



Federal Lands Impacted Schools Association

Education For Children, Fairness for Taxpayers

MISSION

The Mission of National 7002 Impacted Schools is to secure federal funding which reimburses eligible districts for tax revenue lost (for student programs) due to the federal governments removal of land from the local tax roles; such revenue to be used for the public education of students.

VISION

Secure **100%** funding for the 7002 program

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

7002 Impact Aid Funds will be distributed in a fair and equitable manner

Membership in Section 7002 will be expanded

No decision will financially destroy or severely harm any district

GOAL

Secure funding to increase the 2009 appropriations for Section 7002 to \$104,208,335, which would bring it to a funding level of one-third of our entitlement over the next ten years.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop the strategy that will cause the achievement of this goal
2. Enhance communications among 7002 districts
3. Enhance communication with members of Congress
4. Work with the leadership of other NAFIS groups to form a unified front to speak with one voice
5. Cultivate leadership from within the 7002 group
6. Assure continued reauthorization of the 7002 Impact Aid Program
7. Broaden participation by increasing membership and encouraging active participation by current members

ACTION ITEMS/ACTIVITIES

*As outlined in Advocacy Action Plan

FEBRUARY 03, 2017

Philly teacher launches GoFundMe to buy Pat Toomey's vote on Betsy DeVos

POLITICS EDUCATION UNITED STATES PAT TOOMEY BETSY DEVOS PENNSYLVANIA SENATE

BY MICHAEL TAMENBAUM
PhillyVoice Staff

UPDATE, Friday, 3:05 p.m.: GoFundMe said today that the "Buy Pat Toomey's Vote" is the top trending campaign on the platform, with donations from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The campaign has raised \$39,839 of \$55,800 goal on the strength of 2,451 donors.

...

In a week that has become a full court press against Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey, there is now a GoFundMe page up and running to buy his potentially pivotal vote in the confirmation of Betsy DeVos, President Donald's Trump's nominee to lead the U.S. Department of Education.

Toomey was thrown into the middle of a heated movement on Wednesday after two Republican senators, Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, said they would oppose DeVos's nomination. Criticism of DeVos arose almost immediately over her staunch advocacy of charter schools and education vouchers, a headline position foes believe could endanger the U.S. public education system. She was also criticized for a lack of knowledge of some of the finer points of the education system.

RELATED ARTICLES

84 Lumber switches up controversial Super Bowl ad tackling immigration, Trump's wall

WATCH: 'SNL' skewers Donald Trump's diplomatic phone calls, Sean Spicer's press conferences

Toomey believes DeVos is 'a great pick,' spokeswoman says

Toomey addresses weekly demonstrations: 'People are free to protest'

If three Republicans join 48 Democrats aligned to block DeVos's confirmation, her nomination could be rejected.

Any hope of that happening through Toomey was puried Wednesday afternoon when a spokeswoman said the senator thinks DeVos is a "great pick." Angered constituents immediately pointed out that DeVos has donated \$60,500 to

Toomey's campaign funds.

Convinced that the senator's support was bought, local costume designer and teaching artist [Katherine Fritz](#) set up a GoFundMe page to buy his allegiance back.



Buy Pat Toomey's Vote

\$72,821 of \$60.1k

Organized by Katherine Fritz

4.6K 32K



"Betsy DeVos has never set foot in a classroom, did not send her children to public school, cannot distinguish between proficiency and growth, and thinks that guns should be allowed in schools in the event of grizzly attacks," Fritz wrote. "That fictitious grizzly is about as qualified as Ms. DeVos to run the Department of Education. If Betsy DeVos can buy Senator Toomey's vote, we should be allowed to do the same."

The campaign is calling for \$55,800, a steep hill to climb within the week, but even if that total isn't reached, all funds raised will go to Camp Sojourner, the Pennsylvania Arts Education Network, and the Children's Literacy Initiative.

Fritz posted an update late Wednesday night, voicing surprise that a campaign that began as a joke had raised thousands of dollars. She acknowledged that buying Toomey's vote would be illegal.

