

THE CROATIAN AMERICAN ADVOCATE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE NFCA CULTURAL FOUNDATION



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NFCA Concludes 22nd Annual Assembly in Pittsburgh

Washington, DC - The National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation (NFCA) convened on June 5 for its 22nd Delegates Assembly and held another successful Friday evening Wine Tasting Fundraiser. The well-attended reception was for Croatia's Special Olympics team and was held at the National Headquarters of the Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) in Pittsburgh, PA. Over 220 attendees at the fundraiser raised more than \$2,500 for 'Team Croatia' on Friday night, June 5. The NFCA friends and supporters were wined, dined, and entertained by several music ensembles, including ballads by The Lettermen founder and lead singer Tony Butala. Other excellent musical entertainment that night was provided by Zabava, Mikey Dee, Ponoc, and Trubaduri.

On Saturday, June 6, the NFCA elected a new President and Executive Board at the Federation's annual meeting conducted in the Boardroom of the CFU. The NFCA's new President for the coming year is Mijo Radocaj of Ohio. Historically, Mr. Radocaj was the fifth President of the Federation when he served in 1998. His Executive Vice President will be Zvonko Labas of Maryland. Elected to another term as National Treasurer was Jay Hunter of Pennsylvania. NFCA's new National Secretary will be Vlatka Persin of Maryland. The remaining officers include three Vice Presidents: Frank Jerbich of Illinois, Steve Rukavina of Pennsylvania, and John Kraljic of New York. Jim Kresnik of Nebraska was elected Officer-at-Large, and Andrea Neumann of Minnesota and Bernadette Luketic-Sikaras were added to the Board. Outgoing President Paul Tonsetic-Kunder congratulated the newly elected Officers and Board members.

The NFCA was pleased to host a special presentation by U.S. Representative Mike Doyle of Pennsylvania on Saturday. Congressman Doyle, a founding member in 2005 of the Congressional Croatian Caucus in the House of Representatives, drew special attention to the contributions of Croatians to the economic and political life of the United States. Rep. Doyle's district is home to over 30,000 Croatian Americans. The Congressman drew important attention to the leadership of Representatives Janice Hahn of California and David Joyce of Ohio, the current Co-Chairs of the Croatian Caucus. He also highlighted the crucial support they have provided for Croatia's continued Western alliance integration and full membership ascension into NATO and the EU.

Ambassador Jadranka Negodic of Bosnia and Herzegovina thanked NFCA for all its assistance to her country during her three years of diplomatic service. Ambassador Negodic has successfully represented her relatively new nation-state in Washington on very complex political and economic issues affecting both BiH and the Balkans at large. (continued on pg. 2)

U.S. Ambassador Noyes Meets with Top Croatian Americans at State Department

Washington, DC - On September 9, newly Senate-confirmed U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Julieta Valls Noyes met with senior leaders of the NFCA and the Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) at the U.S. State Department in Washington, DC.

The Ambassador and the newly appointed Croatian Desk Officer, Emilie Bruchon, hosted eight members of the two major Croatian American organizations: Mijo Radocaj, NFCA President; Ed Pazo, CFU President; Zvonko Labas, NFCA Executive Vice President; Bernadette Luketic-Sikaris, CFU National Secretary/Treasurer; Steve Rukavina, past NFCA President and current Vice President; Vlatka Persin, NFCA National Secretary; John Kraljic, past NFCA President and current Vice President; and, Joe Foley, NFCA Public Affairs Director.

The new Ambassador to Zagreb showed great understanding of the history of Croatia and its current concerns in Southeast Europe and on the world stage. In her prior assignments for Secretary of State John Kerry and his predecessors, she had been Deputy Chief of Mission to the Holy See, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, Director in the Office of Multilateral and Global Affairs, Deputy Director for the Office of Policy and Coordination for the Western Hemisphere and Desk Officer for Greece.

She also administered political affairs positions in several U.S. Embassies in Central America. Ambassador Noyes has become fairly fluent in the Croatian language and appreciated the briefing on issues of concern to the Croatian American community.

