevent interest rate rises. In August 1977 the EPG feared that the Fed would respond to an increase in money supply by raising interest rates and so Carter was advised to talk to Burns.⁴⁴⁶ Fed policy changed in the summer of 1979 when Carter appointed Miller to replace Blumenthal at the Treasury and picked Paul Volcker as his replacement. Volcker believed that the only way to fight inflation effectively was to control the money supply.⁴⁴⁷ Such a strategy would prove to be very damaging for Carter with an election due, but he did not publicly attack Volcker for this policy. Despite what seemed conflicting strategies on fighting inflation, cooperation between the Fed and the White House increased with Volcker attending budget meetings which was unprecedented.⁴⁴⁸ The White House did try to use its influence on Volcker by appointing one of their own men to the Fed board⁴⁴⁹ and applied pressure to hold down interest rates.⁴⁵⁰ However, in the final weeks of the 1980 election with

⁴⁴⁵ Briefing for Carter, 20 November 1976, SS Box 2 and Burns to Carter, 31 March 1977, SS Box 15, *JCPL*.

⁴⁴⁶ Eizenstat to JC, 13 August 1977, SS Box 36, *JCPL*.

⁴⁴⁷ Biven, *Jimmy Carter's Economy*, 237-42.

⁴⁴⁸ Schultze Interview, *Miller Center*, 40.

⁴⁴⁹ Appointing Lyle Gramley to Fed board, 13 February 1980, SS Box 151, *JCPL*.

⁴⁵⁰ Schultze to Carter, 11 April 1980, SS Box 158, *JCPL*.

inflation still rising, Schultze, and by implication Carter, had accepted the inevitability of the monetarist strategy and had ceased to resist it.⁴⁵¹

If control of the Fed proved difficult, the relationship with key members of congress on the economy was even more challenging for Carter and his team. Under the Constitution all revenue-raising measures had to pass the House through the Ways and Means Committee, under its Chair Albert C. Ullman of Oregon. Ullman had been instrumental in reforming the congressional budget process and tax reform. He was to prove a key player in supporting Carter's stimulus package in February 1977. Senator Russell Long's Finance Committee, along with Ways and Means, dealt with between 80 and 90 percent of the administration's legislation.⁴⁵² Long, unlike other Chairmen, had not devolved any of his powers to sub-committees. He had a strong personal influence over each of its members and as a result the committee as a whole.⁴⁵³ The White House eventually recognised the importance of Long, and under pressure from Mondale, Eizenstat and Moore, Carter agreed to a series of personal meetings and dinners with the influential senator. But there was no meeting of minds. Long had not campaigned for Carter and saw himself as a reluctant teacher of an inexperienced president.⁴⁵⁴ He spoke of admiring Carter's values,⁴⁵⁵ but he expected deals to be struck which was not Carter's way of operating. This resulted in a frustrated Senator: 'I never knew if I could count on him or not.'⁴⁵⁶ So he used the cover of Carter's U-turn on the \$50 tax rebate in

⁴⁵¹ Schultze to Carter, 25 September 1980, CEA Schultze Box 54, JCPL.

⁴⁵² Mark A Peterson, *Legislating Together: The White House and Capitol Hill from Eisenhower to Reagan* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 220-21.

⁴⁵³ *Congressional Weekly Report XXXV no.37*, 10 September 1977:1905-15.

⁴⁵⁴ Mann, *Legacy to Power*, 339.

⁴⁵⁵ Tate to Moore, 8 December 1977, SS Box 54, JCPL.

⁴⁵⁶ Mann, *Legacy to Power*, 368.

his Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) of 1977 to sneak into the bill an exemption on oil drilling costs that would help his home state of Louisiana; the sort of deal that would appal Carter.⁴⁵⁷ Long's committee blocked the administration's attempts at tax reform, and Carter's perceived inability to stand up to Long was seen as a personal failure.⁴⁵⁸ In the end Carter's frustrations boiled over. He told Califano that, 'I never can understand him and then I never know what he is going to do except screw me most of the time.'⁴⁵⁹ This attitude to Long was known to Carter's staff, with David Rubenstein of the DPG commenting that the one way *not* to influence Carter on a proposal was to tell him that an interest group or Russell Long was in favour of it.⁴⁶⁰ The failure of this relationship was to have a critical impact not only on Carter's economic policies but any policy that had an economic dimension.

Whilst the Carter election campaign may have lacked specific proposals on the economy, the new administration was committed to a package of measures that would reduce unemployment, increase growth and control inflation.⁴⁶¹ Briefings Carter received in November 1976 claimed that the economy was moving into recession with a growth forecast at 4 percent that would be insufficient to reduce unemployment below the current level of 8 percent. The recommendation from his advisors was for a plan that would create jobs, incentivise the private economy, implement tax reform and establish prudent measures to balance the budget when recession was beaten.⁴⁶² Work on the plan's components started before Blumenthal had been appointed, so it was

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, 339-40.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, 358-59.

⁴⁵⁹ Califano, *Governing America*, 130.

⁴⁶⁰ Carp Interview, *Miller Center*, 37.

⁴⁶¹ Abernathy, *Carter Years*, 36.

⁴⁶² Schultze to Carter, November 1976, SS Box 1, *JCPL*.

developed, at least initially, by Schultze. The stimulus package had all the hallmarks of a Carter solution. It was a comprehensive proposal that was designed to address many of the economic problems that the country faced. The complexity of the package meant that components were integrated with each other so a change to one area would have a detrimental effect on the whole plan. It was a conservative proposal with the total value of the stimulus less than the Ford package of 1975.⁴⁶³ The mix of tax cuts and job creation was a compromise between liberals and conservatives within the administration, with Carter straddling the debate. He was supportive of job creation but wanted the emphasis placed on training rather than public works. On the issue of the tax cut Carter, whilst accepting it was necessary, was insistent that it would only be temporary because he wanted to protect his commitment to a balanced budget by the end of his term in office. The structure of the proposal suggested an 'all or nothing' negotiating strategy with Congress, which was not usual practice.

The package of measures was called the Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) and was submitted to Congress on 31 January 1977. Carter, in a fireside broadcast on 2 February 1977 ⁴⁶⁴ emphasised the balanced nature of the plan which included proposals that dealt with both inflation and unemployment. He recognised that his proposals were not perfect and that many groups would want a different emphasis but argued that it was the best chance of producing steady, balanced, sustainable growth. His broadcast proved prescient as ERP was attacked by all interest groups as not doing enough for their

⁴⁶³ Biven, *Carter's Economy*, 70.

⁴⁶⁴ Economic Recovery Program: Message to Congress, 31 January 1977 and Report to the American People; Remarks from the White House Library, 2 February 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7344&st=&st1=> and <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7455&st=&st1=>

sectors. The AFL-CIO and the conference of mayors who had campaigned for him wanted more done to create jobs.⁴⁶⁵ This opposition was reflected in Congress with Ullman presenting his own alternative proposals on tax credits with the aim of stimulating employment. Carter, already frustrated by the House leadership breaking up the package and sending it to different committees,⁴⁶⁶ now faced a proposal that his staff believed would destabilise ERP.⁴⁶⁷ Despite an attempt by Blumenthal to dissuade him,⁴⁶⁸ Ullman continued to promote his plan and within three weeks of its submission \$1.6bn worth of spending had been added to the ERP.⁴⁶⁹ The administration was also struggling to coordinate negotiations with Congress as each department was responsible for different aspects of the plan. This resulted in Eizenstat and Moore having to issue briefings to White House staff and cabinet secretaries to keep track of the plan's status in Congress.⁴⁷⁰ The chances of the legislation passing deteriorated further when the White House announced cuts in Water Projects. The congressional reaction was hostile. Carter's attempts to reassure were to no avail as the Senate retaliated by delaying passage of ERP with Long threatening to put legislation in 'deep freeze' until the results of a review of the projects that Carter had ordered were known.⁴⁷¹

The delay in the legislation not only gave its opponents more time to resist elements of ERP which they did not approve but also allowed uncertainty to develop in the White House over the tax cut. The \$50 tax rebate was designed to boost consumer

⁴⁶⁵ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 37.

⁴⁶⁶ Jones, *Trustee President*, 130-34.

⁴⁶⁷ Eizenstat to Carter, 31 January 1977, SS Box 5, JCPL.

⁴⁶⁸ Blumenthal to Carter, 3 February 1977, SS Box 6, JCPL.

⁴⁶⁹ FM legislative report, 15 February 1977, SS Box 8, JCPL.

⁴⁷⁰ Eizenstat and Moore to all White House and Cabinet Staff, 24 February 1977, SS Box 9, JCPL.

⁴⁷¹ Tate to Moore, 23 February 1977, FM Box 50, JCPL.

spending and the economy as a whole. At \$11.9bn it represented by far the largest cost element of the plan with a further \$4bn to be spent on tax simplification and a business tax cut. The cut was unpopular with both Congress and business. Moore was reporting in early February that Democratic support on the Senate Finance committee was wavering whilst the GOP wanted a permanent tax cut.⁴⁷² Further uncertainty was created by unexpectedly favourable unemployment and growth figures in March 1977,⁴⁷³ resulting in some questioning the economic necessity for the rebate.⁴⁷⁴ In April Carter received a brutally frank briefing from Dan Tate from Congressional Liaison on the Senate vote on the rebate and Carter's congressional strategy. Tate stated that Democrats were voting against him across the spectrum, knowing that it would be personally embarrassing to Carter. They criticised him for not negotiating and being naive or selfish or stubborn. Although they respected a hard-headed president, what they feared most was one who was high handed. According to Tate, Byrd believed that only Carter's personal intervention could save the rebate whilst Tate himself warned that this political battle would be key for his future relationship with Congress.⁴⁷⁵ Carter continued to rally his administration and his supporters in Congress to support the rebate. He wrote to senators on 6 April laying out the arguments for the rebate.⁴⁷⁶ The turning point was a briefing from Mondale who had talked to Senator Alan M. Cranston of California and was now convinced that the administration was going to lose the vote and that any compromise would not necessarily succeed or be worth the price paid.

⁴⁷² Moore report on ERP, 5 February 1977, SS Box 5, *JCPL*.

⁴⁷³ Schultze to Carter, 2 March 1977, SS Box 9 and Schultze to Carter, 18 March 1977, SS Box 14 *JCPL*

⁴⁷⁴ Schultze briefing for Carter, 29 March 1977, SS Box 13, *JCPL*.

⁴⁷⁵ Tate to Carter, 5 April 1977, FM Box 80, *JCPL*.

⁴⁷⁶ Carter note to Senators, 6 April 1977, SS Box 10, *JCPL*.

Mondale also reflected the growing view that the economic conditions had changed and that many people whom Carter respected were opposed to this proposal.⁴⁷⁷ Following further discussion with his economic team, Carter decided to drop the rebate in mid-April 1977. Given its unpopularity in Congress this should have been a win for the administration, but unfortunately poor communication resulted in many of his staff, cabinet and key congressmen being given no warning of Carter's change of heart. Blumenthal was left to make a speech to the National Press Corps without being apprised of the change of policy. Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine, a close ally, who had fought hard for the rebate, was also not told, prompting him to say, 'You can't trust these people.'⁴⁷⁸

The fate of ERP highlighted the issues that Carter was to face early in his presidency: the difficulty in proposing a comprehensive package that would be scrutinised piecemeal by different committees in Congress and a White House lacking the coordination and experience to manage the process. A consequence of the reversal of policy on the tax rebate was damage to key relationships in Congress, particularly with Byrd.⁴⁷⁹ The failure of his economic advisors to predict the early upturn in the economy and more seriously the inflationary aspects of ERP was to prove a continuing problem for Carter. Although the size of the stimulus effect had been reduced by the withdrawal of the tax rebate, the early improvement in unemployment and growth figures did suggest that the ERP had been successful. However, even the more optimistic

⁴⁷⁷ Mondale to Carter, 13 April 1977, SS Box 15, *JCPL*.

⁴⁷⁸ Schultze Interview, *Miller Center*, 24-27.

⁴⁷⁹ Tate to Carter, 18 April 1977, SS Box 15, *JCPL*.

advisors like Blumenthal were raising concern about inflation and this was increasingly to become the focus of Carter's economic policy from the summer of 1977 onwards.⁴⁸⁰

This was not the only attempt by the Carter administration to stimulate the economy. The Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act (also known as the Humphrey-Hawkins Act) was signed by Carter into law on 27 October 1978. This legislation was an attempt by liberals to tighten congressional control of economic policy by committing the government and the Fed to achieve targets on all key economic indicators. The aim was to force the government to achieve 'full employment' by developing job creation schemes. The bill was sponsored by former Vice President Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota and a leading member of the black caucus, Representative Augustus F. Hawkins of California. Both men had been important supporters of Carter during the election and passing this legislation had been a campaign commitment. Unfortunately for Carter the bill represented economic theory that was under attack and tied the White House to actions that were inappropriate for the economic climate. The neo-Keynesian faith in government action to control growth, employment and inflation was being proved ineffective and the administration was forced to prioritise its actions on fighting inflation at the expense of unemployment. Furthermore, whilst the bill had the support of liberals, the unions and minority groups, there were conservatives even within the Democratic Party that had strong reservations about its inflationary aspects. They saw Humphrey-Hawkins as a symbol of excessive government spending.⁴⁸¹ The draft bill was submitted in the House in January 1977, but the EPG had fundamental objections. Blumenthal believed that the targets set on unemployment were not

⁴⁸⁰ Blumenthal to Carter, 11 May 1977, SS Box 20, *JCPL*.

⁴⁸¹ Eizenstat to Carter, 6 October 1977, SS Box 45, *JCPL*.

achievable, that insufficient attention was paid to inflation, and the government had not been given enough flexibility to achieve its goals. He was also worried that proposed monetary controls would face objections from the Federal Reserve.⁴⁸² In an early example of the DPG intervening on economic policy on political grounds, Eizenstat raised concerns with Carter that a draft letter from Schultze to Hawkins which proposed changes to the bill would alienate his supporters.⁴⁸³ There followed a series of attempts by the White House to reach a compromise, initially with Hawkins and later with a more flexible Humphrey. Carter sought Tip O'Neill's advice who argued that the bill was unlikely to pass in its current form and urged compromise.⁴⁸⁴ The bill's sponsors, fearing declining support in the House, accepted a White House proposal that softened the unemployment target to 4 percent by 1983, removed many of the detailed restrictions and placed more emphasis on fighting inflation.⁴⁸⁵ The compromise bill passed the House in March 1978 and the Senate to become law in the following October. Many of Carter's economic team did not believe that even the watered-down targets were achievable.⁴⁸⁶ This proved to be the case as by June 1980 Schultze was recommending moving the unemployment target date be extended by more than five years. Carter could argue that he had fulfilled a campaign promise, but it had little practical effect.

Another campaign commitment proved even more difficult to achieve, Carter's promise to reform the tax system. He may have been vague with many of his campaign promises but on tax reform he was very clear. In his acceptance speech at the

⁴⁸² EPG note, no date, SS Box 25, *JCPL*.

⁴⁸³ Eizenstat to Carter, 24 May 1977, SS Box 22, *JCPL*.

⁴⁸⁴ Schultze to Carter, 22 June 1977, SS Box 27, *JCPL*.

⁴⁸⁵ Eizenstat and Schultze to Carter, 6 October 1977, SS Box 45, *JCPL*.

⁴⁸⁶ McIntyre to Carter, 24 October 1977, SS Box 47, *JCPL*.

Democratic Convention in New York, he said, 'It is time for a complete overhaul of the taxation system. I still tell you it is a disgrace to the human race. All my life I have heard promises about tax reform, but it never quite happens. With your help, we are finally going to make it happen. And you can depend on it.'⁴⁸⁷ In his fireside talk on 2 February 1977 he confirmed that his advisors were working with Congress on a reform that would give a fairer, simpler tax system. He talked of a comprehensive package by the end of the year.⁴⁸⁸ Carter did not give his advisors any specific guidance on reform, but this did not mean that he did not have views of his own. In his campaign speeches he talked about fairness where the taxation burden was to be shifted from lower and middle income families to the well off, and the closing of tax loopholes which gave allowances for lunches and entertainment that favoured the rich.⁴⁸⁹ He also expressed an interest in reducing the level of taxation as a proportion of GDP, something Reagan would be campaigning for in 1980.⁴⁹⁰ Carter looked to the Treasury to produce tax reform proposals. Blumenthal raised concerns that other administration initiatives, particularly on energy, would cut across his work but a deadline of the end of July 1977 was agreed; this proved to be optimistic.⁴⁹¹ By mid-May Carter expressed disappointment at the Treasury's early proposals, characterising them as 'too timid.'⁴⁹² As a consequence Carter sent Eizenstat to brief Larry Wordworth, who was leading the Treasury team, on Carter's views. Eizenstat emphasised that Carter wanted a comprehensive solution built

⁴⁸⁷ Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention, July 1976, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25953&st=&st1=>

⁴⁸⁸ Report to the American People – Remarks from the White House Library, 2 February 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7455&st=&st1=>

⁴⁸⁹ Campaign briefs, no date, Speechwriters Staff Offices, Jim Fallows Files Box 8, *JCPL*.

⁴⁹⁰ Eizenstat to Carter, 3 June 1977, SS Box 24, *JCPL*.

⁴⁹¹ Blumenthal to Carter, 8 February 1977, SS Box 7, *JCPL*.

⁴⁹² Carter, *Diaries*, 53-4.

based on first principles that would produce a fairer, simpler, progressive system that eliminated tax shelters. His mandate was for reform and not for a proposal that was watered down to suit Congress. For good measure Eizenstat went through statements Carter had made on the campaign. He stressed what Carter wanted from the Treasury was the best solution at zero cost and to leave how Congress might react to the president. Eizenstat expressed major concerns about the Treasury proposals which did not fulfil many of Carter's criteria, and having talked to Long and Ullman, he concluded that September 1977 was a more realistic target date.⁴⁹³

White House dissatisfaction with Treasury proposals continued through the summer of 1977. Carter's speechwriter Jim Fallows raised concerns about whether the current proposals squared with the presidential campaign promises, quoting from Carter's convention speech.⁴⁹⁴ Carter was also receiving criticism from liberals like Califano and Senator Edward M. Kennedy who had his own ideas on a new progressive tax system where the rich contributed more.⁴⁹⁵ He wrote to Blumenthal and Woodworth, requesting changes with greater progressivity and the closing of more loopholes. Frustration with his Treasury team resulted in Carter looking for alternative sources of advice. This included Joe Pechman from the Brookings Institution whose ideas were to continue to receive a favourable response from the White House throughout Carter's term in office.⁴⁹⁶ He was also concerned about quotes in the press attributed to Blumenthal that directly contradicted Carter's views on progressivity.⁴⁹⁷ Blumenthal

⁴⁹³ Eizenstat to Carter, 16 May 1977, SS Box 21, *JCPL*.

⁴⁹⁴ Fallows to Carter, 6 February 1977, Eizenstat Box 287, *JCPL*.

⁴⁹⁵ Califano to Blumenthal, 11 July 1977, Eizenstat Box 287 and Eizenstat to Carter, 14 July 1977, SS Box 42, *JCPL*.

⁴⁹⁶ Eizenstat to Carter, 22 June 1977, SS Box 27, *JCPL*.

⁴⁹⁷ Carter to Blumenthal and Laurence Woodworth, 29 June 1977, SS Box 28, *JCPL*.

denied this, but there did appear to be a lack of trust between them. When he met Ullman on the proposed bill, Carter did not want anyone from the Treasury present, preferring Eizenstat.⁴⁹⁸ Early discussions with congressional chairmen in August had flagged concerns that the proposals were too complex, and many elements would be unpopular. The Democratic leadership suggested splitting the bill, putting back the unpopular measures to the next session.⁴⁹⁹ By September 1977 many of Carter's advisors, inside and outside the White House, recommended a postponement. Their main argument was that Congress would use the tax reform bill as an excuse to delay the passage of the Energy, Hospital Cost Containment and Welfare bills.⁵⁰⁰ Blumenthal, supported by Eizenstat, still argued that the bill was deliverable, particularly if Ullman's committee sat during the winter recess. The risk was if the window was missed the chances of Congress passing a reform bill would be reduced and Carter would only get a tax cut.⁵⁰¹ This had become the most likely outcome as liberals in Congress became pessimistic that a reform bill would pass and were reluctant to take criticism for the unpopular elements of the bill. Mondale advised Carter that a modified bill, focussed on tax relief with limited popular reform options such as allowances for business lunches and entertainment, should be submitted in January 1978. Reluctantly Carter agreed.⁵⁰²

By April 1978 even this strategy was in disarray with a majority on the Ullman committee voting against every aspect of the bill. An evaluation of the administration's performance in promoting the bill by one of Eizenstat's staff was highly critical,

⁴⁹⁸ Moore to Carter, 29 August 1977, SS Box 39, *JCPL*.

⁴⁹⁹ Blumenthal to Carter, 3 August 1977, Eizenstat Box 286, *JCPL*.

⁵⁰⁰ Mondale to Carter, 16 September 1977, SS Box 42 Califano to Carter, 15 September 1977, Eizenstat Box 288, *JCPL*.

⁵⁰¹ Blumenthal to Carter 16 September 1977, SS Box 42, *JCPL*.

⁵⁰² Mondale to Carter, 26 October 1977, SS Box 48, *JCPL*.

suggesting that the Treasury was even unaware of a major Senate amendment.⁵⁰³ The Steiger amendment on capital gains tax which only benefitted the top 1 percent and a more restricted version backed by Ullman, the Jones amendment, signified that Congress had taken control of the legislation. The White House was forced to find a compromise on capital gains tax whilst the reform agenda was gradually being weakened. The White House lobbying of the critical Ways and Means Committee had improved by July 1978 but by then Carter had lost the support of its chair, Ullman.⁵⁰⁴ The search for a compromise on capital gains tax also revealed tensions between Blumenthal and the White House, with articles in the press suggesting he was compromising against Carter's wishes.⁵⁰⁵ This may have been exaggerated because Blumenthal remained proactive in advising Carter in the final months before the bill was approved.⁵⁰⁶ The final bill, whilst similar in terms of total cost, \$21.4bn, bore little relation to Carter's original concept. Despite attempts to secure improvements, Eizenstat still described it as the 'worst tax bill since the 1940's'.⁵⁰⁷ Schultze, in a rare intervention on this issue, argued that despite its faults it would be difficult to justify a veto economically as a tax cut, which was what this bill had become, was needed in 1979.⁵⁰⁸ Carter accepted his advice and signed the bill on 6 November 1978.

The administration's tax reform proposals had all the hallmarks of a Carter project. He wanted a comprehensive solution from his advisors, free from any political

⁵⁰³ Bob Ginsburg to Eizenstat, 17 May 1978, DPS Subject Files Rubenstein Box 84, *JCPL*.

⁵⁰⁴ Wexler to Carter, 10 July 1978, Eizenstat Box 289 and Moore and Eizenstat to Carter, 19 July 1978, SS Box 85, *JCPL*.

⁵⁰⁵ Article in Washington Outlook, 7 August 1978, SS Box 87, *JCPL*.

⁵⁰⁶ Blumenthal to Carter, 20 September 1978, SS Box 91, *JCPL*.

⁵⁰⁷ Eizenstat to Carter, 10 October 1978, Eizenstat Box 289, *JCPL*.

⁵⁰⁸ Schultze to Carter, 27 September 1978, SS Box 92, *JCPL*.

considerations. His Treasury experts either would not or could not follow his wishes. They argued that their view of accommodating Congress stood a better chance of success, but Carter had a mandate for reform and there was a window of opportunity in 1977 to pass such legislation. However, the administration was dealing with a Congress that was overloaded with government initiatives that were equally complex and whose members were very angry about Carter's policy on water projects. If Carter was to be left to deal with the political consequences as he wished, then he did not achieve his stated goals. The final bill had little reform left in it. The tax cuts were skewed towards the rich, many of the loopholes were not closed, it contained nearly \$3bn in capital gains tax cut which Carter did not want, and at best progressivity was merely maintained, not improved as promised.⁵⁰⁹ The administration had failed in its reform goals. After June 1978, the passing of Proposition 13 in California prompted a mood in the country, led by the GOP, that was largely focussed on tax cuts. For Carter his economic priority had moved onto fighting inflation. His tax reform was a missed opportunity. He failed to give his proposal the priority that was necessary, alienated key members of congress with his water projects proposals and overloaded the legislative agenda which enabled opposition to coalesce. The final act contained no elements of reform and merely cut taxes. The opportunity for reform was delayed until the Reagan 1986 Tax Reform Act.

Carter saw deregulation as a means of making government more efficient and facilitate increased competition in the economy. Although he had the strong support of his financial advisors, including the Federal Reserve, Carter faced opposition from interest groups, particularly the unions. However, building on groundwork laid by

⁵⁰⁹ Eizenstat to Carter, 6 November 1978, Eizenstat Box 289, *JCPL*.

President Ford, he was able to pass substantive legislation with the congressional support of conservatives and some liberals, notably Ted Kennedy. Legislation enacted included the deregulation of airline, banking, communications, railroad and trucking industries. This was followed by the eventual removal of restrictions on oil and gas pricing which is discussed in the following chapter. Carter claimed that this legislative programme was 'the greatest change in the relationship between business and the government since the New Deal'⁵¹⁰ and certainly such reforms transformed the lives of many Americans. It was one of the few areas of economic policy where the administration was able to win support from both conservatives and liberals in Congress. Deregulation was to become a major plank of the GOP presidential campaign in 1980 but Carter was able to point to his own substantive record in this area. This policy trend initiated during the Ford presidency and significantly expanded under Carter was to be continued by the Reagan, Bush and Clinton presidencies in the 1980s and 1990s.

Inflation was not a problem unique to the Carter administration. The Ford presidency had struggled with the after effects of the OPEC price rises and had run its own ill-fated anti-inflation programme – WIN (Whip Inflation Now). Inflation, unlike unemployment, was not traditionally a key issue for the Democratic Party, but it was having a major impact on the middle classes by increasing property taxes, college fees and non-unionised wages. However, it was the impact on tax thresholds that was to trigger tax revolts in Colorado and New Jersey as early as 1976, well before Proposition 13 in California.⁵¹¹ Carter had been warned in a transition briefing of the dangers of

⁵¹⁰ Leuchtenburg, 'Jimmy Carter and the Post-New Deal Presidency'.

⁵¹¹ Biven, *Carter's Economy*, 67.

inflation to consumer confidence.⁵¹² Despite this, Carter's focus at the beginning of his term was on the risk of recession. If anyone had concerns about the inflationary aspects of the early stimulus package, Carter's economic advisors were quick to reassure them.⁵¹³ Carter kept Ford's Council on Wage and Price Stability (COWPS) and outlined no new initiatives on inflation until much later in 1977. Given that inflation had been prevalent throughout the 1970's the new administration had a series of options to tackle the problem. These ranged from mandatory controls of wages and prices to varying degrees of voluntary agreements with or without presidential involvement. What was striking throughout Carter's presidency was how little discussion there was of alternative approaches to reducing inflation, when changes such as control of fiscal and monetary policies was being advocated by economists such as Milton Friedman.⁵¹⁴ Mandatory controls were discussed during the transition and rejected, a decision that was maintained right until the end of the administration.⁵¹⁵ All of this limited the options that were available for Carter and his economic team to deal with a problem that from the autumn of 1977 began to dominate their economic priorities.

During the early phase of his administration inflation was between 5.8 and 6.5 percent but there was much more concern about declining growth and unemployment at 7 percent.⁵¹⁶ Elements of the stimulus package, increasing the minimum wage and proposed reforms of energy and social security policy, had an inflationary impact. Fred Kahn, who would later lead the administration's fight against inflation, argued that

⁵¹² Pat Caddell to Carter, 21 December 1976, SS Box 1, *JCPL*.

⁵¹³ Schultze to Mondale, 19 January 1977, Eizenstat Box 144, *JCPL*.

⁵¹⁴ Biven, *Jimmy Carter's Economy*, 128-32.

⁵¹⁵ Eizenstat to Carter, 2 December 1976, SS Box 1, *JCPL* and Schultze Interview, *Miller Center*, 28- 29.

⁵¹⁶ Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 383.

changes in agricultural policy in the stimulus package, which reduced acreage, also contributed to food inflation over the next 18 months.⁵¹⁷ Carter remained concerned about inflation but as long as wage increases kept pace there was no pressure on him from either his advisors or his supporters to deal with inflation. Schultze did not believe that the stimulus package would add to inflation, and at this early stage of the administration Blumenthal, who lacked macroeconomic experience, did not intervene. Schultze's first draft of an anti-inflation policy on 29 March 1977 accepted that Inflation would get worse before it got better but aimed to reduce it to 4% by 1979. He ruled out any wage or price controls and encouraged dialogue with labour and business. COWPS's prime role would be to gather information.⁵¹⁸ Carter, who accepted Schultze's approach, was not without alternative views. Chair of the Federal Reserve, Burns recommended more direct action to curb Federal spending: tax incentives to modernise plant, deregulation and vigorous implementation of anti-trust legislation.⁵¹⁹ There was also criticism of Schultze's proposals from Eizenstat who wanted tougher action on food prices.⁵²⁰ He argued for clear inflation targets in order to win public support, and for speaking out against those in breach of them. A spike in inflation of 1.1% in March 1977, due mainly to food prices,⁵²¹ may have been the catalyst that prompted some tightening of Schultze's proposals. This 'tougher' approach was reflected in Carter's first anti-inflation statement on 15 April 1977.⁵²² Additional measures included wider responsibilities for COWPS on monitoring, more action from government (including

⁵¹⁷ Fred Kahn Interview, *Miller Center*, 106.

⁵¹⁸ Schultze to Carter, 29 March 1977, SS Box 13, *JCPL*.

⁵¹⁹ Arthur Burns to Carter, 31 March 1977, SS Box 14, *JCPL*.

⁵²⁰ Daft to Eizenstat 1 April 1977, Eizenstat Box 44, *JCPL*.

⁵²¹ Schultze to Carter, 6 April 1977, SS Box 14, *JCPL*.

⁵²² Anti-Inflation Program Statement Outlining Administration Actions, 15 April 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7356&st=&st1=>

spending controls) and establishing a framework for co-operation with business and labour.

Whilst Carter's speech indicated more focus on inflation the approach by the White House remained low key and fundamentally ineffectual. Inflation grew to 9.8 percent by the end of 1978 but food inflation was running much higher at 16.4 percent.⁵²³ The internal debate over economic priorities continued until mid-1978 when inflation publicly became the administration's number one priority. Carter was asking questions about the impact of higher interest rates on inflation, prompting a brief discussion on monetary policy with Blumenthal in June 1977.⁵²⁴ His advisors continued to search for alternative approaches, but mandatory controls remained off the agenda. Carter reassured Republican Senator John Tower of Texas whose fear of mandatory controls caused him to hold up the renewal of COWPS in the Senate.⁵²⁵ New proposals from the EPG were sent to Carter at the end of 1977. These included for the first-time numerical guidelines similar to those used by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and an incomes policy which relied upon government persuasion.⁵²⁶ Although he appeared to endorse these recommendations, Carter expressed disappointment that the proposals lacked specifics and appeared to be mostly wishful thinking.⁵²⁷

Further attempts at tightening controls were outlined in Carter's speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on 11 April 1978. It contained few specifics outside Federal government actions, but he emphasised that, 'There were no easy

⁵²³ Biven, *Carter's Economy*, 134-35.

⁵²⁴ Blumenthal to Carter, 15 June 1977, SS Box 27, JCPL.

⁵²⁵ Carter to Senator Tower, 20 September 1977, SS Box 42, JCPL.

⁵²⁶ Schultze to Carter, 7 December 1977, SS Box 54, JCPL.

⁵²⁷ Schultze to Carter, 7 January 1978, SS Box 57, JCPL.

answers. We will not solve inflation by increasing unemployment. We will not impose wage and price controls. We will work with measures that avoid both these extremes.’⁵²⁸ One change that Carter did announce was the appointment of his special trade representative Robert S. Strauss to take on the additional role of special assistant on inflation. Strauss quickly was dubbed the ‘Inflation Czar.’ Whilst he did not have a significant impact on policy, it did symbolise Carter’s advisors’ increasing concern over inflation. In May 1978 Schultze wrote to Carter with some ‘disturbing thoughts about the economic outlook.’ He was beginning to recognise that the underlying problem was that inflation was being fuelled by a drop-in productivity and started lobbying for further cuts in the Federal budget.⁵²⁹ By June 1978 inflation had reached double figures. Carter received a range of proposals. George Meany of the AFL-CIO, afraid of wage controls being implemented, lobbied for credit controls which Carter rejected.⁵³⁰ Strauss wanted budget cuts but also a new Federal committee on efficiency and cost reduction. This was again rejected as it increased bureaucracy and cut across the work of COWPS and the EPG.⁵³¹ By September 1978 there was recognition as inflation continued to rise that a further change of policy was required. It was Blumenthal who argued for more robust measures and it was his proposals, despite reservations from Mondale and Eizenstat, that were mainly reflected in Carter’s new policy announcement.⁵³²

⁵²⁸ President’s News Conference, 11 April 1978, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30653&st=&st1=>

⁵²⁹ Schultze to Carter, 6 May 1978, SS Box 74, *JCPL*.

⁵³⁰ Carter to Meany, 11 May 1978, Eizenstat Box 143, *JCPL*.

⁵³¹ Schultze to Carter, 3 June 1978, SS Box 79 and Eizenstat and Ginsburg to Carter, 18 September 1978, SS Box 92, *JCPL*.

⁵³² Blumenthal to Carter, 13 September 1977, SS Box 92, *JCPL*.

Carter's speech on 24 October 1978 was an important moment in his economic policy. He publicly decided that fighting inflation would be his number one priority but again he went out of his way to dampen expectations: 'I cannot guarantee that our efforts will succeed. In fact, it is almost certain not to succeed if success means quick or dramatic changes.'⁵³³ This partly demonstrated the pessimistic aspect of his character, but it was also a realistic reflection of his advisors' lack of confidence that a solution could be found. He did, however, outline a series of concrete proposals and specific targets. Measures included reducing the budget deficit to \$30bn, cuts in Federal hiring and action on deregulation. He established guidelines both for wage settlements at seven percent and prices at 5.75 percent which were to be monitored by COWPS. Despite continuing to reject mandatory controls, sanctions in the form of withdrawal of government contracts were threatened against those companies in breach of these guidelines. He also appointed Fred Kahn as Special Assistant to the President and Chairman of COWPS. The move of the former Chair of the Civil Aeronautics Board was a high-profile appointment. Kahn would have direct access to the president and joined the EPG. Reaction to the speech, however, was lukewarm. Wall Street did not think it was tough enough and foreign markets reacted with a run on the dollar.⁵³⁴ Kahn did have difficulties coordinating with Carter's economic team. He complained of a lack of resources and felt that he was not getting cooperation from cabinet secretaries.⁵³⁵ Kahn was also frustrated by his inability to get his ideas across, describing the EPG as 'an agency for systematically eliminating and weeding out any possibility of imaginative

⁵³³ Anti-inflation Address to the Nation, 24 October 1978, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30040&st=&st1=>

⁵³⁴ Editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, 31 October 1978 and Schultze, *Interview Miller Center*, 65.

⁵³⁵ Kahn Interview, *Miller Center*, 8-14.

innovation.⁵³⁶The success of the new policy was dependent upon the ability of Kahn and Carter to persuade non-governmental bodies to accept the guidelines without any statutory powers to support them. Despite failure to follow up and communicate previous initiatives,⁵³⁷ a more organised effort was made under Anne Wexler to communicate the new government policy.⁵³⁸ The impact of oil price increases in February 1979 caused Kahn to warn Carter that the policy was not working.⁵³⁹ As inflation hit 14.5 percent in May 1979, Carter's advisors were searching yet again for alternative approaches. Schultze believed that Carter's options had narrowed to fiscal restraint, credit controls or use of the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates.⁵⁴⁰ Carter was even receiving advice from his political rival Edward Kennedy who recommended tougher sanctions such as legislation against companies that did not comply and even hinted at mandatory controls.⁵⁴¹ Kahn had become increasingly frustrated and in September 1979 threatened to resign. This was smoothed over by Carter and Eizenstat, but it was a symptom of Kahn feeling that he was being ignored on policy.⁵⁴² The inflation debates up until July 1979 continued to be limited by the administration's refusal to countenance recession, mandatory wage/price controls and use of monetary policy. This changed when Carter appointed Paul Volcker as Chairman of the Federal Reserve.

⁵³⁶ Kahn Interview, *Miller Center*, 123 and 129.

⁵³⁷ Butler to Jordan, 4 October 1978, SS Box 95, *JCPL*.

⁵³⁸ Wexler to Carter, 6 December 1978, SS Box 98, *JCPL*.

⁵³⁹ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 167-8.

⁵⁴⁰ Schultze to Carter, 13 March 1979, CEA Schultze Box 9, *JCPL*.

⁵⁴¹ Kennedy to Carter, 1 June 1979, Rubenstein Box 64, *JCPL*.

⁵⁴² Eizenstat to Carter, 15 September 1979, SS Box 131, *JCPL*.

Volcker's appointment was probably the one action that Carter did take to address inflation effectively. Inflation had reached 13.7 percent in July 1979 and Volcker made no secret of his intention, if appointed, to tighten money supply.⁵⁴³ It was his determination as the new chair of the Federal Reserve (Fed) to prioritise the fighting of inflation, even at the risk of recession. He ensured that there was an early imposition of tighter monetary controls which resulted in higher interest rates. This imposed a new anti-inflation policy on the administration which would prove to be the long-term solution to the problem. Volcker ensured that the Fed's controls remained in place for the remainder of Carter's term of office, albeit with a brief respite in the summer of 1980.⁵⁴⁴ This imposed a high political cost on Carter's re-election ambitions but he and his advisors recognised that something needed to be done. His aides were already warning of the danger of a weak economy with the primaries only six months away.⁵⁴⁵ Even Schultze viewed Volcker's policies as the 'only show in town' on inflation and he soon began a regular dialogue with him.⁵⁴⁶ In the meantime the administration continued its efforts to find its own solutions to what seemed to be an intractable problem.⁵⁴⁷ There was recognition that whilst wage settlements continued to fall within the guidelines set down by the government, tightening controls was still necessary. Further policy initiatives announced on 14 March 1980 contained no new controls on

⁵⁴³ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 175.

⁵⁴⁴ Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) Minutes, 14 August 1979 and FOMC, Transcript, 6 October 1979, <https://www.federalreserve.gov/>. For further analysis of Volcker's anti-inflation strategy see Iwan Morgan's 'Monetary Metamorphosis: The Volcker Fed and Inflation' in the *Journal of Political History* Vol 24, Number 4, 2012: 545-571.

⁵⁴⁵ Al From to Kahn and Eizenstat, 14 August 1979, Rubenstein Box 64, JCPL.

⁵⁴⁶ Hargrove, Erwin and Morley, Samuel, *President's Council of Economic Advisors*, (Boulder: Westview, 1984), 499-500.

⁵⁴⁷ Kahn to Carter, 13 October 1979, SS Box 135, Schultze to Carter, 24 October 1979, SS Box 137 and Miller and Schultze to Carter, 14 November 1979, SS Box 140, JCPL.

wages and prices but called for further cuts in the budget, the passing of oil conservation legislation and the imposition of credit controls.⁵⁴⁸ However, within the White House there was scepticism as to whether this policy would succeed. Al From, who worked for Kahn, believed that the 'new' programme would not be effective because inflation was approaching a psychological tipping point at 20 percent. The only policy that did work was the Fed's but that was driving up mortgage rates and keeping traditional working-class families out of the housing market.⁵⁴⁹ Attempts by Kahn, with Carter's support, to penalise companies who breached administration guidelines through government contracts failed because both unions and business threatened to withdraw co-operation.⁵⁵⁰ This left only the option of using presidential influence in private meetings or negotiations with major business and union leaders. Wexler's outreach programme did give Carter the opportunity to meet with these leaders but unlike his Democratic predecessor, Johnson, Carter was not adept at such negotiation. Known as 'jawboning' this involved the president in face-to-face dialogue with business and union leaders and applying pressure to achieve the government's targets on wage and price settlements. Despite the urging of his staff Carter did not make the most of his opportunities to influence the behaviour of the country's economic leaders.⁵⁵¹ By April 1980 Kahn was reporting that with the renewed rise in oil prices and increase in mortgage rates, inflation had risen to 18 percent in the previous three months. He feared that wages which had been restrained up to that point would soon accelerate to keep track. He also

⁵⁴⁸Anti-Inflation Program Remarks Announcing the Administration's Program, 14 March 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=33142&st=&st1=>

⁵⁴⁹ From to Kahn, 7 March 1980, SS Box 154, JCPL.

⁵⁵⁰ Kahn to Carter, 2 April 1980, SS Box 157, JCPL.

⁵⁵¹ Wexler, McDonald and Eizenstat to Carter, 9 April 1980 and From to Khan, 17 April 1980, Wexler Box 26, JCPL.

complained that commitments in Carter's 14 March speech to increase monitoring had not been upheld as Congress had failed to authorise the recruitment of 100 additional staff.⁵⁵² The administration's anti-inflation strategy was not working.

In November 1979 Kahn had what he described as a heart to heart with Carter about inflation. He argued that whilst the administration attempted all the right or orthodox actions, none of them were working. Carter's economic advisors had consistently got their inflation forecasts wrong which had damaged the administration's credibility.⁵⁵³ Policies on minimum wage, farm price supports and protecting some organisations against competition had added to the inflationary spiral. Kahn argued for radical solutions and tough political choices on the budget. Carter appeared to sympathise but little of this was done.⁵⁵⁴ Kahn could have added that it took eighteen months for the administration to recognise that inflation was the number one problem; up until then Carter's economic advisors' main concern had been avoiding recession. It could be argued that on inflation, Carter was an unlucky president and point to the OPEC price increases, but these were not a new phenomenon. His predecessor had suffered from substantial rises in 1974-5 and Schultze had told Carter that oil prices had had a negligible effect on inflation until late 1979.⁵⁵⁵ Carter's team tried alternative strategies to tackle the problem, but they were largely boxed in by their own policy decisions and the actions of Congress. The eventual solution, controlling money supply, was not discussed until Volcker imposed the policy on the administration. Any form of sanctions or mandatory policy to control wages and prices was rejected but more significantly the

⁵⁵² Kahn to Carter, 22 April 1980, SS Box 159, *JCPL*.

⁵⁵³ Hargrove, *Council of Economic Advisors*, 484.

⁵⁵⁴ Kahn to Carter, 5 November 1979, SS Box 138, *JCPL*.

⁵⁵⁵ Schultze to Carter, 21 January 1980, SS Box 148, *JCPL*.

underlying decline in productivity was only vaguely understood and not addressed. This coupled with poor forecasting and the increasingly desperate actions of his advisors as they changed policies damaged Carter's credibility with the public. The impact of inflation was not just economic but psychological. Unlike unemployment it affected everyone and added an aura of uncertainty to every personal economic decision. To the electorate Carter did not seem to be in control and his management of the budget only confirmed this view.

The budget process was something Carter understood both from his time as Governor and from his experience as a businessman. He thrived on the minutiae of the budget which he often knew in greater detail than his OMB staff.⁵⁵⁶ Control of government spending was not only a key element of fiscal policy but a demonstration of the competence that Carter had promised the public when he was elected. Unfortunately to pass a Federal budget he needed the support of members of congress who had their own views on how money should be raised and where it should be spent. As far as the budget process was concerned it was politics not economics which dominated congressional thinking.

The process of building the budget was controlled by the OMB but to pass Congress its success was dependent upon the support of government departments and congressional liaison. Carter initially immersed himself in budgeting. It was something he felt he understood, and he hoped to reform the process with the implementation of ZBB helping to bring about a more rational approach. He had implemented this as governor and made major claims for its effectiveness during his presidential campaign.

⁵⁵⁶ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 112-13.

Carter argued that ZBB focussed on objectives and needs, helped combine budgeting and planning, promoted cost effectiveness and finally encouraged management participation in the process.⁵⁵⁷ Whilst it was implemented across government departments, extravagant claims of savings were soon toned down by the OMB.⁵⁵⁸ ZBB was symbolic of Carter's approach to policy - if you build a budget by the best means possible then the legislature would accept it. Nothing could have been further from the truth. To succeed the administration needed to understand the detailed workings of Congress, in particular the committee structure. This was emphasised in a report from Douglas J Bennet, assistant secretary for legislative affairs. He highlighted the importance of building long-term relationships with key financial committee chairmen and to integrate them into the budget process. When the government failed to do this with its first budget, Bennet commented, 'if the administration shows the same contempt for orderly fiscal policy that Congress used to show, why bother with Budget Committees?'⁵⁵⁹ This report was not followed up by Carter who was much more focussed on agreeing a budget internally than how it was going to be sold to Congress.

Carter was hampered by a natural conflict between a Democratic House which was determined to pass the social legislation that had been denied by his predecessors and an administration attempting to fight inflation by fiscal restraint. Carter believed that such fiscal irresponsibility was the 'Achilles heel' of the party.⁵⁶⁰ Liberal Democrats demanded that Carter pass the reforms he 'promised' during the election, but such reforms increased expenditure when nearly 70 percent of the budget was fixed in areas

⁵⁵⁷ Windsor, 'Budget Strategy in the Carter Administration', 404-5.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid, 403.

⁵⁵⁹ Douglas Bennet to Moore, 29 April 1977, SS Box 18, JCPL.

⁵⁶⁰ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 7.

like social security and health entitlements, defence and debt repayments.⁵⁶¹ This reality was to hamper many of Carter's most cherished campaign pledges and put his administration in a war of attrition with Congress. This started in the first months of his presidency as Carter's request for a modest increase in the draft Ford 1978 budget was overridden by Congress which added a further \$5.1bn.⁵⁶² There were also problems to do with the White House losing influence over key congressional appropriations committees.⁵⁶³ Recognition by Carter's advisors by mid-1978 that constraining the budget was an important element of the administration's anti-inflation policy⁵⁶⁴ had been caused in conflict with congressional Democrats who were facing re-election that autumn. Proposals to cut back on spending were heavily criticised by liberals led by Ted Kennedy at the mid-term Democratic Conference.⁵⁶⁵ Carter's staff were concerned that members of the cabinet were expressing opposition to fiscal restraint, some being quoted as describing the draft 1980 budget as a 'Nixon-Ford budget which no Democratic President should sign up to.'⁵⁶⁶ White House staff feared that a decline in Carter's approval ratings had been caused by a perceived lack of leadership in delivering a reduced budget.⁵⁶⁷ Carter publicly committed to reduce the burgeoning deficit in the 1980 budget to under \$30bn. This was despite pressure from his own party, a three percent increase in defence spending above inflation, his own plans to deregulate oil and entitlement indexation (against inflation).⁵⁶⁸ This proved not to be achievable.

⁵⁶¹ McIntyre Interview, *Miller Center*, 55.

⁵⁶² Windsor, 'Budget Strategy in the Carter Administration', 387-407.

⁵⁶³ Joe Onk to Carp and Eizenstat, 9 May 1977, Eizenstat Box 154, *JCPL*.

⁵⁶⁴ McIntyre to Carter, 24 May 1977, SS Box 77, *JCPL*.

⁵⁶⁵ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 98-99.

