

FEO Hedges On Nixon's Energy Vow

President Nixon's promise to "break the back of the energy crisis" in 1974 did not mean what it sounded like, says John C. Sawhill, deputy administrator of the Federal Energy Office.

Asked at a news conference whether the nation could, in fact, "break the back of the energy crisis" this year, Sawhill said, "No," and explained that shortages will continue for two or three years because of a shortage of refinery capacity.

Sawhill's boss, energy chief William E. Simon, was later asked the same question, and replied, "Well, we're going to put the policies into place that will start breaking it."

Sawhill said that Mr. Nixon meant only that the United States could "get started in 1974" toward a solution of its energy problems.

Sawhill also said Mr. Nixon did not necessarily mean the United States would supply all of its own energy by 1980 when, in Wednesday's State of the Union message, the President promised energy self-sufficiency by the end of the decade.

Sawhill said the real goal by 1980 is to "demonstrate to the world that we can be self-sufficient," although the United States probably will still have to import some oil.

More immediately, Sawhill said, the nation is beginning to go through some temporary problems as the new petroleum allocation regulations go to work, controlling the distribution of crude oil and refined products.