

President Nixon's Speech on Energy Crisis: November 1973

Good evening:

Three weeks ago, I spoke to you about the national energy crisis and our policy for meeting it. Tonight I want to talk with you again to report on our progress and to announce further steps we must take to carry out our energy policy.

When I spoke to you earlier, I indicated that the sudden cutoff of oil from the Middle East had turned the serious energy shortages we expected this winter into a major energy crisis. That crisis is now being felt around the world, as other industrialized nations have also suffered from cutbacks in oil from the Middle East.

Shortages in Europe, for example, are far more critical than they are in the United States. Already seven European nations have imposed a ban on Sunday driving. Fortunately, the United States is not as dependent upon Middle Eastern oil as many other nations. We will not have a ban on Sunday driving, but as you will hear later, we are going to try to limit it. Nevertheless, we anticipate that our shortages could run as high as 17 percent. This means that we must immediately take strong, effective countermeasures.

In order to minimize disruptions in our economy, I asked on November 7 that all Americans adopt certain energy conservation measures to help meet the challenge of reduced energy supplies. These steps include reductions in home heating, reductions in driving speeds, elimination of unnecessary lighting. And the American people, all of you, you have responded to this challenge with that spirit of sacrifice which has made this such a great nation.

The Congress has also been moving forward on the energy front. The Alaska pipeline bill has been passed. I signed it into law 9 days ago, right here at this desk. The Congress has passed a fuel allocation bill which I will sign into law on Tuesday.¹ An additional emergency bill providing special authority to deal with this problem has now passed the Senate.

¹On Tuesday, November 27, 1973, the President signed S. 1570, the Emergency Petroleum Allocation Act of 1973, Public Law 93-159 (87 Stat. 627).

When the House returns from its recess, I am confident the House will move promptly so that this vital legislation can be signed into law by the middle of December.

And so we have made some encouraging progress, but there is much more to be done, and that is what I want to talk to you about tonight.

I have appointed an Energy Emergency Action Group, under my chief energy adviser, Governor John Love, to analyze our situation on a continuing basis and to advise me of all actions required to deal with it.

And upon the action and the recommendation of this group, I am announcing tonight the following steps to meet the energy crisis:

First, to increase the supply of heating oil that will be available this winter, we must adjust production schedules and divert petroleum which might normally go for the production of gasoline to the production of more heating oil.

To accomplish this, the amount of gasoline which refiners distribute to wholesalers and retailers will be reduced across the Nation by 15 percent. As we reduce gasoline supplies, we must act to insure that the remaining gasoline available is used wisely and conserved to the fullest possible extent.

Therefore, as a second step, I am asking tonight that all gasoline filling stations close down their pumps between 9 p.m. Saturday night and midnight Sunday every weekend, beginning December 1. We are requesting that this step be taken voluntarily now.

Upon passage of the emergency energy legislation before the Congress, gas stations will be required to close during these hours. This step should not result in any serious hardship for any American family. It will, however, discourage long-distance driving during weekends. It will mean perhaps spending a little more time at home.

This savings alone is only a small part of what we have to conserve to meet the total gasoline shortage. We can achieve substantial additional savings by altering our driving habits. While the voluntary response to my request for reduced driving speeds has been excellent, it is now essential that we have mandatory and full compliance with this important step on a nationwide basis.

And therefore, the third step will be the establishment of a maximum speed limit for automobiles of 50 miles per hour nationwide as soon as our emergency energy legislation passes the Congress. We expect that this measure will produce a savings of 200,000 barrels of gasoline per day. Intercity buses and heavy-duty trucks, which operate more efficiently at higher speeds and therefore do not use more gasoline, will be permitted to observe a 55 mile-per-hour speed limit.

The fourth step we are taking involves our jet airliners. There will be a phased reduction of an additional 15 percent in the consumption of jet fuel for passenger flights bringing the total reduction to approximately 25 percent.

These savings will be achieved by a careful reduction in schedules, combined with an increase in passenger loads. We will not have to stop air travel, but we will have to plan for it more carefully.

