

For these many reasons, then, it seems essential that we do all we can to assist the citizen in becoming an intelligent and knowledgeable consumer.

Many private institutions, organizations, and individuals are endeavoring to properly inform consumers. But, lack of resources means that their efforts can only have limited effect. Government has also undertaken some programs to protect and inform the consumer, but so far results have been minimal. The Federal Government, in particular, with its multitude of programs affecting the consumer has done less than is necessary to help the consumer. This is especially so in the case of the poor.

I do not mean or imply that the Federal Government should engage in the wholesale regulation of business. To do so would only destroy the free enterprise system that has made the Nation strong. Nor do I intend that the Federal Government should treat consumers as adolescents who must be sheltered and guarded. This can only lead to welfare statism and a loss of freedom and dignity. What I do believe is that we in the Government can do more to assist the consumer in becoming a better informed and more intelligent purchaser. And, we can do this without conferring any greater authority upon the Government or taking away any independence of action from producers.

Today, the Federal agencies engage in many activities which have been conferred upon them by Congress. Some of these activities are undertaken as a part of running the Government, such as purchasing goods and services. Others are undertaken to assist or protect citizens such as establishing rates or preventing the sale of flammable products.

The problem is, however, that so many activities are engaged in, by so many different agencies, each surrounded by walls of expertise and procedure, that the consuming public receives little usable information which may be profitable for their own purchasing needs.

I, therefore, welcome these hearings in order that we might be able to determine what areas and types of information are presently being obtained by agencies of the Government which, if released in layman's language, might assist the citizen in becoming a better consumer. If the consumer can become better informed, he will be in a better position to make a wiser and freer choice in his purchases. This, to me, is the essence of our market economy.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. Mr. Kaplan.

STATEMENT OF MORRIS KAPLAN, TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, CONSUMERS UNION

Mr. KAPLAN. My name is Morris Kaplan. I am technical director of Consumers Union of the United States, a nonprofit membership organization, incorporated under the laws of the State of New York in 1936. We publish the monthly magazine, Consumer Reports, and have a circulation approaching one and a quarter million copies per month. Our purposes are "to provide consumers with information and counsel on consumer goods and services * * * to give information and assistance on all matters relating to the expenditure of the family income * * * and to initiate and to cooperate with individual and group efforts seeking to create and maintain decent living standards."

I am grateful to the committee for the opportunity you have offered me to present my views on the desirability of making available to the American consumer product information in the possession of the Federal Government. So that you may place these views in the proper perspective, it may help you to know that I have been technical director at Consumers Union since 1946; that before that I spent 16 years in the Federal civil service doing research for the Navy Department and administering and working in laboratories of the Bureau of Customs, Alcohol Tax Unit and happily in the "dear, dead days beyond recall," the Bureau of Prohibition. One consequence of these associations was contact with the work of a number of Government organizations, both directly and through their publications.