

# Fighting to Right a Wrong

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Last December, NIAF received a holiday surprise from Capitol Hill. Two bills had been introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives regarding the mistreatment and internment of Italian Americans during World War II. Brought to our attention between tree decorating and Christmas karaoke, the proposed legislation was a sober reminder of our past, our mission, and the fights still left to be fought.

It also represented a step forward. We closed out the year ready to actively support the bills' passage in 2016. Now, we're asking you to join us in this legislative push.

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren of California introduced H.R. 4146 and H.R. 4147 on December 1, 2015. The first bill requests funds to provide grants for education programs on the history of Italian Americans during World War II. The latter asks for an official apology for the treatment of Italian Americans during that time. NIAF has officially endorsed both bills. And, with your help, both will be exciting achievements for the Italian American community.

Rep. Lofgren, who is not Italian American, may seem an unlikely sponsor of the legislation. The issue landed with the Congresswoman after a constituent approached her. Seeing his determination to pass a law on Italian American mistreatment during World War II, she told the constituent that, if he wrote two bills on the issue, she would introduce them on the House floor. Chet Campanella readily agreed.

At 85, Campanella is well-spoken and unassuming. When asked for a photo for this column, he said, "Well, I don't think I've had a picture taken in years!" A long-time resident

of San Jose, Calif., Campanella is a retired pharmacist and the son of Italian immigrants, Nicholas and Maria, from the region of Bari.

When the United States entered World War II, Campanella's parents and 600,000 other Italians living here were classified as "Enemy Aliens." They faced movement restrictions, curfews, property confiscation, and potential relocation and internment. Although Campanella was only about 12 at the time, his memory of these injustices hasn't faded. For the last 14 years, he has dedicated himself to educating Americans about the mistreatment of Italian Americans during World War II. "People just have no idea this happened," he said.

Campanella's family stories illustrate how difficult it was to be an Italian in America in the 1940s. His parents had applied for natural citizenship, but had not yet completed the process when the United States entered the war. Although there was no reason to monitor his parents' actions, officials were apparently suspicious of his father's Italian military service and involvement with Italian American lodges.

"He loved America," Campanella said. "He never would have done anything to hurt this country." But as classified "Enemy Aliens," his parents had to register at the local Post Office where they were fingerprinted and given booklets to carry at all times.

The FBI searched Campanella's childhood home twice, without warrants, looking for banners, flags, radios, anything subversive. And, while Campanella remembers property taken and never returned, others faced worse. Along California's coast, 10,000 residents were forced to

board up their homes and relocate. Fishing boats were confiscated in the San Francisco Bay area, taking from fishermen their livelihood.

Campanella watched as FBI agents arrested his uncle and sent him to an internment camp for two years. "He wouldn't talk to anyone about it," said Campanella. "He wanted to pretend it never happened."

That seemed to be the general consensus among Italian Americans and U.S. government officials. Campanella's parents told him, "Keep quiet—that's not something we talk about." The government classified all documents relating to issue until they were declassified in 1997.

In 2010, Campanella campaigned for an official apology from the state of California for the treatment of Italian Americans during World War II. Testifying before the California State Senate, he spoke with no notes, "just from the head and heart." The measure passed unanimously and was signed into law later that year.

With dogged determination, he plans to keep working on the national stage until the bills she introduced are passed. "If they don't go for it this session," he said, "by God, I'm going after them next year. I'm not giving up."

As a network of NIAF members and supporters—as the NIAF family—we must ensure he doesn't have to do this alone. Please contact your members of Congress asking them to support or cosponsor H.R. 4146 and H.R. 4147. Together, we can earn the resources needed to study and share our history with future generations. And we can achieve a long-deserved apology on behalf of all mistreated Italian Americans during World War II. ▲