

Had our final congressional-leadership breakfast. There was a different tone today—one of a degree of relief that the Democrats will not be responsible for all the problems in the future.

—JIMMY CARTER, DIARY ENTRY, DECEMBER 2, 1980



Jimmy Carter

*An Outsider's Pursuit of
"Trustee" Leadership*

IN THE post-Watergate era, Jimmy Carter (served 1977–1981) assumed office seeking to end the ceremonial trappings and power abuses of the “imperial presidency” while promising the nation a presidency “as good as its people.” Yet despite his promises of positive new directions, his four years in the White House were a continuing struggle. In 1981 Carter reflected sadly on an election he had lost by ten percentage points, thereby relinquishing control of the White House to Ronald Reagan, the most conservative Republican president since the 1920s.

Carter had sought to govern differently. He liked to pursue policies he viewed to be in the long-term public interest, and he placed less emphasis on bargaining with Congress. His approach also featured a zealous pursuit of administrative efficiencies and a desire to have direct, town meeting-style communication with the public. Did this low-opportunity president turn his trustee leadership into success on the domestic front?

Personal Characteristics

James Earl Carter Jr. (1924–) was the first president to have been born and raised in the Deep South since Woodrow Wilson. He also was the most devoutly religious president serving since 1932. Had he been raised in comparable family circumstances outside of the one-party South, he might well have emerged as a Republican.¹

Jimmy was the son of a prominent peanut farmer and processor in tiny Plains, Georgia. After high school, he left south Georgia to attend college and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1946. The young officer carried out many assignments during his brief naval career, including engineering officer on a nuclear submarine. After the death of his father in 1953, he abruptly left the navy and returned to Plains to run the family business.

On one of his trips home from the Naval Academy, young Jimmy met seventeen-year-old Rosalynn Smith, who also had grown up in Plains. The oldest of four children whose father had died when they were young, Rosalynn worked as a cleaning girl in a beauty salon to meet the family's expenses. Jimmy and Rosalynn married when she was only eighteen.

Career Path

Jimmy Carter had less experience in significant administrative and elective positions than any other post-1932 president. After serving on the Sumner County, Georgia, school board and in the state legislature for four years, he ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1966 and successfully in 1970. Restricted by the state's constitution to a single term, he left office in 1974 after pushing for reorganization of the state government and budgeting reforms and making progress in the appointments of blacks. His relationship with the factionally divided legislature was stormy, however, and it is unlikely he would have been reelected if a second term had been allowed.²

Between 1974 and 1976 Carter laid the foundation for his bid for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. He had tried tentatively for the vice presidential nomination in 1972, but decided after talking with other potential Democratic candidates that he was as well qualified as any of them to serve as president. The difficult task ahead was apparent, however, when even his mother responded to his announcement that he was going to run for president by saying, "President of what?"

Carter emerged victorious in the 1976 primaries and at the Democratic National Convention as a candidate who appealed to moderate Democrats and many Christian evangelicals. Fortunately for him, in the early primaries the more liberal candidates divided voter support, and he was able to win in Pennsylvania, which helped to establish his credentials as a national rather than a regional candidate. In the later primaries, how-

ever, greater uncertainty about his candidacy began to surface and he won only seven of the final twelve.

Carter faced a weak incumbent in the fall election. President Gerald Ford had barely survived a close primary contest with Ronald Reagan and was hampered by the lingering issue of his pardon of Richard Nixon. Carter released a lengthy list of issue positions during his campaign but did not give a clear sense of where he was heading. He did, however, frequently assert that his administration would be far more open than Nixon's, and he pledged not to lie or deceive the public. These themes drew some support, but they did not clarify his policy goals. By October 1976 the press had begun to decry the lack of substance in the campaign. Thus he lost support in its final days, but Ford was unable to close the gap. Carter was aided in his victory by strong southern support and his ability to hold northern Democratic strongholds such as New York and Massachusetts.

What Manner of Man?

Despite his low-key demeanor, Carter was highly self-confident and ambitious. During his years in the navy, he had openly aspired to become the chief of naval operations. He also was confident enough in alternative career opportunities to return to Plains. In fact, he was so ambitious that he was willing to embark on campaigns when given little chance of victory by the experts.³

Highly intelligent, Carter sought vast amounts of information about policy issues. Since he was a "quick read," that information helped him in his campaigning when he often was able to impress observers with his knowledge of national issues. His interest in historical perspectives was limited, however; he preferred gathering technical information on a specific issue. Some analysts believe this trait contributed to his weaknesses as a strategic thinker.

Carter's religious beliefs also were an important defining characteristic. His religious commitment, which intensified with the help of his sister (and evangelist) Ruth Stapleton after he lost his first race for governor in 1966, was one of seeking spiritual growth rather than relying on a certainty that he had the answers. In seeking that growth, he prayed as often as twenty-five times a day while in the White House.

Carter has been described in many different ways by the people who have known him. Staff aide James Fallows, shortly after departing the

White House in 1979, stressed Carter's basic fairness and decency. Carter would be an ideal person to judge one's soul, he noted.⁴ Yet he also found that Carter seemed to conduct a passionless presidency. Others have pointed to Carter's honesty and forthrightness, high degree of self-discipline, and tenacious pursuit of personal goals, even in sporting contests. Less-flattering assessments have pointed to his naiveté about the nature of government, limited creativity, and tendencies toward self-righteousness.

Policy Views

President Carter's commitment to government reorganization was unusual; unlike previous presidential candidates, he had made government reorganization a major campaign theme.⁵ He also was fond of pointing out existing policies had been influenced too much by special interests. As a result, in some quarters he was perceived as anti-business.⁶

Carter was fiscally conservative but held liberal views on some social and environmental policy issues. Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., pointing to Carter's commitment to deficit reduction rather than the traditional programs of the liberal Democratic coalition, called Carter the most conservative Democratic president since Grover Cleveland. Yet on civil rights, Governor Jimmy Carter had surprised Georgians with his declaration that the era of segregation was over and the scope of his efforts. He continued to support civil rights as president.

