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INDEPENDENT RETAILERS AND WHOLESALERS SPEAK OUT TO CONGRESS

ARLINGTON, Virginia (June 26, 2002) – The 2002 Washington Conference and Grocers Care Celebration was held June 23-25 in Washington, DC. The event, cosponsored by the National Grocers Association (N.G.A) and Food Industry Association Executives (FIAE), was an opportunity for retail and wholesale grocers and state association executives to lobby members of Congress on many key legislative issues.

The conference also included the Grocers Care Celebration dinner, which acknowledged retailers, wholesalers, and manufacturers whose civic, community, and charitable contributions have made significant impact throughout the years.

Over 100 independent retailers, wholesalers, and state association executives met in over 110 meetings with members of Congress to discuss legislative issues that are critical to their company's futures. They spoke out in favor of permanent death tax repeal, the need to preserve competition and consumer choice, and allowing supermarket pharmacies the opportunity to participate in prescription drug programs for seniors under Medicare. They also opposed a national bottle bill, an increase in the minimum wage, and burdensome 401(K) reforms.

The highlight of the conference was a keynote address by Representative Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) at the Grocers Care Celebration Dinner, which was held Monday evening, June 24. Emerson urged retailers to forcefully deliver their message in opposition to the House Republican leadership's Medicare prescription drug plan for seniors. She said that the republican bill doesn't deal with pricing. "We're talking about coverage issues in Congress, but what we really need to be talking about is affordability," said Emerson. She praised grocers for the work that they do in their communities and thanked them for their donations of food and plans to fight hunger.

Earlier that afternoon, attendees were invited to a special White House briefing, which was held in the Old Executive Office Building, to hear first-hand the current priority issues facing the Bush administration and the supportive role grocers have played on tax and budget issues. Speakers at the briefing were Glenn Hubbard, Chair of Economic Council of Advisors; Jim Wilkinson, Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Communications Director; and Sam Bodman, Deputy Secretary of Commerce. Hubbard discussed the president's economic agenda, minimum wage, long-term tax policy, and acknowledged the value family-owned businesses play in making the marketplace competitive. He urged attendees to remind congressmen and senators that this death tax is very real to them. Wilkinson discussed how the Communications Department gets their message across through the media and how there is a need to better educate other countries as to who America really is. Bodman discussed the day-to-day operations of the Department of Commerce and how the government as a whole has responded to the President's call to action in the aftermath of September 11.

"This was a great time for independent retailers, wholesalers, and state associations all across the country to meet with their members of Congress," said Tom Zaucha, N.G.A. President and CEO. "These community-based businesses were excited about delivering their message on key legislative issues that are happening before Congress. They welcomed the opportunity to thank Representatives and Senators for their votes on permanent death tax repeal and urged them to vote again for permanent repeal in the future. They also strongly opposed the Medicare prescription drug plans that would put pharmacies out of the Medicare business for seniors."

N.G.A. is the national trade association representing the retail and wholesale grocers that comprise the independent sector of the food distribution industry. An independent retailer is a privately owned or controlled food retail company operating in a variety of formats. Some are publicly traded but with controlling shares held by the family. Most independent operators are serviced by wholesale distributors, while others may be partially or fully self-distributing. Independents are the true “entrepreneurs” of the grocery industry and dedicated to their customers, associates, and communities. N.G.A. members include retail and wholesale grocers and their state associations, as well as manufacturers and service suppliers.