

Political Update – March 2005

By Nina Albano Vidmer

The 94th session of the Illinois General Assembly started with the reappointment of Senator James A. DeLeo to the post of assistant majority leader, a post he has held since 2003. Senator DeLeo said he was pleased with re-securing the leadership position so as to ensure the representation of the Northwest side on key issues as schools, transportation and other community matters.

State Rep. Angelo “Skip” Saviano was sworn in for a seventh term and pledged, among other things, to work toward a resolution of the medical malpractice problem facing our state as well as the ongoing budget crisis. Rep. Saviano says he will continue to support initiatives aimed at providing children with a quality education, making prescription drugs more affordable to low-income seniors, reducing crime, and balancing the budget.

State Rep. Rosemary Mulligan has been chosen to serve as a legislative advisor to the New Americans Initiative Citizen’s Advisory Panel. There are 340,000 immigrants in Illinois who are eligible for citizenship. The purpose of the panel is to find ways to reach out to these individuals and to assist them in the transition from immigrant to New American. The panel provides assistance in English language training, legal services and citizenship classes to Illinois immigrants who are eligible for citizenship but haven’t applied.

Congressman Don Manzullo was reappointed to serve as chairman of the House Small Business Committee for the 109th Congress. In that capacity, Congressman Manzullo announced that he has brokered a deal between the United States and China to allow for one-year multiple entry business and tourists visas between the two countries. The agreement allows tourists and business executives to travel between the United States and China under a single visa for 12 months, instead of seeking new visas for each trip.

According to one private study, U.S. businesses lost nearly \$31 billion in sales between 2002 and 2004 because foreign business executives could not get into the U.S. to purchase American goods and services and to attend trade shows.

Manzullo who also chairs the U.S.-China Interparliamentary Exchange, worked with the departments of State, Justice, and Homeland Security, as well as with the FBI, CIA, and the White House to broker the policy.

Manzullo says that his goals for 2005 include continuing to promote legislation that reduces the surging cost of health care for small business owners and their employees; urge Congress to make the 2001 tax relief provisions permanent, encourage federal agencies to do more business with small business; pursue free and fair trade for small business exporters; continue to fight burdensome and unnecessary federal regulations; and continue to lead the effort in Congress to restore manufacturing. and preserve our Defense Industrial Base as a matter of national security.

Applications for 2005-06 General Assembly Scholarship Program are now available at your district office. Students may obtain an application by sending a letter of request to their state representative; e-mail requests from students will also be accepted. Deadline for application is submission by March 31, 2005. To qualify, the student must be a graduating high school senior (or GED holder), continuing student at a state university, community college student, or college graduates pursuing a post-graduate degree. Legislators are allowed to award up to eight scholarships to any Illinois public university. Eligible state universities are the University of Illinois campuses at Champaign, Chicago and Springfield; Chicago State University; Eastern Illinois

University; Governors State University; Illinois State University; Illinois State University; Northern Illinois University; Northeastern Illinois University; Southern Illinois University-Carbondale campus; Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville campus; and Western Illinois University. A non-partisan Scholarship Advisory Committee helps to evaluate the applications.

Cook County Commissioner Peter Silvestri co-sponsored the recently-approved Cook County Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance, designed to create a maximum annual cap on property tax reassessments to seven percent. This does not mean a mandatory increase of seven percent, but that the formula known as your property assessment is capped to a minimum of seven percent. The Northwest side of Chicago recorded assessment increases of more than 35 percent; while the villages of Oak Park and River Forest increased more than fifty percent in many cases.

Nina Albano Vidmer, Italian American Political Coalition executive director, writes this column. Information for publication in the next issue of Fra Noi should be faxed to 708-338-0997 by the first day of the previous month.