

Ultra-right libertarian to run the US Education Office of Civil Rights

Nancy Hanover
18 April 2017

Last week, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos announced her appointments of key Education Department (ED) officials. The new officials are drawn from the forefront of right-wing education ideologues and profiteers, public school privatizers, charter school advocates and for-profit college personnel.

*Josh Venable was named as chief of staff. He and DeVos served on Jeb Bush's Foundation for Excellence in Education, a national powerhouse in the promotion of charter schools. The think tank, funded by the Gates and Broad Foundations, has been chaired by former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice since its founding.

*DeVos's senior counselor is Robert Eitel, on leave from his job as general counsel for Bridgepoint Education, an operator of a for-profit college that was recently investigated by the Department of Education. In February, the inspector general determined that Bridgepoint owes the department a \$300,000 fine for miscalculating the refund of federal aid provided to students.

*Ebony Lee will serve as DeVos's deputy chief of staff for policy. During the Obama administration, she worked on charter school policy at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

*Jason Botel, named as the deputy assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education, founded the for-profit KIPP charter school in Baltimore and then led statewide privatization efforts as executive director of MarylandCAN (part the national 50CAN, which is now merged with notorious education privatizer Michelle Rhee and her StudentsFirst organization).

*Possibly the most significant appointment is Candice Jackson as deputy assistant secretary of the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights. Jackson is a libertarian and shares DeVos's ideological opposition to public education and devotion to unrestrained capitalist exploitation.

Jackson is being appointed to a role that does not require Senate confirmation, but she will operate as the department's acting executive until, if ever, a secretary is nominated and confirmed. She would be responsible for investigating thousands of civil rights complaints annually and supervising over 500 staffers.

Since her college days at Stanford University, Jackson has made a name for herself by opposing Affirmation Action,

feminism and identity politics, from the right. She has alleged personal discrimination "because she is white," reprising the language of the inflammatory ultra-right.

In a *ProPublica* expose published last week, the liberal investigative news site looks at Jackson's records and political connections. While valuable, the article fails to draw out the more dangerous implications. It lays its primary stress on the near-inevitability that Jackson will roll back Obama-era supports to racial and gender preferences and aggressive investigations of sexual harassment on campuses.

The fact is that the divisive policies of race- and gender-based politics, with which the Democratic Party has become wholly identified, has paved the way for the even deeper onslaught against democratic rights by Trump, DeVos, Jackson and their neo-fascistic ilk.

Years of massive budget cuts to education under the Bush and Obama administrations have shredded large parts of the system, while the federal endorsement of privatization and profiteering has gone a long way to making schooling entirely class-based. Far from fulfilling hopes for universal and high-quality public education for all, regardless of race, ethnicity or socio-economic background, both political parties have opened education to profit-hungry privateers and hedge funds. The Democrats attempted to camouflage the process with race- and gender-based programs, which handed over a portion of the spoils to a thin layer of minority and female entrepreneurs.

The ultra-right politics of Candice Jackson make clear that a severe escalation of the assault on public education and civil rights is now on the agenda. In a recent Twitter post, for example, she makes clear her hostility to the rights of immigrants and, by extension, their children, quoting a co-thinker, "Why should a nation look out for refugees, especially if doing so poses a tangible threat?"

ProPublica author Annie Waldman traces Jackson's political evolution from "conservatism" at Stanford to libertarianism at the Ludwig von Mises Institute, a think-tank for contemporary libertarians reportedly established with funding by Ron Paul. Jackson's ongoing collaboration with the Mises Institute would indicate her initial fellowship with the organization solidified her outlook.

At the Institute, Jackson assisted in the production of a book

of essays by Institute co-founder Murray N. Rothbard. Jackson also wrote two papers analyzing his theories including one that states that his “Ethics of Liberty” “shines as a monumental achievement...setting forth ‘a positive ethical system’...to establish the case for individual liberty,” according to Waldman’s research.

Jackson’s ideological mentor

Over Rothbard’s deeply reactionary lifetime (1926-1995), he supported a variety of extreme right-wingers, from former KKK grand wizard David Duke to Republican Pat Buchanan, with kind words to say about the anti-communist witch-hunter Senator Joseph McCarthy. Rothbard was one of the founders of the Cato Institute (formerly the Charles Koch Institute), which advocates for the abolition of Social Security, public transportation, the US Postal Service, minimum wages and bans on child labor, as well as other reforms and gains for the working class.

The core of Rothbard’s philosophy is hostility to social equality in the service of profit. “Equality is not in the natural order of things, and the crusade to make everyone equal in every respect (except before the law) is certain to have disastrous consequences,” he wrote.

He further called for the elimination of “the entire ‘civil rights’ structure” stating that it “tramples on the property rights of every American.” He opposed *Brown v. Board of Education* and called for the repeal of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Rothbard’s book *Education: Free and Compulsory*, first published in 1971 and updated by Jackson for re-publication in 1999, is a polemic against public education, which libertarians deride as “compulsory education.” Describing it as “a leveling downward,” he argues, “It is evident that the common enthusiasm for equality is, in the fundamental sense, anti-human. It tends to repress the flowering of the individual personality and diversity, and civilization itself; it is a drive toward savage uniformity.”

In language only a short step away from eugenics, he vituperates against the education of what he calls “dullards,” “hoodlums” and the “underclass.” “The effect of the State’s compulsory schooling laws...is also to force into schools children who have little or no aptitude for instruction at all. It so happens that among the variety of human ability there is a large number of subnormal children...whose reasoning capacity is not too great”.

As with Betsy DeVos’s and her ideological mentor neo-Calvinist Andrew Kuyper, Rothbard also opposes the French Revolution and the Enlightenment as the evil sources of “compulsory” education and notions of social equality. Like Rothbard, DeVos and the Acton Institute, which she funds and

has presided over as a board member, have opposed bans against child labor.

Jackson has distinguished herself not only as thoroughly hostile to basic democratic rights, but also as an advocate for wealthy capitalists no matter how corrupt. In college she wrote for the *Standard Review*, cofounded by Peter Thiel, PayPal billionaire and Trump adviser.

Her papers, available on the Mises Institute web site, reveal her passionate defense of Enron CEO fraudster Ken Lay, the symbol of unbridled financial corruption, and Credit Swiss First Boston financial scammer Frank Quattrone.

“While U.S. attorneys are not providing bread and circuses to the masses, they are giving the public the next best thing: public humiliation of wealthy executives and their families, many of whom have committed the crime of being successful,” writes Jackson about federal investigations into Wall Street corruption. It is no wonder this person has found her way into the Trump administration!

In 2005, Jackson lent her political backing to the neo-fascistic forces who promoted the impeachment of former president Bill Clinton. She published a venomous screed focused of the salacious details of Bill Clinton’s sex life, “Their Lives: The Women Targeted by the Clinton Machine,” and has followed it up with creating and running “Their Lives Foundation,” purportedly devoted to women “abused by other women” such as Hillary Clinton.

In “Their Lives,” Jackson writes, “The imminent threat of terrorism should remind us of government’s fundamental purpose: protecting us from foreign aggression.” She goes on to explain that “scarce resources” place Social Security, subsidized housing, expensive health care, costly college educations, etc., out of range, describing the “liberal” masses as under the sway of the “Illusion of the Omnipossibility.”

Clearly Jackson has found a home in the Trump administration, where she aims to assist in the onslaught against public education and civil and democratic rights.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact