

Who is Betsy Devos?

"I would imagine that there's probably a gun in the school to protect from potential grizzlies,"

Betsy Devos when questioned at her Senate confirmation hearing if guns belong in schools.



Betsy Devos, a wealthy Republican donor with almost no experience in public education, was confirmed by the Senate as Secretary of the Department of Education in February, 2017, but only with the help of a historic tie-breaking vote from Vice President Mike Pence after weeks of protests and two defections from within her own party.

Betsy Prince Devos was born February 8, 1958 to Edgar and Elsa Prince in Holland, Michigan. Her father was a billionaire businessman who founded the Prince Corporation, a maker of auto parts. Betsy attended Holland Christian School and graduated from Calvin College, affiliated with Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI, with a degree in business economics in the spring of 1979. She never attended a public school.

She is married to Richard Devos, heir to the Amway fortune. He ran for governor in 2006 and lost by 14% after spending a record \$35 million on his campaign. They have four children, all of whom attended private Christian schools, and six grandchildren.

Betsy and Richard have emerged as a powerful political force in Michigan, using their combined \$5 billion fortune to bankroll Christian causes: conservative politics and school choice.

Why do Dick and Betsy DeVos want to change America's schools? They see it as the literal battleground for making a more Christian, God-centered society. "The church—which ought to be, in our view, far more central to the life of the community—has been displaced by the public school," Dick DeVos [said](#) at the Gathering in 2001

Michigan Initiatives

- **2000** – Betsy directed a statewide ballot campaign to legalize public funding of religious schools. 69% of voters rejected the proposal.
- **2001** – The couple founded Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), which funneled money to PACs pushing legislators to enact education reform and expanded use of charter schools.
- **2016** – The charter school campaign funded by the Devos family has totally remade Michigan education. The cap on the number of charter schools was eliminated and attempts to provide public oversight have been defeated, making Michigan's charters among the most-plentiful and least-regulated in the nation.

About 80 percent of Michigan's 300 publicly-funded charters are operated by for-profit companies, more than any other state. This means that taxpayer dollars that would otherwise go to traditional public schools are instead used to buy supplies such as textbooks and desks that become private property.

Results

- Michigan has the most for-profit charter schools in the country. The schools have become financial assets to outside entities.
- A 2017 Brookings Institute analysis of national test scores ranked Michigan last among all states when it came to improvements in student proficiency.
- Michigan charter schools are managed by Education Management Organizations (EMOs) that receive public and private funds. Banks and hedge funds take large tax breaks by investing in EMOs. EMOs buy buildings for the schools at low prices and lease them to the schools for a few years and then sell them to the school for a few million dollars, causing the school to take on large, long term mortgage debt. (*NY Times Magazine*. September 5, 2017)

Devos' Federal Education Initiatives

Proposed Budget Cuts:

- Cut \$9.2 billion from education budget
- Cut College work-study programs in half
- End public service loan forgiveness

School Choice in K-12 Education

- \$400 million earmarked for vouchers for private and religious schools and expansion of charter schools.
- \$1 billion to push choice-friendly policies like private “scholarships” offering tax breaks to wealthy donors.

Higher Education

- Moving to strengthen due process rights for those accused of sexual assault on campus. See pros and cons: [New York Times](#)
- Appointed Dr. Julian Schmoke to lead the Department of Education’s Student Aid Enforcement Unit. Dr. Schmoke comes from DeVry University, which last year paid \$100 million to settle a claim by the FTC that it misled students and professionals about job prospects after graduation.
- Has moved to cut regulations that would have cut off funding to low-performing programs at for-profit colleges.
- Has delayed student loan forgiveness under the borrower defense rule which allows students to have their federal student loans forgiven if a school employed deceptive practices to encourage students to borrow to attend the school.

Senate Budget Vote (Education Next, September 15, 2017)

- Increase education funding by \$29 million, not cut \$9.5 billion
- No cuts to teacher training or after-school funding
- \$25 million additional to charter schools instead of proposed \$167 million bump

Just the Stats

Betsy Devos



- Birthplace: Holland, Michigan
- Born: February 8, 1958
- Education: Holland Christian School, Calvin College
- Family: Husband Richard Devos and 4 children
- Net Worth: \$5 billion
- Donated \$9.5 million to 2016 Republican campaign
- No experience in public education
- Never attended a public school
- Never put her own children in public school
- Pence had to break a tie vote before she could be appointed
- Supports for-profit education
- Advocates for school choice including federal money paid to religious schools
- Wants to cut \$10.6 billion from the education budget

Resources

educationnext.org (Frederick Hess) September 15, 2017

forbes.com. (Zack Friedman). 7/28/2017.

nbcnews.com. (Alistair Jamieson) January 18, 2017

New York Times. (Emmarie Huetteman and Yamiche Alcindor) Feb. 7, 2017

New York Times. (Erica L. Green) June 10, 2017

New York Times. (Stephanie Saul and Dana Goldstein) September 7, 2017

politico.com. (Michael Stratford). 8/31/2017.

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<https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/betsy-devos-32722.php>