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Illinois Wine Lovers Stripped of Rights After Governor's Signature

—Higher Wine Prices, Less Choice Await Illinoisans—

(Sacramento, CALIF)—The Specialty Wine Retailers Association (<http://www.specialtywineretailers.org>) and wine lovers watched yesterday as Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich ignored Illinois citizens' interests for an action benefiting campaign contributors among Illinois alcohol distributors. In signing HB 429, Governor Blagojevich stripped Illinois consumers of their long held right to purchase wine from out-of-state wine merchants, a move that will increase prices for wine, lessen Illinoisans' access to wine and protect Illinois alcohol distributors from competition.

Between 2002 and 2006 alone, Illinois alcohol distributors gave more than \$490,000 in campaign contributions to the Governor. Could there be a connection between those donations and his signature on HB 429, a bill that saw no consumer support and in fact resulted in overwhelming opposition by Illinois consumers?

While continuing to allow Illinoisans to purchase wine from out-of-state wineries, the new law prohibits consumers from purchasing wine from wine shops, wine clubs, Internet wine stores, and auction houses that reside outside Illinois, as well as hundreds of California winemakers that are not specifically licensed as wineries but produce wine nonetheless. Illinoisans have been able to purchase and have shipped to them wine from these businesses for more than 15 years.

\$490,000 in Campaign Contributions Leads to Alcohol Distributor Protection Act

"SWRA and Illinois consumers are disappointed that the Governor would choose to shield a well-heeled special interest from competition rather than look out for the interests of his constituents," said Tom Wark, executive director of the Specialty Wine Retailers Association. "Illinois wine lovers have been put on notice: Their interests are secondary to those of large contributors looking for protection from a free market."

The primary intent of the new law is to shield Illinois alcohol distributors from competition. For 15 years, consumers have been able to look to out-of-state retailers for wines Illinois alcohol distributors did not provide to in-state retailers and look to out-of-state retailers for lower prices on wines. Literally thousands of imported and domestic wines are not made available to Illinois consumers by the state's alcohol distributors. With HB 429 in place, Illinois distributors will have no motivation to provide a well-rounded selection of wines since they no longer are subject to competing in a national market as they have been for the last 15 years.

"The new law has been hailed as the result of years of negotiation, yet it's unfortunate that at no time did anyone ever ask what was good for the Illinois consumer," said Wark. "What we have now is nothing more than a 'Illinois Alcohol Distributor Protection Act'."

Based in Sacramento, California, Specialty Wine Retailers Association is a national association of wine merchants that seek fair and constitutional wine laws and is the only national organization that seeks to protect all the interests of America's wine lovers.

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