"This campaign isn't actually about buying a vote from an elected official," Fritz wrote. "But it is about using satire to point out the various ways in which our elected officials can — legally! — take money from the same people that now seek political office. Our education system shouldn't be "pay-to-play," and neither should our democracy."



National Association of Federally Impacted Schools

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February 28, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary, US Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

Congratulations on your confirmation to serve as the US Secretary of Education.

The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS) serves as the umbrella organization for four subgroups: Military Impacted Schools Association (MISA), National Indian Impacted Schools Association (NIISA), Mid-to-Low LOT Schools (MTLLS), and Federal Lands Impacted Schools Association (FLISA). We are the leaders representing school districts that receive Impact Aid funding. We write to share information about the Impact Aid program, request a meeting with you on March 14, 2017 when we will all be in Washington, DC, and invite you to visit a federally impacted school district.

Our organizations collectively represent the 1,200-plus Impact Aid-recipient school districts nationwide that educate over 10 million students. Impact Aid is the oldest elementary and secondary education program and its purpose is to reimburse school districts for a loss of local revenue due to the presence of non-taxable Federal property such as military installations, Indian Treaty, Trust, or Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act lands, Federal low-income housing facilities, national parks and laboratories. Congress recognized in 1950 that the Federal government had an obligation to help meet the local responsibility of financing public education in these communities. That same recognition holds true today.

Federally impacted school districts educate diverse student bodies, including concentrations of students who are military connected, live on Indian lands or in low-rent housing, or whose parents are Federal employees. Impact Aid funding is efficient and flexible. Each year, congressional appropriations flow directly from the US Department of Education's Impact Aid program office to school districts, bypassing state involvement. Locally elected school board members and appointed district leaders make decisions on how to use these dollars for any general fund purpose. Impact Aid funding is not supplemental. In fact, a significant number of school districts that rely on Impact Aid funding have a minimal local tax base, and without Impact Aid funds they would not have the resources to keep their doors open.

The underlying Federal obligation of Impact Aid, along with its efficiency and flexibility in providing support to federally impacted school districts have long solidified the program's bipartisan support. The Congressional House and Senate Impact Aid Coalitions total nearly 120 members.

THE NAFIS FAMILY

MISA

Military Impacted
Schools Association

NIISA

National Indian Impacted
Schools Association

FLISA

Federal Lands Impacted
Schools Association

MTLLS

Mid-to-Low-LOT
Schools

Funding

Because Impact Aid is a replacement for lost local tax revenue, when Impact Aid funding is stagnant or funding is cut, local taxpayers have to increase their tax burden or students go without. Some states cap tax increases, limiting local revenue from year to year, while other communities can generate only a few thousand dollars annually from the limited taxable property within their boundaries.

The funding situation for federally impacted school districts is bleak. Just four years ago, sequestration forced districts to eliminate staff positions, increase class sizes, reduce professional development, cut bus routes and afterschool programs, delay technology and facility upgrades. Now, funding cuts and stagnation are threatening the solvency of the program's two major funding streams: Basic Support and Federal Properties. We urge you to work with the White House and Congress to prioritize Impact Aid.

Basic Support: Sequestration and stagnant appropriations have significantly eroded the purchasing power (measured by the Learning Opportunity Threshold) of Basic Support payments. The current payout – FY 2013 aside – is at its lowest level in two decades. At the same time, enrollment and education costs annually increase. Additional resources are required to help school districts close the achievement gap – particularly for American Indian and Alaska Native students, as well as ensure school districts have sufficient resources related to culturally relevant curriculum and teacher retention. Education is a quality of life and readiness issue for military families. Special education costs have increased dramatically for some military-connected school districts due to compassionate post assignments, where the special needs population can top 20-percent. **We urge you to request, at a minimum, a \$70 million increase for Basic Support over FY 2017 and FY 2018.**

Federal Properties: This line item has not received an increase since FY 2010. Additional funding would partially offset the cost of newly eligible school districts – including those that become eligible as the Federal Government continues to acquire property; partially offset the higher-payment needed for school districts where the Federal Government continues to take property off the local tax rolls; and ensure there continues to be an equitable distribution of formula dollars. **We urge you to request, at a minimum, a \$4 million increase for Federal Properties over FY 2017 and FY 2018.**

