

As you know, and most of us know, within the past few years there has been much, much discussion about food prices. Many studies and investigations have already been made. We in the retail food industry have been proud of the results of these studies up to this point, but we would again welcome and pledge our cooperation with any reputable group or duly authorized body to make a study in depth of the entire problem, and particularly as it applies to the consumer in the poverty and low-income areas.

I would like to touch on a couple of things here that bothered me just a little bit before I conclude. This is not in my statement, and I am not discrediting anybody's testimony or saying that they are wrong or anything like that, but the statement was made that our store at 4331 Natural Bridge did not have any competition. Natural Bridge is a main artery.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. I don't remember that. Who said that?

Mr. O'NEAL. Mrs. Dames, the Post-Dispatch, the green-pepper incident.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. It sounds like the title of a movie.

Mr. O'NEAL. At any rate, you talk about competition now. Natural Bridge is six lanes wide going west, and then there is a cross street, Neustadt Avenue. We are one-half block east of Neustadt. We have a major competitor, equal-size store or larger, in a newer building; namely, Bettendorf, that sits one-half block west from our store on Neustadt Avenue.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. I can't follow geography very well. Is that across this major highway?

Mr. O'NEAL. They are both on the same side of the street. It is not a major highway, it is just a wide street. They are one block apart and they are on the same side of the street. Now, if that isn't competition, I don't know what we are looking for.

Now, in addition to that, two blocks east of us there is a fine new IGA store that's 8 or 10 years newer than our store, and recently this store has, I don't know who operates it now, but recently the ownership of this store has changed and this man is trying to build his business, which I would too if I were him, and we have been forced to meet competition, and this is in the so-called low-income poverty area. So these things happen in the city as well as in the suburban areas.

We are not running away from the city. I am not at liberty to disclose the specific location, although probably most of my competitors probably know where we are going to build it, but we are going to build a new store in the Gateway district area. It will be a fine store, we'll staff it with the best possible people we can come up with, it will be as competitive as we know how, it will be a complete food store in every respect, and I imagine that the gentleman of the Human Development Corp., Mr. Norman Saigh, who is present here today, will help us to acquire good, capable people to work in this store.

I hope that I have been able to throw some kind of light on this problem, and I don't say my piece may be as well as some people, but, in any event, I hope I have been able to answer some of the questions and some of the suspicions that must have been raised in your minds by recent newspaper reports.