

CSJ Article
July 2017

My Brothers and Sisters:

It was an honor for me to be selected the new Chairman of the New York State Commission for Social Justice. I hope to follow in the great footsteps of those chair people that came before me. Our job is a formidable one; we have many issues that we face that need to be corrected. Although we will deal with these issues as they come we will always be mindful of an important aspect of the CSJ, promoting a positive image of Italian-Americans.

Columbus Day

One of the most pressing issues facing the Italian-American community today is the attack on Christopher Columbus and those pushing to have Columbus Day removed from the calendar. This month we were notified that the City Council of Los Angeles will be taken up a measure voted by a committee to remove Columbus Day and replace it with Indigenous Peoples Day. This issue seems to be snowballing all over our country. We, in New York, under the leadership of Brother Louis Gallo have been successful in preventing Columbus Day to be removed from the calendar in parts of New York. I congratulate Brother Lou and thank him for these victories. My brothers and sisters we have to take this fight head on with vigor and a resolve to be victorious. We cannot allow those that speak the loudest and those elected officials that respond to them to be able to take away this one day that Italian-Americans have to show our culture and our heritage. We also cannot allow those that want to rewrite history in order to be politically acceptable to now make Christopher Columbus a villain instead of the hero that he has been the last 500 years. We, as Italians and Italian-Americans, have to come together to have our voices heard loud and clear that we will not accept these attacks on Christopher Columbus Day and on our Italian heritage to continue. We need to join forces with all Italian-American groups in this country as well as other ethnic groups to fight this attack. One such group that I am trying to reach out to is the leadership in the Latino community. As many of you know the day before we celebrate Columbus Day there is a march up Fifth Avenue by the Hispanic community celebrating Columbus Day. I am reaching out to those leaders to join us.

I understand the need for the Native American community to have their day to show their great achievements and culture. I support that as I am sure many of you do. There are 365 days in the year and I am urging the Native American Community to find another day to honor their culture and heritage. My Brothers and Sisters, if you have not already done so, I am urging you to sign the petition to save Columbus Day. We have over 7000 members in the New York State Sons of Italy and we need over 7000 signatures to be added from New York. Please don't wait for someone else to do this; I'm urging each of you to sign this petition and to get your friends and family members to do the same.

The petition can be located on the web at <https://www.change.org/p/order-sons-of-italy-in-america-s-commission-for-social-justice-save-columbus-day>. We also have hard copies available for those that are not online.

Saturday Night Live

The attack on the Italian-American community continues in the media and on TV. In a segment of Saturday Night Live a skit was performed purporting to be in a Lower Eastside tenement. In that script Italians were called greasy Italians, grease balls, filthy Italians among other smears. It was the most disgusting attack on us ever seen on TV. To think that they could get away with that is part of the problem that we have as Italian-Americans. Any other group would be storming NBC and Saturday Night Live demanding a full apology and demanding that SNL be taken off the air. Board member Marianne Prince drafted a strong letter under my signature that has been sent to all the advertisers of Saturday Night Live demanding that they pull their sponsorship of the show. This is not comedy. This is a vicious attack on us. We have also scheduled a meeting with the leadership of the Polish Community, who were also attacked in this segment. We will be joining forces in this fight. We will continue to voice our objections to both NBC and the sponsors of the show until we get the proper respect and apology.

Linda Stasi Article

In Linda Stasi's column in the Daily News on June 18th she compared Donald Trump to a mobster. I'm not getting involved in the politics of the article because that has no bearing on the issue. However, in the article Linda Stasi used words such as mob and omerta and having a picture of President Trump hanging on puppet strings, as in the Godfather in describing the Trump administration. There was no reason for her to use words that are associated with Italian organized crime. I was surprised and angry with that and drafted a letter to her letting her know my feelings and urging her to understand how those words continue to promote a negative stereotype of Italian-Americans. I urged her in the letter to work with us in promoting a positive image of Italian-Americans and fighting this very negative stereotype. I am waiting for her response.

Positive Image

I am very happy to report that my Co-Chair Eleanor Jobbagy will be working on involving us once again in the Italian-American Experience at Hofstra University. At this event we will be showcasing the traditional dress of the different regions of Italy. We will also be there to give out positive image materials to all involved and attending this event. It is important that we do all we can to present Italian-Americans in a positive way. I want to personally thank my Executive Board, all dedicated members, for the hard work they do in promoting a positive image of Italian-Americans and in fighting all those that want to defame us. We must do all we can to highlight the great achievements of Italian-Americans. I'm very happy to report that we are creating a new bookmark in honor of Judge Frank Gulotta. We have many positive image materials that are available to any Lodge that needs them. I urge you to make use of these materials during your events.

These materials are a valuable tool in recruiting members to our Order. They serve no purpose being stored away for no one to see. Please contact me if you need any of these materials.

Fraternally yours,
John