

Minnesota for her comments. She speaks from experience and knowledge, as has the senior Senator from Washington State, on this issue.

In my years here, I have seen thousands of confirmation votes, literally at all levels, up to and including Cabinet members and Supreme Court justices. I have voted for a large majority of a President's nominations—both Republican and Democratic Presidents. Some may not have been those I would have chosen, but I felt that, at least, the President should be given the prerogative, if the person is qualified.

Now, ideology is one thing, and qualification is another. Out of those thousands of confirmation votes, I have a hard time remembering any that were like this one. This one had a whirlwind confirmation hearing and committee vote. It was almost as though they were afraid to have the nominee actually have to appear and answer questions. And now the Senate is going to vote on the nomination of Betsy DeVos to lead the Department of Education.

I will be very blunt. On the very little time that she was allowed to be shown to the public, she showed—and I certainly believe this—that she does not have the qualifications to uphold the Department of Education's primary goal—that of ensuring that all students—all students, not just the wealthy, but all students—have access to a quality, public education that allows them to succeed.

I am both a father and a grandfather, and I am proud of it. I watched my children go to school. And now I see my grandchildren going to school. I understand well the impact of education on our children. When students have access to strong public education from the very beginning, they are more apt to succeed in the long run.

Our Nation's public schools—as is the case in my home State of Vermont—hold the promise of student success through strong State accountability measures and legal protections regardless of one's race, income, or learning ability. They offer nutritious meals for underserved students, many of whom receive their only meals of the day at school. Any teacher will tell you that if you have a hungry child, you have a child who cannot learn. If a child is fed, you have a child who can learn.

Public education means strong teachers and school leaders, technology in the classroom, an assessment to test not just how well a student can memorize material for an exam on a particular day of the year, but how much they have grown over the course of many months.

Many of the schools have counselors and nurses. They operate under a modern infrastructure to support those with disabilities and children in foster care. But public education also means that both the States and the Federal Government are held accountable for everyone having access to the same excellent resources.

In fact, just over 1 year ago, this body agreed to these protections. We

passed the Every Student Succeeds Act here in the Senate by a vote of 85 to 12—an amazing, overwhelming, bipartisan vote. It was the firm agreement among the majority of the Senate—Republicans and Democrats alike—that all students deserve access to critical public school resources in order to succeed. We made a promise that we would do better by our students; that public schools would be the premier standard for outstanding education for all.

Unfortunately, the nominee before us—in the very little time that she was allowed to testify and be questioned in the confirmation hearing—showed that she does not share these same goals. Instead, she has referred to public schools as a “dead end.”

Well, if you are a billionaire, you have a choice to go wherever you want to school. Maybe these people in a public school are not good enough for you? Well, then, go buy a school if you want. Most people don't have that option. Most people are hard working. My wife and I were when our kids were in school. Our children are today.

What does Betsy DeVos advocate for? She advocates for the privatization of education. She has funneled millions of dollars into organizations and initiatives to promote private school vouchers and school choice.

These efforts have diverted public funds toward private schools, schools that are not held to any antidiscrimination or accountability standards. These schools can discriminate all they want.

At her confirmation hearing—in the very little time that she did speak—she did not understand the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This is a landmark law. It is a Federal law that public schools in all 50 States must follow.

Lastly, Mrs. DeVos and her family have contributed to anti-LGBT causes and anti-women's health efforts, which are in direct conflict to the one who is supposed to lead the Department of Education. How can a nominee disagree with the mission of the Department of Education and be fit to oversee that agency and promote the civil rights of schools and college campuses?

She also appears to oppose efforts to expand college access, in an era when college is so important. Again, in the little bit of time she was allowed to testify before the Senate HELP Committee in January, Mrs. DeVos, when asked, would not agree to work with States to offer free community college to eligible students, instead saying that “nothing in life is truly free.” This is an easy thing to say if you are a billionaire.

She also admitted to knowing little about the Pell Grant Program and Federal student loans, as neither she nor her children have ever had to use such resources. As most of us know our children will have to use them, this is simply out of touch with the real life expectations of millions of students and families who rely on these funds to make college attainable.

It is what I hear from hard-working families in Vermont. Parents tell me that their child is going to be the first one in their family to go to college, and the only reason they can do it is because they can get Pell grants or Federal student loans. Mrs. DeVos's answer is: What are those?

College tuition rates have climbed more than 300 percent in the last decade. It is unacceptable to deny students Federal financial resources. To say, well, if you are rich, you can have them, but otherwise, tough.

As it is, students are increasingly saddled by insurmountable student loan debt. Many forgo starting a family, or buying a house or a car. Many of these students have also fallen prey to for-profit institutions, many of which continue to offer the false promise of gainful employment upon graduation. In reality, many of these institutions offer nontransferable credits or unaccredited degrees, and are increasingly shutting their doors, leaving students with egregious debt and nowhere to turn to finish their degrees.

The Department of Education has an extremely important role to ensure that all students—of every race, income level, or whether that student has disabilities or not—have access to the critical tools provided by public schools and by student financial aid programs.

Thousands—thousands—of Vermonters have called or written to me worried that Mrs. DeVos does not agree with these principles. When I say thousands, to put that in context, we are the second smallest State in the Union. Thousands have contacted me. I share these concerns of my fellow Vermonters.

They know my children went to public school. They want to be able to send their children to public school too. They want the best education.

I am telling these Vermonters I will not support this confirmation. It is dangerous and shortsighted to confirm someone who has so much to learn about our Nation's public schools and the challenges they face.

Universal free public schools were a revolutionary American invention. It has helped make America the great Nation it is today. So in the United States, we should strengthen public schools, not snub them.

Mrs. DeVos is the wrong choice for our children but also for our Nation's future. Our public schools need strong leadership, not someone who has made it her life's work to undermine their success. So I oppose this nomination. I hope my fellow Senators will too.

TRAVEL BAN

Mr. President, while I have the floor, I will just take another minute or two to mention something else, as I have mentioned Vermont.