Impact Aid is not supplemental – it is a basic revenue stream that keeps school districts operating. In a recent poll of NAFIS members, we asked what school districts could do with additional Impact Aid funds:

- *Invest in the additional resources needed to provide services to our students regarding social work, **counseling** (drug, alcohol, emotional), and academic assistive services for our struggling students. We are a high-poverty district with struggling students and additional staffing and services would be of great benefit to our students PreK through 12. (NY)*
- *After school **tutoring**, which is necessary for helping our students get the additional time they need on academic skills. This would provide our staff with an option to help students who need one-on-one time to develop skills with guidance. We also need to continue to make sure that our internet connection is consistent and at least up to 10 Mbs so that we can connect to the many resources for **individualized instruction** that are necessary to meet the wide variety of needs in the school. (AK)*
- *Purchase updated buses and **expand routes to reduce student bus times** - students travel many times up to two hours in buses filled to capacity; Extend learning opportunities for students who travel 50 to 70 miles to school. Extend opportunities closer to home (i.e. alternative schools, tutoring services, etc.); Hire social workers to work with at-risk families that hinder students' progress. . . **Enhance career and technical education programs** that serve 60 to 70 percent of our students. . . **Enhance college readiness opportunities** such as campus visits, FAFSA assistance, career programs, etc. (AZ)*

- *With additional funding we can **fund more counseling positions** in our district that are greatly needed, we can offer **more elective classes** at the high school, we can provide **more intervention/tutoring** at every school in district. . . We are a small rural district and our staff is stressed to the max with limited funds and resources to meet the needs of our students and extra funding would help restore a lot of positions that were cut due to financial deficits and ultimately these positions would greatly assist our students. (CA)*
- ***Professional Development** directed at Teachers of English Language Learners and SPED students, **technology**, new teacher training, and purchasing student and teacher resources. (TX)*
- *Provide **before or after school programs** for students (especially students with disabilities) who need Tier 2 and 3 instructional supports that will assist them in meeting the reading and math benchmarks on state assessments. (VA)*

ESSA

As you know, Impact Aid is Title VII of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We urge you to continue to provide clarity on ESSA implementation. Our school districts want to do right by students and comply with all Federal requirements, but that necessitates accurate technical assistance and sufficient resources on the part of Federal policymakers and administrators. Specifically, we urge you to re-issue guidance that clarifies school districts that educate American Indian and Alaska Native students may combine various consultation requirements (i.e. the new Tribal consultation requirement, Title VI parent-advisory committee, and Title VII Indian Policies and Procedures) so long as they continue to meet all program requirements. We urge you also to provide clarity on the new military student identifier. The Federal government, states, and school districts are currently operating with different data collection systems and multiple definitions of “military connected” that may cause confusion.

Construction

Federally impacted school districts have limited or no bonding capacity. This justifies why a construction line item has existed in the Impact Aid law since its inception. Federally impacted school districts need adequate resources to address health and safety code violations and capacity issues that come with educating students in buildings that are, in some cases, over 100 years old, as well as to ensure all students have access to 21st century learning environments. Impact Aid construction funds fall far short of the funding need. We urge you to work with Congress and the White House to secure an increase for this line item, including through a one-time infusion of funding through any major infrastructure package. This line item – and the staffing and management capacity that supports it – is already in place to get funding for shovel-ready projects out the door.

Internal Management

The staff in the Impact Aid program office work hard each day to provide great customer service and detailed one-on-one technical assistance to school districts, and ensure funding gets to our school districts in a timely manner. We urge you to prioritize the office’s staffing and internal capacity needs. There are currently several open positions that should be filled as quickly as possible. It is important for the staff to travel throughout the year to see our communities and provide payment and technical updates in person. Our members are excited about the creation of the Electronic Data Count pilot program that will go a long way toward modernizing the application process away from an antiquated paper and pencil system. We are concerned that the technology infrastructure for tracking applications, disbursing funds, and communicating with federally impacted school districts is antiquated. Impact Aid disburses more than \$1 billion directly to school districts; we cannot afford a glitch or inadvertent shutdown in the system. **School administrators would greatly benefit from an updated system to**

manage their application and payment vouchers that will allow them to track payments and optimize customer service.

