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National Italian American Foundation Dinner Remarks: Draft

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DRAFT NIAF

THANK YOU, CHAIRMAN RODINO, FOR THAT WONDERFUL INTRODUCTION. WHEN THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF OUR TIME IS WRITTEN, AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISES REVIEWED, THE NAME PETER W. RODINO WILL HAVE A PROMINENT PLACE ON THE SIDE OF JUSTICE.

MR. PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT BUSH, FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE FOUNDATION, AND FRIENDS.

I WANT TO WELCOME EVERYBODY TO THE FIRST TAG-TEAM PRESIDENTIAL AND VICE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE IN AMERICAN HISTORY. IN THE SPIRIT OF THE EVENING, AND THE INTEREST OF FAIRNESS, THE DEBATE WILL BE CONDUCTED IN ITALIAN.

ALLORA, CI SONO DOMANDE? NO? OKAY -- VA BENE ALLORA COMENCIAMO. AND NO FAIR FOR JOHN VOLPE AND FRANK STELLA TO HELP!

AS A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE NATIONAL ITALIAN AMERICAN FOUNDATION, IT GIVES ME GREAT PRIDE TO BE HERE TONIGHT. I AM PROUD TO JOIN IN SALUTING THE FIVE OUTSTANDING MEN AND WOMEN WHO WE ARE HERE TO HONOR. AND I AM ESPECIALLY PROUD THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IS HERE.

IT IS A GREAT TRIBUTE TO THE TREMENDOUS ACHIEVEMENTS OF THESE FIVE INDIVIDUALS -- AND TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NIAF. AND I KNOW THAT THE PRESIDENT IS LOOKING FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN AN ITALIAN-AMERICAN IS SWORN IN AS VICE PRESIDENT -- OR PRESIDENT -- OF THE UNITED STATES.

AND SO, MR. PRESIDENT, AM I.

I MUST SAY THAT I FIND A SPECIAL SATISFACTION IN THIS EVENING'S PROCEEDINGS. THESE PEOPLE -- ART DECIO, DANIEL TRAVANTI, GIANCARLO MENOTTI, DR. ROBERT GALLO, AND SISTER MARGUERITE MARCHIONE -- RICHLY DESERVE THIS HONOR, AND I WOULD BE PROUD TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THEM UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

BUT IT FEELS JUST A LITTLE BIT BETTER WHEN IT IS ITALIAN-AMERICANS HONORING OUR OWN. AND I WANT TO CONGRATULATE NIAF FOR ITS TEN YEAR RECORD OF PROMOTING ITALIAN-AMERICANS. THANKS TO LEADERS LIKE JENO PAULUCCI, AND JOHN VOLPE, AND FRANK STELLA, NIAF HAS BECOME A FORCE IN WINNING FOR AMERICANS OF ITALIAN DESCENT THE RECOGNITION AND RESPECT WE DESERVE. IT IS A TRUE SUCCESS STORY.

IT IS EXCITING THAT WE HAVE COME SO FAR AND ACCOMPLISHED SO MUCH. BUT IT IS NOT SURPRISING. FOR WITHIN THE OVERALL SUCCESS STORY THERE ARE COUNTLESS INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS STORIES.

THE STORY OF MY FAMILY IS ONE OF THESE. IT IS A SPECIAL STORY, NOT BECAUSE IT IS UNUSUAL OR UNIQUE, BUT BECAUSE IT IS SO MUCH LIKE THE STORY OF SO MANY ITALIAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES.

MY FATHER CAME HERE FROM THE SMALL TOWN OF MARCIANISE, IN CASSERTA. HE CAME TO THIS LAND OF GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY, BELIEVING THAT IF YOU WORKED HARD, AND PLAYED BY THE RULES, AND KEPT FAITH WITH YOUR GOD, YOU COULD CARVE OUT A BETTER FUTURE FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY.

MY MOTHER SHARED THAT BELIEF. AND WHEN SHE WAS WIDOWED WITH TWO YOUNG CHILDREN, SHE WENT BACK TO WORK, IN NEW YORK CITY'S GARMENT DISTRICT, TO MAKE SURE MY BROTHER AND I WOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITIES SHE NEVER HAD.

AND BECAUSE SHE WORKED HARD, I WORKED HARD. I WASN'T ABOUT TO LET HER DOWN. AFTER COLLEGE I TAUGHT IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NEW YORK BY DAY, AND WENT TO LAW SCHOOL AT NIGHT. IT WAS HARD WORK, BUT I LEARNED THE ONE LESSON MY MOTHER AND FATHER MOST WANTED TO TEACH ME: HARD WORK PAYS OFF.

