

# Short Vote Short Circuits Educational Choice

*by Arthur J. Delaney President, Greater Philadelphia/ South Jersey Chapter*

With Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge pushing hard to pass his educational choice bill, the centerpiece of his educational reform plan, and with 95 affirmative votes out of the needed 102 already on the vote tally board, House Speaker Matthew Ryan ordered the June 16 vote stricken citing electronic malfunctioning of the voting machine. The outcome was obvious: the school choice proponents were between 5 and 7 votes short.

Governor Ridge admitted the loss, telling reporters, "We lost fair and square." But, he added, "Let me make one thing perfectly clear, I am not done asking. This is not the end, it's merely the end of the beginning."

The Philadelphia Chapter of the Catholic League, advancing essentially the same position that the founder of the Catholic League, Fr. Virgil C. Blum, S.J., enunciated more than twenty years ago, was in the thick of the fight. Local League officers and advisors responded to numerous letters, editorials, and op-ed pieces in addition to producing many of their own. From the outset, two officers served on the Archdiocesan School Choice Committee.

So why the short vote, and what happens now?

In the first place, the school choice proponents have a large job to do in *motivating* and *energizing* their *own* constituents. Too many of those whose rights would be most redressed by choice legislation are too laid back and apparently fail to realize the gravity of the matter.

Most of the arguments offered by the anti-choice coalition are

contrived emotional appeals created to make the public feel threatened and therefore panicked into negative voting.

The real enemy in this matter is the monopoly in educational funding which our political policies have allowed to develop over the years. Eventually such policies will wreck both the present established public school system and the great private school system, endangering the common good of the nation.

Things are beginning to change, however. The educational monopoly that has been thwarting Educational Choice is beginning to crumble. George Voinovich in Ohio has already signed a bill creating a pilot voucher program in Cleveland and Tommy Thompson signed into law a dramatic *expansion* for the Milwaukee voucher program. We in Pennsylvania shall revisit and continue to present this legislation until justice is done and our rights are not only recognized but honored! As Cardinal Bevilacqua put it, "We are certainly closer than ever before."

Second, school choice proponents in Pennsylvania face an enormously powerful coalition of anti-choice special interest groups. Such groups as the AFL/CIO, ACLU, PAC's, AFT, PaFT, PFT, NEA, PSEA, NAACP, Pa. Jewish Coalition, Pa. Black Caucus, Pa. Council of Churches, Public School Administrators, League of Women Voters, coupled with a large number of those representing good, old-fashioned bias, are among the opponents.