On February 1 of this year, Vermont welcomed 31 new U.S. citizens from 14 countries through a naturalization ceremony in Rutland, VT. Later that night, more than 1,000 people from our

small city in Vermont gathered on our statehouse lawn—just a few feet from where I was born and raised—in support of refugees and immigrants.

We Vermonters understand what community means. It is a helping hand in a time of need. It is a kind word in a moment of distress. It is a welcoming embrace to calm a fear. We may be small, but in Vermont there is no limit to our compassion.

As with each of our 50 great American States, immigration is a rich part of Vermont's past. For decades, we have opened our communities to immigrants and refugees. They have all become part of the fabric of our State. They have enriched us with their diverse cultures.

Since the President signed his disgraceful Executive order that stymied our immigrant resettlement program and sent a shameful message to Muslims that they are not welcome in our country, I have heard from hundreds of Vermonters. Compassionate Vermonters, pleading that we continue our Refugee Resettlement Program and welcome refugees of all religions, concerned Vermonters, anxious about the threats to our Constitution's protected freedoms and rights, nervous Vermonters wondering what next steps this administration will take in the name of security, but are just rooted in politically charged scare tactics.

Vermonters have already proven that we will not back down. Marching in Montpelier and in Washington on January 21, Vermonters' voices were heard. In candlelit vigils across the State, their empathy has been seen. At the naturalization ceremony on February 1, Vermont's welcoming spirit could be felt.

A man I admire greatly, Federal District Court Judge Geoffrey Crawford, gave stirring remarks at that naturalization ceremony, and the impact of those remarks are summarized by this one line, which he directed particularly to our new Muslim citizens: "You are equal in the eyes of the law." Judge Crawford's message was simple: You are welcome. You are equal. You are protected.

My fellow Vermonters inspire me every day. We should all take note from their example of what it means to be patriotic Americans.

So I ask unanimous consent that Judge Crawford's remarks from the February 1, 2017, naturalization ceremony in Rutland, VT, be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

I look at Judge Crawford. Frankly, I have no idea what either he or the other Federal district judge's politics are. I just know they uphold the law. We are fortunate in this country to have a Federal court system made up of men and women of integrity, competence, and independence.

I was shocked this weekend when the President of the United States tried to demean the Federal judiciary, tried to downgrade an individual Federal judge

because he disagreed with him. And it was almost within hours that he praised President Putin and tried to excuse the assassinations—the assassinations—carried out in Russia against journalists or those who disagreed with Putin—by saying: Well, that is no different than our country.

Well, Mr. President, I am proud to be a citizen of the United States of America, and we are different than Russia. You may have some "friendship" with Vladimir Putin, but let me tell you right now, show some more respect to our country and to our Constitution.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

REMARKS OF JUDGE GEOFFREY CRAWFORD AT 2/1/17 U.S. NATURALIZATION CEREMONY, RUTLAND, VT

Welcome—all of you—to your naturalization ceremony. You will all leave here as American citizens. We are very happy to include you among us. Let me take a moment to talk about a few things.

First, although our theme today is one of welcome and new beginnings, we should all start by considering both the difficulties of the journeys you have made and the richness of the backgrounds which you bring. First the journey. The Latin poet Catullus said it best:

"*Multas per gentes et multa per aequora vectus*"

In English,

"Carried through many nations and over many seas"

Your journeys have not been easy. Some of you have left family—all of you have left friends and the comfort of familiar surroundings for this new place. Some of you are refugees from lands which are broken by war. Today we honor the commitment of our nation to welcoming and caring for refugees. Some of you experienced hunger, illness and hardship. All of you come in search of a better life. But it would not be right to forget the value of the lives and communities from which you come.

As we welcome you, we honor your heritage—your parents, your culture, and the lands of your birth. You bring variety and energy and new ideas to us. You know a lot that we do not know. You have had experiences that we want to hear about. We are lucky that you have chosen to make your lives here. We need each of you because of what you will contribute to us—your work, your ideas, your sense of humor, your food, your children.

Let me speak directly about our new citizens who are Muslims. What I have to say is simple: you are equal in the eyes of the law. You are just as welcome here as citizens as anyone else. Your faith and your right to worship are honored and protected by our laws. We recognize that the Muslim faith is ancient and learned and that it has contributed greatly over more than a thousand years to our shared civilization. Muslim citizens and residents have served America for more than two centuries in military service, in scientific research, in literature and the arts, in the professions, in commerce, in labor—in all the ways that we all contribute to the daily life of our nation. As Muslims, you have the same right as any other citizen. These include protection from discrimination on the basis of your relations and your national origin and protection of your right to worship freely. These protections are not empty promises. They form part of our constitutional law. These protections are enforced every day by our courts. But let me

turn towards a happier subject. This is a day of celebration. Today we welcome you as our brothers and sisters, common citizens of the county we all love and which you have chosen as your own.

What can you expect in the years ahead as American citizens? Two things stand out: opportunity and individual freedom. These are the values which have brought people like your family and mine to America for more than two centuries. Let's talk about both.

Opportunity means the chance to work, to go to school, to find a way to support yourself which has meaning for you, to have money for your family, to rent or buy a home, to educate your children and some day to retire with dignity. Because our economy is strong, there is room for you to find a place which suits you. It is never easy, and there are many disappointments along the way, but it is possible and millions have succeeded before you.

This is a very open society for workers. One job leads to another. Your first job is not going to be your last. You are already in a select group—people who have chosen to come here and have the drive and enthusiasm to join us as citizens. The same energy which carried you through the naturalization process will help you in your search for a good job.

Now, let's talk about freedom. Freedom means the chance to speak, assemble in groups, worship, and engage in politics without fear of interference from the government.

If I can make one respectful suggestion, it is that you use this freedom by getting involved in a cause or a committee or a campaign. Maybe something local—like asking for a sidewalk where one is needed—maybe national—like volunteering on a political campaign. In case you haven't noticed, we are in the middle of a presidential race this year. There is a candidate for every possible political belief. I urge you to take part in any way that suits your own convictions and interests. Freedom is strongest when it is used, not when it sits dusty on the shelf, and we welcome your involvement in public life together.

