

OSBA statement on Betsy DeVos nomination and confirmation hearings

President Donald Trump's choice of Elisabeth "Betsy" DeVos for secretary of the U.S. Department of Education has stirred considerable controversy since his initial announcement, and the criticism has continued following her initial confirmation hearings.

DeVos is not your typical choice for appointment to this vital national education post. She has no prior experience or training as an educator or even personal experience with public schools. She has never served as an elected or appointed public official.

Instead, the Michigan businesswoman is a billionaire and philanthropist, well-known for her long-standing advocacy of school choice and voucher programs. She has lobbied for decades to expand charter schools and taxpayer-funded vouchers for private and religious schools. She is an ardent defender of the Detroit charter school program and a member of the board of the Foundation for Excellence in Education. She has served as chairwoman of the board of the Alliance for School Choice.

Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, has forcefully defended her nomination, saying that she is "a champion of low-income families." On the other side of the aisle, Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) ranking member of the committee said, "Ms. DeVos gave what has been widely seen as ill-informed, confused and concerning responses to serious and reasonable questions."

A number of Democratic senators have expressed concerns and announced that they will not support her nomination. They have asked for a second hearing, but at present that request has been denied. Instead, the committee is scheduled to hold an executive session to vote on DeVos nomination Jan. 31.

Regardless of one's opinion on DeVos' candidacy and qualifications, OSBA is prohibited from directly opposing or supporting political appointments. Rather, it is our role and responsibility to help our members learn more about the issue and to encourage them, as individual citizens, to express their opinions directly to their senators.

OSBA supports the efforts of the National School Boards Association and urges our congressional leaders to consider DeVos' nomination in a very serious and

deliberative manner. It is critically important for our public schools to know and trust that any secretary of education holds the welfare of all the nation's children uppermost. It is essential to know the level of commitment to fully implement the new Every Student Succeeds Act program, as well as the desire to reduce federal overreach and to support increased federal investment in preschool, elementary and secondary education.

With respect to school choice, the "elephant in the room," will she commit to full accountability and transparency for the use of public funds used for choice and vouchers, and will she ensure that traditional public schools also benefit from any flexibilities to be offered to charter schools?

We have shared a letter from Tom Gentzel, National School Boards Association executive director, with Ohio Sens. Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman and urged them to fully consider the responses prior to a full Senate vote. The letter is available <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/72646>.