EACH OF YOU KNOWS WHAT I MEAN. YOUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS CAME TO THIS COUNTRY WITH DREAMS FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR THEIR CHILDREN. THEY SACRIFICED AND STRUGGLED AND WATCHED AS THEIR KIDS GREW UP. AND THEY WERE REWARDED WHEN WE GREW UP AND BUILT BETTER LIVES FOR OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN. IT IS AS TRUE TODAY AS IT EVER WAS, "NOI PONIAMO I NOSTRI SOGNI NEI FIGLI -- E CON FEDE IN DIO, LAVORIAMO AFFINCHE QUESTI SOGNI SI REALIZZINO."

THAT IS WHAT THE IDEA OF FAMILY IS ALL ABOUT. WE HONOR THE SACRIFICE OUR PARENTS HAVE MADE FOR US BY THE SACRIFICES WE MAKE FOR OUR CHILDREN.

IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS, WE UNDERSTAND THAT WE DEPEND ON EACH OTHER, TO HELP EACH OTHER. THAT SPIRIT OF SHARED INTERESTS, OF MUTUAL CONCERN AND CARING, WAS SOMETHING ELSE OUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS BROUGHT WITH THEM FROM THEIR TOWNS AND VILLAGES IN ITALY. AND WE HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN.

TODAY, IN THIS FAST-MOVING WORLD, THE RULES HAVE NOT CHANGED. OUR CHILDREN MAY LIVE IN THE SUBURBS, OR EVEN IN DIFFERENT CITIES, INSTEAD OF UPSTAIRS IN THE SAME HOUSE OR A FEW DOORS DOWN THE STREET. BUT WE FEEL JUST AS CLOSE, AND WE CARE JUST AS MUCH FOR THEIR FUTURE. AND WE HOPE WE HAVE MADE THEIR PATH A LITTLE EASIER.

BECAUSE THAT, I BELIEVE, IS THE TRUE AMERICAN SPIRIT. NOT WHAT CAN WE ACHIEVE FOR OURSELVES, BUT WHAT WE CAN WE DO FOR THE GREATER GOOD. FOR OUR FAMILY, OUR COMMUNITY, OUR COUNTRY, AND FOR OUR FELLOW COUNTRYMEN AND WOMEN.

WE ARE HERE TONIGHT TO HONOR THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF FIVE HUMAN BEINGS. AND ON THE BASIS OF THEIR TALENTS, AND THEIR ABILITIES, AND THEIR MINDS, THEY ARE TREMENDOUSLY DESERVING OF THE HONOR.

BUT WHEN WE PRESENT AWARDS TO INDIVIDUALS, WE ARE REALLY HONORING MANY OTHERS AS WELL. BECAUSE THE FACT IS, THAT NO MATTER HOW BRILLIANT AND HARD-WORKING AND GIFTED ONE PERSON IS, NOBODY MAKES IT ALONE. WE ALL BENEFIT FROM THE EFFORTS OF OTHERS, IN THIS FAMILY WE CALL AMERICA.

IN ALL FAMILIES, THERE ARE SOME MEMBERS WITH GREATER GIFTS THAN OTHERS. BUT THE GIFTED MEMBER IS NOT MORE LOVED AND MORE CHERISHED THAN THE OTHERS. WE ARE IN THE COMPANY TONIGHT OF GIFTED PEOPLE, PEOPLE WHO GIVE DEEP MEANING TO THE WORDS:

"...WHEN A GOD-GIVEN BRIGHTNESS COMES, A RADIANT LIGHT RESTS ON MEN, AND A GENTLE LIFE."

WHAT WE HAVE ALWAYS AIMED FOR IN AMERICA IS TO GIVE EVERY PERSON ~~THE~~ CHANCE TO LET HIS OR HER GOD-GIVEN BRIGHTNESS SHIN

SISTER MARCHIONE, DR. GALLO, MR. TRAVANTI, MR. DECIO, AND MAESTRO MENOTTI ALL HAVE THE CAPACITY TO GENERATE A RADIANT LIGHT. WE HONOR THEM, AND WE ARE HONORED BY THEIR PRESENCE. BUT AS WE NOTE THEIR RADIANCE, WE REMEMBER THAT IN AMERICA, WE HAVE ALWAYS AIMED TO GIVE EVERY PERSON THE CHANCE TO LET HIS OR HER GOD-GIVEN BRIGHTNESS SHINE.

THAT IS THE VISION OF AMERICA THAT NIAF HAS HELPED ADVANCE. THROUGH THE WORK YOU DO EVERY DAY, YOU HAVE OPENED THE DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY

NIAF/5

FOR ALL ITALIAN-AMERICANS. THE PROGRESS WE HAVE MADE IN THE PAST
DECADE, WE HAVE MADE TOGETHER. I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO DECADES OF
FUTURE COOPERATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF OUR COMMON HERITAGE.

I AM HONORED TO BE HERE. I SALUTE THE OUTSTANDING
INDIVIDUALS YOU HONOR TONIGHT. WITH THEM, AND WITH YOU, I SAY,
SONO ORGOLIOSA DI ESSERE ITALIANA.