Saving fuel

The decade when a sweater, and its message, shocked a nation out of its comfort zone.

In April 1977, Jimmy Carter defied presidential broadcasting protocol and spoke to the nation not wearing a traditional sharp suit but a sweater to prove a point — conserve energy, use less fuel and — presumably — dress warmer.

The 10 principles outlined in the speech (and his sweater) urged Americans to think responsibly, consume wisely and turn down their thermostats to avoid a fuel crisis.

“It was one thing for him to appear in a sweater on TV and to tell Americans to turn down their thermostats, but it was another thing for him to lecture them and tell adult voters they needed to cut back,” said John Bullion, professor of American history at MU.

“Carter has a knack for appearing to lecture, not like a professor, but like a parent.”

“Our is the most wasteful nation on earth. We waste more energy than we import,” said Vicky Smith, a Columbia resident since the 1970s.

“This is the chatter, and the chatter goes here.

The Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, refused petroleum to those nations that supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War.

In a bid to keep control and stabilize the economy and avert a bigger crisis, the U.S. government began setting price controls, limiting the cost of ‘old oil’ — oil already discovered — in a bid to allow new discoveries of oil wells and sell new oil at higher prices.

The speed limit was lowered to 55 mph from 75 to 80 mph depending on the region and an unusual system was set up to help ease pressure at the pumps. Drivers with license plates ending in odd numbers could get gas only on odd numbered days and those ending in even numbers on even days.

“Stations closed on the weekends, and there would be great long lines on Fridays, even though it was expensive and you still couldn’t even get it,” said Val German, a Columbia resident originally from California.

“Gas became such an issue that you couldn’t even take trips without really thinking about whether it was worth it. The major effect was the inconvenience of it and the uncertainty of what was going to happen next.”

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