⁵⁶⁶ Wexler to Jordan, 30 May 1978, Wexler Box 67, *JCPL*.

⁵⁶⁷ Bo Cutter to Jordan 30 May 1978, Wexler Box 67, *JCPL*.

⁵⁶⁸ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 100.

The 1978 mid-term elections were a setback for his party, but the Democrats maintained their majority in the House despite an increase in the number of fiscally conservative congressmen elected. This should have helped Carter in achieving a balanced budget by 1981 but a review carried out by Moore's team found that whilst the majority of congressmen supported budget cuts in principle no one wanted to be associated with unpopular measures in an election year unless they were certain such changes would pass Congress.⁵⁶⁹ By the end of 1979 Carter's advisors had accepted that a balanced budget was not a feasible goal.⁵⁷⁰ Eizenstat argued that not only was this not achievable in a recession but such proposals would not pass Congress.⁵⁷¹ Congressional proposals for the 1981 budget costlier than the White House's, which had included an additional \$7bn for defence. This was despite efforts by Carter to make further savings by reducing the costs of social programmes including welfare reform.⁵⁷² On the advice of his team he vetoed the proposed congressional budget as inflationary, alienating Byrd in the Senate who withdrew all support from Carter.⁵⁷³ With the 1980 presidential election only five months away, Carter had failed in his budgetary goals and did not have an agreed budget for 1981.

McIntyre argued that Carter was successful in managing government spending but this was based largely on technical issues such as establishing a three-year budget process and the use of budget reconciliation.⁵⁷⁴ The public, however, saw constant

⁵⁶⁹ Moore to EPG, 5 March 1980, Eizenstat Box 154, *JCPL*.

⁵⁷⁰ Schultze to Carter, 27 December 1979, Schultze Files Box 52, *JCPL*.

⁵⁷¹ Eizenstat to Carter, 1 March 1980, SS Box 152, *JCPL*.

⁵⁷² Eizenstat to Carter, 26 March 1980, SS Box 156, *JCPL*.

⁵⁷³ Eizenstat to Carter, 26 May 1980, SS Box 163 and Tate to Moore, 28 May 1980, SS Box 164, *JCPL*.

⁵⁷⁴ Comments by McIntyre in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 418-19.

haggling with Congress and a president who had failed to get to grips with a burgeoning Federal budget.⁵⁷⁵ This was a harsh judgement given that much of government expenditure was fixed. Also, the administration had been affected by crises outside Carter's control and by a Congress which continued to promote its own agenda. But this was a president who had campaigned on his competence. He looked anything but as his public commitment to a balanced budget became less credible with the passing of each financial year.

Many historians in writing about Carter's economic policy have stated that he tried to balance the liberal policies of his party with the fiscal realities of a weak US economy. His objective to move his party to the centre away from expensive social programmes to greater fiscal responsibility, ultimately, they argued, failed because his administration could not control inflation.⁵⁷⁶ Others like Ann Mari May used a comparison of the key performance indicators of the Ford, Carter and Reagan administrations to argue that Carter's economic record was largely successful, particularly in relation to growth.⁵⁷⁷ Iwan Morgan has stated that Carter's economic policies of giving priority to fighting inflation, fiscal conservatism, deregulation and supply-side economics were a precursor of his New Democratic successor Bill Clinton.⁵⁷⁸ Others have argued that his use of monetary policy and deregulation laid the

⁵⁷⁵ Steven Roberts, 'Carter and Congress: Doubt and Distrust Prevail', *New York Times*, 5 August 1979.

⁵⁷⁶ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 69-70, Morgan, *Age of Deficits*, 75 and Biven, *Carter's Economy*, 253-56.

⁵⁷⁷ Ann Mari May, 'Monetary Policy and the Carter Presidency' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol.23 (Fall, 1993): 669 -711.

⁵⁷⁸ Morgan, 'Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and the New Democratic Economics', 1015-1039.

groundwork for what became known as 'Reaganomics'.⁵⁷⁹ His fundamental differences with Reagan were not over economic policy but in their views on government. Reagan famously saw government as 'the problem' and wanted a free market economy whilst Carter believed in the power of government to do good and correct faults in the economy. The underlying assumption in the historiography suggests that Carter had a coherent view on economic policy but there is little evidence to support this. Decisions were made by his experts who failed to develop a consistent economic policy throughout his term of office, zigzagging between fighting recession and inflation. The administration's economic forecasting was at best problematic, underestimating the economic recovery in 1977 and inflation rates throughout his presidency. His advisors did not grasp the significance of the decline in productivity or the importance of monetary policy until late in the administration. Carter's interest in the budget and government spending may have indicated that he was a fiscal conservative, but he never articulated his views in any coherent economic philosophy, unlike his Democratic successor Bill Clinton. His fiscal policies were more influenced by his business background and a moral sense of the importance of a country living within its means. Carter's failure to convince his party and ultimately the country of the benefits of a balanced budget left his administration with little to offer other than austerity.⁵⁸⁰ To the liberals in the Democratic Party, Carter's economic policies were little different from the Republicans and this contributed to their support for Kennedy for the 1980 Democratic nomination. By the 1980 election the economic outlook indicated the continuation of

⁵⁷⁹ Anthony Campagna, *Economic Policy in the Carter Administration* (Westport: St Martin's press, 1992), 205.

⁵⁸⁰ Morgan, *Age of Deficits*, 74.

high inflation and an imminent recession. This was not the message of competence that Carter had presented to the public in 1976. None of his economic policies appeared to work and his most specific economic commitment, reform of a tax system he described as 'a disgrace', had been gutted by a Congress controlled by his own party.

It is worth considering how did Carter's character influenced the way economic policy was developed in his administration. He did actively involve himself in micro-economic matters around the budget, ZBB and saving money in the White House, but contributed little to the macro-economic debate. Whilst he did get frustrated with his economic team, sometimes seeking alternative advice, he generally followed their guidance. His main role as president was to 'sell' his policy both in Congress and to the public, unfortunately this did not play to his strengths. Clinton, who was Arkansas's governor when Carter was president, described Carter's economic speeches as him sounding more like '17th Century New England Puritan than a 20th Century Southern Baptist'⁵⁸¹ Clinton was to learn from this experience. Carter 'preached' self-sacrifice but did not articulate a positive view of his policies that would justify in the minds of the public the sacrifices that he was asking them to make. His dealings with Congress were hampered by his marked reluctance to build relationships and do deals, something experienced Congressmen had been used to under his Democratic predecessor, Lyndon Johnson. His distaste for the hard bargaining involved in passing legislation damaged his relationship with Congress. His decision to appoint Volcker to be chair of the Federal Reserve highlighted one of the positive elements of his character, the determination to do the right thing whatever the political cost. The tightening of money supply was the

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

eventual, if painful, solution to inflation. Carter recognised this would cost him politically in the run up to the November 1980 election but as was often the case he did it anyway because he saw it as the right thing to do. It was Carter's one positive economic legacy. His economic policy was in many ways a failure of presidential influence. He could not through his speeches, his conversations with members of congress and other leaders persuade decision makers and the American public that his economic policies would work and were worth the price he was asking them to pay. He was to face a similar response when he asked for yet more sacrifice from the public when trying to solve the country's energy crisis.

Chapter Three

The Energy Crisis

America's oil production had been declining since it reached its peak in 1950 and its share of world imports had fallen from 52 percent in 1950 to 16 percent in 1974. US Oil imports had risen ten times in five years and represented an increase of \$10bn on the US trade deficit.⁵⁸² The concept of a US energy 'crisis', however, was by no means unchallenged. The US public throughout the 1970's continued to believe that any crisis was caused by the greed of the oil companies or the incompetence of government. A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report stated that whilst dependence on OPEC imports represented 40 percent of US domestic consumption, the opening of new fields in Alaska, Mexico and the Arab peninsula would remove the threat of shortage by 1980.⁵⁸³ The options for America in dealing with an energy shortage were either to increase production and/or reduce consumption by conservation. To increase production required initial investment to find and develop new oil and gas fields. In the US, major suppliers had control of all stages of the production cycle from exploration, production, refining and distribution. Profits from increased prices in both oil and gas were restricted by regulation which kept prices artificially low for the US consumer but did nothing to stimulate new production. Deregulation as a solution, strongly favoured by conservatives, would raise prices, increase both inflation and supplier profits but would

⁵⁸² Marilu Hunt McCarthy, 'Economic Aspects of Carter Energy Program', in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 555 and Crain, *Ford Presidency*, 74.

⁵⁸³ Crain, *Ford Presidency*, 74.

not necessarily guarantee increased local production as the producers often received a better return by investing in overseas oil fields.

The alternative approach to address the country's profligacy in energy consumption was conservation. In the 1970's America was consuming 2.3 times more than the European Economic Community (EEC) and 2.65 times more than Japan.⁵⁸⁴ A conservation strategy would include bringing US prices up to the real cost of production, fuel efficiency measures and incentivising alternative sources of energy like coal, nuclear power and solar energy. There were two opposing views about resolving the energy problem. The first was the belief that the free market would be the most effective means of stimulating production and stabilising prices. Alternatively, there was the acceptance of some form of regulatory control to protect poorer families against profiteering and reduce pollution.⁵⁸⁵ Both options needed to be considered against a background of an American public who were used to cheap, easily available energy and had been unused to any restrictions on their consumption since World War II. In addition, there were powerful interest groups representing energy suppliers, environmentalists, business and consumer groups, all expressing divergent views on the best energy strategy for the country.

Although America's energy security had been deteriorating steadily since the 1950's, it was not until the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1973 that energy problems began directly to impact the public. The OPEC price increases in 1973-4 presented a challenge to the US government of Presidents Nixon and Ford. In his first State of the Union

⁵⁸⁴ Hunt McCarthy, 'Economic Aspects of Carter Energy Programme,' 555.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid, 559-60.

address, Ford unveiled policies to deal with the problem. This included deregulation, incentives for coal and nuclear power plants as well as an oil import fee. His policies were largely anathema to a Democratic Congress and Ford found himself in a year-long battle before his legislation passed in the form of the Energy Policy and Conservation Act on 22 December 1975.⁵⁸⁶ This bill reinstated price controls originally brought in by Nixon but allowed the president to increase prices by 10 percent a year over 40 months. There were also some conservation measures including establishing a Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) and average fuel economy standards for cars.⁵⁸⁷ This bill was regarded as having fallen short of Ford's stated objectives. The Carter campaign team therefore entered the presidential race in 1975 expecting that energy policy would be a major issue.

The decision to prioritise his new administration's efforts on resolving America's energy crisis was Carter's. It was not forced upon him, but he chose it over other substantive issues. Energy had many of the characteristics of a problem that he liked to address. It was an issue that was highly technical, complex and fundamentally impacted on American society. Energy policy cut across ideology with possible solutions dividing Democrat from Democrat, liberal from liberal and region from region. It was a challenge that Carter saw as an opportunity to demonstrate that government could be a force for good, despite the failure of his predecessors. To political scientist Charles O Jones, energy was the perfect issue for a 'Trustee President.'⁵⁸⁸ To James Schlesinger, who would become the President's Assistant for Energy, the choice highlighted two of

⁵⁸⁶ Crain, *Ford Presidency*, 106-8.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

⁵⁸⁸ Jones, *Trustee President*, 135-43.

Carter's character traits: the engineer who wanted to solve complex technical problems and the moral leader who wished to curb the country's wasteful use of energy.⁵⁸⁹ Carter was influenced by writers like Robert Bellah, Christopher Lasch and Daniel Bell who wrote about the dangers of consumerism and were invited to the White House by Carter soon after his election.⁵⁹⁰ Hence there was an element in his policy of Carter seeking to promote energy conservation with consumers.

Energy, however, was not a major issue in the 1976 presidential campaign. Carter did not mention it in his speech accepting his nomination on 15 July 1976. The Carter-Ford Presidential debates in September and October 1976 did offer him the opportunity to promote his energy proposals. During the 23 September debate Carter argued strongly for an energy policy that would include moving production from oil to coal and support for solar energy. He emphasised the importance of conservation and criticised Ford for 'yielding every time to the special interest groups [who] put pressure on the President.'⁵⁹¹ This early indication of Carter's mistrust of interest groups was to have a major impact on how his administration's policy was developed. Another sign that Carter was considering an initiative on energy was the active involvement of Democratic Senator Henry 'Scoop' Jackson and his staff in the transition. Jackson had been a rival of Carter in the primaries but was a strong advocate of a proactive energy policy and chaired the important Senate Energy and Resources committee. Jackson's staff provided advice on energy either through Jackson or directly to Carter and his transition team. This advice was for Carter to be cautious on energy policy. Grenville

⁵⁸⁹ James Schlesinger Interview, *Miller Center*, 13.

⁵⁹⁰ Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis of the 1970s*, 10.

⁵⁹¹ Presidential Campaign Debate, 23rd September 1976,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29404&st=&st1=>

Garside, who was Jackson's staff director and counsel for the Senate Energy Committee, recommended that Carter should just focus on recruiting top quality people to the Federal Energy Administration (FEA) and the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA), and appointing an energy Czar. He made no recommendations for specific policies but wanted the new administration to concentrate on education, consultation and policy formulation.⁵⁹² The reasons for Jackson's caution were expressed in a memorandum to him from Arlon Tussing, chief economist on the Senate Energy Committee, who argued

Energy Policy was not a promising area for early policy innovation by the new Administration. No crisis is imminent and there are no bold dramatic steps that can quickly assure long-term security of our energy supply or bring down fuel and electricity prices. Most bold moves would at least in the short run increase uncertainty and result in higher costs and prices. We can afford to spend a year or more reconsidering the whole spectrum of energy issues without the aura of crisis and confrontation that have surrounded them since 1973.⁵⁹³

Carter did act on some of this advice from Jackson's staff, particularly on the eventual scope of the new Energy Department,⁵⁹⁴ but ultimately, he wanted his administration to produce a comprehensive solution to the energy problem and he was not prepared to wait.

Carter may not have followed all of Jackson's advice on policy, but he did try to ensure that his key advisor on energy would be of the right calibre and someone he

⁵⁹² Grenville Garside to Senator Jackson, 19 November 1976, SS Box 1, *JCPL*.

⁵⁹³ Arlon Tussing to Jackson, 19 November 1976, SS Box 1, *JCPL*.

⁵⁹⁴ Dan Dreyfus to Carter, 13 December 1976, SS Box 1, *JCPL*.

trusted: he chose James Schlesinger. This was a critical appointment not just because Carter expected Schlesinger to become the Secretary of the newly formed Department of Energy but because he would delegate most of the policy development to him. He took an instant liking to Schlesinger. As well as giving him regular access during the week he met regularly with him on early Saturday mornings.⁵⁹⁵ Schlesinger proved to be one of Carter's most controversial appointments. He had been Ford's secretary of defense but had been fired because of his covert opposition to SALT II and his condescending attitude to Ford over the president's relations with Congress.⁵⁹⁶ Carter was also aware of concern from his staff about Schlesinger's suitability for the role.⁵⁹⁷ The perception of Schlesinger being a difficult character was subsequently borne out by his actions over appointments, where he tended to ignore recommendations from the White House.⁵⁹⁸ Tensions with White House staff persisted until his resignation in July 1979. The relationship with Carter, however, remained cordial but Schlesinger was not above criticising the president for spending too much time on the detail and not enough on leadership.⁵⁹⁹ If Schlesinger was important to his administration's policy development it was Congress and the American public whom Carter needed to persuade to support his policy proposals. It was essential that Carter and his team were able to influence key congressional leaders and committee chairmen if their legislation was to pass. But this was to be hampered by the inexperience and naivety of both Carter and his staff. Energy policy divided Congress not on party or even ideological lines but more in terms of a

⁵⁹⁵ Schlesinger Interview, *Miller Center*, 12.

⁵⁹⁶ Crain, *Ford Presidency*, 69-70 and 194-95.

⁵⁹⁷ Omi Warden to Carter, 18 December 1976, and Dave Freeman (ERDA) to Carter, 17 December 1976, SS Box 1, *JCPL*.

⁵⁹⁸ Schlesinger Interview, *Miller Center*, 89.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 19.

state's natural resources and geography. In addition, the very complexity of the legislation resulted in the involvement of a wide variety of powerful interest groups. For example, there were 117 groups alone involved in decisions on the pricing of natural gas in 1978.⁶⁰⁰ Carter's deep mistrust of interest groups and their influence would be a major factor in how his administration decided to develop the new policy and how he dealt with individual members of congress and the public.

Carter's inauguration address on 20 January 1977 gave no indication that he was going to give energy such a high priority. Indeed, there were many alternative policies that were regarded as equally urgent, not the least of which was dealing with the parlous state of the US economy. The decision may have been prompted by a winter fuel crisis in eleven states east of the Rockies caused by the coldest winter in 100 years. This crisis prompted lobbying of Carter from such diverse individuals as Senator Jackson, the consumer lobbyist Ralph Nader and Carter's mentor Admiral Rickover. Carter began to see energy not just as a complex technical problem to be solved but also, in seeking to reduce waste, a moral one.⁶⁰¹ To Carter, the policy's degree of complexity justified careful study and analysis. He wanted a comprehensive solution that would be for the public good and not for the benefit of interest groups. It was not to be a panicky response to a one-off crisis. The winter gas shortages were resolved by effective cooperation between the Federal government, Congress and private industry. It resulted in the passage of the Emergency Natural Gas Act on 2 February 1977. Recommendations from his staff for further action were met with a 'let's not panic'

⁶⁰⁰ Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, 22.

⁶⁰¹ John C Barrow, 'An Age of Limits: Jimmy Carter and the Quest for a National Energy Policy', in Fink and Graham, *Carter Presidency*, 160-61.

comment from Carter.⁶⁰² But, in his statement on the energy shortage on 21 January 1977, Carter had said that, 'Today's crisis is a painful reminder that our energy problems are real and cannot be ignored. This Nation needs a coherent energy policy and such a programme of energy action will be formulated promptly.'⁶⁰³ Carter's promise of action was confirmed in his 'Fireside Talk 'on 2 February 1977.⁶⁰⁴ Energy was not the only issue covered by this address, but it was the first one he raised. Carter set a deadline of 90 days for his administration to report back to Congress on a new energy policy. This would include recommendations for a new Department of Energy as well as a focus on conservation, reduced dependency on oil and use of alternative energy sources, particularly coal and solar power. He acknowledged that the public might not believe that there was an energy crisis but hoped that the winter gas crisis would have changed their minds.

Two decisions proved critical in how Carter's proposals were received: firstly, the creation of a 90-day deadline; and, secondly, the decision to keep the development of the plans restricted to a small group of 'experts' under Schlesinger. An artificial deadline had been used by Carter before as governor to drive through proposals with the legislature and lobbyists who, given the short timescales, found it more difficult to disrupt his legislation. He also hoped to replicate the cooperation that enabled the passage of the Emergency Natural Gas Act earlier in the year. He was concerned that any consultation prior to announcement would just be an opportunity for special

⁶⁰² Eizenstat and Carp to Carter, 2 February 1977, SS Box 5, *JCPL*.

⁶⁰³ Inaugural Address, 21 January 1977,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6575&st=&st1=>

⁶⁰⁴ Report to the American People, 2 February 1977,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7455&st=&st1=>

interests to delay and sabotage his proposals. So, he insisted that the plans be developed by experts in secret even from other government departments which Carter believed had relationships with interest groups. Unfortunately, this had the effect of restricting the expertise available to Schlesinger's team and consequently limiting the scope of their analysis of the problem.⁶⁰⁵ This decision also caused concern in the White House and resentment in Congress. Eizenstat became involved in March 1977, acting on behalf of advisors from the CEA and DPG who were growing concerned about the potential economic and political implications of any energy proposals.⁶⁰⁶ Economic advisors eventually saw the proposals two weeks before publication and immediately raised objections about the impact on growth and inflation. Fortunately, there was time to resolve this before Carter's speech in April, but this opportunity was not available to Congress. Major supporters like Jackson felt excluded and as early as 3 February 1977 Dan Tate from Congressional Liaison described Jackson's behaviour as 'bitter' and that he had 'made life in the Senate Liaison pretty miserable lately.'⁶⁰⁷ The use of an artificial deadline and secrecy did hamper the progress of the new policy and Carter's approach would draw striking parallels with the doomed attempt by the Clinton administration to pass healthcare legislation 16 years later.

Although there were tensions caused by the secrecy within the White House during the 90-day deadline, many issues were resolved. Schlesinger was able to agree with Cecil Andrus, secretary of the interior, on the structure of the new Department of

⁶⁰⁵ Hunt McCarthy, 'Economic Aspects of Carter Energy Policy', 563-565.

⁶⁰⁶ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 48-49.

⁶⁰⁷ Tate to Moore, 3 February 1977, SS Box 5, JCPL.

Energy.⁶⁰⁸ The concerns expressed by the EPG over the plan's impact on inflation proved to be manageable.⁶⁰⁹ There was pressure from liberals within the administration such as Secretary Califano to do more to protect the poor from the aftereffects of the fuel crisis and use energy taxes to reform social security but these ideas were resisted.⁶¹⁰ Carter also rejected attempts by Schlesinger to include more individual 'sacrifice' in his plans with taxes on commuter parking and luxury cars.⁶¹¹ As the deadline approached Carter, prompted by Eizenstat, became concerned that the new energy plan should be integrated with other programmes so as not to hamper the administration goal of a balanced budget by 1981.⁶¹² Overall whilst the imposed deadline and secrecy did bring disadvantages, especially with Congress, Carter had no reason to believe that a broad package of well thought out measures would not succeed. He now wanted to use his current high approval ratings to convince the American people of the benefit of his Energy Plan, thus enabling him to defeat the formidable interest groups that would be aligned against him.⁶¹³

Carter understood that on energy his main task was to convince the American people of the seriousness of the energy crisis and the fairness of his solution. The launch of his Energy Plan was carefully choreographed. He continued the use of symbolism that he had followed in the winter fuel crisis with a Saturday cabinet meeting and the staged

⁶⁰⁸ Schlesinger to Carter, 16 February 1977, SS Box 8 and Briefing to Carter, 28 February 1977, SS Box 9. *JCPL*.

⁶⁰⁹ Schultze to Carter, Impact described as 0.2-0.4 percent, 15 April 1977, SS Box 15, *JCPL*.

⁶¹⁰ Eizenstat to Carter, 10 February 1977, SS Box 7 and Califano to Carter, 18 April 1977 SS Box 18, *JCPL*.

⁶¹¹ Schlesinger to Carter, 31 March 1977, SS Box 13, *JCPL*.

⁶¹² Carter to Schlesinger, 29 March 1977, SS Box 13, *JCPL*.

⁶¹³ Barrow, 'Carter and the Quest for a National Energy Policy', 162.

helicopter visit to Pittsburgh prior to his speech.⁶¹⁴ He spoke to the nation on 18 April 1977, followed by his address to Congress two days later and a televised press conference on 22 April.⁶¹⁵ The administration had attempted to engage the public as part of the 90-day period by sending out over 450,000 postcards asking for suggestions on energy.⁶¹⁶ Carter had also used the Town Hall meetings to raise awareness of energy issues. Early ABC polling indicated that whilst there was initially an increased level of public concern about energy this was not sustained.⁶¹⁷ Carter's speech was remembered for the acronym MEOW which was derived from the phrase the 'moral equivalent of war', something he had taken from Admiral Rickover.⁶¹⁸ Carter sought to convince the American public that the country faced a situation that was worse than the gas crisis of four weeks earlier and even the OPEC crisis of 1973. He sought to promote moral and social responsibility for the common good. He argued that 'we must not be selfish' and wanted to 'test the character of the American people,' all of which was aimed at encouraging individual self-sacrifice in the use of energy.⁶¹⁹ In presenting Schlesinger's comprehensive package to Congress, he was much less 'preachy' but was certainly downbeat: 'This cannot be an inspirational speech tonight. I don't expect much applause. It's a sober and a difficult presentation.'⁶²⁰ In his televised press conference,

⁶¹⁴ Shogan, *Promises to Keep*, 114-15.

⁶¹⁵ Carter *Energy Addresses and News Conferences*, 18, 20 and 22 April 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7369&st=&st1=>
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7372&st=&st1=>
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7381&st=&st1=>

⁶¹⁶ Domin, *Public Opinion and Values*, 40.

⁶¹⁷ Russell D Motter, 'Seeking Limits: The passage of the National Energy Act as a Microcosm of the Carter Presidency', in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 576.

⁶¹⁸ Carter, *Keeping the Faith*, 91.

⁶¹⁹ Address to the Nation on Energy, 18 April 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7381&st=&st1=>

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

Carter was forced to defend the use of the phrase MEOW which had been criticised as an overreaction. He later claimed that his bill had raised energy awareness by 20 percent⁶²¹ but it did not get the response from the American people that he had hoped. Three months later he was saying that 'the public is not paying attention, voluntarism is not working.'⁶²² Carter's desire for an honest assessment of the energy problem without any 'spin' came across as so pessimistic that it failed to motivate the American people. If the US public was not responding, how would Congress react to the complex set of proposals submitted by Carter?

The National Energy Plan, submitted on 20 April 1977, covered 113 separate but interlocking initiatives, the clear majority of which were not controversial. The objective of the proposed legislation was to reduce energy demand, increase supply and distribute costs equitably between the consumer and industry. Measures included a Crude Oil Equalisation Tax (COET) which would allow the domestic price of oil to rise to world levels by the ending of price controls by 1981 with the first-year tax revenue being redistributed to poorer families. Oil consumption targets were to be established and if missed by over one percent, a five cents gasoline tax was to be imposed. There were incentives for mass transportation and alternative sources of energy such as coal and solar power. Conservation was to be encouraged through incentives for major buildings and house insulation, and a national 55 mph speed limit was proposed.⁶²³ Carter's Energy Plan was comprehensive and complex and he recognised the difficulty he would

⁶²¹ Radio-Television News Directors Association - Interview With Members of the Board of Directors of the Association, 29 April 1977,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7430&st=&st1=>

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Hunt McCarthy, 'Economic Aspects of Carter Energy Programme', 560-63.

face in passing such legislation given the number of congressional committees that could be involved.⁶²⁴ He also had no natural constituency either in Congress or the country that would support his proposals in full. This resulted, for example, in environmentalists being natural supporters of his conservation measures but in opposition to the move to 'dirty' coal-fired power stations. This meant that the administration would have to build different alliances for each aspect of the plan. To be successful would require the White House to run a sophisticated operation to manage the legislative process and muster public support.

The initial public response according to a Gallup poll on 26 April 1977 was overwhelmingly in favour of the Carter plan (87 to 13 percent)⁶²⁵, but there were few if any groups that supported the whole package. Democrats were split not only in terms of ideology but to a large extent geography. Natural supporters like the environmentalists favoured restricting growth but Carter's labour constituency wanted a plan that would increase jobs. Supporters such as the Urban League believed that aspects of Carter's proposals would hit the poor whilst unions like the Teamsters regarded the standby tax as an imposition on working people.⁶²⁶ These were just some examples of the response from within the Democratic Party and did not include the views of the GOP or the energy industry who would be lobbying to support or change parts of the plan that they did not favour. Carter hoped that by developing the plan in secret he would avoid such pressures until it was announced but he knew that he could not avoid opposition indefinitely. He did hope that he could counter the interest groups

⁶²⁴ Carter, *Keeping the Faith*, 97.

⁶²⁵ Motter, 'Seeking Limits: Passage of the National Energy Act', 578.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

by mobilising popular opinion but whilst the overall plan had high public approval ratings, these were never translated into active support. This encouraged congressional intransigence. The struggle with Congress over energy also had a negative impact on Carter's personal popularity with a 10 percent drop in his approval ratings reported as early as 5 May 1977.⁶²⁷

Carter's performance in supporting the Energy Plan was also subject to criticism in the press and even from Schlesinger. The conservative press continued to argue that there was no crisis, just government incompetence. Jordan summed up the problem for Carter by saying, 'We cannot create an atmosphere of sacrifice that is politically meaningful if the American people persist in thinking the crisis is not real.'⁶²⁸ It was suggested that he 'dropped the ball between April and September' by not being sufficiently proactive.⁶²⁹ This was unfair as up until August 1977 the bill was being managed successfully by Speaker Tip O'Neill in the House and it was only when it transferred to the Senate that problems occurred. It was at this point that Carter became heavily engaged in lobbying by going on the road, making three televised speeches and encouraging cabinet members to speak out in favour of the plan.⁶³⁰ In a rare occurrence the workaholic Carter recognised that he had to prioritise his time: 'It's become obvious to me that we've had too much of my own involvement in different matters simultaneously. I need to concentrate on energy and fight for a passage of an acceptable

⁶²⁷ Caddell to Carter, 2 May 1977, Jody Powell Papers Box 30, JCPL.

⁶²⁸ Meg Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump. The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970's* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2017), 73-83.

⁶²⁹ *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, Vol XXXV No 40.

⁶³⁰ Kellerman, *Political Presidency*, 199-202.

plan.⁶³¹ There was some recognition that he was more effective after that point⁶³² but criticism remained about his ability to influence key members of Congress. Schlesinger regarded him as a failure at lobbying, quoting an unsuccessful meeting with Senator Lloyd Bentsen of Texas as an example.⁶³³

The passage of Carter's Energy Plan took eighteen months despite his personal efforts. Although this legislation contained many significant measures, it was not the solution that Carter had promised. The parts of the plan that involved price increases like the oil standby tax and the COET (also called the Wellhead Tax) had little support in Congress and the country. Carter's appeal for self-sacrifice came up against the hard realities of electoral politics. An unnamed Democratic Representative from New York bleakly summed up the problem in supporting Carter: 'You are asking me to vote for something that will cost my constituents money and make life less convenient and they won't see any benefit from it for the next 5 years. And I'll tell you something else if I do what you want ... I will be out.'⁶³⁴ The White House and the party leaders in Congress faced different coalitions of members for every aspect of the legislation. Carter's most effective champion in Congress was Tip O'Neill. He did not break the bill down and send it to different committees as was customary but by using one super committee created an 'Omnibus Bill' and successfully managed its passage through the House.⁶³⁵ This radical approach ensured that following the bill's introduction in the House on 2 May 1977, it passed three months later.⁶³⁶ Only the standby gasoline tax proposal failed due

⁶³¹ Carter, *Carter Diaries*, 118.

⁶³² Kellerman, *Political Presidency*, 207-8 and 218.

⁶³³ Schlesinger Interview, *Miller Center*, 28-29.

⁶³⁴ Motter, 'Seeking Limits: Passage of the National Energy Act', 576.

⁶³⁵ Farrel, *Tip O'Neill*, 471.

⁶³⁶ Motter, 'Passage of the National Energy Act', 579.

to opposition from a coalition of liberal and conservative representatives neither of whom were convinced by the administration's case.⁶³⁷

The Senate would prove to be much more difficult. The momentum created by the passage of the House Omnibus bill was lost during the summer recess and the impact of the Lance Affair. Senate Majority Leader Byrd was a traditionalist and so, unlike Speaker O'Neill, he broke the bill up and sent it to the various Senate Committees. The two key committees were Finance under Russell Long and Energy and Resources under Henry Jackson. The administration's difficult relationship with Long has already been discussed but it should be added that Long's home state, Louisiana, was oil producing and so he was naturally opposed to many of the bill's provisions. Jackson, on the other hand, had long campaigned for a national energy policy and had contributed to the Carter transition discussions on energy. However, relations between Jackson and the White House were never cordial. Jackson had mounted a late challenge to Carter in 1976, and Jordan had made derogatory comments about him in an interview during the campaign. The president had also rejected Jackson's advice on the inclusion of natural resources in the new Department of Energy.⁶³⁸ Schlesinger argued that it was the White House's failure to build an alliance with Long and Jackson that damaged the Energy bill in the Senate.⁶³⁹ Long, whilst supporting Carter on some issues like the new Energy Department, proved too resourceful for Carter and his team whose lobbying Long labelled 'sloppy and naive.'⁶⁴⁰ The White House tried to use Byrd as a conduit to Long but was unsuccessful, as were attempts to influence both Long and Jackson (whose wife

⁶³⁷ Moore to Carter, Weekly Legislative Report, 30 May 1977, SS Box 23, JCPL.

⁶³⁸ Schlesinger, *Interview Miller Center*, 6 and 30.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

⁶⁴⁰ R Mann, *Legacy to Power*, 347.

was Georgian) by inviting them and their spouses to dinner at the White House.⁶⁴¹ The Energy bill that passed the Senate was significantly different from the House version. Most of the revenue raising aspects of the original bill like COET and the standby gasoline tax had been removed by the Senate and replaced by a series of energy tax concessions. These tax changes, if passed, would increase the fiscal deficit during 1978-81 by \$34bn more than the House bill.⁶⁴² The administration used all its resources to influence the outcome of the joint conference when the House and Senate came together to resolve the differences. In establishing strategy for the conference, Carter's staff had two major concerns: firstly, the continued belief in Congress that the public still did not believe that there was an energy crisis and therefore did not support any 'sacrificial' elements of the legislation; and secondly, that when the pressure of negotiations was applied, the administration (meaning Carter) would compromise too early. For the six-week period between late September and early November 1977, the White House established a task force to manage the lobbying on the bill, employing many members of the administration including the cabinet and the president.⁶⁴³ Carter was told not to get involved personally too soon in discussions because 'if we compromise early, the Senate will think we are suckers and the House will think us unreliable.'⁶⁴⁴ In the briefings that Carter had with members of Congress and Lane Kirkland of the AFL-CIO, he emphasised how important the Energy bill was to the prestige not just of the president but of Congress and the Democratic Party.⁶⁴⁵ The attempt to move the final bill towards the

⁶⁴¹ Moore to Carter, 18 May 1977, SS Box 21, *JCPL*.

⁶⁴² Schlesinger, Eizenstat and McIntyre to Carter, 1 November 1977, SS Box 48, *JCPL*.

⁶⁴³ Eizenstat and Schlesinger to Carter, 12 October 1977, Eizenstat Box 199, *JCPL*.

⁶⁴⁴ Schultze, Eizenstat, Schlesinger, Jordan, Moore, McIntyre and Larry Woodworth to Carter, Strategy on Energy Conference, 1 November 1977, SS Box 48, *JCPL*.

⁶⁴⁵ Moore and Eizenstat to Carter, 18 October 1977, SS Box 46 and Eizenstat, Butler, and Kitty Schirmer to Carter, 19 October 1977, SS Box 47, *JCPL*.

House version failed because the overwhelming majority of Senate Democrats, including liberals, were against revenue-generating measures like COET.⁶⁴⁶

Despite considerable efforts by the White House and Carter personally, the final passage of the Energy bill did not take place until October 1978. Many elements of the original proposals were defeated by the sheer complexity of the alliances deployed against the administration, often involving Carter's nominal supporters. Congressional liberals watered down gas deregulation proposals and attempts by Carter to reach out to petroleum leaders, arranged by Charles Kirbo, were vetoed by staff concerned about possible reaction from environmental supporters.⁶⁴⁷ Some of the administration's failure was down to decisions made as early as February 1977. The self-imposed deadline to produce the Energy Plan resulted in a limited investigation of alternatives. There were technical flaws in the proposals with errors in some numbers submitted to support the legislation. The initial pre-briefing on the bill was bungled with important material not being ready in time and Carter's brusque style resulted in a failure to explain his policy to members of congress with sufficient clarity.⁶⁴⁸ There was also a lack of understanding of the fundamental differences between how the House and the Senate operated which hampered White House effectiveness.⁶⁴⁹ O'Neill 'one bill' tactics could not be replicated in the Senate and time was wasted in delayed lobbying of the Senate during the summer recess. Finally, there was the impact of the administration's other legislative initiatives both on the congressional timetable and on relationships with important legislators, who often tried to use their support for the Energy Bill as a

⁶⁴⁶ Moore and Tate to Carter, 17 October 1977, SS Box 46, *JCPL*.

⁶⁴⁷ Eizenstat and Schirmer to Carter, 8 December 1977, Eizenstat Box 198, *JCPL*.

⁶⁴⁸ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 161.

⁶⁴⁹ Jones, *Trustee President*, 141.

bargaining chip for other legislation. Carter remained an active participant in the lobbying, meeting with Long and Jackson as well as intervening, for example, in the Natural Gas conference, to ensure a deal.⁶⁵⁰ Not all of his interventions were successful, for instance his talk of oil producers as war profiteers alienated Senate and business leaders.⁶⁵¹ Although there was criticism of the effectiveness of lobbying by inexperienced staffers, Carter was exempted from this because of his in-depth knowledge of the subject.⁶⁵² However, despite this Carter admitted that, 'The issues before us are so complicated, it has gotten past me.'⁶⁵³ He was far less successful in persuading the American people of the necessity of his plan. Carter went on TV three times in nine months to try to galvanise support but whilst polls reflected public criticism of oil companies and Congress, only 43 percent believed that there was an energy crisis.⁶⁵⁴ Attempts by Rafshoon to develop a 90-120-day communication strategy to raise awareness failed to increase pressure on Congress to act.⁶⁵⁵

The National Energy Act of 1978 was by any definition a substantial piece of legislation. It increased overall energy supply with subsidies for alternative programmes and incentives to utilities to share power. Gas deregulation was deferred until 1984 but controlled prices were increased with future rises established as inflation plus 4 percent. The legislation set up the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) with storage capacity of 120 days or one billion barrels, which would take seven years to complete and cost \$70bn.

⁶⁵⁰ Call to Jackson, 9 January 1978, SS Box 57, Meeting with Long, 18 January 1978, SS Box 65 and Eizenstat and Schlesinger to Carter, 27 March 1978, SS Box 69, *JCPL*.

⁶⁵¹ Motter, 'Seeking Limits: Passage of the National Energy Act', *New York Times* (NYT) and CBS poll, 18 January 1978, 582.

⁶⁵² *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*. Vol XXXV. 24 December 1977: 2231-36.

⁶⁵³ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 191

⁶⁵⁴ Motter, 'Seeking Limits: Passage of the National Energy Act', 586.

⁶⁵⁵ Rafshoon to Carter, 7 June 1978, Eizenstat Box 198, *JCPL*.

Significantly, price incentives for both industry and the consumer were rejected by Congress as too costly.⁶⁵⁶ Carter's staff quickly recognised that he was not receiving credit for the bill as the press and the public were not so much focussed upon what was included in the legislation but what was not and how long it took to pass.⁶⁵⁷

By the end of Carter's second year in office the energy debate had moved onto the issue of oil deregulation. The oil producers and their supporters argued that allowing the price to rise to its natural level would provide an incentive for new fields to be explored. As a politician who believed in deregulation, his policy on the air industry being a case in point, Carter was sympathetic to this view but many of his supporters were opposed. Liberal congressmen argued that oil producers would reap huge profits from deregulation which they would not necessarily invest in American oil fields but would rather exploit cheaper options abroad. There was also concern over protecting poorer families who would be hardest hit by the price increase. Environmentalists favoured switching production away from oil to cleaner energies and wanted much more emphasis on conservation. The solution appeared to be linking deregulation with a tax on oil company profits (a Windfall Profits Tax) which could be used to subsidise poorer families and fund cleaner energy. The argument for such a tax was by no means clear cut and this argument dominated energy policy for the remainder of Carter's term in office. The administration was 'helped' in this debate by the revolution in Iran as it resulted in OPEC price increases which added \$22bn to the US annual import bill. Although US prices continued to be held below world rates, poor internal oil allocation

⁶⁵⁶ Hunt McCarthy, 'Economic Aspects of Carter Energy Programme', 562.

⁶⁵⁷ Eizenstat and Moore to Carter, 16 October 1978, Frank Moore Box 36, *JCPL*.

resulted in local shortages in May 1979.⁶⁵⁸ Further attempts to deregulate oil were delayed by the opposition of his own supporters in Congress. Liberals continued to fear the impact on the poor and environmentalists wanted much more emphasis on conservation.⁶⁵⁹ Carter tried to make contingency plans in the event of shortages as part of emergency measures, but these were delayed by conflicting messages within his own administration. Schlesinger stated that the energy crisis justified contingency plans for rationing, but his own department argued that US energy stocks were healthy and that even with oil consumption rising, there was no need for contingency plans in the medium term.⁶⁶⁰

The White House worked hard to build a coalition that would support oil deregulation linked to a windfall profits tax. Carter met with senior senators, including Long, and by the end of March 1979 he believed he had enough support to recommend action.⁶⁶¹ However, there remained differences amongst his staff, especially on strategy. His advisors argued that making deregulation contingent on a windfall profits tax would not work because conservatives and liberals would separately oppose each piece of legislation, thus causing deadlock. They recommended using the 1975 Ford Energy Act to phase in deregulation by 1981 and challenge Congress to bring in a tax on excess profits.⁶⁶² In the end Carter chose to launch both proposals in his speech on 5 April 1979. In it he continued to remind the public that, 'The energy crisis is real. I said so in 1977,

⁶⁵⁸ Hunt McCarthy, 'Economic Aspects of Carter Energy Programme', 565-6.

⁶⁵⁹ Poll of Senators, No Date, Eizenstat Box 250, *JCPL*.

⁶⁶⁰ Rafshoon to Carter, 23 February 1979, SS Box 108, *JCPL*.

⁶⁶¹ Moore to Carter, 23 March 1979, SS Box 110, *JCPL*.

⁶⁶² Schultze, Blumenthal, Juanita Kreps, Schlesinger and Henry Owen to Carter, 23 March 1979, Eizenstat Box 250, *JCPL*.

and say so again tonight, almost exactly 2 years later. Time is running out.’⁶⁶³ He equated the dependence on imported oil as a risk to national security and sought public support to ensure that Congress responded to the crisis. Initial response from the public was favourable⁶⁶⁴ but the bill proposed, whilst not as complex as two years earlier, still involved seventeen separate pieces of legislation.⁶⁶⁵ The warning from his staff about the difficulty in passing the Windfall Profits Tax proved prophetic and there was evidence that Carter was becoming frustrated. Speeches he made against oil companies were very hard hitting even inflammatory. Eizenstat became concerned that Carter’s remarks were not being seen as presidential and had fixed the administration’s position when negotiation and flexibility were required in the future.⁶⁶⁶ This was not Eizenstat’s only concern about Carter’s speeches on the administration’s new energy proposals. In a speech in Iowa in May 1979, Carter appeared to undermine his carefully worked-out position on deregulation by seeming indifferent to the issue. Eizenstat told Carter how damaging this was to his reputation with Congress and its implications for the future passage of the legislation. He was so concerned that he arranged an editorial in the *New York Times* to ‘correct’ Carter’s statement.⁶⁶⁷ The continued battle with Congress prompted his team to recommend another nationwide address on energy to mobilise the public support for his policies in July 1979 when Carter returned from the Tokyo Summit. It was during the summit that a further large OPEC price increase prompted a

⁶⁶³ Energy Address to the Nation, 5 April 1979,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32159&st=&st1=>

⁶⁶⁴ ABC Harris Poll, 6 April 1979, DPS Rubenstein Energy Files Box 97, *JCPL*.

⁶⁶⁵ Eizenstat to Carter, Energy Program Report 1, 21 April 1979, SS Box 114, *JCPL*.

⁶⁶⁶ Eizenstat to Carter, 25 April 1979, SS Box 114, *JCPL*.

⁶⁶⁷ Eizenstat to Carter, 4 and 7 May 1979, Eizenstat Box 322, *JCPL*.

fresh crisis with petrol queues and a 'riot' of truckers in Levittown, Pennsylvania, on 24-5 June 1979.⁶⁶⁸

Carter's address to the nation on 15 July 1979 became known as the 'Malaise' speech but it was supposed to be a speech on 'Energy and National Goals.' The evolution of the speech will be covered in Chapter Seven but much of the mood of pessimism which pervaded the White House in the run up to the speech was related to frustration with energy policy. As Eizenstat told Carter, 'nothing else has so frustrated, confused, angered the American people or so targeted their distress at you personally.'⁶⁶⁹ His approval rating at this time had sunk to 27 percent.⁶⁷⁰ His speechwriters were equally direct: 'Gas lines promote anger, not conservation.' 'Hatred for the oil companies is only matched by lack of confidence in the Administration,'⁶⁷¹ but they were struggling to create a draft that would galvanise public opinion. Proposals were to deregulate oil prices over 28 months, and for a Windfall Profits Tax that would be used to build an Energy Security Fund to help the poor and build mass transit systems. In addition, there were to be government initiatives to reduce consumption by 5 percent including a 55-mph speed limit. However, all of this remained deadlocked in Congress. Proposals on creating a Low Energy Assistance Programme for poor families immediately ran into trouble as further OPEC price increases had tripled the cost of decontrol. Pressure from Senate liberals forced Carter to expand this programme of support from \$800m to \$2.4bn.⁶⁷² The agonising over the energy speech, its postponement and the resulting

⁶⁶⁸ Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump*, 219-221.

⁶⁶⁹ Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis*, 19.

⁶⁷⁰ Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump*, 222.

⁶⁷¹ Achsah Nesmith, Walter Shapiro and Gordon Stewart to Rafshoon and Hertzberg, 29 June 1979, Speechwriters Subject Files Box 8, *JCPL*.

⁶⁷² Eizenstat, McIntyre, Califano and Graciella Olivare to Carter, 11 July 1979, SS Box 123 *JCPL*.

series of meetings at Camp David moved the debate away from energy. This caused tension between Carter and his advisors. Carter refused to have his energy staff present at Camp David when he met external experts. Eizenstat implied that it was because Carter believed his staff had leaked a confidential memorandum to various journalists.⁶⁷³ This tension was highly unusual in the Carter White House but symptomatic of the atmosphere at the time. Following lobbying from Mondale and Eizenstat the final version of the speech did contain new targets on energy with the aim of inspiring a positive public response. These included the goal of never importing more fuel than the US had done in 1977, backed by import quotas to ensure that this was achieved. In addition, Carter proposed massive funding from the Energy Security Corporation (ESC) for alternative fuels and mass transit as well as targeting utilities to cut consumption by 50 percent. Finally, in alluding to the spirit of World War II, Carter proposed the creation of an Energy Mobilisation Board (EMB) to speed up energy production.⁶⁷⁴

Although initial polling after the speech was positive, Carter failed to inspire the public. *New York Daily News* commented next day that Carter only had one problem: how 'to wake up the 80 million Americans he put to sleep last night.'⁶⁷⁵ Carter's attempt to gain support for a new energy policy was to be made with a new secretary of energy as James Schlesinger had resigned. He had discussed leaving with the president before he left for Tokyo to enable Carter to have someone in post who was 'less scarred by

⁶⁷³ Eizenstat to Carter, 7 July 1979, SS Box 123, JCPL.

⁶⁷⁴ Address to the Nation on Energy and National Goals: "The Malaise Speech", 15 July 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32596&st=&st1=>

⁶⁷⁵ Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis of 1970's*, 120-41.

earlier battles.⁶⁷⁶ Schlesinger always claimed have enjoyed a close relationship with Carter but the presidential papers are littered with Carter and his staff expressing concerns to Schlesinger over many issues, particularly over his choice of staff.⁶⁷⁷ Carter's advisors had been so concerned that they argued that the resignation was an opportunity for a top to bottom overhaul of the new department.⁶⁷⁸ Schlesinger, in later interviews, was highly critical of a number of Carter's decisions. He criticised the limited time he had to develop energy proposals and build a new department.⁶⁷⁹ He was equally critical of Carter's leadership style, arguing that tactics on oil deregulation showed 'the administration and the President of the United States did not understand governing.'⁶⁸⁰ Nevertheless Schlesinger did influence Carter in the more interventionist elements of his energy policy, especially in his 15 July speech.⁶⁸¹ His successor, Charles W. Duncan, came from the Department of Defense and lacked energy expertise, but he did have considerable managerial experience and was widely regarded as a more effective operator by White House staff.