People who are born in the United States sometimes take it for granted. Like people anywhere. Or they concentrate on our faults and the unfair things about our society. New Americans such as you bring optimism. You would not have come if you did not see the chance for a better life for your family. One thing is certain—after the work to obtain citizenship, no one here is going to take it for granted. I ask that in the years ahead, you hold on to the hope and great expectation we all share with you on this day.

Thank you so much for coming to join us today as American citizens.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I yield the remainder of my time to Senator SCHUMER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I rise today to call on my colleagues to reject the nomination of Betsy DeVos as the next Secretary of Education.

It is difficult to imagine a worse choice to head the Department of Education. Betsy DeVos doesn't believe in public schools. Her only knowledge of student loans seems to come from her own financial investments connected to debt collectors who hound people struggling with student loans. Despite being a billionaire, she wants the chance to keep making money off

shady investments while she runs the Department of Education. We need someone in charge of the Nation's education policy who knows what they are doing and who will put America's young people first, and that is not Betsy DeVos.

Let's start with her record. Betsy DeVos has used her vast fortune to undermine Michigan's public schools. She is sure she knows what is best for everyone else's children, even though she has no actual experience with public schools.

In Michigan, the K-12 policy she has bankrolled has drained valuable taxpayer dollars out of the public schools and shunted that money into private schools, sketchy online schools, and for-profit charter schools. Even worse, DeVos believes these schools should get the money with virtually no accountability for what these schools do with taxpayer dollars. The results have been a disaster for Michigan kids.

Let's be perfectly clear. This is not a debate about school choice. It is not a debate about charter schools. There are people on all sides of this debate who are genuinely pouring their hearts into improving educational outcomes for children. Massachusetts charter schools are among the very best in the country, and they understand the difference.

Before her nomination hearing, I received an extraordinary letter from the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association. The letter outlines their opposition to Betsy DeVos's nomination, citing her destructive record of promoting for-profit charter schools without strong oversight for how those schools serve students and families.

People who work hard to build good charter schools with high accountability are offended by the DeVos nomination. This abysmal record is troubling because the Secretary of Education is responsible for safeguarding the investments that the Federal Government makes in public schools and for holding States accountable for delivering a good education for all their students, especially those who need the help the most.

The Secretary is also responsible for enforcing critical civil rights laws, like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, but Betsy DeVos's confirmation hearing demonstrated to the entire world she is embarrassingly unprepared to enforce these laws.

Her apparent unfamiliarity with these critical civil rights laws has terrified families who have children with special needs, terrified families in Massachusetts and all across the country. These parents are afraid we could have an Education Secretary who doesn't even have a basic understanding of the Federal laws that guarantee their kids a chance to receive a public school education.

We still have a long way to go to make sure all kids in this country have

a shot at a decent education, particularly children living in poverty, children of color, children with disabilities, and children who are immigrants or refugees. That is why the Federal Government got involved in education in the first place, to make certain that all of our children, not just some of them but that all of our children get a chance at a first-rate education.

Public education dollars should come with some basic accountability for how that money is spent and some basic expectations about what we get in return for these investments, not just doled out to some for-profit school that doesn't even meet basic standards in educating our children. This is also true in higher education, where the financial stakes are huge for America's college students.

The Department of Education is in charge of making sure that the \$150 billion that American taxpayers invest in students each year through grants and loans gets into the right hands and that students get an education that will help them pay back their loans.

The student aid program is not well understood, but it is vitally important to get it right because \$1 trillion of student loan debt currently out there will impact the future of an entire generation.

Betsy DeVos has no experience in higher education. During her confirmation hearing, I gave her the opportunity to show that she is at least serious about standing up for students. I asked her basic, straightforward questions about her commitment to protecting students and taxpayers from fraud by these shady for-profit colleges. Her response was shocking. She refused to commit to use the Department's many tools and resources to keep students from getting cheated when fraudulent colleges break the law.

In her responses to my written questions, she even refused to commit to doing what the law requires by canceling the loans of students who have been cheated by lawbreaking colleges. An Education Secretary who is unwilling to cut off Federal aid to colleges that break the law and cheat students would be a disaster for both students and taxpayers. Betsy DeVos's refusal to guarantee debt relief for defrauded students could leave thousands of Americans saddled with student loan debt that by law they are not required to pay.

Betsy DeVos also refused to rule out privatizing the Direct Loan Program. Think about this. As if our students don't have enough problems already, DeVos is ready to let Wall Street banks get their claws into our students and start charging extra profits on top of the already high cost of student loans.

If Betsy DeVos won't commit to strengthening the Federal student loan program and running it for students, then she is absolutely unfit to be in charge of it.

I am also deeply concerned about the conflicts of interest and potential gov-

ernment corruption if Betsy DeVos is allowed to take the reins of the Department of Education. Betsy DeVos is a multibillionaire, and that is fine, but for her, that is apparently not enough. She already makes money off of several businesses that could profit from decisions she makes as Secretary of Education—several businesses, at least, that we know about. She said she will get rid of the ones we know about, but she wants to keep her family trusts and whatever investments two of them hold a secret—a secret from Congress and a secret from U.S. taxpayers. She says she doesn't have to follow rules that everyone else follows and tell the Senate what her investments are or what they will be in those secret trusts. I want you to think about that for just a minute. She already has billions of dollars, but she won't give up her secret trust and her chance to make investments that could create conflicts of interest while she is running the Department of Education? Who exactly does Betsy DeVos want to help out—the young people of America or her own bank account?

You know, I really don't get this. I disagree with her education policy, but the one thing we ought to be able to agree on is that no one, especially not some billionaire, ought to keep investments that go up or down in value depending on the decisions she makes while she has a job working for the U.S. Government. Because of that concern, I wrote a letter with several of my Democratic colleagues to raise concerns about her potential conflicts that aren't clearly resolved by her public ethics agreement. We asked her some simple questions about the lack of financial transparency and the shady investments she plans to keep while she has a government job. What did we get back? Nothing. Zero. Bupkes. She thought our basic questions about ethics weren't even worth an answer. That stinks. This whole process stinks.

