

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Senator Ribicoff has devoted much of his time and energy to the protection of the consumer. A consistent supporter of consumer-oriented legislation, he has become particularly associated with consumer protection through his efforts regarding auto safety, truth-in-lending, and truth-in-packaging.

Senator Ribicoff believes the road to consumer safety, accurate information, free choice and an adequate hearing is never ending. In modern society the consumer is constantly exposed to the winds of change. Countless new products -- and new forms of old products vie for his attention and his dollar. The American housewife, the major American consumer, cannot help but feel confused and too often unheard as she seeks the best value for the hard-earned dollar she spends. This government is pledged to come to her aid with new legislation and new administrative actions.

Meat Inspection

In 1967 at Storrs, Senator Ribicoff recommended that the voluntary inspection program, run by the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, be made mandatory, brought in line with meat inspection standards and put under a unified consumer protection agency.

In 1967, Ribicoff voted for the Meat Inspection Act of 1967 which gave the states two years to make their inspection programs "at least equal" to the federal inspection system. If they failed to do so, the Secretary was directed to assume the costs and duties of inspection in plants producing meat for intrastate consumption. In addition, the Secretary was authorized to inspect any intrastate plant which he found was producing meat dangerous to public health, if he first notified state officials and they did not act.

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Poultry Products

Senator Ribicoff voted for passage of the Wholesome Poultry Products Act of 1968. In 1967, more than 1.6 billion pounds of poultry received no federal inspection and state inspection was minimal. Today, only four states have effective inspection systems and 31 have no inspection laws at all. The law passed follows the pattern of the Wholesome Meat Act -- the states are given two years to bring their programs up to the federal level. After that, the federal government will assume the inspection duties.

Truth-In-Packaging

Previous statutes did not require the net weight or contents to be stated on the label in terms readily understood by the consumer. Senator Ribicoff supported the Truth-in-Packaging bill when he came to the Senate in 1963. Senator Ribicoff's approach to consumer protection is summed up in his testimony supporting the bill before the Hart Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly in March, 1963. Senator Ribicoff said: "The catch-them-after-the-fact-and-prove-it-if-you-can concept of enforcement in this field may have been adequate 30 years ago. It is not adequate today." Senator Ribicoff co-sponsored the bill in 1965. Truth-in-Packaging passed the Congress in 1966 (P.L. 89-755). The bill required packaged goods to provide simple, direct, accurate and visible information as to the quantity of their contents. In addition, the Secretary of HEW and the FTC were given discretionary authority to regulate adjectives used on the labels, such as "jumbo size" and promotional gimmicks, such as "cents off" advertising.

Truth-in-Lending

Independent studies show that most consumers don't know how much they are paying in interest. They are surprised to learn they are paying an average of 23 percent interest. Consumers pay \$13 billion in interest a year on a total consumer debt of about \$100 billion. Ribicoff voted for the Truth-in-Lending bill which has been signed into law. The bill requires that the purchaser or borrower be told precisely what the interest charges will be. It does not control the terms or costs of credit.

SECURITIES: Ribicoff also voted for a measure requiring companies which sell securities over-the-counter to disclose publicly the same information about their activities and management as companies listed on the national exchange.

Department of Consumer Protection

On November 9, 1967, Senator Ribicoff called for the establishment of a Department of Consumer Protection. "It is time we directed our attention to achieving coordination, efficiency and the maximum effectiveness in the government's efforts in the field of consumer protection. Today at least 33 government agencies engage in 296 consumer protection activities. Yet nowhere is there any single department or agency to coordinate or administer these activities. The efforts were -- and are -- conducted separately and independently." Senator Ribicoff proposed that a Department of Consumer Protection be established at the cabinet level as a basic regulatory agency, administering

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a consolidated set of basic consumer protection laws. He suggested a merger of the consumer protection programs of the Food and Drug Administration, the Federal Trade Commission, the Department of Agriculture, and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries of the Department of the Interior.

Youth Camp Safety

In 1966, Senator Ribicoff introduced the Youth Camp Safety bill. Senator Ribicoff said: "Each year about six million children attend resident or day camps or participate in travel camps or teen tours throughout the nation and overseas. In a few states, there are excellent and comprehensive regulations covering camp safety. In 19 states, there are no regulations at all -- in the rest, only a few aspects of the situation are covered."

Senator Ribicoff's bill received the support of the American Camping Association, the American Association of Private Camps and several safety groups. The measure would authorize the Secretary of HEW to establish federal minimum standards for youth camps after consultation with an advisory council made up of camp and safety representatives. The bill would also establish a grant program to help states set up the machinery for inspection to insure compliance with the standards. No licensing or other sanctions were included in the bill. Camps meeting the federal standards would be encouraged to display and advertise their compliance so that parents could be assured that their child's camp met minimum safety requirements.

DRUGS AND DRUG SAFETY: Senator Ribicoff voted for a 1965 measure which made it illegal for anyone not in the legal "chain of distribution" to possess amphetamines, barbituates and hallucinagenic drugs, except for his own use or that of members of his household or pets. Senator Ribicoff has supported President Johnson's efforts offering greater governmental control over the distribution and sale of drugs, their labelling and quality.

TRAFFIC SAFETY: As a result of Senator Ribicoff's extensive hearings into the subject of automobile safety and defects in construction which can cause accidents, a measure was passed in 1966 which authorized new car safety standards and required a defect warning to motor vehicle owners and the government, when the manufacturer discovers such a defect.

CIGARETTE LABELING, ADVERTISING: In 1965, Senator Ribicoff supported the bill which required warnings about the hazards of smoking to be printed on every cigarette package.

CHILD SAFETY: Senator Ribicoff supported legislation which (1) brought all hazardous substances, regardless of their labels, under the Federal Hazardous Substances Labeling Act; (2) barred from commerce those household substances that are so hazardous that warning labels are not adequate safeguards; and (3) banned the sale of toys and other children's articles containing hazardous substances, regardless of their packaging.

FIRE SAFETY: In 1967, Senator Ribicoff voted for the Fire Safety Act, upgrading fire fighting training and techniques, and the Flammable Fabrics Act, regulating the manufacture of flammable clothing, blankets, drapes and carpets.

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NATURAL GAS PIPELINE SAFETY: Senator Ribicoff supported the Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act of 1967, which set minimum safety standards for design, installation, operation and maintenance of interstate and intrastate pipelines.

OTHER AREAS: Senator Ribicoff has supported legislation in many other areas of consumer protection, such as scuba diving equipment, hazardous radiation, boat safety, auto insurance, and deceptive sales tactics, the latter recently passed by the Senate with Senator Ribicoff's support.

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