



The California Promise

In the 1850's, the gold rush lured people worldwide to California. Most believed they would strike it rich and take California's gold back home, but many Italians came to California to stay.

Italians brought the wealth of their skills and talent as farmers, merchants, industrialists, stonecutters, fishermen, and vintners to build new lives and develop a better California. Italians founded settlements throughout California including San Diego, Mendocino, Sacramento, Napa, Eureka, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

Dating back to the earliest days of California statehood, Italians' pride of ancestry did not supersede the interest of their adopted country and the desire to support its needs through elected office.

Building a Better California

Italian Americans have served with distinction in the California State Legislature throughout California's history. The first known, Dr. Alfred W. Taliasterro, was elected in 1852, just three years after the Legislature's first session held on December 15, 1849. Bob Moretti served as Speaker of the Assembly from 1971-1974 and remains the only Italian American to hold this important position. Two Italian Americans have served as President pro Tempore of the California State Senate--David Roberti (1980- 1994) and Don Perata (2004-2008).

Throughout California's history, Italian Americans championed legislation benefiting generations of Italian Americans and Californians alike. From Assembly Minority Leader Anthony Caminetti's 1911 legislation marking Admission Day as a legal holiday in California to Assemblyman John B. Badaracco's anti-Ku Klux Klan legislation in the 1920s, Italian Americans have honored California and defended the rights of all who live here.

Today, Italian Americans continue to uphold the examples set by their forbearers in order to forge a better California for everyone.



A Legacy of Service

ITALIAN AMERICAN LEGISLATORS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

- 1) **Dr. Alfred W. Taliaferro (Tagliaferro)** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1852 as a Whig and to the California State Senate in 1857 and 1858 as a Democrat representing Marin and Mendocino Counties. According to an article published by the Marin County Historical Society and author Lawrence DiStasi, Taliaferro is believed to be the first Italian American elected to the California Legislature. He was a physician and surgeon and was commonly known as "Dr. Tolivar," an Anglicized pronunciation of his Italian name.
- 2) **Augustus Splivalo** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1867 as a Republican representing San Francisco. He was a prominent attorney, an editor of the La Paro la Italian newspaper, he served as president of the Italian Mutual Benevolent Society of San Francisco.
- 3) **Anthony Caminetti** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1883 and 1897 and to the California State Senate in 1887, 1889, and 1907-13 as a Democrat representing Amador County. He co-founded an Italian Benevolent Society in 1881 and was elected District Attorney for Amador County prior to running for his legislative seat. He served as the Senate Minority Leader in 1911. His legislation included a bill to make Admission Day a legal holiday and a voter-approved constitutional amendment that divided legislative sessions. He also served in Congress.
- 4) **Egisto C. Palmieri** was elected to the California State Senate in 1884 as a Republican representing San Francisco. He was president of the Italian Chamber of Commerce and was prominent in Italian and business circles.
- 5) **Louis P. Zocchi** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1894 as a Republican representing San Francisco. He is believed to be of Italian American heritage and authored a bill to reimburse an Italian paper, L'Italia, for printing constitutional amendments.
- 6) **Dr. August Angelo Cavagnaro** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1900 as a Democrat representing San Francisco. His mother was born in Italy; his father, a native



Ohioan, moved to California in 1849. After serving in the Legislature, he earned a degree in medicine and practiced in Stockton and San Jose.

- 7) **Ennio B. Martinelli** was elected to the California State Senate in 1908 as a Republican representing Contra Costa and Marin Counties. An article indicates his parents were Swiss, but it was not uncommon at that time for Swiss-Italians to indicate only Swiss heritage. Italian American Museum of Los Angeles confirms his Italian heritage.
- 8) **Victor J. Canepa** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1912 and 1914 and to the Senate in 1916, 1918, 1922, and 1926 representing San Francisco. His party affiliations varied, sometimes running as a Republican, Prohibitionist, or Independent. He was born and raised in San Francisco and was a member of Native Sons, a group dedicated to preserving California's heritage.
- 9) **Charles P. Vicini** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1917 and 1919 as a Democrat representing Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, and El Dorado Counties. Vicini was an attorney prior to his service in the Legislature and was appointed Superior Court Judge of Amador County subsequently.
- 10) **John B. Badaracco** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1918, 1920, and 1922 as a Democrat representing San Francisco. The name "Badaracco" originates from a town near Genoa, Italy. A man with the same last name-and 11 children-moved to California for the Gold Rush. Assemblyman Badaracco is believed to be this man's son. Assembly Member Badaracco was known for authoring anti-KKK legislation (eleven Italian Americans were lynched in New Orleans in 1891). He is confirmed Italian by the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles.
- 11) **Joseph Leroy Pedrotti** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1920 and 1922 and to the California State Senate in 1924 and 1928 as a Republican representing Fresno and Madera Counties. He changed his party affiliation to Progressive when he was re-elected to the Senate in 1934. He was engaged in the plumbing business in Los Angeles and served as an appraiser for the Los Angeles County Probate Courts.
- 12) **William Bonelli** was first elected in 1930 and served until 1932 in the California State Assembly as a Republican representing Los Angeles. While a biographical profile indicates he is of Swiss-English heritage, the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles confirmed his Italian heritage.
- 13) **Frank P. Belotti** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1950 and served until 1972 as a Republican representing Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Lake, and Sonoma Counties. A bridge, highway, and building in Humboldt County are named in his honor.
- 14) **Frank G. Bonelli** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1953 and served until 1958 as a Democrat representing Los Angeles County. Apart from service in the Legislature, he was a merchant. The Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park, located in San Dimas, California is named in his honor.
- 15) **Paul J. Lunardi** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1958 and served until 1962 when he was elected to the California State Senate and served until 1966 as a Democrat representing Placer County. He served as Mayor of Roseville prior to his