Federally impacted school districts cannot afford to lose funding or face another year of stagnant appropriations. Additional investments in Impact Aid are critical to help school districts close achievement gaps, update technology, expand access to early childhood and afterschool programs, integrate culturally-relevant curriculum, replace failing infrastructure, offer competitive salaries to recruit and retain school leaders, and more. We ask you to continue to view Impact Aid as a critical Federal investment in our schools and a tax replacement program for federally impacted communities.

Finally, we strongly encourage you to visit a federally impacted community within six months of your tenure. We can help identify a school district and support your visit. We are proud of our schools and the leadership that school administrators and school board members provide for their diverse student bodies – with all of their challenges and opportunities.

Please have your staff contact Jocelyn Bissonnette (jocelyn@nafisd.org or 202-624-3614) if you are available to meet with us on March 14, 2017. We look forward to working with you on behalf of all federally impacted schools and stand ready to serve as a resource to you and your staff.

Sincerely,



Hilary Goldmann
Executive Director
NAFIS



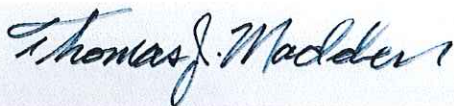
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Tom Madden
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Jim Sarruda
President
Mid-to-Low LOT Schools

Cc: Senate and House Impact Aid Coalitions

Who is Our Secretary of Education, What Will She Do, and What Should We Do?

Recent national data show that **nine out of ten students in this country attend public schools**. Additionally, national polls consistently show that the **majority of Americans, both republican and democrat, approve of their neighborhood schools**. They oppose closing them down, even when they are low-performing. This may very well be the fundamental basis of why so many individuals, especially those affiliated with public education express concern regarding the newly confirmed Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos.

The mantra of opportunity, choice and competition has been the guiding principle for Secretary DeVos in Michigan and nationally. Initiatives she has backed have included efforts to expand the number of charters in the public school system and to limit oversight and regulation of charters. Secretary DeVos has also advocated for tuition tax credits and voucher programs that use public money to help students attend private schools. She was a strong supporter of a failed Michigan ballot measure on vouchers for private schools.

Groups she has supported and helped run — including the American Federation for Children — have pushed similar free-market choice ideas. Another hint at policies Secretary DeVos might pursue as Education Secretary comes from the Great Lakes Education Project - which Secretary DeVos helped create and, until her nomination, served on its board. The organization supports full or comprehensive choice options with what is known as portability. Executive Director Gary Naeyaert noted, "We want the investment in a child's education, be they federal or state dollars, we want [that money] to follow that child to the school of their choice whether it's public or private".

A number of individuals in Michigan, Secretary DeVos' home state, have expressed concern. Stephen Henderson an editor with the Detroit Free Press wrote the following: "In Detroit, parents of school-age children have plenty of choices, thanks to the nation's largest urban network of charter schools. What remains in short supply is quality.

In Brightmoor, the only high school left is Detroit Community Schools, a charter boasting more than a decade of abysmal test scores and, until recently, a superintendent who earned \$130,000 a year despite a dearth of educational experience or credentials.

On the west side, another charter school, Hope Academy, has been serving the community around Grand River and Livernois for 20 years. Its test scores have been among the lowest in the state throughout those two decades; in 2013 the school ranked in the first percentile, the absolute bottom for academic performance. Two years later, its charter was renewed.

Or if you live downtown, you could try Woodward Academy, a charter that has limped along near the bottom of school achievement since 1998, while its operator has been allowed to expand into other communities.

For students enrolled in schools of choice — that is, schools in nearby districts who have opened their doors to children who live outside district boundaries — it's not much better. Kids who depend on Detroit's problematic public transit are **too far away from the state's top-performing school districts — and most of those districts don't participate in the schools of choice program, anyway**.

