

Ferdie J. Deering

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# Who Will Watch the Watchdogs?

**C**ONSUMERS are being misled. Uncertain about quality of many items, upset about rising prices, and concerned about supplies, they are being deceived by promises that federal government, can, should and ought to intervene to protect them from free enterprise.

This is not to say that the government should not establish standards of weights and measures, police foods and drugs to ensure wholesomeness and purity, and put a stop to frauds.

Those things are essential, and that is why they are being used by demagogues as part of their schemes to change the form of government in this country. The apparent plan is to set up government controls over as many phases of individual lives, businesses, industries and other institutions as possible, making them increasingly dependent upon and subservient to government.

If that is not the case, then consumer protectionists must be perpetrating some gigantic but not funny joke on the public. Either way, consumers need protection from consumer protectionists.

Congress seems to be close to passing laws called the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) by the House and the Consumer Advocacy Act (CAA) by the Senate. The agency provided in the bills would have broad authority to act in the name of consumers in many kinds of proceedings, including other federal agencies.

Certain congressmen who have studied the bills say that the proposed agency would create an un-

controllable new bureaucracy to harass businesses and other federal agencies. Businessmen agree. They already have had bitter experiences with the government trying to control or manage prices, wages, hiring practices, safety rules, working conditions, advertising, packaging and environment.

Bureaucrats placed in charge of such activities often do not have experience in areas they are dealing with and many do not take time or effort to obtain essential facts. Although many, if not most consumers, are quite able to speak for themselves, especially through existing organizations, Congress didn't think this was enough and in 1972 created another consumer agency called the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

CPSC has listed more than 300 common products it considers to be hazardous, and it is putting restrictions on such things as bicycles, stairs, doors, cleaning agents, and

tables. Its new specifications for bicycles, to become effective January 1, will increase costs of bikes an average of \$3 each.

If created, the proposed Consumer Advocacy Agency could bring the CPSC to court because it didn't do more for bicycles, and then take manufacturers to task as well.

The director of CPSC has said that marbles and baseball bats are probably the most dangerous toys of all, but that they should not be banned. The proposed CAA could make CPSC ban such toys, and probably baseball uniforms, too, if they didn't fit.

Consumers smart enough to earn a living in these days of inflation ought to be smart enough to spend their money satisfactorily without having a government bureaucrat to supervise them. Even if consumers are allowed to retain freedom of choice at stores, they should be aware that so-called consumer protection agencies are forcing costs of production higher and limiting their choices.