

Senator Collins' Statement on Betsy DeVos

“Mr. Chairman, I will be voting today to report Mrs. Devos' nomination out of committee for consideration by the full Senate. I do so because I believe that Presidents are entitled to considerable deference in the selection of Cabinet members regardless of which political party is in power. That is why during President Obama's administration, I voted for cloture on his nominations for Secretary of Defense and for Secretary of Labor, allowing them to be brought to a vote by the full Senate, even though I ultimately voted against those two nominees on the Senate floor.

“At the time I stated that it is appropriate for each and every Senator to have the opportunity to vote for or against an individual nominee. And I still believe that that is the right approach for Cabinet members.

“Now let me make clear that I know that Mrs. Devos cares deeply about children. I recognize that she has devoted much time and resources to try to improve the education of at-risk children in cities whose public schools have failed them, and I commend her for that service.

“Like all of us, Mrs. Devos is the product of her experience. She appears to view education through the lens of her experience in promoting alternatives to public education in Detroit and other cities where she is no doubt done valuable work. Nevertheless, her concentration on charter schools and vouchers raises the question of whether or not she fully appreciates that the Secretary of Education's primary focus must be on helping states and communities, parents, teachers, school board members, and administrators strengthen our public schools. That is why I wrote to Mrs. Devos, seeking her assurances in writing, that she would not support any federal legislation mandating that states adopt vouchers, nor will she condition federal funding on the presence of voucher programs in states. She has provided that commitment, and I would ask unanimous consent that my letter to Mrs. Devos and her reply be entered into the record.

“There remain other questions about Mrs. Devos' knowledge of certain federal education laws. While it is unrealistic and unfair to expect a nominee to know all of the details of such programs, I was surprised and concerned about Mrs. Devos' apparent lack of familiarity with the landmark 1975 law, IDEA, that guarantees a free and appropriate education for children with special needs.

“Therefore, I will continue to evaluate this nomination before it comes to the floor for a vote even as I vote today to advance it so that all of our colleagues have the opportunity to assess this nominee. Thank you Mr. Chairman.”