This deeply dysfunctional educational landscape — where failure is rewarded with opportunities for expansion and "choice" means the opposite for tens of thousands of children — is no accident. It was created by an ideological lobby that has zealously championed free-market education reform for decades, with little regard for the outcome. And at the

center of that lobby is Betsy DeVos, the west Michigan advocate whose family has contributed millions of dollars to the cause of school choice and unregulated charter expansion throughout Michigan."

The national education unions have expressed concern. After a historic confirmation battle in which she became the first cabinet secretary confirmed by a vice president's tie-breaking vote Randi Weingarten, president of the AFL-CIO affiliated American Federation of Teachers, lashed out at DeVos in a press release.

"DeVos shows an antipathy for public schools; a full-throttled embrace of private, for-profit alternatives; and a lack of basic understanding of what children need to succeed in school," she said. "But it's more likely we'll now hear the same trashing of public schools that the disrupters, the privatizers, and the austerity hawks have used for the last two decades. That makes this a sad day for children."

The National Education Association, the largest teachers' union in the country, also denounced the 51-50 vote to install DeVos at the Department of Education. NEA President Lily Eskelsen García said that the union will continue to battle DeVos with the ferocity it summoned during the confirmation battle, saying that recent events marked "only the beginning of the resistance. We are going to watch what Betsy DeVos does. And we are going to hold her accountable for the actions and decisions she makes on behalf of the more than 50 million students in our nation's public schools," she said.

It is clear Secretary DeVos' beliefs and prior actions have created substantial concern, maybe even fear, among many public educators. While she was confirmed in the narrowest manner possible, it is still important to note she was confirmed. Only two Republican senators broke rank. One could ask why more senators did not try to block her confirmation if indeed she represents "bad business" for public schools. Obviously, we can appreciate their support for the newly elected president and the possible sense of political obligation. This certainly begs the question, does party politics mean more than maintaining the current school system. Or is there a sense by many of the legislators that it is time to try something new.

There is already some initial back and forth related to ESSA. Secretary DeVos is keeping in place the Obama administration's timeline for submitting the plans, which includes one early bird deadline on April 3rd and one later deadline, on September 18th. Interestingly the accountability regulations include a template for states to use as they build their ESSA plans. However, Secretary DeVos has indicated they are reviewing that template to make sure that it does not ask for any information that is not "absolutely necessary." Additionally, the new Department of Education may release a new template for states by mid-March.

With so much activity and speculation happening right now, the FED ED has not lost sight of how important your perspective is. The FED ED understands that the public schools we represent have a history of providing outstanding education for their students and communities. Our constituents continually strive for excellence and adapt and evolve as necessary. In many ways, we believe that the school districts that we represent are educational leaders and can serve as models for other school districts throughout the country. That is why we will continue advocating strongly for the advancement of public education. This means there are certain issues we will oppose and certain ones we will support. The FED ED recognizes that while some of the individuals in Washington DC have changed and there is an anticipated new sense of direction, we need to be wise advocates. We cannot blindly oppose actions just because of a new political agenda or perceived contrary philosophy. We need to continue being thoughtful and rational. We need to continue being experienced advocates representing good ideals and good ideas. More than ever the FED ED needs to continually know your thoughts and interests. When we speak with the various legislators in Washington DC we need to have our facts and



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The Upshot
SCHOOL CHOICE

DeVos and Tax Credit Vouchers: Arizona Shows What Can Go Wrong

Kevin Carey MARCH 2, 2017

Steve Yarbrough is one of the most powerful men in Arizona. As president of the State Senate, he has promoted a range of conservative policies, including a tuition tax credit system that provides over \$100 million per year to finance vouchers for private schools.

In his speech to Congress this week, President Trump singled out a young woman who attended private school using a tax credit-financed voucher. The president urged Congress to pass legislation that would provide similar benefits to millions of students.

