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1274 Newsline



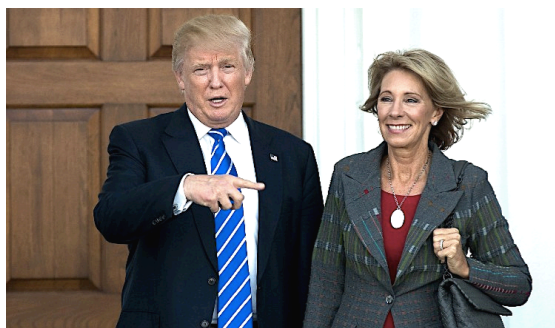
North Suburban Teachers Union – Local 1274, CFL, IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

January 2017

Labor Response to Cabinet Picks: “Troubling”

If there was any doubt about the attitudes of the President-elect to education policy and workers’ rights, you need look no further than his appointments of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education and Andrew Puzder as Secretary of Labor.

DeVos is a billionaire from Michigan who has been involved in so-called education reform for decades. She is a former chairwoman of the Michigan Republican Party and a mega-donor to conservative Republican candidates, as well as the prime mover behind the pro-school-choice advocacy group American Federation for Children. She has been a relentless leader of the movement to undermine public education by expanding charter schools and creating programs that funnel tax revenue to private schools in the form of vouchers.



Perhaps the clearest test of DeVos’s school choice agenda can be found in her home state. Using her clout as a heavy-weight campaign contributor, she helped pass legislation that encouraged the proliferation of charter schools and opposed effective regulation and oversight. While DeVos believes that the actions of a free market will be sufficient to improve school quality, the facts suggest otherwise.

In Michigan, charter schools as a whole have produced test scores in reading and math below the state average. Worse still, for-profit charters have preyed on the

state’s most vulnerable citizens. In Detroit, school choice has become an educational Wild West where low-income parents, seeking better schools, frequently move their children from one poorly-performing charter to another, while higher-performing schools remain too far from their neighborhoods to offer a real option.

According to IFT President Dan Montgomery, the appointment of Betsy DeVos is “troubling.” “Here in Illinois, voters don’t want more so-called ‘choice.’ They want fully-funded, vibrant public schools where their kids will get a well-rounded education in their own neighborhood.” Montgomery also pointed out that the DeVos family contributed generously to the Rauner campaign for Governor in 2014, drawing a connection between the school choice agenda and the billionaire class represented by DeVos, Rauner and Trump.

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Illinois Bucks National Trends

As results came in on election night, it soon became clear that in races across the state of Illinois voters were pushing back against the red tide sweeping across many other states.

In the statewide races for U.S. Senate and Comptroller, Illinois voters elected Democrats Tammy Duckworth and Susana Mendoza. Tammy will join current U.S. Senator and long-time IFT supporter Dick Durbin (D) to advocate for working people in Washington, while Susana will replace Governor Rauner’s hand-picked appointee and be a much-needed independent fiscal watchdog in Springfield.

Leaders of both the IFT and the AFT praised Duckworth’s election, calling her “an American hero.” AFT President Randi Weingarten said that in electing her to the U.S. Senate “the people of Illinois sent a clear message that partisan politics and obstructionism, as well as hateful and racist rhetoric, have no place in our country.”

Continued on page 4.

Voices of a Generation: Local High School Students React to the Election

A number of publications have reported on the reactions in America's schools to the election of Donald Trump. These included, in some places, walk-outs and protests. In other places, there were reports that hate speech had spiked – sometimes called the Trump Effect.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, fear and anxiety were widespread. In the days after the election, they administered an online survey to 10,000 K-12 educators. Nine out of 10 educators reported a negative impact on students' mood and behavior; eight out of 10 reported heightened anxiety on the part of marginalized students; and four in 10 heard derogatory language used.

We have no such survey for our own local schools, but interviews with five high school students from Niles North High School, all in Pankaj Sharma's social studies classes, shed some light on their complex and nuanced reactions.