Issues reviewed with the Ambassador included; (1) the enlargement of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) to encompass Croatia; (2) the needed expansion of economic activity between the U.S. and Croatia that could eventually lead to the signing of a joint Double Taxation Treaty; (3) the regional economic benefits of energy transportation infrastructure development based in Croatia and to enhance Eastern European national security; (4) the Croatian American community's continued concern regarding instability in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), including the ongoing economic and political difficulties experienced by Bosnian Croats; and, (5) the participation of NFCA Board Members in the Croatian Government's 55-member Advisory Council for Croats Outside the Republic of Croatia.



22nd Annual Assembly (continued) Rep. Mike Doyle pictured above.

Croatia's Deputy Chief of Mission, Mario Skunca, discussed at length matters related to Croatia's readiness for inclusion in an expanded Visa Waiver Program (VWP) with the U.S. DCM Skunca also spoke eloquently to the Assembly Delegates about improving the economy in Croatia and the many benefits of a future Double Taxation Treaty between our two countries. Zvonko Labas and John Kraljic, both re-elected NFCA Vice Presidents, expertly reviewed the charter and goals of the Croatian government's Advisory Council for Croats Abroad. They both were appointed members three years ago and remain active on a variety of issues. According to law, the Diaspora Council meets annually in Zagreb.

Joe Foley, Public Affairs Director, addressed the NFCA's Delegates for his 16th time. Mr. Foley provided updates on the success to date of the organization's promotion of a Double Tax Treaty for Croatia before the U.S. Department of the Treasury and in concert with the Croatian Embassy in Washington. Other issues he discussed in his presentation were: (1) the planned growth of the Congressional Croatian Caucus, (2) the potential consideration of Visa Waiver Program expansion in the new Congress, and (3) Rep. Janice Hahn's legislative work in Congress to encourage effective foreign policies in order to promote and guarantee equal political, economic, and religious rights for all the people of Bosnia. Mr. Foley also provided an overview of the varied and extensive press coverage in Croatia, Bosnia, and the U.S., which had been generated by NFCA's issues development and related activities during the prior year.

Paul Tonsetic-Kunder used the occasion of his retirement after two years as President to bestow several NFCA-sponsored awards on deserving individuals for their selfless contributions to the NFCA's success over the years. This also included a special President's Award to Melania and Zvonko Labas for their generous gift of funds to the NFCA to continue the organization's reliable representation of all Croatian Americans in Washington and beyond. Recognition for their valuable contributions was also given to Jay Hunter, Bill Vergot, Frank Jerbich, and Anne Pavlich.

A special appreciation was awarded to BiH Ambassador Jadranka Negodic for improving the lives of the citizens of Bosnia and her tireless work to expand the present peace in her country. NFCA's newly elected President, Mijo Radocaj, closed the Assembly.

Mr. Radocaj specifically expressed his and the entire Federation's thanks to retiring President Paul Tonsetic-Kunder and to Anne Pavlich for her longtime service as National Secretary. President Radocaj also praised Bill Vergot, another former NFCA President, for his tireless work in developing this year's Assembly program. Last, but not least, Mr. Radocaj was effusive in his praise of Mr. Ed Pazo, CFU's new President, and his entire Headquarters staff: "Mr. Pazo, puno hvala to you, your talented national officers, and the dedicated staff of the CFU for their generous contributions of time and much appreciated hospitality during NFCA's very memorable weekend in Pittsburgh."

In Memoriam: Bernard Luketich

The NFCA expresses our deepest condolences over the loss of long-time CFU President Bernard Luketich. Bernie, who passed away on December 9, was one of our most effective Croatian American leaders and a one-of-a-kind individual who we will never be able to replace.



The NFCA salutes Bernie and his legacy. Throughout his service over the last 30 years as the CFU President, he embraced endless Croatian priority projects and provided tireless and effective leadership. He won the respect of many presidents of countries on both sides of the Atlantic. The NFCA acknowledges that we would not even exist without the leadership, support and vision of Brother Bernard Luketich during the 1990s.

Congresswoman Janice Hahn (D-CA) Reintroduces Resolution Calling for a Presidential Special Envoy for Bosnia and the Balkans

Croatian Caucus Co-Chair Janice Hahn introduced H. Res. 477 in October. The Hahn Resolution recommends that President Obama appoint a Special Envoy to help his Administration and Congress fully understand the successes and shortcomings pursuant to the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accord (DPA) over the past 20 years. Recent presentations in Washington by senior U.S. State Department officials have cited a current need for a comprehensive assessment of Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH) ongoing dilemmas to better determine a way out of this 'frozen conflict.' There has not been a singular focus on Bosnia and related regional interests since the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke effectively led U.S. diplomatic intentions in the Balkans and at Dayton in the mid-1990s.

