

Hon. Joseph J. DioGuardi

Joe DioGuardi was the first Member of Congress to bring the issue of Albanian rights in the Balkans to the attention of the U.S. government through a Congressional Resolution that he sponsored as a new Member of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1986. He was also responsible for the first Congressional hearing on Kosova in 1987. Since leaving Congress in 1989, he founded the Albanian American Civic League (AACL), which he serves as the volunteer president.

DioGuardi has worked with members on both sides of the political aisle in an effort to bring lasting peace and stability to Southeast Europe. After making his first trip to Kosova in 1989, where he witnessed the Serbian occupation firsthand, he convinced Congressman Tom Lantos to travel there with him in 1990, in order to challenge the brutal policies of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic's regime in Kosova. From there, he and Lantos made the first trip of US officials to Albania in fifty years, opening the doors to democracy in this former Communist dictatorship. In Albania, the last Communist dictator, Ramiz Alia, seeking to ingratiate himself with Congressman Lantos, a Holocaust survivor from Hungary, gave him a thick file of never-before-seen newspaper clippings, photographs, and letters addressed to Albanian families, but never delivered, from the Jews that they rescued during World War II. DioGuardi immediately sent the file through an Israeli friend, Elli Streit, to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Israel, where they were later authenticated.

In 1995, DioGuardi and the Civic League's Balkan Affairs Adviser, Shirley Cloyes (whom he met in 1994 and subsequently married in 1998), sponsored the historic addition of Albania to the "Righteous among Nations" section in the U.S. Memorial Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Congressman Ben Gilman, then Chairman of the House Committee on International Relations, the late Congressman Tom Lantos, and Congressman Jerrold Nadler cochaired this commemoration. In 1996, DioGuardi and Cloyes returned to Albania with Chairman Gilman to meet with President Sali Berisha to discuss Albanian national security. In 1998, they again traveled to Albania to assess the humanitarian crisis emanating from the war in Kosova, at the request of Congressman Dana Rohrabacher.

DioGuardi testified before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1991 at a hearing about the status of Kosova (and again in May 1998), chaired by then Senator Joseph Biden. He criticized US foreign policy in the Balkans and clashed with Biden over the need for military intervention through NATO, which Biden subsequently supported.

With the start of the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in March 1999, DioGuardi and Cloyes represented the Albanian perspective on the Balkan conflict, separately and together, in more than 50 TV and radio broadcasts. In the summer of 1999, they traveled to Kosova after the NATO bombing campaign ended to assess conditions and report back to Chairman Ben Gilman. Since then, DioGuardi and Cloyes have made numerous fact-finding missions (totaling more than 40), to Albania, Kosova, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Presheva (southern Serbia) in order to report back to Congress about the social, economic, and political conditions in the region.

In 2003, the AACL was responsible for the introduction of a Congressional Resolution (H.Res. 24) and a hearing calling on the U.S. government to recognize Kosova's independence now, with the active support of then House International Relations Committee Chairman Henry Hyde and Ranking Member Tom Lantos. In August 2003, DioGuardi and Cloyes led a delegation with Congressman Lantos to

Montenegro to assess the status of Albanians there and helped to create the first Congressional hearing on this issue. They returned to Montenegro in August 2005 with Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, a senior member of the House International Relations Committee, to once again assess the status of the human and political rights of Albanians there.

In May 2005, DioGuardi, Cloyes, and the board of directors of the Albanian American Civic League and the Albanian American Foundation held a 15th anniversary dinner, “A Salute to Albanian Tolerance, Resistance, and Hope: Remembering *Besa* and the Holocaust,” in conjunction with the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps. The dinner was devoted to the role that Albanians played in rescuing Jews from the Holocaust, after which the Civic League took Kosova’s Bishop Mark Sopi, Fr. Lush Gjergji, Fr. Shan Zefi, and Kosova’s Minister of the Environment, Ardian Gjini, to Washington, DC, to testify before a House International Relations Committee hearing on the current and future status of Kosova. At the hearing, Sopi, Gjergji, Gjini, and Cloyes countered propaganda that Albanians are a Muslim majority who pose a potential fundamentalist, terrorist threat in the heart of Europe. This groundbreaking hearing was instrumental in convincing the U.S. government to support the independence of Kosova in February 2008.

In November 2007, DioGuardi and Cloyes traveled to Israel to attend the ceremony at Yad Vashem honoring the saving role of Albanians during the Holocaust. On November 28, 2012, the 100th anniversary of the independence of Albania, DioGuardi and Cloyes, together with the members of the Board of the Albanian American Civic League and Foundation, held a ceremony and dinner on Capitol Hill commemorating the unique role that Albanians played in saving Jews during the Holocaust.

Before coming to Congress, DioGuardi was a practicing Certified Public Accountant who served twenty-two years with the international accounting firm of Arthur Andersen & Co., twelve of them as a partner. In 1984, he became the first practicing CPA ever elected to the U.S. Congress. In addition to his human rights work while in the House, DioGuardi took the lead in sounding the call for federal financial reform. He was the original author of the Chief Financial Officer’s Act, signed by President George H. W. Bush in 1990, which mandated the assignment of a CFO to each major department and agency in the U.S. government. After leaving Congress in 1989, he established a nonpartisan foundation, Truth In Government, and in 1992 published a book entitled *Unaccountable Congress: It Doesn’t Add Up*. In 2009, he testified before the Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board about the fiscal unsustainability of the U.S. government. He also has served as an independent director and trustee for several publicly traded and privately held U.S. companies since leaving Congress in 1989.

DioGuardi was born and raised in the Bronx, New York, where he graduated from Fordham Prep in 1958 and Fordham University with honors in 1962. His late father, who immigrated to America in 1929, was an ethnic Italian-Albanian (known as “Arberesh”) who was born in Greci (near Naples), the oldest of the 51 Albanian-speaking towns and villages in Italy today. His late mother was a first-generation Italian American whose family immigrated to New York from Bari, Italy, in 1910.