

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

## PRESS RELEASE 682#

### BETSY De VOS; TRUMP'S EDUCATION SECRETARY:

#### PRO-VOUCHER, PRO-CHARTER

#### ANTI-PUBLIC EDUCATION

On Wednesday 23 November 2016, President-elect Donald Trump of the USA announced the appointment of **Betsy DeVos**, as his Education secretary. This lady has a very public record of her advocacy in the K-12 education space. The former chairwoman of the Michigan Republican Party, DeVos, has worked through her advocacy group to advance an agenda promoting so-called school choice: Programs that provide free alternatives to public elementary and high school education either through public charter schools — which are typically privately managed, but publicly funded — or [by providing families with public funds to pay for private schools.](#)

Who is she?

Here are five things to know about Besty DeVos, whom [President-elect Donald Trump picked for education secretary](#) on Wednesday: She is

#### 1. A top Michigan GOP fundraiser

As a member of the DeVos clan of west Michigan, she is one of the top Republican fundraisers in the state. The family has given millions over the years – including about \$10 million in the most recent political cycle – to elect Republicans, including to the campaign efforts of two other presidential candidates, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla. During the presidential campaign, Betsy and Dick DeVos [never publicly supported Trump](#), although other members of DeVos clan [donated \\$245,000 to a fund](#) to help elect Trump and other Republican candidates.

She has

## 2. A husband who ran (unsuccessfully) for governor...

DeVos' husband, Dick, is the son of Amway co-founder Richard DeVos. He ran as the Republican nominee for Michigan governor against the incumbent, Jennifer Granholm, in 2006, and lost. She also has

## 3. Other interesting family ties

She's the daughter of west Michigan businessman Edgar Prince, whose auto supplies company made lighted visors and many other products before being sold to Johnson Controls in 1996. Her brother, Erik Prince, is a former Navy SEAL who founded the private security company Blackwater, which came under criticism for actions during the Iraq War.

The family foundation reported a \$55.7 million balance in 2014, the most recent filing available, including various investments with a fair-market value of \$51.7 million. She is:

## 4. A big vouchers advocate...

In 2000, Betsy and Dick DeVos funded an unsuccessful statewide ballot initiative to amend the state Constitution to allow tax dollars to be used for private school tuition through education vouchers. They have since advocated for school vouchers in other states.

In 2012, Dick DeVos led the charge in getting the Legislature to make Michigan a right-to-work state, eliminating work rules that made financial support of unions a condition of employment for teachers in public schools.

The DeVoses founded their own charter high school, the West Michigan Aviation Academy, located on the grounds of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport in Grand Rapids. Finally, she is:

## 5. And a backer of school choice and Charter schools

The DeVoses founded their own charter high school, the West Michigan Aviation Academy, located on the grounds of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport in Grand Rapids. She and her husband have been big backers of charter schools in Michigan, heavily funding candidates who share their views, and pushing back against efforts to require more accountability of charter schools.

DeVos is chair of the American Federation for Children, a Washington, D.C.-based single-issue organization devoted to expanding school of choice options across the country.

Speaking in July during a school choice forum at the Republican National Convention in Ohio, DeVos accused teachers unions of holding back innovation in education and called them "a formidable foe" at both state and national levels.

In Michigan, DeVos sits on the board of the Great Lakes Education Project, which has operated as her influential family's school choice advocacy arm in Lansing. For the past 14 years, the group has been actively advocating its education reform agenda in both the Capitol and state House and Senate elections, particularly Republican primaries

## Opposition to Appointment

Lily Eskelsen García, president of the National Education Association, meanwhile, issued a statement saying DeVos has done more to undermine public education than support students.

“She has lobbied for failed schemes, like vouchers — which take away funding and local control from our public schools — to fund private schools at taxpayers’ expense. These schemes do nothing to help our most-vulnerable students while they ignore or exacerbate glaring opportunity gaps,” Garcia said.

DeVos has consistently pushed a corporate agenda to privatize, de-professionalize and impose cookie-cutter solutions to public education, Garcia said.

“By nominating Betsy DeVos, the Trump administration has demonstrated just how out of touch it is with what works best for students, parents, educators and communities,” she said.

David Hecker, president of the American Federation of Teachers in Michigan, called the intended appointment “devastating for public education” because DeVos has devoted her career to “undercutting” public education by advocating for private charter schools.

Hecker said he feels “bad that now the remaining 49 states” will have their education policy influenced by someone intent on enriching those in the private charter school industry.

“She wants her million and billionaire friends to profit off of childhood education,” Hecker said.

The Michigan Democratic Party also criticized the intended appointment in a statement Wednesday.

The party’s chairman, Brandon Dillon, said DeVos is someone “who has made it her life’s work to channel her family’s massive wealth toward destroying Michigan’s public education system, and now she’s about to oversee the policy and direction of education for the entire United States.

“She has consistently encouraged and enabled attacks on public school teachers and our children’s right to a quality public education, to line the pockets of corporate charter school investors and make her family’s extremely conservative views part of a mainstream curriculum.” For further information see

<http://www.freep.com/story/news/education/2016/11/23/betsy-devos-trump-five-things/94350382/>

On the **Diane Ravitch blog**, Mitchell Robinson, a professor of music education at Michigan State University. [writes here](#) about the Betsy DeVos that the people of Michigan know, the one who wants to monetize education spending and voucherize the schools so that families can spend their education dollars wherever they want.

