



Evangelicals Could Prove Key to Trump Education Plans

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The nomination of Betsy DeVos as education secretary, combined with other key players in President Donald Trump's administration, means evangelicals could play a role in shaping his education agenda, officials in the field and lawmakers say.

DeVos agrees religious schools should be eligible for taxpayer funding, **McClatchy reported**, and was once **quoted in The New York Times** as saying education reform is a way to "advance God's kingdom."

Such comments have already raised some eyebrows.

Also, combining her with Vice President Mike Pence – an evangelical community leader who could break a Senate tie to confirm DeVos – and with Jerry Falwell Jr., the president of the evangelical Liberty University heading up a Trump education task force, some experts are voicing concerns. Others cheer the President's selections.

"They weren't even at the table under President [Barack] Obama," said Rep. Rep. Robert Pittenger, R-N.C., who has a connection to the evangelical community. "I think it's prudent . . . that those who have a world view of the Bible be able to have a conversation."

But liberals oppose DeVos' nomination and do not agree tax dollars should be spent on religious schools.

"I don't think that religion defines a person, but what we see is a real clear agenda that Trump began," said National Education Association Director of Government Relations Mary Kusler, who is overseeing the NEA's efforts to block DeVos.

"We believe that the public school system has largely been a cornerstone of democracy," Kusler said.

Neil McCluskey, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, commented DeVos' nomination is a "proxy on private school choice," and said DeVos has many things working against her. However, he believes DeVos will not only be confirmed, but in six months to a year, nobody will remember the furor.

However, the Rev. Mark Harris in North Carolina said he welcomes the possibilities, adding there appears to be a "shift" occurring, and Christianity will be more accepted in the nation's schools.

Kusler said she believes the NEA push will mean DeVos will be ineffective if she's confirmed, even if she wins.

"If she is confirmed next week she will be the first cabinet secretary who has had to engage the vice president of our country to break a tie," Kusler said.