The moral elements of Carter's 15 July speech continued to be debated for the rest of his time in office, but he was determined to implement the specific measures he had proposed. The White House of 1979 was much better organised and it deployed all of its resources to support the new energy goals with an elaborate communication plan.⁶⁸² Members of the cabinet and senior members of staff were co-opted under

⁶⁷⁶ Schlesinger to Carter and reply, 20 July 1979, SS Box 124, *JCPL*.

⁶⁷⁷ Carter to Schlesinger, 5 December 1977, SS Box 53 and Carter to Schlesinger 6 March 1979, SS Box 109, *JCPL*.

⁶⁷⁸ Rubenstein to Eizenstat, 10 July 1979, DPS Rubenstein Energy Files Box 98, *JCP*.,

⁶⁷⁹ Schlesinger Interview, *Miller Center*, 10-11 and 23.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 84.

⁶⁸¹ Schlesinger to Carter, 13 July 1979, SS Box 123, *JCPL*.

⁶⁸² Rafshoon to Staff, 20 July 1979, DPS Rubenstein Energy Files Box 98, *JCPL*.

Wexler's speaker programme to give speeches in support of legislation.⁶⁸³ Unions like United Automobile Workers (UAW) were engaged in sending postcards to Congress demanding action.⁶⁸⁴ Carter himself was heavily involved in meeting with members of congress and lobby groups both face to face and on the phone.⁶⁸⁵ Despite these efforts the speech did not change the fundamental politics of Congress. Senator Byrd, due to his support for increased coal production in his home state, tried to take a proactive role but the legislation remained largely in the hands of senators from oil producing states like Russell Long.⁶⁸⁶ There was very little change in the attitude and practice of Congress and so progress remained painfully slow. Caddell complained to Carter that opinion leaders were not engaging with his programme and that public frustration was being directed at Carter personally.⁶⁸⁷ Frank Moore provided Carter with an update in August 1979 which summed up the complexity of the debate in the Senate committees with concerns being expressed on regional, environmental and ideological grounds about the proposed legislation on the Energy Security Corporation (ESC) and the Energy Mobilisation Board (EMB).⁶⁸⁸ Carter's renewed commitment to synthetic fuels and what was felt as a weakening in Carter's support for environmental safeguards led to the loss of support from environmental groups.⁶⁸⁹ These were not the only Carter supporters who were dissatisfied with his July proposals. Liberals in the mid-west and north eastern states continued to press for more assistance for low-income families hit by the

⁶⁸³ Wexler to Carter, 31 July 1979, SS Box 125, *JCPL*.

⁶⁸⁴ Wexler, Jordan, Powell and Eizenstat to Carter, SS Box 130, *JCPL*.

⁶⁸⁵ Energy Legislation, 23 and 25 July 1979, SS Box 125 and Moore to Carter, Energy calls, 8 August 1979, SS Box 127, *JCPL*.

⁶⁸⁶ Moore to Carter, Energy Legislation, 23 July 1979, SS Box 125, *JCPL*.

⁶⁸⁷ Jack Watson to Carter, 14 August 1979 and Caddell to Carter, 7 August 1979, SS Box 126, *JCPL*.

⁶⁸⁸ Moore telegraph to Carter, 17 August 1979, SS Box 127, *JCPL*.

⁶⁸⁹ Article in Wall Street Journal, 31 August 1979, SS Box 129, *JCPL*.

proposed oil price increases. This resulted in the original proposal for a Low-Income Energy Assistance Programme being increased to \$4bn, much more than Carter had envisaged.⁶⁹⁰

It took nearly a year for Congress to pass the major elements of the president's 1979 proposals. This was mainly due to arguments over the Windfall Profits Tax and the Energy Mobilisation Board. The Windfall Profits Tax was vital to fund not only support for poorer families but key elements of Carter's energy conservation strategy, including the development of synthetic fuels and mass transportation systems. Carter's attempt to raise revenue with an oil import levy had been defeated when for the first time in 29 years Congress overturned the veto of a president from the same party.⁶⁹¹ This increased the pressure on the administration to reach a compromise. There was intense lobbying from the White House but it faced opposition in the Senate where over 100 amendments were submitted from liberals and conservatives who had different views as to how revenue from the tax should be dispersed.⁶⁹² Most of Carter's core supporters in the unions, minorities and the poor had concerns about the impact of deregulation of oil prices and as a consequence lobbied hard for a bigger slice of the proposed revenues. On the other hand, conservatives representing the oil lobby wanted a greater share of the revenue being allocated to incentives designed to increase local oil production. These debates persisted until the bill's passage on 2 April 1980. As a result, the legislation was the product of a series of compromises with all the major interest groups. This enabled Carter to claim that the fundamental balance between incentives for

⁶⁹⁰ Eizenstat to Carter, 8 September 1979, SS Box 129, *JCPL*.

⁶⁹¹ Abernathy, *Carter Years*, 19.

⁶⁹² Tate to Carter, 26 November 1979, SS Box 140, *JCPL*.

production and revenue raised was the same as in his original plan.⁶⁹³ However, there were major differences. For instance, the revenue generated was far less with \$227bn now agreed compared with \$292bn in the original plan.⁶⁹⁴ Given the obstacles in his path Carter had every reason to be satisfied with the final bill. The concept of the Energy Mobilisation Board (EMB), that it would cut through red tape and ensure that energy projects were quickly implemented, had a wide appeal in Congress. But it also raised fundamental concerns over the increased powers of Federal Government in relation to state's rights, and fears, especially from environmental groups, about how and in what circumstances the EMB could overturn ('waive') environmental and regulatory protection. This issue of the 'waiver' was described by House Energy and Commerce Chair, John Dingell of Michigan, as the 'single most important environmental issue this administration has faced.'⁶⁹⁵ The usually supportive House split three ways over this and with over 200 environmental leaders signing an open letter against the waiver, the White House had failed to win congressional support by July 1980 when the election was in full swing.⁶⁹⁶

By the first anniversary of the 'malaise' speech Carter could argue that most of the major reforms he had recommended had been passed. He could also point to a substantive list of completed legislation that fulfilled his 1976 campaign promises and addressed the 'energy crisis.' As part of the preparation for running Carter's presidential campaign in 1980, the speechwriter's office was asked to pull together the

⁶⁹³ Eizenstat to Carter, 27 April 1980, DPS Rubenstein Energy Files Box 103, *JCPL*.

⁶⁹⁴ Eizenstat and Schirmer to Carter, 1 April 1980, Eizenstat Box 322, *JCPL*.

⁶⁹⁵ Gus Speth to Carter, 31 March 1980, SS Box 156, *JCPL*.

⁶⁹⁶ Eli Strobbs (Council of Environmental Quality) to Eizenstat, 14 April 1980, DPS Rubenstein Energy Files Box 102, *JCPL*.

administration's key achievements, on energy, the list was impressive. It included the phased deregulation of oil and gas production, a new Department of Energy, the first integrated Energy Plan, massive investment in alternative energy sources, and a new focus on conservation in government, industry and homes. In addition, there was support for the poor to cushion the effect of price increases, investment in mass transit schemes and an overall 11 percent reduction in dependence on imported oil.⁶⁹⁷ Despite all of this, energy was not regarded as a Carter success story. In all his television addresses, town hall meetings and news conferences Carter failed to persuade the public that a personal sacrifice was required in response to an energy crisis that they believed was not real. In June 1979 31 percent of Americans believed energy was the most important problem facing the country but one week before the 1980 election, in a similar poll, only three percent cited energy as the number one concern.⁶⁹⁸ Carter himself accepted that his initial use of apocalyptic language, 'moral equivalent of war (MEOW),' was a mistake.⁶⁹⁹ The failure to persuade the public resulted in there being insufficient support for those controversial measures that required active personal sacrifice such as tax or price increases. At the same time, by inflating the size of the 'crisis', Carter created expectations that appeared to be lost in a long drawn out battle with Congress. By highlighting the security risk caused by US dependence on imported oil, he also increased the perception of American impotence which reflected badly on Carter. Another problem for the administration was that there were often differences

⁶⁹⁷ Undated, Speechwriters Subject Files Box 2, and 22 September 1980, Plains Files President's Daily Diary Box 16, *JCPL*.

⁶⁹⁸ Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump*, 268.

⁶⁹⁹ George C Edwards, 'Exclusive Interview: President Jimmy Carter' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol.38 (March,2008): 1-13.

in emphasis in messages from the president and his experts, Carter saying that there was a crisis and the Department of Energy often disagreeing. Even in his final year in office there was a major disagreement between members of the DPG and Secretary Duncan on whether to announce an energy emergency in Carter's final State of the Union speech.⁷⁰⁰

So why did Carter decide to make energy the priority for his administration? Energy was an archetypal 'Carter issue.' It was a highly technical, complex and long-term problem that affected everyone and therefore required expertise and serious study if a comprehensive solution was to be developed. He believed that solving this problem would be a clear demonstration of both presidential and governmental competence. Political scientists like Charles Jones, Erwin Hargrove, and Kenneth Morris,⁷⁰¹ in analysing Carter's failure on energy policy, have acknowledged the moral dimension but have concentrated on his organisational and communication failures. This approach has neglected evidence that Carter saw energy policy in moral terms and was determined to push legislation forward despite the political costs. This is not to suggest that Carter was naive on this issue; he realised that he had to mobilise public opinion to overcome resistance from major interest groups. The 1977 Energy Plan's 90-day deadline and secrecy may have hampered implementation but fundamentally did not affect the outcome.

Carter underestimated the practical difficulties involved in passing complicated legislation. Congressional splits were not on party or even ideological lines but more

⁷⁰⁰ Eizenstat and Schirmer to Carter, 19 January 1980, SS Box 147, *JCPL*.

⁷⁰¹ Jones, *Trustee President*, Hargrove, *Carter as President*, and Morris, *American Moralist*.

based on region or geology. As a congressman if oil was in your state your position was fixed whether you were Democrat or GOP or conservative or liberal. Each element of the Carter energy plan created a different type of opposition which often involved strange bedfellows. For example, environmentalist congressmen working with the conservative oil lobby to oppose the proposed switch to coal. Groups that Carter assumed would be his supporters like the environmental and consumer lobbies were frequently in opposition. The first critic of his 1977 energy plan was consumer lobbyist and supporter Ralph Nader, who complained that Carter's rhetoric was too dark, and the plan needed more emphasis on conservation.⁷⁰² The White House became more effective at lobbying and achieved some well worked compromises on energy policy, for example on the Windfall Profit Tax but this was not enough to deliver Carter's ambitious goals. Burton and Scott Kaufman in the *Presidency of James Earl Carter* argued that Carter's inability to articulate a more positive vision for the country hampered his attempts to implement energy policy.⁷⁰³ Seeing energy as a moral issue heavily influenced his speeches. In the 'malaise' speech of 15 July 1979, he argued that 'we are confronted with a moral and spiritual crisis.'⁷⁰⁴ It was Carter, the preacher, asking for personal sacrifice for the greater good but such a 'preachy' tone did not motivate the public. Asked in an interview why the American public did not believe that there was an energy crisis, a frustrated Carter commented rather sourly that 'they don't want to face an unpleasant fact.'⁷⁰⁵ Carter's decision to frame energy policy as a moral issue was to reduce the chances of establishing a political consensus. Ultimately it was the failure to

⁷⁰² Motter, 'Seeking Limits: Passage of the National Energy Act', 576-7.

⁷⁰³ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*.

⁷⁰⁴ Address to the Nation on Energy and National Goals: "The Malaise Speech", 15 July 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32596&st=&st1=>

⁷⁰⁵ Richardson, *Conversations with Carter*, 1 June 1979, 172-75.

energise public support and the consequential inability to outmanoeuvre the powerful interest groups inside and outside Congress that proved decisive.

Carter made energy a major priority throughout his administration. He was more personally involved in this than any other domestic policy issue, including the economy and more liberal issues like health insurance. He gave television addresses, went to town hall meetings, held briefings for the press and lobbied key congressmen, face-to-face and by phone.⁷⁰⁶ So what did energy policy signify about Carter's ideology? It confirmed Carter's belief in the necessity for the government to intervene in the energy market for the benefit of all. The ESC and particularly the EMB were seen as evidence of his liberal beliefs. The *Wall Street Journal*, commenting on his 15 July speech, said, 'The real Jimmy Carter has finally stood up and on the far left of the Democratic party.'⁷⁰⁷ However, the same president deregulated, albeit gradually, oil and gas prices, a key issue for free marketers. These were important changes but were implemented only when Carter felt he had no choice. Unlike his successor, Ronald Reagan, Carter did not believe that the free market could solve all energy problems⁷⁰⁸ but other more conservative beliefs were prominent in the battle to pass energy legislation. Carter's fiscal conservatism was often in evidence as he continued to express concern about the cost of energy initiatives, be it coal/gas conversion or the nuclear 'fast breeder' programme.⁷⁰⁹ This mix of conservative and liberal actions may suggest a president trying to establish a new 'third way' but there is little evidence to support this. Carter saw energy as a moral and

⁷⁰⁶ Moore to Carter, 8 August 1979, SS Box 127, JCPL.

⁷⁰⁷ Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis*, 120-41.

⁷⁰⁸ Barrow, 'Quest for National Energy Policy,' 174.

⁷⁰⁹ Carter to Eizenstat, 4 March 1980, DPS Rubenstein Energy Files Box 101 and Eizenstat to Carter, 26 March 1979, DPS Rubenstein Energy Files Box 97, JCPL.

technical challenge for his government to address. Unlike Bill Clinton, who couched his policies within a 'New Democrat' philosophy, Carter attached no ideological framework to the proposals that Schlesinger brought forward. He soon found his programme attacked on all sides ideologically; there was no middle ground. His staff therefore had to build a new coalition of support for each component of his policy.

Carter's energy legacy was substantial, but it all seemed much less than he had promised.⁷¹⁰ Much of his energy programme was dismantled by his successor, including the Windfall Profits Tax, which was repealed in 1988.⁷¹¹ Ronald Reagan was opposed to Carter's interventionist approach but was helped by more favourable conditions in the global energy market. Reagan benefitted from the fall in OPEC prices in 1983 and the consequential oil glut, so did not have to deal with the immediate challenges that Carter faced. By 1986 oil prices had fallen back to their 1973 levels. However, given the same circumstances Reagan would have spoken to the public in a very different way. Whereas Carter emphasised the complexity of the energy problem, Reagan would have simplified the message. He would not have immersed himself in the detail or announce that he was going 'to have an unpleasant talk'⁷¹² with the American people about personal sacrifice. He would have talked about taking the government out of the energy business. An oversimplified even misleading message possibly, but Reagan would always promote a positive vision of America that would leave the audience feeling somehow better, not something Carter was ever able to achieve. The fundamental difference between the two men lay not in their politics but in their character. The optimistic Reagan saw

⁷¹⁰ Abernathy, *Carter Years*, 18.

⁷¹¹ Barrow, 'Quest for National Energy Policy', 170-72.

⁷¹² Address to the nation on Energy, 18 April 1977,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7369&st=&st1=>

positive outcomes in any scenario whilst Carter, the Baptist engineer, saw the complexity of every problem, the hard road ahead and the need for sacrifice.

Energy was yet another policy area where Carter did not benefit from good fortune. This proved to be a continuing story when his administration sought to solve the long-term problems of welfare, health insurance and social security. Only this time Carter had to meet the expectations of the liberal wing of his party.

Chapter Four

Health-Welfare Policy: Betrayal of the Liberals?

Hamilton Jordan did not usually attend in-depth policy discussions at the White House but, in the run up to a decision on welfare reform in April 1977, he attended a Department of Health and Welfare (HEW) briefing for Carter. His honest and insightful note of the meeting to the president demonstrated the closeness of their relationship, the impact of the administration's substantial legislative workload and the nature of Carter's involvement with HEW's Secretary, Joseph A Califano. Jordan advised Carter against making any immediate decision on welfare reform because he believed that the president did not, yet, fully grasp the complexities of the subject. He contrasted Carter's understanding of welfare with his involvement in energy policy where he had participated in a lengthy discussion with Schlesinger and his team, as well as completed hundreds of hours of reading. Jordan estimated that the time Carter spent on welfare was as low as five percent compared to time spent on energy policy. For Jordan the questions Carter was asking at that meeting just confirmed his lack of detailed knowledge. He argued that this was not surprising given Carter's level of involvement in the ERP, the debate over the tax rebate, the Energy bill and SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks). Jordan believed that the HEW proposals were uncoordinated and flawed but concluded, 'I do not believe that it is humanly possible to have a good welfare reform program ready by 1 May that you believe in and are comfortable with.' He also

told Carter that he looked exhausted and with his first major international summit in London due in two weeks, he must find time to rest.⁷¹³

Jordan's observations were revealing for several reasons. Firstly, they highlighted that as early as April 1977 both Carter and his staff were becoming overloaded but that the view that Carter involved himself in too much of the detail of policy did not apply in this instance, or indeed other policy issues. He had decided to delegate policies like welfare reform to Califano. Jordan's memorandum underlined the difficulty for Carter in making decisions on complex issues when he did not fully grasp the detail. This was something that Carter was not used to because as governor he was able to be involved in the minutiae of all-important policy issues. Now as president he was already finding the job beyond his considerable capacity to absorb detailed information. Carter was trying to delegate but as a result it became much more important for his staff to coordinate all viewpoints, both inside and outside the White House, to help him come to a decision. These organisational issues were critical in the development of all the HEW reforms that his administration sought to implement. Welfare reform and National Health Insurance (NHI) were key issues for the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and this placed major expectations on Carter at a time when the president was facing opposition not just from the GOP and powerful interest groups but from a more conservative electorate who were becoming resistant to what they saw as 'big' government solutions.

As the first successful Democratic presidential candidate in twelve years, Carter faced high expectations, particularly from the party's liberal wing. The delivery of

⁷¹³ Jordan to Carter, undated/late April 1977, Chief of Staff Box 37, *JCPL*.

welfare and health reforms was seen as an important measure of his 'liberal credentials'. His election campaign and inaugural address gave few indications of his commitment to reform. Reference in speeches to compassionate government and getting people back to work gave little indication that such reforms would be a major priority.⁷¹⁴ The one exception to this was his speech on health ideas to the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) in Washington DC on 16 April 1976. In this speech, Carter's liberal credentials were there for all to see, as he made specific commitments to universal health coverage.⁷¹⁵ His ideas on these reforms, however, had some conservative themes. He acknowledged that the Federal government was inefficient and wasted money and that schemes like welfare were subject to fraud. Carter's focus therefore when dealing with health and welfare reform was as much about establishing an efficient service and clamping down on waste and fraud as on increasing benefits to the poor and sick. In this he was responding to the conservative mood in the country and this was one of the reasons why Rafshoon wanted Carter in 1978 to make a major national speech on waste and fraud.⁷¹⁶ Another influence on his administration's reform plans was Carter's increasing concern over inflation and a public commitment to eliminate the budget deficit. This resulted in pressure from his economic advisors to oppose, or at least water down, any substantial reforms even when campaign promises were involved. Eizenstat in his role as coordinator of policy found it difficult to bridge the gap between HEW and Carter's economic advisors. These internal policy differences

⁷¹⁴ "Our Nation's Past and Future": Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention, 15 July 1976, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25953&st=&st1=>

⁷¹⁵ Carter's National Health Speech to Student National Medical Association (SNMA) DC, 16 April 1976, DPS James Mongan and Joe Onek Box 48, *JCPL*.

⁷¹⁶ Rafshoon to Carter, 10 November 1978, SS Box 97, *JCPL*.

as well as disagreement over legislative priorities amongst White House staff hindered the legislative process. As a result, HEW proposals suffered because its draft legislation became entangled in a series of congressional committees. The prioritisation process, managed by Vice President Mondale, pushed both welfare and health reform down the administration's agenda for 1978 and 1979 as difficulties with Congress became more apparent.⁷¹⁷

Carter's commitment to welfare and health reform would place a heavy workload on HEW and its Secretary Joseph Califano who had been recommended to Carter for the role by Mondale. Two attributes made Califano stand out from most, if not all, of Carter's cabinet appointments. Firstly, his liberal credentials were outstanding as his role in the Johnson administration had helped shape the Great Society reform legislation.⁷¹⁸ Moreover, he had liberal friends in Congress and the media. He was a close friend of Ben Bradlee, editor of the *Washington Post*, and of the Kennedy family. Secondly, his experience of government, particularly of major reorganisations, was invaluable to the new administration.⁷¹⁹ However, he was also regarded as a classic Washington insider, especially by Carter's Georgian staff and this made him an object of their suspicion. This was exacerbated by the size and nature of the department he ran. HEW was criticised by conservatives for being too large and a source of government waste, especially in relation to welfare benefits. Carter's interest in reducing waste and fiscal restraint often resulted in disputes over its budget.⁷²⁰ HEW had substantial

⁷¹⁷ Agenda update, 9 January 1978, SS Box 58 and Mondale to Carter, 15 January 1979, SS Box 102, *JCPL*.

⁷¹⁸ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 38.

⁷¹⁹ *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, Vol XXXV, 11 January 1977.

⁷²⁰ McIntyre, Eizenstat and Moore to Carter, 2 June 1978, SS Box 79, *JCPL*.

resources, for example it had over 40 of its own congressional liaison staff,⁷²¹ and jealously guarded its lead status on issues. This often resulted in conflicts with the White House on issues such as HEW's anti-smoking policy and its lack of support for Carter's Education bill.⁷²²

Whilst HEW's anti-smoking stance was in line with Carter's campaign pledges, its active promotion damaged him with southern constituencies, especially in North Carolina. Carter was embarrassed by the announcement of an anti-smoking initiative as Califano gave him no advanced warning and the press had picked up on the contradiction between HEW's policy and the administration's backing of price supports for tobacco.⁷²³ Carter understood Califano's position on this issue, as it was a campaign pledge, but he was much less tolerant of Califano's actions on the Education bill. The establishment of a separate Department of Education was also a major campaign commitment and it was supported by some, if not all, of the unions.⁷²⁴ It was not surprising that HEW would have reservations about losing a major component of its organisation. Nonetheless once the legislation was agreed within the White House, Califano was accused by Carter's staff of continuing to lobby secretly in Congress against the bill.⁷²⁵ It was cited as one of the major reasons why Califano was eventually fired by Carter in July 1979. Califano's covert actions against the Education bill were not the only

⁷²¹ Moore Interview, *Miller Center*, 16.

⁷²² Robert Finbow 'Presidential Leadership or Structural Constraints? Failure of President Carter's Health Insurance Proposals' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol.28 (Winter, 1998): 169-186.

⁷²³ Warshaw, 'Carter Experience with Cabinet Government', 381 and President's News Conference, 17 January 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32324&st=&st1=>

⁷²⁴ Taylor Dark, 'Organized Labor and the Carter Administration: Origins of Conflict', in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 767.

⁷²⁵ Rafshoon Interview, *Miller Center*, 34.

source of tension with White House staff. Jordan had made no secret of his deep-rooted suspicion of Califano's liberal background, in particular his closeness with the Kennedy family.⁷²⁶ Califano was criticised for his poor record on recruiting minorities and women and a lack of consultation on hires.⁷²⁷ There was also condemnation for his performance at a Senate sub-committee on Mental Health, Rosalynn Carter's area of personal interest. It was described by a staff member in a memorandum to the First Lady as 'such a discredit to you and to everyone who has worked so hard on the commission and this legislation.' This criticism could not have done anything but damage his standing with both the President and his influential wife.⁷²⁸ Califano in turn had an unfavourable view of White House staff, describing them as naïve and accusing them of leaking negative stories about him to the press.⁷²⁹

Carter's attitude to Califano and the role he played in the cabinet was often contradictory. In many ways Califano was only cabinet member carrying out the role in the manner that Carter himself had defined. He wanted his cabinet to be independent, manage their departments efficiently; and Califano had the experience and confidence to do both. Carter, as he was focussed on other issues, devolved major responsibilities to HEW to develop important policies on health and welfare. This demonstrated a personal confidence in his secretary. Califano also felt able to comment on a wide range of issues outside his immediate responsibility. For example, he expressed strong views against the position of the Justice Department on the Bakke discrimination case.⁷³⁰ This

⁷²⁶ Jordan Interview, *Miller Center*, 42.

⁷²⁷ Arnie Miller to Carter, 6 December 1978, SS Box 100 and Jordan to Carter, 18 July 1979, C of S Box 33, *JCPL*.

⁷²⁸ Kathy Cade to Rosalyn Carter, 24 May 1979, SS Box 118, *JCPL*.

⁷²⁹ Califano, *Governing America*, 29-30.

⁷³⁰ Califano to Carter, 9 August 1977, SS Box 40, *JCPL*.

flexibility given to cabinet members became an issue when White House staff became more influential in policy making. It was not just a problem with Califano but given his background and the complexity of the policies he was responsible for, conflict between HEW and White House staff was probably inevitable.⁷³¹

Califano's personal relationship with Carter was not straightforward. On the one hand, White House papers contain numerous hand-written notes of praise from the president⁷³² who often gave support to Califano in policy disputes with White House staff.⁷³³ They agreed on a number of moral issues, notably abortion where Califano, as a Catholic, supported Carter who was criticised on this by his own staff.⁷³⁴ Califano was allowed to be candid with the president about his leadership.⁷³⁵ But much of the criticism of Califano about not supporting the Education bill and not cooperating with White House staff was passed on to Carter. The Georgians on Carter's staff simply did not trust him.⁷³⁶ Rafshoon could not understand why Carter and Mondale continued to trust Califano even though, Rafshoon believed, he directly lied to them both on a number of occasions.⁷³⁷ The HEW Secretary always felt under suspicion because he was part of the 'Washington Cocktail circuit' but to the president it was about being a team player. In the end Carter believed that he had become incompatible with White House staff and cabinet members and so he was eventually dismissed in July 1979.⁷³⁸ However

⁷³¹ Warshaw, 'Carter Experience with Cabinet Government', 378-9.

⁷³² Carter to Califano, 3 March 1977, SS Box 10, 30 June 1977, SS Box 28 and 27 January 1978, SS Box 60, *JCPL*.

⁷³³ Califano to Carter, 10 June 1977, SS Box 24, *JCPL*.

⁷³⁴ Califano, *Governing America*, 65-66.

⁷³⁵ Carter, *White House Diaries*, 185-88.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid*, p.308 and Carter to Califano, 3 January 1979, SS Box 102, *JCPL*.

⁷³⁷ Rafshoon Interview, *Miller Center*, 36.

⁷³⁸ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 13-14.

much of a problem Califano was perceived to be, the fact was that he remained Carter's main spokesman for major legislation for nearly three quarters of his administration suggests that the differences were exaggerated.

If there was an early example of Carter facing up to a moral challenge and 'doing the right thing,' it was on resolving America's social security funding deficit. The issue for the new administration was that the social security schemes, delivered principally through Old Age Survivors Insurance (OASI) and Disability Insurance (DI), were due to run out of funding in 1983 and 1979 respectively.⁷³⁹ In the eventual solution, brokered by the White House with Congress, both parties agreed to tax increases before the 1978 mid-term elections, a risky proposition for many congressmen. Despite this, Congress continued to seek ways to backtrack from that commitment, forcing the White House to develop a more palatable solution to this problem. This, unfortunately for Carter, caused divisions in the White House, leaving him with three competing proposals from the Economic Policy Group (EPG), Domestic Policy Group (DPG) and HEW. This problem was caused by a lack of coordination across the administration and limited presidential engagement.⁷⁴⁰ Carter has often been criticised for his inordinate attention to detail, but on this, as with other such policies, he did not have the time to study proposals in depth.⁷⁴¹ When he was asked by his staff to talk to Senator Herman Talmadge of Georgia about social security, Carter commented that whilst he had done so he did not know if he had helped as 'he knows more about it than I do'.⁷⁴² The recognition of the need to plug the gap in funding did not mean a solution could be easily found. The additional

⁷³⁹ Blumenthal to Carter, 28 April 1977, SS Box 19, *JCPL*.

⁷⁴⁰ Organisational review of EPG, undated, SS Box 23, *JCPL*.

⁷⁴¹ Eizenstat and Frank Raines to Carter, 29 April 1977, SS Box 19, *JCPL*.

⁷⁴² Moore and Eizenstat to Carter, 18 October 1977, SS Box 47, *JCPL*.

money required, Schultze estimated, was \$60-80bn over five years.⁷⁴³ The administration's proposal submitted envisaged increases in payroll tax but also substantial increases in employer contributions.⁷⁴⁴ As with other financial legislation, Senator Long was an unenthusiastic supporter of any tax increase and Carter's staff worked extremely hard either to secure his acquiescence or at least to mitigate his opposition.⁷⁴⁵ The bill was submitted in May 1977 and was passed that December. The law provided long-term funding from 1980 until 2030. It focussed on increased payments from the wealthier, lifted restrictions on what retirees could personally earn and still retain benefit and ended discrimination on the grounds of sex.

The passing of Social Security legislation on 20 December 1977 was a success for Carter but this proved difficult to sustain as pressure from Congress to reduce or remove proposed tax increases soon followed. The domestic policy team argued that part of the problem was how the tax increases were inaccurately portrayed in the press. There was debate within the administration over how Carter should respond.⁷⁴⁶ Carter publicly urged Congress to hold its nerve and not amend the law.⁷⁴⁷ The pressure remained so the administration was forced to explore alternatives to the scheduled tax increases.⁷⁴⁸ Options included alternative forms of funding and a programme of cost savings.⁷⁴⁹ Suggestions to reduce the level of benefits as an option were rejected as this was

⁷⁴³ Schultze to Carter, 2 May 1977, SS Box 19, *JCPL*.

⁷⁴⁴ Blumenthal to Carter, 28 April 1977, SS Box 19, *JCPL*.

⁷⁴⁵ Eizenstat to Carter, 12 August 1977, SS Box 36, *JCPL*.

⁷⁴⁶ Eizenstat and Raines to Carter, 21 March 1978, SS Box 68, *JCPL*.

⁷⁴⁷ Social Security Financing Legislation Letter to Congressional Leaders, 10 April 1978, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30650&st=&st1=>

⁷⁴⁸ Califano to Carter, 5 December 1978, SS Box 102 and Chris Edley to Eizenstat, 11 December 1978, Eizenstat Box 277, *JCP*.

⁷⁴⁹ Califano to Powell, 5 January 1979, Eizenstat Box 277, *JCPL*.

unlikely to pass Congress.⁷⁵⁰ The funding issue continued to be debated right up to the 1980 election with Califano's successor, Patricia Harris, asserting that the administration had to hold the line on the proposals as increases in unemployment and inflation would further deplete scheme funds.⁷⁵¹ Continued disagreement and the forthcoming 1980 election resulted in no further changes to the legislation. The passage of the Social Security bill reflected Carter's idealism but was more a demonstration of his pragmatism, delivering effective legislation across party lines. Social security had been in the past an ideological issue but in this instance all sides, whatever their ideology, recognised that the funding problem was an issue that had to be resolved. This would prove to be a very unusual occurrence and not something the administration would benefit from with their other policy initiatives. For Carter it was a question of good government but one with which he had limited personal involvement, given the pressures on his time.

Welfare services in the 1970's were delivered through a number of programmes by Federal and State organisations. These helped the poor, the unemployed, the disabled and their families. Attempts at reform in previous years, like the Nixon administration's proposals on the Family Assistance Plan (FAP), had failed because of the complexity of the legislation and an inability to gain cross party support. However, the pressure for reform had increased, driven by two major factors. Firstly, there was the spiralling cost of these programmes due mainly to increasing numbers of claimants. This was not just a Federal problem. Some of the programmes like Aid to Families with

⁷⁵⁰ Califano to Carter, 28 May 1979, SS Box 119, *JCPL*.

⁷⁵¹ Patricia Harris to Miller, Marshall, McIntyre, Eizenstat, Schultze and Kahn, 18 January 1980, DPS Rubenstein Subject Files, *JCPL*.

Dependent Children (AFDC) were supported by the states and those with large concentrations of urban poor, such as New York, were struggling financially. In California, Governor Ronald Reagan negotiated a deal with his Democratic legislature which made reforms and controlled expenditure.⁷⁵² The second incentive for change was increasing public criticism of the welfare system. Reagan and other conservative politicians were arguing that these programmes discouraged employment, were poorly run and subject to fraud. Carter was very sensitive to this. Papers in the Carter White House at the time included a *US News and World* report headlined 'The Great National Rip Off – How People Cheat and Steal \$25,000,000,000 a year from the Government.'⁷⁵³ Not all welfare programmes were criticised in this way, but the national mood was stronger than any counter pressure from liberals to improve benefits.

Carter's attitude to welfare had always been sympathetic; his background in rural Georgia meant that he understood what it was like to be poor.⁷⁵⁴ But his approach to reform was as much conservative as liberal. In introducing his plans for welfare to the nation on 2 February 1977, he balanced the benefits of reform between savings for the tax payer and help for those who 'genuinely' needed it.⁷⁵⁵ Carter's insistence on a zero cost solution was in line with his conservative fiscal outlook but advisors like Schultze and Califano never believed reform could be implemented without at least some initial additional funding.⁷⁵⁶ Carter was also conscious of conservative criticism of waste and

⁷⁵² Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan. His Rise to Power* (New York: BBS Public Affairs, 2003), 349-353.

⁷⁵³ Rafshoon to Carter, 22 September 1978, SS Box 93, *JCPL*.

⁷⁵⁴ James T Paterson, 'Jimmy Carter and Welfare Reform' in Fink and Graham, p.117.

⁷⁵⁵ Report to the American People, 2 February 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7455&st=&st1=>

⁷⁵⁶ Laurence E Lynn, and David de F Whitman, *The President as Policy Maker: Jimmy Carter and Welfare Reform* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 202-3.

fraud and constantly sought answers on this from Califano.⁷⁵⁷ All of this caused concern among his liberal supporters with Congressman Charles Rangel quoted as saying that 'the poor are not a priority in this administration.'⁷⁵⁸

Welfare reform was a more administratively complex problem to solve than energy policy. Yet there were similarities in how Carter approached each problem. In both cases he opted for a comprehensive solution and he committed publicly to a fixed deadline; in welfare's case - 90 days. He encouraged his staff to focus on technical rather than political issues and he communicated no overarching theme to guide them. Equally, in both cases, there were powerful groups inside and outside Congress who opposed his plans. However, there were some differences between each policy area. The first was that the wide range of welfare programmes and the requirement to create job programmes meant several government departments became engaged in policy development. The two major departments affected were HEW and Labor but also involved were the departments of Agriculture and Commerce as well as White House staff groups like EPG, DPG and OMB. As a result, the consulting group established to help coordinate this policy had 30 members.⁷⁵⁹ Given the nature of the task and the number of interests involved, disputes were inevitable, especially between the two major players HEW and Labor. Unfortunately, during the first five months of the administration, there was no organisational mechanism to manage such disputes. The energy policy was developed within a tight group and detailed proposals were not seen outside until much later. Also, any policy issues could be resolved by Carter as he was

⁷⁵⁷ Carter to Califano, 21 March 1977, SS Box 11 and Carter to Califano, 15 October 1977, Eizenstat Box 318, *JCPL*.

⁷⁵⁸ Lynn and Whitman, *Carter and Welfare Reform*, 140.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 53.

heavily involved in the detailed discussions. This was not possible to achieve with welfare reform due to its complexity and, unlike energy, issues arising from earlier outside consultation which was encouraged by Carter.⁷⁶⁰ He tried to resolve the bureaucratic infighting by using Schultze to adjudicate, albeit without success.⁷⁶¹ Finally, a major difference with energy was Carter's own involvement. As discussed earlier, from the start he immersed himself in the detail of energy policy, but with welfare he stepped back and left responsibility to Califano and his team.⁷⁶² This was partly an indication of the importance attached to energy but also a response to his heavy workload early in his administration. Hence, he was only able to give broad direction to Califano which was to cause, at least initially, some confusion in critical areas of policy.⁷⁶³

Carter imposed two specific restrictions on welfare reform that severely hampered policy development. He established an arbitrary deadline of 1 May 1977 to bring forward proposals and specified that any plan would be at zero additional cost. Califano, whilst not challenging the deadline, wanted a further 60 days for 'consideration of programme and budgetary alternatives and political feasibility.'⁷⁶⁴ Carter agreed to wide consultation but would not move the date. Califano also could not envisage any comprehensive reform without incurring cost, at least initially.⁷⁶⁵ The issue of zero cost continued to be a source of friction between Carter and not just Califano but other members of his administration.⁷⁶⁶ For example, Califano was shocked when he

⁷⁶⁰ Califano to Carter, 9 February 1977, SS Box 7, *JCPL*.

⁷⁶¹ Schultze Interview, *Miller Center*, 62.

⁷⁶² Jordan to Carter, Undated/late April 1977, C of S Box 37, *JCPL*.

⁷⁶³ Paterson, *Carter and Welfare reform*, 125.

⁷⁶⁴ Califano to Carter, 5 January 1977, SS Box 1, *JCPL*.

⁷⁶⁵ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 55-60.

⁷⁶⁶ Lynn and Whitman, *Carter and Welfare Reform*, 157.

presented options that required additional funds to ensure that more claimants gained from the reform than lost, that Carter rejected those proposals.⁷⁶⁷ The principles of welfare reform were agreed by Carter on 12 April 1977. This included simplifying administration, redirection of CETA (Community and Employment Training Act) training to the poorest, a freeze on the state supplement for AFDC and the provision of universal minimum benefit. The principle was also established that non-working families would not have higher benefit than working families, and incentives would be provided for recipients to work and keep families together.⁷⁶⁸ There were major disagreements between Labor and HEW over how the job creation programme would integrate with the structure of HEW benefits. These issues were not finally resolved until 20 May 1977, after Carter's self-imposed deadline.⁷⁶⁹ There was also scepticism over whether Labor could deliver the promised number of up to 1.4m new jobs and so it was decided that no jobs target would be discussed at Carter's initial press briefing.⁷⁷⁰

This was not the only issue that required resolution in May. The HEW proposal to fund claimants through negative income tax was administratively simple but ran the risk of being seen by Congress and the public as providing cash handouts and therefore being a disincentive to work.⁷⁷¹ There was also recognition that not all welfare programmes could be covered initially so the plan focussed on AFDC, Supplementary Security Income (SSI) and Food Stamp programmes. However, as late as 29 April 1977, Califano was expressing concern over the negative reaction from Congress to the White

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid, 99-102.

⁷⁶⁸ Califano to Carter, 12 April 1977, SS Box 17, *JCPL*.

⁷⁶⁹ Eizenstat, Schultze and Lance to Carter, 20 May 1977, SS Box 22, *JCPL*.

⁷⁷⁰ Welfare Reform Remarks at a News Briefing on Goals and Guidelines, 2 May 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7434&st=&st1=>

⁷⁷¹ Eizenstat, Carp, Bill Spring and Raines to Carter, 26 April 1977, SS Box 18, *JCPL*.

House's Food Stamp proposals and suggesting delaying their implementation.⁷⁷² As the issues were debated in the run up to Carter's announcement, domestic policy staff were still recommending an alternative phased approach⁷⁷³ and the OMB expressed concerns about the accuracy of HEW's costing for the programme.⁷⁷⁴ The White House therefore started discussions with Congress with many issues unresolved and increasing concern that important legislators would be in active opposition.⁷⁷⁵

Carter's announcement of his proposals emphasised his commitment to reform but confirmed to Congress that his first priorities were the Energy bill, Tax Reform and Social Security.⁷⁷⁶ Califano was concerned about the timing because he feared that the cost of Carter's Tax Reform bill would eat into funding for welfare and, later, health reform.⁷⁷⁷ Whilst there was little controversy over HEW's welfare principles, the *LA Times* called them about as controversial as the Boy Scout oath,⁷⁷⁸ there were major objections from across the political spectrum of the detailed proposals. Liberals argued that the benefits were too low and 38 states, mainly in the north, would have to supplement payments. They also argued that not enough jobs or training were being offered and the payment of minimum wages would undercut the employment market. Conservatives, on the other hand, opposed the reform because they believed that the guaranteed income plan discouraged work, the jobs programme was too expensive, and

⁷⁷² Califano to Carter, 29 April 1977, SS Box 19, JCPL.

⁷⁷³ Eizenstat, Carp, Spring and Raines to Carter, 26 April 1977, SS Box 18, JCPL.

⁷⁷⁴ Lynn and Whitman, *Carter and Welfare Reform*, 207-8.

⁷⁷⁵ Watson and Jim Parnham to Carter, 23 May 1977, SS Box 22, and Eizenstat to Carter, 25 May 1977, SS Box 22, JCPL.

⁷⁷⁶ Welfare Reform Remarks at a News Briefing on Goals and Guidelines, 2 May 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7434&st=&st1=>

⁷⁷⁷ Califano to Carter, 13 June 1977, SS Box 24, JCPL.

⁷⁷⁸ Lynn and Whitman, *Carter and Welfare Reform*, 136-37.

the proposals would increase welfare rolls.⁷⁷⁹ In addition individual congressmen and lobby groups had specific concerns. AFL-CIO favoured a permanent government job creation programme.⁷⁸⁰ Several legislators like Al Ullman, Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, recommended a phased implementation which Carter rejected. The zero-cost option had resulted in more welfare recipients being worse off than better. Califano, as late as 25 July 1977, was requesting additional funds from Carter to address this.⁷⁸¹ At the same time the president received a memorandum from Lance suggesting that even without additional funds, HEW's 'zero cost' budget was \$3.3bn in deficit.⁷⁸² The political analysis from his domestic policy team was, if anything, more pessimistic. They told Carter that the programme would be attacked by both wings of the Democratic Party and that Long and Ullman, as committee chairmen in the Senate and House respectively, wanted more conservative options presented. They further suggested that there were three constituencies for welfare reform: one that sought savings for the tax payer; one, increased benefits, and the states that sought fiscal relief for their own benefits bill. The DPG analysis of these groups was that the latest proposals did not bring any reduction in the size of the welfare bill and the modest fiscal relief was only provided by making 6.5 million AFDC recipients worse off by an average of \$400 annually. Suggested changes to the proposals were rejected by Carter as unlikely to

⁷⁷⁹ Paterson, *Carter and Welfare Reform*, 128-30.

⁷⁸⁰ Lynn and Whitman, *Carter and Welfare Reform*, 40.

⁷⁸¹ Califano to Carter, 25 July 1977, SS Box 33, *JCPL*.

⁷⁸² Lance to Carter, 25 July 1977, SS Box 34, *JCPL*.

receive Long's support.⁷⁸³ Despite these major reservations, some amendments were agreed, and the legislation was formally submitted to Congress on 6 August 1977.⁷⁸⁴

In the ensuing legislative battle, the White House failed to get its proposals out of committee onto the floor of the House. Ullman, whose concerns were well known, in the end proposed his own version of the bill which also failed to pass his committee. In addition general concerns over the cost of the legislation caused Congress to seek an independent review of HEW's budget which found flaws in its cost assumptions.⁷⁸⁵ Administration efforts continued to push for legislation with Speaker O'Neill's support,⁷⁸⁶ but by the end of 1977 welfare had ceased to be a priority and was not mentioned in the following January's State of the Union Address.⁷⁸⁷ Whilst Carter had by no means given up on welfare reform, his personal involvement declined after 1977. The initiative for reform passed to Califano and Congress. Ullman, Long, Moynihan, James Corman and other legislators introduced bills at various stages during 1978 and 1979, each representing a different approach to reform. Califano initiated a further attempt at legislation in March 1978.⁷⁸⁸ This did not receive enthusiastic support from the White House with Eizenstat expressing scepticism over its chances of passage but he nevertheless recommended Carter's support, claiming it would prevent him from being accused of giving up on a campaign commitment.⁷⁸⁹ This still did not get full backing from White House staff with McIntyre at the OMB not only continuing to oppose

⁷⁸³ Eizenstat, Carp, Raines and Spring to Carter, 27 July 1977, SS Box 34, *JCPL*.

⁷⁸⁴ Welfare Reform Message to Congress, 6 August 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7942&st=&st1=>

⁷⁸⁵ Lynn and Whitman, *Carter and Welfare Reform*, 232-35.

⁷⁸⁶ Califano to Carter, 30 November 1977, SS Box 53, *JCPL*.

⁷⁸⁷ Lynn and Whitman, *Carter and Welfare Reform*, 238.

⁷⁸⁸ Califano to Carter, 9 March 1978, SS Box 66 *JCPL*.

⁷⁸⁹ Eizenstat to Carter, 23 May 1978, SS Box 77, *JCPL*.

such legislation but unusually submitting OMB's own counter proposals.⁷⁹⁰ Carter supported the Califano initiative and a later incremental and more limited proposal in early 1979,⁷⁹¹ but both failed at the committee stage after facing criticism from conservatives and liberals. White House staff continued discussions with Congress up until March 1980 before Carter cancelled the last attempt at reform due to budgetary pressures.⁷⁹²

Laurence E Lynn and David de F Whitman, in their book *The President as Policy Maker: Jimmy Carter and Welfare Reform*, argued that the failure of Carter's welfare reform was a result of poor management and ineffective communication.⁷⁹³ The policy development process without Carter's direct and detailed involvement had no mechanism to bring together the different views in his administration or evaluate the political consequences. This role would be taken in future by Eizenstat and his team, but this function was not in place during the first part of 1977. Consequently, no consensus was reached on legislation submitted in August 1977. The focus placed on policy development resulted in no thought being given as to how reform was to be supported to enable legislation to pass Congress. As a result, the legislation produced was so complicated that it would prove impossible to pass even in the House. There were issues outside the administration's control which would hamper any efforts at reform, not the least the hostile attitude of the public to taxation and to the payment of benefits to the 'undeserving poor'. Sensing this trend, Carter continued to seek a wide-ranging solution

⁷⁹⁰ McIntyre to Carter, 9 June 1978, SS Box 82, *JCPL*.

⁷⁹¹ Eizenstat, McIntyre, Schultze, Bob Bergland, Califano and Marshall to Carter, 23 December 1978, SS Box 101, *JCP.L*

⁷⁹² Jim Mongan and Florence Prioleau to Eizenstat, 17 March 1980, Human Resources Prioleau Box 21, *JCPL*.

⁷⁹³ Lynn and Whitman, *Carter and Welfare Reform*, 255-79.

but at zero cost. But his commitment to deliver jobs, a campaign promise to extend coverage and his promise not to consolidate programmes, all at zero cost, could be delivered only by making many of the current beneficiaries worse off.⁷⁹⁴ To liberals in his administration, including those in HEW, his apparent willingness to accept this was incomprehensible. It was a continuing source of tension between Carter and Califano, who still went back to him with additional options to improve the terms. To those intimately involved in the crafting of the reforms, what Carter was asking of them was impossible and to those in HEW it just confirmed Carter's natural conservatism. However, Carter may well have not seen this as an ideological issue but a question of delivering what he viewed as a practical solution given the circumstances. He was already facing defeat at the hands of conservative Democrats on tax reform and his energy policy. He feared the same with any measure that was not fiscally conservative, whatever his personal views. Equally he was not likely to be convinced by technical arguments in favour of more generous benefits because he lacked the detailed knowledge that he had in other policy areas like energy.

