

Feature Address

Presented by Justice Frank King, Chairman of the Fair

Trading Commission

**on the occasion of the Opening of the First Consumer Open day
held by the Fair Trading Commission.**

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce,
Consumer Affairs and Business Development, Canon James
Springer, Heads of service and community groups,
represented here, my fellow Commissioners and other
specially invited guests...

As Chairman of the Commission, I join the Chief Executive
Officer Ms. Goddard in welcoming you to this first open
house hosted by the FTC. I am delighted that so many of you
have responded to our invitation to spend some time with
us this morning. It is a clear indication to all of us at the FTC

that you consider our work to be important and we are greatly encouraged by your presence.

Our aim is to create a business climate in which consumers can engage in economic activity with confidence, knowing that their interests are safeguarded. The creation of this chapter in our nation's history is being effected in various stages and I crave your indulgence as I give you an overview of the events that have brought us to this place and time.

The Fair Trading Commission came into existence the 02 January 2001, to amongst other things "safeguard the interest of consumers".

Ladies and gentlemen, our mandate has been clear from the outset. The FTC has been given its powers to act through the enactment of four pieces of legislation, listed as follows:

1. Fair Trading Commission Act, 2000-31
2. Utility Regulation Act, 2000-30
3. Fair Competition Act, 2002-19
4. Consumer Protection Act, 2002-20

If you were to examine these pieces of legislation, you would come to the conclusion, as we have, that the interests of the Barbadian public and the protection of all consumers is what gives life to the legislation.

In the area of utility regulation, we are expected to “protect the interests of consumers by ensuring that

service providers supply to the public, service that is safe, adequate, efficient and reasonable. In Fair Competition, in endeavoring to eliminate unfair trade practices, we promote the welfare and interests of consumers. The Consumer Protection Act makes substantial provisions for the protection of the rights of consumers in areas such as unfair contract terms, unfair trading practices and the safety of goods.

So, ladies and gentlemen, as we seek to safeguard your interests, it is necessary to build a relationship with you that will allow us to do our job. To be successful in achieving this goal, we have determined that there are a number of things that we must take responsibility for.

1. We must be available to you.
2. We must communicate with you.

3. You must perceive that we are serving your interests effectively.

Today, we commit publicly to earning the right to exist through the quality of the service we provide to you.

Let me assure you though, that in the months since the proclamation of the Consumer Protection Act, the staff at the FTC has been working in your interest. Two Help Bureau Officers were appointed in early December 2002, and after a period of intensive training, they assumed responsibility for the Consumer Help Desk. After the passage of the legislation in early January, the Commission increased its capacity to handle consumer complaints with the appointment of two Consumer Protection Officers. This team, developed with oversight and training from the General Legal Counsel has ably

investigated and resolved a number of matters over the period, January to May 2003.

Evidence of their competence is provided in the following details. To date we have provided advice and assistance to over 400 consumers who have called the FTC with queries and complaints. The FTC continues to investigate a number of alleged breaches of the Consumer Protection Act.

In the regulatory arena, the FTC has received and investigated billing and other service complaints. Our Fair Competition division has met with businesses with a view to resolving a number of queries raised under this area of legislation. Research projects are continuing on emerging

issues. These will all result in real benefits to you - the consumer.

You must feel free to come to us with your concerns and complaints. To facilitate easy access to our services we are now making available a Consumer Hotline, number 421-2FTC. We expect it to be well used. When you see things that do not seem right to you, do not think that your matter will be seen as inconsequential, please get in touch with us. We are here to serve you. We will not be successful in our mission unless you work with us.

Today, we are providing the opportunity for you to get to know us. We have provided information that will help you to better understand the work that we do on your behalf. In addition, we are here to talk to you about your

rights and the processes you should use when you need to complain.

I congratulate the staff of the FTC for the outstanding effort they have put into preparing for this occasion. The Commission appreciates their hard work in this and all other matters.

I now have the pleasure of inviting you to become involved as I declare our consumer open house officially open.