

SCORE ONE FOR OUR SIDE ON FR. SERRA

In early July, the California state legislature announced that it would postpone a vote on the proposal to remove the statue of Fr. Junípero Serra from the U.S. Capitol. A few weeks later, California Gov. Jerry Brown, while attending an event in the Vatican, flatly said, "We're going to keep his statue in Congress. It's done as far as I'm concerned." We are happy to report that we had a hand in this outcome.

At the beginning of the summer this issue was anything but settled. California State Senator Ricardo Lara was responsible for authoring the proposal to remove the statue, but after a massive campaign protesting his decision, he requested that the vote be postponed. He cited Pope Francis' upcoming visit as the reason for the postponement.

California Assemblyman William P. Brough and Sen. Pat Bates welcomed the good news. According to a joint statement released by Brough and Bates, "Debating such a bill just before the pope's visit would have conveyed a terrible message to him and millions of Catholics around the world, contradicting California's reputation as a tolerant and welcoming place for all people."

"Now that the California legislature has agreed to a delay," Bill Donohue said at the time, "perhaps they can take this opportunity to reconsider the proposal and drop the matter entirely. The Catholic League has contended that the opposition to Fr. Serra's statue rises out of misunderstandings of his work and legacy. It was to correct such misunderstandings that I published the booklet, *The Noble Legacy of Fr. Serra*; it was distributed to interested parties in California and beyond."

In the run-up to the vote, we blanketed California with copies of Donohue's booklet. John Liston, executive director of Serra International, wrote to him expressing his gratitude. "I think it went a long way in assisting the California legislature to suspend the vote to remove the statue of Fr. Serra from Statuary Hall," he said.

We are grateful to Gov. Brown for laying anchor on this matter. As we have continually argued, Fr. Serra deserves to be honored, not vilified. He was the most prominent person to champion human rights for American Indians. That is why he will be canonized by Pope Francis on September 23rd.