**Ohio Consumers’ Counsel, Robert S. Tongren, Elected President of National State Advocate’s Group**

Elected officers also included Maryland, Indiana and Arizona state advocates

SILVER SPRINGS, Md. – November 14, 2002 – With a commitment to increasing their impact on federal energy and telecommunications issues and securing additional benefits for consumers, the nation’s utility consumer advocates elected their new president this week. In a unanimous vote, the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) elected Ohio Consumers’ Counsel Robert S. Tongren to a one-year term at its annual meeting in Chicago. NASUCA represents the interests of consumers on federal and state electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues.

Important federal issues that NASUCA and Tongren will be tackling over the next year include the proposed national “do-not-call” list to protect consumers from unwanted telemarketing calls; local telephone companies’ attempts to hinder competition by increasing wholesale prices; and the development of an effective wholesale electric market.

“With more utility issues being decided at the federal level, the importance of NASUCA has increased dramatically. It is vital that we advocate for consumers on federal issues that impact the rates they pay and the services they receive,” said Tongren. “This organization takes the consumer point of view from our individual states to the decision-makers in Washington, DC. I look forward to using my experiences as a consumer advocate to help impact legislation and provide benefits on the national level.”

Also elected NASUCA officers: Michael Travieso, Maryland People’s Counsel, Vice President; Anne Becker, Indiana Utility Consumer Counselor, Secretary; and Lindy Funkhouser, Director of Arizona’s Residential Utility Consumer Office, Treasurer.

Known for creating innovative programs to educate and protect residential consumers, Tongren helped build a comprehensive outreach and education program that distributed over 370,000 pieces of educational information and gave presentations to 63,000 consumers and organizations in 2001.

Since assuming his leadership role in 1994, he has been credited with several major initiatives benefiting consumers. Tongren was instrumental in developing two of the nation’s most successful natural gas choice programs in which consumers have saved over $130 million to date.

As the state restructured its electric market, Tongren helped secure consumers numerous benefits including capped distribution rates for as many as six years, a five percent reduction in generation rates, opportunities for local government aggregation and the availability of discounted power to jumpstart competition in northern Ohio. In addition, he has advocated for local telephone competition for residential consumers over the past seven years. As a result of efforts by Tongren and others, Ameritech Ohio’s wholesale prices have been lowered and more competitors are now offering local telephone service to residential consumers. To help educate consumers about the new companies and their offers, the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel developed the only local telephone comparison chart in the state.

“Our nation’s advocates play an increasingly important role in the lives of residential consumers as they begin to make more decisions about their utility services,” said Stephen Ward, Maine’s Public Advocate and the outgoing NASUCA President. “Rob Tongren will bring his commitment to educating consumers and delivering them benefits to the national stage. With so many opportunities ahead, I am excited about his vision for our organization.”

**About the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel**

Ohio Consumers’ Counsel Robert S. Tongren represents the interests of more than four million residential utility consumers in the state. He has been active in utility law since the early 1980s, serving as the Ohio Attorney General’s Chief Counsel to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and as an Assistant Vice President at United Telephone before his appointment as the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel in 1994. He earned his law degree from the University of Akron School of Law and his bachelor’s degree from DePauw University. Prior to his NASUCA presidency, Tongren served as Vice President of the organization.

Note to Editors: High resolution color and black and white photographs of Rob Tongren, Ohio Consumers' Counsel, as well as his biographical information are available on the OCC website at under News, Media and Alerts - Media

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