



California Italian-American Task Force

ORGANIZING FOR SUCCESS

California Italians Establish Statewide Taskforce

It was in April 1994 that the California Legislature passed a Resolution calling for the creation of a statewide Italian American Taskforce to address issues of special concern to the Italian communities of the State.

The idea for a statewide commission was initiated in conjunction with the exhibit "Una Storia Segreta" which was displayed in the State Capitol Rotunda in April 1994. This powerful exhibit portrayed the painful and little known story of the forced relocation and suppression of California's Italian immigrants and their families during World War II.

The exhibit provided the moral basis for the call to place Italian American issues and concerns on the public policy agenda of the state government. The creation of the Taskforce is a historic moment in the history of the Italians of California

Although the Italian people are one of the largest and oldest ethnic groups in California, they have never had a voice at the State level. And it is at the State level that so many of the decisions that affect Italian Americans are made. Other ethnic and identity groups long ago marched on our state institutions and made their needs known. Now we have that same opportunity.

Taskforce organizers Julie Scopazzi, Bill Cerruti, Larry DiStasi and Adele Negro are bringing together Italian American leaders from across the state to serve on the Taskforce and push the "Italian American Agenda."

The Taskforce idea was initiated by Bill Cerruti, Executive Director of the Italian Cultural Society of Sacramento, which organized the World War II

exhibit at the State Capitol. Working with State Assemblyman Dominic Cortese, the Society was able to obtain passage of several resolutions which set forth a statewide "Italian American Agenda" around which Italian Americans can organize for the first time and called for the creation of the Taskforce to address the status of the Italian population of the State.

And there are many issues on the "Italian American Agenda" that need to be addressed. Some of the most pressing are the status of Italian Language studies at the elementary, high school and university levels and the need for Italian American studies to be included in the public school curriculum.

Most Italian Americans would agree that as a group we have been ignored. As a result, our specific language, cultural, identity and communal needs have also been ignored. The purpose of the State Taskforce on Italian Americans is to address our specific interests in a society which is organized along ethnic, racial, gender, cultural, religious and class lines.

In the past, Italian Americans have not always been organized for success. As a result, our state's institutions have not always served us well. The creation of a statewide voice to petition our institutions to do a better job for us is long overdue.

If we are to build a better future for the Italian Americans in California, then the statewide Taskforce is a big step in the right direction and should help strengthen the status and position of the Italian citizens of California.