The H. Res. 477 targets in great detail the political, economic, and religious difficulties that Croat Bosnians continue to face in the Federation (FBiH). As we know, Croats are the smallest of the three DPA-established national constituencies in BiH, and they have failed to recover or be compensated by the Republika Srpska (RS) for stolen properties during the war in Bosnia.

Congresswoman Hahn has noted that since her Resolution was first introduced during the last Congress, its additional contribution has been to further spur debate and action elsewhere on these matters. This has included a renewed look at the DPA in Brussels at the EU.

The Croatian Caucus Co-Chair has noted that it remains important for the U.S. to continue to lead and work in concert with multilateral organizational allies on these critical stability issues in BiH. Positive and negative developments in Bosnia greatly affect neighboring Croatia and the Balkans at large. While the U.S. has historically pushed for the Bosnian government to initiate needed reforms themselves, February 2014 witnessed a country with great political and economic potential fall back into violent patterns and further away from transatlantic integration.

NFCA will continue to draw attention to the many relevant findings and assessments in H. Res. 477 related to the present status of Croat Bosnians. The NFCA will maintain support for the consideration of the Hahn Resolution by the Congress this term. The text of H. Res. 477 can be viewed at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-resolution/477/text>.



NFCA Supports Team Croatia For Special Olympics World Summer Games by Steve Rukavina, Vice President

This summer the Special Olympics World Games were held in Los Angeles, CA from July 25-31, and Team Croatia was there with a 31-member delegation. The Opening Ceremony, with 60,000 in attendance at the LA Coliseum, was led by First Lady Michelle Obama, Stevie Wonder, and many others. The ceremonies also included inspiring words by Tim and Maria Shriver, longtime leaders of the Special Olympics.

Members of Team Croatia felt very honored and truly appreciated at the two local events hosted by the local Croatian American community in LA. The first was an evening reception at the San Pedro Croatian Club. Niko and Peter Hazdovac made sure the red carpet was rolled out and that hospitality was over-flowing through the night. The second event was a spectacular farewell luncheon at St. Anthony's Catholic Church. CFU Lodge 677 was the local host and every Croatian athlete received a gift in addition to the support and wonderful lunch. The Croatian President of Special Olympics, Zdenko Mlakar, and National Executive Director, Franjo Horvat, asked me to thank the NFCA organization for supporting them during this World Games trip to California. The NFCA network raised over \$20,000 for Team Croatia, including gifts from 50 individuals and 220 Croatians who attended the wine tasting fundraiser at the CFU headquarters as part of the NFCA convention on June 5. A special thanks goes out to Nada and Mladen Buntich, as well as Mary and Ivan Marjanovic, for their generous donations.

Also, I am proud to share that Pittsburgh, PA resident Anna Maria Sicenica was one of the two 24-7 Team Croatia liaisons over the 12-day event and did an amazing job. She's even willing to head to Austria with Team Croatia for the Winter World games in Graz, Austria in 2017. Lastly, Team Croatia's volleyball team and two swimmers won medals, and all 22 athletes, including the men's soccer team, had a wonderful experience at the World Summer Games. They told their coaches that the experience with the Croatian Americans was the biggest highlight of all. I must say that during the four days I attended the World Games I saw so much determination and bravery coupled with human goodness all around. It was very gratifying and inspiring to see the triumph of the human spirit through sports during these very Special Olympians. The NFCA should be proud of our successful collaboration and support of Team Croatia.

2015 Washington Report by Joe Foley, NFCA Public Affairs Director

This year marks my 16th year of service to the NFCA, the Croatian American diaspora at large, and our development of support for the Republic of Croatia's continued progress and positive acknowledgement in Washington, at the UN, and within other multilateral organizations. I attribute our measurable success to the wise leadership by the NFCA over these many years. We have had a long string of talented people who have diplomatically steered NFCA's important voice for Croatian Americans since our founding in 1993. This steady leadership and the loyal financial support of the diaspora are the crucial keys to NFCA's continued effectiveness in Washington and internationally.

