



## **Group challenges 'Know Nothing' governor's anti-Catholic legacy**

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For years, the portrait of the 19th century Massachusetts Gov. Henry Gardner has hung in the State House just outside the House of Representatives. But that, as well the legacy Gardner has left in the Massachusetts constitution, are things that Catholic advocates and the Pioneer Institute say need to change.

"It should trouble Massachusetts residents that the portrait of Gov. Henry Gardner, a member of the nativist 'Know-Nothing' party, hangs in the State House right next to the main entrance of the Massachusetts House of Representatives," said Pioneer Institute Executive Director Jim Stergios.

"Just as the portrait should be moved from its prominent spot on the wall of our State House, so should two bigoted amendments that are the Know-Nothings' legacy be struck from the commonwealth's Constitution," he continued.

The Know-Nothing party, as it was commonly called due to the party's semi-secretive origins, was an American political party that was prominent in the 1850s. At a time when many people in the United States were Protestants, the party deeply opposed the large number of Catholic immigrants flowing into the country.

The party gained power quickly in a number of states, including Massachusetts, in the mid-1850s, although their political prominence was short lived. Yet, for the few years the party members did have political power, they passed laws and amendments that sought to oppress Catholics and immigrants in the country.

Gov. Henry Gardner, who was in office from 1855 to 1858, passed what some say was an anti-

Catholic amendment to the Massachusetts constitution that barred the state from using public money to fund schools run by "any religious sect."

That amendment was superseded by another one in 1917 that bans the use of public funds going to primary or secondary schools, hospitals, or other "charitable or religious undertaking" that is not publicly owned or under the control of "public officers or public agents authorized by the Commonwealth or federal authority or both."

The Pioneer Institute, a privately funded and independent research organization, is calling for those amendments to be repealed, and the portrait of Gov. Gardner to be moved.

The institute held a short forum on Aug. 1 at the State House to advocate for these changes that headlined former Ambassador to the Vatican and Boston Mayor Ray Flynn.

"There is no issue more central to the American Dream than giving poor, working-class and minority kids a chance to get a good education," said Flynn.

"I am horrified not only that we have bigoted nativist amendments in our state constitution that block greater school choice, but that Gov. Henry Gardner's picture hangs outside the chamber where I once served," he said.

Several other prominent members of the community also spoke at the event, including Gerard Robinson, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise; Con Chapman, a partner at Burns and Levinson in Boston; former New Hampshire state Rep. Jason Bedrick and Grace Cotter Regan, the head of school at St. Mary's in Lynn.