



A Union of Professionals

## The Real Betsy DeVos: Background Information

### BETSY DEVOS LACKS EXPERIENCE WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

#### **DeVos' children did not attend public school.**

Betsy and Dick DeVos did not send any of their four children to the local public schools, even though their local public schools are highly ranked. Betsy DeVos said that her two daughters were home-schooled for a number of years.<sup>1</sup>

#### **DeVos did not attend public schools.**

DeVos attended a private Christian school in Michigan and graduated with a bachelor's degree from a private Christian college.<sup>2</sup>

#### **DeVos would be the first secretary of education not to have experience teaching or working in state or federal education policy.**

President Jimmy Carter created the Cabinet-level position in 1979, appointing Shirley Hufstедler, a former law professor. Six of the previous appointees had K-12 or higher education teaching experience prior to their appointment. Four had experience working at a public institution and guiding educational policy.<sup>3</sup>

#### **DeVos believes there are “way too many traditional public schools.”**

Responding to an audience member question at a 2015 SXSWedu conference panel, DeVos claimed that “If you aren’t able to attract people and students and have them stay and be a committed part of your school, then maybe there’s a reason that you shouldn’t exist. The reality is today that we don’t have any of those kinds of situations. There’s way, way, way too many traditional public schools that are open simply because they exist and because they are continuing to receive taxpayer dollars with no accountability for results.”<sup>4</sup>

#### **DeVos' statements evince a lack of understanding of education policy: She believes that the teaching profession is “very self-serving” and that vouchers will magically make teaching a more attractive profession.**

From her comments at a 2015 SXSWedu appearance:

As far as good teachers and recognizing good teachers, I couldn’t agree with you more that an excellent teacher should be a very highly valued individual. And I think that teaching has become very deprofessionalized over the years, as it’s been part of an industry that has been very closed to itself and, I would argue, very self-serving. I believe that opening up the system will go a long way toward placing a renewed value on the quality of a good teacher. And I believe that more young people will be encouraged to enter the field of teaching if we have the kind of innovation and creativity in education in general that I think would be unleashed by the notion of full, open educational choice.<sup>5</sup>

#### **DeVos has said “government really sucks” and “we don’t fire teachers enough.”**

Prepared remarks from DeVos at 2015 SXSWedu show that she claimed that she claimed that “government really sucks” and argued for firing more teachers.<sup>6</sup>

### DEVOS DRAINED MONEY FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

#### **New York Times calls DeVos a champion of diverting money from public schools.**

The *New York Times* recently opined that “[i]t is hard to find anyone more passionate about the idea of steering public dollars away from traditional public schools than Betsy DeVos.”<sup>7</sup>

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### **DeVos pressured the Michigan Legislature not to postpone a tax cut for school funding.**

DeVos is described as the leading voice against postponing a 2003 tax cut for six months in order to “spare schools and local governments.” From the *State Net Capitol Journal*:

PARTY LEADERS’ FEUD INTENSIFIES: MICHIGAN Gov. Jennifer Granholm’s (D) efforts to delay a cut in the state income tax has intensified an ongoing feud between the Democratic leader and state GOP Chairwoman Betsy DeVos. Granholm reached an agreement two weeks ago with Sen. Maj. Leader Ken Sikkema (R) to postpone the state’s planned income tax cut for six months to spare schools and local governments from severe budget cuts in exchange for new tax breaks for businesses. Having lost the battle to stop the tax cut delay in the GOP-held Senate, DeVos initiated an aggressive campaign to kill the plan in the GOP-controlled House. Her efforts appear to have paid off; last week, House Republicans voted down the Granholm-Sikkema deal, instead approving additional cuts in spending on education and other programs roughly equal to the \$77 million that would be saved by suspending the tax rollback.<sup>8</sup>

### **DeVos wants state education funds spent on private schools.**

In a 2013 interview, DeVos said that she had “never been more optimistic” about the “publicly funded, private-choice” education programs and that the movement’s growth was accelerating.<sup>9</sup> In an opinion piece, she wrote, “We need reforms that provide better educational opportunities and improve academic outcome for our students. ... We should expand school choice so students could use state education funds at the public or private school of their choice.”<sup>10</sup>

