

The original documents are located in Box 1, folder “1/14/76 - White House Consumer Conference, Kansas City” of the Carla A. Hills Speeches at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Copyright Notice

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Gerald Ford donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

WHITE HOUSE CONSUMER CONFERENCE
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
JANUARY 14, 1976

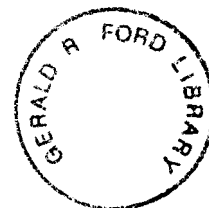
GOOD MORNING!

AND, IF YOU'LL JUST MULTIPLY THAT GREETING BY THE NUMBER OF INVITATIONS YOU RECEIVED -- YOU'LL KNOW HOW PLEASED WE ARE TO SEE YOU HERE TODAY.

IF THE MAYOR OF OMAHA GOT 19 INVITATIONS -- AS I HAVE BEEN TOLD -- IT JUST PROVES THAT AT LEAST NINETEEN FEDERAL ENTITIES IN WASHINGTON HAVE A HEALTHY REGARD FOR OUR CITY FATHERS.

SO, I TRUST YOU'LL FORGIVE THEIR BURST OF EXCESSIVE FEDERALISM.

THE AGENDA FOR OUR CONFERENCE TODAY -- PARTICULARLY IN THE PRESENTATION OF OUR VARIOUS FEDERAL AGENCY CONSUMER PLANS -- PRESENTS YOU WITH TWO REALISTIC POINTS OF REFERENCE:



ONE: THE THRUST OF GOVERNMENTAL REGULATORY PROGRAMS
AS THEY RELATE TO CONSUMER NEEDS; AND

TWO: THE NEED TO SPUR CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT IN THE
REGULATORY DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR LIVES.

AND, THESE TWO POINTS GET US DOWN TO THE CRUX OF THE
CONSUMER PERPLEX -- AND, THAT IS --

.....HOW MUCH GOVERNMENT DOES THE CONSUMER NEED?

.....HOW MUCH GOVERNMENT DOES THE CONSUMER REALLY WANT?

.....AND, INDEED, HOW MUCH GOVERNMENT CAN THE CONSUMER STAND?

FOR THOSE OF US CHARGED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FINDING
A WORKABLE BALANCE IN ANSWERING THOSE QUESTIONS -- WHETHER IN
THE PRIVATE SECTOR OR PUBLIC OFFICE -- THERE ARE NO SIMPLE
SHORT CUTS.



WE WANT, ON THE ONE HAND, TO PROVIDE PROTECTION TO THE CONSUMER WHILE KNOWING FULL WELL THAT WHEN THE GOVERNMENT GETS INTO THE ACT THE CONSUMER PAYS A PRICE -- AND THAT ONCE THE GOVERNMENT GETS IN, IT HARDLY EVER GETS OUT, SO THE CONSUMER KEEPS ON PAYING.

ONE OF THE GREAT BOONS TO THE CONSUMER IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN THE EMERGENCE OF "TRUTH" IN MERCHANDISING -- IN ADVERTISING CLAIMS, ON CIGARETTE PACKAGES, ON FOOD CONTAINERS, ON LOAN CONTRACTS AND NEW CAR WINDSHIELDS.

IN FAIRNESS, WE SHOULD WELCOME SIMILAR DISCLOSURES OF THE HIDDEN COST OF GOVERNMENT IN EVERYTHING THE CUSTOMER BUYS.

IN HOUSING, FOR EXAMPLE, WE KNOW THAT OVER THE PAST DECADE THE PRICE OF THE AVERAGE HOME HAS GONE UP A FULL 14 PERCENT HIGHER THAN THE "COST OF LIVING" AS MEASURED BY THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX. THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT INCREASINGLY COMPLEX FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL REGULATIONS, ORDINANCES, CODES, AND RESTRICTIONS HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY ADDED TO THE BUILDERS' COST OF DOING BUSINESS.

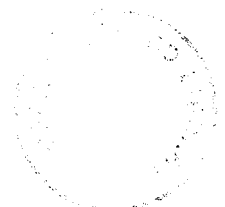


I AM NOT HERE TO ARGUE THE NEED FOR SUCH REQUIREMENTS AS BUILDING CODES, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS, NO-GROWTH POLICIES, SEWER MORATORIA, OR RESTRICTIVE ZONING -- FAR FROM IT. ALL OF US HAVE VIEWED WITH SOME HORROR EXAMPLES OF SHODDY HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS -- TURNED SLUMS; AND, OF LAND USE ABUSE THAT BORDERS ON THE CRIMINAL.

WE DO KNOW THAT SOME RESTRICTIVES IN THESE MATTERS ARE NECESSARY -- BUT, WE ALSO KNOW THERE'S ALWAYS A COST INVOLVED, ULTIMATELY FOR THE CONSUMER.