But Mr. Yarbrough is not just a champion of tax credit vouchers. He also profits from them personally. The story of how that happened raises questions about President Trump's campaign promise to spend \$20 billion to increase school choice. There's a strong chance that he'll do that through tax credit vouchers — a mechanism that Betsy DeVos actively campaigned for before she became Mr. Trump's education secretary.

State tax credit voucher programs have grown rapidly in recent years. The number of students receiving them increased to 256,000 this year, from about 50,000 in 2005. Arizona has one of the oldest and largest programs. It allows taxpayers who donate money to nonprofit voucher-granting organizations to claim a 100 percent, dollar-for-dollar credit against their state taxes (up to a certain limit). In other words, if a married couple donates \$1,000 to a voucher-granting nonprofit, their tax bill is reduced by \$1,000. The nonprofit then gives the money to families who use it to pay tuition at private schools.

The Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization (Acsto) is one of the state's largest voucher-granting groups. From 2010 to 2014 (the latest year recorded in federal tax filings), the group received \$72.9 million in donations, all of which were ultimately financed by the state.

Arizona law allows the group to keep 10 percent of those donations to pay for overhead. In 2014, the group used that money to pay its executive director \$125,000. His name? Steve Yarbrough. Forms filed by the organization with the I.R.S. declare that he worked an average of 40 hours per week on the job — in addition, presumably, to the hours he worked as president of the State Senate.

Yet the group doesn't do all the work involved with accepting donations and handing out vouchers. It outsources data entry, computer hardware, customer service, information processing, award notifications and related personnel expenses to a private for-profit company called HY Processing. The group paid HY Processing \$636,000 in 2014, and millions of dollars in total over the last decade.

The owner of HY Processing? Steve Yarbrough, along with his wife, Linda, and another couple. (The "Y" in "HY" stands for "Yarbrough.") According to The Arizona Republic, Acsto also pays \$52,000 per year in rent. Its landlord? Steve Yarbrough. In June 2012, Mr. Yarbrough bought a car for \$16,000. In July 2012, Acsto reimbursed him the full amount.

Most voucher-granting nonprofits are not run by powerful legislators who pay themselves rent. While Arizona has over 50 loosely regulated voucher organizations, Florida disburses nearly 100,000 tax credit vouchers with just two. In Pennsylvania, private schools can accept tax credit donations and provide vouchers to themselves.

But the fact that an influential politician can both promote and profit from tax credit vouchers shows what can happen when public funding for education is largely removed from public hands.

Both Democratic and Republican lawmakers like tax credits, for several reasons. For some, spending \$1,000 directly on a school voucher is government spending, while forgoing \$1,000 in revenue to finance a \$1,000 nonprofit voucher is a tax cut. Spending is often subject to strict budget limitations, while certain forms of tax credits can face less scrutiny.

Tax credits for vouchers also allow states to circumvent so-called Blaine amendments, legal prohibitions against the direct disbursement of public funds to parochial schools that were added to many state constitutions in the 19th century during a wave of anti-Catholicism.

But the shell-game process of moving money from the public treasury to a donor to a nonprofit to a family to a private school makes it very difficult to account for how well those public dollars are ultimately spent.

Tax credit voucher policies vary among states, but most impose few requirements on the private schools that receive them. By contrast, many of the largest new direct voucher programs, where funds go straight from the government to the school, require private schools to administer the same tests given to students in public schools. That's how researchers were able to determine that vouchers in

in public schools. That's how researchers were able to determine that vouchers in some states are driving down student test scores to an unprecedented degree.

Managing the transfers of all that money is also expensive. Arizona's 10 percent overhead provision is typical, which means that millions of dollars meant for education are being diverted to pay for, at best, pure bureaucracy. If President Trump makes good on his campaign promise of \$20 billion for school vouchers by creating a national tax credit scheme, it could vastly increase the amount of bureaucratic waste.

And it's not clear that states can be relied upon to prevent self-dealing. Mr. Yarbrough's personal financial interest in tax credit vouchers first received wide attention in 2009, when The East Valley Tribune published an in-depth investigation of Arizona's tax credit program. Tribune reporters found widespread evidence of abuse. In some schools, parents would "recommend" that their fully refundable donations be used to finance vouchers for neighboring families, who would then reciprocate in kind, a practice Arizona has since banned. Many private schools sharply increased their tuition in response to newly available voucher funds.