election to the State Legislature. He was a member of the Sons and Daughters of Italy in America.

- 16) **Bill Bagley (Baglietto)** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1960 and served until 1974 as a Republican representing Marin and Sonoma Counties. He is best known as a joint author of the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act (1967), which requires official meetings of state boards and commissions to follow rules similar to those of the Brown Act. His Italian name is "William Baglietto," but was changed to "Bill Bagley" by his father. A segment of Highway 101 to 1-580 is named in his honor; he is author of California's Golden Years: When Government Worked and Why (2009).
- 17) **Robert J. "Bob" Lagomarsino** was elected to the California State Senate in 1961 and served until 1974 as a Republican representing Ventura County. He practiced law before entering politics. His grandfather came from Italy to California during the Gold Rush. A visitor center at Channel Islands National Park is named in his honor.
- 18) **Eugene A. Chappie** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1964 and served until 1980 as a Republican representing Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Tuolumne and Yuba Counties. In an oral history interview conducted by the California State Archives, he relayed how his first grade teacher changed his family name from "Chiappa" to "Chappie". He also served in Congress.
- 19) **Bob Moretti** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1964 and served until 1974 as a Democrat representing Los Angeles. He is the first Italian American legislator to be elected Speaker of the Assembly (1971-74). A scholarship bearing his name, the "Bob Moretti Memorial Scholarship Foundation," was formed in 1984 for students seeking legislative careers. A memorial bench in his honor is located in Capitol Park at the California State Capitol.
- 20) **George R. Moscone** was elected in 1966 to the California State Senate and served until 1976 as a Democrat representing San Francisco. He served as the Senate Majority Leader from 1969-1976. His grandparents were from the small Ligurian village of Fontana Rossa in Liguria, Italy. While Mayor of San Francisco, he and County Supervisor Harvey Milk were assassinated by a fellow supervisor in 1978. San Francisco's Moscone Center and George R. Moscone Elementary School are named in his honor.
- 21) **Paul V. Priolo** was elected in 1966 to the California State Assembly and served until 1980 as a Republican representing Los Angeles County. He was the Assembly Minority Leader from 1976-1979; author of the Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Act which required the creation of state earthquake hazard maps. He was affiliated with the Sons of Italy.
- 22) **David A. Roberti** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1966 and served until 1971 when he was elected to the California State Senate and served until 1995 as a Democrat representing Los Angeles. First elected at the age of 27, he is the longest serving Italian American member (28 years) and was the first Italian American to serve as President pro Tempore of the Senate. Roberti is one of five legislators who sponsored resolutions establishing the California Italian American Taskforce and currently serves as a member. He is credited with helping return the statue "Columbus' Last Appeal to

Queen Isabella" to the Capitol rotunda's first floor and is an active contributor to the Legacy Project.