### **DeVos called traditional public schools a “dead end.”**

In a 2015 speech at SXSWedu, DeVos described six “inconvenient truths” that she attributed to the United States public school system. One of the six was a view that traditional public schools were a “dead end.”<sup>11</sup>

### **DeVos has been described as the “four-star general” of the voucher movement.**

In 2011, *Alternet* described DeVos as “the four-star general of the pro-voucher movement.”<sup>12</sup>

### **DeVos’ Great Lakes Education Project created a Twitter hashtag (#EndDPS) urging legislators to eliminate the Detroit Public Schools.**

The hashtag was created during the 2015 fight to save Detroit Public Schools. DeVos and the Great Lakes Education Project—a lobbying group she created and sat on the board of—advocated against a central oversight body for Detroit’s charter schools and traditional public schools called the Detroit Education Commission.<sup>13</sup> On Twitter, GLEP advocated for eliminating the school district, tagging tweets with the hashtag #EndDPS.<sup>14</sup>

### **DeVos claimed that “we need to retire” Detroit Public Schools.**

Detroit Public Schools, under significant financial strain from the school choice policies pushed by DeVos, was in need of a restructuring in 2015. Instead of saving the school district, she argued in an editorial that DPS should be eliminated, proposing that “[r]ather than create a new traditional school district to replace the failed DPS, we should liberate all students from this woefully under-performing district model and provide in its place a system of schools where performance and competition create high-quality opportunities for kids.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Great Lakes Education Project worked to pass legislation that made it harder for traditional school districts to raise taxes for public schools.**

GLEP and the pro-privatization Mackinac Center for Public Policy, both funded by the DeVoses, supported a “contentious bill” in the 2015 Michigan state legislative session that included a last-minute provision to “prevent school districts and other public bodies from distributing factual information about a millage request or ballot proposal, 60 days before an election.” According to the Detroit Free Press, “It’s already illegal for local governments and school districts to use public funds to campaign for or against a ballot proposal. Opponents of the legislation say to also ban the dissemination of factual information is overkill and could violate free-speech rights.” The DeVos-supported groups “say so-called neutral information frequently crosses the line and the intent is to stop taxpayer-funded propaganda.”<sup>16</sup>

## **BETSY DEVOS WILL BE BAD FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL CHILDREN:**

### **DeVos has been called “one of the architects of Detroit’s charter school system.”**

DeVos was “one of the architects of Detroit’s charter school system,” which is “what even charter advocates acknowledge is the biggest school reform disaster in the country.” According to a 2016 *New York Times* report, “Detroit schools have long been in decline academically and financially. But over the past five years, divisive politics and educational ideology and a scramble for money have combined to produced [sic] a public education fiasco that is perhaps unparalleled in the United States.” Detroit’s “unchecked growth of charters has created a glut of schools competing for some of the nation’s poorest students, enticing them

to enroll with cash bonuses, laptops, raffle tickets for iPads and bicycles. Leaders of charter and traditional schools alike say they are being cannibalized, fighting so hard over students and the limited public dollars that follow them that no one thrives.”<sup>17</sup> Detroit’s cap on charter schools was lifted in 2011.

**DeVos was the “main driver” of Michigan’s “Wild West” charter school system.**

Douglas N. Harris, a professor of economics at Tulane University and the founding director of the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, wrote that the situation in Detroit “is not entirely Ms. DeVos’s fault, of course, but she is widely seen as the main driver of the entire state’s school overhaul. She devised Detroit’s system to run like the Wild West. It’s hardly a surprise that the system, which has almost no oversight, has failed. Schools there can do poorly and still continue to enroll students. Also, after more than a decade of Ms. DeVos’s getting her way on a host of statewide education policies, Michigan has the dubious distinction of being one of five states with declining reading scores.”<sup>18</sup>

**Charter school leaders have not supported DeVos over concerns about her opposition to regulation.**

The Atlantic has noted that charter school leaders have remained quiet on the DeVos nomination, despite her long history as a school choice supporter. The article points out that “[charter school operator Steve] Evangelista and others in the [charter] sector also disagree with DeVos’s apparent stance on charter-school regulation, which she fought in her home state of Michigan.”<sup>19</sup>

**BETSY DEVOS WILL BE ESPECIALLY BAD FOR LGBT STUDENTS.**

**DeVos sits on board of the Acton Institute, which sponsored a conference held by an anti-gay hate group.**

DeVos is a board member of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty and has donated \$1,284,750 to the institute from the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation. In 2010, the Acton Institute sponsored a conference by Gary DeMar’s American Vision.<sup>20</sup> DeMar is listed in the Southern Poverty Law Center’s “extremist files” for his extreme anti-gay views and his belief that “the execution of abortionists and their parents” should be a “long-term goal.”

