

CFHE statement on the nomination of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education

January 27, 2017

We believe that public education, from pre-K through grade 12 and into post-secondary education, is at the core of our democracy, and of ensuring affordable, quality higher education for all who pursue it. The nomination of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education makes clear that the new administration has no such commitment.

DeVos's entire career, as well as her confirmation hearings, demonstrates that her primary commitment is to subsidizing private and religious education at the expense of public education. Her efforts to inculcate one set of interpretations of one religion into public education would have ominous repercussions for access, affordability, accountability, safety, and civil rights.

All evidence suggests that DeVos will refuse to support millions of current and future college students on college access and affordability. Her nomination signals a blatant disregard for not only the magnitude of debt plaguing our students but also the widespread fraud that has been exposed in the for-profit sector across the country. It also reveals an irresponsible resistance to protecting students from sexual assault and gun violence and to ensuring the rights of immigrants and students with disabilities.

Equally troubling, at her confirmation hearing and in the disclosure of her extensive financial entanglements, DeVos refused to commit to enforcing existing laws protecting students from fraudulent practices. Her financial connections to a student loan collection agency and inexperience managing the trillion dollar student loan portfolio that would be her responsibility reinforce her unsuitability for the position.

Her responses to questions in her confirmation hearing raised concerns about the safety of students on our campuses. When asked about Title IX, DeVos indicated that as Secretary she would refuse to ensure that existing campus sexual assault prevention and response processes are respected and improved. She also refused to endorse a ban on guns in K-12 schools, suggesting that she would take a similar position with respect to college campuses.

DeVos also demonstrated a woeful ignorance of the federal scope of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, putting the rights of all students with disabilities at risk. We also do not know if she would respect DACA, on which DREAMER students depend for their safety and protection.

In short, we believe that Betsy DeVos is wholly unqualified to fulfill the Department of Education's obligation to ensure that all students who seek a college education will have fair access and will receive the highest quality education possible with a minimum of debt. The path to best serving the educational opportunities of all of our students will not be served by entrusting this important cabinet position to someone who interested primarily in promoting narrow religious ideologies, to privatizing public education, and to ignoring students' civil rights. DeVos's agenda and lack of true experience or expertise in education are a dangerous black hole into which the nation's students,

faculty, and campus communities cannot afford to be pushed. We urge the Senate to reject her nomination as Secretary of Education.