

'73 Pledges: Victories and Some Defeats

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 30—Only a year ago, President Nixon, beginning his second term after an overwhelming re-election victory, sent a series of written messages to Congress to describe his vision of the State of the Union.

Mr. Nixon did not present his views personally to Congress. But his messages added up to a glowing description of social and economic conditions after four years of his Presidency and a confident declaration of his plans for the nation.

He told members of Congress he would ask for legislation to fulfill those plans, but the tone of his messages indicated a determination to use his electoral mandate to impose his own priorities.

Now, a year later, after the Watergate trauma, the consequent disruption of Government and other setbacks, a rereading of those State of the Union Messages shows that some of the promises and programs have been fulfilled; others are still thrashing through the governmental mechanism; but many have simply been crushed beneath the weight of events.

'The Best Four Years'

In the first of last year's messages, sent on Feb. 2, President Nixon predicted that 1973 and the succeeding years of his second term, would be "the best four years in American history."

By November, Mr. Nixon was telling Congressmen visiting the White House that the Watergate scandal had created, for himself at least, "seven months of pure hell."

In some cases, the promises of Mr. Nixon's 1973 State of the Union Message were fulfilled. For example, he did hold the line against an increase in income taxes, after successfully cutting back on Federal spending in a number of areas, particularly social programs.

He also got, at least in principle, an agreement from Congress to set limits on its spending. His warning against "loose fiscal policies" was heeded. And his determination to keep farm income high was achieved in 1973.

Mr. Nixon's plans for improving the nation's international economic position also appeared to be working out well. The dollar has strengthened and the trade balance turned around and showed a surplus at the end of 1973. Moreover, Congress will probably pass legislation giving him

most of the authority he sought to exercise a flexible trade policy.

As he promised, Mr. Nixon seems to have made progress in consolidating the nation's anti-drug abuse programs and, in fact, in slowing illicit drug traffic.

A number of other programs outlined in last year's State of the Union Message have come to fruition. But even more of the programs have been resisted by Congress, dropped by a beleaguered Administration or frustrated by developments during the year.

President Nixon's statements about ending inflation failed to ring true during a year in which the Consumer Price Index rose by a near-record 8.8 per cent. His pledge of "relief for the American housewife" in the form of reasonable food prices in the latter half of 1973 was shattered by a rise of more than 20 per cent in the price of foods from December, 1972, to December 1973.

As one result of the inability of his Administration to make good on his promise to keep inflation in check, President Nixon's additional "good news" about increasing purchasing power for workers in 1973 has also not materialized. In fact, purchasing power of the average American declined by 3 per cent over the year.

An Energy Policy

In last year's message, Mr. Nixon discussed the "encouraging job picture." While the unemployment rate dipped to 4.5 per cent briefly, it quickly rose again and now, in the face of the energy shortage, is going up sharply.

Mr. Nixon's plans for energy last year also have not come to fruition. He said he had a plan to ensure adequate supplies of energy "at acceptable economic and environmental costs."

He did present an energy plan but it was a plan that failed to solve the problem and now, in the midst of a crisis, the Government is still struggling to develop a comprehensive energy policy.

The energy situation, meanwhile, has raised doubts about

Mr. Nixon's assertion last year that "America is well on the way to winning the war against environmental degradation — well on the way to making our peace with nature."

Environmentalists have expressed strong doubt that approval of the Alaska pipeline, the new permissiveness on offshore oil drilling, and the deferral of strict auto emissions standards is helping win this particular war.

Urban Affairs

Mr. Nixon's message on urban affairs was extremely optimistic, declaring, in fact, that the crisis in the cities had ended. But there has been no action on his plan to provide revenue sharing for community development through the Better Communities Act. Other plans for a department of community development and a responsive government also seem to have gone aglimmering.

In a message to Congress a year ago, the President reiterated the goal of a "decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family." But he stopped all funds for subsidized housing. And by the second half of the year, even the private housing industry had been slowed to a walk by soaring interest rates and materials shortages.

The message on "human resources" also turned out to be an empty document in many respects, according to leaders of minority and poverty groups. Education revenue sharing has not come to pass yet. The welfare reform spoken of so frequently by the President has not been undertaken. The most publicized effort in the field of economic opportunity was the abortive effort to dismantle the Office of Economic Opportunity.

In view of the constitutional clash between the executive and legislative branches created by the Watergate crisis, perhaps the greatest irony of President Nixon's message on the State of the Union in 1973 was his "sincere hope that the executive and legislative branches can work together in this great undertaking in a positive spirit of mutual respect and cooperation."



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Peter W. Rodino Jr., head of House Judiciary Committee, listening to President Nixon last night.