The fifth step involves cutting back on outdoor lighting. As soon as the emergency energy legislation passes the Congress, I shall order the curtailment of ornamental outdoor lighting for homes and the elimination of all commercial lighting except that which identifies places of business.

In the meantime, we are already planning right here at the White House to curtail such lighting that we would normally have at Christmastime, and I am asking that all of you act now on a voluntary basis to reduce or eliminate unnecessary lighting in your homes.

As just one example of the impact which such an initiative can have, the energy consumed by ornamental gaslights alone in this country is equivalent to 35,000 barrels per day of oil, and that is enough fuel to heat 175,000 homes.

Finally, I want to report to you tonight that we have now developed final plans for allocating reduced quantities of heating oil this winter, and all of you know how very important heating oil is, particularly in the wintertime.

These plans, to be published Tuesday, will call for an average reduction of 10 percent of heating oil for industrial use, 15 percent for home use, and 25 percent for commercial use.

The reductions for homeowners alone will result in a savings of some 315,000 barrels of heating oil a day, which is enough to heat over 1 1/2 million homes every day. For the average American family, as I indicated 3 weeks ago, this cutback in heating oil does not mean severe discomfort for anyone, but it will mean that everyone should lower the thermostat--as it is right here in this office now, and throughout the White House, and throughout every Federal installation--you should lower the thermostat by 6 degrees below its normal setting so that we can achieve a national daytime average of 68 degrees. Those who fail to adopt such a cutback risk running out of fuel before the winter is over.

While additional actions will be necessary to further offset the anticipated shortage of 17 percent, the steps which I have outlined tonight will relieve about 10 percent of that shortage.

They will make a very substantial contribution to our immediate goal of insuring that we have enough fuel to be adequately warm in our homes this winter, that we are able to get to work, and that we experience no serious disruptions in the normal conduct of our lives.

Above all, every step will be taken to insure that any disruptions to our economy, which could cost jobs, will be as brief as possible and that they do not cause serious damage.

Nothing we do can succeed, however, without the full cooperation of the Congress in providing the legislation we must have, without the full cooperation of State and local government in providing the broad leadership that we must have, and without the full cooperation of each and every one of you, all the American people, in sacrificing a little so that no one must endure real hardship.

For my part, I pledge to do everything in my power to insure that the decisions I have announced will be carried out swiftly and effectively and fairly, and whatever additional action is necessary to achieve our objective will be taken.

I intend to participate personally and on a regular basis, as I have since I last addressed you 3 weeks ago, in the work of my energy advisers. I intend to advise the Congressional leadership regularly of problems and progress. And I intend to see that the persons and organizations having responsibilities and capabilities in this area are fully and regularly informed.

We need new rules if we are to meet this challenge, but most of all, we need sustained and serious action and cooperation by millions of men and women if we are to achieve our objective, and that means millions of Americans across this land listening to me tonight.

Let me conclude by restating our overall objective. It can be summed up in one word that best characterizes this Nation and its essential nature. That word is "independence." From its beginning 200 years ago, throughout its history, America has made great sacrifices of blood and also of treasure to achieve and maintain its independence. In the last third of this century, our independence will depend on maintaining and achieving self-sufficiency in energy.

What I have called Project Independence 1980 is a series of plans and goals set to insure that by the end of this decade, Americans will not have to rely on any source of energy beyond our own.

As far as energy is concerned, this means we will hold our fate and our future in our hands alone. As we look to the future, we can do so, confident that the energy crisis will be resolved not only for our time but for all time. We will once again have plentiful supplies of energy which helped to build the greatest industrial nation and one of the highest standards of living in the world.

The capacity for self-sufficiency in energy is a great goal. It is also an essential goal, and we are going to achieve it.

Tonight I ask all of you to join together in moving toward that goal, with the spirit of discipline, self-restraint, and unity which is the cornerstone of our great and good country.

Thank you and good evening.