At every step along the way, the Republicans have made it clear that no matter her inexperience, no matter her radical views, no matter her potential conflicts of interest, no matter her secrecy, no matter her blowing off basic anti-corruption practices, they will ram this nomination down the throats of the American people sideways. Here are just a few egregious examples.

First, committee Democrats were allotted 5 minutes—5 minutes total—during her hearing to question Betsy DeVos on her troubling record. Republicans suddenly invented a new rule that we couldn't ask additional questions. This is an important job. I asked President Obama's Secretary of Education multiple rounds of questions, and he had led a public education system in the past, but I guess when a Republican nominee and megadonor is in line to run education policy, we are supposed to fall in line and keep quiet.

Second, breaking with standard practice and what we did for President Obama's Education nominees, we were

forced to hold Betsy DeVos's hearing before the ethics review of her billions was completed. The complicated ethics review raised a ton of additional questions, but we got absolutely no chance to question her about it.

Third, Betsy DeVos is the first nominee ever to go through the HELP Committee who has flat-out refused to fully disclose her financial holdings. She will be the first nominee in recent history to hold secret trusts. She was supposed to complete a form that requires nominees to list in detail all of their assets, investments, and gifts so that the committee has a full understanding of the nominees' potential conflicts of interest. No, she wants to keep many of her holdings in a family trust a secret, so she just won't tell.

Fourth, Republicans ignored and overrode the rules of the Senate in order to barely squeeze the DeVos nomination out of committee as quickly as possible. And now, with at least 50 Senators—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—publicly opposed to this nomination, the Republican leadership has rigged the vote so that Senator SESSIONS can drag her across the finish line just before he is confirmed as Attorney General. Why is Senator SESSIONS even voting on this nomination? It is a massive conflict of interest. As the AG, SESSIONS will be responsible for enforcing the law against DeVos if her cesspool of unresolved financial conflicts results in illegal behavior, but apparently the Republicans just don't care.

Let's face it: The Republican leadership wants DeVos, and they are willing to ignore her hostility to public schools, willing to ignore her indifference to laws that protect special needs kids, willing to ignore the giant ethical cloud that hangs over her—ignore it all so that billionaire and Republican campaign contributor Betsy DeVos can be Secretary of Education. The American people can see what is happening here.

I commend my Republican colleagues, Senators COLLINS and MURKOWSKI, for standing up for what is right and saying they will vote against Betsy DeVos's nomination on the floor. I know how difficult it can be to stand up for what is right even under overwhelming pressure from your own team to just keep your head down and go with the flow. They have been listening to the teachers and parents in their States, and I deeply respect their principled opposition to this nomination.

I have also heard from thousands of teachers, parents, and education leaders in Massachusetts raising deep concern about Betsy DeVos's nomination. I hear their concern, and I share their concern.

You know, this isn't just politics, this is deeply personal. It is personal for me. My first job out of college was as a teacher. I taught little ones, children with special needs, in a public elementary school. I have never lost my appreciation for the importance of

strong public education because I have seen how public education opened a million doors for me, and I know it opens doors for young people in Massachusetts and all across this country. I believe that strengthening America's public schools is critical for securing a better future for our children and for our grandchildren. I also understand the vital role the Secretary of Education plays in making sure every young person has real opportunities and a fighting chance to succeed.

We are one vote away from making sure this job is not entrusted to Betsy DeVos. One vote. We need just one more Republican to stand up for the children of America, to stand up for public education, to stand up for college students, to stand up for basic decency and honesty in government. With just one more Republican, we can say this Senate puts kids ahead of partisan politics. With just one more Republican, we can say this Senate still cares about public officials who put the public ahead of their own interests. Just one more Republican, that is all we need. Just one.

I assumed that the rush to complete this nomination has something to do with the fact that Republicans' phones have been ringing off the hook from citizens who are outraged by the idea of this nomination. Before these Republicans decide whether to help Donald Trump reward a wealthy donor by putting someone in charge of the Department of Education who doesn't really believe in public education, I want them to hear from the people of Massachusetts, the people who on their own have contacted me about this nomination.

I have received countless letters and calls from constituents in Massachusetts, including a batch of letters from a new local grassroots organization—Essex County #6 Indivisible—that is very concerned that Betsy DeVos is a danger to our schools. So I just want to share a few of those letters with my colleagues right now.

I heard from Matt Harden, who is a teacher from Plymouth, and he wrote this:

I have been a teacher for fifteen years and a parent for seven. I feel incredibly proud of the schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and view my position as a music educator not simply as a job but a vocation. The recent referendum in the Commonwealth regarding the expansion of cap on Charter Schools was soundly defeated by the electorate. I have grave concerns about Ms. DeVos and her ties to corporate interests in education. Schools are not businesses, and students are not products on an assembly line. This line of thinking is a clear and present danger to our students, and reflects a lack of familiarity with the public education system.

In this matter, my concerns are not limited to the borders of our own state but the equitable access to education across our nation. Ms. DeVos is not the right person to be an intellectual and educational leader for our nation—we need real change and ideas, not privatization and politicization of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

I also heard from Alexandra Loos, a special education teacher from Cambridge. She had this to say:

I am a special education teacher who works with children with developmental disabilities, and I urge you to vote against the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education.

I have grave concerns about the qualifications of Ms. DeVos due to her lack of experience in the public education system as well as her record of support for charter and private schools that are not obligated to follow Federal education standards or guidelines.

Most urgently, as a professional who specializes in evaluating and treating children with autism, Down syndrome, learning disabilities, ADHD, and other developmental and behavioral disorders, I am extremely concerned about Ms. DeVos's apparent lack of understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal law that guarantees "a free and appropriate public education" to children with disabilities. During her confirmation hearing this week, Ms. DeVos appeared to be unfamiliar with IDEA . . . stating that she felt that enforcement of this federal law should be left up to the states. This is unacceptable and clearly indicates that Ms. DeVos is unqualified to serve as Secretary of Education.

