



Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies – Review of the Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request for the U.S. Department of Education

Senate Appropriations Labor-HHS-Ed Subcommittee

Tuesday, June 6, 2017

Recorded live from Dirksen 124

[Link to Webcast](#)

Summary:

On Tuesday, June 6, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos testified before the Senate Labor-HHS-Ed Subcommittee on the President's fiscal year 2018 budget for the Department of Education. On May 24th, Secretary DeVos defended the same budget before the House Labor-HHS-Ed Subcommittee where she drew criticism for the extensive cuts to education programs. Tuesday's hearing featured similarly contentious moments during the question and answer section, as Senators questioned Secretary DeVos on the budget's impact to civil rights and student debt. Secretary DeVos defended the FY2018 budget for granting flexibility to school districts and communities by cutting back on federal oversight.

In his opening remarks, Chairman Roy Blunt (R-MO) acknowledged that Congress will not vote for many of the requested budget cuts. Chairman Blunt specifically condemned cuts to TRIO, Federal Work-Study, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC), and technical and community colleges. Chairman Blunt encouraged Secretary DeVos and the committee members to use the hearing as an opportunity to identify priority programs within the budget, along with those that are duplicative or ineffective. Despite his criticism over cuts to a few select programs, Chairman Blunt praised the budget as an attempt to reduce the role of the federal government in local school districts.

The budget was universally panned by Democrats. Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) criticized the budget for undermining the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). She highlighted specific cuts to programs such as 21st CCLC, Special Olympics, Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy grants, Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants, Public Service Loan Forgiveness, Federal Work-Study, the Pell Grant program, and the Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants (Title II). In addition, Ranking Member Murray expressed her concern that Secretary DeVos does not understand the role the federal government plays in protecting the civil rights of students in primary and secondary education.

In her testimony, Secretary DeVos defended the budget for promoting school choice, returning autonomy to states and local school districts, and saving taxpayer dollars. Secretary DeVos

stated the budget will save taxpayers \$5.8 billion and will eliminate 22 programs that are “duplicative or ineffective.” She stated that the budget prioritizes grants that promote competition and creativity among students, while servicing the needs of low-income students. The Secretary defended a controversial provision that provides \$1 billion for a new voucher program that will be added to Title I. Secretary DeVos argued the new voucher program, along with cuts to federal programs, gave more flexibility to local schools to meet the needs of their communities.

During the question and answer segment of the hearing, Democrats repeatedly voiced their concern over the budget’s impact on student civil rights, student debt, and for-profit higher education institutions. Ranking Member Murray asked Secretary DeVos if schools receiving vouchers will be required to comply with the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Secretary DeVos replied “schools that receive federal funds, must follow federal laws.” In addition, Ranking Member Murray asked Secretary DeVos to justify her budgets’ \$578 million cut to Title I-A. Secretary DeVos claimed the budget intends to fully fund Title I and that Ranking Member Murray’s number is based on the final appropriations level Congress passed after the budget had already been completed by the Administration. Ranking Member Murray emphasized that regardless of the origin, the cut to Title I-A would have a real-world impact on public schools.

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) criticized the budget’s cuts to Pell grants and Federal Work-Study, and the impact they will have an impact on student debt. He argued that cuts to federal aid programs will require students to take out more loans, further punishing low-income college students. In addition, Sen. Durbin stated that 35% of student loan default originates from students attending for-profit institutions, and he criticized Secretary DeVos for failing to regulate these institutions.

Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) lamented the budget’s cuts to Title IV and explained the state of West Virginia does not have the funds to fill the role the federal government plays in education. It should also be noted that Sen. Shelley Capito (R-WV) criticized cuts to 21st CCLC, echoing the concerns voiced by Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray in their opening statements.

Republicans were generally supportive of the budget for saving taxpayer dollars and reducing the role of federal government in schools. Sen. James Lankford (R-OK) praised Secretary DeVos for cutting back the enforcement of Title VIII, which he argues grants the federal government an intrusive role in school systems. Sen. Rubio argued student performance is not dictated by funding alone, but is heavily impacted by socioeconomic factors of the students’ environment.