Although Carter was not as engaged in welfare reform as he was, for example, in energy policy, that did not necessarily mean his personal involvement would have changed the outcome for his legislative proposals. Nixon's welfare policy initiative, Family Assistance Programme (FAP), failed in 1970 and again in 1972 despite active support from a president about to win a landslide election victory. Carter took on a highly complicated policy issue. He was unable to manage his administration in a way that delivered legislation that could pass Congress. It would be misleading, however, to

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid, 268-71.

imagine that a fully engaged president supported by a united, well organised administration could have been more successful. Carter was sufficiently attuned to the public mood to understand that any increase in spending and government bureaucracy would meet strong resistance in Congress. It would be difficult to envisage that any government could have created legislation that would satisfy both liberal and conservative viewpoints. The outcome for the president was conclusive: a major plank of Carter's campaign in 1976, welfare reform, had failed to gain congressional approval.

Whilst Carter can be criticised for his inability to prioritise and plan his legislative programme, the administration's approach on health policy was more measured. The decision to concentrate on controlling hospital costs, made in January 1977, was supporting economic policy and as a necessary first step in achieving in 1978 the liberal 'holy grail' of comprehensive National Health Insurance (NHI).⁷⁹⁵ The White House recognised that controlling spiralling health costs, projected to rise to \$200 billion by 1979,⁷⁹⁶ would align with Carter's anti-inflation policy. This message would be used by the administration as the main argument in selling the legislation after 1977. Carter believed that the case for mandatory cost controls was overwhelming and would receive support inside and outside Congress. Yet there were major obstacles to overcome if his proposals were to become law. His bill needed to pass four health sub committees and five full committees, as well as the floor of both Houses.⁷⁹⁷ This process would take time which helped medical interest groups like the American Medical Association (AMA) and American Hospital Association (AHA) to develop their opposition. These groups proved

⁷⁹⁵ 24 January 1977, SS Box 4, JCPL.

⁷⁹⁶ General briefing on HCC, Date unknown, Eizenstat Box 217, JCPL.

⁷⁹⁷ Peterson, *Legislating Together*, 20.

to be highly effective at influencing members of congress. The White House's improved capability to mount outreach campaigns in support of legislation, in place by 1978, was unable to work effectively on Hospital Cost Containment (HCC). Anne Wexler, responsible for outreach, argued that this was because opposition to the bill was well entrenched and that the public were not directly affected by its benefits as personal medical costs were incurred by insurers not the individual.⁷⁹⁸

The legislative strategy followed by the White House was to work with Herman Talmadge who chaired the Senate Health Sub-committee.⁷⁹⁹ By April 1977 Califano was already reporting on the depth of the opposition from the AHA. He informed Carter that hospitals employed one in thirty of all US workers and that pressure against the bill would be applied to congressmen even before proposals were published. He concluded that, 'In short the hospital cost containment legislation will not be enacted unless the Administration is willing to expend significant political energy.'⁸⁰⁰ Carter launched the Hospital Cost Containment bill on 25 April 1977⁸⁰¹ and continued to work with Congress for the next 18 months. The bill that eventually passed the Senate, based on the Nelson amendment, was a compromise in which voluntary cost controls were to be initially trialled and, if unsuccessful, would be replaced by mandatory rules. This success was due to effective congressional lobbying and the willingness of Carter to compromise, not something that was regularly achieved elsewhere in his legislative programme. The bill still had to pass the House. Carter's continued commitment to HCC was confirmed in his

⁷⁹⁸ Wexler Interview, *Miller Center*, 48.

⁷⁹⁹ Eizenstat to Carter, 11 February 1977, SS Box 9, *JCPL*.

⁸⁰⁰ Califano to Carter, 20 April 1977, SS Box 17, *JCPL*.

⁸⁰¹ Healthcare Legislation Message to the Congress, 25 April 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7401&st=&st1=>

1979 State of the Union address: 'There will be no clearer test of the commitment of this Congress to the anti-inflation fight than the legislation that I will submit again this year to hold down inflation in hospital care.'⁸⁰² He followed this up by establishing a legislative task force to support passage of the bill.⁸⁰³ In his announcement of legislation in March 1979 he argued that, 'The American people want me, and they want other elected representatives, to take action, action that is strong, prompt and effective.'⁸⁰⁴ For the remainder of the year, the White House worked hard for the bill to pass the House and Carter was involved in personal lobbying and made speeches.⁸⁰⁵ Despite this intense effort, the bill was rejected by House members. Carter's staff continued to argue that HCC was still worth pursuing and that projected savings alone were worth \$1.1bn in the 1981 budget.⁸⁰⁶ However, no further attempts were made with Congress even though there remained a bill in the Senate. A proposal was made to use Carter's executive powers to control hospital spending, but this was abandoned on legal advice.⁸⁰⁷ For the remainder of the administration hospital costs were managed as part of Carter's overall anti-inflation policy which focussed on monitoring and voluntary cost restraint.

Carter saw the battle over HCC as one between his administration and the medical lobby. He believed that his loss was down to the AMA's huge financial

⁸⁰² State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress, 23 January 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32657&st=&st1=>

⁸⁰³ Jordan and Moore to Carter, 23 January 1979, SS Box 104, *JCPL*.

⁸⁰⁴ Hospital Cost Containment Remarks Announcing Proposed Legislation, 6 March 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32001&st=&st1=>

⁸⁰⁵ Preparation for meeting with Carter, 22 October 1979, Alonzo McDonald Box 12, *JCPL*.

⁸⁰⁶ Harris, McIntyre, Eizenstat, Kahn and Frank Press to Carter, 21 December 1979, SS Box 150, *JCPL*.

⁸⁰⁷ Eizenstat to Carter, 13 February 1980, SS Box 150, *JCPL*.

contributions to three or four Illinois congressmen.⁸⁰⁸ This is perhaps an oversimplification but unlike some other policies submitted by Carter, HCC did have more proponents in Congress and the White House made fewer mistakes in managing that support for the bill. Effective compromises and alliances were built in the Senate, particularly with liberals. Ted Kennedy's support was achieved by the promise of future cooperation on NHI. However, the AMA and AHA proved more effective in the House in equating mandatory controls with increased government involvement, a keystone issue for the public. The power of these medical interest groups would be critical when Carter sought to bring in broader healthcare reform.

Carter did not personally focus on healthcare policy until November 1977;⁸⁰⁹ but his commitment to reform had been established nineteen months earlier. His speech on national health policy to the SNMA in Washington DC was passionate and specific. He talked about Medicaid being 'a national scandal' and criticised the bureaucracy of programmes that were spread over fifteen departments and were ripe for reorganisation. He pledged reform, stating, 'Coverage must be universal and mandatory. Every citizen must be entitled to the same level of comprehensive benefits.'⁸¹⁰ What gave this speech added importance was that its content had been negotiated with the unions by Eizenstat, at the time a key advisor in Carter's campaign team. The outlined policy was very close to union proposals on health and fell just short of the Kennedy-Corman Health Security bill drafted in 1975. This bill, with its 'cradle to grave' entitlements, was at the time stalled in Congress.⁸¹¹ This speech would frame the

⁸⁰⁸ Carter Interview, *Miller Center*, 228-29.

⁸⁰⁹ Califano, *Governing America*, 98.

⁸¹⁰ Speech to SNMA, 16 April 1976, DPS Mongan and Onek Box 48, *JCPL*.

⁸¹¹ Califano, *Governing America*, 88.

expectations of the unions, congressional liberals and their standard bearer on health policy, Senator Kennedy.

Although politically damaged by his involvement in the death of one of Bobby Kennedy's female staff at Chappaquiddick in 1969, Kennedy remained a powerful figure in the Senate and the Democratic Party. He was regarded as the champion for universal health care and used his chairmanship of the Human Resources sub-committee as a platform for health reform. There would be questions from the Carter White House about the motivation for his actions on this legislation but Kennedy's commitment to health reform was both genuine and longstanding. He first submitted proposals in 1973 and saw health reform as a moral issue, like civil rights, not something that could wait until the economy could afford it.⁸¹² He was to remain influential on this issue right up until his death in 2009, being one of the sponsors of the Affordable Care Act of 2010. To the Carter White House, he was major player in Congress with a good voting record in support of the administration, but he was not the most important Senator on this issue; those were the Chairs of Finance and the Health sub-committees, Senators Long and Talmadge. Outside Congress Kennedy had developed a close relationship with the unions, particularly Doug Fraser of the United Automobile Workers (UAW), who were strong supporters of Carter and universal healthcare. Consequently, the White House worked very hard to keep Kennedy involved in the policy development process, often using Peter Bourne, Special Assistant to the President on health issues, as an additional channel of communication.

⁸¹² Stanley, *Kennedy vs Carter*, 52.

Health policy was developed in a similar way to welfare reform and HCC. Carter devolved responsibility to Califano and did not involve himself in the detail. However, he did not impose a rigid deadline as was done with welfare nor did he exclude other policy makers from the process as he had done with his energy plan. This was in contrast with his Democratic successor, Bill Clinton, who in 1993 imposed secrecy and time restraints on the development of his ultimately unsuccessful Health Reform bill. The White House had to manage conflicting views in Congress and an overcrowded legislative schedule to make progress on any proposals. Finally, like welfare and HCC, the administration faced strong and effective opposition from interest groups. Carter found himself caught between, on the one hand, his natural compassion and a campaign commitment and, on the other, his concern for fiscal restraint. His economic advisors, especially the OMB, applied consistent pressure to restrict the scope of any HEW proposals on the grounds of cost.

The planning of health reform was discussed by his staff throughout 1977. Carter was under pressure from his economic advisors to postpone proposals indefinitely but he was anxious to maintain union support and so wanted to proceed.⁸¹³ Peter Bourne, his assistant on health policy, continued to feedback Kennedy's concerns, stating that Kennedy had hinted that lack of action from Califano could prompt him to go public with his criticism.⁸¹⁴ Jordan, in response, defended Califano and the White House strategy but also expressed concern about promoting Kennedy over other congressmen like Rostenkowski, Long and Talmadge who were in his view equally, if not more, important

⁸¹³ Califano, *Governing America*, 99-103.

⁸¹⁴ Bourne to Jordan, 20 June 1977 and Bourne to Jordan and Eizenstat, 1 August 1977 Eizenstat Box 240, *JCPL*.

to the success of any health legislation.⁸¹⁵ It was agreed that a White House decision on the draft proposals would be made by 15 December 1977 with legislation to be sent to Congress in April 1978.⁸¹⁶

It quickly became evident that whilst HEW were developing a comprehensive scheme broadly in line with the Kennedy-Corman bill and Carter's health policy speech of April 1976, there were major obstacles to passing such legislation. Califano believed that consultation on reform would take several congressional sessions and not enough time was being allowed for this.⁸¹⁷ In a briefing from his domestic policy team for a meeting with Kennedy, Carter was told that there was wide disagreement amongst his advisors and in Congress. His economic team continued to express concern about the cost of reform. Many in Congress were opposed to significant Federal involvement in the scheme as part of general antipathy to big government initiatives. This coupled with a restricted congressional timetable indicated that the chances of passage of a reform bill were limited and it would be better to wait until after the mid-term elections in 1978. Bourne, a liberal on health policy, presented a more positive picture on progress. He argued that HEW's policy was mainly settled and that any delay had been due to the need to 'educate' Califano. He believed the impact of the 1978 mid-term elections would be marginal and that so far Kennedy had been very restrained in not criticising the administration.⁸¹⁸ But Bourne's view within the administration was a minority one. At the same time, Fraser, as leader of the UAW, was querying why Carter would not just support the Kennedy-Corman bill as its content broadly aligned with Carter's SNMA

⁸¹⁵ Jordan to Bourne, 8 July 1977, Eizenstat Box 240, *JCPL*.

⁸¹⁶ Onek and Bob Havelly to Eizenstat, 8 September 1977, Eizenstat Box 240, *JCPL*.

⁸¹⁷ Califano to Carter, 3 November 1977, Eizenstat Box 240, *JCPL*.

⁸¹⁸ Bourne to Carter, 12 December 1977, SS Box 53, *JCPL*.

speech.⁸¹⁹ Despite his staff's reservations, Carter decided that he would present legislation in 1978, accepting only the necessity to delay its introduction until July of that year.⁸²⁰ There was, however, no specific commitment on the sort of policy that would be presented. Although Carter vehemently denied this, the unions continued to believe that he was committed to draft legislation on the lines of the Kennedy-Corman bill.⁸²¹

Throughout 1978, Carter was under pressure from many of his advisors to postpone the National Health Insurance (NHI) proposals until after the mid-term election. Califano believed much more time was required to gain support whilst Carter's economic advisors objected to the cost of a comprehensive scheme.⁸²² In a series of meetings with the unions, UAW and AFL-CIO, Carter and his staff attempted to persuade them to change key elements of their proposals. Carter was worried about their scheme being federally funded with no patient contribution, as this would drive up the cost and reinforce congressional opposition to government involvement.⁸²³ In March 1978 Kennedy and the unions came up with what they believed was a compromise. This accepted in principle that healthcare could be administered by the private sector, but their proposals were still largely based on the Kennedy-Corman bill with comprehensive benefits and universal coverage. The revised proposal was viewed by Carter's advisors as too costly both politically and economically. Joseph Onek from Carter's domestic policy team warned that most unions provided good health cover, so could take a tough line without risk to their membership. In addition, although NHI was a popular measure

⁸¹⁹ Eizenstat, Onek and Havelly to Carter, 20 December 1977, SS Box 56, *JCPL*.

⁸²⁰ Butler to Jordan and Eizenstat, 12 January 1978, Eizenstat Box 241, *JCPL*.

⁸²¹ Califano, *Governing America*, 100.

⁸²² Eizenstat to Carter, March 1978, Eizenstat Box 241, *JCPL*.

⁸²³ Eizenstat to Carter, 8 February 1978, SS Box 62, *JCPL*.

with the public, many people already had the cover it provided, so there was no direct benefit to them in the legislation. Without this personal stake many would oppose NHI if it was seen as too expensive.⁸²⁴ Discussions with Kennedy and the unions throughout April failed to reduce the cost of their proposal because the White House could not get agreement on reduced coverage, limited patient contribution and more effective cost control.⁸²⁵ By mid-May consultations had been extended to include key members of congress, only to find more conflicting opinions. Califano found in his round robin congressional discussions that Ullman opposed the Kennedy-Corman proposals in principle and did not want any NHI bill as it contradicted anti-inflation policy. Senators Long, Talmadge and Ribicoff only favoured their own limited health bill which federalised Medicaid and provided cover for catastrophic injury. All congressional leaders opposed sending forward a bill in 1978, whilst Long went so far as to say that his bill would be the only one to pass his Finance Committee. Only Kennedy and Corman favoured putting a comprehensive NHI bill forward but even Corman had raised objections about the proposal by the unions to use private insurers.⁸²⁶

Despite these difficulties Carter wanted to honour his campaign commitment and in this he was supported by Califano. The HEW secretary opposed Carter's economic advisors who were arguing on cost grounds for a phased scheme as the only realistic option that had support in Congress. Califano maintained that the phased option would fail, Carter could not continue to 'string Kennedy along', and that it would be better to fulfil his campaign promise by submitting a comprehensive scheme even if it eventually

⁸²⁴ Onek to Eizenstat and Butler, 13 March 1978, Eizenstat Box 241, *JCPL*.

⁸²⁵ Eizenstat briefing for meeting with Kennedy and Labour, 6 April 1978, SS Box 69, *JCPL*.

⁸²⁶ Califano to Carter, 15 May 1978, Eizenstat Box 241, *JCPL*.

failed.⁸²⁷ Eizenstat in principle supported Califano but wanted to delay submitting a bill until after the mid-term elections. He did acknowledge the validity of the concerns over cost articulated by the CEA, Treasury, Commerce and OMB.⁸²⁸ These disagreements hindered Carter's commitment to Kennedy and labour to publish his proposals by July 1978. Carter's economic advisors delayed attempts to finalise the administration's NHI principles by refusing to sign them off. They submitted their own version of NHI based on affordability that would be implemented in phases over future years.⁸²⁹ Carter met Kennedy in June 1978 and warned him that while he still supported a comprehensive scheme, all of his economic advisors opposed this and wanted a phased solution.⁸³⁰ The agreed compromise on the principles between liberal and conservatives in the administration left undecided the issue of how the scheme was to be implemented. Whilst it set out a path to comprehensive insurance, the financial triggers required in the proposal made the long-term goals problematic for Kennedy.⁸³¹ In the final meeting Carter was unable to convince Kennedy or the unions that a phased approach would guarantee comprehensive legislation and Kennedy therefore withdrew his active support.⁸³²

The initial response from the National Insurance Association of America to Carter's plan was positive: they characterised it as a 'good start'.⁸³³ But there were divisions both inside and outside the White House. There were three proposals before

⁸²⁷ Califano to Carter, 30 May 1978, SS Box 78, *JCPL*.

⁸²⁸ Eizenstat to Carter, 31 May 1978, SS Box 78, *JCPL*.

⁸²⁹ Schultze and McIntyre to Carter, 14 June 1978, SS Box 81, *JCPL*.

⁸³⁰ Briefing Eizenstat and Onek to Carter, 21 June 1978, DPS Mongan and Onek Box 49, *JCPL*.

⁸³¹ Eizenstat and Onek to Carter, undated, Eizenstat Box 242, *JCPL*.

⁸³² Eizenstat and Onek to Carter, 27 July 1978, SS Box 86, *JCPL*.

⁸³³ Press release, 28 July 1978, DPS Mongan and Onek Box 50, *JCPL*.

Congress. A Senate bill sponsored by Long, Talmadge and Ribicoff, which provided cover against catastrophic illness and federalised Medicaid, would cost \$13bn. The Kennedy–union comprehensive plan would cost \$59bn. Finally, the cost of the Carter plan, which was phase one of a comprehensive solution, was initially estimated at \$25bn.⁸³⁴ In addition there were continued disagreements within the White House over legislative tactics. Mondale favoured, in August 1978, going for a quick deal on the Long bill as he viewed this as the most realistic option. This was rejected at the time because of reservations about the limited scope of Long’s proposals as well as an underlying concern about whether Long could be trusted.⁸³⁵ There were also disagreements with Califano who believed that a phase one bill would not pass, and the Long plan was fundamentally wrong. He therefore wanted HEW to demonstrate the administration’s long-term commitment by presenting a comprehensive plan.⁸³⁶ Eizenstat led the opposition to this, arguing that in the increasingly conservative climate, the mere highlighting of the expensive comprehensive plan would damage any chances that Carter’s bill had of passing Congress. This dispute between DPG and HEW was eventually resolved in February 1979 with limited involvement by the president in the discussions.⁸³⁷ To have any chance of success in 1979, the administration had to move quickly and gain the support of the liberals in Congress. Meetings were organised with Kennedy and the unions in February 1979. The proposal was to gain support for phase one in return for an agreement on the content of the final comprehensive scheme. Eizenstat recognised that this would be difficult to achieve but believed that Kennedy

⁸³⁴ No date, Eizenstat Box 242, *JCPL*.

⁸³⁵ Richard Moe to Mondale, 14 August 1978 and Eizenstat to Mondale, 22/8/78, Eizenstat Box 242, *JCPL*.

⁸³⁶ Onek to Eizenstat, 27 November 1978, Eizenstat Box 241, *JCPL*.

⁸³⁷ Eizenstat, McIntyre and Schultze to Carter, 17 January 1979, SS Box 103, *JCPL*.

would make concessions.⁸³⁸ Carter, however, was unable to persuade either Kennedy or the unions to accept a phase one approach and/or that his proposal was more generous than the Long bill. The liberals remained wedded to a comprehensive policy.

The administration continued to try and pass a bill that met the requirements of both wings of the party - a tough task made even more difficult by objections from Carter's economic advisors about the cost of even the phase one element of his plan. McIntyre of the OMB wrote to Carter wanting a meeting to discuss a cheaper OMB alternative whilst Schultze also raised concerns.⁸³⁹ There was intense debate during May 1979 that focussed on a plan to provide increased help for the poor whilst controlling costs. The objective was to occupy the centre ground and force conservatives like Long to support Carter or form an alliance with the medical lobby to vote down the bill.⁸⁴⁰ As for the liberal supporters, by June 1979 differences between Carter and Kennedy and the unions had become unbridgeable. Financially the gap between the White House and the Kennedy plans was nearly \$40bn, which Carter deemed as simply unaffordable.⁸⁴¹ A new proposal had been shaped by compromises reached within the White House and with Congress.⁸⁴² White House staff managed to form a coalition of potential supporters across the party to be present at Carter's public announcement of the proposed legislation on 12 June 1979. The inclusion of James Corman, co-sponsor of the Kennedy-Corman Health Security bill, was a major coup due to compromises Carter

⁸³⁸ Eizenstat to Carter, 22 February 1979, SS Box 108, *JCPL*

⁸³⁹ McIntyre to Carter, 15 May 1979, Eizenstat Box 241 and Schultze to Carter, 16 May 1979, SS Box 117, *JCPL*.

⁸⁴⁰ Eizenstat and Onek to Carter, 16 May 1979, SS Box 117, *JCPL*.

⁸⁴¹ Differences between Kennedy and Carter Healthcare plans, Undated, DPS Rubenstein Subject Files Box 59, *JCPL*.

⁸⁴² Eizenstat and Moe to Carter, 23 May 1979, Eizenstat Box 241, *JCPL*.

felt able to make.⁸⁴³ Whilst Carter was prepared to see congressmen Long, Rangel and Ullman prior to the announcement, he left the unions to Mondale. He also rejected the opportunity to make a full speech endorsing his proposals, opting instead for a short statement.⁸⁴⁴ The press conference merely highlighted the differences with Congress, with a less than enthusiastic endorsement from Long.⁸⁴⁵ This was followed by a statement released by Kennedy which, whilst emphasising that he would continue to work with Carter, criticised his plan as fundamentally unfair and ineffective in reducing costs.⁸⁴⁶ When Kennedy launched his presidential bid in November 1979, NHI became a political issue but even before then his public criticism ensured that Carter's bill would be attacked by liberals as well as conservatives in Congress. In addition, attempts by the White House to get any health bill passed by the Senate Finance Committee were delayed by other administrative priorities on the Windfall Profits Tax and Hospital Cost Containment.⁸⁴⁷ The conservative political climate and approaching 1980 election, as well as the existence of three different congressional proposals on health, made a successful outcome very unlikely. The most positive conclusion that the White House could present going into the 1980 election was that they had submitted a bill and the intention remained to pass NHI legislation should Carter be re-elected.

The creation of a comprehensive national health scheme was an article of faith for the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and the union movement. Following his speech to the SNMA, they believed that they had a president who was committed to

⁸⁴³ Califano to Carter, 6 June 1979, Eizenstat Box 241, *JCPL*.

⁸⁴⁴ Eizenstat to Carter, 29 May 1979, Eizenstat Box 241, *JCPL*.

⁸⁴⁵ National Health Plan Remarks Announcing Proposed Legislation, 12 June 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32465&st=&st1=>

⁸⁴⁶ Kennedy press release, 12 June 1979, Eizenstat Box 243, *JCPL*.

⁸⁴⁷ Eizenstat to Carter, Undated, Eizenstat Box 243, *JCPL*.

pass such legislation. Whilst Carter accepted the need for a comprehensive health scheme, unlike his Democratic successors, Presidents Clinton and Barack H Obama, he did not make this his number one reform priority. In contrast to Clinton, he chose to prioritise welfare policy over health and was prepared to compromise over the final legislation. But both presidents found that critics characterised their legislative proposals as imposing ‘big government’, a damaging message when both he and Clinton had been elected to change the way the government operated.⁸⁴⁸ Carter did not immerse himself in health policy and he was, therefore, more dependent on his advisors. Unfortunately, health insurance became an issue that split the Democratic Party and caused fundamental disagreements amongst White House staff. The coordinating role of Eizenstat’s domestic policy team was on more than one occasion bypassed by McIntyre’s OMB, who not only disagreed with the fragile consensus of the policy teams but presented their own counter proposals. This hindered the ability of HEW and White House staff to formulate a consistent policy during 1978-9. Califano, who cut a frustrated figure during this period, believed that Carter recognised that he was caught between his campaign commitment and a lack of money.⁸⁴⁹ Ultimately Kennedy and the unions believed it was right to submit a comprehensive health bill even if, given the conservative make up of Congress, there was no possibility of its passage. It was Carter who took the pragmatic view and supported a phased proposal because he believed that had the best chance of success. This involved lobbying Ullman and Long because they had powerful positions in Congress and not Kennedy who simply did not have such

⁸⁴⁸ Alex Wadden, ‘Found and Lost: A Third Way on Health Care’, in Mark White, ed, *The Presidency of Bill Clinton: The Legacy of a new Domestic and Foreign Policy* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2012), 92-119.

⁸⁴⁹ Califano, *Governing America*, 108-9.

legislative influence. In the end it was ideological disagreements as well as highly effective lobbying from the medical industry that ensured that no health legislation was passed before the 1980 election. Carter believed that Kennedy's constant criticism of his health policy was a product of an early decision to run against him in 1980.⁸⁵⁰ This view was held by several his staff and may explain Jordan's unusual level of involvement in health policy. Yet whilst health did become an issue in the primaries and at the Democratic Convention, there is little evidence to support this view prior to the summer of 1979. For Kennedy, health policy was, and would continue to be for the rest of his political life, a question of principle. Carter did make every effort to pass health legislation, but he lacked the passion, commitment and even the evangelical fervour of Kennedy who saw health as a moral issue.

In his speech on health policy to the SNMA, Carter quoted his favourite philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr, by saying that it was 'the sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world.'⁸⁵¹ The reforms he sought in health and welfare brought together his religious faith and his belief in government to achieve social change for the greater good. This might indicate that Carter was acting as a social liberal in carrying out these policies. If this was the case it raises the question of why Carter was not more proactive. Why for example did he not use his office more to persuade the American public of the need for reform? The concept of the 'bully pulpit' came naturally to Carter as a lay preacher and he had used it regularly during his administration on subjects like energy and inflation. It was before his trip to Japan in April 1979 that he began to express doubts about the effectiveness of his many speeches in support of

⁸⁵⁰ Carter, *Keeping the Faith*, 463.

⁸⁵¹ Carter Speech to SNMA, 16 April 1976, DPS Mongan and Onek Box 48, *JCPL*.

energy reform.⁸⁵² This period of reflection could well explain Carter's reluctance to speak out on health reform after April 1979.

Carter's handling of health and welfare policies during this time contrasted with the way that many historians have characterised his working style. He did not immerse himself in the detail but delegated the work to policy experts. Whilst he did impose arbitrary deadlines, he did not exclude key members of his administration from the policy-making process. He displayed a much more pragmatic approach, trying to negotiate an agreed plan with members of Congress opposed to his legislation. This contrasts with the image of Carter in the media as a leader as someone who was involved in every minute aspect of the workings of his administration and who would not make deals. These changes were partly driven by the pressure on his time. He was much less personally engaged in these policy debates than he was in energy or even the economy. The legislation left over from Carter's first year in office adversely affected the HEW sponsored bills being put forward in 1978. His congressional liaison team made it clear that bills in Energy and Tax Reform would take priority during 1978 and even beyond. So, if a log jam hampered Carter's Health and Welfare bills, it was one of his own making. The deteriorating economic conditions strengthened the position of conservatives inside and outside the White House as Carter sought to achieve change at minimal or even zero cost; a near impossible task. The role of the OMB after 1977 became more influential in challenging the cost of HEW programmes and reminding Carter of the potential impact on his anti-inflation strategy. He did not have the more favourable climate in the legislature enjoyed initially by both of his Democratic

⁸⁵² Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 178.

successors, Clinton and Obama. He was also not helped by the unrealistic expectations of liberal supporters whose position on reform became more entrenched at a time when such views were in decline in the country.

Carter's commitment to social reform was genuine. He grew up with poverty and cared about solving the problems of health and welfare, but he lacked the passion of the liberals in his party. There were few major speeches calling for sacrifice for the poor and the sick. Unlike Kennedy he ultimately regarded health reform not as a moral issue but as a practical problem to be solved. Liberals in Congress had been his most consistent supporters, but he never regarded himself as one of them. They were an important constituency whose programmes needed to be accommodated if possible. His approach to solving such problems lacked Kennedy's moral certainty and at no point did his proposals veer away from the practicalities of fiscal restraint. His response was pragmatic in trying to establish a middle ground between conservative and liberal positions. His speeches on health and welfare issues placed much more emphasis on cost savings and reducing waste and fraud than the social benefits of the reforms being proposed. There was, however, no natural constituency on Capitol Hill and beyond for this approach and hence it was doomed to failure. He did not give up easily on these policies, sustaining the fight through most of his remaining time in office, but he continued to refuse to give them legislative priority. Carter's track record on delivering HEW's social legislation was poor. Only his attempt to save the social security system from bankruptcy was a notable success but even that suffered from attempts by conservatives to claw back the agreed tax increases. These social policies were fundamental to the Democratic Party and many liberals felt that Carter had failed to deliver on his campaign promises. This may not have been a fair assessment given the

political environment, but it would lead to an increasingly frosty relationship with some of his core constituencies in the Democratic Party, particularly the unions.

Chapter Five

Labour Policy: A Fragile Alliance

In December 1980 White House staff were writing memoranda on the administration's achievements for a State of the Union address the following January. Deputy Chief of Staff Landon Butler wrote the brief on relations with labour. Butler had been Carter's liaison with the unions, principally the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), during the 1976 election campaign and then throughout Carter's term of office. His report, at least initially, presented a balanced picture of White House–union relations but Butler ended by saying that 'it is no exaggeration to conclude that no political leader in the country enjoys more loyalty and support from labour leaders than yourself.' He justified his argument with a description of union resources, believed to be in the region of \$12-15 million, deployed to support the president in the 1980 campaign.⁸⁵³ Butler argued that Carter secured greater backing from the union leadership than he had done in the 1976 election but in the 1980 election both Carter and those leaders were unable to convert this into votes from either union or non-union workers. The success of Ronald Reagan in persuading millions of the American working class to vote for him signified a major failure not just for Carter but for the union leaders who supported him. Since the 1960's there had been a decline in union influence, in the economy and the political process, which hampered any attempt by Carter to deliver an effective labour strategy.

⁸⁵³ Butler to Carter, 22 December 1980, Plains Box 16, *JCL*.

Since the inception of the New Deal the unions had been a key component in the electoral alliance that had helped keep the Democratic Party in power. The economic boom after 1945 had brought full employment, high wages and substantial increases in real income but it also saw the end of the unions' active involvement in the Federal government. The economic growth of the 1950's ensured a continuation of labour's economic influence but the rise of the new defence and technology industries in the Sunbelt states. signified a direct challenge to union power. To incentivise the transfer of industries and their skilled workforce from their traditional base in the north and north-east, southern states created attractive tax incentives and passed 'Right to Work' legislation which banned not only closed shops but unions altogether. By 1955 17 states had passed 'Right to Work' laws.⁸⁵⁴ This trend contributed to a decline in union membership and was one of the major factors in the AFL-CIO seeking to reform the Taft-Hartley Act of 1946. The transfer of jobs to the Sunbelt also signalled the decline in traditional industry in the north where the blue-collar workforce was unionised. This threat to the union's economic power was mirrored by the decline in its powerbase in the Democratic Party.

Reforms initiated in 1975 to increase grassroots membership weakened the influence of union bosses in the nomination of delegates to the party convention. The unions faced competition for influence from emerging social movements representing women, ethnic and environmental groups who had different political and economic goals and were often critical of older national institutions like the unions.⁸⁵⁵ This

⁸⁵⁴ Melvyn Dubofsky and Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America, A History*, (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1999), 357-58.

⁸⁵⁵ Dark, 'Organized Labor and the Carter Administration', 776.

resulted in the union leadership having less influence over the nomination and election of members of congress, and by 1976 the number of traditional labour constituencies had declined.⁸⁵⁶ In addition they faced major demographic changes in the workforce with a decline in unionised blue-collar jobs, counterbalanced by a rise in the white collar employment which tended not to be unionised.⁸⁵⁷ This trend, often stimulated by reforms like the introduction of the minimum wage, would continue until there were more white-collar jobs than blue collar by 1982.⁸⁵⁸ Butler suggested that the AFL-CIO had struggled to meet these challenges because of what he characterised as ‘institutional disarray.’ He argued that AFL-CIO split with liberal unions like the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and uncertainty over a successor to the aging AFL-CIO president George Meany made collective decision-making difficult. In addition the decrease in union influence nationally resulted in the leadership being, in Butler’s view, ‘intimidated by minority views.’ He quoted, as an example, the UAW’s success in persuading the AFL-CIO to oppose Carter’s proposals to remove controls on energy prices. Butler argued that the easiest way for the AFL-CIO to mollify minority union opponents was to criticise the president directly.⁸⁵⁹

Given all this uncertainty it was not surprising that the AFL-CIO in 1976 did not commit to any Democratic Party candidate until after the convention. Its electoral steering committee concentrated its resources on the encouragement of voter

⁸⁵⁶ Dubofsky and Dulles, *Labor in America*, 381.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 355-57.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 377-80.

⁸⁵⁹ Butler to Carter, 22 December 1980, Plains Box 16, *JCL*.

registration.⁸⁶⁰ However, several major unions chose to ignore this and formed their own 'Labour Coalition' which endorsed individual candidates during the primary campaign. It was with these groups, rather than the AFL-CIO itself, that the Carter campaign team liaised. Rather than commit himself at the Democratic Convention to deals with the 'old institutions' like the AFL-CIO, Carter found his natural support with those more liberal unions such as the UAW and National Education Association (NEA).

Carter had little if any experience of unions in Georgia and he said very little about them in public. Whilst they viewed themselves as legitimate representatives of the working class and part of the New Deal coalition, Carter saw them as just another interest group albeit one that generally supported him. In office he had to be reminded by Butler that referring to labour as special interests in speeches was counter-productive and using the term 'great institutions' was suggested as an alternative.⁸⁶¹ The unions had a historically privileged position in the New Deal coalition, but Carter rarely referred to this in his campaign rhetoric. He did not frame himself as a successor to FDR and nor did he choose him as a role model. Instead he suggested, somewhat unconvincingly, that Truman was the president he most admired.⁸⁶² The absence of AFL-CIO support during the primaries encouraged Carter to make common cause with individual unions over specific policy issues like health insurance (UAW) and education (NEA). He also discussed issues such as deregulation and government reform that would affect some

⁸⁶⁰ Isabel D Harrison, *State and Labour in the US: The Carter Administration and the AFL-CIO, 1976-1980: Political Strategy and the National Accord*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, (Oxford University, 1989).

⁸⁶¹ Butler to Carter, 16 July 1978, SS Box 124, *JCPL*.

⁸⁶² Leuchtenberg, 'Jimmy Carter and the Post-New Deal Presidency', 14-16.

unions. However, Carter was not necessarily 'anti-union' and would, as the 1976 race became closer, tailor his rhetoric to ensure their support.

In developing labour policy and in handling day-to-day relations with the unions, Carter relied upon experienced members of his team. He often used Mondale and his contacts within the Democratic Party to maintain dialogue with labour, but his key appointment was Ray Marshall as Secretary of Labor. Meany had made it clear to Carter that he wanted Ford's Secretary of Labor, John Dunlop, to get the job. Meany feared that Marshall would focus too much on non-union labour and discrimination issues. At their respective interviews Carter got on with Marshall, a fellow southerner with whom he had worked before, but not with the Republican, Dunlop. Marshall may not have been Meany's first choice, but he had advised Carter to appoint him as his chief economic advisor and wanted him for an AFL-CIO post as director of research.⁸⁶³ In the end on the key labour appointment where Carter had a free hand, he chose to ignore the advice of the President of the AFL-CIO. Perhaps this was a sign of Carter's attitude to what was regarded as labour's biggest interest group. He did, however, listen to one union boss, Jerry Wurf of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), who supported Carter in the primaries. Wurf said that, 'I didn't get much out of Carter but one thing I did get was that Dunlop did not become Secretary of Labor.'⁸⁶⁴ Marshall, as with other cabinet members, was given the freedom to make his own appointments and he regarded himself as enjoying an advantage of being the only one in the White House who knew about the unions.⁸⁶⁵ He was not without allies

⁸⁶³ Gary Fink 'Ray Marshall. Jimmy Carter's Ambassador to Organized Labor,' *Labor History Vol.37* (Fall, 1996): 463-79.

⁸⁶⁴ Dark, 'Organized Labor and the Carter Administration,' 764.

⁸⁶⁵ Ray Marshall Interview, *Miller Center*, 4-6.

in the administration on labour issues, often enjoying the support of Mondale and Eizenstat.⁸⁶⁶ At staff level Butler's responsibilities as deputy chief of staff included labour liaison whilst Bert Carp of the DPG established regular information sessions for keeping business and unions informed of government policy, with the occasional if somewhat reluctant presence of the president.⁸⁶⁷

From Carter's viewpoint, union support through most of the 1976 campaign was sporadic at best. He had only been able to get backing from the unions on a state by state basis in the primaries. At the convention he was endorsed with Mondale's help by the AFL-CIO, but he was widely regarded as the least bad option. Carter continued to campaign in 1976 as an outsider, separate from the big organizations, like the unions, which he viewed as part of the system. The AFL-CIO was the institution that George Meany had grown up with from his time as a young plumber in New York and had gone on to oversee the merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955. Meany was a reformer within the union, a strong campaigner against discrimination on the grounds of race or religion.⁸⁶⁸ He was also a conservative on foreign policy issues, backing Nixon in the 1972 election over Vietnam. He was 82 when Carter took office and had been president since 1955. His organisation was facing serious economic and political challenges, and he was looking to a Democratic president to help meet them.

Carter's major legislative priorities were not driven by concern over labour, but some policies had a close association with specific unions. The UAW influenced administration proposals for National Health Insurance. The NEA were strong

⁸⁶⁶ Melvyn Dubofsky, *Jimmy Carter and the End of the Politics of Productivity* in Fink and Graham, 98-9.

⁸⁶⁷ Carp Interview, *Miller Center*, 46-47.

⁸⁶⁸ Dubofsky and Dulles, *Labor in America*, 349-50.

supporters of the formation of the new Department of Education. But Carter could not afford to ignore the AFL-CIO. In a memorandum to Carter, Jordan warned that they were the 'single most formidable force on the Hill and due to their support, many Democratic congressmen in the north and north-east had ran ahead of the national ticket in 1976.'⁸⁶⁹ They submitted their own 'shopping list' following their Miami conference in February 1977. They were determined to reinstate the four labour bills that had been passed by Congress but vetoed by Ford. They wanted an increase in the minimum wage to \$3 per hour as well as amendments to the Taft-Hartley Act which, they argued, would restore the intended balance between employers and workers.⁸⁷⁰ Carter did not accept or reject these proposals but discussions facilitated by Eizenstat with Marshall, Mondale and Butler established the administration's position which was confirmed at a meeting with Meany and his deputy, Lane Kirkland, on 4 March 1977.⁸⁷¹ Although the unions wanted White House support for their agenda, they did not believe that they would need it to pass the legislation that Ford had vetoed.⁸⁷² They had developed a formidable lobby organisation over the years and expected the loyalty of members of congress they had supported during the election campaign. However, changes in the congressional committee structure and the increasing influence of both left and right-wing pressure groups on Democratic members had reduced union influence. Meany complained that it was not just the AFL-CIO which was suffering; Democratic Party leaders found that 'quite a few new House members are not paying attention to their instructions.'⁸⁷³ In

⁸⁶⁹ Jordan to Carter, no date, SS Box 4, *JCPL*.

⁸⁷⁰ David Rubenstein to Eizenstat and Butler, 15 February 1977, Chief of Staff Butler Box 85, *JCPL*.

⁸⁷¹ Eizenstat and Butler to Carter, 23 February 1977, SS Box 8, *JCPL*.

⁸⁷² Formal AFL-CIO statement, 22 February 1977, Chief of Staff Butler Box 85, *JCPL*.

⁸⁷³ Tracy Roof, *American Labor, Congress and the Welfare State*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 152.

response to these difficulties labour formed a progressive alliance to fight the conservative trend in Congress and the Democratic Party.⁸⁷⁴ However, the unions were to become more reliant on the administration for practical support to pass legislation.

The first test of Carter's labour strategy was the passage of the Common Situs Picketing bill. The bill, one of those vetoed by Ford, applied mainly to the construction industry and allowed picketing of all workers on a site even if they were not directly involved in the dispute. Although this legislation's impact was negligible nationally, the business lobby argued that the bill was a denial of rights and an abuse of power. The bill was part of the Democratic Party platform in 1976 and so Carter agreed that he would sign it. He did express concern about the impact on small businesses and the union's decision to remove a clause from the original bill which imposed a 30-day cooling off period in disputes. Eizenstat urged Carter to demand that this clause be replaced but also reminded him of his need for AFL-CIO support on other issues.⁸⁷⁵ Carter chose not to insist on its reinstatement, partly because he had made no commitment to support the bill actively, just to sign it if it passed. The union's refusal to compromise with the opposition in Congress demonstrated their supreme confidence that their legislation would pass the House, but this was misplaced. Their discussions with new Democratic members failed to detect reservations about the bill and as a result 37 out of the 68 freshmen voted against it, ensuring the vote in the House was lost.⁸⁷⁶ This defeat was a major surprise and it encouraged the business lobby and conservatives in Congress to oppose the AFL-CIO's next objective, the Labor Law Reform bill (LLRB).

⁸⁷⁴ Dark, 'Organized Labor and the Carter Administration', 767.

⁸⁷⁵ Eizenstat and Ben Johnston to Carter, undated, SS Box 8, *JCPL*.

⁸⁷⁶ Roof, *American Labor*, 155-56.

Following the defeat of Common Situs, the proposed Labour Law Reform bill was seen by the AFL-CIO as a major test of its political strength and, by implication, a measure of Carter's labour credentials. The administration accepted that the original Taft-Hartley Act had not been working as intended. The new bill was promoted by its supporters as a series of sensible measures to strengthen the powers of the National Labour Relations Board (NRLB), increase penalties for breaches of the law, speed up the process of union recognition and close loopholes used by employers to disregard the act. The most controversial element of the bill was the proposal that employers who were found guilty were to be denied Federal contracts.⁸⁷⁷ From April to early July 1977 administration officials worked with the unions to shape the draft bill. White House reservations over certain aspects of the bill, in particular union insistence on repealing the 'Right to Work' law, were resolved in the administration's favour. In briefing Carter, his staff acknowledged that the unions had been realistic in their demands.⁸⁷⁸ His senior advisors, Marshall, Mondale and Eizenstat recommended that Carter support the revised bill. There was also an intervention from Jordan who emphasised that the legislation was backed by those liberal unions such as UAW and the Machinists and Communication Workers of America (CWA) who were strong Carter supporters. Whilst indicating some minor reservations, Carter accepted his staff recommendations and put the full resources of his administration behind the legislation.⁸⁷⁹

The LLRB was launched on 17 July 1977 and passed the House in October of that year. Its final passage was dependent upon the government getting the sixty votes in

⁸⁷⁷ Gary M Fink, 'Fragile Alliance: Jimmy Carter and the American Labor Movement', Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policies of Jimmy Carter*, pp. 788-89.

⁸⁷⁸ Eizenstat and Johnston to Carter, 27 June 1977, DPS Rubenstein Box 66, JCPL.

⁸⁷⁹ Eizenstat to Carter and Jordan to Carter, 30 June 1977, SS Box 29, JCPL.

the Senate to overturn any filibuster by the opposition. Carter's congressional liaison team were confident of getting the necessary votes. There was an option that an early move to a vote in the Senate after October 1977 might have garnered enough votes to succeed but the legislation was delayed by the way Carter prioritised passage of the Panama Canal Treaty. The subsequent delay of four months enabled the business lobby, marshalled by a National Action Committee, to send out 8 million leaflets which painted the bill as a radical measure designed to increase union power. In addition, several senators who had backed Carter on Panama did not want to be seen voting for two 'liberal' measures consecutively.⁸⁸⁰ Carter's staff were confident of the support of 59 Senators and initiated heavy lobbying of a further seven to get the extra vote. The administration used every resource, including Carter personally, to persuade these legislators to vote for the bill but this was to no avail; they could not overturn the filibuster.⁸⁸¹ Proposals to pass a weaker bill were rejected by the unions.⁸⁸² Plans to reintroduce the bill in 1979 were also rejected on the grounds that the 1978 mid-term elections had resulted in the loss of eight senators who had previously supported legislation, thus making it impossible to pass anything other than a watered down version.⁸⁸³

Carter was subsequently blamed for LLRB's failure but at the time Meany gave him high marks for his support.⁸⁸⁴ The AFL-CIO president put the bill's failure down to 'a

⁸⁸⁰ Sar Levitan and Martha Cooper, *Business Lobbies and the Public Good* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 134.

⁸⁸¹ Marshall to Carter, 19 May 1978, SS Box 76, Moore and Bob Thomson to Carter, 13 June 1978, SS Box 80 and Eizenstat and Johnston to Carter, 19 June 1978, SS Box 81, *JCPL*.

⁸⁸² Moore, Thomson and Nik Edes to Carter, 10 July 1978, SS Box 84, *JCPL*.

⁸⁸³ Mondale to Carter on 1979 Agenda, 21 November 1978, SS Box 98, *JCPL*.

⁸⁸⁴ Butler to Carter, 10 July 1978, SS Box 84, *JCPL*.

heavily financed, well-orchestrated coalition between big business and right-wing extremists.’⁸⁸⁵ Despite a well-financed lobbying effort by the unions, the conservative mood in the country and the new committee structures in Congress proved too difficult to manage, even with Carter’s full backing. As an indicator of the issues the administration faced, 16 Democrats voted against the bill, most of them from the south, despite heavy lobbying by a Secretary of Labor and a President from the same region.⁸⁸⁶ From Carter’s perspective he was comfortable with this labour reform as it had no real budgetary implications.⁸⁸⁷ The same could not be said of labour expectations of his economic policy.

Carter’s Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) was designed to address the recession he inherited from the Ford administration and was broadly endorsed by the unions. The plan contained two policies that aligned with union conference resolutions: measures to address unemployment and an increase in the minimum wage. Carter was able to reach agreement with the unions on these issues as part of the 1977 budget, but this stimulus package was the last traditional Democratic budget he was able to submit. Carter was the first Democratic president since the war to face an economy that was not growing substantially, so many policies recommended by the unions would have to involve a redistribution of the economic cake or an increase in taxation.⁸⁸⁸ In such a debate the unions wanted to support a stimulus package that addressed unemployment rather than promote tax cuts which were supported by conservatives. They hoped that

⁸⁸⁵ Dubofsky and Dulles, *Labor in America*, 382.

⁸⁸⁶ Comments by Harold P Coxsen, in Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policy of Jimmy Carter*, 808.

⁸⁸⁷ Melvyn Dubofsky, *Jimmy Carter and the End of the Politics of Productivity*, 105-6.

