be uniquely qualified to advance the cause of consumers and the efficiency of the marketplace. It now provides consumers with useful information on a broad range of subjects including infant care, nutrition, credit guides, family food budgeting, health frauds, house planning aids, and insect control, to name but a few. But very little information is available from Federal sources which relates directly to the consumer's essential function and responsibility of purchasing safe products and getting the most for their money. We intend, therefore, to examine the nature and extent of product information now in the possession of the Federal Government, its potential usefulness to consumers, and the feasibility of having the Federal Government expand its consumer information activities to include safety, performance, and price information on consumer-type products.

We do not advocate a program whereby any Federal agency would undertake to tell the American consumer that one brand product is superior to another or what he should or should not buy. Nor are we unmindful of the fact that in purchasing consumer-type products, the Federal Government's requirements are sometimes different from those of the average consumer. We do believe, however, that the Government's needs and those of private consumers are sufficiently parallel and the consumer's role is so important to the success of our free enterprise economy, that a governmental program calling for the systematic screening and release of product information is more than justified.

Our first witness this morning is Mr. Morris Kaplan, technical director of Consumers Union.

Mr. WYDLER. Mr. Chairman, I have a short statement which I would like to put in for the record. I don't have to read it at this time. I would just like to comment on some of the possible offshoots of these hearings and I want to say I fully support them because it would be an important service to the people of the country if we could determine to what extent information presently available within the Government could be made available to the general public and to aid them in the efficient management of their income.

Of course, there are certain—and I mention these before the hearing starts because I would like some of the witnesses to think about it and possibly direct some of their testimony to it—certain serious problems arising from this. In particular, there might be some legal implications, for example, in the Government making statements available to the general public as to the safety of a particular item because if that information was made public and the item proved unsafe or someone was injured in using it, we might find we established a new form of liability for the Government.

This is something to think about. Somebody would then claim he had been misled by the Government into believing this item was safe for a particular use. These are the types of things we will have to think about when we talk about making available information that the Government has, or having the Government express an opinion.

Inevitably, it seems to me, when the Government makes information available, by the very size and stature of the Government, people are impressed by that information. For example, if there were 10 competing products and the Government issued a report about one of them and stated that it thought it was a good product it would seem to me it would give that product a tremendous market advantage and that