With approximately 13% of public school children in special education, it is essential that an Education Secretary be knowledgeable and supportive of the federal laws that guide special education services. Please vote "no" on Ms. DeVos's confirmation.

Yes, Alexandra. Yes.

My office also heard from Diana Fulerton, a school adjustment counselor from Salem. Diana said she had never written to a politician before, but she felt strongly enough about Betsy DeVos to write:

I am a school adjustment counselor in an elementary school in Gloucester. I have never gotten involved much in politics until this election. I went to the Boston Women's March on Saturday and this is my first time writing to a politician. I am extremely concerned about Trump's nomination for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. In my work I support students who are very vulnerable: on IEPS, in high-poverty environments, identifying as gay or transgender, and coming from backgrounds where English is a second language. I believe that Ms. DeVos' extreme and uneducated positions on the needs of students in public schools could harm my children. Please vote against her nomination as Secretary of Education.

Thanks, Diana. I will.

I heard from another teacher from Newton, who said:

I am opposed to Betsy DeVos as the next Secretary of Education. I have spent my entire life as a teacher—first in public and private schools for 14 years teaching French, then as a member of the faculty of Lesley University for 26 years, and now as a teacher in a Life Long Learning program at Brandeis. I cannot imagine having a Secretary of Education who has never had any direct educational experience. I am also very worried about her views of public education and her appalling record on civil rights. Strong education is the foundation of our democracy. Please do what you can to maintain and improve our current system.

Thank you.

Yet another teacher contacted our office, this one from Abington. She wrote:

I believe in my community's public schools. In fact, I've worked in them as a

teacher for over 15 years. The nomination of Betsy DeVos has me seriously considering a change of employment. Betsy DeVos believes in school privatization and vouchers. She has worked to undermine efforts to regulate Michigan charters, even when they clearly fail, and yet she has never worked in a school. The marketplace solution of DeVos will destroy our democratically governed community schools. Her hostility toward public schools disqualifies her. I am asking you to vote against the confirmation of Betsy DeVos.

We also heard from parents all across the State, including Leslie Boloian, a mother from Andover. Leslie said:

I am a mother of an 8 year old who is dyslexic. She is smart and very capable of learning what other kids can learn; however, she needs specialized education. Through the public school system, she is learning to read and continues to reach new milestones daily. I fear that Betsy DeVos could put my daughter's education at risk.

I urge you to oppose Secretary of Education nominee Betsy DeVos, who is best known for her anti-public education campaigns!

The chance for the success of a child should not depend on winning a charter lottery, being accepted by a private school, or living in the right ZIP code. It is our duty to ensure all students have access to a great public school in their community and the opportunity to succeed. Betsy DeVos has consistently worked against these values, and her efforts over the years have done more to undermine public education than support all students.

Betsy DeVos has no experience in public schools, either as a student, educator, administrator, or even as a parent. She has lobbied for failed schemes, like vouchers to fund private schools at taxpayers' expense. These privatization schemes do nothing to help our students most in need, and they ignore or exacerbate glaring opportunity gaps.

We need a Secretary of Education who will champion innovative strategies that we know help to improve success for all students, including creating more opportunities and equity for all. Betsy DeVos is not that person, and I urge you to vote against her for Secretary of Education.

Thank you, Leslie.

Kate Brigham, a mother from Somerville, also wrote. She said.

My name is Kate Brigham, and I am a constituent of yours from Somerville. . . . I'm writing to urge you to vote against Betsy DeVos' confirmation as Secretary of Education. The future of our kids here in Somerville and across the country are depending on you to see the difference between education progress and privatization.

The majority of America's school children attend public schools. We cannot leave their futures and the future of our country in the hands of a woman whose ideas to privatize school funding have already left the state of Michigan and its children in shambles. Her personal financial conflicts of interest are staggering.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—which DeVos did not know was a federal law—guarantees rights to both students with disabilities and to their parents. So this isn't just about civil rights; it's also crucial to families. We cannot afford a Secretary of Education who's "confused" on what the law is. My own 2-year-old daughter benefits from MA's wonderful Early Intervention program and will need special education services when she turns 3 in September.

IDEA and the ADA were both signed into law by Republican Presidents. Disability

rights are not and cannot become a partisan issue. Thank you for ensuring that public education for ALL will be protected. Somerville, and Massachusetts, needs it. And we won't succeed with Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education.

Thank you, Kate. Thanks for writing. Samantha Lambert, a mother of four from Everett, also contacted us with her concerns. Samantha wrote:

I am a voter from MA who has struggled with the change coming as a result of this election. . . . It is difficult to focus when there is a new outrage at every turn.

No one frightens me more than Betsy DeVos. Why? The impacts of her ignorance and disdain for public education will remain with us for a generation. I have 4 children, all educated in the Everett Public School System, one of whom benefits from Special Education.

We have one opportunity to get it right with our children. I was asked by a conservative friend who was curious why this appointment brought such a backlash, and the answer was simple for me. Our job is to protect our children, the nation's children. Those unable to influence their future with a vote. There is no mandate for the destruction of our most treasured institution, the foundation of our democracy.

My son deserves a free and fair education, as do his siblings. As do their peers. The children in our school district are in the lower socioeconomic rung. Many rely on public transportation and neighborhood public schools. That takes the choice out of school choice, doesn't it? It favors students on economic lines, furthering the divide and putting an undue burden on the schools left behind who will struggle to serve the students that need this gift of education most.

The public hearing demonstrated that Mrs. DeVos is wholly unqualified for this appointment. Her answers or lack of answers, specifically regarding IDEA and school choice, were frightening. As a parent, I was literally shaking.

My nine-year-old son was listening to a portion and heard Senator Hassan mention dyslexia in her question. He cheered and asked if we were going to make sure all kids get special help to read. I couldn't answer him because in her answer, Mrs. DeVos seemed not to know that IDEA is a Federal law protecting these beautiful minds. Protecting them from being a line item that can be wiped away, their future successes and achievements going right along with it.