Challenges and Opportunities

Carter took office at what was "not an opportune time"⁷ and in "probably a more restrictive atmosphere than any president [had faced] since World War II."⁸ The election results and levels of public support were not overly promising. Carter's margin of victory over Ford in the 1976 election was merely 2.1 percentage points—putting him way down in seventh place in the margins of victory of the post-1932 presidents. In terms of popularity, he began with a respectable 63 percent during his first year, but ultimately ranked as only the eighth most popular president (see Table 1-2). Moreover, Carter was an outsider, with little knowledge of the arcane workings of the Washington community.

The situation in Congress was not promising as well. Party strength looked impressive on the surface, with 292 Democrats in the House and 61 in the Senate (Table 1-3). Their margins were inflated by the large

post-Watergate surge of Democrats in the midterm election of 1974, but they gained only one more House seat in 1976. The new Congress also was able to flex its post-Watergate muscle. Reforms aimed at strengthening Congress's role in relation to that of the president had opened the way to hiring more staff to develop congressional proposals and increased the number of subcommittees as ambitious legislators sought to achieve a piece of the action. In fact, many of the newer members had never dealt with a Democratic president and were somewhat reluctant to see a significant transfer of power: "The new president faced a new Congress, one with changed attitudes about itself, fresh faces and new leaders, improved capabilities, and different ways of doing business."⁹ In this unpromising legislative setting, the strong supportive role played by Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, D-Mass.—despite his personal displeasure with Carter's approach to Congress—became one of the few positive influences.

In looking forward to some promising issues, Carter also faced expectations within the Democratic Party coalition that would be difficult to meet. Measures such as health care and welfare reform were popular, but the public was shifting away from support for the other spending measures traditionally promoted by the Democratic Party.¹⁰ Environmental issues were the most promising; Ford had vetoed three environmental bills. Some legislators and citizens also wanted to see the government reduce federal regulation in several areas of the economy.

Unfortunately for Carter, two big problems did not promise easy legislative action.¹¹ The first was the simultaneous rise in both unemployment and inflation which made it difficult for him to rely on the traditional Keynesian solution of expanded deficit spending. The basic conundrum for policy makers was that an increase in spending or a reduction in taxes aimed at stimulating the economy might worsen levels of inflation. Further complicating the problem, the budget deficit in the preceding year had been 18 percent of total spending (Table 1-3). Economist Anthony Campagne was quite blunt about Carter's predicament when he argued that in this situation the economics profession could not offer clear solutions.¹²

Energy policy presented a second tough problem. A wide variety of proposals had been discussed in the wake of the 1973 energy crisis in which an embargo by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) had contributed to a sharp rise in oil prices. Yet consumers and the producers of various energy sources such as coal and oil disagreed on the appropriate remedial policies. A strong environmental movement presented some opportunities for energy conservation, but that approach

sparked controversy among its more conservative, anti-regulatory political and business opponents. According to political scientist Eric Uslaner, this situation was a “zero-sum game” in which bargaining to develop coalitions was difficult because policy choices created both clear losers and clear winners.¹³

But Carter’s troubles did not stop there; he encountered further difficulties, especially during his last two years in office. A second OPEC oil embargo forced reconsideration of energy policies in the summer of 1979. Then, on November 4, 1979, 250 Americans were taken hostage at the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Carter’s popularity rose somewhat as he undertook an extensive, highly publicized effort to gain their release in the months that followed. Yet when no progress was made and an April 1980 rescue attempt had to be aborted in the Iranian desert because of helicopter failures, his public approval for handling foreign policy fell dramatically. In fact, the hostage crisis was a major liability in his reelection effort. Further complicating Carter’s position in 1980 was heightened concern over Soviet intentions after their invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979. Unpopular presidential actions, including a grain embargo against the Soviets that reduced American exports and Carter’s refusal to allow the United States to participate in the 1980 Moscow Olympics, soon followed.

Leadership Style

Carter brought a distinct leadership style to the White House. He replaced the “imperial presidency” with an open administration more accessible to the public. And he turned to government reform to improve efficiencies and help to restore confidence in government. In his overall approach to issues, the president considered himself to be a trustee who looked toward long-range concerns rather than simply cutting political deals on Capitol Hill. As such, he developed a personal dislike for many legislators and interest group politics, had confidence in his ability to develop effective policies, and looked for help to government reform, which he had used successfully in Georgia to modernize state government.

The Advisory Process and Approach to Decision Making

Carter recruited many Georgians and campaign aides for his staff and a variety of prominent figures for his cabinet. Of his top aides, six of the

nine had worked for him as governor or during his campaign, including key aide Hamilton Jordan, Press Secretary Jody Powell, legislative liaison head Frank Moore, and senior adviser Jack Watson.¹⁴

Carter sought to increase the legitimacy of his administration and pursue government efficiency by recruiting for his cabinet men and women with extensive Washington experience and strong reputations. Despite the initial “outsider” perspective expressed by Hamilton Jordan that the new administration would not consider Washington establishment figures such as Cyrus Vance, Vance was later asked to serve as secretary of state. Key domestic appointments were former Lyndon Johnson aide Joseph Califano to head the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (later renamed the Department of Health and Human Services), Michael Blumenthal as secretary of the Treasury, and former Nixon and Ford defense secretary James Schlesinger to head the new Energy Department. For attorney general he turned to another Georgian, Griffin Bell.

The initial organization of Carter’s White House stemmed from his confidence in own ability to absorb vast amounts of information and his desire not to replicate Nixon’s strong chief of staff model which Carter associated with abuse of power. He envisioned a White House organization in which aides would have equal access to him in a spokes-in-a-wheel operation. His plan proved unworkable, however. He simply did not have time to soak up information about every single policy issue. Nor did he have time to implement properly the managerial demands of such an approach. By mid-1979 Hamilton Jordan had been named chief of staff.

