



## **Federalist: Democrat Michelle Rhee as Education Secretary ‘Would Be a Terrible Choice’**

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President-elect Donald Trump is reportedly meeting Friday with Democrat Michelle Rhee, the former Washington, D.C., schools chancellor and potential candidate for the post of U.S. secretary of education.

Andrew Ujifusa, writing at *Education Week*, reported the slated meeting Friday.

“Trump’s search for education secretary appears to be crossing party lines,” writes Ujifusa. “Rhee, who has identified as a Democrat throughout her career, is a strong supporter of school choice (including vouchers), which appears to be the top K-12 priority for Trump.”

Rhee, however, who was D.C. schools chancellor from 2007 to 2010, is a Common Core supporter, a fact that does not mesh with Trump’s stated goal of finally getting rid of any federal mechanisms that are keeping the boondoggle going.

The *Federalist*’s Joy Pullmann writes that Rhee “doesn’t fit Trump at all.”

“For one, she’s highly skeptical of school choice,” Pullmann says, and continues:

She strongly supports charter schools, a good but highly managed government alternative to traditional public schools, and prominently reversed her opposition to vouchers in 2013. Yet she still supports a highly regulated version of vouchers driven by applying the tests to them that public schools use, which undercuts their very premise. We don’t want to use vouchers to mold private schools into the public schools whose failure justifies vouchers in the first place, but to provide diversity of parent choice in education. That requires light regulation.

“There are a lot of people out there who sort of believe, the free market, let the free market reign, the market will correct itself — give every kid a backpack with their money in it and let them

choose wherever they want to go,” Rhee said in a 2012 interview with *Education Week*. “I don’t believe in that model at all.”

“Instead, she supports highly limited and highly regulated voucher programs just for poor families, not all taxpayers,” says Pullmann.

Pullmann observes the all-important distinction among methods of bringing about school choice, and vouchers are a means that have been shown to create the greatest amount of regulation to private and other schools that agree to accept them for low-income students.

A recent *Education Next* poll shows that while overall support for school choice is high in the United States, support for the use of vouchers to access choice programs has declined.

“Program design matters,” Lindsey Burke, education fellow at Heritage Foundation, told Breitbart News. “The poll results found a drop in support for school vouchers, which could reflect recent experiences in states that have heavily regulated their school voucher programs, leading, paradoxically – as the regulations were promulgated in the name of accountability – to lower participation among high quality private schools.”

In a 2010 study at the Cato Institute, Andrew Coulson found that voucher programs are more likely to “suffocate the very markets to which they aim to expand access” because state funds—which invariably invite state regulation—are directly transferred, in the form of vouchers, to parents to spend in an alternate education setting.”

Instead, tax credit scholarships and education savings accounts are fast becoming the more popular means to create school choice.

But the possible consideration of Rhee as U.S. education secretary raises other concerns.

Rhee is married to current Sacramento Mayor and former NBA star Kevin Johnson, who was the focus of considerable scandal in 2015.

In a piece titled “The Comeuppance of Creepy Obama Crony Kevin Johnson,” conservative author Michelle Malkin highlighted published reports by the *Sacramento News & Review* on Johnson’s alleged “use of public resources for personal gain.” Sports site Deadspin had also slammed Johnson for allegations of “sleazy financial dealings and personal perversities.”

Malkin continued, “Among Deadspin’s damaging scoops: an exclusive interview with accuser Mandi Koba and video of her 1996 police interview in which the then-17-year-old victim graphically described repeated sexual molestation by Johnson, then 29 and a star member of the Phoenix Suns.”

Having reported on similar behavior by Johnson in 2011, Malkin writes that then-federal inspector General Gerald Walpin of the Corporation for National and Community Service uncovered other examples of “inappropriate contact” between Johnson and several high school students while also probing into misuse of about \$1 million in AmeriCorps funds at St. HOPE Academy of California, the charter school organization founded by Johnson.

Malkin reported Walpin concluded Johnson used AmeriCorps funds for his own political and personal purposes. Additionally:

Johnson's attorney, Kevin Hiestand, approached at least one of the (St. HOPE) students describing himself only as "a friend of Johnson's," and "basically asked me to keep quiet." She had complained to St. HOPE officials that Johnson groped her sexually after instructing her to grade papers with him in her apartment. According to her interview with Walpin's investigators, "about one week later, Kevin Johnson offered her \$1,000 a month until the end of the program, which she refused to accept."

Walpin's office also found that Rhee, who was Johnson's fiancé at the time and a St. HOPE board member, "played the role of a fixer, doing 'damage control'" for Johnson, Malkin wrote.

"The White House, which so ostentatiously crusades against sexual harassment and the War on Women, looked the other way," she wrote. "The Obamas and Johnsons are close pals. Reminder: Johnson donated the maximum individual amount to Obama for America, campaigned across the country for Obama in 2008, and bragged to California media during his mayoral run about his friendship and access to both Barack and Michelle Obama."

Rhee now chairs the board of St. HOPE Public Schools, the charter school organization her husband started.