I ask you, please oppose Betsy DeVos for Education Secretary, for the good of ALL our nation's children.

Thank you, Samantha. Thanks for writing.

We also heard from Laura Fukushima, a mother and former teacher from Dedham. She wrote to say:

Before having my own children, I taught in public schools for five years—three in Boston and two in Tennessee (Sumner Country)—and I'm writing to ask you to vote against confirming Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education.

It's evident that Ms. DeVos is passionate about education—judging from the enormous amounts of money she has poured into shaping policy—and I have no reason to doubt her intentions are good. But that doesn't qualify her for this job. Here are my concerns:

1) Aside from having no experience in public schools, either as a parent or a student, she has no experience in any kind of school as an educator.

2) At her confirmation hearing, she demonstrated a lack of basic understanding of

many pertinent issues and concepts—an intimate knowledge of which is required to shape good educational policy.

3) Despite lacking both the prerequisite knowledge and experience within the field of education, she actively used her wealth to sway legislators in Michigan away from their initial support of bipartisan measures, based on a broad coalition of informed participants, to regulate and improve charter schools. (For the record, I do support charter schools, but understanding that there is a vast disparity in their quality, I see the need for rigorous oversight.) Her efforts, I believe, have been more detrimental than beneficial to the children of Detroit.

4) Her suggestion that enforcing IDEA should be left to the states is very troubling. Such policy would leave our most vulnerable students very far behind.

While I agree with Ms. DeVos that our educational system would benefit from some additional choice for parents, I think she's wildly mistaken if she believes a completely free market will fix our schools. We need a Secretary of Education who believes in proper oversight and can help create effective measures of assessment and accountability to improve education for all our children. That's what the Department of Education is for. To run it successfully, we need a Secretary, unlike DeVos, who is well trained in the field.

Thank you, Laura.

A mother from Clinton also wrote about how she would be personally affected by Betsy DeVos, saying:

I have an 8-year-old daughter with Autism Spectrum Disorder who receives services through our public elementary school. I believe that every individual deserves an equal education. IDEA must be upheld! My daughter is doing very well with her studies because of the supports she receives. She is a very smart girl but needs and deserves accommodations. I am thankful there are laws to protect her.

Betsy DeVos thinks that states should decide how to fund education for individuals with disabilities. I believe it should remain federally mandated. I wouldn't be able to afford a private education for my daughter in a special school. I know there are many more parents like me.

I also opposed expanding Charter schools in our state. I believe publicly funded schools should be publicly run and overseen.

I request you reject Betsy DeVos for Education Secretary.

Thank you.

Another parent wrote to say:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. She has demonstrated NO commitment to public education throughout her life, and her support of charter schools in Detroit has been a demonstrated failure. The framing of for-profit charter schools as providing "choice" for parents is a false framing—it provides the illusion of a poorly regulated and poorly supervised choice for some parents while limiting the resources and choices left to the other parents and leading to a downward spiral in the quality of public education. Transferring public funding of education to for-profit charter schools, creaming off the children of the most motivated parents, and leaving the more difficult, lower income, and children with special education challenges is a prescription for failure of public schools and will result in herding lower-income students into dysfunctional schools, setting them up for a lifetime of underemployment.

I am not a teacher, nor a member of a teacher's union. I am a mother, and I was

proud to send my son to the Brookline Public Schools for his entire K-12 education. I want other children to have a chance for a quality education, not to be the fodder for a private, for-profit charter school with no commitment to the public good.

Quality public education is the foundation of a free society and the key to sustaining a vibrant economy in the future. Please oppose the confirmation of Betsy DeVos.

A woman from Canton also wrote in. She said:

As a parent of public school children, I urge you to reject the nomination of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. A free and appropriate education is the cornerstone of our democracy, but Ms. DeVos has shown no interest in preserving public education. In fact, she has worked tirelessly to divert public funds into private pockets by way of deregulating and expanding charter schools and to offer vouchers which can be used at private and religious schools. This is a clear violation of our principle of separating church and State.

Ms. DeVos's strategies have had disastrous consequences in Michigan. Eighty percent of charter schools there operate for profit. When schools look first to satisfy investors, they rely on teaching to standardized tests, not on educating children. Here in Massachusetts, we overwhelmingly rejected the idea, one funded by billionaires, and resisted by parents and public school teachers.

Please join us in opposing a "lead educator" who has never gone to a public school nor sent her children to one. Please consider that the nation's future depends on educating every child, and that to do so, we need to restore and strengthen our public school system, not dismantle it in favor of profiting off the backs of our youth.

Thank you.

It is no surprise that we also heard from many constituents struggling with student loans. One of those was Liam Weir, a college student from Brighton, who had this to say:

As a college student and a resident of the State of Massachusetts, I am writing you to express my deep concern over the potential appointment of Betsy DeVos to the position of Secretary of Education. Ms. DeVos is extraordinarily unqualified to lead such a department. The fact that the President has chosen such a person, with no experience in education administration in any capacity at any level, is an insult to the millions of teachers, students, and school administrators across the country. Ms. DeVos's policies will undermine already struggling public school systems by allocating taxpayer funds to advance a cynical and deeply troubling agenda against established science. I myself am a recipient of Federal college grants and loans, and I am growing increasingly concerned about Ms. DeVos's competency in managing the looming student debt crisis.

Now more than ever is a time for the Education Department to be run by capable and caring individuals, not willfully ignorant ones.

A young mother from Winthrop also reached out to us. She had this to say:

I urge you to vote No on the confirmation of Betsy DeVos, a singularly unqualified individual . . . among a veritable sea of unqualified individuals this administration has chosen to lead our country.

My husband and I have no personal stake in public education over the next 4 years. Our daughter is only 7 months old. But I am the child of two public schoolteachers in RI, my friends are teachers, my friends' children are in school, my nephews, cousins, etc. I be-

lieve in public schools and I believe that Betsy DeVos is not the right direction for our public education system. She is dangerous, and her lack of knowledge is appalling.