**DeVos and her family are credited with launching the Family Research Council.**

Jeremy Scahill, in his book *Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, quotes the Family Research Council’s Gary Bauer as saying, “I can say without hesitation that without Ed and Elsa [Ed and Elsa Prince, parents of Betsy DeVos] and their wonderful children, there simply could not be a Family Research Council.”<sup>21</sup>

**Advocate called Trump’s pick of DeVos “distressing to LGBT people.”**

Noting her contributions to the 2004 effort to amend the Michigan Constitution to ban same-sex marriage, as well as her ties to vouchers and the Christian right, the *Advocate* called DeVos an “anti-gay activist.”<sup>22</sup>

**DeVos family listed as sponsors of conference promoting “ex-gay” conversion therapy.**

“The DeVoses were cited as sponsoring an annual conference advocating ‘ex-gay’ or reparative therapy, the discredited practice of trying to somehow alter a persons’ sexual orientation. (The American Psychological Association has warned that the dangerous therapy poses serious risk to youth, and reparative therapy on minors has been banned in several states.)”<sup>23</sup>

**Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation has donated \$275,000 to Focus on the Family since 1999.**

Focus on the Family has written papers defending “ex-gay” conversion therapy and has called homosexuality “preventable and treatable.”<sup>24</sup>

**Dick and Betsy DeVos donated \$200,000 to anti-gay-marriage ballot initiative in Michigan.**

“In 2004 Betsy and Dick DeVos (son of Richard, Doug’s brother) led the effort to put the anti-marriage amendment on the ballot and contributed over \$200,000 to the campaign to enshrine discrimination into the Michigan constitution.”<sup>25</sup>

**DeVos has said gay marriage is wrong because “children need a mother and a father to love and care for them.”**

DeVos’ speech at the 2004 Michigan Republican state convention contained attacks on marriage equality, according to the *Associated Press*.<sup>26</sup> She said “Republicans support traditional marriage,” and “We support marriage between one man and one woman because that is the way God set it up and because children need a mother and a father to love and care for them.”

**DeVos family donated \$500,000 to the National Organization for Marriage and \$125,000 to the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy.**

“In 2012, members of the LGBTQ community called for a boycott of the family’s Amway company and its affiliates after news broke that the DeVoses had donated \$500,000 to anti-marriage equality organization National Organization for Marriage

(NOM).<sup>27</sup> NOM's founder and former president, Maggie Gallagher, also founded the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy,<sup>28</sup> which has filed amicus briefs arguing against gay marriage.<sup>29</sup>

## **DEVOS SUPPORTS FOR-PROFIT PUBLIC EDUCATION:**

**DeVos' American Federation for Children's Policy Summit received sponsorships from K12 Inc. and Connections Academy.<sup>30</sup>**

**At a 2001 meeting of Christian right-wing funders known as The Gathering, Dick DeVos praised K12 Inc. as a charter school operator that would work well with home-school and Christian curriculums.<sup>31</sup>**

**Dick and Betsy DeVos were pre-IPO investors in K12 Inc., according to Dick DeVos' 2006 financial disclosures.<sup>32</sup>**

**DeVos called troubled for-profit operator Charter Schools USA a "great provider," and her lobbying group accepted \$200,000 in donations from the head of another troubled operator, White Hat Management.**

DeVos referred to Charter Schools USA, the troubled for-profit company whose CEO once owned a yacht called "Fishing 4 Schools," as a "great provider."<sup>33</sup>

Head of the troubled Ohio charter school operator White Hat Management, David Brennan, donated \$200,000 to DeVos' All Children Matter.