⁸⁸⁸ Leuchtenberg, ‘Jimmy Carter and the Post-New Deal Presidency’, 22-23.

the passage of the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act, signed into law by Carter on 27 October 1978, would compel future governments to focus on growth and unemployment. This proved a false hope as many of the act's more proscriptive provisions had to be removed to enable its passage. Carter continued to back programmes to help the unemployed, principally through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA),⁸⁸⁹ but he did not accept that the government should prioritise full employment over problems like inflation.⁸⁹⁰ In terms of fiscal policy during 1977-78, the AFL-CIO had reason to be fairly satisfied with Carter. However, they expressed concern over the conservative nature of his tax reform proposals which had kept many of the loopholes that favoured the rich without significantly reducing the tax burden on poorer families.⁸⁹¹ Despite this disappointment the unions continued to try to influence the spending priorities in the budget round.⁸⁹²

As the economy deteriorated, the administration gave priority to controlling inflation. This created various issues for the unions. Firstly, whilst labour leaders would always support liberal interventionist policies to help employment and growth, they were fundamentally opposed to any government intervention in wage bargaining. There was also concern that as Carter's inflation policy took centre stage less attention would be given to achieving full employment. The president was opposed to statutory wage controls and reassured the CWA at their convention that, 'My own belief is that the system of free enterprise, the great union organizations can best handle their affairs

⁸⁸⁹ Carter announcement, 22 February 1978, DPS Eizenstat Box 230, *JCPL*.

⁸⁹⁰ Fink, 'Fragile Alliance: Jimmy Carter and the American Labor Movement', 790-93.

⁸⁹¹ Doug Fraser to Carter, 8 November 1977, SS Box 52 and George Meany to Carter, 20 October 1978, SS Box 95, *JCPL*.

⁸⁹² Meany to Carter, 9 November 1978, SS Box 98, *JCPL*.

through equal authority at the bargaining table.⁸⁹³ But the support of the unions along with business was critical to the success of any voluntary anti-inflation policy.

Another consequence of the shift in economic policy was the increase in influence of policy-makers like Schultze, Kahn and McIntyre, all of whom had less sympathy with the union view on the economy.⁸⁹⁴ The administration went through a series of phases in its anti-inflation programme but managed to keep union support through most of 1978. In direct discussions with Meany, Marshall managed to persuade the labour leader that inflation was a direct threat to AFL-CIO members' standard of living. He also played on Meany's fear that if the unions did not co-operate, the public would blame them for the policy's failure. Meetings with union leaders highlighted their absolute opposition to mandatory controls, their deep mistrust of business leaders and concern that they would not be able to persuade their membership to support government policy in their pay settlements.⁸⁹⁵ In May 1978 the administration was able to gain union support for its policy provided there were no fixed-figure targets for pay settlements.⁸⁹⁶ This was a major achievement for the government and ensured that the unions were locked into the policy by their membership of tripartite committees with business and the government. However, even with full cooperation there was no guarantee that a voluntary policy would work, and as the inflation rate continued to rise,

⁸⁹³ Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the Annual Convention of the Communications Workers of America, 16 July 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32598&st=&st1=>

⁸⁹⁴ Dubofsky, *End of the Politics of Productivity*, 108-9.

⁸⁹⁵ Marshall and Bob Strauss to Carter and Schultze and Barry Bosworth to Carter, Meetings with Labour, 9 May 1978, SS Box 75, *JCPL*.

⁸⁹⁶ Butler to Carter, 10 May 1978, SS Box 75, *JCPL*.

the pressure on the government to toughen penalties for non-compliance increased. This would lead at the end of 1978 to a very public disagreement with Meany.

By September 1978 the White House was seeking to tighten wage controls. The unions were concerned about being blamed for inflation when wage-price guidelines were policed by the employers. They also argued that business could adjust its prices to inflation regularly whilst the unions were usually committed to three-year wage deals.⁸⁹⁷ The AFL-CIO became publicly critical of Carter's inflation policy and refused to support the proposed September 1978 guidelines which were based around seven percent wage settlements. Meany's action was as much about his inability to control his own members on wage settlements as it was a disagreement with the White House.⁸⁹⁸ The public dispute with Meany was resolved by early 1979 but disagreements persisted over wage settlements and wider economic policy for the remainder of Carter's term in office. Labour continued to argue that Carter's anti-inflation policy was fundamentally unfair because, unlike wages, the controls being applied to prices were so flexible as to be almost non-existent. There was also a suggestion that Marshall had made himself unpopular with leaders by continuing to defend Carter's economic programme.⁸⁹⁹

Despite the ultimate failure of Carter's inflation policy, his administration continued to receive the union's reluctant support until he left office. The AFL-CIO found it increasingly difficult to restrain its members in their settlements. In addition, the powerful independent Teamsters union ignored the guidelines in 1979.⁹⁰⁰ The

⁸⁹⁷ Marshall to Carter, 18 September 1978, SS Box 92, *JCPL*.

⁸⁹⁸ Butler to Carter, 22 December 1980, Plains Box 16, *JCPL*.

⁸⁹⁹ Butler to Carter, 7 December 1978, SS Box 100, *JCPL*.

⁹⁰⁰ Abernathy, *Carter Years*, 47-48.

agreement between the government and union leaders announced on 28 September 1979, known as the National Accord, enabled their continued participation in the bodies that monitored inflation in return for union involvement in government decisions. This ensured labour support for the annual agreement of the wage-price strategy.⁹⁰¹ The settlements made during this period were broadly in line with the guidelines set and so were, to a limited extent, an economic success. However, the overall anti-inflation policy was a major failure which brought no great benefit to the unions, its members or the working population.

After the passage of the ERP in 1977, the unions could point to few if any economic policy successes. The Carter White House could and did argue that the battle with inflation was in part for the benefit of union members but after the administration's first year, little priority was given to labour's twin goals of increased growth and full employment. The National Accord gave Meany's successor, Lane Kirkland, a seat at the table in discussions on the draft 1981 budget but he could not stop the anti-recessionary slant of public spending and the increased expenditure on defence.⁹⁰²

Some policy initiatives from Carter could be linked to the unions who had supported him in the 1976 campaign. The National Education Authority (NEA) was a strong supporter of the creation of a separate Department of Education. Carter was unable to increase funding for education significantly during his term of office due to economic constraints, but he was determined to deliver on his campaign promise for a new Department of Education. He was faced with internal opposition from HEW

⁹⁰¹ Miller to Carter, 14 September 1979, SS Box 130 and Butler to Jordan, 28 February 1980, SS Box 152, *JCPL*.

⁹⁰² Lane Kirkland to Carter, 21 December 1979, SS Box 144, *JCPL*.

Secretary Califano, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the AFL-CIO and conservatives in Congress; and he was forced to intervene with Califano to stop him stalling and lobbying against the bill.⁹⁰³ But he had strong support within his administration from Mondale and Jordan who recognised the importance of keeping the backing of the NEA's two million membership.⁹⁰⁴ The new Department of Education was finally signed into law on 17 October 1979, and despite subsequent campaign promises and threats of closure from Carter's GOP successors, the department has remained in place to this day.

Another union who supported Carter in 1976 was the UAW under the leadership of Douglas Fraser. This partnership proved less sustainable as Carter was unable to deliver on his campaign commitment to pass a National Health Insurance bill. Carter kept Fraser informed of the bill's development even though he supported Kennedy's more liberal plan. Fraser was critical of the conservative nature of Carter's tax reform plans,⁹⁰⁵ but he was able to maintain his influence on the White House on various issues, including the enforcement emission standards under the Clean Air Act.⁹⁰⁶ On other policy issues that involved labour the government was more successful. A promise to consult regularly with Meany ensured AFL-CIO support on Civil Service Reform.⁹⁰⁷ On the other hand effective use of public opinion enabled the administration to overcome the joint opposition of unions and management in delivering airline deregulation in October 1978.⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰³ Carter, *Diaries*, 308.

⁹⁰⁴ Richard Pettigrew to Carter, 28 November 1977, Chief of Staff Box 34, *JCPL*.

⁹⁰⁵ Fraser to Carter, 8 November 1977, SS Box 52, *JCPL*.

⁹⁰⁶ Eizenstat and Schirmer to Carter, 3 February 1977, SS Box 5, *JCPL*.

⁹⁰⁷ Butler to Carter, 2 March 1977, Chief of Staff Butler, *JCPL*.

⁹⁰⁸ Si Lazarus, *Exit Interviews*, *JCPL*, 3.

Marshall argued strongly in favour of Carter's labour legislative record, stating that the president had defended protective labour laws, strengthened occupational safety, created job growth in the private sector and expanded youth and minority training.⁹⁰⁹ But some of the bills sent to Congress by the administration that had strong union support failed, notably Labor Law Reform and Health Insurance. The AFL-CIO News described the result of the first Congress in 10 years under a Democratic president as 'not a monument to forward looking legislation but a tombstone.'⁹¹⁰ This was an unfair criticism of Carter. Whilst not heavily engaged in supporting labour legislation, he did honour his campaign commitments and ensured his staff fully co-operated with the union lobby. The reason for failure lay not with the president at all but the makeup of Congress and the decline in union influence. The new committee structure and 'sunshine rules' hampered the 'closed door deals' on which union lobbyists thrived. The increase in the number of conservative interest groups also resulted in a countervailing pressure on individual members of congress. Andrew Biemiller, AFL-CIO legislative director, noted in 1979 that 'more than ever before you have to see practically every member of congress if you are to have any hope of success.'⁹¹¹ Carter's liaison team had quickly found out that this was the normal practice but for the union lobbyists this was something totally new.

Although labour's political influence was declining, it had become important to their leaders, particularly Meany, that they were seen to have regular access to power, especially as there was a Democratic president. The AFL-CIO felt threatened by the

⁹⁰⁹ Dubofsky, *End of the Politics of Productivity*, 111.

⁹¹⁰ Dubofsky and Dulles, *Labor in America*, 382.

⁹¹¹ Roof, *American Labor*, 151-52.

independent actions of the more liberal unions which had backed Carter earlier in the 1976 campaign and had tried to persuade the White House that they should be the first point of contact for all unions.⁹¹² This was never accepted by Carter who continued to invite union leaders like Jerry Wurf and Doug Fraser to meetings when he sought a range of views on policy matters.⁹¹³ Meany expected access to Carter not only on economic and labour issues but some foreign policy matters that concerned him.⁹¹⁴ When he thought he was being ignored he reverted to a confrontational style which often took the form of personal attacks.⁹¹⁵ Carter ensured that Meany was given as much access as he could and sent him personal notes,⁹¹⁶ but there was no rapport between them. Carter was once upset over a draft letter due to go to the AFL-CIO President that addressed him as 'President George Meany.' Carter told his staff, 'I don't call him George.'⁹¹⁷ Eizenstat met with the unions every six weeks but he also did the same with business groups.⁹¹⁸ For Carter, the unions were just another interest group whose views had to be considered when formulating policy because they were major supporters. It was important that he kept all members of the Democratic coalition together on issues, particularly where there was potential conflict, but there was no meeting of minds.⁹¹⁹

Early meetings between White House staff and the unions acknowledged the practical help that the AFL-CIO had provided during the transition and scheduled

⁹¹² Dark, 'Organized Labor and the Carter Administration', 764.

⁹¹³ Fink, 'Fragile Alliance: Jimmy Carter and the American Labor Movement', 799 and List of Union reps at Camp David, undated, Eizenstat Box 162, *JCPL*.

⁹¹⁴ Carter to Meany on Crown of St Stephen, undated, Chief of Staff Butler Box 85, *JCPL*.

⁹¹⁵ Fink, 'Fragile Alliance: Jimmy Carter and the American Labor Movement', 784.

⁹¹⁶ Carter to Meany, Handwritten note wishing Happy Birthday, 15 August 1977, Chief of Staff Butler Box 85, *JCPL*.

⁹¹⁷ Untitled draft, 13 January 1978, SS Box 58, *JCPL*.

⁹¹⁸ Eizenstat Interview, *Miller Center*, 47.

⁹¹⁹ Charles Warren, Speth and Marion Edey to Carter, Environmental Lobby, 25 August 1977, SS Box 39, *JCPL*.

briefings on the administration's ERP and Civil Service Reform.⁹²⁰ Although Carter's legislative record did not deliver on key union priorities, the administration continued regular dialogue with union leaders on matters of interest. These meetings denoted a degree of 'embedding' of the unions in the administration's consultation process, which was to increase when the National Accord was established.⁹²¹ Dialogue also continued outside the domestic policy sphere, with Carter seeking AFL-CIO support for the Panama Canal Treaty and Meany lobbying hard for greater congressional control of the Federal Reserve.⁹²² After six months Carter's staff provided him with a list of 'significant actions' that the administration had taken since coming to office. The section on labour covered a wide range of issues, including the minimum wage, trade quotas, the Teamster union pension fund support, health safety reforms, unemployment benefits, as well as draft labour legislation.⁹²³ However, there were tensions between the White House and the unions as neither party felt that their efforts were being reciprocated. Butler told Carter, 'The relationship between AFL-CIO and the administration cannot continue to be a one-way street.'⁹²⁴ Carter was irritated when Meany's criticisms of him appeared in the press. In response to an article in which Meany highlighted Carter's alleged indecisive handling of the miner's strike, bemoaned his lack of consultation and even hinted that he might switch his support to Governor Edmund Brown, Carter commented that, 'I'm getting tired of this.'⁹²⁵ Butler's attempt to reassure Carter that this was just Meany

⁹²⁰ Butler to Carter, 25 January 1977, SS Box 3, *JCPL*.

⁹²¹ Eizenstat and Butler to Carter, 3 March 1977, SS Box 10 and Eizenstat and Butler to Carter, 13 January 1978, Eizenstat Box 136, *JCPL*.

⁹²² Jordan to Carter, 22 August 1977, SS Box 37 and Meany to Carter, undated, Chief of Staff Butler Box 86, *JCPL*.

⁹²³ Summary of actions taken by President Carter, undated, SS Box 33, *JCPL*.

⁹²⁴ Roof, *American Labor*, 156-61.

⁹²⁵ Copy of article, 25 February 1978, SS Box 65 and Carter to Butler, 25 February 1978, Chief of Staff Butler Box 86, *JCPL*.

playing to negative comments from his mid-level union officials did not diminish the president's disquiet.⁹²⁶ Two months later, Jordan encouraged Carter to voice his annoyance at a meeting with Meany about the union's failure to acknowledge or promote to their members Carter's efforts to support policies that helped them.⁹²⁷

There were efforts made by the White House to improve relations. In early 1978 Butler recommended to Jordan that the president should allocate more time to meet with the unions by attending international labour conferences taking place in Washington and organizing a special White House dinner.⁹²⁸ Carter's speech at the steelworkers' convention that autumn was an attempt to promote the administration's track record.⁹²⁹ Staff reviewed labour-related actions taken by the White House in the previous 18 months, which covered events for and invitations to union leaders. This included Carter attempting to call two or three union leaders a week.⁹³⁰ The breakdown in relations in September 1978 was due to tension between the administration on the one hand and labour and business on the other over wage-price controls. Union anger at business leaders who blamed them for wage inflation came to a head in July 1978 when Fraser resigned from the Labour-Management group stating that he believed that 'leaders in the business community have chosen to wage a one-sided class war in this country.'⁹³¹ The AFL-CIO's increasing concern over Carter's policy on wage-price controls was evident when Meany demanded a meeting with Carter the day before the announcement of the new inflation policy. Carter's alleged refusal to meet prompted

⁹²⁶ Butler to Carter, 28 February 1978, Chief of Staff Butler Box 86, *JCPL*.

⁹²⁷ Jordan to Carter, 25 April 1978, SS Box 73, *JCPL*.

⁹²⁸ Butler to Jordan, 11 January 1978, Chief of Staff Butler Box 86, *JCPL*.

⁹²⁹ Remarks at the United Steelworkers of America Convention, 20 September 1978, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29809&st=&st1=>

⁹³⁰ Laurie Lucey to Butler, 25 September 1978, Chief of Staff Butler Box 86, *JCPL*.

⁹³¹ Dubofsky and Dulles, *Labor in America*, 382.

three months of non-cooperation from the AFL-CIO.⁹³² This failed to cause any major crisis for the White House because Carter's staff, supported by the vice president, worked assiduously to maintain contact with the individual union presidents who were members of the AFL-CIO. These contacts included invitations to White House dinners and briefings from Marshall and the OMB.⁹³³

Cooperation was formally resumed in January 1979 following a meeting between Carter, Mondale and the president's advisors with Meany, Kirkland and six union presidents. Consultation arrangements were agreed with monthly meetings between the AFL-CIO and Mondale.⁹³⁴ The continued failure of the administration's inflation policy increased pressure for strong counter measures and therefore tension with the unions. The administration wanted greater flexibility from the unions if a new tougher anti-inflation policy was to be successful. The circumstances for a deal were helped by the declining health of George Meany who handed over day-to-day control to Lane Kirkland in April 1979 and formally stepped down the following November. Kirkland, an intellectual southerner, was to be more amenable to a deal but only at a price of greater union involvement in policy-making.⁹³⁵

The signing of the National Accord was regarded by the White House and the unions as a major contribution to improved relations. It was modelled on the European Social Contract and was principally negotiated by Kirkland and the recently appointed secretary of the treasury, William Miller.⁹³⁶ The Accord's aim was, 'To provide for

⁹³² Untitled, 22 December 1980, Plains Box 16, *JCPL*.

⁹³³ Butler and Moe to Mondale, 19 January 1979, Chief of Staff Butler Box 114, *JCPL*.

⁹³⁴ Dark, 'Organized Labor and the Carter Administration', 771.

⁹³⁵ *Ibid*, 771-72.

⁹³⁶ *Ibid*.

American Labour's involvement and cooperation with the Administration on important national issues.⁹³⁷ For the administration the Accord locked the unions into the anti-inflation plank of its economic policy at the price of increased consultation on a wide range of issues, including some on foreign policy. For the unions it presented an opportunity to influence and to be seen to influence government policy. They also hoped that the tripartite board involving government and business would help ensure that the price of austerity was more equitably distributed.⁹³⁸ Carter's staff established a series of regular meetings between Mondale and Marshall to keep the AFL-CIO leadership informed and undertook to consult them on major policy decisions at a preliminary stage. This would also give Meany and his successor Kirkland the opportunity to meet Carter to influence important government policies in advance of a final decision.⁹³⁹

Despite the initial fanfare, the Accord had no meaningful sanctions on dealing with inflation and concern was expressed by Carter and some of his staff about its effectiveness. In June 1980, Eisenstat and Democratic Party Chair, Jon White, complained that the deal was a one-way street after the unions were perceived to have 'ambushed' the administration over the renewal of Council on Wage and Price Stability (COWPS). Butler defended the unions, highlighting that they had largely complied with the wage guidelines and had tacitly supported Carter's position on oil and gas deregulation. In addition, he argued that Kirkland had not supported Kennedy's election campaign and the Accord had helped bring in union support during the primaries.⁹⁴⁰

⁹³⁷ 28 September 1979, Chief of Staff Butler Box 87, *JCPL*.

⁹³⁸ Fink, 'Fragile Alliance: Jimmy Carter and the American Labor Movement', 797.

⁹³⁹ Process of consulting AFL-CIO confirmed, No Date, Chief of Staff Butler Box 86, *JCPL*.

⁹⁴⁰ Butler to Jordan, 4 June 1980, SS Box 165, *JCPL*.

Butler remained a convinced advocate of the Accord, stating that whilst it was at times on 'very thin ice. unless some development occurs, I don't expect it to break.'⁹⁴¹ Eizenstat was more realistic about its limitations but nonetheless urged Carter to support the Accord claiming it was a price worth paying to get union support. He also argued that it would be a signal that the administration was equitable to the unions and help gain their backing for the 1980 election.⁹⁴² The Accord did provide an effective vehicle for the administration to engage with union leaders in the final year of Carter's term in office. It was noticeable, however, that the work to establish the Accord was carried out by his labour advisors with little direct input from the president. The Accord, Landon Butler's rather overblown defence notwithstanding, did help with the president's election campaign by ensuring the union leadership's support.

The decision of Senator Kennedy to run against Carter caused a dilemma for the unions as Kennedy had been a long-standing friend of labour. Although the AFL-CIO maintained formal neutrality, many unions took sides. The more liberal unions such as the UAW, AFSCME and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) backed Kennedy whilst Carter received support from the majority of unions, many of which had benefitted from his policies.⁹⁴³ This support was not necessarily reflected on the ground during the primary campaigns as the Kennedy unions were often better organised.⁹⁴⁴ During this phase of the campaign Carter maintained regular contact with Kirkland. White House staff believed that Carter's sensitive response to Meany's death in January 1980 with his public statement, the lowering of the flag at the White House and the issue

⁹⁴¹ Butler to Carter, 10 April 1980, SS Box 157, *JCPL*.

⁹⁴² Eizenstat to Carter, 14 September 1979, SS Box 130, *JCPL*.

⁹⁴³ Dark, 'Organized Labor and the Carter Administration', 773-74.

⁹⁴⁴ Butler to Jordan, 4 January 1980, Chief of Staff Butler Box 142, *JCPL*.

of a commemorative stamp, had been appreciated by the AFL-CIO. Whilst officially neutral Kirkland had continued to speak in favour of Carter's foreign policy and had refused to invite Kennedy to speak at the AFL-CIO conference.⁹⁴⁵ A series of early Carter primary victories resulted in White House staff seeking to build bridges with Kennedy unions in the summer of 1980. Butler reported that he was optimistic about the level of union support and that only a minority of unions would not support Carter in the coming presidential election. In the end only the air traffic controllers (PATCO) and the Teamsters union endorsed Reagan during the 1980 campaign although the support of some liberal union leaders was less than whole-hearted.

In contrast to his attitude to interest groups in general, Carter was personally involved in a series of meetings with the unions in 1980.⁹⁴⁶ This would be part of a pivot strategy that was to focus his campaign resources on the anti-union policies of GOP candidate Ronald Reagan.⁹⁴⁷ The Carter team remained confident throughout the campaign of strong union support. Writing to Jordan, Butler argued that the administration had better knowledge of the unions after nearly four years in power and had more union support at state level following primary campaigning.⁹⁴⁸ However, this was at the price of increased union influence over Carter's policies. Union delegate representation at the 1980 Democratic National Convention had increased from 20 to 29 percent. Kirkland played a key role in the dialogue between the Carter and Kennedy

⁹⁴⁵ Butler to Jordan, 6 February 1980, SS Box 150, *JCPL*.

⁹⁴⁶ Bernie Aronson to Butler, 30 May 1980, Chief of Staff Butler Box 145, *JCPL*.

⁹⁴⁷ Butler to Jordan, 1 May 1979, Chief of S Butler Box 114, Wexler and Moe to Jordan, undated, Chief of Staff Jordan Box 79 and Butler to Moe, 30 May 1980, Chief of Staff Butler Box 145, *JCPL*.

⁹⁴⁸ Butler to Jordan, 18 April 1979, Chief of Staff Jordan Box 79, *JCPL*.

camps to ensure the final agreement of the Democratic platform.⁹⁴⁹ This resulted in Carter accepting, against the wishes of his economic advisors, a commitment to spend \$12bn on job creation.⁹⁵⁰ Kirkland continued to meet Carter under the umbrella of the Accord and sought to persuade the administration to increase spending on his proposal for a Re-industrialisation Finance Corporation (RFC). Kirkland also tried, less successfully, to change the tone of the Carter campaign to focus on positive messages as he felt uncomfortable with the anti-Reagan message.⁹⁵¹ In return the unions contributed significant resources to the campaign, albeit with limited results. Butler argued strongly that the White House had been very successful in gaining the backing of major union leaders.⁹⁵² Unfortunately this support did not translate into votes for Carter from its members. Union membership represented a third of the electorate in six key states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania, but in 1980 they were all were lost to Reagan. In comparison to 1976, Carter's share of the union vote dropped 17 points to 46 percent and for non-union workers it dropped 8 points to 35 percent.⁹⁵³

Carter's approach to dealing with labour in office highlighted some important differences from the way he was perceived in the media to have operated. His deep suspicion of interest groups could have been expected to cause tension with labour, but it did not result in any serious breach in their relationship. One of the reasons for this was that Carter delegated the management of the labour relationship almost entirely to Marshall, Mondale and the president's White House advisors. This was the case when

⁹⁴⁹ Eizenstat to Carter, 21 July 1980, Chief of Staff Jordan Box 79, *JCPL*.

⁹⁵⁰ Harrison, *State and Labour in the US*.

⁹⁵¹ Butler to Carter, 24 August 1980, SS Box 173, *JCPL*.

⁹⁵² Butler to Carter, 22 December 1980, Plains Box 16, *JCL*.

⁹⁵³ Harrison, *State and Labour in the US*.

there was a crisis, for example during the miners' strike in early 1978. This strike affected large areas of the country and there was concern over the impact on energy supplies. Marshall worked hard to deliver a compromise acceptable to both parties and Carter was kept informed of his progress. It was Carter who made the final decision to invoke the Taft-Hartley Act that forced the miners back to work which eventually resulted in a settlement.⁹⁵⁴ In nearly all instances Carter accepted his advisors' recommendations and this enabled the administration to meet most of its campaign commitments to the unions. Where union supported legislation failed it was not from a lack of effort by the White House, and his staff could point to policies that were passed due to Carter's direct intervention to quell internal opposition; the transfer of Mining Enforcement and Safety administration (MESA) from Interior to Labor being a case in point.⁹⁵⁵ Where he was less successful, as in the case of the Labor Law Reform bill, union criticism of Carter was notably muted. George Meany said that, 'I think if he were a stronger President, stronger in relation with Congress. I think he might have been helpful to us.'⁹⁵⁶ However, there was recognition from labour leaders that the decline in their influence was not a result of lack of interest or effort from Carter. Meany admitted that by the mid-1960's workers, who had prospered in the 1950's and began owning homes in the suburbs, had become more middle class in attitude and were less interested in labour issues.⁹⁵⁷ The unions became more focused on being seen to have the trappings of power. Leaders like Meany and Kirkland wanted both the government and business to acknowledge that the labour movement was a positive force in the economy.⁹⁵⁸ The National Accord was the

⁹⁵⁴ Marshall to Carter, 7 March 1978, Chief of Staff Butler Box 93, *JCPL*.

⁹⁵⁵ Eizenstat and Bill Johnston to Carter, 30 March 1977, SS Box 13, *JCPL*.

⁹⁵⁶ Roof, *American Labor*, 152-53.

⁹⁵⁷ Dubofsky and Dulles, *Labor in America*, 369.

⁹⁵⁸ Butler to Carter, 24 August 1980, SS Box 173, *JCPL*.

administration's attempt to accommodate that need in return for their support for Carter's inflation policy, and in the 1980 campaign Carter was comfortable enough with this strategy as he had to give up very little.

There has been a strong theme in press coverage at the time and in the historiography from authors like Hargrove and Mollenhoff⁹⁵⁹ of painting Carter as a president who was obsessed with the minutiae of government. Comment was made on the volume of documents he read and his often quoted involvement in allocating use of the White House tennis court.⁹⁶⁰ This was used as part of a wider criticism on his seeming inability to step back from issues or even trust his subordinates. There is some evidence to support this premise in Carter's approach to his first major policy initiative on energy. Whilst this fulfilled many of the behaviours reflected in the press not the least his in-depth involvement in policy, it was not representative of his administration as a whole. His handling of labour policy was more typical of Carter's managerial style. He delegated to Marshall on all labour issues and the debates on strategy usually took place without his participation. He invariably took the advice of his advisors on labour issues. Meetings with union leaders and key members of congress were often initiated on their advice. His 'hands-on' approach to energy was also not in evidence on health and welfare policy or other domestic policy areas like transport, agriculture and housing. The image of him being involved in the detail of policy-making is therefore not supported by the evidence. This perception may well have been created by Carter's preference for receiving comprehensive policy papers in writing. This was not something that his predecessor and certainly his immediate successor did. Reagan wanted all paperwork to

⁹⁵⁹ Hargrove, *Carter as President* and Mollenhoff, *The President who Failed*.

⁹⁶⁰ James Fallows, 'The Passionless President'.

be kept to an absolute minimum for final decisions. Carter's Democratic successor, Bill Clinton, was well known for being personally involved in White House policy debates, but Carter eschewed such dialogue. His engineering background and his ability to speed read encouraged his staff to provide technical detail in the final decision phase of a policy. This applied even when Carter had not been involved in the detailed discussions. This was the pattern followed by the president for most major policy decisions, including on labour.

Carter's labour policy demonstrated that his natural antipathy to interest groups was more nuanced than previously reported. Where an election campaign was involved, either through a campaign commitment or during the run up to the election itself, Carter worked diligently to accommodate labour's views. Interest group or not, the politician in Carter recognised the importance of key stakeholders and did everything he could to retain their support. In fact, these interventions signified the actions of Carter the politician rather than the influence of any ideological or moral viewpoint. Early support from more liberal unions was a product of co-interest on specific policies, which soon dissipated if the policy failed. Labour may have been regarded as a liberal cause but to Carter his interest was not based on ideology but political expediency and the need for electoral support. This demonstrated a trait that contrasted with his supposed distaste for interest groups. Eizenstat observed how 'a president who was so consciously apolitical in his governance ... could turn on a dime when campaign season began.'⁹⁶¹ Carter's overall labour strategy of cultivating union leadership to gain labour support in the country was based on a premise which was no longer valid and ultimately was

⁹⁶¹ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 647.

doomed to failure. National union leaders no longer had the influence at the ballot box they once enjoyed, and workers (whether unionised or not) were listening to different, often conflicting, messages from other sources. These were not just from conservative organisations but also from other more liberal groups who opposed the more traditional labour views on the environment, urban renewal, gay and women's rights. This was one of the many shifts in American society that influenced the political scene in the 1970's and the environment in which Carter sought to govern.

Chapter Six

Culture Wars

The 1960s and 1970s was a period of profound change. It saw the rise of new social movements that had a major impact on both political parties. Interest groups, whilst national in scope, represented distinct and often conflicting views on social issues like race, women's rights, the environment and religion. Given Carter's natural suspicion of the Washington lobby in general, he would have been expected to be wary of their influence. However, in the case of these groups, he had not only received their strong support during the 1976 election, but also they represented views which Carter had espoused in one form or another. They were in 1976 Carter's natural supporters, but they represented change. These social movements argued for more reform but also faced a serious challenge from conservative groups based on, according to writer Joe Queenan, 'the widespread feeling America had taken a wrong turn in the 1970's.'⁹⁶² These conflicting feelings both for and against further change appeared to be answered by Carter who stood as an 'outsider' from Washington.⁹⁶³ His track record as president in these areas of policy was in many ways impressive but could never match the expectations created in these movements by his election victory. For these groups, Carter's record in office was never enough but for those conservatives who opposed change even the status quo constituted a bridge too far.

⁹⁶² Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid*, 270.

Since President Kennedy had defined the Civil Rights question as a moral one, this issue had become a question of character for all presidents; a test of their moral compass. It was an issue on which Carter was seen to be on the right side, despite his 'southernness.' He came to the attention of northern Democrats in January 1971 when he announced in his inaugural speech as governor of Georgia that 'the time for discrimination was over' and by hanging a portrait of Martin Luther King in his office.⁹⁶⁴ This marked him out as one of a new breed of southern Democratic politicians who were determined to accept desegregation and strive for equality. Although his primary campaign for governor in 1970 against the liberal former governor, Carl Sanders, was a calculated attempt to win the pro-segregation vote,⁹⁶⁵ there were several examples from his early life when Carter had taken a personal stand against prejudice. His refusal in 1962 to join the White Citizens Council was widely noted but less so was his standing up for a black naval classmate, Wesley Brown, at Annapolis and as a result being accused of being 'a God dammed nigger lover.'⁹⁶⁶ He also argued strongly against the exclusion of blacks from his church.⁹⁶⁷ Carter's belief in equality of opportunity did not equate to support for radical change. He was not so much a quintessential liberal on race but more someone who wanted to expand opportunity within the confines of the current law. The declaration at his inauguration was not a call for change but a confirmation that change had occurred; it was time for the South to move on and the law to be enforced. Carter's

⁹⁶⁴ *Governor Carter's Inaugural Address*, 12 January 1971,

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jimmycarterlawday1974.htm>

⁹⁶⁵ Randy Sanders, 'The Sad Duty of Politics: Jimmy Carter and the Issue of Race in his 1970. Gubernatorial Campaign' *Georgia Historical Quarterly*. Vol LXXVI, (Fall 1992): 612-638.

⁹⁶⁶ Balmer, *Redeemer*, 8.

⁹⁶⁷ Carter, *Why Not the Best?* 45.

commitment to social justice was genuine but he wanted to help all racial groupings to improve their social and economic status not just the one minority group.⁹⁶⁸

Only a handful of black leaders had actively campaigned for Carter, for example Andrew Young from Atlanta, Mayor Coleman Young from Detroit, and Martin Luther King's father, 'Daddy' King. Nevertheless black interest groups believed that they had been essential to Carter's election victory and expected the first Democratic president since January 1969 to deliver on their agenda. Carter's campaign as a Washington 'outsider' implied criticism of the very government welfare programmes that poor blacks were dependent upon.⁹⁶⁹ He accepted that he needed the support of 'Civil Rights Heroes' to overcome the 'stigma' of him coming from the south.⁹⁷⁰ The irony of this situation was not lost on the *New York Times* which commented on a 'South Georgian white man with a mint julep drawl being sent to the White House by the grandchildren of slaves.'⁹⁷¹ Equally there was increasing pressure from conservative groups in the northern states concerned over being forced to bus their children to black schools and the level of taxation required to support welfare. In addition, whilst black groups continued to lobby Carter for fairer income distribution through measures like the Humphrey-Hawkins bill, they faced competition in a restricted economy from other groups like women, the disabled and environmentalists for government support.⁹⁷² If the age of discrimination was over so was the age of major Civil Rights legislation. Attempts to improve the circumstances of poor blacks would have to be addressed as

⁹⁶⁸ Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 244.

⁹⁶⁹ Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, 88.

⁹⁷⁰ Carter, *Diaries*, 4.

⁹⁷¹ Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 245.

⁹⁷² Hugh Davis Graham, 'Civil Rights in the Carter Presidency', in Fink and Graham, *Carter Presidency*, 202-3.

part of a wider economic agenda which included welfare reform, urban renewal and job training. This did not preclude the use of symbolic actions by the White House to reinforce support for equality. These included 'Daddy' King's presence at Carter's inauguration and sending his daughter Amy to a local, mainly black, school in Washington.⁹⁷³ Such actions became matters of debate early in the administration when 'Roots', a television programme about slavery based on a book by Alex Haley, was broadcast. Eizenstat saw the political value of Carter presenting an inaugural book to the author, commenting that, 'Such action would have powerful symbolism and yet would not offend virtually anyone in the south.'⁹⁷⁴

Whilst attuned to symbolism of black issues in general, the administration was slow to pick up on the implications of a university selection case being dealt with by the Justice Department. Alan Bakke had applied in 1973 to the University of California (UCLA) medical school but although he was, at 33, above the usual age for a new student, he scored highly in his application and was recommended to the school. He was turned down for a place both initially and on appeal. Bakke took the Regents of UCLA to court, arguing that the school's policy of affirmative action, which reserved 16 percent of its places for minority (and by implication less qualified) students, denied him as a white man equal protection under the law.⁹⁷⁵ The case had been working its way, almost unnoticed, through the minor courts but in 1977 went to the Supreme Court for a final ruling. The issue, as seen by Carter's Justice Department, was whether to submit an Amicus curiae brief to the court giving the government its view as an interested party.

⁹⁷³ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 36.

⁹⁷⁴ Eizenstat to Carter, 28 January 1977, SS Box 4, JCPL.

⁹⁷⁵ Schulman, *Seventies*, 69-70.

It was reluctant to do so because UCLA had mismanaged the selection process and therefore Bakke would not make a good test case. When Attorney General Bell did decide to proceed, he dismissed any concerns about the political implications for affirmative action programmes and delegated the work to Wade McCree, whom Bell described as 'the best black lawyer in America.' However McCree, only recently appointed, delegated the brief to a holdover from the Nixon administration.⁹⁷⁶ Whilst happy to show the draft brief to Carter, Bell did not want any involvement from liberals in the White House but that was exactly what happened.⁹⁷⁷ Concerns had been raised with Eizenstat in February 1977 on the potential impact on schools of a negative decision on the Bakke case that would set 'back affirmative action programmes 3-5 years.'⁹⁷⁸ Eizenstat responded by including Mondale in what turned out to be the first test of the vice president's role in the White House. Mondale assessed the impact of a negative decision on other universities and, following advice from Jordan, persuaded Carter that the draft Amicus brief required wider consultation.⁹⁷⁹

The domestic policy team received the draft brief at the end of August.⁹⁸⁰ Once circulated it drew major criticism from not only White House staff but cabinet members Joe Califano and Patricia Harris. Califano's written objections, which he sent to Carter, ran to 16 pages.⁹⁸¹ There was concern expressed that a weak or neutral brief would result in a decision that would damage current affirmative action programmes and as a

⁹⁷⁶ Walter Mondale, *The Good Fight: A Life in Liberal Politics*, (New York: Scribner, 2010), 179.

⁹⁷⁷ Bell, *Taking Care of the Law*, 30.

⁹⁷⁸ Annie Gutierrez to Eizenstat, 18 February 1977, DPS Eizenstat Box 149, JCPL.

⁹⁷⁹ Mondale, *Good Fight*, 177-81.

⁹⁸⁰ Drew Days to Eizenstat, 12 August 1977, Department of Justice, Attorney General, Box 114, *National Archives and Records (NARA)*.

⁹⁸¹ Califano to Carter, 7 September 1977, DPS Eizenstat Box 149, JCPL.

consequence weaken the administration's relationship with liberal and minority groups.⁹⁸² Liberals within the administration such as Stuart Eizenstat argued that Justice was focussed far too much on defending Bakke and not enough on supporting affirmative action.⁹⁸³ Carter had similar concerns about the draft brief but in addition he wanted it to reflect his views on affirmative action which he insisted must not include quotas as they were likely to be declared unconstitutional by the courts. This meant that Justice had to present a nuanced argument that proposed a solution that distinguished between evaluating the potential of disadvantaged groups and selection based on that potential; unlike quotas this would not be a rigid process.⁹⁸⁴ The other issue Carter was concerned about was Bakke himself. He wanted to ensure that whatever the result Bakke would not lose out and that there was a way to let him be accepted without compromising affirmative action programmes.⁹⁸⁵ During this process Carter was appraised of the wider risks involved. Jordan warned him that even though he was not involved in the detail, the case was important as it was being seen as symbolic of Carter's personal commitment to equality. Jordan implied that Bell did not grasp the case's importance and was inordinately comforted by the fact that the detail was in the hands of two black lawyers, McCree and Solicitor General Drew Days III. Jordan argued that even they would be discredited by their community if the message was poorly expressed.⁹⁸⁶ Concern expressed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) confirmed Jordan's point.⁹⁸⁷ The decision which found in

⁹⁸² Eizenstat to Carter and Eleanor Holmes Norton to Carter, 9 September 1977, SS Box 40, *JCPL*.

⁹⁸³ Holmes Norton to Wade McCree, 12 September 1977, DPS Eizenstat Box 149, *JCPL*.

⁹⁸⁴ Eizenstat and Bob Lipshutz to Carter, 6 June 1977, DPS SS Box 39, *JCPL*.

⁹⁸⁵ Eizenstat to Carter and Mondale, 16 September 1977, SS Box 41, *JCPL*.

⁹⁸⁶ Jordan to Carter, undated, DPS Eizenstat Box 149, *JCPL*.

⁹⁸⁷ Bunny Mitchell to Kraft, 12 September 1977, SS Box 40, *JCPL*.

Bakke's favour did confirm the validity of taking race and ethnicity into account when making decisions. This encouraged the use of affirmative action to increase diversity, whilst confirming the unconstitutionality of quotas.⁹⁸⁸ The administration was therefore able to reflect positively on the result in the press and maintain the momentum on affirmative action programmes.⁹⁸⁹

In policy terms Carter had made only limited promises on Civil Rights issues in the 1976 election. In his view the Civil Rights battles of the 1960's and early 1970's were over and the emphasis should be on the interpretation of the law and increased regulation to enforce it. So whilst there was to be no new Civil Rights legislation, the enforcement unit of the Department of Justice was reorganised and its budget increased from \$74.2m to \$124m in to order to increase the pressure on employers.⁹⁹⁰ An early example of this was the enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act which forbade discrimination in any programme which received federal aid.⁹⁹¹ Another major effort to consolidate African-American support was Carter's intention to appoint more black officials. His Q & A at the National Black Network in July 1977 highlighted this, as did the appointment of Drew Days III and Eleanor Holmes Norton to the posts of Solicitor General and Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission.⁹⁹² This approach was reinforced by a series of personal notes to the cabinet and heads of agencies reminding them of their responsibility to appoint more people who were women and/or from

⁹⁸⁸ Schulman, *Seventies*, 69-70.

⁹⁸⁹ Memorandum From the President on Equality for Women, 20 July 1978
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=31115&st=&st1=>

⁹⁹⁰ Graham, 'Civil Rights in the Carter Presidency', 204-6.

⁹⁹¹ 10 December 1977, Department of Justice, Attorney General Box 114, NARA.

⁹⁹² Interview With the National Black Network Question-and-Answer Session With Representatives of the Network, 18 July 1977,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7857&st=&st1=>

ethnic groups.⁹⁹³ The administration did try to accommodate the views of black interest groups in the development of policy but the Bakke case highlighted a weakness in Carter's White House organisation: a lack of staff who dealt with the black lobby on a regular basis. Although this was resolved in August 1978 with the appointment of the Georgian Louis Martin as special assistant, Carter continued to rely upon the liberals in his cabinet and his staff for support on black issues. Martin was able to establish links and set up meetings with black groups, including the congressional caucus that Carter attended. These were often successful but frequently Carter delegated such meetings to Mondale or Eizenstat.⁹⁹⁴ The president, however, was conscious of the image of the administration with the black and minority communities. In an early meeting with his staff, Powell organised a photographer from *Time* magazine to take a team picture, but Carter ordered him out when he realised that there was only one black person in the group and the only woman was his wife.⁹⁹⁵ He was also conscious of the need to ensure that the black viewpoint was considered by the cabinet in day-to-day policy decisions.⁹⁹⁶

As part of the programme of enforcement, Carter continued the policy of desegregating schools despite increased opposition from local white communities. In the early 1970's it was possible to find solutions locally, often with the support of black churches, as was the case with Atlanta.⁹⁹⁷ But by 1977 any attempt to enforce desegregation would have entailed complex negotiations and a joint task force involving

⁹⁹³ Carter note to Cabinet and Heads of Agencies, 25 March 1977, SS Box 12 *JCPL*.

⁹⁹⁴ Valerie Pinson to Carter, 7 September 1977, SS Box 40 and Louis Martin Exit Interview, pp. 3-4, *JCPL*.

⁹⁹⁵ Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 39-40.

⁹⁹⁶ Carter to Eizenstat and Harris, 16 February 1978, Harris Papers Box 113, *Library of Congress (LC)*.

⁹⁹⁷ Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 192.

at the very least the HEW and Justice Departments. The issue became politically sensitive in the north where cities like Chicago, at the time the third largest public-school system in America, refused to submit any plans to desegregate. Despite strong resistance from local Democratic politicians, the administration eventually took Chicago to court⁹⁹⁸ and a desegregation plan was eventually implemented in the summer of 1981. The Public Works Employment Act was the main piece of legislation from the administration that supported minorities. Passed on 13 May 1977, it allocated 10 percent or up to \$4bn of the government's procurement budget for minority employers.⁹⁹⁹ Carter wanted to incentivise minority businesses and continued to keep track of the act's implementation after its passage.¹⁰⁰⁰ The main concern of black interest groups, not the least the black caucus, was to influence the administration on the economy. Congressman Parren Mitchell requested this type of access in February 1977 but Carter though indicating he wanted to help, only offered cabinet member Harris as a liaison.¹⁰⁰¹ As Carter's economic policy moved to a greater focus on austerity and fighting inflation there were increased black concerns, particularly as African-American youth unemployment increased from 32.7 to 35.5 percent in March 1979.¹⁰⁰² Such concerns about the administration's economic policy continued right up to the 1980 election.

Harris and Martin were at pains to remind Carter of the importance of the black electorate. Harris highlighted the black vote in the 1976 election (Carter won 85-90

⁹⁹⁸ Days to Civiletti, 21 April 1980, Justice Department, Attorney General Box 133, NARA.

⁹⁹⁹ Stephanie A Slocum-Schaffer, *America in the 70's* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 150.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Watson to Carter, 16 August 1979, SS Box 127, JCPL.

¹⁰⁰¹ Carter to Parren Mitchell, 8 February 1977, Harris Papers Box 112, LC.

¹⁰⁰² Louis Martin to Carter, 12 March 1979 Louis Martin Papers, Box 2, LC.

percent of the vote) to emphasise the importance of a high turn out through effective urban policies.¹⁰⁰³ Although the administration emphasised its record on minority appointments, support for minority businesses (\$3bn) and enforcement on Civil Rights, Carter mainly promoted his track record on the economy and promises of future investment.¹⁰⁰⁴ Despite what was a comprehensive defeat in 1980, the Carter-Mondale ticket still managed to receive 83 percent of the black vote.¹⁰⁰⁵ This result alone would suggest that Carter's policy was successful in terms of maintaining black support, although he was helped by what was regarded by most blacks as an unsympathetic GOP candidate.

In what was a valedictory address at a black leader's luncheon on 5 January 1981, Carter highlighted his successes.¹⁰⁰⁶ His appointment of 12 percent black officials, particularly to judgeships, compared favourably with that of his predecessors and his successor,¹⁰⁰⁷ as was his support of minority businesses. The administration's policy was to use affirmative action and regulation in federal appointments to reflect the demographics of society. Such actions, as indicated by the Bakke case, did not prove easy to enforce. The Justice Department found that this was the case with the enforcement of minority contracts as white companies often used small black companies as 'fronts' to get around the regulations.¹⁰⁰⁸ Such policies, whilst perfectly in keeping with Carter's vision of an efficient government, did not fulfil the dreams of black leaders of structural economic reform. It was not just Carter's anti-inflation policies that

¹⁰⁰³ Harris to Carter, no date, Harris Papers Box 114, *LC*.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Undated, Martin Box 2, *LC*.

¹⁰⁰⁵ <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/?s=jimmy+carter>

¹⁰⁰⁶ Carter Speech to Black Leaders, 5 January 1981, SS Box 185, *JCPL*.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, 89.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Thomas Sullivan to Bell, 9 May 1979, Attorney General Box 114, *NARA*.

threatened the social programmes on which minority groups were dependent but also the growing tax revolt increased resentment over federal expenditure on welfare which was seen to favour blacks. He tried to reassure black groups¹⁰⁰⁹ but he did not change his policies. Carter may not have wanted radical change but his scope for even minor reform was severely limited. Given these constraints his record of achievement in Civil Rights was solid, if not spectacular.