Also, and I thank you so much for asking about this at her hearing—student loans are not a business, they are a crisis in this country. My husband has a six figure debt, with interest rates at 7.5 percent. He had to take a job . . . rather than pursue his dreams of working in criminal justice because he needed a job that could pay his \$1,000 a month student loan bill. Our saving grace is that I have a good job, and my student loan debt is nearly paid off—because I was loaned a reasonable amount at a reasonable 2 percent interest rate. We are a case study in how the program should work vs. predatory lending.

That is so true. Thanks for writing.

Liz Bosworth, a mother of two from North Dartmouth, had this to say:

While I am fully aware that you do not support the nominations for many of President Trump's nominees, I am currently most concerned about Ms. DeVos. I watched parts of her hearing and I remain concerned that there was a denial for a second hearing. I hope this leads to continued questions and a final opposition of her as Secretary of Education. Your lines of questioning served to highlight her lack of qualifying experience but still, in light of this last six month's politics, I believe anything is possible.

As the mother of two small children and a daughter-in-law, niece, cousin, friend, and wife of public school teachers, I find her to be quite alarming and somewhat scary as the potential leader of that office. We are strong proponents of public education and of teaching our children to value their time in school and to achieve high levels of success.

With that comes some anxiety around their aspirations to higher learning. As a master's level social worker, I will be paying off my loans until I start to pay for my son's higher education. I do not want the debt for my children that I have. At this rate, I am saving far much less money per month for their college funds while paying off my own. I want my children to go higher than myself, but I want them to do so with a level of confidence in their finances that I was not afforded. Ms. DeVos, highlighted by you in her confirmation hearing, has not been involved with student loans on any level and does not have the experience to become entrusted with my current debt or the debt of my children.

Finally, I would like to highlight my abject fear of the treatment of those students with learning disabilities, particularly severe and profound disorders, if she is confirmed. While I see many walks of life in my field, my mother was a proud special education teacher in New Bedford for 33 years. She was proud to be able to teach life skills like budgeting, simple cooking and social skills to her students who may not ever be college ready. We worry about those kids and what will become of them if Ms. DeVos is confirmed. My husband is currently employed in a collaborative that works with mentally ill children who need a different kind of educational process but can still achieve the same goals. I am not sure they would ever qualify for a voucher to attend some Charter school.

We are committed to families and community maintenance of all students with the right care at the right time. I am not sure that Ms. DeVos is committed in the same way.

Please vote to oppose Ms. DeVos.

Thank you, Liz. Thanks for writing.

I heard from another student in Boston who told me the following:

I am writing to you today as a public school teacher and a Ph.D. Candidate in Urban Education, Leadership and Policy Studies. I believe in public schools. Betsy DeVos believes in school privatization and vouchers. She has worked to undermine efforts to regulate Michigan charters, even when they clearly failed. The "marketplace" solution of DeVos will destroy our democratically governed community schools. She has no professional experience in the education field. She does not truly understand the nuances of public education nor does she want to understand.

I managed to earn scholarships that took care of most of my schooling, but I still have about \$80,000 in student loans. (Not bad for 2 expensive private institution degrees!) I am a first generation college student and my single mother could not afford to help me pay for my schooling. Betsy DeVos just doesn't have experience in K-12 public schools, but she has no experience in running the student loan department. The Federal student loan program is far from perfect. We need someone running it who is knowledgeable in the process, believes in making college more affordable, and understands what it feels like to not be sure how you will pay for college. She has no qualifications of any kind in this area.

I am asking you to vote against the confirmation of Betsy DeVos. Please consider this request and the thousands of other people across the country who vehemently disagree with Ms. DeVos's candidacy.

Thank you.

Sarah Rothery, a mother of two from Northborough, told me about her two sons, saying:

I am writing to ask that you oppose the confirmation of Ms. DeVos for the cabinet position for which she was nominated under President Trump. I have put 2 sons through college thanks to Stafford loans and personal savings and I think she has no idea what is involved in middle class families financing college educations today. One of my sons is now an 8th grade history teacher in a public charter school, Abbot Kelly Foster, in Worcester, and worries that Ms. DeVos has no real understanding of urban education as well.

Thank you, Sarah. Thanks for writing.

I have also heard from Alicia Bettano, a former student from Merrimac who bravely shared with me her own experiences. This is from Alicia:

I suffer from a Non Verbal Learning Disorder. Up until I was 13 years old I was not diagnosed with anything. I went to aides, speech therapists, everyone. I had trouble in the maths and in sciences. I was thought of as stupid. I was yelled at by aides. When I was 13 and diagnosed, my teachers didn't understand. They thought sitting me closer to the white board would allow me to understand better, despite the fact that it was their teaching methods that confused me. I was told I would not go to college or graduate. My parents had to hire an advocate to work for me to get my teachers and school to understand my disability. It took me some time to figure out what I wanted and needed, but in May I graduated college.

Betsy DeVos would be a horror for those with disabilities; not just learning ones, but mental ones. I was lucky I had parents and one teacher backing me. What about the ones that don't? Putting Betsy DeVos into office will hurt our children in America—that's not making America great.

Alicia, thank you for writing. I really appreciate it. Congratulations on your graduation.

A man from Brookline also wrote in, saying this:

As someone passionate about education, especially the education of students in Massachusetts, and as a graduate of a public elementary school, middle school, high school and college; as a young professional burdened by education debt; as the husband of an early childhood educator working in a struggling Boston neighborhood; as a member of a family filled with men and women dedicated to careers in public education, I strongly urge you to oppose Secretary of Education nominee Betsy DeVos. My vote for or against candidates in future elections will be informed by whether the candidate publicly opposed this Secretary of Education nominee.

Betsy DeVos has consistently worked against public education and she is incredibly unqualified for this position. At best, she should be an undersecretary focused on public-private partnerships. If you must work with the incoming administration, suggest her nomination for that role, but you must oppose her cabinet-level appointment.

DeVos has no experience in public schools, either as a student, educator, administrator or even as a parent. She has lobbied for, and been employed by, initiatives that have undermined public education in America.

