

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 9, 1976

Office of the Vice President
(New York, New York)

REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
AT THE
COLUMBUS CITIZENS COMMITTEE DINNER
GRAND BALLROOM, WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

AT 8:41 P.M. EDT

Your Eminence, Your Excellency, Speaker Carlino,
his Honor the Mayor --

The mayor and I have been friends for a great many years, and we share a tremendous love for this city and the people of this city. We share it with all of you here this evening.

And to my very close and warm friend, the Attorney General, Louis Lefkowitz --

(Applause)

-- Judge di Falco, Mr. Peters, and good friends:

It has been my honor and pleasure to be your guest at these dinners for so many years. The gathering of Americans of Italian heritage here on Columbus Day is a New York tradition.

In Washington a similar dinner was recently held which will stand out as a high point of this Bicentennial year and its celebrations. The purpose of that Italian-American Bicentennial dinner in the Nation's Capital was to honor four distinguished Americans: Judge John Sirica, Senator John Pastore, Congressman Peter Rodino and Congressman Dominick Daniels.

And what could be more appropriate to this Nation's celebration of its birth than to recognize the indispensable contributions of Americans of Italian descent. After all, the Bicentennial which we are celebrating in 1976 really began with the voyage of an intrepid Italian in 1492. That beautiful name, a word which sends shivers of pride down our spines every time the flag passes by, the name "America" itself was chosen to honor a bold and brilliant Italian navigator.

And the honors in that Washington dinner accorded to Judge Sirica and Peter Rodino reminded us of something we can never forget. This country's Constitution was written largely by English-Americans in 1787. But that Constitution was saved, in large measure, by Italian-Americans in 1974 -- by Judge Sirica, by Peter Rodino and by all those who joined with them in making our Constitutional system work, bringing us through our gravest Constitutional crisis since the Civil War.

As those distinguished Italian-Americans were being honored, President Ford told a hushed audience: "We might

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just take a moment to remember certain people who can only be here in spirit tonight -- the people who would have gotten the biggest thrill out of the occasion, the parents of people like Judge Sirica and the other honorees. When you stop for a minute and think about those parents," the President went on, "about the sacrifices they made, about the hardships they endured, about the dreams they had for their children, and then you see those dreams come true in the careers of these fine men -- that is when you know exactly what America is all about."

The President's words deeply moved every man and woman in that audience. And they could be said just as well about the mothers and fathers and grandparents of every one in this audience tonight.

Just last spring I was reminded again of the roots from which your strength derives. That was when the President made me his personal emissary to the areas of Italy struck by the earthquake. The gratitude of America to Italy and to the Italian people was evidenced by the fact that, when the President of the United States sent a bill to Congress requesting the equivalent of over 20 billion lira for aid to Italy, it was overwhelmingly adopted in both Houses of Congress that very same day.

Nothing similar has ever occurred. Such speed of action reflects our sense of kinship with the Italian people.

While that assistance is important, it did not take me long to understand that what was really going to pull these proud and wonderful people through was not so much outside help as it was their own inner strength -- the same determination, the same courage to build new lives, the same capacity for hard work, the same strong qualities which motivated your families, those same qualities which explain why Americans of Italian descent became one of the strongest pillars upon which this Nation achieved greatness.

Thank you all. "Buona Fortuna."

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(AT 9:48 P.M. EDT)