

## In Supporting DeVos, Republicans Oppose 'False News'

Alice B. Lloyd

January 30, 2017

Tuesday's Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee vote on Education secretary-designate Betsy "Cruella" DeVos will most assuredly fall along party lines. With a Republican majority weighing in her favor, every remaining Democrat, according to Minnesota senator Al Franken, (and every other American with a heart in his or her chest, according to Connecticut senator Chris Murphy) will oppose her appointment.

DeVos, one of President Trump's most controversial nominees, has been cast a failed reformer with untold influence and an uninformed plutocrat who tinkered around with education advocacy in her ample leisure time. A grassroots campaign to protect innocent children from her free-market machinations sowed groundless panic and flooded Senate offices with, probably fairly unpleasant, calls.

alling foul on detractors' claims falls to data-driven debunking. Max Eden of the Manhattan Institute and Cato's Jason Bedrick dismantled the *New York Times's* editorial claims that DeVos drove Detroit schools into a hole and diminished charter school accountability—a criticism DeVos herself called "false news" from the hot seat at her hearing.

Now, on the eve of the HELP panel's vote on her nomination, Eden's picked apart the *Times's* characterization, made on the basis of earlier reporting, and found it flawed. The data backing their assertion that Detroit charter schools supported by DeVos underperform, in fact, show the opposite—and concluding otherwise required comparing an average to a median. "Statistical nonsense," Eden called it.

Senate Democrats, by and large, have fallen in line with the overarching narrative, one that both exaggerates her influence in Detroit schools and underplays the partisan underpinnings of the battle, as Alexander Russo pointed out in an elegant takedown of DeVos's "problematic media coverage." Her views on school choice are hardly radical, and her accomplishments in education reform are moderate compared to the outrage they've inspired. Her family ties to the Republican party receive too little clarifying context, and teachers' unions' leading opposition to her nomination are simply not covered enough, Russo illustrates.

Meanwhile, defenders across the ideological spectrum—with background knowledge enough to see the spin for being overspun—repeat their trust that DeVos's vision and leadership will

advance equal opportunity in education. Dr. Howard Fuller, for instance, the former superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools and leader of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, has called her "a proven reformer" and offered his support for a renewed national attention to school choice, saying, "We need more parent choice... particularly for low-income and working-class families."

Fuller, who identifies with neither political party, told me he trusts and supports Betsy DeVos, but, "I don't support the person she works for. I didn't vote for him." He also couched the controversy surrounding DeVos's nomination in a partisan context: "Betsy and anybody else who's taken a position with Donald Trump have to know that the Democrats, and I don't blame them, are going to be going after his appointees."

He's right, of course. The partisan theatre playing out around DeVos's appointment is itself predictable. And it puts Republicans in a position to take a hard line against distracting and misleading spin. Because, at least when it comes to DeVos's confirmation, Democrats are packing an arsenal full of readymade alt-facts.