Over the last two years, the NFCA has helped establish the need for a Double Tax Treaty (DTT) between Croatia and the U.S. Many Americans who may like to retire to Croatia have stressed that expanded economic activity between our two countries would be an obvious net result of a DTT. Thus tax relief is in order. While working with the U.S. Department of Treasury it has been learned that the Treasury, to no one's surprise, is more interested in collecting taxes than in actually providing tax relief. Regardless, NFCA will continue to work with the Croatian Embassy and Rep. David Joyce of Ohio, our Croatian Caucus Co-Chair, to maintain momentum and move this matter forward for all.

NFCA has actively supported the inclusion of Croatia in a potential expansion of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). We continue to forward supportive letters, attend meetings, and offer to testify before relevant Committees in Congress to underline this consistent support. However, after the violent January and November 2015 attacks on the citizens of Paris that have been promoted by the Islamic State group (ISIS), the VWP expansion legislation stalled in Congress. The current 38 countries in the VWP, who benefit from limited citizen screening at our U.S. embassies, will most likely maintain their membership. There may be additional scrutiny applied to their citizens who are currently on the 'no fly list' or those who have traveled to Syria and Iraq. We will continue to closely track all these VWP developments in Washington for our membership.

The NFCA was especially pleased to have Congressman Mike Doyle of Pennsylvania speak to the Delegates at our 22nd Annual Assembly, which was held in early June at the elegant offices of the Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) in Pittsburgh, PA. The Congressman lauded the crucial promotion of many past and current issues of interest by Croatian Americans in Washington. He applauded both legacy diaspora groups, the CFU, and the NFCA, for their essential organizational persistence and critical accomplishment on matters of concern for Croatian Americans, including our active support of the Republic of Croatia's continued success in Euro-Atlantic alliances. The Congressman specifically lauded the Croatian Caucus' first 10 years of progress and the contributions by Croatian Americans towards Croatia's achievement of NATO and EU membership. The Congressman also cited NFCA's steadfast concern for the economic and political plight of Croat Bosnians, as highlighted by Caucus Co-Chair Janice Hahn's call for a Special Envoy for Bosnia and detailed in H. Res. 477. Congressman Doyle's full speech and photos of the 22nd Assembly were finely presented in the November 23 edition of the 'Zajednicar,' which can be viewed on CFU's website.



NFCA Attends 2015 CFU Baltimore Dinner

A NFCA delegation attended the recent 24th CFU Quadrennial Convention Banquet on September 21 in Baltimore, MD, and joined all of the CFU delegates in a night of fun, food, music, and fraternal conversation. Zvonko Labas, Vlatka Persin, Joe Foley, Steve Rukavina, Jim Kresnik, Anne Pavlich, and Tom Steich (pictured from left to right) were thrilled to be part of the festivities and the banquet.

NFCA members were pleased to hear CFU President Ed Pazo acknowledge the activities of the NFCA in the nation's capital. Bernadette Luketich-Sikaras, who served as the Mistress of Ceremonies, also acknowledged the work of the NFCA.



NFCA Meets with Dragan Covic at UN General Assembly

The NFCA delegation of Joe Foley, John Kraljic, Zvonko Labas, and Steve Rukavina (pictured from left to right) met with Bosnian Croat President Dragan Covic on September 29 during the Opening Week of the historic 70th Session of the UN General Assembly.

The one-hour meeting focused on a possible collaboration that will pursue ways to acquire more rights and equal opportunity for Croatians throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. There was also a serious discussion about specific ways to modernize the Dayton Peace Accord through needed constitutional changes. President Covic was very interested to hear about the NFCA's efforts promoting H. Res. 477, which prioritizes keeping the U.S. State Department engaged with EU efforts in Southeast Europe, in particular BiH.

First In-Person Conference: Association of Croatian American Professionals (ACAP) — April 22, 2016 — Save the Date for Washington, D.C. Meeting

This year ACAP's organizing conference will be held jointly with the Embassy of the Republic of Croatia. It aims to connect Croatian Americans and to identify partners and projects. For any questions, contact Dr. Steven Pavletic or Branka Pazin at communications@croampro.com or visit the website croampro.com.



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