

**Statement of
The Honorable Mike Doyle
National Federation of Croatian Americans
June 6, 2015**

Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to participate in this 22nd annual National Federation of Croatian Americans Assembly of Delegates.

I am pleased to welcome you to Monroeville on behalf of the people of Pennsylvania's 14th Congressional District. I also wish to extend a welcome to the dignitaries in attendance this afternoon, Bosnian Ambassador Jadranka Negodic, and the Deputy Chief of Mission from the Croatian Embassy, Mario Skunka. We are honored that you could take the time out of your busy schedules to travel to Pittsburgh to attend this year's Assembly.

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Our great, diverse population has immeasurably strengthened our nation. Croatian immigrants have made up some of our most culturally prominent communities, and we are fortunate in southwestern Pennsylvania to have such a large population of Croatian-Americans in our midst.

The United States and Croatia have had a deep connection for over a century. From large waves of immigration to the United States from Croatia in the mid-1800's and early 1900's, to the formal opening of diplomatic relations between our countries in 1992, and on to the present, the United States and Croatia have benefited from this connection. Some of the United States' most significant advances in the culinary sciences and electrical engineering have been promoted by citizens of Croatian descent. Perhaps the most well-known Croatian-American is Nikola Tesla, who pioneered the harnessing of electricity and paved the way to our modern electrical infrastructure. It is important that we remember the many significant achievements and contributions of Croatians and Croatian Americans.

The U.S. and Croatia have also had notable cooperation in military operations. In 1996, Croatia and the Minnesota National Guard entered into a partnership as part of the National Guard State Partnership Program.

This military partnership, which has strengthened the ties between Croatia and the United States, began with small unit exchanges, and has since progressed to deployments to support overseas contingency operations, assist in disaster preparedness, and support of EU operations. They have also deployed teams to offer training and support of other nations during Operation Enduring Freedom.

Pittsburgh is home to many diverse ethnic communities, including one of the largest - if

not the largest - Croatian-American populations in the United States, with about 30,000 residents of Croatian-American descent in the Greater Pittsburgh Area. This city has deep ties to Croatia, and hosts one of three honorary Consulates to Croatia in the United States. Pittsburgh is proud to have Croatia represented in our City.

The City of Pittsburgh is also the birthplace of the Croatian Association - which was founded one hundred and twenty-one years ago - and has since grown into the Croatian Fraternal Union. The Croatian Fraternal Union has aided Croatian American communities by providing much-needed financial assistance to its members, and presenting scholarships to young members pursuing higher education. The CFU has engaged in humanitarian relief efforts as well, most notably perhaps to help victims of the violence that tormented Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990's – but it has also provided relief for those in need in the United States and Canada.

The CFU has made important contributions to the preservation and sharing of Croatian culture through its cultural museum and its support for tamburitza ensembles, festivals, and fraternal lodge development across the nation. With such strong commitment to the strengthening of Croatian-American communities, it seems fitting that the NCFCA would hold its annual meeting here, in the Monroeville headquarters of the CFU, this year.

Last year, Bernard Luketich retired after over half a century of membership and more than three decades as President of the CFU. Under his distinguished leadership, the CFU had seen tremendous progress and expansion. I would be remiss not to recognize Bernie's remarkable record of service to the advancement and preservation of Croatian culture and Croatian-American relations.

I would also like to congratulate Edward Pazo on his election to the position of National President of the CFU.

A lifetime member of the CFU, Mr. Pazo has served as President of the Board of Trustees and as National Secretary and Treasurer until his election to the presidency last year. With such a distinguished record of service to the Croatian-American community, I am certain that Ed will lead the CFU well, and I wish him great success in his Presidency.

Finally, I want to recognize NCFCA President Paul Tonsetic-Kunder for his achievements in support of the Croatian American community as NCFCA President over that last two years. Paul has been a dedicated representative of all Croatian Americans as NCFCA President, as demonstrated by his efforts to promote equal economic and political treatment for Croats in Bosnia. For the last twenty-two years, the NCFCA has been instrumental in furthering the interests of Croatian Americans, and developing and protecting cultural connections in communities throughout the United States, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and elsewhere.

As a founding member of the Congressional Croatian Caucus in the U.S. House of

Representatives, I have been closely involved in the development of support for the Republic of Croatia's political and economic progress. The current Congressional Croatian Caucus Co-Chairs are Representatives Janice Hahn, of California and David Joyce, of Ohio. Their congressional districts are, like Pittsburgh, home to two of the largest Croatian American populations in the United States, and they both carry on the tradition of outstanding political and legislative leadership for the Croatian American community in the US Congress – a tradition we established with the Croatian Caucus' creation ten years ago.

Croatia has experienced a great deal of positive change, and is setting a strong example as a leader in South Central Europe as a contributor to further political stability in the Balkans. In 2005, the NFCA was instrumental in the development and passage of a bill recognizing the great strides Croatia had made in reforming its economic, political, and military structures and strengthening its democratic institutions to meet the requirements of NATO's Membership Action Plan. The bill recommended the immediate integration of the Republic of Croatia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and was a crucial stepping stone in achieving this important multilateral organizational goal for both Croatia and the US. I was pleased to support this legislation at the time as a founding Member of the Congressional Croatian Caucus.

In 2009, the Republic of Croatia was formally accepted into NATO, which guaranteed its place in our Euro-Atlantic security umbrella. I understand that it was a very proud moment for the NFCA's Leadership and Croatian Americans across the country.

On July 1, 2013, the Republic of Croatia joined the EU, sealing its place as a full member of Europe and as a new member of the Western family of nation-states.

Croatia's newly elected President, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, is the first woman President of Croatia.

She was once Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the U.S., and later became an Assistant Secretary General of NATO in Brussels. I had the honor of meeting the new President when she was Croatia's Ambassador in Washington several years ago, and I hope she will return to the U.S. for a visit soon, hopefully to Pittsburgh.

Croatia now boasts one of the most prosperous tourist industries in Europe, with tourists flocking to the many resorts and pristine beaches along its Adriatic Coast. It is my strong belief Croatia's wellbeing will continue to improve.

It's easy to see how far the Republic of Croatia has come since the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the early 1990's, but there is still more that needs to be done. Croatia and its neighbors would all benefit significantly from increased political stability and economic integration in Southeast Europe.

Please be assured we will continue to monitor developments with NFCA's help and promote these goals with the continued involvement and leadership of the Croatian Caucus in the US Congress.

The NFCA's dedication to the development of connections with Croatian communities, its promotion of positive relations between the U.S. and Croatia, and its continued representation of the interests of Croatian Americans is commendable, and I congratulate you on its many impressive achievements.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to strengthen the bonds between the United States and Croatia, celebrate and preserve Croatian culture here in southwestern Pennsylvania, and improve the lives of Croatians here and abroad.

I want to thank you all for allowing me to be a part of your 22nd Annual Assembly, extend my best wishes for your continued success, and encourage those of you who are visiting our region to explore and enjoy all the many experiences Pittsburgh has to offer.

Thank you.

###