A BALANCE MUST BE STRUCK. I DO QUESTION THE LOGIC OF THOSE RESTRICTIONS THAT ARE OF NO PROVEN BENEFIT -- EITHER TO THE INDIVIDUAL CONSUMER OR THE COMMUNITY -- BUT ONLY SERVE TO THROW MORE RED TAPE IN THE PATH OF THIS NATION'S SORELY NEEDED HOUSING RECOVERY.

FOR, HOUSING RECOVERY -- ITSELF -- IS ONE OF OUR NATION'S GREATEST CONSUMER NEEDS RIGHT NOW, AND IN THE YEARS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD.




THUS, MY POINT TODAY IS MORE CONCERNED WITH THE FUTURE TIGHT-ROPE WE MUST WALK TO MAKE SURE THAT THE CONSUMER IS BEING PROTECTED FROM THE ABUSES OF THE MARKET PLACE WITHOUT FALLING PREY TO THE EXCESSES OF THE GREAT PROTECTOR.

AND, IT IS IN THIS CONTEXT THAT I PERCEIVE HUD'S ROLE IN CONSUMER AFFAIRS -- AN AREA WHICH I IDENTIFIED AS ONE OF MY HIGHEST PERSONAL PRIORITIES LAST YEAR IN MY FIRST PUBLIC ADDRESS AS SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT.

FOR INDEED THE CONSUMERS OF HOUSING ARE HUD'S PRIME CONSTITUENCY AND WE HAVE A CLEAR MANDATE TO SEE THAT THEIR LEGITIMATE EXPECTATIONS ARE NOT BILKED -- BY DESIGN, DECEIT, NEGLIGENCE OR IGNORANCE. AND, WHERE THE HOUSING THEY BUY OR RENT IS INSURED OR ASSISTED WITH FEDERAL FUNDS, WE HAVE AN ADDITIONAL MANDATE TO MAKE CERTAIN THE TAXPAYERS' INVESTMENT IS ZEALOUSLY GUARDED.

HUD'S CONSUMER REPRESENTATION PLAN, WHICH WILL BE PRESENTED HERE THIS MORNING, IS DESIGNED TO PROTECT THE CONSUMER THROUGH TOUGH REGULATORY PROGRAMS WHICH COME DOWN TO A PLAIN AND SIMPLE CONTROL FORMULA -- AND THAT IS -- IF THE BUILDER OR SELLER DOESN'T COMPLY WITH HUD REQUIREMENTS, HE DOESN'T PARTICIPATE IN HUD PROGRAMS, PERIOD.



BUT, IT IS ALSO DESIGNED TO FORESTALL CONSUMER ABUSES BEFORE THEY HAPPEN.

GOVERNMENT CAN ESTABLISH SOME MINIMUM LEVELS OF QUALITY AS IN HUD'S MINIMUM PROPERTY STANDARDS, IT CAN PROVIDE REMEDIES FOR THE MOST COMMON ABUSES AS IN INTERSTATE LAND SALES.

BUT OFTEN, THE MOST EFFECTIVE FEDERAL ROLE IS AS AN "ENABLING AGENT" -- WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT; WITH CONSUMERS AND THE MAKERS OF CONSUMER PRODUCTS -- PROVIDING EXPERTISE AND, WHERE NEEDED, SEED MONEY, TO ACHIEVE OUR COMMON CONSUMER GOALS.

THE ONLY WAY WE CAN MAKE SURE THAT OUR DESIGNS FOR CONSUMER PROTECTION ARE FEASIBLE, REASONABLE, PRACTICAL AND ENFORCEABLE -- IS TO MAKE SURE THAT WHAT WE WANT TO DO FOR THE CONSUMER IS WHAT CONSUMERS SAY THE CONSUMER WANTS AND NEEDS.

IT IS THE JOB OF GOVERNMENT, INDUSTRY AND THE PEOPLE -- TOGETHER -- TO MAKE SURE THE AMERICAN CONSUMER HAS ALL THE INFORMATION NEEDED TO MAKE THOSE DECISIONS; AND IS GIVEN THE PLATFORM NEEDED TO MAKE THOSE DECISIONS KNOWN.



THAT IS THE SPIRIT IN WHICH PRESIDENT FORD ESTABLISHED
TODAY'S WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON CONSUMER AFFAIRS.

IT IS IN THAT SPIRIT, WE WELCOME AND ANTICIPATE YOUR
LIVELY PARTICIPATION.

I, FOR ONE, AM DELIGHTED TO BE HERE IN KANSAS CITY --
IN THE CONSUMER-ORIENTED "SHOW ME" STATE.