Robinson writes:

*The news that Donald Trump has named Betsy DeVos as his choice for Secretary of Education is just another brick in the wall for Mr. Trump's plan to turn the US into a giant flea market, selling off the bits and pieces of a once great nation for parts to the highest bidders.*

*I had to laugh in recent weeks as folks set off alarms at the rumors of Michelle Rhee or Eva Moskowitz being appointed to this position. The truth is Rhee and Moskowitz are mere amateurs at this school privatization scheme. For Pete's sake, Ms. Moskowitz still spends her days actually stepping foot in to schools in NYC, terrorizing students and teachers. And Rhee, a former Teach for America recruit, whose "go to" classroom management technique was taping the mouths of her reluctant "scholars", has been in hiding after a disastrous run as Superintendent of DC's schools, an experiment that ended in failure for all concerned, and threatened to dim the rising star of the corporate reform movement—until recently, when she and her icky hubby reemerged for a photo op at Trump Tower.*

*Betsy DeVos, on the other hand, is a pro at this game. And unlike Rhee and Moskowitz, who depend on the kindness—and financial backing—of others, Betsy has the financial wherewithall to bankroll her own plans. Like her new boss, Ms. DeVos—allegedly—won't be beholden to any "special interests" in her efforts to turn our public education system into a Sotheby's auction.*

*Rest assured, also, that unlike Ms. Moskowitz, Betsy DeVos hasn't been spending any of her valuable time in... "schools" lately, and certainly hasn't been close enough to a real, live student to tape them up—even though I'm sure she approves of Ms. Rhee's approach to building a safe and welcoming classroom learning environment. No, Ms. DeVos has been busy dreaming up new ways to capitalize on the billions of taxpayer dollars currently being wasted on children, teachers, and schools, and helping her puppet in the Michigan governor's residence with his plan to destroy the state's schools.*

*Remember, Michigan is the state where the Governor poisoned the water in one of the city's largest cities, and more than 400 days later has still refused to replace a single water pipe. And the state whose lawyers recently claimed—and I swear I'm not making this up—that the state's children had no "fundamental right to literacy."*

*This is Betsy DeVos' and Rick Snyder's dream for how a state should govern—that a state and its elected officials have no responsibility to provide clean drinking water or a quality education for its children. It's a dystopian vision of the future that absolves a state's leaders and institutions from providing, maintaining, repairing, and supporting its schools, roads, water systems, and infrastructure, or protecting its most vulnerable citizens from the permanent damage caused by a poisoned water supply.*

*So, if you want to know what our new federal education policy is going to look like under Secretary DeVos, what has happened in Michigan under Gov. Snyder—and bankrolled and supported by the DeVos family—provides perhaps the best example of what to expect...*

Robinson tells the story of the “skunk works,” which was a secret gathering of Snyder allies intent on turning public schools into “a virtual bonanza for profiteers.”

*The idea behind the “skunk works” plan was to radically increase the use of technology (i.e., virtual charters, online classes) to dramatically reduce the number of teachers needed, and to decouple tax dollars from schools by providing every student in the state with an “education debit card” that could be used for a wide range of educational experiences (i.e., music lessons, art classes, sports teams).*

*The ultimate goal here was to create a new “value school” model in the state, delivering schooling at a per-student cost of roughly \$5000, over \$2000 less than the average reimbursement provided by the state for each child enrolled in a district’s schools—with “edupreneurs” pocketing the balance. For Snyder and DeVos, the purpose of education is not to help develop a more informed and educated citizenry, or to help children to become more fully human by providing a comprehensive, high quality curriculum, including music, art, and physical education in addition to the rest of the disciplines. The purpose of education under Snyder and DeVos is to turn the state’s once excellent system of public schools into an educational WalMart, boasting “low, low prices” in place of quality instruction....*

*Ms. DeVos is the perfect ideological mate for Mr. Trump: neither seems concerned with allowing petty little things like rules, regulations, or ethics get in the way of them pursuing their agendas. The Constitution only applies to the “little people,” not the billionaire “deciders” who will make the rules in the Trump administration.*

*Betsy DeVos was the absolute worst possible choice for Secretary of Education, so it’s no surprise that Trump chose her for this cabinet post. Her appointment is much closer to Trump’s choice of Steve Bannon as Chief Strategist than it is to his choice of Reince Preibus as Chief of Staff. One is a party insider who will make the “trains run on time”: the other is an arsonist who would happily burn the train station to the ground. Betsy DeVos’ mission is no less than the total destruction of public education. Her apparent support for charters is merely a head fake to the right to distract us from for her ultimate goal of “decoupling” state and federal dollars from supporting schools of any type*

*Under Secretary of Education DeVos we will see the emergence of a two-tiered educational system:*

*One, a system of elite private and religious schools for well-to-do, mostly White parents with the means to afford expensive tuition payments, staffed by qualified, certified teachers, with a rich curriculum based on face-to-face instruction in clean, safe, well-maintained schools...*

*The other, a parallel system of “fly by night” virtual and online “schools” that open and close seemingly at random, and for-profit charters operated by scam artists like Northern Michigan’s Dr. Steve Ingersoll, with little to no state or federal regulation or oversight, and a bare bones, “back to the basics” curriculum delivered by unqualified and uncertified “teachers”.*

*I'm guessing that the leadership at Teach for America is practically salivating today.*

*For the rest of us, welcome to the Hunger Games of public education....*

Betsy DeVos needs to hear, loudly and clearly, that her cynical, selfish, profit-focused vision of public education isn't constitutional; it's predatory.

Her approach is not that of an educational leader; it's that of a vandal.

Tell her that these are OUR public schools, and we value them and need them. And that we won't let her, and her new Boss, destroy them."

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