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NEWS RELEASE

A SCHOOLHOUSE DIVIDED: FIRST GILVARY SYMPOSIUM TO FOCUS ON SCHOOL CHOICE DEBATE

DAYTON, Ohio — “A Schoolhouse Divided: The Debate Over School Choice” will bring together lawyers, educators, taxpayers and policymakers for a town hall-style symposium at the University of Dayton School of Law Oct. 17-18.

The symposium is likely to coincide with national attention to the school-choice debate. The U.S. Supreme Court may hear arguments this fall on the Ohio Pilot Project Scholarship Program. In December, the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Cleveland school voucher program was unconstitutional, saying it violated the separation of church and state. Most of the schools participating in the Cleveland voucher program have religious affiliations.

U.S. Rep. John Boehner, chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee, will give opening remarks at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 17, in the Mathias Heck Courtroom. Experts, including lawyers on both sides of the Cleveland school voucher case, will serve as panelists for the event, the first Hon. James J. Gilvary Symposium on Law, Religion and Social Justice.

The events are free, but advance registration is requested by Oct. 9. Lawyers may earn 1.5 hours of general continuing education credit. Call (937) 229-3793 or register online at www.law.udayton.edu/conferences/gilvary. The site also includes a discussion forum. As a way to jump start the discussion, Think TV will re-broadcast an hourlong Frontline series documentary, “The Battle Over School Choice,” tentatively slated for 10 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 10.

National experts at the symposium include:

- Edward Foley, former state solicitor of Ohio. He briefed and argued the Cleveland school voucher case in both the federal district court and court of appeals. Foley is a professor of law at Ohio State University.
- Elliott Minberg, vice president and legal and education policy director for People for the American Way, a national organization that promotes constitutional and civil rights. Minberg has served as co-counsel in religious freedom cases, including challenges to school voucher programs in Ohio and other states.
- Michael Guerra, president of the National Catholic Educational Association and former executive director of NCEA’s secondary school department. He is an outspoken advocate for school choice and educational reform.

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- Bella Rosenberg, assistant to the president of the American Federation of Teachers. She's a critic of vouchers and other school-choice initiatives.

The panelists will speak at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 17, followed by a 9 p.m. town hall discussion with audience members and a reception. Thomas Lasley, dean of UD's School of Education and Allied Professions, will moderate a round-table discussion on school-choice issues by the featured speakers and local education experts, from noon to 1 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 18, in the Mathias Heck Courtroom.

School choice, an issue that also includes charter schools, touches on economic, moral, constitutional and social justice concerns, said Lori Shaw, a UD law school lecturer who is leading the symposium planning committee. "People feel passionately about this issue, and there are valid arguments on both sides," Shaw said.

Shaw hopes for civilized debate on a complex issue. Proponents of school choice say the system encourages individual schools to experiment and develop effective educational approaches while allowing parents to select the school environments that work best for their children. Choice, proponents say, fosters competition, an avenue for improving public schools.

Critics worry about the costs to children of such educational experimentation. They counter that choice may drain resources from already struggling public schools, leaving even more children behind.

"I would hope the symposium makes people think and take action," Shaw said.

The symposium honors the legacy of one of Dayton's most respected judges. Gilvary, a 1951 UD graduate, a Montgomery County Common Pleas Court judge and former chair of UD's board of trustees, died in 1999.

Gilvary, "in his tenure on the bench, had to balance law, religion and social justice issues and look at the impact of their application to the case and society," Shaw noted. "The goal of the symposium is to help participants "ponder legal issues that have religious and social consequences and to look at areas of law that need to be changed and take steps to change them."

In future years, the Gilvary Symposium might take up topics such as a living wage, international policies, the death penalty or gun control, Shaw said. A fund-raising effort, led by UD law school alumnus Tom Whelley, is under way to underwrite future symposia. Julie Gilvary, the judge's widow, members of the class of 1951 and the Dayton legal community, including the firms of Freund, Freeze & Arnold, Faruki, Gilliam & Ireland and Thompson Hine made significant gifts to launch the symposium.

"Judge Gilvary was a beloved figure," Shaw said, noting that he had served as president of the Dayton Bar Association and the Legal Aid Society of Dayton. "We have received donations from all over. It's a real tribute to Judge Gilvary."