In his decision making, Carter tended to follow up on his intense desire to fulfill his campaign pledges. Jeff Fishel found that Carter basically did just that. Fishel compared ten issues that Carter had stressed during his campaign and the salience of those issues to Carter’s agenda during his first two years in office. Fishel found that Carter failed to maintain a high salience for only one issue—tax policy.¹⁵ In some instances, in keeping with the perspective of a trustee president, Carter was primarily motivated by his sense that an important issue was not being addressed by Congress.

The Carter White House tended to look at policy issues from a technical, engineering perspective and pay little attention to the reasons earlier initiatives had failed. For example, administration officials approached welfare reform by collecting a great deal of current data on systemic problems and seeking solutions in a comprehensive manner, but they paid little attention to political feasibility. This tendency to overlook political feasibility was especially evident in James Schlesinger’s rushed effort to

put together an energy package in the first three months of the Carter presidency. Carter later recognized that the process had been a mistake, but one dictated by the desire for speed.¹⁶ More generally, Carter encouraged his staff to develop good decisions, telling them, "You worry about the policy; I will worry about the politics." He did, though, often consult Hamilton Jordan and First Lady Rosalynn Carter on political feasibility questions. And at points Carter clearly made political decisions, as when he sought to have Joseph Califano cut back on an educational campaign against smoking when the tobacco industry lobbied the White House in opposition to the Califano plan. More often, however, he paid little attention to the political feasibility of an action or decision.

In the same vein, Carter has been widely criticized for how he used his own time in the decision- and policy-making process. His personal involvement on welfare reform in 1977, for example, seemed to put him at the information-gathering level of an assistant secretary for planning. He got too much information and not necessarily the right pieces of information.

The organization and experience of the White House staff also drew criticism, but some observers did note a marked improvement over time. On the minus side, many of Carter's senior staff had no prior Washington experience, and it seemed clear that Carter had not learned good staff work in Georgia. Although the absence of a more hierarchical staff at the outset seemed to prevent timely decisions, some significant improvements were noted. For example, over time fewer special task forces were used and fewer time limits were set on the development of proposals. Along the way, former Georgia lawyer Stuart Eizenstat, chairman of the Domestic Policy Staff (the former Domestic Council), became one of the most powerful men in Washington.¹⁷ In addition, in areas such as hospital cost control, one of the president's early proposals, the initial defeat in 1977 produced a realization that interest group concerns would have to be addressed more extensively. As one strong indication of change, an "almost glitch free" operation was proclaimed in 1980 by political scientist Stephen Hess.¹⁸ In the end, then, Carter seemed to learn from his mistakes, but it was too late to save his reelection chances.

Carter's relationships with his cabinet did not show a comparable improvement over time.¹⁹ His cabinet members were generally quite capable of taking strong roles in developing and promoting policies. Nevertheless, they possessed little personal loyalty to Carter, and, because they often received little direction, they usually just went their own way. Controversies

did erupt periodically, however, over specific policies. HEW Secretary Joseph Califano, for example, objected to Carter's cautious approach to several policy issues.²⁰

In July 1979 Carter took the unprecedented step of removing no fewer than five of his cabinet officers, including some of the more prominent figures such as Michael Blumenthal, Joseph Califano, and James Schlesinger. He had become increasingly frustrated with press leaks and signs of disloyalty, and some leading Democratic Party officials advised him that to reorient his administration he would have to seek several resignations. The firings, though, produced considerable uncertainty about the stability of the administration and led to a decline in public support.

Administrative Strategies

As noted, Carter was unusually interested in "good government."²¹ In keeping with that interest and his desire to streamline White House operations, he successfully sought legislation that would restore the president's reorganization authority, which had expired in 1973. Carter also succeeded in creating two new departments. One was the Department of Energy, an idea that had surfaced in the Ford administration and in Congress. Carter had to compromise significantly on his initial proposal in the face of pressures from various energy interests, but with the aid of several key legislators the measure passed in 1977.²² Carter also led a fight to establish the Department of Education. Passage of this legislation in 1979 was strongly supported by the National Education Association, which had backed Carter in the 1976 election.

Civil service reform also was high on Carter's agenda as well. His strong efforts to gain legislative support included convening a task force, headed by Les Francis of the legislative liaison staff, to coordinate legislative lobbying; orchestrating calls by cabinet secretaries to key legislators; and making his own phone calls to designated legislators.²³ By pushing an issue that Congress otherwise would not have pursued, Carter was able to see enactment of the most extensive civil service reform since the system was founded in 1883.

Carter's commitment to good government drew mixed assessments. Two public administration specialists found civil service reform "the most impressive achievement of Jimmy Carter's presidency."²⁴ Yet by 1981 top aide Jack Watson was pondering Carter's efforts: "I think we spent an undue amount of emphasis, time, political capital and energy on

governmental reorganization too much as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end.”²⁵

Carter made a modest effort to shape policies through administrative action. In 1979 he named his most fateful appointment in the midst of considerable concern about the financial markets and inflation. Signaling his desire to fight inflation, Carter nominated Paul Volcker as chairman of the Federal Reserve Board. Volcker, who was actually Carter’s second choice, was selected after only a limited staff assessment. In an Oval Office meeting with Carter, Volcker stressed the importance of independence for the Federal Reserve Board and the need to wage a stronger battle against inflation. Carter, convinced that Volcker was the right choice, quickly announced his nomination.²⁶ The result, as many observers foresaw, was a major effort to reduce the money supply, thereby reducing inflation. Unfortunately for Carter, the negative short-term economic impacts of these actions coincided with his reelection year.

Carter also used administrative roles in addressing social issues. In civil rights he staffed his administration with more African Americans than any president to that time and generally supported existing policies, but he made no concerted new administrative effort. On affirmative action he sought to manage conflicts rather than take strong positions and generally subscribed to a position of defending affirmative action but not quotas.²⁷ In the abortion arena, he made little effort to support the concerns of religious fundamentalists, at least as many of them saw it, and to either legitimize the ruling in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision or overturn it.²⁸ That lack of decisive action, according to Barbara Craig and David O’Brien, was reflected in Carter’s appointments, which sent mixed signals on various abortion rights matters. Overall, then, Carter’s administrative interests were more oriented toward achieving “good government” than toward efforts to use administrative roles in ways that would change substantive policy outcomes and his potential for reelection in 1980.

