

WELCOMING REMARKS

by
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Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare the distinguished members of the Council on Consumer Information. I welcome the opportunity to thank you on behalf of all the American people for your contributions in a hitherto neglected field.

American consumers enjoy a standard of living that is unsurpassed throughout the world. They participate in an economic system that is unique in productivity and quality of consumer goods. They likewise are the beneficiaries of a vast effort to protect the consumer's health and pocketbook. They are protected by the law of the land and by its enforcement machinery. And they are protected by less tangible forces--for example, by generally high ethical standards in business and professional conduct. No other country in the world pays as much attention to consumer protection in all its many aspects.

And yet, paradoxically, American consumers tend to be complacent and to neglect their own interests, while other elements in our society are organized and vocal. And this is the significance of the Council on Consumer Information as an organization which seeks, through communication, to foster the interests of consumers.

A true free-enterprise economy cannot exist unless the consumer is able to perform his basic function as a discriminating purchaser. Industry, Government, and the consumer--each have a distinctive role in the great drama of the marketplace. Yet all these roles are directed to a single purpose--to supply our needs and wants.

The progress of technology has made consumer protection increasingly complex. The role of Government, with which I am concerned, is both aided and made more difficult by scientific advances. A Government agency that is particularly affected by the impact of technology is the Food and Drug Administration in this Department. Here is an organization that must perform a unique task. It must combine law, science, and administrative action to assure maximum protection of the consumer and do this in a manner which promotes the progress of legitimate industry, whose integrity and honest products contribute to our civilization.

The task is complex--yet there are great and simple fundamentals which must continue to guide our action. Last year, in his message to the Congress on consumer protection, President Kennedy stated four fundamental rights of the consumer:

1. The right to safety
2. The right to be informed
3. The right to choose
4. The right to be heard

We can all take pride in the accomplishments made during this past year toward these basic objectives. A real step forward was the appointment of the Consumers Advisory Council, attached to the President's Council of Economic Advisers. In his message, the President recommended that each major agency of the Federal Government appoint a special representative on consumer interests. Ours was the first of the 10 Cabinet departments to follow this suggestion, with the appointment of a Special Assistant to the Secretary last July. Since then, 21 other Federal agencies have appointed special consumer protection officers.

Likewise, this past year we have seen the enactment of the Kefauver-Harris amendments which have greatly strengthened consumer protection in the area of drugs. You will hear more about this new law from Commissioner Larrick.

But there is more to be done, in this and other areas. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare shares with your Council a common goal--protection of the health and the pocketbook of the people of America.

We in the Department look forward to cooperating in every possible way with you, and I wish you well as you plan your important work now and for the changing years ahead.