

Special Message on Protecting the Consumer Interest

**Statement read by President John F Kennedy
Thursday, 15 March 1962**

I have sent to the Congress today a Special Message on protecting the consumers Interests. All of us are consumers. All of us have the right to be protected against fraudulent or misleading advertisement and labels – the right to be protected against unsafe or worthless drugs and other products – the right to choose from a variety of products at competitive prices.

But modern living is so complex that the present laws on the statute book are inadequate to secure these rights. Thousands of common household items contain potentially harmful substances. Every year new chemicals are being added to our food or sprayed on crops. Ninety percent of the prescriptions written today are for drugs which were unknown twenty years ago. Unless the housewife is an expert dietician, mathematician, chemist and mechanic, she cannot properly and economically run her house and shop for her family.

This administration has already taken steps to increase Federal inspection of food, drugs, meat and poultry, to increase safety on the highways and in the airways, to cut back deceptive trade practices, false advertising, monopolies, and high utility bills, to improve the consumers' opportunity to purchase a less expensive home and enjoy great recreational opportunities.

But much more needs to be done, and I have asked the Congress first of all for strengthened regulatory authority over food, drugs and cosmetics. Since 1913 an Act of Congress has protected hogs, sheep and cattle against the marketing of worthless drugs. It is time we can men, women and children the same protection.

New drugs are being placed on the market every day, without any requirement of advance proof that they will be effective in treating the conditions for which they are recommended. Over twenty percent of the new drugs available since 1956 were found to be incapable of bearing out one or more of their sponsors' claims on which their effect would be.

This means that people not only are wasting their money but are also suffering needlessly. Similarly, two billion dollars of cosmetics are sold every year without any requirement that they be tested for safety – and as a result, thousands of women have suffered burns and other injuries to the eyes, skin and hair.

A fifth of all the meat we eat is not inspected by the Department of Agriculture, and extensive underground traffic exists in habit-forming barbiturates and stimulants. Drugs which could also be sold by a simple common name are too often sold by complex scientific names which confuse the purchaser – and raise the price.

All of these problems are covered by my recommendations to the Congress today. Other recommendations call for a law to require consumers to know how much they are being charged in interest and at what rate, when they purchase goods on credit, or on the instalment plan.

A law to require new televisions sets to be capable of receiving seventy ultra high frequency channels as well as the twelve VHF channels.

And laws to tighten up our safeguards against monopoly and mergers, which injure the consumers' interests.

None of these recommendations is very costly. But I believe that they can be immensely important to the well-being of every American family.