Public Leadership

Carter was a firm believer in the importance of presidential relationships with the public. In his view, presidents should set a high moral tone while also communicating directly with the public to get around the concerns of special interests.

But the results of Carter’s efforts were mixed. His personal popularity fell his first year—a drop surpassed only by Clinton’s in 1993, and he pe-

riodically received ratings under 30 percent during his last two years in office. His performance looks somewhat better, however, when placed in the context of his circumstances. According to a study by Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley, he ranks fourth among the modern presidents when popularity levels are viewed in the context of popularity-shaping influences.²⁹

Some of Carter’s problems stemmed from his poor choice of a persona. He campaigned as an “outsider” and proceeded to dramatically demphasize presidential symbols such as the anthem “Hail to the Chief.” Yet over time it became apparent that the removal of the trappings of office had gone too far, as the public seemed unmoved by his attempt to present himself as a rather unassuming “nice guy” and an “average American.”³⁰

Carter also had problems in gaining favorable press coverage. Especially in the beginning he did not go out of his way to court the press. In the aftermath of Watergate when reporters played a key role in the investigation, some journalists seemed anxious to show they could take a critical stance toward a Democratic president. Based on his examination of the content of leading newspapers, Mark Rozell found that views of Carter in these newspapers were more negative than the public’s views.³¹

Overall, Carter’s public leadership reflected his preferences for less-traditional public relations activities. He held fewer press conferences than most presidents, and he was not particularly skilled at focusing on issues or at presenting his administration in a favorable light. He gave only 1.5 televised voluntary domestic addresses a year—slightly below average. Because Carter preferred to seek direct contact with the electorate, he gravitated toward the use of town meetings, a device he had used successfully in his days as governor and during his election campaign. The town meetings, however, proved to be less effective for a president, as the public seemed more interested in a president who had proposals to present rather than one who simply wanted to listen to the public. Moreover, Carter was unable to get the town meetings on the air, and so in the end they rarely changed anything.³²

Finally, there was the matter of Carter’s speaking style. Because he viewed public addresses as more of a burden than an opportunity, he only achieved mixed results. One problem was his preference for a somber, moralistic tone. As one staffer saw it, “If Carter had delivered FDR’s ‘nothing to fear’ speech, the Depression would still be going on.”

Congressional Leadership

Carter's relationships with Congress were marked by considerable tension and widespread criticism. Frank Moore, Carter's one-time liaison with the Georgia state legislature, handled the day-to-day interactions with Congress from the unusually small Office of Legislative Liaison. Especially during 1977, he drew widespread criticism for his lack of experience and Washington savvy. No other top aide had a strong role. Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan, who enjoyed campaign politics more than legislative tactics, maintained no direct contact with Speaker Tip O'Neill despite his influential White House role.

In general, criticism of Carter and his staff ranged from finger-pointing at poor White House staff work by Washington outsiders ignorant of the ways of Congress, to jibes at the staff's failure to engage in the expected care and feeding of members of Congress, to pundits' observations of Carter's inability to build strong relationships with congressional leaders—and almost everything in between. Carter approached congressional relations as an outsider, failing to move effectively to an insider strategy.

Carter's own relationship with Congress was shaped by his dislike of bargaining and patronage but also by his tenacity in trying to get things done. He continued the traditional morning breakfasts with legislative leaders and maintained a concerted effort to enlist their aid. Frequently, he tried to achieve influence with members of Congress by presenting information rather than direct bargaining; he believed bargaining produced short-term, wasteful policy results, and thus he avoided it.³³ One staff aide was vehement on the subject: "[Carter] doesn't like politicians. . . . He knows there are good ones and bad ones and so on, but he really does not like them. He's anti-politician."³⁴

But Carter did change some over time. During his first year he made energy policy a top priority and decided to wait on health care until 1978. Yet he was reluctant to choose among other issues and would even comment that he had "over a hundred priorities." As a result, by March 1977 too many bills were heading for the House Ways and Means Committee, but Carter still did not force himself to pick and choose issues more carefully. As his term progressed, however, he did on occasion work hard on priorities, from civil service reform to hospital cost containment. Efforts to build public support also improved when Anne Wexler took over the public liaison responsibilities and placed greater em-

phasis on possible interest group coalitions than on the bland "good government" expressions of support the White House had sought for energy legislation in 1977.

Legislative Enactments

No landmark legislation emerged during Carter's four years in office. He attempted a fast-start strategy in 1977 and was able to chalk up several easy victories because of previous Ford vetoes, but he went down to a crashing defeat with his energy proposals. His second year produced several important new enactments, including some in which he played a significant role. During his final two years, Carter clashed even more intensely with liberals in his own party and saw frequent stalemates, but he also hailed some legislative victories. Once again, his levels of influence and success differed among policy areas.

Energy Policies

In 1977 Congress had two topics on the table: energy and everything else. Carter had pushed energy to the top of the agenda. Although there had been some (largely unsuccessful) efforts to decrease America's dependence on foreign oil between 1973 and 1976 and a considerable amount of public discussion, neither the public nor Congress anticipated that President Carter, who had said little on the subject in the 1976 campaign, would present Congress with a major energy initiative.

Carter made his commitment for several reasons. The assessments by the Central Intelligence Agency were sobering, and a record-setting cold wave in January had underscored the nation's energy problems. In addition, the many issues involved in devising an energy policy appealed to Carter's desire to develop a comprehensive policy approach.³⁵

The policy proposal submitted to Congress in April was a complex, controversial document containing over one hundred separate initiatives.³⁶ It emphasized conservation and the development of alternative energy sources more than efforts to expand production. Major initiatives in the proposal called for maintaining price and production controls on natural gas in interstate commerce but at a higher price, taxing foreign crude oil to encourage American production, imposing a "gas guzzler" tax on automobiles, and boosting gasoline taxes dramatically. Conservation mea-

asures included mandatory energy efficiency standards for home appliances, reform of electric utility rates, and tax credits for home insulation.

