

# Heartland Institute: Experts react to Senate confirming Education Secretary Betsy DeVos

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The United States Senate today voted to confirm school-choice advocate Betsy DeVos as President Donald Trump's first Secretary of Education. She was approved as the nation's 11th Secretary of Education by a vote of 51-50, with Vice President Michael Pence casting the tie-breaking vote.

The following statements from education policy experts at [The Heartland Institute](#) – a free-market think tank – may be used for attribution. For more comments, refer to the contact information below. To book a Heartland guest on your program, please contact New Media Specialist Billy Aouste at [media@heartland.org](mailto:media@heartland.org) and [312/377-4000](tel:3123774000) or (cell) [847/877-9100](tel:8478779100).

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“The status quo in American education must be broken, and Betsy DeVos is the first nominee for the Department of Education who might actually break it. It is time to dismantle the ‘business-as-usual’ of the American district-based school system, and replace it with a system that puts parents and children first, not unions and patronage-based administration employment.”

## **[Bruno Behrend](#)**

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“Congratulations to Betsy DeVos on becoming the Secretary of Education. As a champion of education choice, DeVos should work quickly with Congress to pass the following education policies: implement education savings accounts for students in Washington DC and Native Americans in Bureau of Indian Education schools; expand Coverdell 529 plans to allow expenditures from pre-kindergarten through high school while increasing pre-tax limits to \$5,000 per year per child; implement a personal education income tax credit for all pk-12 education expenses; end all federal mandates on testing and requirements to maintain Common Core State Standards; and announce all current federal education grants will not be renewed upon completion in conjunction with a Department of Education staff reduction of at least 25 percent.”

**[Lennie Jarratt](#)**

Project Manager, Education

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“The fight against Betsy DeVos was not really about Betsy DeVos at all. It was really a fight against education choice. Democrats in Congress are far beyond the mainstream on this issue, including the majority of their own constituents. However, when it comes to choosing between the interests of low-income families searching for something better for their children and the wealthy, check-cutting teachers unions looking to preserve their power and privileges, the wealthy, check-cutting teachers unions win with the Democrats every time. The way they went to the mattresses over the DeVos nomination was a signal to their union backers that they haven’t strayed from the faith.

“The education choice movement grows stronger and more popular every year, and Betsy DeVos and the Trump administration have a real opportunity to take significant action that would benefit the lives of thousands and thousands of families. Congressional Democrats can now decide if they want to become part of this movement, or if they just want to help their union backers futilely try to put the toothpaste back in the tube.”

**Tim Benson**

Policy Analyst

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“The federal government has no constitutional authority to interfere in education, but the appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education is the best we could hope for short of abolition of the department and all federal intrusion into this state and local matter.

“Initially taken in by hype over Common Core, DeVos now opposes that effort to nationalize school curricula, which was a truly awful and repugnant idea. We shall have to hope that her conversion remains in effect.

“Insofar as the federal government unconstitutionally intrudes into K-12 education, it should at least refrain from discriminating in favor of our tragically underperforming traditional public schools. DeVos’ support for school choice over the years suggests that U.S. Department of Education policies will encourage state recipients of federal education money to increase the amount of education choice for all families. That will reduce the damage the federal government does to education – though elimination of all such interference should be the goal of those who want to bring excellent educational opportunities to all of the nation’s children.”

**S.T. Karnick**

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“Betsy DeVos’ first order of business as Secretary of Education ought to be cutting federal controls on local schools that make the prospect of federal school-choice vouchers so problematic. Common Core and choice are fundamentally incompatible.”

**Robert G. Holland**

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“Speaking in Washington recently, Jeb Bush said the country needs to redefine public education. He asserted that it should not be ‘focused on the system, but focusing on customizing the learning experience for each and every child.’ Bush is right. And Betsy DeVos is the perfect person to implement the redefinition.”

**Larry Sand**

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“Today’s vote is a victory for those wanting to change the public school education monopoly that often impedes parental choice, competition, and efficiency, instead putting adult school employees ahead of children.”

**Richard Vedder**

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“Watching the Betsy DeVos confirmation process proved some things I hoped would not be true. For example, Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) – who says he is a proponent of school choice and has spoken at more than one event hosted by DeVos – turned on her during the confirmation process and came across as opportunistic at worst and weak at best. Many people proved they do not know what school choice is, how it works, or why it matters to families.

“In this history-making vote by Vice President Pence to confirm DeVos, only one thing became clear to me. It’s up to voters and state legislators to remain vigilant and make sure the school choice laws and programs encouraged by the Trump administration are in fact good and solid laws and programs that will yield results for students. I don’t think the fight ends here. The public outcry against DeVos only means more people are paying attention to the way school choice laws and programs will be crafted. This is really the beginning.”

### **Heather Kays**

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“The vote for Betsy DeVos is a vote for America’s children. Mrs. DeVos has exercised her constitutional right to put her money where her mouth is – into school choice – and we’re excited to see her promote her preference to give families options for their children’s education. Competition is a rising tide that lifts all boats; there’s especially no reason for an unchallenged government monopoly for America’s low-income families.

“The new Secretary of Education will promote access to choice for families – who are, after all, the best, most local option – while encouraging traditional public schools to be more innovative in improving academic achievement. As our recent study on Georgia education spending demonstrated, it’s high time this nation refocused education to work on ‘how’ instead of ‘how much.’

“The January 26 study titled “Balancing the Books in Education’ found the Georgia Department of Education website underreports – by about \$3.5 billion – annual state public education funding. That ‘missing money’ was not spent on real salary increases for teachers, according to the study author, Dr. Ben Scafidi. It went to a ‘staffing surge’ beyond what was needed to accommodate student growth.”

### **Kelly McCutchen**

President, Georgia Public Policy Foundation

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“Why did the ‘mainstream’ media deliberately exclude mentioning parent groups as opponents of the DeVos/Hubbard nominations?”

**[Sandra Stotsky](#)**

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“This is a victory, by the edge of a razor, for democratic process and the right of presidents to choose their own cabinets. But the appointment of Betsy DeVos is also a tremendous frustration for those who have fought Common Core and the rise of Fed Ed.

“DeVos will be good for school choice advocates, but what good are charter and voucher schools if the money they take from state and federal entities compels them to replicate failed public school models of education? Choice only works if parents can choose genuinely different options from what goes on in our government schools. We must continue to pressure President Trump and his new Secretary of Education to fulfill those critical campaign promises: Remove Common Core and dismantle the Department of Education.”

**[Duke Pesta, Ph.D.](#)**

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