

Dumping the Know-Nothing Amendments: Church, State, and School Reform

March 16, 2011 | 8:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Omni Parker House | 60 School Street, Boston

Keynote: Ray Flynn, Former Mayor of Boston and former U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See
Policy Talk: Prof. Patrick Wolf, 21st Century Endowed Chair in School Choice, University of Arkansas

The Pioneer Institute, in conjunction with the Parents Alliance for Catholic Education Pioneer Institute, the Black Alliance for Educational Options, Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance, and the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, hosted a discussion of school choice options in Massachusetts. Members of the educational, legislative, and public communities were invited to listen to the speakers and panelists, and ask questions.



Jim Stergios, Executive Director of the Pioneer Institute, introduced the day's discussion with an explanation of the organization's longstanding interest in the issues surrounding educational choice. "Be Not Afraid," the Pioneer Institute's most recent paper, addresses the role of Catholic schools in the education of Boston students. The paper sharpened the day's focus and emphasized the positive, unique triumphs of urban Catholic schools.

Mr. Stergios then invited keynote speaker Ray Flynn, former Mayor of Boston and former U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See, to share his experiences and offer advice for the future of the initiative. Former ambassador Flynn recalled the time he spent as a state legislator, comparing the program's objectives today to similar efforts in recent history. In order to succeed where others have encountered legislative and public opinion road blocks, he argued that it is critically important to focus on framing the issue in a way that attracts the attention of the media and local lawmakers. Rather than present the tax credits initiative as a Catholic issue, or one that would only benefit select faith-based communities, the coalition's leaders need to build an argument for broader school choice options for *all* parents on the basis of justice, hope, and a unique opportunity to represent those in society who would otherwise not have a voice. Today's real discrimination, he argued, is against the people who can't pay the cost of tuition. In the future, it will be important to mobilize young, poor, urban parents into action on behalf of their children.

Patrick Wolf, the 21st Century Endowed Chair in School Choice at the University of Arkansas, spoke about the success of urban Catholic schools. He focused on his experiences in Washington, DC and the Opportunity Scholarship program. Using research-based evidence, Dr. Wolf demonstrated the uniquely positive impact of urban Catholic schools on underserved student populations in DC. Dr. Wolf also discussed the constitutional and legislative restrictions that strictly limit the funding that goes to non-public schools. His comprehensive PowerPoint presentation, *Anti-Aid Amendments and School Choice*, offered three ultimate solutions:

- One, to convert Catholic schools to secular Charters;
- Two, to overcome legislative roadblocks to offer a personal or corporate tax credits program in Massachusetts; or,
- Thirdly and most optimistically, to work to repeal all anti-aid amendments.

A diverse panel answered questions from the crowd and addressed the points made by Mr. Flynn and Dr. Wolf. Topics of discussion included potential opposition from teachers' unions, the difficulties of attracting overwhelming public support (namely, that of Massachusetts families who would not directly benefit from a strengthening of Catholic and other non-public schools), the absence of support for students with special needs, the comparable laws and policies regarding school choice in western Europe, and how obtaining state funding would not only change Catholic schools themselves but also how it would consequently affect the budgets of local public school systems.

In recent months, the Pioneer Institute has published a number of school choice Op-Ed pieces in local newspapers. To read them, simply click on the links below.

- [Worcester Telegram Op-Ed](#)
- [Lowell Sun Op-Ed](#)
- [South Coast Today Op-Ed Piece](#)
- [Providence Journal Op-Ed Piece](#)
- [Patriot Ledger Op-Ed Piece](#)
- [MARCH Boston Herald News Article](#)
- Click on the image below to bring up a pdf of the Boston Herald Op-Ed that was printed in November 2010.



Dan Rea, WBZ radio host, recently featured a conversation about school choice in Massachusetts. Click on the links below to hear it in five segments.

1. <http://www.mediafire.com/file/gfhi9y11malt164>
2. <http://www.mediafire.com/file/t3cu3m53d1li577>
3. <http://www.mediafire.com/file/cchccitucyc9tv0>
4. <http://www.mediafire.com/file/6rsvu9561uggbbi>
5. <http://www.mediafire.com/file/2nel2sji3uu8tug>

To learn more about the progress made by other states, consult the link below.

[A useful resource that outlines the Tax Credits programs other states have adopted.](#)

Enrollment Trends in Massachusetts paper by Dr. Ken Ardon, PhD University of California, Santa Barbara:
http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/080924_ardon_enrollment_trends.pdf.