Although Carter tried to rally public support for his proposal, he largely failed. In a period of considerable public skepticism about oil company operations, he was unable to convince a majority of the electorate that the energy crisis was real. The public also could not bring itself to applaud gas taxes and other measures requiring direct consumer outlays. The president was able to generate some public support for the less costly conservation measures, however.

Entries in Carter's own diary describe his coalition-building efforts. He noted he had held meetings several times a week with leaders from "business, agriculture, finance, transportation, the elderly, international trade, local and state government, the news media, consumer affairs, electric utilities, mining, and oil and gas industries for briefings and appeals from me . . . and others."³⁷ Quite strikingly, this list did not include segments of the liberal Democratic coalition such as labor and representatives of minority groups. In a similar fashion, the Office of Public Liaison sought an educational role and eagerly pursued individual suggestions, but it did little in the way of systematically seeking to organize coalition support.

The defeat of the energy bill can be traced in part to the intense lobbying efforts of the oil and natural gas producers and their allies in Congress. But Carter's efforts also were ineffective. He had taken on a difficult problem and proposed a solution but had paid little attention to its political feasibility. Moreover, his approach to building public support was flawed. He did begin to phone legislators when the energy bill became bogged down in the Senate, but he had little success with key opponents such as arch oil industry supporter Russell Long, D-La. In retrospect, it is not surprising that a flawed leadership effort in behalf of an extremely ambitious and difficult policy proposal would end in defeat.

Carter took a very different and more skillful approach to energy policy in 1978. Most important, he decided to return to the position he had originally taken in the 1976 campaign and support phased decontrol of natural gas prices. That step, plus the elimination of the proposed gasoline tax, substantially improved prospects for passage of the energy bill. Moreover, the Carter administration, which had learned from past mistakes, launched in August and September of 1978 a very impressive executive lobbying effort in behalf of the natural gas compromise. According to Elizabeth Sanders, the White House employed all of the tools of presi-

dential persuasion: "pragmatic bargains involving tangible quid pro quos were struck with individual congressmen; grassroots support was marshaled by lectures to visiting community opinion leaders and high-level conferences with banking and business executives who were subtly reminded of the many ways in which executive prerogatives could be used to help or hurt them."³⁸ In addition, legislators who supported the measure lobbied those who were undecided.

Despite Carter's distaste for repeatedly dealing with energy policy, a 1979 Iranian boycott of oil sales to the United States forced additional action in 1980. This occurred as motorists were becoming increasingly angry with a new surge in energy prices and long lines at gas stations. Carter's response to the situation came in two different steps. In an attempt to appeal to the more liberal segments of his coalition, he successfully promoted the establishment of a windfall profits tax; in tandem, he used his administrative discretion to deregulate oil prices. Carter sought to have the revenue from the windfall profits tax placed in trust funds for designated programs such as mass transit and assistance for low-income energy consumers. Congress at first resisted the promotion of trust funds but later overcame an intense lobbying effort by the oil industry to establish a modified trust fund approach. Declining oil prices in 1980 and actions by the Reagan administration eliminated that revenue source.

In an attempt to pursue new energy sources, Carter also successfully promoted an initiative seeking to extract oil from shale. In 1979 the House passed a measure calling for creation of a new private industry for oil production from shale, and Carter in turn embraced proposals for syn-fuel development as part of his July 1979 address that called for both new energy policy initiatives and other steps to overcome a seeming "crisis of confidence."³⁹ As the battles over the initiatives began in key legislative committees, the Carter administration limited its involvement.⁴⁰ The omnibus energy measure finally produced called for \$88 billion in new spending. It had a relatively short life, however. A combination of easing energy shortages in the 1980s and the desire for fiscal constraint in the Reagan administration led to a sharp reduction in and ultimately the dismantling of this policy initiative.

Environmental Policies

The struggle over environmental policy began early in Carter's first year as he sought to reduce the number of water projects being built by the U.S.

Army Corps of Engineers. For Carter, unnecessary dams and water projects were the "worst examples" of pork barrel politics.⁴¹ After a veto of some of these projects, Carter agreed to a compromise arranged by House Speaker Tip O'Neill and got a reduction of about half of what he had hoped to achieve.

In 1977 Congress passed three environmental measures that had been vetoed by Gerald Ford or Richard Nixon or both. The Carter administration supported the measures, but interaction with Congress often occurred at the departmental level, and none of these issues achieved the importance the Carter administration attached to energy policy. The most far-reaching bill amended the Clean Air Act by both expanding and reducing the standards being applied. The other two measures established strip mine regulations for surface and underground mining and modified segments of the Clean Water Act.

Other important legislation came at the end of Carter's four years in office. Despite his languishing position in the polls, he was able to help gain passage of two major environmental measures in 1980. A proposal for a "superfund" to address problems such as the dramatic toxic waste episode at Love Canal, New York, in 1977, had been in the works for over two years. Because Carter and the environmentalists had to compromise considerably in 1980, the final measure covered only chemical problems and not oil spills. Nevertheless, a major new effort had been launched.

The environmental measure on which Carter had the strongest impact came a week after his 1980 reelection defeat when Congress passed a measure that more than doubled the size of the country's national parks and almost tripled the area of land designated as wilderness. In the wake of defeats by various energy interests over a two-year period, Carter moved in 1980 to make this his primary legislative initiative. He worked with key legislators such as Democratic House member Morris Udall of Arizona and encouraged the mobilization of interest groups by orchestrating a White House kick-off in July to help build support for the proposed legislation. Carter also watched attentively as on Capitol Hill the inevitable compromises were pursued prior to final passage of the bill.

Taxes, Jobs, and the Minimum Wage

Carter and Congress engaged in repeated conflicts over how to address the problems of a stagnant economy. He had started off badly in 1977. In the wake of his criticism of Ford and 8 percent unemployment, he had

proposed a \$50 per person tax rebate. He then infuriated supporters a mere two months later when he concluded that signs of an economic upswing made the rebate unnecessary. In the halls of Congress, members and staff bantered about the line that the president had invented a new "Carter bomb" that killed its friends and left its enemies standing. Some tax reform nevertheless did occur.