- 23) **Arlen F. Gregorio** was first elected to the California State Senate in 1970 and served until 1978 as a Democrat representing San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. He served as a member of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors before his election to the State Senate.
- 24) **Larry Chimbole** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1974 and served until 1980 as a Democrat representing Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino Counties. He served as Mayor of Palmdale prior to his election to the State Assembly. A cultural center bearing his name is located in Palmdale.
- 25) **Vic Fazio** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1975 and served until 1978 as a Democrat representing Sacramento, Solano, and Yolo Counties. A portion of Route 113 between 1-5 and 1-80 in Sacramento County and a wildlife area in Yolo County bear his name. He co-founded California Journal magazine. He was later elected to Congress.
- 26) **Douglas Bosco** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1978 and served until 1982 as a Democrat representing Humboldt County. He is an attorney and subsequently served in Congress.
- 27) **Dr. William J. "Bill" Filante** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1978 and served until 1990 as a Republican representing Marin and Sonoma Counties. He was a physician and surgeon who consistently won elections in a majority Democratic district as a Republican. He authored the Filante Tanning Facilities Act of 1988 to impose tighter state health standards for tanning parlors.
- 28) **Cathy Marinelli Wright** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1980 and served until 1992 when she was elected to the California State Senate in 1992 and served until 2000 as a Republican representing Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. She is believed to be the first Italian American woman elected to the Legislature and the longest serving Italian American female (20 years). Wright carried a bill that was signed into law that encouraged teachers to use films and video about Italian American internment during World War II.
- 29) **Don Sebastiani** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1980 and served until 1986 as a Republican representing Napa, Solano, and Sonoma Counties. He is a highly successful, well-known American vintner.
- 30) **Dominic Cortese** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1980 and served until 1996 as a Democrat representing San Benito and Santa Cruz Counties. His mother is of Sicilian descent and his father is a native of the Sicilian town of Trabia. He is one of five legislators who sponsored resolutions establishing the California Italian American Taskforce and carried the resolution that established it.
- 31) **Sal Cannella** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1990 and served until 1996 as a Democrat representing Merced and Stanislaus Counties. His son, Anthony Cannella, currently serves as a California State Senator from the Central Valley.

- 32) **Mike Thompson** was elected to the California State Senate in 1990 and served until 1998 as a Democrat representing Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Napa and portions of Solano and Sonoma Counties. He was a vineyard owner, professor, and legislative consultant prior to his election to the State Legislature. He is currently serving in Congress.
- 33) **Paula Boland (Mazzarelli)** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1990 serving until 1996 as a Republican representing Los Angeles County. Prior to her election, she was a realtor and member of the Los Angeles Charter Commission. She is the second Italian American female elected to the Legislature.
- 34) **Tom Bordonaro, Jr.** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1994 and served until 1998 as a Republican representing San Luis Obispo County. He currently serves as the San Luis Obispo County Assessor.
- 35) **James Rogan** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1994 and served until 1996 as a Republican representing Los Angeles County. He was the last Republican to serve as Assembly Majority Leader in the California Legislature. He served in Congress from 1996-2000 and currently serves as a Superior Court Judge in Orange County. He is author of *Rough Edges: My Unlikely Road from Welfare to Washington* (2002).
- 36) **Marilyn Cerolini Brewer** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1994 and served until 2000 as a Republican representing Orange County. She currently serves as a member of the Little Hoover Commission. She is believed to be one of five Italian American women elected to the California State Legislature. She is also one of five legislators who sponsored resolutions establishing the California Italian American Taskforce.
- 37) **Wally Knox** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1994 and served until 2000 as a Democrat representing Los Angeles County. Prior to his election to the State Legislature, he served as Trustee and President of the Los Angeles Community College District. His grandfather changed his family name from "Nuzzo" to "Knox".
- 38) **Don Perata** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1996 and served until 1998 when he was elected to the California State Senate and served until 2008 as a Democrat representing Alameda County. Prior to his election, he served on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. He is the second Italian American to serve as President pro Tempore of the Senate. He is the son of Italian immigrants.
- 39) **Anthony Pescetti** was elected to the California State Assembly in 1998 and served until 2002 as a Republican representing Sacramento and San Joaquin Counties. A community room in the Galt Police Station is named in his honor. He sponsored State grant funding for the Italian Center of Northern California and was one of five legislators who sponsored resolutions establishing the California Italian American Taskforce.
- 40) **Joe Canciamilla** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2000 and served until 2006 as a Democrat representing Contra Costa County. He is an attorney and business owner and served on the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors prior to his election. He authored a bill encouraging Italian American representation in K-12 curriculum.

- 41) **Mark Wyland** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2000 and served until 2006 when he was elected to the California State Senate where he served as a Republican representing the 38th Senate District until 2014. He represented Orange and San Diego Counties. He has coauthored annual resolutions designating October as Italian American Heritage Month since 2008.
- 42) **Patty Berg** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2002 and served until 2008 as a Democrat representing Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Lake and Trinity Counties. Her mother's maiden name is Nicolini. Prior to her election, she was a regional leader advocating state and national policy changes on issues related to aging and women's rights. She is believed to be one of five Italian American women elected to the California State Legislature. She coauthored the first resolution designating October Italian American Heritage Month in 2008.
- 43) **Doug LaMalfa** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2002 and served until 2008; he subsequently served in the California State Senate from 2010 to 2012, he is currently a member of the U.S. House of Representatives serving as a Republican Congressman in the 1st District. While in the California State Senate, he represented Butte, Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Nevada, Placer, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Yuba Counties. LaMalfa is a fourth generation rice farmer. He has coauthored annual resolutions designating October as Italian American Heritage Month.
- 44) **George Plescia** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2002 and served until 2008 as a Republican representing San Diego County. He served as legislative consultant to State Senator Bill Marrow prior to his election to the State Assembly. He has coauthored annual resolutions designating October as Italian American Heritage Month.
- 45) **Roger Niello** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2004 and served until 2010 as a Republican representing Sacramento County. He is a certified public accountant and a business owner. He has coauthored annual resolutions designating October as Italian American Heritage Month.
- 46) **Cathleen Galgiani** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2006 and to the California State Senate in 2012 where she currently serves as a Democrat representing Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Stanislaus Counties. She was a health care professional and served as chief of staff to Assemblywoman Barbara Matthews before taking office. She authored and coauthored annual resolutions designating October as Italian American Heritage Month.
- 47) **Anthony Portantino** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2006 and to the California State Senate in 2016 where he currently serves as a Democrat representing Los Angeles County. Prior to his service in the Legislature, he was in the entertainment industry and Mayor of La Canada. Since 2008, he has coordinated annual State Capitol Italian American Exhibits, authored or arranged authorship of all annual resolutions designating October Italian American Heritage Month and organized their annual receptions. He currently serves as the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee and Chair of the Senate Budget Subcommittee 1 on Education.

