



December 9, 2016

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of members and activists of People For the American Way, I write to urge you to reject the nomination of Betsy DeVos to be Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.

American students deserve a Secretary of Education who is committed to helping public schools deliver an excellent education, not one who has worked relentlessly to undermine public education. As [a report on DeVos's nomination in *The New York Times*](#) noted, "It is hard to find anyone more passionate about the idea of steering public dollars away from traditional public schools than Betsy DeVos."

The nomination of DeVos, who has been called "[the four-star general of the voucher movement](#)," is a fox-guarding-the-chicken-coop moment if ever there were one. After voters rejected a series of voucher initiatives around the country, she turned her efforts to buying legislators and legislation with aggressive political spending and lobbying. DeVos and her family have used their considerable financial resources to target and defeat legislators who support public education and replace them with others who are willing to assist in the dismantling of public education through vouchers, tax schemes, and other projects.

From the perspective of using money to buy political influence, DeVos's efforts have been impressive. But the results are less impressive from the point of view of students. For example, DeVos and her family have been the biggest political and financial supporters of a major experiment with school choice in her home state of Michigan, where 80 percent of charter schools are run by for-profit organizations and where [the DeVos family spent nearly \\$1.5 million](#) to prevent Michigan from strengthening charter school oversight.

But, as *The New York Times* has noted, "[if Michigan is a center of school choice, it is also among the worst places to argue that choice has made schools better](#). As the state embraced and then expanded charters over the past two decades, its rank has fallen on national reading and math tests. Most charter schools perform below the state average."

As one of the architects of Detroit's charter school system, DeVos "[is partly responsible for what even charter advocates acknowledge is the biggest school reform disaster in the country](#)," according to Tulane University professor Douglas Harris, founding director of the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans. And while charter schools have provided mixed educational results, the outcomes are even worse for the kind of unregulated vouchers DeVos has championed, making her nomination, in Harris's words, "[a triumph of ideology over evidence that should worry anyone who wants to improve results for children](#)."

As an editorial from the Madison, Wisconsin *Capital Times* [said in describing DeVos as a “horrible” choice for Secretary of Education](#):

Michigan billionaire Betsy DeVos has sought for years to undermine public education as an advocate for irresponsible and discredited schemes to steer money away from the programs and the public school students that need them most.

She’s a special-interest power player who has used her money to warp the politics of Wisconsin and states across the country in order to advance an education agenda that is as unworkable as it is irresponsible... Trump could not have chosen a worse nominee than DeVos...

In short, Betsy DeVos is one of the leading figures in a decades-long campaign by Religious Right leaders and anti-government ideologues to divert public education funds into religious schools and replace public education with a profit-maximizing marketplace model.

People For the American Way believes that public education is a core democratic institution, one that has provided generations of Americans with the tools to become productive members of society, and has helped integrate generations of immigrants more fully into our communities.

We believe that a thorough review of Betsy DeVos’s record will make it clear that she is unfit to serve as U.S. Secretary of Education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marge Baker".

Marge Baker
Executive Vice President for Policy and Program