

LOCKDOWN

From Washington and Concord, the assault on public education and educators has begun

The assault on public education and collective bargaining has begun. With the loss of the Governor's office last November, and the recent ratification of Betsy DeVos as US Secretary of Education, the results could be devastating for New Hampshire public school students and educators.

Ignoring the voices of over a million Americans, the Senate needed the Vice-president to cast the deciding vote, to approve DeVos, marking the first time in history such a move was required to confirm a cabinet post.

With no experience as an educator or elected official, and despite a decades-long record of undermining public schools by promoting taxpayer-funded vouchers for private and religious schools, lobbyist and Republican donor Betsy DeVos is now the highest ranking education official in the country.

In Michigan, DeVos fought for tax cuts for the wealthy at the expense of public schools, for vouchers that divert taxpayer funds from public schools to private schools, and to allow for-profit charter school corporations to operate with no accountability while being funded by taxpayers.

In total, DeVos and her organizations have spent at least \$33.5 million to support public school privatization efforts. Now she leads the nation's public schools.

As secretary of education, DeVos will be tasked with pushing Trump's plan to steer \$20 billion in existing federal public education funding toward private vouchers that pay for private schools, perhaps tapping into \$15 billion in so-called Title I money that goes to schools that serve the country's poorest children.

In New Hampshire, Governor Sununu nominated DeVos-clone Frank Edelblut to be the new Commissioner of Education. Like DeVos, Edelblut has no experience or interaction with the public education system of New Hampshire, choosing instead to home school his children. Overseeing a state department of education requires an in-depth knowledge of how public schools are governed, how they are managed, and the challenges employees in public schools face. Mr. Edelblut possesses no such knowledge or experience.



Betsy DeVos and Frank Edelblut both lack the qualifications and experience necessary to lead education departments.

Other than overseeing the management functions of the employees under his direct supervision, the business skills Mr. Edelblut possess are not transferable to ensuring our children's educational experience is exceptional. Our children's futures are too important to rely on someone who cannot hit the ground running on day one, but instead only promises to surround themselves with experts and ask intelligent questions.

Mr. Edelblut isn't sure full-day kindergarten is good for children and he supports funding programs with public dollars to pay private school tuition. The new Commissioner of Education is setting up to be the chief architect of the dismantling of public education in New Hampshire.

Edelblut's lack of qualifications aren't the only reason he is unfit for the job. As Commissioner of Education, he would be responsible for the adequate education and safety of all of our school children.

That's why it's so concerning that Edelblut sponsored an ALEC model Parental Rights Amendment that would remove community protections for children, giving parents the final word on their child's health, education and welfare – even if it meant the child was put at risk or danger.

Edelblut voted against banning unethical gay conversion therapy. In testimony, Edelblut compared this anti-LGBT counseling to counseling to end a smoking, drinking, or drug habit. Edelblut recently refused to answer a reporter's question about whether he'd support teaching creationism in science curriculum, stating: "What I would advocate is for good science, and good science should support all theories of human origins, whatever they might be."

Additionally, Edelblut voted last spring to force all state-funded facilities to allow guns on their premises, including hospitals, day care centers, drug treatment centers, and halfway houses. As Education Commissioner, would Education Commissioner Edelblut also advocate for more guns in public schools?

The New Hampshire Legislature has introduced bills this year to make the Granite State a so-called Right-to-Work state, end payroll deduction for dues, increase the age at which a pension begins, limit the court's jurisdiction over adequate education funding decisions, give the Legislature full discretion to determine education funding and to define standards for accountability. Multiple bills allowing for the creation of more charter schools, an increase in funding for charter schools, and reducing the accountability and oversight of these schools have also been introduced.

"The fundamental promise of a great public education for all students is under attack here, and across the country," said Megan Tuttle, NEA-NH Vice-president. "We're not just arguing over budget questions any longer; we're in a full-on ideological battle with people who do not believe that every child deserves the same opportunity to succeed."

"Betsy DeVos and Frank Edelblut can't put in place a corporate takeover of public education by themselves. They need the buy-in of elected officials and the American people. We can stop that from happening, so long as we continue to stand up for our shared values that every student, regardless of their zip code, deserves a great public education."

"This is the beginning of the resistance," says Tuttle. "Get up, get out, and support the schools and educators in your district. Vote. Approve budgets and contracts that support the priorities of great public schools. Hold elected officials accountable. Let your community know we are here to stay and we will protect public education!"