In 1978 the administration produced another tax reform proposal calling for simplification, greater equity in taxation, and an effort to promote greater incentives for investment. The proposal stalled, however, and for a time was judged to be dead in the House Ways and Means Committee. Earlier, in June 1977, California voters had approved a massive tax reduction initiative (Proposition 13) which served as a catalyst for further action in Congress. But the Carter administration did not join in support until a compromise bill was about to reach the House floor. The measure that finally emerged was significantly different than the original administration proposal. Its major provisions called for reducing the capital gains tax from 30 percent to 28 percent, expanding opportunities for uses of Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs), and increasing the amount of assistance provided by the earned income tax credit. Ultimately, the tax measures that passed in 1977 and 1978 bore almost no resemblance to the legislation proposed by Jimmy Carter.⁴²

The 1977 increase in the minimum wage was achieved through the more typical bargaining between the White House and the other players. The Carter administration bargained with AFL-CIO president George Meany and Democratic members of Congress over the size of the increase. Meany was angered by the administration's initial proposal of a \$.20 increase to \$2.50 an hour along with future indexing for inflation. They finally agreed on \$2.65 an hour, plus indexing. The ultimate legislative compromise produced a bill with no indexing, but a gradual increase to \$3.35 an hour.

Carter's proposal to broaden the government's job creation efforts revealed the sharp tensions between Carter and many Democratic liberals. In 1977 the president successfully promoted an expanded jobs program with a multiyear increase of \$5.5 billion in funding for the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA).⁴³ Liberals sought a broader program named after its sponsors, Hubert Humphrey, D-Minn., and Augustus Hawkins, D-Calif. Their bill included broad language calling for a national policy of full employment, increased real income, economic growth, greater productivity, stable prices, and a balanced budget. Carter

was at best lukewarm—and many of his aides were opposed—so he gave only reluctant support, bowing to heavy pressure from the Black Caucus and organized labor. Final passage of a bill stripped of its automatic trigger mechanism for new jobs proved to be largely symbolic and did not reduce tensions over economic policy issues.⁴⁴

Economic Deregulation

The period 1977–1980 saw the Carter administration join some liberal and conservative advocates in Congress in promoting deregulation as an anti-inflation strategy. The passage of a bill in 1978 deregulating the airline industry was the first of four important measures. The Carter administration and in particular inflation fighter Alfred Kahn (appointed by Carter in 1979 as head of the Council on Wage and Price Stability) were important players in passage of that legislation, as well as some Senate liberals such as Edward Kennedy, D-Mass. Passage of the bill also was eased by the major divisions within the airline industry itself.⁴⁵ With that victory, the government took the relatively rare step of eliminating the Civil Aeronautics Board and its role in regulating the price of airline tickets.

Carter and his administration played an even bigger role in the deregulation of the trucking industry. The initial impetus for reducing the role of the Interstate Commerce Commission came from commission members themselves. Carter then joined that effort and surprised members of Congress by making trucking deregulation a high-priority issue (he even mentioned it in his 1980 State of the Union message). In pushing for a strong measure, he called and met with key legislators. He may have compromised a bit too early, but there was widespread agreement that a far stronger measure emerged because of his strong leadership role. A top staff member, perhaps forgetting the time constraints Carter faced, praised that effort and he suggested that if Carter had made a comparable effort on other legislation he would still be president.⁴⁶

Deregulation of the savings and loan industry also began during the Carter years. Legislators and others, responding to the adverse impact of inflation on this industry together with the technological changes occurring in the nation's financial institutions, had been calling for action to modify regulations.⁴⁷ Congress acted in 1978 by lifting the ceilings on the interest rates savings and loan institutions could offer. The industry continued to have difficulties, however, and so Congress took more decisive

steps in 1980 by passing the Garn–St. Germain Depository Institutions Act. What turned out later to be the most fateful step came as Rep. Ferdinand St. Germain, D-R.I., a longtime proponent of the savings and loan industry, successfully pushed for granting its favorite wish—an increase in guaranteed deposits from \$40,000 to \$100,000. That increase was a big factor in the 1989 federal bailout of the ailing savings and loan associations nationwide.

Health, Social Security, and Welfare

Carter had one success and two losses in his efforts to change health, Social Security, and welfare policies. Social Security provided Carter's success in 1977 as Congress moved to expand the Social Security tax amid projections that a tax increase was needed to maintain the solvency of the Social Security trust fund.⁴⁸ This problem arose largely because far higher-than-expected inflation rates had sharply increased benefit levels with the application of the 1972 cost of living adjustment. Carter responded initially to the projected shortfall with a proposal calling for an increase in employer taxes but not taxes on employees. Congress then modified his proposal by increasing the taxes on both employees and employers. Carter thus contributed to this enactment, but the impetus had come from the projections of the Social Security Administration, and Congress significantly modified his initial proposals.

Carter also tackled welfare reform in his first year, in part because of his experiences in dealing with federal–state relations on welfare policy while serving as governor of Georgia. As a first step, he asked Joseph Califano to head a task force charged with developing a comprehensive reform proposal. Apparently, though, the planning process suffered from Carter's lack of a clear direction and difficulties in meeting his desire for a comprehensive policy that included both welfare reform and an overhaul of manpower programs.⁴⁹

Despite indications of public approval of the plan that emerged from the task force, Carter was handicapped by two factors in his dealings with Congress. He had reluctantly agreed to an increase of \$2.8 billion in his proposal, but the recently created Congressional Budget Office projected that the actual cost would be \$14 billion. These cost concerns increased resistance to the plan. Sen. Russell Long, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and Al Ullman, chairman of the House Ways and Means

Committee, already had a plan they regarded as far too ambitious. Thus neither of their committees reported out a bill in 1977, and the administration's later attempts to push smaller bills were unsuccessful.

