**Letter to the editor in response to the Wall Street Journal's "A Telecom Breakthrough" editorial**

To the editor:
The Baby Bells have brought out their arsenal of lobbying resources in an attempt to persuade federal and state decision makers to help eliminate their competition.

In his Dec. 12 story "Bell Companies Lose Customers to AT&T, MCI," reporter Yochi Dreazen described the competition facing SBC Communications, Inc. and some other Baby Bells. It has taken six years of hard work by state utility regulators, consumer advocates and competitors for consumers to realize the dream that Congress envisioned when it passed the sweeping piece of legislation known as the Telecommunications Act of 1996. It was this act that laid the competitive foundation by telling the Baby Bells to open their local markets. Now, the Baby Bells want it all to end.

On the national level, the Federal Communications Commission will soon consider denying competitors the ability to lease vital parts of the telephone network from the Baby Bells at wholesale rates. This would devastate competition. Experts predict that higher monthly bills, service interruptions and less choice in the variety of services would result.

State by state, many of the Baby Bells are proposing drastic increases in the wholesale rates they charge competitors. If approved by regulators, this would also slam the door on local telephone choice. While critics of competition may view these rates as "discounted" or "subsidized," these prices are cost-based and the result of lengthy regulatory cases. The U.S. Supreme Court recently upheld the formula used to set these prices.

With local telephone competition just beginning to develop in many states, eliminating the current wholesale structure would be a giant step backward and ignore the interests of those that deserve and demand the benefits of choice - our nation's consumers.

Sincerely,

Robert S. Tongren
President, National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates
Ohio Consumers' Counsel