One lesser known aspect of the Civil Rights legislation in the 1960's was that discrimination was made illegal not just on the grounds of race but also of gender. The formation in 1966 of the National Organisation for Women (NOW) was just one example of a wider women's movement that sought to encourage the role of women in all aspects of American life and to widen and deepen that influence economically and politically. By 1970 women made up 43 percent of the paid work force and this would grow to 52 percent by 1980.¹⁰¹⁰ NOW, was successful at increasing its representation at the 1976 Democratic Convention. However, the growth of the women's movement was faced in the 1970's with a conservative backlash from women who felt threatened, not emancipated, by this new-found independence. Leaders like Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum often brought strong emotional arguments against what they saw as pro-feminist proposals. She testified at a congressional hearing against establishing domestic abuse centres because they would become 'feminist indoctrination centres.'¹⁰¹¹ Even at what was regarded as the high-water mark of the women's movement, the National Women's Conference in November 1977, conservative groups under Schlafly were sufficiently

¹⁰⁰⁹ Martin to Carter, 13 September 1978 Martin Box 2, LC.

¹⁰¹⁰ Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 81.

¹⁰¹¹ Robert Freedman 'The Religious Right and the Carter Administration' *The Historical Journal* Vol.48 (March 2005): 231-260.

organised to control one fifth of the seats. The majority at the conference, under the Chair of Bella Abzug, laid out an agenda for 1977 that assumed a major role for the Federal government, but conservative opposition would ensure that this would be challenged.¹⁰¹² Carter and his wife were strong supporters of women's issues, in particular on Federal appointments and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Also, unlike White House dealings with other interest groups, he appointed staff early in his administration to liaise with the women's movement. The main contact was Midge Constanza, who was later to be replaced by Sarah Weddington. Her role could not always be regarded as an indication of Carter's personal commitment to all women's issues. Carter did regard Constanza as essential but only because, as he said, 'she takes a tremendous burden off me from nut groups that would insist on seeing me if they could not see her.'¹⁰¹³ Whilst Carter argued that he was, through his appointments strategy, a supporter of equality, his backing for the ratification of the ERA was seen more by the women's movement as the authentic indicator of his equality credentials.

The constitutional amendment on women's equality was supported by both parties, when it passed both Houses of Congress in 1972, but had to be ratified by the required 38 states before the 1979 deadline. The proposed amendment established gender equality before the law which would be enforced by Congress if required. It had bipartisan support when introduced under Nixon and was endorsed by Ford. By the time of Carter's election 34 states had ratified the amendment and therefore only four more were required. This outwardly positive situation hid what had been more recently a largely negative trend. Since 1975 seventeen states had had the opportunity to ratify

¹⁰¹² Schulman, *Seventies*, 186.

¹⁰¹³ Carter, *Diaries*, 127.

the amendment but only one, North Dakota, had done so. In addition, during the same period two states, Tennessee and Nebraska, had rescinded their original decision to support the amendment. The impact of this would have to be tested later in the courts.¹⁰¹⁴ Most of the remaining states were in the south or the Sunbelt where there were fewer groups who were prepared to campaign for ERA.¹⁰¹⁵ The more negative political climate was linked to the growing concern articulated by Schlafly and others. Although she appealed to conservative men by arguing that ERA was nothing more than a Federal power grab, she gained even more support from married women who were worried that the amendment would remove their traditional protections. Whilst both sides were concerned about women's economic vulnerability, the fear that ERA would weaken the commitment of men to family life and force women out of their 'normal lives' was gaining support by the time Carter was elected.¹⁰¹⁶ This was particularly the view of religious groups, with 98 percent of opponents of ERA being churchgoers.¹⁰¹⁷ Carter's ongoing support for ratification linked him in their eyes with the 'anti-family, pro-lesbian ERA.'¹⁰¹⁸

Carter was not discouraged by the unfavourable political climate he inherited in 1977. Early narrow defeats in North Carolina and Nevada, partly offset by victory in Indiana in March 1977, were followed by a pessimistic assessment of ERA chances in a further five states.¹⁰¹⁹ Yet Carter remained committed to the cause. He made numerous

¹⁰¹⁴ Briefing, undated, ERA Box 128, LC.

¹⁰¹⁵ Schulman, *Seventies*, 168-70.

¹⁰¹⁶ Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 84.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Ibid*, 256.

¹⁰¹⁸ Freedman, 'Religious Right', 231-260.

¹⁰¹⁹ Mark Siegel to Carter and Rosalyn Carter, 5 March 1977 and Rick Hutcheson to Carter, 3 March 1977, SS Box 10, JCPL.

speeches which equated ERA to Human Rights in his foreign policy and the Civil Rights legislation of another era. He was also supported by the active involvement of his wife and daughter-in-law Judy Carter in the movement.¹⁰²⁰ The overall campaign was coordinated by ERAmerica under Mary (Liz) Carpenter and Mildred Jeffrey but was helped by White House officials, particularly Sarah Weddington who organised help from the president and his cabinet in states like Illinois.¹⁰²¹ Ultimately with crucial ERA votes it was local politics that prevailed, despite many phone calls from Carter and his colleagues. The vital Illinois vote failed to pass because local Democratic politicians believed it was a vote loser in national elections and a court action brought by Schlafly based on erroneous charges that the administration had sought to bribe one of the legislators.¹⁰²² Carter and his wife continued to support local campaigns by attending events, making calls and even complaining when they felt they were not being used enough.¹⁰²³ If he was unable to affect events locally, Carter was able to exert influence nationally by persuading Congress to extend the ERA deadline until 30 June 1982. He remained committed to ERA throughout his time in office, both in terms of direct intervention with state politicians and speeches across the country. Fundamentally, however, the success or failure of ERA was dependent on local campaigns. The states that were yet to endorse ERA in 1977 lacked the infrastructure of support that was available in the earlier ratification campaigns. These states were generally much more conservative. The extension of the deadline to 1982 proved no more than a gesture as

¹⁰²⁰ Equal Rights Amendment Remarks at a White House Reception for Supporters of the Amendment, 23 October 1979,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=31578&st=&st1=>

¹⁰²¹ Liz Carpenter and Mildred Jeffery to Carter, 19 April 1978, ERA Box 120, LC.

¹⁰²² Illinois ERAmerica and Weddington to Carter and Rosalyn Carter, 21 April 1980, SS Box 163, JCPL.

¹⁰²³ Sarah Weddington to Carter and Rosalyn Carter, 28 May 1979, SS Box 119, JCPL.

no other state ratified the amendment. Carter, in his White House Diaries, blamed church groups for the failure of ERA.¹⁰²⁴ Whilst there was much misinformation created by conservatives, the end of gender segregation of prisons if ERA passed being just one,¹⁰²⁵ the proposed amendment created genuine fears which conservatives were able to exploit successfully.

Other than ERA, Carter's focus on women's issues was on using his office to appoint more women. As with other minorities, Carter actively encouraged cabinet members and White House staff to appoint more women and engaged with women's groups to establish a pool of good candidates.¹⁰²⁶ Carter was particularly focussed on getting women into Federal Judgeships but bemoaned difficulties with Congress on such appointments.¹⁰²⁷ On wider women's issues the White House hosted a Women's National History Day and established a cabinet level interdepartmental task force on women.¹⁰²⁸ There were other bills in Congress on prevention of discrimination on pregnancy in the work place and establishing domestic abuse centres which the administration supported, albeit unsuccessfully.¹⁰²⁹ The White House continued to encourage women's groups to organise and establish an agenda for the future, the 1980 White House Conference on the Family being a case in point. Many women's issues became subsumed into the government's economic policy but one that stood out and continued to be divisive for Carter personally was abortion.

¹⁰²⁴ Carter, *Diaries*, 253-54.

¹⁰²⁵ Response to letter in *Ridgway Report*, 14 September 1980, ERA Box 2, LC.

¹⁰²⁶ Watson to Carter, 12 April 1980, SS Box 158, JCPL.

¹⁰²⁷ Carter, *Diaries*, 276-77.

¹⁰²⁸ 7-8 March 1980, ERA Box 120, LC and Hutcheson to Carter, 21 March 1978, SS Box 69, JCPL.

¹⁰²⁹ Susan M Hartman, 'Feminism, Public Policy and the Carter Administration', in Fink and Graham, *Carter Presidency*, 232-36.

Whilst the President projected a liberal image on women's issues in general, he remained consistently and personally opposed to abortion except where the health of the mother was at risk or where pregnancy was because of rape and incest. To Carter this was a matter of personal faith and as with all such matters, he did not hide his views. He continued to comply with the Supreme Court decision, *Roe v Wade*, which conservatives and religious groups wanted overturned. He also supported sex education for teenagers, better adoption arrangements and established women and infant children support programmes. But he opposed federal support for abortion.¹⁰³⁰ Carter's attempt to distinguish his own views from public policy did not prevent major criticism from women's groups and even his own staff. Califano, who as a Catholic had similar views to Carter, highlighted that Constanza had organised a petition in the White House in protest at Carter's views on abortion which was supported by cabinet members' Patricia Harris and Juanita Kreps.¹⁰³¹ This opposition was also reflected in women's groups such as Carter's own National Advisory Committee on Women (NCAW). He sacked its co-chair, Bella Abzug, in 1979 for being openly critical of the administration's budget proposals.¹⁰³² Concern about lack of access to Carter, perceived lack of support on issues like ERA and abortion, and the removal of Abzug and Constanza, caused groups such as NOW to back Edward Kennedy in the primaries of 1980.¹⁰³³ Attempts by Carter to regain the initiative in 1980 through the White House Conference on the Family badly backfired as damaging splits between liberal women's groups and the recently formed conservative Eagle Forum disrupted the event. Despite attempts by Carter to maintain

¹⁰³⁰ Carter, *Diaries*, 71.

¹⁰³¹ Califano, *Governing America*, 65-66.

¹⁰³² Hartman, 'Feminism, Public Policy and the Carter Administration', 228.

¹⁰³³ *Ibid*, 228 and Weddington to Carter, 22 November 1978, SS Box 93, *JCPL*.

a middle ground, an inability to agree on ERA, the abortion rights controversy and arguments about what constituted the family, forced the White House to divide the conference into three separate events which still failed to reach any consensus and sparked walk-outs from conservative groups.¹⁰³⁴

Carter's personal commitment to support women's equality was sustained beyond his presidency even when it touched on his faith. He and Rosalyn left the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000 over the issue and he spoke out again in 2009 in a speech entitled 'Losing my religion for equality'¹⁰³⁵ when he criticised all the major religions for their treatment of women. Decades earlier during his presidency his track record on appointments was impressive. The 40 new Federal judgeships, including future Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, quadrupled the number of women on the Federal bench.¹⁰³⁶ However, the rise of feminism was never a natural part of the New Deal coalition and faced major opposition in both parties in Congress. Carter's personal support did raise expectations in the Women's movement that he was unable or, in the case of abortion, unwilling to deliver. In addition his fiscal policies were heavily criticised as they often weakened programmes that helped women, for example his refusal to endorse equal pay because of the risk of inflation.¹⁰³⁷ It was also the case that he did not feel comfortable with the militancy of some of the feminist groups, often characterising them in private as 'crazy', and he was not supportive of the radical nature of the women's policies espoused in the 1980 Democratic Platform.¹⁰³⁸ Yet despite

¹⁰³⁴ Schulman, *Seventies*, 187-89.

¹⁰³⁵ <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/federal/losing-my-religion-for-equality-20090714-dk0v.html>

¹⁰³⁶ Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 84.

¹⁰³⁷ Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 272.

¹⁰³⁸ Carter, *Diaries* p.378 and Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, 80.

unfair criticism of his performance on ERA, more women than men voted for Carter in the 1980 election and women's rights were the only policy issue in the polls on which Carter led Reagan.¹⁰³⁹ Carter's administration had a credible record on women's issues but the more radical changes wanted by many in the movement were not an option given the rising tide of conservative opposition and Carter's own fiscal conservatism.

The environmental movement was a relatively new phenomenon when Carter was elected. It grew out of concern over the impact of the economic expansion of the 1960's. The celebration of the First Earth Day on 22 April 1970 triggered a reaction from politicians who responded with a series of environmental laws.¹⁰⁴⁰ Carter cared deeply about the environment.¹⁰⁴¹ In his inaugural address as governor in 1971 he talked about the environment being 'threatened by avarice, greed, procrastination and neglect.'¹⁰⁴² His books and diaries were littered with comments and concerns about the environment whilst his 1976 campaign biography, *Why Not the Best*, contained a chapter on his love for the Georgia outdoors.¹⁰⁴³ As governor, with the support of environmental groups, he prevented the building the Spewell Bluff Dam on the Flint River even though it was to be fully funded by the federal government, and reclaimed the Chattahoochee River for recreation.¹⁰⁴⁴ Carter therefore entered office with genuine environmental credentials and high expectations from the environmental lobby. He seemed determined to make a difference as president. Carter wrote in the afterword of his White House Diaries that

¹⁰³⁹ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women* (London: Chatto and Windrush, 1992), 306.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Slocum-Schaffer, *America in the 70's*, 130-31.

¹⁰⁴¹ Eizenstat, *Democratic Party and Making of Domestic Policy*, 6.

¹⁰⁴² *Governor Carter's Inaugural Address, 12 January 1971*.

¹⁰⁴³ Carter, *Why not the Best?* 137.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Jeffrey Stine, 'Environmental Policy During the Carter Presidency', in Fink and Graham, *Carter Presidency*, 180 and Morris, *American Moralists*, 198.

one of the three key themes of his presidency was the environment (including energy conservation).¹⁰⁴⁵ In an early entry as president on a potential dispute on air pollution with auto manufacturers, he said that 'my inclination when there's a direct conflict is to stick with environmental quality.'¹⁰⁴⁶

The environment appeared to be an area where Carter enjoyed public support as well as the backing of the environmental lobby. This enabled him to appoint specialists to important positions and gave him the opportunity to secure congressional backing for new legislation. Unfortunately, the first battles Carter chose to fight on water projects and energy caused major problems with Congress and damaged his environmental credentials. The proposed reduction in the number of water projects across the country was environmentally and fiscally sensible. It also highlighted Carter's deep mistrust of the Corp of Engineers based on his experience as governor. But despite the support of the Water Resources Council, the Council for Environmental Quality and 74 congressmen, Carter's political defeat and eventual retreat damaged his reputation with environmental groups.¹⁰⁴⁷ On water Carter was unable to recover his position politically, with concessions made over the Tellico dam in September 1979 that gave priority to his economic and political concerns over environmental issues. The complexity of Carter's energy proposals, sent to Congress on 29 April 1977, caused major splits within the environmental movement. Some groups wanted the elimination of fossil fuels, some the ending of nuclear energy, others promoted solar power, whilst some groups wanted priority given to conservation. Carter's proposals included many

¹⁰⁴⁵ Carter, *Diaries*, 527.

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Scheele, 'Carter and the Water Projects'.

of these ideas but not to the satisfaction of any faction within the movement. The economics of energy policy caused the fragmentation of the coalition that supported Carter. He was forced to choose between allies such as environmentalists who wanted priority given to conservation and the labour unions who were focussed on protecting jobs. Whereas early in his administration he indicated he would lean towards protecting the environment, this position became politically less tenable as the economy deteriorated.

Although he had made no major speech on the environment during the 1976 campaign, Carter did make his intention clear early in his administration that he was going to promote such policies. His environmental message sent to Congress on 23 May 1977 was comprehensive;¹⁰⁴⁸ it included all the recommendations made by his staff.¹⁰⁴⁹ In his legislative programme he was able to pass improved Clean Air and Water Acts which Ford had previously vetoed. He increased the responsibilities of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), made improvements to National Parks, established the National Heritage Trust, regulated strip-mining through the passage of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 and expanded coverage under previous legislation of National Trails and Wild and Scenic rivers.¹⁰⁵⁰ Another major piece of legislation was the Comprehensive Environmental Response and Compensation Liability Act, signed into law by Carter on 11 December 1980, that established a superfund worth \$1.6bn to protect the public against the damage from toxic waste.¹⁰⁵¹

¹⁰⁴⁸ Environment Message to Congress, 23 May 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7561&st=&st1=>

¹⁰⁴⁹ Warren, Speth and Marion Eley to Carter, 22 April 1977, SS Box 20, JCPL.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Eizenstat to Carter, 8 February 1977, SS Box 7, JCPL.

¹⁰⁵¹ Stine, 'Environmental Policy in the Carter Presidency', 180.

Not all of this legislation was straightforward. The Clean Air Act required the EPA, with Carter's support, to steer a careful political path between the auto manufacturers and the UAW on the impact of tougher emission standards on fuel efficiency.¹⁰⁵² Similarly the establishment of the Redwoods National Park was only achieved by compromise over land usage in order to gain the support of the lumber industry.¹⁰⁵³ In both cases Carter accepted the advice of his staff to enable the legislation to pass. However, despite having a credible legislative programme, the administration's relationship with environmental groups was far from smooth. Part of the problem for the White House was logistical. Gus Speth, Carter's Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, reported that there were over 50 nationally based environmental groups and between 2,500 and 5,000 local groups which totalled some four million members. Speth stated that such groups were largely middle class, cohesive and politically active. Carter's energy policies alienated many of them as they opposed his recommendations on synthetic fuels, coal and the creation of the Energy Mobilisation Board (EMB).¹⁰⁵⁴ A sense of betrayal caused by Carter's energy policies resulted in many groups campaigning actively against those policies, and some supported Ted Kennedy in the primaries.

The environmental lobby also had reservations about Carter's signature environmental legislation, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) which was passed on 12 November 1980 and signed into law three weeks later. ANILCA provided, to varying degrees, special protection to over 157 million acres of land,

¹⁰⁵² Eizenstat and Schirmer to Carter, 14 April 1977, SS Box 15, *JCPL*.

¹⁰⁵³ Eizenstat to Carter, 20 April 1977, SS Box 17, *JCPL*.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Speth to Carter, 16 August 1979, SS Box 127 *JCPL*.

including national monuments, parks, wildlife refuges, rivers, recreational areas, forests and conservation areas. It was the most sweeping proposal of its type ever to pass Congress. It doubled the size of land designated as national parks and almost tripled the amount allocated to wilderness. It also, consequently, prevented exploitation by oil, gas and lumber companies as well as the state government. Carter called it 'one of his most gratifying achievements.'¹⁰⁵⁵ It was also a demonstration of his personal commitment and tenacity. He had continued to push for this legislation from his first environmental message in early 1977 until his eventual success at the end of his presidency. He faced some robust opposition, principally from Alaskan Senators Ted Stevens (GOP) and Mike Gravel (Democrat). Under the provisions of the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, Congress had until the end of 1978 to agree on which lands could be withdrawn from development for conservation purposes. Carter's Secretary of the Interior, Cecil Andrus, shaped the administration's proposals which sought to limit access to developers. Internal debate within the administration saw the OMB lobbying for more flexibility for developers but Carter supported Andrus.¹⁰⁵⁶ However, by the end of 1978 it had become clear that no legislation would be passed in time and so Carter acted on the advice of his cabinet and staff to use his executive powers under the Antiquities Act, and for Andrus to use his powers under the Land Policy Management Act to withdraw nearly 100 million acres in total pending legislation.¹⁰⁵⁷ This was to give the administration breathing space but it prompted wide protests across Alaska which

¹⁰⁵⁵ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 209.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Eizenstat to Carter, 13 September 1977, SS Box 41, *JCPL*.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Eizenstat, Cecil Andrus and Bob Bergland to Carter, 29 November 1978, SS Box 98, *JCPL*.

included Carter being burnt in effigy and a serious civil disobedience campaign known as the Great Denali Trespass.¹⁰⁵⁸

Carter continued to press Congress for legislation and worked with Mo Udall, Chair of the House Interior Committee, in the House to pass a bill in May 1979, and with the Senate to pass their own bill in the following year. Carter maintained a high profile, supporting legislation by visiting Alaska and quoting in press briefings that he regarded the bill as ‘the top environmental priority of my administration, perhaps of my life.’¹⁰⁵⁹ But as the Senate debated the measure Carter was guided by his allies in Congress, principally Udall and Senator Paul Tsongas; often this was advice to stay quiet.¹⁰⁶⁰ He made calls to senators when requested, which were usually successful,¹⁰⁶¹ and balanced the demands of the pro-environmental Alaska Coalition with the need to keep the support of Senator Stevens who, although Republican, was prepared to back a compromise. Although unable to pass the bill before the presidential election, the imminent arrival of a Reagan administration, with its threats of rolling back environmental protection, ensured that potential objections to a compromise from liberals both in and outside Congress did not materialise. Carter may have had a poor track record of persuading Congress to back many of his proposals but in late 1980 he was able to pass this landmark legislation. He succeeded by accepting his staff’s advice, working closely with his allies in Congress and being prepared to compromise.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Dateline: Cantwell, Alaska, *Associated Press*, 15 January 1979 and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGel-9cLoDq>

¹⁰⁵⁹ Press Briefing, 12 July 1980, Congressional Liaison Evelyn Small, Box 320, *JCPL*.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Eizenstat to Carter, 8 August 1980, SS Box 175, *JCPL*.

¹⁰⁶¹ Moore, Bob Schule and Gary Fontana to Carter, 23 July 1980, SS Box 169, *JCPL*.

Eizenstat argued that Carter's track record on the environment was impressive.¹⁰⁶² He built on the trend of environmental reform established by his Republican and Democratic predecessors. Yet this still failed to give him the wholehearted support of those in the environmental lobby who were opposed to his energy policy. Staff such as Bert Carp were highly critical of these groups, calling them 'impossible to deal with.'¹⁰⁶³ This opposition did not last when faced with a potential Reagan presidency and despite the initial support of some for Kennedy in the primaries, environmentalists rallied behind Carter in the 1980 election. Carter's personal commitment to the environment was matched by a legislative record that not even the Reagan administration could eradicate. At the very least his presidency built on and surpassed the record of the Johnson administration and no subsequent president until Barak Obama could claim a more substantial record on the environment.¹⁰⁶⁴

Social change in the 1970s was reflected not only in liberal social movements but also in the politicisation of religion, principally through conservative evangelicalism. For Carter, as a man of faith, this related directly to how he used the issue of his character in the 1976 election. When he presented himself to the American people, he put his character front and centre of his campaign by describing the roles he had played: a scientist, a farmer and a governor, but he always ended by saying that he was a Christian. His faith influenced his behaviour both as a politician and president. He had become a 'born again' Christian in 1966 and he played an active part in his Church life, holding minor office, teaching Sunday School and going on outreach missions to Massachusetts

¹⁰⁶² Eizenstat, 'Democratic Party and the Making of Domestic Policy', 10.

¹⁰⁶³ Carp Interview, *Miller Center*, 47-8.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 272-73 and Stine, 'Environmental Policy', 180

and Pennsylvania. He continued to affirm his faith in his speeches despite any potential political disadvantages and concerns from liberal advisors like Eizenstat that over-emphasising his 'born again' or evangelical credentials (Carter preferred the former term) would turn off many voters. Carter did not accept this argument. His faith was an integral part of who he was, and it was politically relevant as he was standing on the issue of his character. He believed that being an active Christian helped his campaign. He stood as someone who could be trusted; hence his campaign line, 'I will never lie to you.' Carter believed his character and faith tapped into the electorate's desire for moral leadership following Watergate and Vietnam.¹⁰⁶⁵ His faith was reflected in many of his speeches, not the least the 1976 convention address which was described as the 'language of the pulpit, not the podium and yet it fired a worldly crowd.'¹⁰⁶⁶ Carter came from a progressive strain of evangelicalism which emphasised the need for social improvement of the poor, supported Civil Rights and promoted the role of women. This was particularly reflected in his Law Day Speech at the University of Georgia on 4 May 1974.¹⁰⁶⁷ He was also unusual in that during the 1960's evangelicals did not actively participate in politics. But Carter believed, having studied the Christian writer Reinhold Niebuhr, that it was possible to be a politician without compromising his beliefs.¹⁰⁶⁸ He believed by focussing on his moral character, he could earn the trust of the American public. There was a part of the electorate to whom Carter's faith was of real interest and these were his fellow evangelicals. To an evangelical movement that was beginning to develop a conservative political agenda, Carter seemed to be the ideal candidate. But as

¹⁰⁶⁵ Adey, *American Civil Religion*, 77-8.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 79.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Balmer, *Redeemer*, 69.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Freedman, 'Religious Right'.

was soon to become apparent there were fundamental differences between his approach to faith and political power and their own.

During the 1960's and 1970's there was a revival in interest in religion with a tripling in the number of Americans who talked of the growing role of faith in their lives. In addition, 1976 was declared by *Time* magazine as the 'Year of the Evangelical'. Leaders like Pat Robertson, James Robinson, Jim Bakker and Jerry Falwell had an estimated 100 million followers. Pat Robertson set up Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) which focussed on fundamentalist issues and had five million viewers.¹⁰⁶⁹ It was Falwell who established the 'Moral Majority', a lobby group that grew to two million supporters and campaigned for pro-God and family policies. Despite the growth in evangelicalism there was an initial reluctance to become involved in politics. In the 1960's Falwell spoke out against evangelicals campaigning ¹⁰⁷⁰ but this started to change in the 1970's with progressives such as Carter campaigning for social justice whilst conservatives responded to what they saw as their fundamental values being challenged by the state.¹⁰⁷¹ This fear was triggered by Supreme Court decisions on prayer in school (1962) and abortion (1973).¹⁰⁷² As a political force, they joined conservatives within the Republican Party who campaigned in 1974 against Ford's choice as Vice President, Nelson Rockefeller, a liberal and divorcee. They subsequently formed with business an effective pressure group to defeat pro-labour legislation, campaigned against the ratification of the ERA, abortion and school bussing, and supported capital punishment. Despite this move to the right, the evangelical movement had political expectations of their fellow

¹⁰⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷¹ Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 84 and 250.

¹⁰⁷² Freedman 'Religious Right'.

believer. Carter seemed to be 'one of their own' with impeccable 'born again' credentials and they voted for him in large numbers in 1976, helping to secure the south for the Democrats. They were to be severely disappointed by the end of Carter's term of office but the clues to their differences were to be found in the 1976 campaign.

Carter emphasised moral leadership during his campaign which was supported by his simple style and candour about religion. This was appealing to the religious right and in the south, but Carter recognised that his 'born again' beliefs could be regarded as strange in some quarters. His attempt to address this and other questions about himself, including his perceived vagueness on issues, resulted in his interview in September 1976 in *Playboy* magazine. Perhaps it was also a misguided attempt to emphasise that he was 'normal' and appeal to a younger, more liberal audience. His choice of *Playboy* for the interview - Californian Governor Jerry Brown had used this successfully - and his professed admiration for Bob Dylan, which were his sons' obsession not his, were other examples of this. But the language he used in the interview shocked his Christian supporters and reinforced an image of strangeness with the rest of the electorate. The electoral impact of the *Playboy* article was exaggerated. Carter's early lead in the polls was a false one as the gap with Ford had started to close long before the interview was published. Conservative Christians were clearly upset by the language and the choice of the medium to publicise his views but what they should have been more concerned about was what he said in the main interview. He made it clear that whatever his personal faith, he was not proposing an evangelical political agenda.¹⁰⁷³ Carter's campaign reinforced this point: he promised few if any changes to

¹⁰⁷³ Carter Interview, *Playboy*, November 1976.

the liberal social legislation already in place. Nevertheless, this ultimately did not erode the widespread support of evangelicals across the south that enabled him to win the election.

Carter may have wanted to downplay the influence of the religious right on his presidency, but it was a matter of supreme irony that it was the actions of his administration that did most to politicise the movement. This was caused by the initiation of a policy which one conservative strategist described as having the effect of kicking 'a sleeping dog.'¹⁰⁷⁴ The issue was the Inland Revenue Service (IRS) decision to enforce the *Green v Connally* court ruling of 30 June 1971 which allowed the IRS to withdraw tax allowances on segregated schools.¹⁰⁷⁵ The ruling was designed to penalise schools that had been established in the south to avoid desegregation legislation and put the onus on these schools to prove non-discrimination. Carter's new IRS commissioner, Jerome Kurtz, believed enforcement would prevent education establishments like Bob Jones University in South Carolina from blatantly refusing to accept black students. This was consistent with administration policy of enforcing Civil Rights laws. It was an administrative decision that required no political authorisation from the White House. However, many of the affected schools had been established in response to genuine concerns about their children's education such as the court decisions on banning prayer in school and decisions by the Federal government on sex education. These parents not only felt under attack for their beliefs but bitterly resented the implication of racism.¹⁰⁷⁶ As a result of its decision the IRS was inundated with

¹⁰⁷⁴ Freedman, 'Religious Right'.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Balmer, *Redeemer*, 103.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 250.

protests. Kurtz received 126,000 letters of complaint and was forced to request secret service protection.¹⁰⁷⁷ Christian Right activists such as the Moral Majority co-founder Paul Weyrich and Director of National Christian Action Bob Billings Sr. were able to frame IRS action as an attack on religious freedom and mobilised support across the country. They were also able to utilise this activism for wider political action against the administration on other conservative issues. Billings was quoted as saying that 'Jerome Kurtz has done more to bring Christians together than any man since St Paul.'¹⁰⁷⁸ Although the IRS produced modified guidelines in 1979, the protests continued. Carter himself was criticised with Republican Congressman John Ashbrook of Ohio finishing a letter of protest to him by saying, 'You must not desert your religious followers by inaction.'¹⁰⁷⁹ But Carter did not respond and continued to leave any decision to the IRS despite reservations from some of his advisors.¹⁰⁸⁰ Carter's inaction on this issue 'galvanised the religious right. It was the spark that ignited their involvement in real politics.'¹⁰⁸¹

Carter's inaction is explained by his attitude to his faith and politics. His desire to separate his personal beliefs from political decisions meant he often saw religious groups just as fellow believers not as political actors. He did meet some moderate religious leaders at the White House but in his diaries expressed concern about evangelists using television to politicise Christianity.¹⁰⁸² By the end of his second year in

¹⁰⁷⁷ Schulman, *Seventies*, 202.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Thomas Edsall with Mary Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991), 132-3.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Freedman, 'Religious Right'.

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸¹ Edsall with Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, 132-33.

¹⁰⁸² Carter, *Diaries*, 454.

office the White House had developed a sophisticated outreach programme targeting all the key interest groups, but Carter did not appoint a special assistant for religious affairs until May 1979. Bob Maddox had known Carter since the 1960's and had applied for a religious liaison role in the White House twice but had been turned down, once by Carter himself. This was despite White House staff acknowledging that they needed Maddox's contacts in the evangelical movement.¹⁰⁸³ This suggested that Carter was reluctant to acknowledge the religious right as a political force. Maddox spent the remaining 18 months of the administration trying to rebuild Carter's support among religious groups. He travelled widely meeting evangelicals but only persuaded Carter to see them in January 1980. The meeting went well but in a press conference afterwards Falwell distorted what Carter had told them about his attitude to gay rights.¹⁰⁸⁴ Despite this and Carter's comment that they had sounded 'really right wing,' he still believed that these leaders were fundamentally supportive of his presidency.¹⁰⁸⁵ This demonstrated a basic misunderstanding by Carter of their position on political issues. The Christian right now had a political agenda and like any other interest group they expected Carter, as a fellow believer, to deliver on it. For example, when Carter was interviewed by Robertson for CBN, he agreed to consider evangelical candidates for jobs in his administration but none of the twenty CV's Robertson sent over were ever considered.¹⁰⁸⁶ They also became increasingly frustrated by Carter's treatment of them in terms of political access. His negative attitude to interest groups was well established but other groups, particularly supporters, received serious consideration of their

¹⁰⁸³ Robert Maddox Exit Interview, 8 December 1980, *JCPL*.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 12-13.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Carter, *Diaries*, 394.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Maddox Exit Interview, 8 December 1980, *JCPL*.

priorities. To Carter religion was essentially a private not a political matter. This approach was reflected throughout his presidency.

In January 1977 Jimmy Carter became America's third Baptist president after Harding and Truman. There were many visible signs of his evangelical background during his presidency from the careful choice of biblical quotes in his inaugural address, his secret service code name, Deacon, his regular attendance at his new church in Washington and insistence on teaching Sunday school there. There were also more subtle signs of the influence of his Baptist background. He attempted to take the ceremony out of the presidency by walking with his wife to the White House after his inauguration, reducing the use of 'Hail to the Chief' when he arrived at events, and even carrying his own bags onto Air Force One. But his faith did not translate into concrete policies in his new administration. Carter's position on his beliefs and his role as president was reflected in a press conference he gave in November 1978. He explained, 'I have been very careful not to inter-relate my Christian beliefs with my responsibilities as President. But it is a great personal gratification for me to have that religious faith.'¹⁰⁸⁷ Whilst reinforcing the importance of faith to him *personally*, he carefully drew a line between his beliefs and his responsibility to the office. He argued that he had a rational approach to the presidency that was not affected by faith or for that matter ideology. On policy he said that he tried to analyse each question individually: 'I've taken positions that to me are fair and rational.'¹⁰⁸⁸ In effect he was arguing in personal terms for the

¹⁰⁸⁷ President's News Conference, 9 November 1978,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30140&st=&st1=>

¹⁰⁸⁸ Carter Interview, *Playboy*, November 1976.

separation of Church and State. This would prove to be a lot more difficult than he had imagined.

On no issue was this more controversial than abortion. The evangelical movement started to move away from a previously sympathetic position on abortion in the 1970s and began to form an alliance with Roman Catholics on the issue. The landmark Supreme Court decision, *Roe v Wade*, established in January 1973 the legality of abortion in certain circumstances. Although women's groups sought to widen the criteria, religious groups wanted the ruling overturned. In an increasingly volatile climate, Carter maintained his position of refusing to overturn *Roe v Wade* whilst making clear his personal opposition to abortion. He supported the Hyde amendment which restricted the use of Federal funds for abortion except when the life of the mother was threatened. Carter's attempt to separate his personal beliefs from his public position was directly challenged by fellow evangelicals.¹⁰⁸⁹ Bob Maddox believed that Carter was blindsided by how emotive the abortion issue was because as governor he had not faced it as a problem in Georgia.¹⁰⁹⁰ But it was just one of many issues on which evangelicals felt Carter was letting them down. These included the IRS tax exemption on religious schools, ERA, prayer in schools, the White House Conference on the Family and gay rights, where Carter had criticised California's Proposition 6 which sought to ban gay people from teaching.¹⁰⁹¹ To the religious right these were not just policies but matters of conscience and they could not accept that a president who was 'born again' would not act on them. They proved to be much more forgiving of Reagan who had actively

¹⁰⁸⁹ Balmer, *Redeemer*, 97.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 134.

¹⁰⁹¹ Sacramento, California Remarks at a "Get Out the Vote" Rally, 3 November 1978.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30111&st=&st1=>

campaigned against Proposition 6. They were also prominent in the conservative right's targeting of Senator Dick Clark of Iowa in the 1978 mid-term elections. It was the campaigning of religious groups on the issue of abortion that proved a significant factor in Clark's surprise defeat.¹⁰⁹² They reinvigorated their alliance with conservative Republicans that had flourished briefly at the 1976 GOP convention. This time they were committed to a much broader conservative agenda.

To ensure the support of religious groups, the Republican Party shifted its position on ERA and the IRS rulings on religious schools to align with their agenda. In addition, as presidential candidate, Reagan promised to appoint 'Godly men' into his administration.¹⁰⁹³ Republicans were rewarded with strong support during the 1980 election. Evangelical groups sent out 840,000 leaflets. The Christian Voice raised \$500,000 whilst the Moral Majority Political Action Committee (PAC) supported 12 Republican congressional challengers, 11 of whom were elected. Their impact went beyond the south and the evangelical movement as their support ensured the victory of Catholic candidates in Alabama and Oklahoma.¹⁰⁹⁴ The politicisation of the religious groups was symbolised by Bob Billings Sr. who had led the fight against the IRS and became the Moral Majority's first Executive Director and later President Reagan's religious affairs advisor.¹⁰⁹⁵ Maddox believed that despite his efforts on Carter's behalf to engage with the evangelical movement, the tide had turned against him as early as 1979 with some groups even questioning whether the president was a Christian.¹⁰⁹⁶

¹⁰⁹² Balmer, *Redeemer*, 100-1.

¹⁰⁹³ Freedman, 'Religious Right'.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Edsall and Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, 132-3.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Maddox Exit Interview, 8 December 1989, *JCPL*.

Personal attacks against Carter also extended to his family with a particularly vicious campaign against his evangelical sister, Ruth Carter Stapleton.¹⁰⁹⁷ In the 1980 election Reagan picked up more of the evangelical vote than Carter and in the 96 most Baptist counties, Carter ran 18 percent down on his performance in 1976.¹⁰⁹⁸ This contributed heavily to Reagan's gains in the south.

Carter's religious beliefs were reflected throughout his political career in his behaviour and approach to government. His speeches were often delivered in the style of a preacher and laced with moral themes. His marked reluctance to strike political bargains was largely a Baptist trait.¹⁰⁹⁹ His beliefs did give him a sense of inner calm and detachment from the pressures he would face as president. He was unable to convert his public profession of faith into political support from the growing influence of the conservative Christians. He failed to recognise them as an interest group and although he was always willing to discuss matters of faith, he was not prepared to change his policies. To Carter, his faith was ultimately a personal matter unrelated to politics. His anger at a photograph of him appearing in the press attending church was symptomatic of this.¹¹⁰⁰ The separation of faith and politics was incomprehensible to many fellow believers who felt under attack by changes in society. They expected as a matter of conscience for Carter to act politically on their core issues. His lack of action on policies like abortion and the IRS rules on religious schools was viewed as nothing less than an act of betrayal. It was unsurprising therefore that in the 1980 election they swung their

¹⁰⁹⁷ Faludi, *Backlash*, 264.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Freedman 'Religious Right'.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Speer, 'Carter was a Baptist President', 92.

¹¹⁰⁰ Bergland Interview, *Miller Center*, 9.

support behind Reagan who promised much of what they wanted, although when in office delivered little.

The interest groups discussed in this chapter were movements that campaigned for social change during this period. Although they were Carter's natural constituency and voted for him in large numbers in 1976, they also represented a major challenge for his administration. His perceived espousal of their causes created huge expectations for his presidency. While he agreed with many of their views, he took a moderate rather than radical line on reform. Faced with the ideological divide between the liberal and conservative views on policy, Carter invariably stood on the middle ground but ended up being attacked from both sides. As a moderate he sought to build on previously enacted legislation through active enforcement and using increased government oversight to ensure that these movements were more represented in his administration. But Carter did not initiate radical change; every action reinforced or supplemented measures that had gone before. His famous quote that 'the time for discrimination was over'¹¹⁰¹ was typical of this approach. Civil Rights has long been regarded as a moral issue where presidents were expected to demonstrate leadership. Carter's nuanced stance, focussing on incremental change, did not fulfil such expectations. This moderate response was deemed inadequate by minority groups who saw their cause as a moral necessity.

The problem for Carter was that whilst he endorsed the broad aims of these groups' his support was neither impassioned nor unqualified. He did not have the luxury of wholeheartedly supporting one cause as other factors had to be considered. This did

¹¹⁰¹ *Governor Carter's Inaugural Address*, 12 January 1971.

not mean that his character did not influence his relationships with these groups. His decision to proceed with cutting the water projects budget in 1977 may have been economically and environmentally driven but he also opposed these projects on moral grounds.¹¹⁰² His fraught relationship with fellow evangelicals was caused by Carter's fundamental belief in the separation of his faith from politics. Such beliefs were never understood by these groups who often saw issues in one-dimensional terms. This resulted in reactions from activists that ranged from disappointment to even a sense of betrayal. Much of this disenchantment came from liberals who expected a Democratic president to follow an agenda based on progressive social values. Carter may not have been a liberal in its broadest sense, but his genuine attempts to implement many of these core policies were hampered by his own fiscal conservatism. Many of these programmes involved increased government expenditure which conflicted with an anti-inflation strategy that Carter prioritised. Finally, all these groups faced opposition from a conservative movement which was gaining popular support. Conservatives were leading protests on a wide range of issues against tax increases, affirmative action, ERA and government regulation in general. This backlash was effective in pushing back reform, particularly when such policies were taken up by the Republican Party by the end of 1978.

Given this, Carter found himself in the middle of warring interest groups on almost every issue with little room for manoeuvre. Despite these inherent difficulties, the administration could claim some major successes, especially in environmental protection. In terms of how Carter managed these issues, there was little evidence of

¹¹⁰² Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 260

his alleged antipathy to working with interest groups. This was possibly because they were natural supporters and he generally approved of their goals. In the case of ethnic minorities, women and environmental groups he had members of staff who understood and sympathised with their objectives and liaised closely with them. It was his advisors who guided Carter in dealing with these groups so, despite general disappointment with Carter's lack of radical action on their behalf and a brief dalliance by some with Kennedy, he was able to maintain their support in the 1980 campaign.

The exception to this was the evangelical movement: despite their common faith, Carter did not collaborate with them politically as he did not recognise them as a political force. It was paradoxical that he lost the support of the one interest group with whom he had the most in common personally. The Christian right continued to support Reagan but much of their social programme, including the repeal of *Roe v Wade*, was not implemented during Reagan's time in office. The other liberal groups were to have reason to mourn Carter's electoral passing as under Reagan many of his administration's achievements in energy and the environment were reversed. Some relatively minor changes survived, such as the appointment of minorities to the federal bench and deregulation. The most notable exception was the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act which proved to be the greatest long-lasting domestic policy achievement of Carter's presidency.

Chapter Seven

1980 Election: The Battle against Kennedy and Reagan

On 15 July 1979 Carter gave a television speech about the latest energy crisis but he went on to talk about what he saw as a much deeper problem in the country. He stated that 'the erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America.'¹¹⁰³ This pessimistic assessment was followed by the expression of confidence that a solution was possible, and he outlined his plans on how this could be achieved. This address was dubbed by the media the 'malaise speech' although this was not a term he used. The speech was intended by the White House to be a watershed moment for the administration. It was designed to signal a new approach on how Carter was going to govern in the run up to the 1980 presidential election, which was only sixteen months away. As part of this new approach he made a series of organisational changes designed to make his administration more effective in addressing policy failures on the economy and energy. The roots of this speech and the subsequent organisational changes related back to polling completed in late 1978 which touched upon two different aspects of Carter's character: his faith and his belief in rational analysis.

In October 1978 Carter's newly appointed religious liaison, Bob Maddox, wrote to Carter about his discussions with religious leaders. He reported that all of them had highlighted the need for the president's moral leadership because they believed that

¹¹⁰³Address to the Nation on Energy and National Goals: "The Malaise Speech," 15 July 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32596&st=&st1=>

the country was 'at a crisis point in our spirits.'¹¹⁰⁴ This view was reinforced by Carter's pollster Pat Caddell whose 'State of the Nation' survey conducted from the end of 1978 to January 1979 made for gloomy reading for the administration. The survey described a pervading sense of pessimism in the country. The number of voters who were pessimistic about the future had doubled since January 1977 and now outnumbered the optimists 48 to 16 percent. This trend was accelerating and represented the worst figures since Watergate.¹¹⁰⁵ Carter was seen to lack relevance, the public had 'tuned out' of his messages and, most troubling, whilst his personal qualities continued to be appreciated, the majority did not believe that he was a competent president.¹¹⁰⁶ It was these findings that Caddell used in April 1979 to produce his report 'Of Crisis and Opportunity'¹¹⁰⁷ which heavily influenced both the tone and content of Carter's energy speech in July 1979. Caddell argued that there was an underlying pessimism in the country that Carter needed to address before trying to solve the energy crisis. Not everyone in the White House agreed with this analysis, particularly its inherent pessimism; some staff dubbed Caddell's paper 'Apocalypse Now.' However, from April 1979 onwards, few in the White House would disagree that the administration was in serious trouble. The latest fuel crisis sparked by the revolution in Iran had resulted in the doubling of the price of oil in twelve months. Increases in petrol prices triggered a trucker's strike and widespread queues at gas stations. Between April and early July 1979, the White House was focussed on drafting what would be the president's fifth speech on energy. Carter's advisors were split on the approach he should take. His

¹¹⁰⁴ Maddox to Carter, 3 October 1978, SS Box 93, JCPL.

¹¹⁰⁵ Caddell to Carter, 12 July 1979, Chief of Staff Butler, Box 142, JCPL.

¹¹⁰⁶ Caddell report, 23 April 1979, Powell Papers, Press Offices, Box 40, JCPL.

¹¹⁰⁷ Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis*, 17.

speechwriters were worried, noting that the mood in the country was 'grim' and that 'hatred for the oil companies is only matched by the lack of confidence in the administration.' For his latest speech they warned of the dangers of Carter's preachy style and argued for 'no more berating the American people for waste and selfishness.'

¹¹⁰⁸ Eizenstat and other liberals in his administration were more optimistic that a focussed energy speech could work. During the 1976 election and his early years as president, Carter prided himself on his connection with the American people but there were signs in April 1979, before he left for an economic summit in Japan, that he was increasingly frustrated by his inability to convince the public on energy policy. He described the draft speech he received before he left as the worst he had ever seen.¹¹⁰⁹ His uncertainty persisted when he returned to Washington. He called Lance and said, 'I came back from my meeting in Tokyo and it all seemed to be falling down around me in the White House. I don't know what to do about it.'¹¹¹⁰ These were the signs that Carter was suffering from his own personal 'crisis of confidence.'

His solution was to cancel the speech and invite a wide range of prominent Democratic Party figures, members of Congress, governors, labour leaders, academics and clergy to Camp David from 9-12 July 1979 to confer on the state of the nation. The feedback received from the participants reflected the internal debate within the White House. They told him that he had to convince the American public that the administration had credible solutions to solve its energy problems whilst addressing the underlying 'crisis of confidence'. This debate was reflected in the drafting of the speech

¹¹⁰⁸ Nesmith, Schapiro and Stewart to Rafshoon and Hertzberg on energy speech, 26 September 1979, Speechwriters Subject Files, Box 8, *JCPL*.

¹¹⁰⁹ Rafshoon and Hertzberg to Carter, 1 April 1979, SS Box 112, *JCPL*.

¹¹¹⁰ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 178.

after Camp David. Eizenstat, Mondale and other liberals argued for a practical energy programme matched by a speech to the public that was not 'too much like an old scold and grouch' and 'instead ... play to their better instincts.'¹¹¹¹ Eizenstat was highly critical of Caddell's ideas, describing him as 'Rasputin like,' whilst Mondale was 'visibly angry' both with Caddell and Carter. Mondale told the president at a meeting that 'you're very tired and this is affecting your thinking'.¹¹¹² Caddell argued that addressing the underlying pessimism was the only way to regain the public's attention and gain their active support. The final speech was a compromise and reflected both perspectives. Carter delivered his speech to a television audience of 65 million, twice the number compared with recent speeches. The initial response from the public and the press was positive. Carter's approval rating went up 11 percent.¹¹¹³ Letters into the White House ran 85 percent in favour with a positive reaction to his call to rebuild the American spirit.¹¹¹⁴ The press was generally supportive, some praising it as his best speech, but conservative media remained critical. The *Wall Street Journal* commented sarcastically on Carter that, 'You roam America in your Boeing 707 and helicopter seeking insight into the nation's soul.'¹¹¹⁵

The ultimate success of the speech was dependent upon the administration's ability to pass meaningful energy legislation after the congressional summer recess, but the initial goodwill had largely dissipated before then. Carter's aggressive energy speech

¹¹¹¹ Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis*, 94-96.

¹¹¹² Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 670-72 and 680.

¹¹¹³ Ribuffo, 'Selling the President', 155.

¹¹¹⁴ Hugh Carter to President Carter, 17 July 1979, SS Box 124, JCPL.