Most of the students expressed shock at the results of the election. Joshua Thomas had worked as an intern for democratic candidates. "I was devastated that all the work that the other interns and I had done for the race of the president had gone to waste."

Others were less surprised or upset, but recognized the distress around them. Ahmad Zaidi, from a Muslim family, said that his sister was "very upset. She believed that all the Trump supporters are racists who want to ban Muslims." Spencer Schwartz, whose family identifies as independents, said he realized the impact of the election only when he went to school the next day. "It dawned on me that the results had deeply upset many of my fellow students, and it impacted me as a result of that."

There were many reports of strong emotion. Kati Yau related that on the morning after the election, "I cried, I sat on my bed and I cried. And when my mom saw me crying, she sighed and said in a matter of fact way, 'See, now you know. Now you know that America will never see you as an American. You will always be another Chinese.' And that really hit me because she's been saying that to us (my sisters and I) ever since we were little and I didn't believe it, but this election really made me realize that what

she said was the truth and how deep down I've always felt that way."

All agreed that the atmosphere at school was "solemn" or "somber" on the day after the election. While

Joshua has no concerns about his own safety, "in student government, we talked about the fear that many undocumented immigrants felt because of Donald Trump's hate." Likewise, Samuel Schein felt strong empathy and fear for friends. "I have a close friend who wears a hijab everyday to school. Lately, her parents have been telling her it's ok if she feels like she needs to take it off in public. That is ridiculous."

According to Joshua, the school administration attempted to address these fears, but with some difficulty.

"The school held a safe space room during lunch periods where people could

speak about their feelings. The safe space was considered to be inclusive to only progressives and liberals, which resulted in the principal issuing an apology."

According to Kati, however, not everyone was grieving. "The people who supported Trump came out of the woodwork. They were celebrating because they had won."

The students uniformly expressed concern about America's future. "The nation is split, and that includes this generation," said Kati. "I just hope that we can create change and equality in the future, but change is so slow." Samuel said the election "shows my generation brutal flaws in America's electoral and campaign system" but hopes his generation can fix it. Ahmad is optimistic that we "will come to realize that it is not a great idea to group people based on the location of their birth."

For teachers, this election was also an unsettling experience. "It was extremely difficult to teach about because of the many offensive and controversial comments from Trump," said Sharma. "Also, in most election years we could teach the fundamental differences between the parties through the candidates and debates. However, even many conservative students did not feel that Trump was a true conservative or good representative of Republican values, so his victory was confusing to students from across the spectrum."■

For teaching ideas, go to the AFT at [ShareMyLesson.com](https://www.aft.org/sharemylesson).



Many students around the nation, like these in Seattle, expressed concern and support for their marginalized peers. Many local students shared these feelings.

From the President: A Workers' Bill of Rights

Something went terribly wrong on November 8th, 2016. Surely it wasn't just one thing, but a confluence of factors that delivered unto us a President Trump. It will take the pundits and analysts years to identify all of those factors, sort through them, weigh them, rank them, and even then the answer will remain elusive and the analyses will be debated.

But one fact is undeniable: Donald Trump's victory was sealed by defeating Hillary Clinton in the key battleground states of the so-called rust belt: Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, where his performance among working class voters probably made the difference.

One can assume that the policies of a President Trump – and the Republican-controlled Congress – will not be in the service of those working class voters. But to simply ridicule those workers for “voting against their own interests” reinforces their sense of alienation. More importantly it misses the larger point: to move forward and progress from this electoral disaster, we are going to need to learn from those voters, not condescend to them. If they thought that Donald Trump offered them a better deal than Hillary Clinton, we need to understand why.

What we really need to do is to have a clear platform and message for working class Americans so that they know what we – labor unions and our political, organizational, and community allies – stand for, not just what we are against. We seem to be too often on the defensive, fighting against attacks on our rights, against attacks on our pensions, against a Bruce Rauner or a Scott Walker. Rather than condemning working class Americans for voting against their interests, let's make it more clear what those interests are and who is on their side.