We need a Secretary of Education who will champion innovative strategies that we know help to improve success for all students, including creating more opportunities and equity for all. I urge you to vote against Ms. DeVos for Secretary of Education.

What does Betsy DeVos have to say to Matt and Diana or to the thousands of other teachers who have more experience in public education than she does? What does she have to say to Leslie and Samantha, whose children have benefited from the programs she wants to cut? What does she have to say to Sarah, who relied on Stafford loans to put her sons through college?

It is not just individuals who are worried about Betsy DeVos. We have heard from groups across the State as well. The Massachusetts Charter Public School Association wrote me, saying this:

Dear Senator Warren,

As the Association representing the 70 Massachusetts commonwealth charter public schools, we are writing to express our concerns over the nomination of Elisabeth DeVos as U.S. Secretary of Education. We do not express these reservations lightly, but we believe it is important to raise certain issues that should be addressed by the nominee.

Both President-elect Trump and Ms. DeVos are strong supporters of public charter schools, and we are hopeful they will continue the bipartisan efforts of the Clinton, Bush and Obama Administrations to promote the continued expansion of high quality charters while pursuing reforms that will strengthen traditional public schools.

But we are concerned about media reports of Ms. DeVos' support for school vouchers and her critical role in creating a charter system in her home state of Michigan that has been widely criticized for lax oversight and poor academic performance, and appears to be dominated by for-profit interests.

As the senior Senator from Massachusetts and a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP), which will hold hearings on the nomination, you will be in a position to ensure the nominee commits to holding the national charter school movement to the high-

est levels of accountability and oversight that are the hallmark of the Massachusetts charter system.

By all independent accounts, Massachusetts has the best charter school system in the country. We are providing high quality public school choices for parents across our state. Our urban schools are serving the highest need children in Massachusetts, and are producing results that have researchers double-checking their math. These gains held across all demographic groups, including African American, Latino, and children living in poverty.

The cornerstone of the Massachusetts charter public school system is accountability. The process of obtaining and keeping a charter is deliberately difficult. The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is the sole authorizer and historically has approved only one out of every five applications. Once approved, each charter school must submit to annual financial audits by independent auditors and annual performance reviews by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Every five years, each charter must be renewed after a process as rigorous as the initial application process. For-profit charter schools are prohibited by Massachusetts law.

Our schools have also created partnerships with many Massachusetts public school districts to foster collaboration and best practices sharing, and have forged an historic Compact between Boston charter public schools and the Boston Public Schools that has become a national model.

Bipartisan support has been key to the development and success of the Massachusetts system. Created in 1993 by a Democratic Legislature and a Republican Governor, public charter schools have continued to receive support from all Governors, Republican and Democratic alike, and Democratic legislative leaders.

If the new President and his nominee intend to advance the cause of school choice across the country, they should look to Massachusetts for their path forward.

The history of charter schools in Michigan offers a more cautionary tale. The same researchers from Stanford that declared Massachusetts charter public schools an unqualified success, had mixed reviews for Michigan's charters.

According to media reports, last year Ms. DeVos actively campaigned against bipartisan legislation that would have provided more oversight for Michigan's charters. If these reports are true, we are deeply concerned that efforts to grow school choice without a rigorous accountability system will reduce the quality of charter schools across the country. We hope you agree that quality, not quantity, should be the guiding principle of charter expansion. Without high levels of accountability, this model fails.

We ask that you use the hearing to probe the incoming Administration's intentions regarding education policy in general and school choice and quality specifically.

We'd be happy to provide you with more information on the Massachusetts model and would welcome a meeting with your staff to brief them on our concerns.

Sincerely,

Massachusetts Charter Public School Association Board of Directors.

The people of Massachusetts cannot afford Betsy DeVos. This is why I will vote no on her nomination and why I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH AND THE CABINET

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, President Trump's outstanding Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch has earned high praise from all across the political spectrum.

Some of it has come from unlikely corners, whether Democratic Senators, left-leaning publications, President Obama's own legal mentor, even his former top Supreme Court lawyer. We have heard from those Gorsuch has taught. We have heard from many who have worked alongside him. In fact, just a few days ago we received a letter from several of his former law colleagues. So let me share some of that with you now. The letter began:

We are Democrats, Independents, and Republicans.

Many of us have served in government, some during Republican and some during Democratic administrations; some of us have served in both. We have clerked for Supreme Court justices and appellate and district court judges appointed by Democratic and Republican presidents. We represent a broad spectrum of views on politics, judicial philosophy, and many other subjects as well. But we all agree on one thing: Our former colleague, Neil M. Gorsuch . . . is superbly qualified for confirmation.

He is a man of character, decency, and accomplishment, [one who represented all of his clients] without regard to ideology [and one] who merits this appointment.

Clearly, it is not going to be easy to paint Judge Gorsuch as anything but extremely qualified and exceptionally fair, but that hasn't stopped some on the left from trying. They started musing about blocking any nominee before the President had even nominated anyone. It is a good reminder that much of the opposition we are seeing from far left groups and Democratic Senators isn't so much about Judge Gorsuch as it is about their dissatisfaction with the outcome of the election.

As a Washington Post headline recently declared, "Democrats' goal with court nomination: Make it a referendum on Trump."

"[P]rominent Senate Democrats," the article read, are "giving the nominee's 10-plus years on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit almost secondary consideration." It seems they believe their best, and perhaps only, bet to bring down this highly qualified judge is by "inject[ing] Trump into the process."

The very next day, the New York Times ran an article about Democrats' apparent hope that this Supreme Court fight will be "More About Trump Than Gorsuch." In other words, our Democratic colleagues are finding it hard to oppose Judge Gorsuch on the merits, so they are trying to divert attention and invent new hurdles for him to surmount. That is the playbook. Sure enough, we see them running the play.

Consider the assistant Democratic leader's speech the other day. It was supposedly about Judge Gorsuch. He sure had a lot to say about President Trump, about things President Trump has done, about things President