¹¹¹⁵ Kevin Mattson, *'What the heck are you up to Mr President?': Jimmy Carter, American 'malaise,' and the speech that should have changed the country* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 175.

in Kansas the following day¹¹¹⁶ and the sudden removal of five members of his cabinet appeared to contradict his message of unity. The problem for Carter was as well as trying to address the country's crisis of confidence, he was also trying to deal with the second negative element in the Caddell polls, his leadership. The public wanted strong leadership from their president which they did not believe Carter was providing.¹¹¹⁷ The administration response to this was to refresh the cabinet and reorganise the White House. The intention was not only to improve the administration's effectiveness but also to demonstrate Carter's strength as a leader. The manner and timing of the cabinet departures of Griffin Bell, Michael Blumenthal, Joe Califano, Brock Adams and James Schlesinger were heavily criticised in the press.¹¹¹⁸ The decision to request pro-forma resignations was originally supposed to include undersecretaries and White House staff but the targeting of the cabinet so soon after his keynote speech created the impression of a crisis.¹¹¹⁹ Some of this criticism was unfair as Bell and Schlesinger had already indicated their intention to leave and Adams' indecisiveness on whether he would stay forced Carter to remove him. The only substantial dismissals therefore were those of Califano and Blumenthal, both of whose poor relations with White House staff had made their long-term future untenable. The new additions to the cabinet, particularly Bill Miller at the Treasury and Charles Duncan at Energy, did improve the relationships within the administration. There was one appointment that did have a profound impact on not only the presidency of Carter but his successor: Paul Volcker's arrival at the Federal Reserve, and his subsequent policies, resulted in the defeat of inflation. But

¹¹¹⁶ Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Counties, 16 July 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32597&st=&st1=>

¹¹¹⁷ Nelson, *Presidency and the Political System*, 16.

¹¹¹⁸ Joseph Kraft, 'Self-inflicted Wounds', *Washington Post*, 29 July 1979.

¹¹¹⁹ Jordan to Carter, 17 July 1979, C of S Box 37, JCPL and Carter, *Diaries*, 345-46.

unfortunately for Carter, the initial impact of Volcker's policies of high interest rates triggered a recession that would last beyond Carter's term in office.

The staff changes within the White House, which established a streamlined structure under a chief of staff, did improve efficiency. The appointment of Jordan to the role of chief of staff caused some initial problems particularly as he remained unpopular with members of congress, but he left the detailed work to his deputy Alonzo McDonald.¹¹²⁰ McDonald was one of three experienced advisors brought into the White House after the 15 July speech. Lloyd Cutler became Counsel to the president and Hedley Donovan a senior advisor. All three improved the administration's efficiency but it was McDonald who had the greatest impact, streamlining White House operations from issue management to speechwriting.¹¹²¹ This improvement would continue until the end of Carter's term in office with Jack Watson replacing Jordan as chief of staff in June 1980 when he left to join Carter's campaign team.

For White House staff like Jordan, the 15 July speech was an opportunity for Carter to reassert his leadership, supported by a streamlined organisation and a more effective cabinet. Although these personnel changes were acknowledged as successful by staff,¹¹²² the envisaged 'relaunch' of Carter's presidency did not materialise. The 'post-malaise' mood continued into August. Adding to the sombre atmosphere was the departure of Carter's United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young who was forced to resign for meeting secretly with representatives of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. In addition, Jordan was investigated by the FBI for taking cocaine.

¹¹²⁰ Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 126-27.

¹¹²¹ Alonzo McDonald Interview, *Miller Center*, 16-43.

¹¹²² Carp Interview, *Miller Center*, 60.

Although this charge was false, the speculation was damaging to the administration.¹¹²³ Symbolic of this sense of disappointment was the 'thank you lunch' held by the White House at the end of July for the 150 people who participated in the Camp David Summit. Barely half attended as many did not want to be associated with what was now perceived to be a failure.¹¹²⁴ Carter began his speech on 15 July with, 'This is not a message of happiness or reassurance,' but by 1979 this was not what the public wanted to hear. Conservatives such as Ronald Reagan refused to accept that there was a crisis of confidence in America. They believed the pessimism was caused by a failure of presidential leadership and Republicans would fight the 1980 election on that basis.¹¹²⁵

Carter also soon realised that the speech had failed to reassure the liberal wing of his party, and hence he would be dealing with an internal challenge before he could face the Republicans. Ted Kennedy, in launching his campaign in Boston on 7 November 1979, focussed on leadership and touched on Carter's July speech. He said, 'Before the last election, we were told that Americans were honest, loving, good, decent and compassionate. Now the people are blamed for every national ill and scolded as greedy, wasteful, and mired in malaise.'¹¹²⁶ Kennedy's analysis of Carter's speech from a liberal perspective was to be the same as Reagan's view, although their solutions to the country's problems were to be markedly different. Carter would therefore be faced with a political war on two ideological fronts.

¹¹²³ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 184.

¹¹²⁴ Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors. How Reagan Won and Why Carter Lost the Election of 1980* (New York: Viking, 1981), 45.

¹¹²⁵ Morris, *American Moralist*, 5.

¹¹²⁶ Kennedy speech at Faneuil Hall Boston, 7 November 1979, 1979 General, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, *JFK Presidential Library (JFKPL)*.

Carter's relationship with the Democratic Party had always been problematic. His campaign in 1976 had mainly bypassed national and state organisations using local volunteers to reach the state electorate. Carter said in an interview in 1982 that, 'Very few of the members of congress or members of major lobbying groups or distinguished former Democratic leaders had played much of a role in my election.'¹¹²⁷ This view was not entirely accurate as many Democratic groups at state and national level provided invaluable support during the election. His attempts to shape the party after 1976 were at best sporadic and not always successful. His wish to make fellow Georgian Philip Wise national chair was unsuccessful and he often supported local opposition to key party leaders like Mayor Richard Daley in Chicago.¹¹²⁸ Alonzo McDonald argued that from the party viewpoint, Carter appeared unreliable because he was so independent. In addition, being non-ideological in a party where philosophy mattered, made him vulnerable to attack by both conservative and liberal wings.¹¹²⁹ It was the liberals, oddly Carter's most consistent supporters in Congress, who felt the most disappointment with their president. Liberal uncertainty over Carter's ideology went back as far as the 1976 primary campaign when the entry of the liberal, Jerry Brown, resulted in five primary victories for the Governor of California.¹¹³⁰ But it was Carter's perceived failure to deliver on key liberal policies like labour law reform, health care, ERA and especially on the economy that caused the most anger. Some of this criticism was unfair because with the country becoming more conservative, much of the proposed liberal legislation did not have public or even congressional support. The liberals, however, remained in the

¹¹²⁷ Greenstein, *Presidential Difference*, 128.

¹¹²⁸ Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, 51-52.

¹¹²⁹ McDonald Interview, *Miller Center*, 72-3.

¹¹³⁰ Motter, 'Seeking Limits: Passage of National Energy Act', 571.

majority in the party and they used its mid-term conference in December 1978 to criticise the president publicly. The appointment of Anne Wexler as Special Assistant for Public Outreach in September 1978 did improve the level of engagement between the party and his administration. But Carter reflected in his diary after the 1980 election that due to his nervousness about interest groups, he paid too little attention to his party and did not do enough to prevent liberal defections during the election.¹¹³¹ Carter did work hard, however, to court the party's liberal standard bearer, Ted Kennedy.

Carter and Kennedy had always been seen as rivals who aspired to lead the party. Carter's speech at Georgia University's Law Day in May 1974 was arguably designed not only to enhance his growing reputation nationally but also to upstage Kennedy, his fellow speaker on the day.¹¹³² Kennedy had decided not to run in 1976, largely due to the illness of his son Teddy, but he left open the option to run in 1980 or 1984. An Atlanta reporter alleged that Carter had said on winning the nomination in 1976 that he was pleased to have won the nomination without 'having to kiss Ted Kennedy's ass to get it.'¹¹³³ There was a view in the White House, especially amongst the Georgians, that Kennedy would not wait until 1984 and would use policy issues such as health as a means of differentiating himself from the administration. This rivalry contributed to the White House staff's suspicion of Secretary Califano because of his close relationship with the Kennedy family. Califano's dismissal in July 1979, following White House advisor Peter Bourne's departure the previous year, deprived the president of the only informal channels he had to the Kennedy camp. Despite this, during Carter's presidency,

¹¹³¹ Carter *Diaries* 527.

¹¹³² Glad, *In Search of the Great White House*, 212-13.

¹¹³³ Interview with Jordan, 2 March 1995, Ickes to Jordan, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, *JFKPL*.

Kennedy's voting record, at 84 percent in favour of the administration's legislation, was exemplary.¹¹³⁴ Kennedy was also fulsome in his praise of Carter's support for his initiative on Northern Ireland.¹¹³⁵ Kennedy did vent his frustration on occasion, for example he called Carter's 1978 Revenue Act 'the worst tax legislation approved by Congress since the days of Calvin Coolidge and Andrew Mellon.'¹¹³⁶

It was disagreements over health-care policy that finally brought about Kennedy's split from Carter. Kennedy believed that comprehensive health care was a fundamental right and not something that should be dependent upon the state of the economy. In June 1979 Carter's long-awaited reform plan recommended only a phased implementation of comprehensive health-care which depended upon the prevailing economic conditions. His fiscal conservatism and fear of inflation prevented him giving a guarantee of automatic implementation. Kennedy argued that 'health care and health insurance were the issues that damaged our relations beyond repair.'¹¹³⁷ The inference that this was the reason Kennedy decided to enter the Democratic primaries was supported by Eizenstat who argued that Kennedy could not accept the Carter proposal as it would lose him the support of the labour unions which represented his natural constituency.¹¹³⁸ But even Kennedy was not definitive about the source of the rift. In his autobiography he highlighted Carter's failure to appoint his friend Archibald Cox to a Federal judgeship, despite a personal appeal, and his negative reaction to Carter's 'malaise speech.'¹¹³⁹ Carey Parker, Kennedy's policy director, argued that conflict

¹¹³⁴ Lisa Bourdeaux to Moore, 28 January 1980, SS Box 147, JCPL.

¹¹³⁵ Interview with Jordan, 2 March 1995, Ickes-Jordan, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, JFKPL.

¹¹³⁶ Iwan W Morgan, *Deficit Government. Taxing and Spending in Modern America* (Chicago, Ivan Dee, 1995), 146.

¹¹³⁷ Ted Kennedy, *True Compass* (Boston, Little Brown, 2009). 357.

¹¹³⁸ Eizenstat, Edward Kennedy Oral History, 13 July 2000, *Miller Center*, 11

¹¹³⁹ Kennedy, *True Compass*, 364-67.

between the two men was inevitable once Kennedy realised Carter's agenda was conservative in its nature. Kennedy's speech at the mid-term convention in December 1978 which talked about liberals 'sailing against the wind' was the first signal to the party of an alternative to Carter in 1980.¹¹⁴⁰ To Jordan, the reason Kennedy stood was much more straightforward. He argued that healthcare had nothing to do with Kennedy's decision to run. It was just the simple belief that he could beat not only Carter but the likely GOP candidate, Ronald Reagan. Jordan said, 'He thinks we're weak, and he has reason to believe from the polls that he would win. That's why he's going to run.'¹¹⁴¹ Kennedy formally launched his campaign on 7 November 1979 following discussions with his family that summer. His decision to run ensured that Carter was committed to campaign for the next year against two formidable opponents.

In the twelve months before the election, Carter had to deal with two foreign policy crises that would have a major impact on his campaign: the taking of US embassy hostages in Tehran and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Two days before Kennedy declared his candidacy, the deterioration in relations between Iran and America following the overthrow of the Shah culminated in students storming the US embassy in Tehran and the taking of 52 American hostages. Despite the administration's best diplomatic efforts, as well as an attempted military rescue authorised by Carter in April 1980, the hostages were not released until after Reagan's inauguration on 20 January 1981. The hostage crisis affected the Carter campaign in several ways. Whilst his opponents did not make direct political capital out of the crisis, it became a symbol of Carter's perceived ineffectiveness and lack of leadership. The diplomatic situation was

¹¹⁴⁰ Carey Parker Interview, Edward Kennedy Oral History, 13 October 2008, *Miller Center*, 5.

¹¹⁴¹ Stuart Eizenstat Interview, Edward Kennedy Oral History, 13 July 2000, *Miller Center*, 11.

highly complex which hampered Carter's attempts to resolve the crisis and there was as a result several alleged breakthroughs which raised false hopes. It would also prove a distraction not only for Carter personally but for Jordan, his chief campaign strategist, who the president used during the crisis as an unofficial envoy.¹¹⁴² The hostages further impacted on the nature of presidential campaigning as Carter and his advisors decided that he would not campaign in person but remain in the White House to deal with the crisis. Dubbed the 'Rose Garden' strategy, this had been used successfully by previous presidents when standing for re-election but in Carter's case, with him languishing in the polls, this did not prove to be an effective strategy. This was abandoned at a press conference on 30 April 1980 where Carter rather lamely suggested he could start personal campaigning as the challenges the country faced were 'manageable enough'.

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The second foreign policy crisis that Carter faced was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on Christmas Day 1979. This was a major blow to Carter's policy of detente and virtually killed all hope of Congress passing the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II). The invasion was not only a gift to conservative Republicans like Reagan who had always demanded a much harder line with the Soviet Union but caused Carter to reverse his policy on defence spending. His request to increase military expenditure by 6 percent in the proposed 1981 budget had major implications for the administration's economic policy. The increased expenditure all but removed any hope of Carter fulfilling his commitment to a balanced budget without dramatic cuts in social spending which would be opposed by Kennedy and other liberals in the party. These two crises did not

¹¹⁴² Jordan, *Crisis*.

¹¹⁴³ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 806

have an entirely negative effect on the Carter re-election bid as public support, at least initially, for a president in a time of crisis did help him in the primary campaigns. Whilst in presidential elections foreign policy issues do not always become major factors, the hostage crisis and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were used by Republicans to highlight their view of Carter as a weak and ineffective leader.

Carter also had to deal with a deteriorating economy and pressure on his commitment to balance the budget. The initial White House forecast for the 1981 budget became unsustainable with pressure from labour to help the poor and unemployed against recession, and the impact of Carter's decision to increase defence spending because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In January 1980 inflation rose to 19.2 percent which caused a panic on Wall Street. Eizenstat admitted that the White House was 'proposing a budget program which is unachievable as well as undesirable in the present recessionary climate.' As a result, Carter recalled the budget from Congress and tried to impose further spending cuts, but these would still result in a deficit of \$16.5bn. Even so Congress humiliatingly rejected this revised budget.¹¹⁴⁴

Despite these difficulties the White House had always remained confident of defeating Kennedy in the primaries. The president's leaked comment to congressmen on 25 June 1979 about 'whipping his ass' if he ran was stage-managed, according to Mondale, to make Carter seem tough.¹¹⁴⁵ Carter's campaign tactics for the primaries were in line with his 'Rose Garden' strategy. This involved not actively campaigning but instead using surrogates like Vice President Mondale, other senior Democratic Party

¹¹⁴⁴ Iwan W Morgan, *The Age of Deficits. Presidents and Unbalanced Budgets. From Jimmy Carter to George W Bush* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2009), 66-68.

¹¹⁴⁵ Mondale, Edward Kennedy Oral History, *Miller Center*.

figures and Rosalyn Carter, by now a formidable campaigner in her own right, to visit the states concerned. Carter's position within the party also started to improve. Wexler reported on a poll of party chairmen in December 1979 that showed an improvement in the president's standing.¹¹⁴⁶ Carter also sought to build campaign momentum by bringing forward the dates of primaries in the southern states which were his natural constituency.¹¹⁴⁷ This tactic was largely successful in that Kennedy had no significant primary victories until two wins in New York and Connecticut in late March 1980. Carter was helped by some lacklustre electioneering from Kennedy. His campaign launch in Boston, just three days after the taking of the hostages in Tehran, was viewed as insensitive. More damaging to his electoral image was a televised interview with Roger Mudd of CBS, broadcast on 4 November 1979, in which Kennedy seemed unable to answer a basic question about why he wanted to be president.¹¹⁴⁸ Kennedy's policy director admitted that his staff were simply not prepared for the campaign in November and were not properly organised until the following February.¹¹⁴⁹ Unfortunately, by then Kennedy had slid further in the polls as the public rallied round the president following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Initially at least, Kennedy found it difficult to attack Carter's leadership at a time of national crisis. He sought to maintain the support of business by downplaying his liberal agenda.¹¹⁵⁰ However, in a campaign that was to bear some striking similarities to Reagan's primary campaign against Ford in 1976, Kennedy started to win primaries by breaking free of such constraints to focus

¹¹⁴⁶ Wexler to Carter, 7 December 1979, SS Box 141, *JCPL*.

¹¹⁴⁷ Austin Ranney ed, *The American Elections of 1980* (Washington, London: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1982), 45.

¹¹⁴⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6qLFAnBIFg>

¹¹⁴⁹ Parker Interview, Ted Kennedy Oral History, 13 October 2008, *Miller Center*, 6-7

¹¹⁵⁰ Bob Shrum to Kennedy, 17 December 1979, 1979 General, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, *JFKPL*.

more on a liberal agenda. Victories in Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, California and New Jersey, all critical states for the presidential election, prolonged the race up to the Democratic Convention in August. Kennedy believed that this new momentum, where he was gaining support not only from liberals but from blue-collar and minority groups, could be enough to snatch victory at the convention.¹¹⁵¹ He was appealing to blue-collar voters in key states, those who would later become known as Reagan Democrats.¹¹⁵² There was also polling which suggested that Kennedy was not only leading Reagan but was also more trusted to defeat inflation, the major policy issue for the electorate.¹¹⁵³

By late May 1980, confident of victory, the White House had drawn up detailed plans to 'reintegrate' Kennedy backers, particularly his labour supporters, into the Carter camp.¹¹⁵⁴ But at a meeting with Carter in June, not only did Kennedy refuse to step down but his supporters began lobbying for a free vote at the convention. Kennedy believed he had momentum and that Carter delegates from earlier primaries would switch sides and throw the convention to him. In addition, Kennedy asked for a public debate with Carter. Neither of these options were realistic propositions but the president was unable to persuade Kennedy to step aside.¹¹⁵⁵ The White House position was further complicated by indications that Senator Byrd was involved in an attempt with other Democratic Senators to persuade Carter to step down. This may have been caused by Byrd's anger with the president who had not told him in advance of the hostage rescue

¹¹⁵¹ Stanley, *Kennedy vs Carter*, 145-50.

¹¹⁵² *Ibid*, 156.

¹¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 96-97.

¹¹⁵⁴ Aronson to Butler, 30 May 1980, Chief of Staff Butler Box 145, *JCPL*.

¹¹⁵⁵ Carter note of meeting with Kennedy, 5 June 1980, 1980 General, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, *JFKPL*.

attempt, but it was more likely prompted by Byrd's fear of Democratic losses in Congress in November.¹¹⁵⁶ So, despite having a clear lead in delegates, Carter was faced with uncertainty in the run up to the Convention in August 1980.

For a sitting president, the party convention in an election year is used as both a 'coronation' and launch pad for the forthcoming campaign. This was not the case in 1980 because most of the delegate and media attention was on Ted Kennedy. Attempts to unite the party were blocked by Kennedy's team even after it was certain that the delegate vote would be lost. The convention, held in New York, became a battle over the party platform. To try and end a public split the White House agreed prior to the convention to many elements of the liberal agenda such as labour law reform, ERA, education funding, full employment and tax reform. Attempts to include policies on wage/price regulation and control of energy prices were successfully resisted by Carter's supporters. However, Carter was forced to concede a platform commitment to spend \$12bn on a jobs programme. This would undermine his own policy of achieving a balanced budget.¹¹⁵⁷ When Kennedy did finally concede defeat, he did it in such a way that further damaged Carter politically. Kennedy's convention speech on 12 August 1980, 'electrified the delegates with a rousing New Deal, New Frontier style speech'¹¹⁵⁸ which was indirectly critical of the administration's policies. He said, 'Let us pledge that we will never misuse unemployment, high interest rates and human misery as false weapons against inflation' and 'Let us pledge that unemployment will be the priority of our economic policy.'¹¹⁵⁹ Jordan was in no doubt of the impact of the speech, he stated

¹¹⁵⁶ Moore and Tate to Carter, 10 June 1980, SS Box 165, JCPL.

¹¹⁵⁷ Ranney, *Elections of 1980*, 116-19.

¹¹⁵⁸ Haas, *Politics of Frustration*, 149.

¹¹⁵⁹ <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/tedkenedy1980dnc.htm>

that, 'We may have won the nomination but Ted Kennedy had won their hearts.'¹¹⁶⁰ A second and perhaps more damaging incident was Kennedy's late and unenthusiastic appearance on stage at the end of the convention. Such stage-managed events were meant to signify party unity but Kennedy's late appearance, if anything, symbolised quite the opposite. White House staff, including Powell, were convinced that the slight was deliberate¹¹⁶¹ whilst Carter alluded to Kennedy having had 'a few drinks.'¹¹⁶² Kennedy's own version of these events some years later was at best confusing and certainly unconvincing.¹¹⁶³ What was clear was that Carter left his party's convention weakened not strengthened by the Kennedy challenge and having failed to reunite his party.

Carter's ability to bounce back from unfavourable poll numbers in July 1979 to beat Kennedy in the following year demonstrated his resilience but damaged his political credibility. Kennedy's critique of the Carter White House was shared by Reagan. Like Kennedy, Reagan did not accept that there was a 'malaise' in the country and argued that fault lay in Carter's weak leadership. Kennedy's later success in the primaries was largely based on his promotion of liberal policies; he offered 'a choice not an echo.'¹¹⁶⁴ Kennedy's nine primary victories represented 164 electoral college votes which Carter needed if he was going to win the election. He had to win back liberal voters. In a memorandum early in the campaign, Secretary of Labor Marshall described Kennedy supporters as more intense and committed than Carter's but early polling at the

¹¹⁶⁰ Jordan, *Crisis*, 330.

¹¹⁶¹ Jody Powell, *The Other Side of the Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 250.

¹¹⁶² *Carter Diaries*, 457.

¹¹⁶³ Kennedy Interview, Ted Kennedy Oral History, Date Unknown, *Miller Center*.

¹¹⁶⁴ Stanley, *Kennedy vs Carter*, 2 and 196-98.

convention suggested only 23 percent of Kennedy delegates intended to vote for the president in November.¹¹⁶⁵ The Democratic platform was designed to attract liberal support but doubts about Carter's commitment to this persisted. This was particularly true of how the platform commitment to spend \$12bn on job creation squared with Carter's own fiscal conservatism. The president's challenge in winning back liberal support was further complicated when John B Anderson, decided to run as a new third-party candidate. Anderson, a maverick liberal Republican congressman from Illinois, had run against Reagan in the primaries but he had been encouraged to run by positive national polling. Carter's main opponent, though, was the formidable Republican nominee, Ronald Reagan, who unlike Carter had a united party behind him and had built an early lead in the polls.

In announcing his candidacy on 13 November 1979, Reagan chose to highlight the roles he had played in his life. He stated that he had seen America as 'a sports caster, as an actor, officer of my labour union, soldier, officeholder and as both a Democrat and a Republican.'¹¹⁶⁶ He explained his life in this way, as Carter had done in 1976, to emphasise the range of his previous responsibilities and the rich experience he brought to his candidacy. He was especially keen to highlight his tough upbringing in small-town Illinois during the Depression. This was important to Reagan because for many of the electorate he was remembered just as a Hollywood actor. He was always underestimated by his opponents in his political career. Clark Clifford famously called

¹¹⁶⁵ Marshall to Carter, 31 December 1979, SS Box 144 *JCPL and New York Times* 12 August 1980, General, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, *JFKPL*.

¹¹⁶⁶ Remarks Announcing Candidacy for the Republican Presidential Nomination, 13 November 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=76116&st=&st1=>

him 'an amiable dunce.'¹¹⁶⁷ But his time as an actor gave him important skills for a politician; he could follow a script, handle the public and his producers and directors were his advisors. His move from a New Deal Democrat to a conservative Republican started with his involvement as a leader of the actor's union during the anti-communist period of the 1940's. His work giving speeches to the employees of General Electric in the 1950's helped him develop a conservative philosophy that became the bedrock of his political career. Reagan's optimistic view of America was supported by a belief in small government, low taxes, increased defence spending and strident anti-communism. One of Carter's aides said of Reagan's philosophy, he 'sees the world, I think, very simply. His great success as a politician and public figure is that his entire world is testable against four or five sentences, with the result that he 'knows what he believes in and he believes it, and every time you ask him a question or decision he tests it against that.'¹¹⁶⁸ A historian described Reagan's beliefs 'as inerascable as grooves in an LP.'¹¹⁶⁹

He rose to prominence during the 1964 Presidential election as a supporter of the conservative Barry Goldwater. His recorded speech 'A Time for Choosing' raised not only his profile but also \$8m for his cash-strapped party that year. He gained his first major electoral victory in 1966 by defeating the liberal incumbent, Pat Brown, for Governor of California. He served two terms and proved to be a successful, pragmatic politician who made deals with local Democratic leaders to pass legislation on taxes and

¹¹⁶⁷ Michael Deaver, *A Different Drummer: My Thirty Years with Ronald Reagan* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 98.

¹¹⁶⁸ Michael Berman Interview, *Miller Center*, 72-73.

¹¹⁶⁹ Morris, *American Moralist*, 415.

welfare reform.¹¹⁷⁰ In 1976 he ran unsuccessfully against President Ford, but he gained enough support to damage the incumbent president in his unsuccessful campaign against Carter. In his 1980 campaign he was riding a rising tide of conservative support funded by contributions from business leaders worried about stagflation, high taxes and regulation. Reagan's mantra of less government interference and lower taxation met their needs whilst his successful courting of the Christian right on social policy ensured that he quickly became the only viable conservative candidate.¹¹⁷¹ Reagan's acceptance speech in Detroit on 17 July 1980 set the tone for his campaign. He was optimistic about America's ability to succeed, rejecting Carter's rather gloomy analysis of the country's troubles. He saw no malaise other than that of the president's 'mediocre' leadership.¹¹⁷² Unlike Carter, Reagan left his convention on a high.

The 1980 election has been characterised as not only a watershed but a meeting of diametrically opposed politicians in terms of ideology and personality, but this was not entirely the case. Both candidates had a similar perspective on the effectiveness of government in that they saw its inefficiencies and waste and agreed on the need for radical reform. But whilst Carter argued that a reformed bureaucracy could and should be an agent for good, Reagan stated that government itself was the problem and needed to be dramatically cut back. There were also striking similarities between their economic policies. Carter's policies of long-term commitment to deregulation, controlling government spending and making fighting inflation his main economic priority was very similar to Reagan's economic views. Carter's late espousal of monetary policy and

¹¹⁷⁰ Iwan W Morgan, *Reagan: American Icon* (London: I B Taurus, 2016), 82-112.

¹¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 128-33.

¹¹⁷² Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit, 17 July 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25970&st=&st1=>

increased defence spending in response to Soviet aggression would become major policies of the Reagan administration.¹¹⁷³ In addition, some of their supposed policy differences did not play out in practice. Reagan's social conservatism turned out to be a lot less extreme than predicted, as his new-found supporters on the religious right were to find out. The major distinction between the candidates was not so much about ideology or even policy but were related to personality and political skill. Reagan was an optimist who saw things in simple terms both personally and politically. His belief in the greatness of America was total and so he refused to accept Carter's view of any limit on American power, let alone the presence of a 'malaise.' Whereas Reagan saw life in simple terms, Carter saw its complexity and nuance. He studied issues carefully, reaching conclusions based on logic. To him complicated problems generally did not have simple solutions. He accepted that US power had its limits and that there were restrictions on what could be achieved both at home and abroad.¹¹⁷⁴ Both men had different political strengths which were to be highlighted on the campaign trail. Yet Carter's intellectual strength and capacity for hard work did not prove to be a major advantage over Reagan. As Bill Moyers said about Reagan, 'we didn't elect this guy because he knows how many barrels of oil there are in Alaska. We elected him because we want to feel good.'¹¹⁷⁵ Reagan was known as the 'Great Communicator' but this was largely based on his ability to project a positive image on television. In face-to-face situations like answering questions for the press or the public he was much less

¹¹⁷³ Anthony Campagna, *Economic Policy in the Carter Administration* (Westport, London: Greenwood, 1995), 205.

¹¹⁷⁴ Michael A Genovese, 'Jimmy Carter and the Age of Limits: Presidential Power in a Time of Decline and Diffusion', in Rosenbaum and Urgrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policies of Jimmy Carter 197-214*.

¹¹⁷⁵ Michael Schaller, *Reckoning with Reagan: America and its President in 1980's* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

comfortable. Paradoxically, Carter, known as a poor communicator, was highly effective in interactive environments like town hall meetings and phone ins. However, the main communication channel that would be used in 1980 was television and Reagan both as a former actor and TV performer, was a master technician. His clear, simple messages matched by his relaxed style and self-deprecatory humour helped him win over audiences. Carter's preachy and convoluted speaking style was not regarded as inspiring and his television image, in contrast to Reagan's, was rather unappealing. Reagan acted as if he was 'born for TV'. This was to prove a major disadvantage for Carter who faced a charismatic, likeable, oratorically adept candidate who enjoyed an early lead in the polls.

As president, Carter faced a different type of campaign in 1980 compared to four years earlier. As a virtually unknown candidate he had run an 'insurgent' campaign in 1976 which was four years in the planning. He and his team worked with volunteer activists not state party structures. In 1980 he was president and his skill in meeting people on the stump would be negated by limits on his time and the security restrictions that were imposed on an incumbent. In addition, he had a record in office to defend and, like Ford in 1976, he had already fought a dangerous opponent in the primaries. This all took place in the middle of the hostage crisis which meant his main campaign strategist Jordan was unavailable.¹¹⁷⁶ Kennedy's delay in withdrawing from the campaign and the battle over the Democratic platform at the convention contributed to the disaffection of liberals. Such divisions encouraged the third-party candidacy of John Anderson, who benefitted from electoral discontent with both candidates. On the

¹¹⁷⁶ Interview with Jordan, 2 March 1995, Ickes-Jordan Adam Clymer Personal Papers, *JFKPL*.

important policy issues of the campaign, public opinion was concerned about the economy, inflation and taxation but Carter did not have a good track record on any of them.¹¹⁷⁷ The major advantage that an incumbent president did have was the potential to use the power of his office for political advantage. Unfortunately, Carter seemed reluctant to do this. Anne Wexler, his lead advisor on outreach, argued that Carter did not focus on his re-election, often seeking GOP support to get his legislation passed. When she mentioned the negative political consequences of such action to Carter, she was firmly rebuffed.¹¹⁷⁸

To defeat Reagan, two important sources influenced the Carter campaign strategy, the polling data of Caddell and political advice from Jordan. The Iran hostages had taken Jordan away from the campaign since November 1979 but by June 1980 he was back working full time on Carter's re-election. His first task was to provide Carter with a brief on his Republican rival. Jordan talked to Jesse Unruh and Bob Moretti, leading Democratic politicians in California who had dealt with Reagan as governor. Jordan always maintained that he had underestimated Reagan as an opponent,¹¹⁷⁹ but in the memorandum to Carter in June, he accurately reflected both his opponent's strengths and weaknesses. He described Reagan as 'not dumb but shrewd,' that his conservative beliefs could lead him to oversimplify but that he was more moderate than his rhetoric. He described him as an 'uncanny communicator' and that 'people hear him, like him and believe him.' Jordan later warned Carter against launching personal attacks on Reagan as it had wounded Carter when he used this tactic against Ford in 1976. At

¹¹⁷⁷ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 176.

¹¹⁷⁸ Wexler Interview, *Miller Center*, 38-39.

¹¹⁷⁹ Jordan Interview, 2 March 1995, Ickes-Jordan, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, *JFKPL*.

first this advice was ignored by Carter which, just as Jordan had predicted, harmed his campaign. Carter may have done this in reaction to another part of the same Jordan memorandum. This stated that Reagan had a mean temper which although he had kept under control, would damage him if that became public knowledge. If Carter's personal attacks had been an attempt to provoke Reagan, it proved misguided.¹¹⁸⁰

Jordan's follow-up memorandum later that month outlined the damage that the Kennedy campaign had inflicted on Carter's image and the negative perception of his administration, particularly amongst liberals. Jordan feared that there was a risk that liberal voters would switch to John Anderson. Also, at state level, he argued that the primary battles had divided the party in key states like Pennsylvania and New York. He believed that the electorate's pessimism, highlighted in Caddell's polling, meant that the public believed America's problems were unfixable and that there was very little difference between the candidates.¹¹⁸¹ Jordan, supported by Rafshoon and Caddell, argued for a low-profile, defensive campaign to continue until the Democratic Convention in August. He wanted to keep Carter out of the media glare and allow the press and Carter's surrogates to focus just on Reagan. Then, after receiving the expected positive poll 'bounce' from the Democratic Convention, he recommended that the White House run a more positive campaign highlighting a clear choice between candidates, both in terms of Carter's vision for the future and the dangers presented by Reagan's policies.¹¹⁸² This approach was not universally supported in the White House. Many of the domestic policy team, Eizenstat included, feared that the initial low-key

¹¹⁸⁰ Jordan, *Crisis*, 302-4.

¹¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 304-9.

¹¹⁸² Rubenstein to Eizenstat, 1 July 1980, Box 1, DPS Dave Rubenstein Campaign Files, *JCPL*.

approach would not generate the sort of press coverage that the president required. Caddell projected in July 1980 that Reagan could have a 20-25-point lead in the polls after the GOP convention. Dave Rubenstein of the domestic policy team was concerned that the low profile and the expected post-convention 'bounce' would not be enough to close this gap in the polls given Carter's poor ratings.¹¹⁸³ Carter's aide Hedley Donovan argued that the 'Rose Garden' strategy encouraged a bunker mentality with the press ignoring good White House news stories and focussing on the bad.¹¹⁸⁴

Carter held healthy leads in the polls over Kennedy and Reagan in January 1980, but these had been reversed by July.¹¹⁸⁵ Jordan emphasised that, 'Our worst fear all along had been that the race would ultimately become a referendum on Carter's presidency instead of a choice between him and Reagan.'¹¹⁸⁶ Carter was not able to stay out of the headlines as a series of events forced him to be personally involved in the campaign. A scandal involving his younger brother Billy's dealings with and travels to Libya prompted an independent investigation by the Justice Department. This compelled Carter to endure six weeks of hostile media questioning, including 'how do you think you got into this big mess?'¹¹⁸⁷ Carter eventually dealt with all the issues arising from the investigation, but it proved to be a major distraction and damaged his image. A further round of OPEC oil price increases triggered another energy crisis that summer. This harmed the president's reputation for competence as many of his

¹¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁴ Hedley Donovan, *Roosevelt to Reagan: Reporter's Encounters with Nine Presidents* (New York, Harper and Row Publishing, 1984), 219-22.

¹¹⁸⁵ *ABC/Harris Polls*, 28 January 1980 and 15 July 1980, DPS Rubenstein 1980 Campaign Files Box 1, JCPL

¹¹⁸⁶ Jordan, *Crisis*, 376- 78.

¹¹⁸⁷ President's News Conference, 4 August 1980,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=44875&st=&st1=>

legislative proposals on energy that had been recommended a year earlier had still not passed Congress. The divisive Democratic primary campaign enabled the Republicans to utilise Kennedy's campaign rhetoric of 'no more Jimmy Carter' in television adverts targeted at Democratic voters.¹¹⁸⁸ Jordan had assumed that a low presidential profile would encourage the press to scrutinise Reagan's mistakes on the campaign trail, but he made very few. Errors such as an early speech defending state's rights in Neshoba, Mississippi, near the location where three civil rights Freedom Summer campaigners were murdered and later describing the Vietnam War as a 'noble cause,' both called into question Reagan's judgement. However, in general his campaign was disciplined and well run.¹¹⁸⁹ Reagan was also highly effective in courting the evangelical movement, culminating in his speech in Dallas on 22 August 1980 which led to an endorsement from Jerry Falwell.¹¹⁹⁰ Such was Reagan's success in exploiting the anger of religious groups with Carter's social policies that the Carter campaign were forced to respond with a television advert that reminded the public of the president's deep personal faith.¹¹⁹¹

Carter's ability to affect policy and govern during the long campaign was never more critical than with his handling of the economy. The Carter administration's economic policy was in disarray by 1980. Historian Burton Kaufman described the president's economic team as having 'a bankruptcy of ideas rather than a concerted programme for dealing with a problem that threatened to consume the administration.'¹¹⁹² Carter's long-term commitment to a balanced budget prevented

¹¹⁸⁸ www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980

¹¹⁸⁹ Morgan, *Reagan*, 138-39.

¹¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 134-35.

¹¹⁹¹ <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980>

¹¹⁹² Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 204-5.

him from deploying the traditional Democratic Party policies for managing a deficit. Carter's credibility on fiscal restraint was damaged by the proposed \$12bn increase in spending agreed at the Democratic Convention to fight recession and unemployment. His attempts to weave this into a coherent programme that would win public support were further hampered by the failure of his administration's policy to curb inflation. The launch of the Carter administration's fourth anti-inflation policy in March 1980 had been met with cynicism from reporters.¹¹⁹³ The White House was attempting, yet again, to control the wage price spiral without formal controls. The administration's only effective tool to curb inflation was in the hands of the Federal Reserve and its new Chair, Paul Volcker. His control of money supply and interest rates did manage to bring down inflation to nearer 12 percent, but high interest rates militated against any feel-good factor in the country as economists became increasingly concerned about recession. Volcker was able to ease interest rates during the summer but in early October 1980 Schultz, warned Carter of new interest rate increases later that month due to mortgage and oil price increases.¹¹⁹⁴ By the time of the election in early November, interest rates had reached nearly 20 percent, inflation stood at 13 percent and unemployment at 7.5 percent. These were the worst election indicators that an incumbent president had faced in an election since Herbert Hoover in 1932.¹¹⁹⁵

There were opportunities for Carter to use his office to direct economic policy for political gain. Alonzo McDonald argued that Carter did have the political antennae to sense such prospects, but he always wanted to do the right thing. McDonald quoted

¹¹⁹³ President's Carter News Conference, 14 March 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=33146&st=&st1=>

¹¹⁹⁴ Schultze to Carter, 2 October 1980, SS Box 179 *JCPL*.

¹¹⁹⁵ Morgan, *Age of Deficits*, 73.

an occasion when Carter rejected a concession on energy for the Pennsylvanian steel industry, just before that state's primary election, even though it was supported by the Justice and Treasury departments.¹¹⁹⁶ This approach was reinforced by Carter's response to the pressure he faced in the summer of 1980 to submit a tax cut to Congress. The economic benefits of a major tax cut had long been the policy of the Republican Party but to Reagan it had become the major component of his campaign. Reagan had co-opted a Republican tax initiative in Congress, the Kemp-Roth bill, and promised to implement this on taking office. There was pressure from within the Democratic Party for Carter to respond with his own tax-cut proposals. This came from both conservatives and even from liberals like Ted Kennedy.¹¹⁹⁷ There was an expectation that as an incumbent president, he would pass tax cuts to help his party win re-election. Carter, however, refused to do so as he did not believe that it was right for the economy whatever the political benefits. He told Miller, 'I just cannot flip-flop' on taxes.¹¹⁹⁸ He believed that a tax cut, whilst popular, was irresponsible and would necessitate a 40 percent cut in non-defence government spending.¹¹⁹⁹ Carter continued to argue against the GOP proposed tax cut during the election and it became one of the major differences between himself and Reagan on the campaign trail. He argued for a more modest tax cut as part of his revitalisation programme with half of the benefit going on investment (as opposed to 10 percent in Reagan's proposals). As a result, the Reagan-Kemp-Roth

¹¹⁹⁶ McDonald Interview, *Miller Center*, 58.

¹¹⁹⁷ Carter, *Diaries*, 446-47.

¹¹⁹⁸ McDonald Interview, *Miller Center*, 58-59 and Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 876.

¹¹⁹⁹ McIntyre to Carter, 8 September 1980, SS Box 175, *JCPL*.

tax plan with its focus on a cut in personal taxation would be inflationary whilst the president's plan would reduce inflation.¹²⁰⁰

The main parties' economic platforms had some strong similarities, especially on issues such as deregulation and fiscal restraint. Carter's description of Reagan's economic policies as 'Voodoo Economics,' a slogan coined by George Bush, his opponent in the primaries, now running mate, did result in the Reagan campaign dropping several of its economic proposals. But Reagan still argued for a massive tax cut to revitalise the economy. Carter campaigned consistently against this and was supported by cogent economic arguments about the negative effects of a tax cut on inflation, the deficit and investment.¹²⁰¹ Although the tax cut remained the signature economic policy of Reagan it was not very popular with the electorate. The polls in July 1980 had Reagan considerably ahead of Carter (83-14) on economic issues, but the public were 53-43 in favour of Carter on the question of the tax cut.¹²⁰² The administration's revitalisation plan was a response to public dissatisfaction with the economy. Carter's plan would add \$5.7bn to the 1981 budget, but journalist Elizabeth Drew said of Carter's failure to communicate his proposal, 'he doesn't seem able to implant it in the national consciousness.' Eizenstat was even harsher in his judgement on the campaign's economic proposals: 'We presented no attractive new alternative only thin gruel and more of the same.'¹²⁰³ To many, the programme did not seem credible given the president's fiscal conservatism, and whilst there was no doubting Reagan's absolute

¹²⁰⁰ Interview With the President Question-and-Answer Session with the Editorial Board of Associated Press, 17 October 1980,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=45317&st=&st1=>

¹²⁰¹ Schultze to Carter, 9 September 1980, SS Box 175, JCPL.

¹²⁰² ABC/Harris Poll, 15 July 1980, DPS Rubenstein 1980 Campaign Files Box 1, JCPL.

¹²⁰³ Eizenstat, White House Years, 876

belief in his proposed tax cut, Carter appeared to lack the same degree of conviction for his own economic proposals.¹²⁰⁴

Carter's frustration over his campaign's inability to get his message across led to a serious error of judgement that damaged his standing with the electorate. During 1980, even in polls where Carter was not viewed favourably, 83 percent still believed that he was a man of moral principles.¹²⁰⁵ The White House campaign, in seeking to highlight Reagan's perceived weaknesses, had relied upon political surrogates, particularly the vice president, to attack those weaknesses. The campaign focussed on Reagan's perceived inability to grasp complex issues, claiming that he proposed simplistic solutions to difficult problems and too often 'shoots from the hip.'¹²⁰⁶ However, Carter's advisors complained that such speeches were not receiving fair coverage in the media. This was not necessarily due to bias but the media's difficulty in covering simultaneously three presidential candidates.¹²⁰⁷ Despite earlier warnings from Jordan over the failure of similar tactics in 1976,¹²⁰⁸ Carter, supported by Caddell, personally attacked Reagan in three important speeches. In Atlanta on 16 September he came close to accusing him of being a racial bigot.¹²⁰⁹ At a labour conference in California on 22 September he argued that the election was a decision between war and peace, thus suggesting that Reagan would take America into war.¹²¹⁰ Finally, at a Democratic

¹²⁰⁴ Morgan, *Age of Deficits*, 72-73.

¹²⁰⁵ Morris, *American Moralist*, 287.

¹²⁰⁶ Reagan Talking Points, August 1980, 1980 Election Harris Box 326, LC.

¹²⁰⁷ Germond and Witcover, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors*, 251.

¹²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 243-45.

¹²⁰⁹ Atlanta, Georgia Remarks at a Meeting With Southern Black Leaders, 16 September 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=45059&st=&st1=>

¹²¹⁰ Los Angeles, California Remarks at the California State AFL-CIO Convention, 22 September 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=45116&st=&st1=>

fundraiser in Chicago on 6 October he argued that Reagan would be divisive and that if Carter lost the election 'Americans might be separated black from white, Jew from Christian, North from South, rural from urban.'¹²¹¹ The media heavily criticised these speeches.¹²¹² Carter later argued that the press took these attacks out of context¹²¹³ but they damaged his public image as a moral man. The Reagan campaign responded with a television advertisement featuring Nancy Reagan defending her husband, and accusations of 'meanness' forced Carter in a TV interview with Barbara Walters to promise to tone down his remarks.¹²¹⁴

Another issue that Carter had to deal with during the campaign was press cynicism over his attempts to resolve the Iranian hostage crisis. He faced accusations as early as April 1980 from Kennedy that he was using announcements on the hostages for political purposes.¹²¹⁵ The press, already wary of being manipulated by Rafshoon's communications tactics in 1978, hinted that a hostage release would be stage managed by the White House.¹²¹⁶ McDonald argued that every television network believed that Carter's Rose Garden strategy was not a method to help deal with the hostages but a political tactic. The public shared this view. A poll on 30 September showed an increase from 19 to 44 percent of people who believed that Carter would manipulate the hostage crisis for political gain.¹²¹⁷ The press continued to build expectations of a hostage release

¹²¹¹ Chicago, Illinois Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraising Reception, 6 October 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=45225&st=&st1=>

¹²¹² Timothy Schellhardt, Carter and Meanness, *Washington Post*, 3 November 1980.

¹²¹³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 561.

¹²¹⁴ www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980 and Germond and Witcover, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors*, 261-62.

¹²¹⁵ President's News Conference, 17 April 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=33288&st=&st1=>

¹²¹⁶ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 244-45.

¹²¹⁷ Germond and Witcover, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors*, 319.

as Election Day approached.¹²¹⁸ The problem was further complicated for Carter by signs in September of a serious attempt by some in the Iranian regime to negotiate a settlement. Unfortunately for the White House this gave rise to a series of failed negotiations that continued right up until Election Day. Carter therefore was faced with the worst of both worlds. The media portrayed him as either a cynic manipulating the release of the hostages for political gain or as a weak president unable to secure their release.

Despite these difficulties, the polls showed that Carter was gaining ground on Reagan. The White House message to the public that whatever Carter's difficulties he remained the safe choice in comparison with Reagan was gaining some traction. So, despite having low job approval, the polls indicated that by 9 October the gap with Reagan had closed to just four points, 43-39.¹²¹⁹ It was Carter's belief that in a televised debate with Reagan his superior ability and experience would enable him to overtake his opponent. Unable to agree on three debates as he had wanted, Carter had to settle for the one. This took place on 28 October in Cleveland, Ohio. As incumbent, Carter had not only to 'win' the debate but be seen to 'win' it. He sought to identify his opponent with a dangerous future but without appearing shrill or exaggerating the risks of a Reagan presidency.¹²²⁰ He argued that Reagan was outside the mainstream of the Republican party and his attitude to nuclear arms control was dangerous. He also emphasised the complexity of the office and, by implication, his own experience. 'I've had to make thousands of decisions, and each one of those decisions has been a learning

¹²¹⁸ McDonald Interview, *Miller Center*, 64 and 92-93.

¹²¹⁹ *ABC News/Harris* poll, 8 October 1980, DPS Rubenstein 1980 Campaign Files Box 1, *JCPL*.

