

NEBRASKA LAWMAKER DESERVES CENSURE

On November 9, the Catholic League asked Nebraska lawmakers to censure one of its state senators, Ernie Chambers. Our request for censure made national headlines in an Associated Press article and was broadcast on Nebraska television.

What provoked the league to act was a tirade Chambers launched against the Catholic Church on November 5. At issue was a debate over public monies spent on students who attend Catholic schools; scholarships are currently available to poor students who attend private schools, including two Catholic colleges.

Chambers' complaint was aimed at the "Catholic hierarchy." He accused four fellow lawmakers of an "unholy alliance" with the Catholic Church to protect the scholarship program. He said the Catholic Church was a "political entity" that was guilty of such past "crimes" as allowing segregated schools and the persecution of Galileo.

Thanks to one of Chambers' courageous colleagues, State Senator Mike Foley, we are in possession of a transcript of the discredited lawmaker's remarks. Here is a short sample of Chambers' comments made during the floor debate: "You all know that the Catholic hierarchy and church walk through here like a monster in seven league boots, tromping on the senators, intimidating the senators, calling them to task, letting them know that their soul may be at stake if they don't do exactly what they're told to do, exactly as they're told to do it."

Chambers also charged that "were it not for the Catholic muscle on this floor and in committee, which is exercised for the church rather than the state, a lot of things would not even come before us and they certainly would not receive the

votes they get. I can tell how Catholics are going to vote on issues, and I've done it with lobbyists before."

William Donohue told the media, "We are asking the Nebraska legislature to censure State Senator Ernie Chambers." The Catholic League president branded Chambers "a bigot and thus deserves to be reprimanded." "Preferably," Donohue added, "Chambers should resign."

Chambers shot back saying, "They or anyone else from the Catholic hierarchy or their flunkies can come after me any way they want, but I'm not going anywhere." In making this remark Chambers is taunting not just the Catholic League but his fellow lawmakers in Nebraska.

What we find most mind-boggling about all this is the near impossibility of having a rational debate over the merits of public monies going to Catholic schools. Over and over again we have seen the ugly head of anti-Catholicism raise itself whenever this issue is discussed. That public officials often lead the way is even more disturbing.

If Chambers isn't censured for his bigotry, his colleagues in the legislature will be to blame. We are awaiting their decision.