



Photo by Shawn T. Moore, courtesy of U.S. Department of Labor

Vice President Mike Pence delivers the oath of office to the Alex Acosta, the new labor secretary, on April 28.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — By a 60-38 vote, the GOP-run Senate on April 27 approved President Donald Trump's nomination of Florida law school dean and bank official Alexander Acosta as Secretary of Labor. Acosta will be the sole Latino in Trump's Cabinet. Eight Democrats, most of them holding seats that are up in Trump-carried states next year, joined 51 Republicans and Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) in

voting for Acosta. The other Democrats and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) opposed him. "The test for a Labor Department secretary is a simple one: Will you stand up for 150 million U.S. workers? Alexander Acosta failed this test," said Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) The AFL-CIO had no immediate comment on Acosta's confirmation. It had been skeptical about his record, despite his

prior service as a National Labor Relations Board member. But several unions, including the Laborers and the Fire Fighters, previously supported him, citing that record. Fire Fighters President Harold Schaitberger called Acosta "fair, reasonable and accessible," while Laborers President Terry O'Sullivan said Acosta's "fairness and respect for justice make him highly qualified" to be Labor Secretary.

## ...Education under attack

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cause of the public schools. The teachers and staff in the schools we visited are proud of the important work they do, but they are tired of the attacks and ignorance about public schools. A teacher told me, "There's a misconception that public schools are broken and that comes from people who don't know what is happening in public schools." Another said that "The people best equipped to teach kids are in public schools right now, and we just need the resources to do our jobs."

Investment matters. What they've built in Van Wert, and in communities across Oregon and around the country, will be harmed beyond recognition if the Trump/DeVos budget and the cuts go through. The proposed Trump-DeVos budget cuts education by \$9 billion (a 14 percent cut) — the biggest dollar cut to the education budget ever, and the largest percentage cut since Reagan administration. It zeros out funding for afterschool and summer programs, community schools, and resources to reduce class size and provide teacher professional development. It cuts financial aid for low-income students at the same time they are making it easier for private loan servicers to prey on students and families.

These cuts drive a stake through the heart of public education and destroy the promise and potential it offers our children. By eliminating afterschool and summer programs, Trump and DeVos are telling working parents: Either work and leave your young children unsupervised for several hours a day, or stay home with them and lose the job you need to pay the rent and grocery bills. For many children with tough situations at home, school may be the only safe sanctuary they can count on, or the only place they reliably receive a meal each day; this

budget would rob them of that safety and security. These cuts would leave kids hungry and unsupervised, and force them into potentially dangerous situations. We are not waiting for what Congress thinks about these cuts. We are fighting Trump and DeVos on them already. And part of that is to make them uncomfortable with the consequences of their actions.

The good news is that the American people on our side. That's what we saw in the thunderous opposition to the nomination of Betsy DeVos. The public in public education has never been more visible or more vocal, and it's not going back in the shadows. DeVos is unwittingly mobilizing supporters of public schools. Five million Americans overwhelmed the U.S. Senate switchboard with calls opposing her nomination. There have been hundreds of demonstrations across the country in recent months organized by AROS — the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, with help from the AFT, where parents, students, educators and community members have called for increased support for public schools.

In the end, it's a question of what kind of country we want. Should we settle for some children getting the education they need and deserve, but not all? Do we want a country where people's income determines whether they will have access to the healthcare they need? Do we want a country in which individuals are powerless, and hard-working people are denied the ability to earn decent wages and benefits? Of course not.

In this new era it is we the people who must be the check and balance on the threats to our democracy. It is we the people who must move an agenda to reconnect with our neighbors and those who feel frustrated, angry, and disillusioned. It is we the people who must reclaim the promise of the American Dream.

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