¹²²⁰ Debate brief to Carter, October 1980, SS Box 172, *JCPL*.

process.’ He was mainly on the defensive on his economic record, particularly high inflation, but did attack Reagan’s proposals for tax cuts claiming they would be inflationary. He did promote his economic programme and argued that he had created nine million jobs whilst in office.¹²²¹ He was more positive in promoting his energy policy, highlighting the administration’s success in conservation.¹²²² The debate was watched by 80.6 million Americans, a record which lasted until the Hillary Clinton-Donald Trump debates of 2016. Reagan was very well prepared, having debated John Anderson the previous month and by acquiring leaked copies of Carter’s briefing books for the debate. He handled detailed questions well, stood up to pressure and always remained calm and affable. In their closing statements Carter argued for his experience whilst Reagan focussed on the president’s record by asking Americans whether, since Carter’s election, they felt better off and more secure.¹²²³ This was a telling intervention as it directed the public to examine Carter’s record in office. In his diaries Carter reluctantly admitted that Reagan had done better even though Carter felt that he had won all the key arguments.¹²²⁴

After the debate, the White House focussed more on promoting Carter’s programme for the future. The campaign sought to contradict Republican advertisements which suggested that Carter was a do-nothing president and to emphasise those Reagan policies that he was already implementing such as increased military spending and deregulation.¹²²⁵ Whilst Carter continued to argue that Reagan

¹²²¹ Presidential Debate in Cleveland, 28 October 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29408&st=&st1=>

¹²²² *Ibid.*

¹²²³ Morgan, *Reagan*, 141.

¹²²⁴ Carter, *Diaries*, 479.

¹²²⁵ Neustadt to Rubenstein, 6 October 1980, DPS Rubenstein 1980 Campaign Files, *JCPL*.

was a man unsuited to the office, he also tried to promote his economic revitalisation programme with an emphasis on investment, job creation and reduced inflation. He argued that his programme would reap the rewards of the tough decisions that had been made during his presidency.¹²²⁶ In his later speeches he sought to shore up his support in the Democratic Party by focussing on traditional Democratic audiences such as labour and the minorities.¹²²⁷ To black leaders in Atlanta, Carter emphasised his administration's help for the poor through energy policy and job creation (1.3 million additional black jobs).¹²²⁸ On Labor Day his remarks focussed on the work of the Economic Revitalisation Board, labor law reform, urban renewal and job creation programmes.¹²²⁹ Carter's main problem remained that he could not promote his domestic policy as a major success and continually had to fall back on a critique of Reagan's policies. White House criticism of Reagan's plans on tax or energy for example were framed in terms of why they would not work, rather than being contrasted with Carter's own plans. The most telling indicator of where the Carter campaign team believed his strength lay was in their choice of television adverts. Most of the one-minute adverts emphasised foreign policy and Carter's experience, his role as peacemaker and the absence of war on his watch. In one advertisement Carter's military service was even highlighted, something that he did not emphasise in 1976.¹²³⁰ Carter's

¹²²⁶ Jenkins to Carter, 2 July 1980, SS Box 168, *JCPL*.

¹²²⁷ Germond and Witcover, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors*, 296.

¹²²⁸ Remarks at a Meeting of Southern Black Leaders, 18 September 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=45059&st=&st1=>

¹²²⁹ Labor Day Remarks at a White House Picnic for Representatives of Organized Labor, 1 September 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=44973&st=&st1=>

¹²³⁰ www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980

message to the American people on domestic policy was a negative one; it was that there were no easy answers to their problems and Reagan would make matters worse.

The final days before the election saw the hostage crisis again take centre stage with the suggestion of new terms from Tehran raising hopes of breakthrough. This proved to be a false alarm. Carter had to go on television two days before the election to deny that there was any deal.¹²³¹ On the Monday before Election Day, the front page of every local newspaper showed Iranian students trashing the American seal at the embassy in Tehran. This visual reminder of his administration's impotence was extremely damaging to the president.¹²³² Carter himself noted the symbolic importance of Election Day being the anniversary of the taking of the first hostage.¹²³³

Both candidates elicited high negative feelings from the public with the result that many voters made their decision very late. It was in the period between 1 and 4 November that Reagan dramatically increased his lead over Carter as most undecided voters opted for the Republican candidate.¹²³⁴ On 4 November 1980 Carter suffered the worst defeat for an incumbent president since Herbert Hoover in 1932. Reagan won 44 states, prevailing in the electoral college 489-49. He won the popular vote 51-41 percent, with Anderson gaining 6.6 percent. Reagan, unlike Carter in 1976, had 'coattails' with his party gaining 33 seats in the House and 12 in the Senate which resulted in a GOP majority for the first time since 1954. Republicans also gained four governorships and five state legislatures.¹²³⁵ Post-election polling confirmed that there

¹²³¹ Morgan, *Reagan*, 141-42.

¹²³² McDonald Interview, *Miller Center*, 62.

¹²³³ Carter, *Diaries*, 530.

¹²³⁴ Everett Carl Ladd 'The Brittle Mandate. Electoral De-alignment and the 1980 Election' *Political Science Quarterly* Vol.96 (Spring, 1981): 1-25.

¹²³⁵ Ranney, *American Elections of 1980*, 213.

was a late swing against Carter on all the main policy issues, and he lost support in all voter groups except non-whites.¹²³⁶ In addition a Harris poll found that those who believed that the best government was one that governed least, a core Reagan message, had increased from one third in 1974 to three fifths in 1980.¹²³⁷ Polls also showed that the result was less of a victory for Reagan and the GOP than a rejection of Carter and the Democrats. A *Time* magazine poll found that 63 percent of voters said they voted to reject Carter and only 25 percent saw it as a mandate for more conservative policies. Barely one in four voters supported Reagan in the ideological sense.¹²³⁸ A measure of the lasting strength of the negative reaction to Carter was Reagan's successful use of anti-Carter rhetoric in his presidential campaign against Mondale four years later.¹²³⁹

Carter, in public at least, was non-committal as to the reasons why he believed he had lost. He acknowledged, however, that his drop in the polls just before Election Day may have been due to the last-minute dashed hopes of the hostage release. When pressed, he accepted that the Kennedy challenge had 'crippled him' with core constituencies.¹²⁴⁰ When talking to Jordan two months after his defeat, Carter was more forthcoming. He described 1980 as 'pure hell, the Kennedy challenge, Afghanistan, having to put the SALT treaty on the shelf, the recession, Ronald Reagan and the hostages... always the hostages! It was one crisis after another.'¹²⁴¹ The idea that the 1980 result was somehow certain has been promoted by authors like Skowronek.¹²⁴² He

¹²³⁶ *Ibid*, 237 and 255.

¹²³⁷ Morgan, *Reagan*, 143.

¹²³⁸ *Ibid*, 142.

¹²³⁹ <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1984>

¹²⁴⁰ 1980 Presidential Election Remarks With Reporters on the Results of the Election, 5 November 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=45463&st=&st1=>

¹²⁴¹ Jordan, *Crisis*, 7.

¹²⁴² Skowronek, *Politics that Presidents Make*.

argued that Carter's defeat was inevitable as he was ideologically out of step with the conservative mood of the country, and therefore in trying to find moderate solutions he found himself attacked by both conservatives and liberals. However, the assumption that 1980 was a conservative landslide was not borne out by the figures. The electoral returns saw a two percent drop in turnout and the Democrats lost more votes than the Republicans gained.¹²⁴³ Jordan did not accept that the election was a conservative watershed, arguing that 'it was not an ideological tidal wave; it was instead an expression of frustration with the Democratic Party and doubt that it could provide solutions to America's problems.'¹²⁴⁴ The electorate was not conservative and even strongly liberal on some social issues. It followed therefore, in ideological terms, that promoting the middle ground could have been a winning strategy. Carter could have tried to use the Democratic Party as a vehicle for such a centrist strategy but, as he acknowledged, the party was 'never his', and the Kennedy challenge sapped 5-6 percent of that vote away from him.¹²⁴⁵

If Carter's defeat was not 'inevitable' what were the factors that contributed to his failure? The hostages appear to have been in the minds of White House staff. Aide Tim Kraft complained that the money spent on a largely ineffective media campaign would have been better used on 'two more helicopters in Iran' for the abortive rescue mission.¹²⁴⁶ In separate interviews in 1986 and 1997, Carter endorsed the view that if the hostages had been released he would have won. He also spoke of general press

¹²⁴³ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, pp. 244-5 and Ranney, *Elections of 1980*, 216-17.

¹²⁴⁴ Jordan, *Crisis*, 378.

¹²⁴⁵ George C Edwards, 'Exclusive Interview: President Jimmy Carter', 1-13.

¹²⁴⁶ Rafshoon Interview, *Miller Center*, 52.

cynicism and the television news broadcasts of Walter Cronkite and Ted Koppel. They highlighted in every broadcast the length of time the hostages had been held whilst questioning the administration's motives in seeking their release.¹²⁴⁷ Rafshoon found that the hostage crisis (444 days) received more television coverage than the US involvement in the Vietnam War (ten years).¹²⁴⁸ Carter did receive public support for his handling of this crisis and it certainly benefitted him early in his campaign against Kennedy. However, the stalled negotiations in early November 1980 were a further reminder to the American public of Carter's failure to secure their release, and this almost certainly widened the margin of Reagan's victory. But it should be noted that Reagan himself believed that the hostages were not the main factor in his success and that their release would not have changed the result.

Another important factor in Carter's defeat was the ineffectiveness of his campaign. Unlike in 1976, the 1980 campaign did not have the benefit of Jordan's detailed planning. Although Jordan's absence was attributed to the hostage crisis, advisors like Lance argued that the White House and Jordan should have been actively planning for 1980 as soon as Carter took office.¹²⁴⁹ Jordan admitted that he was distracted by Iran but argued that his increased involvement would not have affected the result.¹²⁵⁰ However, there were mistakes made by the White House that contributed to the president's defeat. Carter's fundamental problem was that he did not have a positive record in office to sell to the electorate and so he was always going to be on the

¹²⁴⁷ Carter Interview, 12 May 1986, *USA Today* and Richardson, *Conversations with Carter*, 17 October 1997.

¹²⁴⁸ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 784.

¹²⁴⁹ Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 97.

¹²⁵⁰ Jordan, Oral History, *JCPL*, 5 and 79-81.

defensive unless he could focus the election on Reagan himself. A major error was Carter's decision to make personal attacks on Reagan to demonise him. This failed and only damaged Carter's image as a moral leader. Whereas in 1976 he stood on his good character, in 1980 he was being painted as mean, remote and indifferent. To win Carter had to convince the electorate that not only was Reagan a threat domestically and abroad but that his vision for a better future was less compelling than his own. In his convention speech, Carter summarised his problem. He argued that presidents must look to the long term and hence 'sometimes ask for sacrifice when the listeners would rather hear the promise of comfort.'¹²⁵¹ Rafshoon argued that the president needed to portray 'hope'.¹²⁵² Carter attempted in the run up to the election to create a programme for long-term change. The Commission for National Agenda for the Eighties established a programme modelled on a similar initiative under Eisenhower. Although its final report was not produced until December 1980, it was evident by August of that year that any hopes Carter had of reaching a consensus on a wide range of national issues that could be used in his campaign were to be dashed by sectional and interest group dissent.¹²⁵³ Reagan's success in building an early lead in the polls forced Carter to rely on the more liberal elements of the party and resulted in a liberal platform being foisted on him. This included an economic plan which was seen as too liberal for Carter and the electorate. His attempts to explain this programme lacked the conviction, clarity and the simple optimism of Reagan's message. Hence the public was often confused and even bored

¹²⁵¹ Remarks Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the 1980 Democratic National Convention in New York ,14 August 1980,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=44909&st=&st1=>

¹²⁵² Rafshoon Interview, *Miller Center*, 55.

¹²⁵³ Edward D Berkowitz, 'Jimmy Carter and the Sunbelt Report: Seeking a National Agenda', Rosenbaum and Ugrinsky, *Presidency and Domestic Policies of Jimmy Carter*, 33-41.

with Carter's vision for future prosperity, and liberals were unconvinced whether Carter, if elected, would really implement such a programme.

The Jimmy Carter of 1980 portrayed himself as the same character who had run in 1976 but had now, as president, gained experience. But the public remained confused about his ideology and in 1980 he had a record to defend which was vulnerable to attack from his opponents. He therefore needed even more of the support of a liberal Democratic Party than he did in 1976. His basic approach to politics had not changed. His political competitiveness, which resulted in personal attacks on Reagan, was not a new phenomenon; he had been equally harsh on Ford in 1976 and Carl Sanders in 1970. His approach to the nation's problems also remained unchanged. He continued to articulate the complexity of issues and the need for sacrifice. This may have struck a chord with the public in 1976 but by 1980 they longed for a simpler, more optimistic vision for the future. This was something that Carter, with his engineering background and his 'preachy' style, was unable to provide.

The critical factor in the campaign for his opponents was Carter's leadership as president, particularly on the economy. Reagan's comment at the end of the televised debate about whether the public felt better off under Carter ¹²⁵⁴ drew attention to the administration's poor economic performance since taking office. Unemployment was higher (7.6 v 7.0 percent), interest rates were higher (15.3 v 6.4 percent) and above all inflation was higher (12.5 v 5.8 percent).¹²⁵⁵ Polling data from Gallup suggested that the

¹²⁵⁴ Presidential Debate in Cleveland, 28 October 1980,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29408&st=&st1=>

¹²⁵⁵ Windsor, 'Budget Strategy in the Carter Administration', 393.

reasons for voting were mainly economic, especially concern about inflation.¹²⁵⁶ This coupled with the president's failure to bring home the hostages put the White House on the back foot for most of the campaign. The Carter of 1976 promised to make government work, but the electorate saw little evidence of this. His campaign tried to focus on Reagan's weaknesses and his own good character and experience. But it soon became reliant upon the electorate's pessimism that no-one in office could fix the country's problems and perhaps Carter was the safer option. This was a high-risk strategy as voter apathy could easily change to discontent with unhappy voters opting for change.¹²⁵⁷

The economic gloom added to the atmosphere of negativity that pervaded Carter's presidency following his 'malaise' speech in July 1979. The continuing hostage crisis added to this general pessimism. The wrecking of the US embassy's seal in the final days of the election highlighted Carter's perceived lack of leadership and became a symbol of his failure. Reagan ran an effective campaign with few mistakes and gave a masterful performance in the TV debate. The focus on Carter's record resulted in the electorate deciding that Reagan's more positive message was a risk worth taking. The perception of Carter as a good man doing his best was no longer enough. As a result, their rejection of the Carter presidency was comprehensive.

¹²⁵⁶ Ranney, *Elections in 1980*, 227.

¹²⁵⁷ Jordan, *Crisis*, 34 -39.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Jimmy Carter's comprehensive election defeat in November 1980 was a bitter blow for any politician to take, particularly as it was against an opponent who appeared to be diametrically opposed to everything Carter stood for. His relationship with Reagan after the election was not helped by a tense transition meeting at which Carter felt (perhaps incorrectly) that Reagan was not paying attention to the detailed briefing he was giving. As Reagan built his team for what promised to be a conservative 'revolution', Carter's final State of the Union message to Congress was a forty-page self-justification of his policies.¹²⁵⁸ During the 1980's and early 1990's, Carter's post-presidency was marked politically by major Democratic politicians trying to avoid being associated with what was widely regarded as a failed presidency. Walter Mondale, standing in 1984 against Reagan, was linked by the GOP campaign with Carter's economic failures. Bill Clinton, despite being elected in 1992, was reluctant to hire 'Carter re-treads'¹²⁵⁹ even when their experience would have been helpful. As president, Clinton often found himself being compared to Carter when his policies were seen to have failed.¹²⁶⁰ It was during the 1990s, however, that media focus moved away from Carter's 'failed' presidency to his actions as a private citizen. Initially it was activities such as working as a volunteer carpenter building houses for the poor as part of Habitats for Humanity, a

¹²⁵⁸ State of the Union Annual Message to Congress, 16 January 1981, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=44541&st=&st1=u>

¹²⁵⁹ Russell Riley, *Inside the Clinton White House – an Oral History* (New York: Oxford University, 2016), 93.

¹²⁶⁰ Nigel Hamilton, *Bill Clinton. Mastering the Presidency* (London: Arrow, 2008), 291.

non-profit Christian organisation, that were highlighted. The press contrasted this with ex-President Reagan who was earning \$2 million on speaking tours in Japan.¹²⁶¹ A more positive profile was also helped by the Clinton administration's use of Carter's mediation skills in Haiti and North Korea in 1994. These missions made use of Carter's diplomatic strengths. A journalist described him as being able to 'deal regularly with inhabitants of godforsaken villages and renegade leaders whom American officials ordinarily refuse to touch.'¹²⁶² Underpinning this new positive image of Carter was the work of the Carter Center. Founded by Carter and his wife in partnership with Emory University in Atlanta, this organisation's remit was 'to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and improve health.'¹²⁶³ Over the years the Center has established programmes to eradicate diseases such as guinea worm and river blindness, as well as immunization campaigns. In addition, Carter has been involved in mediating disputes and supervising elections in countries all over the world. He has also spoken out increasingly on women's rights, leaving his own church, the Southern Baptist Convention, in October 2000 over the issue and establishing a Women's Forum in February 2015.¹²⁶⁴ Carter received recognition for his work in October 2002 when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Thirty-seven years after he left the White House, Jimmy Carter is now receiving the public recognition for not only the work of the Carter Center but for his personal qualities and character on many of the issues he campaigned for in 1976. This new-found respect as both a private citizen has not been followed by

¹²⁶¹ Brinkley, *Unfinished Presidency*, xvi – xvii.

¹²⁶² Curtis Wilkie, 'Blessed be the Peacemaker,' *Boston Globe Magazine*, 12 April 1990.

¹²⁶³ <https://www.cartercenter.org/index.html>

¹²⁶⁴ <http://forumonwomen.cartercenter.org/>

positive public recognition of his presidency. The conservative press has continued to use the image of Carter as a failed president to criticise his Democratic successors.¹²⁶⁵

The view of Carter as a failed President is partly rooted in his electoral defeat in 1980 and the subsequent success of Reagan but it is also based on the perceived 'failures' of his policies. Carter created an expectation that his administration would not only be competent but would make substantial reforms. In his inaugural address he did try to dampen expectation by saying that, 'We cannot afford to do everything,'¹²⁶⁶ but his inability to prioritise greatly hampered his legislative programme. On the critical issue of the economy his administration failed to deliver any substantial improvements. His 1977 stimulus package did help the poor initially but the population in poverty grew from 11.4 to 15 percent during 1978-80. However, it was his failure to control inflation that cost him dearly in the 1980 election. Carter tried to persuade the American public of the value of his numerous anti-inflation initiatives but to no avail. It was his appointment of Volcker to head the Federal Reserve that did result in bringing inflation under control. However, this was at the cost of recession that damaged Carter in the 1980 election. Carter's public commitment to balance the budget was also a failure as the impact of a recalcitrant Congress, oil price rises, and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan made this objective impossible. The one economic programme that Carter was publicly committed to was tax reform but again the eventual legislation passed proved to be a victory for congressional conservatives as it failed in the main to remove few of the tax loopholes and delivered a tax cut that mainly benefitted the well off.

¹²⁶⁵ <https://legalinsurrection.com/2014/10/branco-cartoon-legacy-building/>

¹²⁶⁶ Inaugural Speech, 20 January 1977,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6575&st=&st1=>

Carter's energy policy was an example of his administration attempting to pass comprehensive legislation that addressed a complex problem facing the country. This demonstrated the scope of Carter's ambition but also his naivety in expecting such a complicated bill to pass without amendment. The final legislation was a significant step forward for energy conservation and in establishing a new Department of Energy, but it did not measure up to the expectations set by Carter. It also demonstrated Carter's inability to persuade the American public of the seriousness of the problem in contrast with Reagan's success in convincing voters that government should not be interfering with the energy market.

Carter was equally unsuccessful in his goal of reforming healthcare and welfare as both bills never got out of committee stage. The complexity of these issues was matched only by the strength of the opposition from both wings of his own party. The failure of Carter's Health bill would prove to be damaging to his chances of re-election as it provoked a major split with the liberal wing of his party. There was legislation that Carter did successfully steer through Congress, such as government reform, deregulation and Social Security reform, but none of these, whilst important, had a high public profile. However, there was one major area of policy where Carter was successful and that was on the environment. His administration passed a raft of legislation that reinforced environmental safeguards such as the Clean Air and Water Acts, strengthened the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and established a national environmental compensation scheme. Carter's signature legislation was the Alaskan Lands Act passed just before he left office. Many of Carter's environmental policies were overturned by his successor but Carter's Alaskan legislation, which protected over 157

million acres of land, would stand as a legacy of his administration's environmental credentials. In some ways Carter's legislative record can be regarded as credible, particularly given the parlous state of the economy and divisions in Congress, but not when measured against the goals he publicly set himself.

The historiography on Jimmy Carter's administration has been mainly negative. A case in point is the conclusion of Burton and Scott Kaufman:

'The events of his four years in office project an image to the American people of a hapless administration in disarray and a Presidency that was increasingly divided, lacking in leadership, ineffective in dealing with Congress, incapable of defending American honour abroad and uncertain about its purpose, priorities and sense of direction.'¹²⁶⁷

Where he has received plaudits on his policies, it has been largely on foreign policy, specifically the Camp David agreement and the Panama Canal Treaty. Early writers like Haynes Johnson and Barbara Kellerman commented on Carter's failure of leadership. The Kaufmans and Betty Glad have emphasised his lack of skills, particularly his inability to articulate a vision, establish a coherent agenda and broker deals with Congress. This view of Carter implied that given the right political actions, it was possible for a more adroit president to steer a successful path between conservative and liberal viewpoints. Revisionist writers such as John Dumbrell and Julian Zelizer, whilst acknowledging Carter's skills deficit, have argued that he had major successes despite the highly unfavourable circumstances. The most recent autobiography by Stuart Eizenstat has

¹²⁶⁷ Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter*, 3.

supported that view. Some historians have referred to Skowronek in justifying Carter's difficulties in gaining support. They have argued that Carter was a Democratic president at a time when the hegemony of liberal ideas was being replaced by a new conservatism led by Ronald Reagan. Later biographers of Carter, notably Douglas Brinkley, focussed not on his presidency but his character and his actions after 1980. This more favourable view of Carter in the 1990s has been influenced not only by his policies but a criticism of Reagan's actions over the Iran-Contra affair and scandals in Bill Clinton's personal life.

The difficulty with the argument made by earlier historians is that whilst there is strong evidence to support criticism of Carter's leadership style and tactics, the idea that a middle way was possible with a more effective leader does not stand up to scrutiny. Carter's mishandling of his relationship with Senator Long, for example, did damage his legislative strategy but it was doubtful whether given Long's views on taxation it would have changed the fate of his administration's Tax Reform bill. The assumption that Carter was attempting to steer an ideological path between liberal and conservative factions assumed that he saw politics in ideological terms, but he always denied this and there is little evidence in his behaviour as president to support such an argument. The concept of Carter as a transitional president and therefore having restricted options has some merit but the evidence of the 1980 election did not show the dawning of a new conservative era as the electorate was still supporting liberal solutions on social policies such as welfare and abortion. There is strong evidence to support the arguments of Erwin Hargrove in *Jimmy Carter as President* and Charles Jones in *Trustee President* that fundamentally Carter was non-ideological, dealing with each policy on its merits. Carter

believed that the president represented all the American people, in line with Jones's concept of a 'Trustee President'.¹²⁶⁸ This was reinforced by Carter's belief that as president he better represented the public good than both interest groups and even members of Congress. His early communication strategy of town hall meetings and radio phone-ins supports a 'Trustee' approach; however, it should be noted that the administration's strategy of reaching out directly to the public, known as the 'People Programme', was largely abandoned by the end of 1978. Carter believed that no matter how complex the problem there was a solution that could transcend 'normal' politics and gain public support. He was as president dedicated to delivering a solution on policy that was comprehensive, simple and easy to sell to the public. It often resulted in Carter attempting to integrate opposite views on policy rather than transcend them, but this approach, with its focus on solutions, was consistent with Hargrove's concept of Carter being a 'policy politician.'¹²⁶⁹ The consensus amongst historians that the Carter administration was unsuccessful, due in part to his personal failings, is sound given his record as president. However, the argument that a more effective leader could have created a path between competing ideologies is not supported by any strong evidence and appears to be based on a misunderstanding of both Carter's ideology and character.

In many ways Carter was a misunderstood president, and this was caused by confusion over the question of his ideology. In the 1976 election Carter argued that he was neither conservative nor liberal, and that he took policy positions that 'to me are fair and rational.'¹²⁷⁰ As president he saw policy issues in technical terms and perceived

¹²⁶⁸ Jones, *Trustee President*.

¹²⁶⁹ Knott and Wildavsky, 'Theory of Governing' and Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 23.

¹²⁷⁰ Carter Interview, *Playboy*, November 1976.

his role as ensuring that ‘a good process open and comprehensive would provide wide ranging policy options, the best of which would prevail on the strengths of their merits.’¹²⁷¹ To Carter the process of study and rational argument with experts, not interest groups, to enable him to provide the best solution was more important than ideology. To many politicians facing a national audience, the straddling of the ideological divide by taking a neutral stance was often used as a tactic to increase support, but with Carter this was a core belief. It followed, therefore, that despite some similarities in terms of policies, it would be a mistake to regard him as an early New Democrat as suggested most recently by Eizenstat.¹²⁷² The concept of a ‘middle way’ between competing liberal and conservative ideologies simply did not fit with his total focus on establishing the right solutions to complex problems. To a president trained in engineering there was no such thing as a ‘third way’ only the right way. The difficulty for Carter was that although he was clear about his non-ideological stance, this did not prevent other politicians, journalists and historians from trying to ‘label’ him both during the 1976 campaign and subsequently in office.

To the press and the public Carter was an enigma, and so during the 1976 campaign he was criticised for being all things to all men. His attempt to deal with this perception of ‘fuzziness’ on issues prompted his interview in *Playboy* 1976. Attempts to frame him ideologically against perceived policy stances often resulted in confusion. A good example of this was on Civil Rights. Carter’s inaugural speech as governor of Georgia announced the ‘end of segregation,’ and appeared to northern politicians to introduce a new liberal politician from the south to the national stage. Carter may have

¹²⁷¹ Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, 123.

¹²⁷² Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 13

seemed to signify radical change - he certainly was not a George Wallace - but his speech merely confirmed the new realities for the South. His presidency did not bring any major changes in legislation or reform other than positively enforcing the law. Despite this approach, as his presidency developed disputes over policy increasingly took on an ideological tone. Issues like healthcare and taxation were bellwether policies for liberals and conservatives respectively, with the Carter administration caught in the middle trying to appeal to a shrinking centre over the heads of both parties and interest groups. Historians and former White House staff remain divided on Carter's ideology with a range of labels being associated with his presidency from conservative to liberal, populist, neo-liberal Democrat, New Democrat and even conservative liberal.¹²⁷³ The need to define Carter ideologically has resulted in him being linked with the New Democrats of the 1990s. This was an attempt by members of the Democratic Party to frame policy that responded to a more conservative electorate. Some of Carter's policies certainly reflect this, his fiscal conservatism in conjunction with being socially liberal. However, Carter did not have an ideological template to make any policy decision. He saw policy only in terms of technical effectiveness and it being in line with his personal moral compass.

Carter's non-ideological stance did not preclude him supporting some policies that could be ideologically labelled or from taking into account trends in public opinion. The strategic direction of his economic policy may have shifted in his early presidency, but he could be described as a fiscal conservative. Equally he maintained a consistently liberal stance on issues such as women's rights, protecting the environment and,

¹²⁷³ Eizenstat, 'Democratic Party and the Making of Domestic Policy', 19.

internationally, on human rights. He recognised the conservative trend in the electorate on issues such as the need for a strong military and dissatisfaction with government inefficiency. This would often make him more comfortable with conservative members of congress than liberals, even though it was the latter who voted for him more frequently.¹²⁷⁴ The major difficulty for Carter was that the Democratic Party had become more liberal and the party platforms in 1976 and particularly in 1980 did not fully reflect his own views.

The consequence of Carter's non-ideological stance was that he became increasingly isolated from the ideological 'tides' that were polarising America in the 1970's. Many of the social movements that supported him in 1976 had by 1980 become radicalised. He did not understand the depth of ideological conflict. Carter's chief weakness, as one historian put it, 'seems to have been an inability to appreciate the seriousness of the contradictions that confronted him, a belief that all good things must be compatible.'¹²⁷⁵ To Carter, Phyllis Schlafly and Bella Abzug's rhetoric were equally incomprehensible. Nowhere was this demonstrated more than in his dealings with the religious right. He could not accept that this group were now a political force with strong conservative views. Their expectations of Carter as president were based on his 'born again' credentials but he refused to base his policies on their ideology. Carter's consistent refusal to stake out an ideological position led many to misunderstand his views and resulted in their disappointment and often anger. The desertion of a number of liberal voters to Anderson and evangelicals to Reagan in the 1980 election were good examples of this phenomenon. Carter's failure to recognise the political dangers of

¹²⁷⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 102.

¹²⁷⁵ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, 174.

ideological conflict and what was to become his untenable position in a fast-shrinking political centre contributed to his defeat in 1980. A possible solution to this problem could have been found if Carter had mapped out a coherent vision for the future that linked all his policies. However, as one of his successors, George H W Bush, said of himself, he did not 'do the vision thing.' Even if he was inclined to such an approach, Carter would have faced a major difficulty in articulating a coherent story without exposing the ideological contradictions of his positions. So, Carter's presidency cannot be described effectively in ideological terms. What, though, was the impact of his character?

Thomas Reeves, in his book on John F. Kennedy's presidency, *A Question of Character*, asserted that a president needed a strong moral compass to be effective.¹²⁷⁶ This argument has been used by other historians to focus on flaws in the character and private lives of presidents such as Nixon and Clinton. What would be the impact of a president with a strong moral character; would that enhance his presidency? To win the 1976 election, Carter promoted his suitability for the presidency by highlighting his good character. His emphasis on his faith, his promise 'to never lie' to the American public and to make the government work for the people perfectly suited the needs of an electorate that both mistrusted Washington politicians after Watergate and were concerned about 'big government.' Carter claimed that he would be a president who would always do the right thing for the American people and would provide rational solutions to that nation's problems that would not be influenced by 'selfish' interest groups. Carter often described the nation's problems in moral terms, one example being

¹²⁷⁶ Thomas Reeves, *A Question of Character: A Life of John F Kennedy* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1991).

the energy challenge which he described as the 'moral equivalent of war.' Whilst he kept his religious beliefs separate from presidential decisions, his Baptist upbringing did pervade his behaviour as president. This was reflected in his speeches, his attempt to remove ceremony from the office and a sense of always doing the 'right thing'. Yet to pass legislation as president he had to bargain with Congress, and this he was reluctant to do. His aversion to interest groups, which he regarded with suspicion, extended to members of Congress whom he believed were servants of the local as opposed to the national interest. His mistrust of the motives of such groups continued throughout his presidency and was even reflected in his Farewell Address.¹²⁷⁷ He believed that if the correct process was followed the policy recommended would not only be the best solution but one which everyone would accept. Early in his administration he told cabinet members who were developing a specific policy to ignore the political consequences of their proposals; he would deal with such issues. This was a naïve attitude that bemused and annoyed important congressional leaders like Senators Byrd and Long. Throughout his presidency Carter remained determined to do the right thing whatever the political consequences. His policy agenda, which included major complex reforms on energy, health and tax, could not be delivered even with a workable majority in Congress, which he rarely had. Eizenstat stated that, 'He seemed sometimes to like going against the political grain to do that was right.'¹²⁷⁸ This trait was seen in the way Carter took personal responsibility for policy failures rather than allowing his subordinates to take the blame. As his friend Bert Lance commented, because of this

¹²⁷⁷ Farewell Address to the Nation, 14 January 1981,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=44516&st=&st1=>

¹²⁷⁸ Eizenstat Interview, *Miller Center*, 54.

moral stance, 'he never made a popular decision.'¹²⁷⁹ Carter's image was as someone with a strong moral compass who could be trusted but who could also deal with Washington politics, and so that moral stance did appear to waiver at times.

Carter was once asked by a pastor, when he first ran for the Georgia Senate, why he was getting into the 'sordid' world of politics. He answered, 'How would you like to be the pastor of a church with 80k members?'¹²⁸⁰ His ambition and competitiveness overcame his distaste for operating 'in the hothouse of Washington... where politics is a contact sport.'¹²⁸¹ He had a strong sense of his self-image but not so much how others saw him. He was not above striking deals with members of congress, particularly near election time. However, his stubbornness did damage his effectiveness as president. For example, he continued to refuse any form of 'coaching' on improving his speaking style because he feared it would change his accent which he regarded as important to his identity. He also became frustrated about his failure to persuade the public on his policies, especially on energy. This resulted in him developing a hectoring tone which appeared to blame his audience for policy failures. Another side of this frustration became apparent when he felt he was not being believed. An example of this was the story of him being 'attacked' by a rabbit whilst fishing. The story of the 'killer rabbit,' which developed a life of its own during the summer of 1979, damaged Carter's presidential image as he became the subject of satirical comment.¹²⁸² The story should have been ignored, but Carter kept raising the subject as he was upset that no-one

¹²⁷⁹ Lance Interview, *Miller Center*, 43.

¹²⁸⁰ Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 589.

¹²⁸¹ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 197.

¹²⁸² <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=jimmy+carter+paws+cartoon&tbm=isch&source>

appeared to believe him. To him it was more important that he was believed than stopping a story that was damaging him politically.

An equally important side to his character was his pride in his competence. He argued that by taking a rational approach to solving the country's most serious problems it would result in the best solutions. This technocratic persona was established during the 1976 campaign when Carter chose not to exploit his military service as an officer on a nuclear submarine but to highlight his engineering and scientific background. This was a significant decision because he was giving up a major advantage as the only twentieth-century president who had longer military service than Carter was Eisenhower. He became the candidate who would bring competence back to government, make it more efficient and eliminate waste. Like Reagan, Carter recognised the problems of 'big government' but retained his faith in it as a force for good. He believed that with reform the government would deliver better solutions for the country. The difficulty with the solutions that Carter sought to deliver was that they were complex and not easily the subject of compromise. His energy policy, for example, could not sustain changes to any part of the package that were suggested by Congress because it would compromise the whole policy. Carter was confident that he could gain public support by explaining these complex issues but often his powers of persuasion were found wanting. Also, his policies were attacked if not as a whole then piecemeal by interest groups who often used emotional and simplistic arguments that Carter found difficult to counteract. Ultimately the difficulty with emphasising his competence as president was that to sustain this image, Carter had to demonstrate a track record of success and this he could not do.

One of the factors that hampered Carter's effectiveness in Washington was his personal isolation in the White House. Elected as an outsider, Carter made little attempt to engage personally with the Washington elite in contrast with his successor. It was a characteristic that he did not like mixing with 'unsavoury politicians' and his wife talked of the disdain he had for the social engagements expected of him as president.¹²⁸³ His solitary nature was part of his character. It was reflected in his failure to attend Navy reunions¹²⁸⁴ and his decision-making process which invariably had him reading documents on his own. He was a loner in a highly social profession.

In the 1976 election Carter highlighted elements of his background and character to gain public support. His emphasis on his morality, his faith and his competence were exactly what the American public wanted from their presidential candidates after the trauma of Vietnam and Watergate. Carter may have emphasised some elements of his character and background over others, for example scientist over military, but he was clear about who he was, and this did not change during his presidency. Character traits that were strengths on the campaign trail were not necessarily as effective when he was in government. His belief that campaigning was a positive political activity, whilst deal-making after the election with politicians and interest groups was tawdry and hampered his ability to legislate. For a modern president moral character is not enough to be successful; a high level of political skill is also necessary.¹²⁸⁵ Carter, as a moral exemplar, fitted the public need in 1976 but the American public required something different in 1980. The electorate wanted clear answers to the nation's problems and a positive

¹²⁸³ Eizenstat, *White House Years*, 55 and 112.

¹²⁸⁴ Donovan, *Roosevelt to Reagan*, 240-41.

¹²⁸⁵ Reeves, *Question of Character*, 415.

vision of the future. They had grown tired of the explanations of the complexity of problems and the calls for self-sacrifice. They wanted to see their lives improved after four years. For Carter to 'sell' that message would require not only changes in policy but also a level of pragmatism that would have been out of character from someone who remained unchanged in his core beliefs throughout his presidency. Carter saw the presidency as an opportunity for him to provide rational solutions that would solve the underlying problems faced by the United States. He did not feel constrained by ideology or the need to satisfy interest groups because he believed that he had the character, skills and detailed knowledge to convince the public that he would find the right solutions. Given that he chose to address such substantive issues as energy and healthcare, this required a presidential leadership that was transformational. He needed to be able to change public opinion and have the practical skills to persuade an ideologically-divided congress to pass key legislation.

The political, economic and social environment of the 1970's had an impact on Carter's presidential effectiveness. Unfortunately for Carter very few of these factors were favourable to him. The power of his office since Watergate had been constrained by the legislature. He inherited a Congress that was jealous of its powers and governed by a new complex committee structure that made the legislative process unwieldy. To achieve success, he had to be able to sell his policies to the public and negotiate with senior members of Congress. This was to prove a major problem for Carter. His ability to reach out to the public was limited by his lack of effectiveness on television and the cynicism of both public and press. He was further hampered by the fragmentation of the old New Deal coalition in the Democratic Party and the rise of conservative sentiment

across the country. This created a vacuum that was filled by well-funded interest groups which by their nature took a narrow position on political issues. Carter's refusal to take a consistent ideological stance made it very difficult for him to build a base of support in Congress and the country.

Another major factor which Carter inherited was the weakness of the economy. He was the first modern Democratic president to operate under the restriction of very low growth and had to face oil price rises that drove up inflation. 'Stagflation' was a new problem for America and one to which his neo-Keynesian economic advisors had no effective solution. As well as all these factors of which Carter had little or no control, any new president would need at least some luck. Carter had none, as Robert Strauss, the chair of Carter's 1980 campaign committee, colourfully said: 'Poor bastard, he used up all his luck getting here. We've had our victories and defeats, but we've not had a single piece of luck.'¹²⁸⁶ His term of office saw the oil price rises, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and above all else the hostage crisis in Tehran. Whilst Carter was hindered by the environment in which he operated he was by no means helpless and did have resources that would give him the potential to deliver a credible programme. Yet one of the consequences of Carter's ideological neutrality was that he created expectations on both sides of the ideological divide, conservative evangelicals being a case in point. He was further hampered by his failure to articulate a prioritised agenda supported by a vision of what he was attempting to achieve for the country. His legislative proposals were trying to address either serious underlying problems such as energy and healthcare

¹²⁸⁶ Jordan, *Crisis*, 60.

which were very difficult to pass or technical issues like deregulation and government reform which although more straightforward, excited very little public interest.

The perception of a president's record, particularly in terms of domestic policy, is judged by their ability to pass legislation, but as Hargrove asked: 'when less skilful leaders lack political support, is the failure due to limited skills or to political circumstances?' ¹²⁸⁷ Carter did make mistakes in his legislative strategy, especially on prioritisation and his management of relationships, but his scope for achieving major reforms was limited by the ideological and regional divide in Congress. The public perception of Carter as demonstrated by Caddell's polling data, was that he had no major achievements domestically but there was a general view that no-one could have done any better particularly on the economy. This was not a compelling recommendation for a politician who stood in 1976 on his competence. In the 1980 election Carter did not substantively defend his domestic record and even in his memoirs most of his book is focussed on foreign policy. Carter could not point to a domestic policy equivalent of a Middle East Peace deal. But in discussing such failures as healthcare and welfare reform, consideration should be given to the subsequent policy failures of later Democratic presidents who benefitted from much greater congressional support.

The limits on presidential power in the 1970's meant that to be successful any new president had to be able to reach out and persuade the American public and deal effectively with key congressional politicians and interest groups. The support of a Democratic Party would have been helpful to the president but as early as June 1977

¹²⁸⁷ Hargrove, *Carter as President*, xxiii.

Rafshoon was describing the Democratic National Committee (DNC) as a ‘foreign power.’¹²⁸⁸ To enable Carter to be successful he needed not only the right personal skill set but to have the support of a well-run White House organisation. There were many criticisms of the early Carter administration. These included a congressional liaison which had been under resourced, confused policy coordination and the inexperience of the Georgians he brought with him into the White House. This criticism was largely unfair and often tinged with snobbery from the Washington elite. As with many new administrations, Carter’s took time to bed in but certainly by 1978 the White House was operating well as subsequent comments from former staff bear out. As the quality and the experience of staff improved, units like congressional liaison, the press office and especially outreach became highly effective and their roles and processes were to be replicated by subsequent administrations. This was despite the continuing perception in Washington that Carter and his staff were outsiders. This view was fuelled by the reluctance of the Carter team to engage personally with the Washington elite. One Carter decision that did have a significant legacy was the role played by the vice president. The trust and the formal responsibilities given by Carter to Walter Mondale became the benchmark for subsequent politically active vice presidents like Al Gore, Dick Cheney and Joe Biden. Also, and to a lesser extent, the role of Rosalyn Carter became the model for the political as well as personal partnership of Bill and Hillary Clinton. Whilst Carter’s White House organisation became more effective in supporting his policy initiatives, it was still dependent upon the president’s decision-making and ability to persuade the American public and key politicians of the wisdom of his policies.

¹²⁸⁸ Rafshoon to Carter, 14 June 1977, SS Box 34, *JCPL*.

Carter was a highly intelligent, self-disciplined president who worked extremely hard. He was often criticised for being indecisive and too involved in the detail, but this was based upon a misunderstanding of how he took in information. It was the case that he wanted to understand the detail of any policy, believing this analysis or homework would enable him to balance conflicting views. He was comfortable with complexity and needed to understand the detail, so he could come to a rational decision and explain it to the public. Carter's preferred method of assimilating information was reading. He was intelligent enough to understand technical detail and his skill at speed reading meant that he digested large documents quickly. The assumption that these substantial policy papers were examples of Carter's inability to delegate and delayed his decision making was erroneous. It was ironic that his successor, Ronald Reagan, was to be criticised for making decisions on single page memoranda. As for delegation, Carter used his cabinet to develop new policies such as health reform, labour relations and Social Security with limited intervention from himself. Carter, however, made errors in his approach to legislation which demonstrated both a lack of understanding of how Washington operated and a general naivety. He did not have a structured agenda which was essential to pass legislation. This was despite the efforts of his staff to provide one. He did not prioritise. The result of this was his legislative programme was stuck in Congress and under the control of congressional leaders whom he was unable to influence. He might have been successful if he was more effective in persuading the American public and building coalitions to support his programmes, but this would prove to be his greatest personal weakness.

Historians have studied the skills needed for presidents to be successful leaders. Many have focussed upon the importance of a president's ability to persuade the public and senior politicians to support them. Carter was an excellent campaigner and effective in interactive environments like press conferences, town hall meetings and radio phone-ins. Yet his speeches in set piece environments such as television were not persuasive. His speaking style often came across as 'holier than thou' and even Carter had recognised by April 1979 that his television addresses were not working. Rafshoon and the speechwriting team attempted to compensate for this weakness by trying to manage his message and the communications channels he used but this was criticised as media manipulation by the press. Carter skilfully resisted attempts to persuade him to articulate a vision for his administration that linked his programmes together and could be communicated to the public. His message of rational but complex policies could not be sold to a public that craved simple solutions and a positive vision for the future. This rhetorical deficit became a major issue when Carter faced Ronald Reagan in 1980 because Reagan's message provided a clear, simple and optimistic vision for America's future. Carter had many of the skills required to be a successful president. He had intelligence, a strong work ethic, and, after some early problems, a strong organisation to support him. His inability to persuade his audience, be it the public or members of congress, was a major weakness as a leader. A change in speaking style or creating a vision he simply did not have was never an option for a stubborn man proud of his southern heritage and convinced that he was proposing the best policies for the country. Facing someone with the rhetorical ability of Reagan, Carter was always going to be at a disadvantage, but it was difficult to run an effective campaign when his track record as president delivered few positive achievements.

Jimmy Carter is currently viewed by historians as a 'below average' president. In the C-Span survey of 2017, Carter was ranked 26th out of 43 and below every post-war president except Richard Nixon and George W Bush.¹²⁸⁹ His successor influenced his immediate legacy. His heavy defeat to Ronald Reagan was followed by what was widely regarded as two successful terms of office, and the dismantling of many of Carter's policies. Reagan is ranked 9th in the same survey. Confusion over the ideological significance of his administration has also affected Carter's rating. Conservatives and liberals criticised him severely for failing to deliver on their agendas, even though Carter did not ever endorse these programmes in their entirety. He therefore suffered and has continued to suffer for his insistence on what he regarded as a rational approach to policy. His record in terms of domestic policy, whilst containing both major and minor achievements, was largely unsuccessful in comparison with the ambitious programme he set out in 1976. It would be difficult to argue, however, that this was largely due to Carter's personal failings. The political environment inside Congress and in the nation was not amenable to Carter's remedies for the nation's ills. His failure to prioritise and his inability to persuade his audience did not help but it could equally be argued that he was unlucky with crises that he faced that were beyond his control. His election in 1976 was a major personal victory but it would be difficult to envisage Carter winning at any other time. What was required for victory in 1976 had changed in 1980, and Carter was far too moral a man and, truth be told, too stubborn to change his policies and his image to challenge Reagan effectively. It is possible, even probable, that the view of historians in time will change if for no other reason that his eventual death will bring even more

¹²⁸⁹ <https://www.c-span.org/presidentsurvey2017/?personid=2484>

recognition of his post-presidential activities with the Carter Center and his insistence on doing the right thing on issues whatever the political consequences. However, whilst his reputation may, indeed should, improve in relation to other presidents, analysis of his record domestically should not change his position dramatically. History should come to regard Jimmy Carter as a good, possibly even a great man but never better than an average president which if nothing else demonstrates the disconnection between presidential character and performance.

This suggests that the post-revisionist interpretation of Carter is the most persuasive; and that is what this thesis argues. To be sure it does support the revisionist claim that many of Carter's achievements have been underrated and that some of the criticism of his failures has been unfair, as they were due to factors beyond his control. However, there is a risk of historians being seduced by the 'afterglow' of Carter's post-presidency with insufficient weight being given to the opportunities that he missed in seeking a more substantive legacy. There were errors of judgement on issues that he could influence. These included his failure to engage effectively with key politicians in Congress, his reluctance to prioritise legislation for an already overloaded legislature and his unwillingness to articulate a clear vision for the country. This, therefore, associates this study with the work of post-revisionist historians such as Scott Kaufman.¹²⁹⁰ In addition, this thesis concludes that many of Carter's difficulties with the political elite, interest groups and the media arose from their misunderstanding of who he was and how he thought. His refusal to accept a 'label' often resulted in an inaccurate

¹²⁹⁰ Scott Kaufman, ed, *A Companion to Gerald R Ford and Jimmy Carter* (Chichester: John Wiley and Son, 2016)

picture of the ideological orientation of his policies. This misleading portrayal resulted in expectations that Carter could or would not fulfil and consequently an adverse reaction from a wide range of political groups which felt his action or often inaction represented a betrayal of their values. This misreading of Carter extended to myths about his leadership style. Descriptions of a president who was mired in policy detail and indecisive are not supported by the evidence. In his domestic policies he delegated widely on all major issues except energy and made clear cut decisions throughout his term in office. Nevertheless, whatever his personal qualities, Carter's overall record in domestic policy was more often disappointing than commendable.

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