Carter found health policy issues no easier to tackle.⁵⁰ Health care costs were rising rapidly. In fact, once Nixon's cost controls were removed in 1974, hospital costs and health costs generally began to increase at unprecedented, double-digit levels. For labor unions, consumers, and legislative allies such as Sen. Edward Kennedy, the lack of health insurance for the uninsured and the inefficiencies in the present system cried out for a system of national health insurance. During the campaign, then, Carter reluctantly endorsed national health insurance in a speech that had been directly negotiated between Stuart Eizenstat and representatives of the United Auto Workers.

In response to pleas from Senator Kennedy and nudges from HEW Secretary Califano, Carter chose in 1978 to move toward a system of national health insurance while focusing on policies aimed at containing hospital cost increases. Carter submitted a complex cost control proposal to Congress and immediately faced opposition not only from hospitals but also from other groups that feared the precedent of expanded federal regulation. In this instance, Carter fought hard in Congress for his proposal, including direct appeals to key committee members, but he lost by a single vote on a key committee vote and the proposed legislation did not move forward. Carter persisted in 1979 with a less-ambitious proposal that sought to address criticisms made of his previous one. Eventually, however, both Carter and members of Congress began to lose interest in the issue, and the ultimate result was passage of a measure calling only for voluntary efforts at hospital cost containment.

The notion of health insurance for the uninsured produced a stalemate as well. Liberals, led by Senator Kennedy, vehemently criticized Carter's unwillingness to introduce and promote a major federal commitment. After a tense meeting between Kennedy and Carter in mid-1978, the falling-out was complete. Kennedy then proceeded with an unsuccessful initiative of his own and moved toward his decision to challenge Carter for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1980. Subsequent limited efforts by Carter also did not succeed. Health policy specialist Paul Starr attributed the stalemate to the combination of a large deficit, concerns about inflation, and a public that was growing skeptical of new government initiatives. Thus Carter had no realistic opportunity to succeed with a broad system of national health insurance.⁵¹

Carter and Congress

Carter clearly had difficulty in his relationships with Congress. His effort to undertake a fast start in 1977 was handicapped by his overly large agenda, and he had no clear wins in his efforts to "go public" on major pending legislation. He also probably underachieved in his ability to obtain smaller measures in some controversies and in the extent to which he was able to successfully push his perspectives in legislation that often was developed with little influence from the White House. Yet despite his reputation for disliking legislative affairs, he tenaciously and successfully pursued some measures such as civil service reform and his scaled-back energy package in 1978.

An Assessment

Despite his frequent policy failures, President Jimmy Carter did help to create some domestic policy legacies—notably, energy and environmental policies as well as steps toward deregulation. With help from world market forces, the highly controversial natural gas deregulation had a "soft landing" in the early 1980s without the disruptive higher prices some had feared. The country also made some progress on conservation issues. Tough measures such as a major gasoline tax to reduce consumption had not passed, but steps taken by industry led to considerably more efficient energy use. Although the synfuels program was ultimately abandoned as energy prices dropped in the 1980s, some efforts to develop alternative sources of energy continued. On the environmental front, the government took steps to protect strip mining areas and native lands in Alaska.

Economic deregulation, which the Carter administration had initiated in several areas of the economy, actually picked up speed in the Reagan administration and, along the way, quashed regulatory efforts begun during the Roosevelt administration.⁵² The two most prominent acts of deregulation produced different legacies. Airline deregulation, criticized by some for its effects on safety and the possibility it might lead to a cartel, was hailed for its impacts on ticket prices. Conversely, the move to reduce regulations on the nation's savings and loan associations—while also increasing federal insurance coverage of deposits—proved to be a disaster. Final costs to the government by the mid-1990s had reached the stunning figure of \$500 billion.

How well then did Carter use his opportunities? Presidential scholar Erwin Hargrove found him to be "a good president who made the most of his opportunities, which however were not great."⁵³ Granted, the areas in which he failed—such as health and welfare reform—were extremely difficult to address during a time of intense budgetary pressures. Other observers, however, have argued that a president with greater legislative skills would have been able to make at least some progress in these areas. Moreover, Carter could have achieved more goals if he had assigned priorities to his efforts and sought more effectively to build supportive coalitions among key interests and members of Congress.

But Carter's greatest failing was his ineffective public leadership. His first year was especially damaging, as he projected the image of a struggling and not very effective president that was difficult to change. For a "trustee" president seeking to mobilize public support with direct appeals, he also displayed remarkably little interest in improving his modest rhetorical skills. As he followed public opinion away from traditional Democratic Party positions during his final two years in office, he was again quite ineffective in developing support for centrist positions. Ironically, the derisive epithet "Jimmy Hoover" used by some liberal Democrats was, in one sense, apt. Jimmy Carter could be considered an underachiever.

Notes

1. For a discussion of Carter's southern roots, see Betty Glad, *Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House* (New York: Doubleday, 1980).
2. For a discussion of Carter's experiences as governor, see Gary Fink, *Prelude to the Presidency: The Political Character and Leadership Style of Jimmy Carter* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980).
3. In 1970, for example, Carter vowed that he would openly seek the support of those opposing integration rather than give up that segment of the electorate to his opponent despite the fact that he was not espousing his personal views.
4. James Fallows, "The Passionless President," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1979, 33–48.
5. Peri E. Arnold, *Making the Managerial Presidency: Comprehensive Reorganization Planning, 1905–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 303.
6. Bert Lance, *The Truth of the Matter: My Life In and Out of Politics* (New York: Summit Books, 1991).
7. Anthony S. Campagne, *Economic Policy in the Carter Administration* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), xi.

8. Dilys M. Hill and Phil Williams, "Introduction" to *The Carter Years: The President and Policymaking*, ed. M. Glenn Abernathy, Dilys M. Hill, and Phil Williams (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

9. Charles O. Jones, *The Trusteeship Presidency: Jimmy Carter and the United States Congress* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 67.

