

*Political Update – January 2007*

Congratulations to all of the Italian Americans elected to public office in November 2006, being sworn into office in 2007. These individuals include:

James A. Deleo, 10th Senate; Debbie Defrancesco Halvorson, 40th Senate; Robert S. Molaro, 21st Representative; Franco Coladipietro, 45th Representative (newly elected); Dennis M. Reboletti, 46th Representative; Rosemary Mulligan, 65th Representative; Angelo "Skip" Saviano, 77th Representative; Michael Formento, Dupage County Forest Preserve Comm.; Darlene Ruscitti, Dupage County Reg. Sup.; Peter Silvestri, Cook County Commissioner - 9th Dist.; Larry Sufferdin, Cook County Commissioner - 13th Dist.; Jill C. Marisie, Cook Circuit - 13th Subcircuit - Bierman Vacancy (newly elected). Congratulations to all the above political leaders – you make all of us proud.

U.S. House Small Business Committee Chairman Don Manzullo voted for legislation to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank and expand its outreach to help more small businesses sell their goods and services overseas. The House amended and passed the bill unanimously, and the Senate endorsed it later before sending it to the president for his signature. The bill (S. 3938) would reauthorize the Ex-Im Bank's charter for 5 years and would restore a Small Business Division within the Ex-Im Bank, a top priority in similar legislation (H.R. 5068) co-written by Congressman Manzullo. Created in 1934 as an independent U.S. government agency, the Ex-Im Bank provides export credit guarantees, insurance and direct loans to help American companies export overseas. The legislation also includes provisions championed by Manzullo to give the restored small business division more teeth by authorizing small business specialists within each division of Ex-Im Bank the ability to approve loans, guarantees and insurance at recommended levels up to \$10 million. These provisions will speed up consideration of small business loans by experts who will know what is necessary to help small businesses compete overseas. In addition, S. 3938 allows the Senior Vice President of the Bank's Small Business Division to intervene and advocate for small business exporters in specific transactions. Finally, S. 3938 enhances Ex-Im's delegated loan authority to private banks for medium-term transactions.

This fall, a second public meeting was held by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) at the Elmwood Park Parks and Recreation Building to discuss progress the state has made in assessing viable safety improvements at the Grand Avenue railroad crossing, including anticipated benefits, community and environmental impacts—and, of course—the cost to implement different strategies identified as viable alternatives. Mayor Peter Silvestri says that while the Village has no jurisdiction over the roadway, the railroad crossing, tracks or the trains, from the beginning, IDOT officials have included local and legislative leaders in the process.

At the public meeting, in addition to providing a second opportunity for residents to provide input and voice their concerns, IDOT officials presented an overview of the study and progress-to-date, including a number of alternative plans for consideration. Of the alternatives presented by IDOT, local officials believe construction of an underpass will have the least, if any impact on surrounding properties, including the Grand Avenue business district, and, at the same time, provides acceptable levels of safety and mobility for the community and those traveling through it on a daily basis. Silvestri says the railroad tracks will be slightly elevated to make room for re-construction of the road to pass under it. Silvestri looks to the next steps in this process, specifically, detailed design and engineering drawings for the underpass project. Funding will pose another challenge for state officials, as federal and state dollars for highway improvements are limited and typically appropriated in five year cycles; for example, there are currently more than 60 traffic/safety improvement projects in process in Northeastern Illinois alone.

Over the last several months, the City of Chicago Heights has implemented creative flood relief assistance programs, and the implementation of our rehabilitation plan has continued to move forward as promised. Chicago Heights Mayor Anthony DeLuca announces the city has accepted bids for the immediate cleaning of the 18" and larger (approximately 69,000 feet of pipe) sewer pipes. The deadline for the completion of this sewer cleaning is March 31, 2007, hopefully just before any potential heavy spring rains. The city also approved the purchase of a new Sewer Cleaning Truck.

*This column is written by Nina Albano Vidmer, executive director of the Italian American Political Coalition. To submit information, please fax to 708-401-0360 by the first of each month for consideration in the following month's issue.*