

# SCHOOL CHOICE LOOMS

Finally, after almost 150 years, we may rid the law of anti-Catholic legislation. The U.S. Supreme Court recently heard oral arguments on a school choice case of monumental significance. The Catholic League has been fighting for school choice since Father Virgil Blum founded the organization in 1973.

The case involves a Montana scholarship program that allows individuals and institutions to donate to a private non-profit fund. Those who participate get a tax credit, dollar for dollar, up to \$150. However, the program ran into trouble when the Montana Revenue Department declared that religious schools were excluded. It made its decision based on the state's constitution.

The Montana constitution is one of 37 state constitutions that include what is known as the Blaine Amendment. In 1876, Senator James G. Blaine of Maine tried to pass an amendment that would bar public funds from being spent for any sectarian purpose. It is not a matter of debate that his real target was Catholics: he wanted to marginalize Catholic entities. He failed, but many states accepted his thinking and passed their own Blaine Amendments.

The issue before the Supreme Court is whether a state can pass a neutral program that allows student aid and still exclude parents, who are taxpayers, from sending their children to religious schools.

It is time to put these discriminatory Blaine Amendments to rest. They were born in bigotry and have flourished in bigotry. A decision is expected in the spring.