

PRESS RELEASE

NIEA Releases Statement on Secretary of Education Nominee Betsy DeVos



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 24, 2017

CONTACT

Leah Salgado, lsalgado@niea.org

Washington, D.C. - The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) President Yatibaey Evans issues the following statement to express our concerns regarding the nomination of Ms. Betsy DeVos for U.S. Secretary of Education:

"We urge the Senate HELP Committee to hold an additional hearing to provide an opportunity for consideration of Ms. DeVos's views with respect to the education of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

We make this request because Ms. DeVos did not address the critical duty the Secretary of Education has to Native students in her first hearing and her responses did not allay our concerns that she may prioritize federal funding for private schools over tribal sovereignty. NIEA has two primary concerns with Ms. DeVos.

First, we are concerned Ms. DeVos will not uphold the federal government's trust responsibility, which includes the obligation to provide educational services to all Native students. As outlined in the U.S. Constitution (Article I, Section 8), the trust responsibility has been upheld through federal law with longstanding bipartisan support. Since Ms. DeVos did not answer any questions related to this issue, NIEA has no clarity on whether she understands or would value this special relationship.

Second, Ms. DeVos has a record of supporting not just choice among public schools, but also proposals that would allow parents to use public funding to pay tuition at private schools. Our students attend federally-funded schools within the Bureau of Indian Education system- a system that has been woefully underfunded since its' inception and is in need of more support, not less. Additionally, 92% of Native students attend public schools. Any redirection of public funds into private schools

will undoubtedly negatively impact Native students. Ms. DeVos' answers at the first Senate HELP Committee hearing did not relieve our concerns that she may be more committed to her ideals with respect to school funding than to policies that would be beneficial to Native students.

We remain committed to ensuring a high-quality candidate is confirmed for Secretary of Education. Our long history of, and ongoing commitment to, non-partisanship means we are open-minded as to whether Ms. DeVos may be such a candidate.

However, even with NIEA's ongoing commitment to non-partisanship in mind, we cannot support Ms. DeVos without full consideration at a public hearing on the fundamental question of whether Ms. DeVos respects tribal sovereignty in education. NIEA, and the nation, owe Native students nothing less."

About The National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

NIEA is the Nation's most inclusive advocacy organization advancing comprehensive culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Formed by Native educators in 1969 to encourage a national discourse on education, NIEA adheres to the organization's founding principles- to convene educators to explore ways to improve schools and the educational systems serving Native children; to promote the maintenance and continued development of language and cultural programs; and to develop and implement strategies for influencing local, state, and federal policy and decision makers. For more information visit www.niea.org.