According to the *Columbus Dispatch*, Brennan gave \$200,000 to All Children Matter between 2006 and 2008.<sup>34</sup> Brennan, a former GOP operative, is the head of White Hat Management, a for-profit charter school operator. Brennan's schools are such poor performers that even the heavily Republican *Columbus Dispatch* editorial board has called out White Hat schools for "chronic poor performance."<sup>35</sup> White Hat is known for owning the property of schools they contract with, an arrangement that one Ohio Supreme Court justice called "a fraudulent conversion of public funds into personal profit."<sup>36</sup> A clip of Brennan claiming that "education is first, last, and always a business" was shown on John Oliver's "Last Week Tonight" episode on charter schools.<sup>37</sup>

**DeVos has consistently supported and invested in for-profit online charter schools, which have a demonstrably poor educational track record.**

In addition to being an early investor in for-profit online charter school operator K12 Inc., DeVos has repeatedly voiced her support for online charter schools. During a 2015 interview with a Florida lobbyist, she said she supported a "full range" of education options including "charter schools, online schools, virtual schools."<sup>38</sup> She was a board member of Jeb Bush's Foundation for Excellence in Education, a group that advocated for "online learning and virtual charter schools."<sup>39</sup> She was also a board member of the American Federation for Children, which includes support for "virtual learning" in its vision statement.<sup>40</sup>

DeVos' support for virtual charter schools should trouble parents, as a 2015 study from Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes found that the "majority of online charter school students had far weaker academic growth in both math and reading," a gulf that cost virtual school students 72 days of learning in reading and 180 days of learning in math per year, using a 180-day school year.<sup>41</sup>

1 <http://www.prwatch.org/news/2016/11/131805-things-know-about-billionaire-betsy-devos-trump-choice-education>

2 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/betsy-devos-trump-administration\\_us\\_583605d6e4b09b6056001b00](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/betsy-devos-trump-administration_us_583605d6e4b09b6056001b00)

3 The appointees: Shirley Hufstetler (visiting professor of law), Terrel Bell (former high school teacher), William Bennett (professor at Boston University), Lauro Cavazos (professor at Tufts and the Medical College of Virginia), Lamar Alexander (former president of the University of Tennessee), Richard Riley (worked on public education as governor of South Carolina), Rod Paige (professor at Hinds Community College), Margaret Spellings (chief education advisor in Texas), Arne Duncan (CEO of Chicago Public Schools), John King (three years as a classroom teacher).

4 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f\\_2nH4aLLDc&t=41m35s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_2nH4aLLDc&t=41m35s)

5 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f\\_2nH4aLLDc&t=31m41s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_2nH4aLLDc&t=31m41s)

6 <http://www.federationforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Betsy-SXSWedu-speech-final-remarks.pdf?e40fe9>

7 <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/23/us/politics/betsy-devos-trumps-education-pick-has-steered-money-from-public-schools.html>

8 State Net Capitol Journal, December 22, 2003

9 [http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence\\_in\\_philanthropy/interview\\_with\\_betsy\\_devos](http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence_in_philanthropy/interview_with_betsy_devos)

10 <http://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/2016/02/22/devos-families-need-dps-retread/80788340/>

11 <http://www.federationforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Betsy-SXSWedu-speech-final-remarks.pdf?e40fe9>

12 [http://www.alternet.org/story/150868/the\\_devos\\_family%3A\\_meet\\_the\\_super\\_wealthy\\_right\\_wingers\\_working\\_with\\_the\\_religious\\_right\\_to\\_kill\\_public\\_education](http://www.alternet.org/story/150868/the_devos_family%3A_meet_the_super_wealthy_right_wingers_working_with_the_religious_right_to_kill_public_education)

13 <http://www.metrotimes.com/Blogs/archives/2016/05/17/lawmakers-deciding-the-future-of-detroit-schools-accepted-thousands-from-pro-charter-devos-family>

14 [https://twitter.com/GLEP\\_MI/status/734803525599932416](https://twitter.com/GLEP_MI/status/734803525599932416)

- 15 <http://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/2016/02/22/devos-families-need-dps-retread/80788340/>
- 16 <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/01/03/sign-veto-five-years-snyder-faces-another-test/77837596/>
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