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High Taxes Are Closing Catholic Schools

By James Ostrowski

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Catholic school closings have become a regular feature of life in Greater Buffalo along with businesses closing, people leaving and homes being abandoned. So much so that there is rarely any analysis of whether public policy has contributed to these closings.

There are presently 94 Catholic schools in the Buffalo Diocese, down from 111 in 1996. (*Source:* Diocese of Buffalo). The latest victim was Holy Spirit School in North Buffalo which opened its doors in 1914.

While in a free society there are many conceivable reasons why demand for a certain product or service has declined, common sense suggests that economic and political factors have played a major role in the Catholic school closings.

First, there is the simple fact of population loss. Unless we assume that only non-Catholics have left the area in recent years (an absurdity), the population exodus, driven in large part by the declining economy, has surely deprived Catholic schools of numerous potential students. As I explain in my book, *Political Class Dismissed*, our once-thriving economy has been eviscerated by high taxes and burdensome regulations.

Those Catholics who remain in the area simultaneously face rising tuition costs, exorbitant taxes and a declining number of high-wage jobs. High taxes reduce the discretionary income that families could otherwise spend on private schools.

It is true that over the years Catholic school tuition has risen as a result of the declining population of religious orders, a factor that is not related to public policy. However, at any given level of tuition, there will be a lower demand if fewer people have fewer discretionary dollars in their pockets.

Even those who are indifferent to the traditional prerogative of Catholics to choose their own schools, should be concerned that the closing of Catholic schools means higher public school budgets. See, A. Franczyk, "Catholic schools saving millions, educators say," *Business First* (September 2, 1996).

For years, the taxpaying families that supported Catholic schools were actually subsidizing families that utilized public schools. With the current trend, that annual subsidy is declining and non-Catholic families will have to pick up the slack. Thus, this issue should be of general concern, regardless of one's religious affiliation or preference.

Catholic schools have been a critical part of life in Western New York for well over a century and have produced many of our finest leaders. That Catholic schools are closing, at least in part because of high taxes, is simply one example among many of how big government is threatening our way of life in Western New York.

The good news: Free Buffalo is on the case!

James Ostrowski is an attorney and author of Political Class Dismissed.