10. On this issue it can be argued that some measures of liberalism and conservatism in the electorate did not show a major shift either as of 1976 or as of Reagan's win in 1980. Indications of a "sea change" could be found in various indicators, however. In California the property tax protest culminated in the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978. A perhaps more telling indication of the change: Michael Pertschuk, chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, was astonished to find in March 1978 that his proposed new regulation of advertising that targeted children was being strongly criticized by a most surprising source—the *Washington Post*. See Michael Pertschuk, *Revolt against Regulation: The Rise and Pause of the Consumer Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 69.

11. Carter's problems nicely fit Skowronek's analysis of the problems a "president of disjunction" faces when his party no longer limits policy ideas that can be used to address changing circumstances. See Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Presidential Leadership from John Adams to George Bush* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), chap. 7.

12. Campagne, *Economic Policy in the Carter Administration*, xi.

13. Eric M. Uslaner, *Shale Barrel Politics: Energy and Legislative Leadership* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

14. Bert Lance, Carter's original head of the Office of Management and Budget, was a Georgian and a potentially valuable adviser who emphasized political feasibility in many of his assessments. His resignation on September 21, 1977, was a serious loss. The charges leading to resignation stemmed from his practices as head of a small-town Georgia bank. In 1980, however, he was acquitted of those charges. See Lance, *Truth of the Matter*, 16, chap. 8.

15. Jeff Fishel, *Presidents and Promises: From Campaign Pledge to Presidential Performance* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1985), 91.

16. This emphasis is drawn from Barbara Kellerman, *The Political Presidency: Practice of Leadership* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), chap. 10.

17. The growth in Eizenstat's role is emphasized in Walter Williams, *Mismanaging America: The Rise of the Anti-Analytic Presidency* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 57–60.

18. Stephen Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1988), 147.

19. On staff problems, see *ibid.*, chap. 9; and Colin Campbell, *Managing the Presidency: Carter, Reagan, and the Search for Executive Harmony* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986).

20. See Joseph A. Califano Jr., *Governing America: An Insider's Report from the White House and the Cabinet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

21. Arnold, *Making the Managerial Presidency*, 303.
22. This measure was not included on Mayhew's initial list but nicely reflects Carter's organizational interests. For details, see James E. Katz, *Congress and National Energy Policy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1984), chap. 5.
23. Jones, *Trusteeship Presidency*, 161.
24. P. W. Colby and P. W. Ingraham, "Civil Service Reform: The Views of the Senior Executive Service," *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 1 (1980): 75.
25. Jack Watson interview, April 17, 1981, Miller Center interviews, Jimmy Carter Library, 30.
26. William Grieder, *Secrets of the Temple: How the Federal Reserve Runs the Country* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 46.
27. Kenneth O'Reilly, *Nixon's Piano: Presidents and Racial Politics from Washington to Clinton* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 344.
28. Barbara H. Craig and David M. O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1993), 162.
29. Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley, *Follow the Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).
30. Mary E. Stuckey, *The President as Interpreter-in-Chief* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1991), 102.
31. Mark Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 18, 62–63.
32. Robert S. Littlefield, "Carter and the Media: An Analysis of Selected Strategies Used to Manage the Public Communication of the Administration," in *The Presidency and Domestic Policies of Jimmy Carter*, ed. Herbert D. Rosenbaum and Alexej Ugrinsky (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 429.
33. Matthew R. Kerbel, *Beyond Persuasion: Organizational Efficiency and Presidential Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 60.
34. Thomas E. Cronin, *The State of the Presidency* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 216.
35. On Carter's motivations, see Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 91–93.
36. The story of Carter's failed energy policy initiative has been told in numerous sources. This case study is drawn in particular from Jones, *Trusteeship Presidency*, 135–144; Kerbel, *Beyond Persuasion*; and Kellerman, *Political Presidency*, chap. 10.
37. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 103.
38. M. Elizabeth Sanders, *The Regulation of Natural Gas: Policy and Politics, 1938–1978* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 187.
39. This speech was originally planned as an energy address, but Carter decided to take a broad approach to what he saw as a national crisis of confidence. The speech was received with moderate favor, but the subsequent firing of five cabinet members raised concerns about the stability of the Carter administration. While Carter does not use the phrase, this address is often known as his "malaise" speech.
40. See Uslaner, *Shale Barrel Politics*, chap. 4.
41. For a review of the water projects fight, see Jones, *Trusteeship Presidency*, 143–149.
42. John F. Witte, *The Politics and Development of the Federal Income Tax* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 199.
43. For a review of CETA's enactment and economic impact, see Campagne, *Economic Policy in the Carter Administration*, 57–60. In a related measure, Carter resisted pressures from liberals in Congress, the Black Caucus, and organized labor for a sweeping commitment to new federal jobs as a last resort and then acquiesced as Congress passed the Humphrey-Hawkins Act which had symbolic importance but few specific provisions requiring action.
44. Lance T. LeLoup and Steven A. Shull, *Congress and the President: The Policy Connection* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1993), 188.
45. This interpretation draws from Martha Derthick and Paul J. Quirk, *The Politics of Deregulation* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1985).
46. The interpretation of this case study is based on Dorothy Robyn, *Braking the Special Interests: Trucking Deregulation and the Politics of Policy Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), chap. 7.
47. For details on this role, see James R. Adams, *The Big Fix: Inside the S and L Scandal: How an Unholy Alliance of Politics and Money Destroyed America's Banking System* (New York: Wiley, 1990).
48. See Edward Berkowitz, *Mr. Social Security: The Life of Wilbur J. Cohen* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995); and William W. Lammers, *Public Policy and the Aging* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1983).
49. For a review of differing views of Carter's failure, see Laurence E. Lynn Jr. and David Whitman, *The President as Policymaker: Jimmy Carter and Welfare Reform* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), chaps. 10–11.
50. This account is drawn from William W. Lammers, "Presidential Leadership and Health Policy," in *Health Politics and Policy*, 2d ed., ed. Theodore Litman and Leonard Robbins (Albany: Delmar Publishers, 1991).
51. Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 405–410.
52. This discussion is drawn from Larry N. Gerston, Cynthia Fraleigh, and Robert Schwab, *The Deregulated Society* (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1988), chaps. 4–5.
53. Erwin C. Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 19.

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