



## ***Right-Wing, Anti-Public Education Group Funds Gay, Muslim Democrat as Stealth Candidate in PA House District***

Posted by [racheltabachnick](#) at 9:14 am  
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How far is the school privatization juggernaut willing to go to disguise and promote their agenda? The Betsy DeVos-led American Federation for Children, through its PA affiliate Students First and its funding recipients, is financing the campaign of Fatimah Muhammad. She is an openly gay, African American, Muslim candidate for State Representative in Pennsylvania's Democratic primary in the 188th District. The primary is on Tuesday, April 24.

Adding to the irony, a 2012 recipient of Students First funding has sponsored fliers touting 27-year old candidate Muhammad's liberal credentials and her willingness to challenge Governor Tom Corbett's "War on Women." Daniel Denvir wrote in the Philadelphia [City Paper](#),

"This is politics at its most cynical: major funders of the pro-choice, pro-Muhammad ad are anti-abortion Republican extremists."

If you follow the money trail, it shows that Students First has been funded solely by American Federation for Children in the 2012 election cycle.

Gov. Corbett was the keynote speaker at the American Federation for Children's national conference last year. (I was outside [with protesters](#) from Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and D.C.) Betsy Prince DeVos' family and that of her husband Dick DeVos, [have been leading funders](#) of Focus on Family, Family Research Council, Crisis Pregnancy Centers, Proposition Eight, and other anti-abortion and anti-gay rights organizations.

The surprisingly small core group of funders of American Federation for Children that I've been able to track are generally ultra-wealthy and ultra-conservative, along with a few anti-public education libertarians and school privatization investors. The major

fundings of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), which has been the core entity for promoting vouchers to African American Democrats over the last decade, was founded with money from the Bradley Foundation and Walton family (Walmart heirs), both significant sources of funding anti-reproductive rights and other right-wing causes.

Daniel Denvir points out in his current [Altnet article](#),

”AFC is a member of the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council, the embattled organization comprised of corporations and conservative state legislators that promotes model legislation to spread vouchers and other right-wing policy initiatives. Last year, ALEC released a [report on education](#) that struck an odd World War II analogy, comparing the reform movement to the Allies and teachers unions to the Nazis.”

Pennsylvania has no limit on personal contributions to state campaigns. The state is also home to a vast array of radical free market fundamentalist entities founded by the Scaife foundations. These factors and Pennsylvania’s continuous role as a swing state in presidential elections, has no doubt played a role in making it one of the prime targets of the pro-privatization juggernaut.

### **The Fatimah Muhammad Campaign**

American Federation for Children is the sole contributor to Pennsylvania’s Students First PAC in its 2012 campaign finance reports, providing 1.25 million in funding. I have been able to track the individual donors of much of the 2010 and 2011 funding of American Federation for Children PACs, but not the sources of this 1.25 million in 2012. Campaign finance reports show that Students First and its grantees and employees have provided \$62,639 dollars of Fatimah Muhammad’s total receipts of \$76,030 dollars. See the chart below.

<b>2012 Students First Grants &gt;</b>	<b>2012 Students First Grantee &gt;</b>	<b>2012 Friends for Fatimah</b>
Students First \$25,000.00 >	directly to Friends for Fatimah \$25,000.00 >	Friends for Fatimah
Students First \$12,000.00 >	Public Education Excellence \$7,500.00 >	Friends for Fatimah
Students First \$10,000.00 >	Women for Change \$7,000.00 >	Friends for Fatimah
Students First \$6,000.00 >	Black Clergy PAC \$1,000.00 >	Friends for Fatimah
Students First \$6,000.00 >	Progressive Agenda PAC \$5,900.00 >	Friends for Fatimah
Students First \$8,000.00 >	Citizens Networking 4 Progress \$3,000.00 >	Friends for Fatimah
SF to Make a Difference PAC > \$216,000.00 Make a Difference PAC > Barbara Chavous (consulting) \$16,500.00	Barbara Chavous \$9,239.00 >	Friends for Fatimah
	Students First Exec. Director Dawn Chavous \$4,000.00 >	Friends for Fatimah
	Total \$62,639.00	Total receipts to date \$76,030.00

As reported in the Philadelphia *City Paper*, the 188th District has been repeatedly blanketed with fliers in support of the 27-year old Muhammad and attacking the 26-year incumbent James Roebuck. Roebuck is the ranking Democrat on the House Education Committee and an opponent of the proposed voucher bill that failed to pass in 2011. (See examples of the mailers [here](#) and [here](#).) The cost of these mailers is not shown in the above chart, because they were sponsored by the recently formed group Public Education Excellence. The PAC's campaign finance reports are not yet available, but it has been the recipient of at least \$7,500.00 from Students First in 2012.

Public Education Excellence is led by Joy Herbert, reported as follows in the Philadelphia Inquirer.

Herbert said she believed her group received funding from American Federation for Children in Washington and Students First PA, two proponents for school vouchers with political connections to Williams.

“Williams” in the quote is State Sen. Anthony H. Williams, sponsor of the school voucher bill and to date the largest beneficiary of campaign support from Students First. Much of that money was donated by three members of the same Pennsylvania investment firm.

In his gubernatorial race, Anthony Williams tried some of the same tactics, challenging the other Democratic nominees for not being progressive enough, while being funded by the Right’s machine.

The three Students First mega-donors also gave additional funds directly to American Federation for Children in 2010 and 2011, and smaller amounts (\$6,000 each) to the campaign of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker. The three are members in the right-wing organizations at the forefront of privatization of schools: Arthur Dantchik, on the board of Institute for Justice; Joel Greenberg, on the board of American Federation for Children; and Jeffrey Yass, on the board of the Cato Institute.

The trio of Pennsylvanians continued to give money in 2011, including to Make a Difference PAC and to the Indiana American Federation for Children PAC.

Fatimah Muhammad’s campaign also shows debts to Barbara Chavous for “Advance to Campaign” and “Direct Mail.” As reported in the Philadelphia *City Paper*, Barbara Chavous is the mother of Dawn Chavous, the Executive Director of Students First. Students first has contributed \$216,000 dollars to Make a Difference PAC, which paid Barbara Chavous \$5,500 dollars in consulting fees monthly in February, March, and April of 2012.

Dawn Chavous married a member of the Philadelphia City Council, Kenyetta Johnson, in January of this year. Both she and her husband are former employees of Sen. Williams.

In addition to the list shown in the chart, Students First’s 2012 reports also show a \$350,000 dollar contribution to [Citizens Alliance for Pennsylvania](#) and the following contributions:

Commonsense 4 the Commonwealth \$60,000  
Grass Roots Urban Political Alliance \$20,000  
Believe Again \$11,500  
For a Better PA \$25,000  
Citizens Networking 4 Progress \$8,000

The proliferation of American Federation of Children money through Students First PAC and a growing array of smaller entities funded by Students First, provides the appearance of an extensive grass roots movement.

The pro-privatization movement is apparently willing to think long term and make sacrifices along the way in their efforts to dismantle public education, including backing stealth candidates that will be difficult for progressives to oppose. No doubt they assume

that the privatization of education in America and the diversion of public funds to religious schools, will eventually eliminate the competition on all the other issues, including gay rights.

*This is a crosspost of an article at Talk2action.org. For the rest of this article on the attempt to privatize schools in Pennsylvania, link to <http://www.talk2action.org/story/2012/4/23/21157/2721>.*