- 48) **Tom Ammiano** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2008 and served until 2014 as a Democrat representing San Francisco. He is a former public school teacher, activist, and is believed to be the first openly gay Italian American legislator. He has coauthored annual resolutions designating October as Italian American Heritage Month. He has coauthored annual resolutions designating October as Italian American Heritage Month.
- 49) **Jerry Hill** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2008 and to the California State Senate in 2012 where he currently serves as a Democrat representing San Mateo and Santa Clara County. He was a member of the San Mateo City Council, a member of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, and was Mayor of San Mateo prior to legislative service. He has coauthored annual resolutions designating October as Italian American Heritage Month since 2008.
- 50) **Michael Anthony "Mike" Gatto** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2010 where he served until 2016 as a Democrat representing Los Angeles County. He is an attorney who served in administrative positions for three Los Angeles mayors. He served as Assistant Speaker pro Tempore in the State Assembly and coauthored annual resolutions designating October as Italian American Heritage Month.
- 51) **Anthony Cannella** was elected to the California State Senate in 2010 where he currently serves as a Republican representing Madera, Merced, Monterey, San Benito, and Stanislaus Counties. He is a licensed civil engineer and small business owner. Cannella is the newest member of the informal Italian American Caucus and is the son of former Assemblyman Sal Cannella. He is coauthor of the 2018 resolution designating October as Italian American Heritage Month.
- 52) **Melissa Melendez** was elected to the California State Assembly in 2012 where she currently serves as a Republican representing Riverside County. She is a U.S. Navy Veteran, becoming one of the first women approved to fly aboard the EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft overseas conducting reconnaissance and intelligence gathering operations and reside in Lake Elsinore with her husband Nico and their five children. She is a principal coauthor of the 2018 resolution declaring October as Italian American Heritage Month.

Future of the Legacy

Senate Concurrent Resolution 157, 2018 –

Italian American Heritage Month

WHEREAS, A study published in December 2004 of social science textbooks used in California schools and universities by Lawrence DiStasi and the Italian American Textbook Committee, titled *The Treatment of Italian Americans in California Textbooks*, found that Italian American contributions were largely absent from elementary, secondary, and postsecondary textbooks used in California; and

WHEREAS, Italian Americans are the sixth largest ethnic group in America numbering roughly 25 million people, with nearly 1.5 million residing in California. For much of the 20th century, Italian Americans were the largest immigrant group in the United States, yet they are not extended proper credit for their role in shaping American culture; and

WHEREAS, As one of the country's greatest success stories, Italian Americans made enormous contributions to our country and state. For example, Amedeo Pietro "A.P." Giannini, born of Italian immigrant parents in San Jose in 1870, established in the Italian neighborhoods across California the first branch banking system in the United States, known today as Bank of America. The philosophy that spurred the success of Bank of America was to invest in common people to stimulate rapid economic growth. Mr. Giannini's investments include the movie industry, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Walt Disney Company, and much of today's agribusiness; and

WHEREAS, Italian immigrant Marco Fontana arrived in the United States in 1859 and started the California Packing Company under the Del Monte label. His cannery soon became the largest food WHEREAS, In 1996, the Legislature established the California Italian-American Task Force. The highest priority of the task force is the inclusion in the public school curriculum of Italian American history, achievements, and contributions; and



WHEREAS, Italian American heritage and the contributions made by individual Italian Americans deserve the state's commendation and the designation of a month in their honor for collective reflection and celebration; now, therefore, be it Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature designates the month of October 2018, and every October thereafter, as Italian American Heritage Month; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature encourages public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of the role and contributions of Italian Americans to the culture and history of California and the United States in the elementary and secondary social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author, members of the State Board of Education, the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission, and to school districts for appropriate distribution.