Let us propose and promote a Workers' Bill of Rights. It might look something like this:

1. The right of all workers to **collectively bargain** for their wages, hours, and working conditions. This is the cornerstone of all rights, the one that can enable all others.
2. The right to a **living wage** for all full-time employees.

3. The right to **adequate and affordable health care**.
4. The right to **retirement security**.
5. The right to **employment security**, replacing at-will employment with systems of due process and just cause.
6. The right to a **safe workplace**, free from danger and discrimination, harassment and hostility.
7. The right for workers to defend themselves through a **fair process**, without retribution, when their rights have been violated.
8. The right for workers to **organize** themselves to better advocate for, enforce, and preserve the aforementioned rights.



Once our Workers' Bill of Rights has been established, the next step is to gather political and organizational allies in support, press for legislation and policies that will codify and enforce them, and hold elected officials and candidates accountable for letting the voters know what side they are on when it comes to those essential rights.

In Solidarity,



What we really need to do is have a clear platform and message for working class Americans so that they know what we stand for, not just what we are against.

Cabinet Picks, continued from page 1.

The appointment of Andrew Puzder as Secretary of Labor is equally troubling.

Puzder has been president and CEO of CKE Restaurants, which operates Hardee's and Carl, Jr.'s, since 2000. He has been most visible as a fierce critic of the minimum wage. He responded to the Fight for \$15 campaign with highly charged anti-worker language, proposing greater automation in the fast food industry.



"Machines are much easier to deal with than humans," he is quoted as saying. "They never take a vacation, they never show up late, there's never a slip-and-fall, or an age, sex, or race discrimination case."

Puzder also opposes unions. His restaurants have been the subject of dozens of unfair labor practice allegations, according to NLRB data, including terminating employees for concerted activity. In 2001 alone, CKE Restaurants spent \$53,829.96 hiring a union buster to try to persuade employees not to vote for a union. He has worked with Richard Berman, head of the anti-union Center for Union Facts. Berman is notable for his ongoing campaign to undermine union rights. He maintains a website attacking the American Federation of Teachers and has purchased ads criticizing President Randi Weingarten.

As icing on the cake, Puzder agrees with DeVos in believing, with no basis in fact, that an expansion of charter schools will improve public education. In 2014, in an op-ed for the *Orange County Register*, he also praised an unsuccessful attempt to eliminate teacher tenure and due process. (For more information on Puzder, see the AFT fact sheet at: <http://allin.rtp.aft.org/files/andrewpudzer.pdf>.)

The practical effect of appointments like those of DeVos and Puzder remains to be seen. It is clear, however, that those who will lead the departments responsible for education and labor are people who oppose the basic premise of the *public* in public education and the *rights* in labor rights.■

Illinois Bucks National Trends, continued from page 1.

In the 10th Congressional District, IFT-endorsed Brad Schneider (D) defeated Congressman Bob Dold (R). The partisan makeup of Illinois' Congressional delegation will now change from 10 Democrats and 8 Republicans to 11 Democrats and 7 Republicans.

In Illinois Senate races, Democrats protected their seats in the suburbs, including those of NSTU-backed incumbents Ira Silverstein (Lincolnwood) and Laura Murphy (Park Ridge). However, the democratic Senate supermajority will drop from 39 to 37 members due to gains for Republicans downstate.

In the Illinois House, Democrats retained the majority (67 seats), despite losing four seats. Among the local House candidates backed by the NSTU, all but one was successful. Those who won included Ann Williams and Kelly Cassidy of Chicago, Laura Fine of Glenview, Robyn Gabel of Evanston, Lou Lang of Skokie, Marty Moylan of Des Plaines, and Michelle Mussman of Schaumburg.

The success of union-backed candidates came in the face of strong opposition, with Bruce Rauner investing historic amounts of money into legislative races. IFT leaders attribute this to the efforts of IFT members who knocked on doors, talked with family and friends, and contributed to COPE.■

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