

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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It is both a pleasure and a privilege to be here tonight. Part of my pleasure is the opportunity to be in California. There is something very lovely and very stimulating about the first taste of spring.

Another part of my pleasure is the opportunity to learn more about the exciting things which have been happening in the consumer area in California. I hope that some of the fine consumer legislation and the vigorous consumer activity on the local level will serve as forerunners for similar efforts across the nation.

The last part of my pleasure in being here is that it provides an opportunity for me to learn more about the things that many of you are doing in other parts of the country. I also deem it a privilege to be here with so many of you who have contributed so much to my education.

Gathered here are many of the people who have worked long and hard to further the interests of consumers in this nation. Some have labored long for better legislation, others for improved regulation, and still others for more effective educational programs.

The end result is the present position where consumer issues are recognized as a national concern. The appointment of Mrs. Peterson as Special Assistant to the President for Consumer Affairs is an illustration of this. So is the large and vigorous lobby which opposes consumer legislation.

Father Robert McEwen commented that active opposition is only marshalled when there is evidence of something to oppose. The guidelines for community action programs which were issued by the Office of Economic Opportunity now include consumer education. This is recognition of the potential contribution of this area as a tool in the "War on Poverty," one of our national concerns at the present time.

In a sense this is an historic moment in the consumer movement. For the first time in a period of prosperity the consumer is a national issue. Historically, the con-

sumer has only been a concern when the breadlines were long, and people needed to stretch dollars to survive.

Today, consumer activity is largely focused on helping people choose wisely in an era of many choices. Much of the proposed consumer legislation is geared to providing the information which will enable people to make intelligent choices. Consumer education is primarily focused on helping people use their resources to get a better life, the kind of life which we now believe all members of an affluent society are entitled to have.

The challenge before us now is what can we do, individually and collectively, to enable people to use their personal and community resources more effectively in the future. Traditionally, people who have identified themselves with the consumer movement have concerned themselves with trying to help people maximize what they have. I interpret this broadly. Better utility rates, the development of shopping skills, or the selecting of ways to use one's leisure are all aspects of maximizing utilization of resources.

However, we have not concerned ourselves with helping people get more resources to work with. The usual areas of consumer activity, such as credit, packaging, managing money, or even the newer ones such as choosing services, are all concerned with using resources already available to people.

I would hope that in the future we, as consumers, will concern ourselves more actively with the problem of helping people get more resources, as well as continue our interest in helping people maximize what they have. I think problems such as the licensing of nursery schools, what types of sub-professional occupations offer the greatest economic return, what is the economic value of a general high school education versus a trade school program, are areas of concern to consumers.

They are areas of concern which may affect the future of the persons involved in a more important way than if

they waste money on the poor choice of a specific type of product.

Never before in the history of the United States has the eradication of poverty been a national purpose. The acceptance of this goal as a national concern is a clear indication of the giant steps that have been taken beyond the point where welfare assistance is provided only to fend off the specter of starvation.

Those who are concerned with consumer welfare ought to be seriously concerned with helping people get a basis for intelligent choice in the building of their lives, as well as in the use of the money they earn. Both are important to human welfare.

The Council on Consumer Information is a child in some senses. It has just reached its teens. It has had all the growing problems of a young group. Yet, within the

period of its existence it has gathered in this organization many of the vigorous and vocal people in the United States who are concerned with consumer interests. This is a great tribute to the energy and vision of the people who started and nourished this organization.

Today it stands at a crossroad. I believe that if the consumer movement is to stand up and be counted in the coming years it will be because the Council concerned itself with both helping people maximize their resources as well as helping to provide them with a sound basis to choose life paths that will give them more resources with which to work.

It is sincerely hoped that in the years to come the Council on Consumer Information will take a leadership role in both these directions.