



## **UW policy analyst cautions Trump’s cabinet pick may target higher education for privatization**

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UW-Madison’s Clifton Conrad cautions that Betsy DeVos’ track record of advocacy for charter schools for elementary and high school students may indicate that President-elect Donald Trump’s nominee for secretary of education will push to privatize public higher education too.

“I have an underlying fear that her uncompromising commitment to deregulating charter schools in Michigan signals that she will advance the privatization of higher education—with increased funding for-profit institutions, sabotaging our public colleges and universities and in, in turn, their longstanding contributions to the public good,” Conrad said Monday in an email message.

Conrad is a professor in the School of Education and faculty director of the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education at UW-Madison.

DeVos, who led the Michigan Republican Party from 1996-2000, is a leader in the national school-choice movement. She has supported political candidates who favor charter schools and voucher programs for low-income K-12 students as chair of the American Federation for Children, the political arm of the Alliance for School Choice, a nonprofit advocacy organization.

Trump supported a **major expansion of school choice** programs during the presidential campaign.

DeVos' lack of experience in higher education issues, however, is raising some concern, as is the fact she has never worked for an educational institution.

Conrad said flatly that DeVos "is not qualified for this position."

DeVos' resume gaps are drawing concern from varied quarters. Neal McCluskey, director of the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, said the Department of Education's role in higher education is gigantic, the **Chronicle of Higher Education** reported.

"DeVos will essentially be taking over a hugely bureaucratic lending company — with lots of regulatory power — that on a day-to-day basis could prove to be a far greater burden than she expected," McCluskey wrote in an analysis of her nomination.

Donald E. Heller, provost at the University of San Francisco who was previously dean of the College of Education at Michigan State University, told the Chronicle that DeVos may loosen enforcement of regulations on for-profit colleges. The Obama administration took a hard line on schools whose students go deep into debt but leave without credentials for a well-paying job.

DeVos' past work with faith-based organizations could suggest that she would push for federal funding for private and religious institutions at the expense of public institutions," Heller said.

But DeVos does bring some skill to the table, he acknowledged.

"One advantage she brings, to be fair, is that she's very involved in the political process and policy," he said.