A Union of Professionals

American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
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January 5, 2017

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20015

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, I strongly urge you to oppose the nomination of Betsy DeVos to be secretary of education. DeVos has neither the qualifications nor the experience to serve as the nation's secretary of education, and her record clearly demonstrates that, if confirmed, she will undermine and seek to privatize public education.

AFT members are committed to protecting and expanding a public education system that reinforces our country's promise of economic opportunity, democratic values rooted in pluralism, and equality; that nurtures children in a safe learning environment that is adequately supported, not defunded or privatized; and that includes public higher education that is affordable and inclusive and promotes free inquiry.

And AFT members are not alone. In a recent poll conducted by Hart Research Associates, American voters said they believe we need a secretary of education whose priority is strengthening and improving all public schools (78 percent) rather than someone whose priority is helping parents send their children to private and nontraditional public schools (8 percent). Seventy-three percent of voters want a secretary of education who will ensure every child has access to a good public school in his or her community that provides safe conditions, an enriching curriculum with both academics and extras such as music and art, and effective teachers.

DeVos' education agenda is antithetical to the direction Americans want the next secretary of education to take. First, she is simply not qualified to serve as America's secretary of education. She has no public education experience or training of any kind; she has never been a teacher or school administrator, served on any public board of education, or even attended a public school.

Indeed, DeVos' only involvement in education has been funding efforts to undermine and privatize our public schools. The job of the secretary of education is to support and strengthen America's public education system. Voters want strong neighborhood public schools that are available to all children, not private school vouchers and for-profit charters. However, DeVos and her family for decades have wielded their billions to undermine public education, while promoting private, for-

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The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

profit schooling with little or no regulation, transparency, accountability or respect for civil rights or the Constitution's separation of church and state.

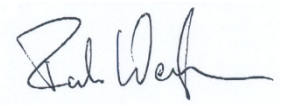
To this end, DeVos has made private school vouchers a priority. In 2000, she and her husband funded a multimillion-dollar and ultimately unsuccessful ballot initiative to create school vouchers in Michigan. Voters rejected the plan to shift public dollars to private schools by a margin of 69 to 31 percent.

Michigan voters knew then, as we know now, that voucher programs have proven ineffective, lack accountability to taxpayers, and deprive students of rights provided to public school students. Sixty-eight percent of those polled in the recent Hart Research survey stated that DeVos should be opposed because of her support for vouchers. Vouchers divert desperately needed resources away from public schools, which serve all children, to fund the education of a few select voucher students. In addition, private school vouchers violate the fundamental guarantee of religious freedom by funding religious schools with public money.

DeVos has used her influence to push an anti-public education agenda that defunds and destabilizes public schools and communities. It is clear that DeVos, who has never had any experience in public education or even attended or sent her children to public schools, and who seeks to undermine public schools, is not qualified to be the head of the U.S. Department of Education.

Again, I urge you to vote no on the confirmation of Betsy DeVos.

Sincerely,



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