Yet in the years since, Mr. Yarbrough has continued to be paid hundreds of thousands of dollars from overhead funds. He also supported the expansion of the tax-credit system. "The impact has been substantial on the number of kids who are getting to go to the school of their parents' choice," Mr. Yarbrough told The Republic in 2015. "It's been better and more successful than even those of us who were enthusiastic from the get-go imagined."

Some states, like Alabama and Indiana, limit tax credit vouchers to low- and middle-income families, or to students who were previously enrolled in public school. But others, including Arizona, do not, subsidizing private education for the well-off.

Tax credit vouchers also finance approaches to education that diverge from generally accepted academic standards. Northwest Christian School, a 1,300-student private academy in Phoenix, helps parents apply to Acsto for vouchers. Northwest Christian's elementary science and social studies curriculums were developed by Bob Jones Publishers, a leading provider of educational materials based on creationism.

If the Trump administration moves ahead with a \$20 billion tax credit voucher plan, it will have to decide how — or whether — to address issues that have arisen with state tax credits.

Kevin Carey directs the education policy program at New America. You can follow him on Twitter at [@kevincarey1](https://twitter.com/kevincarey1).

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The Upshot
SCHOOL CHOICE

Dismal Voucher Results Surprise Researchers as DeVos Era Begins

Kevin Carey FEB. 23, 2017

The confirmation of Betsy DeVos as secretary of education was a signal moment for the school choice movement. For the first time, the nation's highest education official is someone fully committed to making school vouchers and other market-oriented policies the centerpiece of education reform.

But even as school choice is poised to go national, a wave of new research has emerged suggesting that private school vouchers may harm students who receive them. The results are startling — the worst in the history of the field, researchers say.

While many policy ideas have murky origins, vouchers emerged fully formed from a single, brilliant essay published in 1955 by Milton Friedman, the free-market godfather later to be awarded a Nobel Prize in Economics. Because “a stable and democratic society is impossible without widespread acceptance of some common set of values and without a minimum degree of literacy and knowledge on the part of most citizens,” Mr. Friedman wrote, the government should pay for all children to go to school.

But, he argued, that doesn't mean the government should *run* all the schools. Instead, it could give parents vouchers to pay for “approved educational services” provided by private schools, with the government's role limited to “ensuring that the schools met certain minimum standards.”

The voucher idea sat dormant for years before taking root in a few places, most notably Milwaukee. Yet even as many of Mr. Friedman's other ideas became Republican Party orthodoxy, most national G.O.P. leaders committed themselves to a different theory of educational improvement: standards, testing and accountability. That movement reached an apex when the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 brought a new focus on tests and standards to nearly every public school nationwide. The law left voucher supporters with crumbs: a small demonstration project in Washington, D.C.

But broad political support for No Child Left Behind proved short-lived. Teachers unions opposed the reforms from the left, while libertarians and states-rights conservatives denounced them from the right. When Republicans took control of more governor's mansions and state legislatures in the 2000s, they expanded vouchers to an unprecedented degree. Three of the largest programs sprang up in Indiana, Louisiana and Ohio, which collectively enroll more than a third of the 178,000 voucher students nationwide.

Most of the new programs heeded Mr. Friedman's original call for the government to enforce "minimum standards" by requiring private schools that accept vouchers to administer standardized state tests. Researchers have used this data to compare voucher students with similar children who took the same tests in public school. Many of the results were released over the last 18 months, while Donald J. Trump was advocating school choice on the campaign trail.

The first results came in late 2015. Researchers examined an Indiana voucher program that had quickly grown to serve tens of thousands of students under Mike Pence, then the state's governor. "In mathematics," they found, "voucher students who transfer to private schools experienced significant losses in achievement." They also saw no improvement in reading.

The next results came a few months later, in February, when researchers published a major study of Louisiana's voucher program. Students in the program were predominantly black and from low-income families, and they came from public schools that had received poor ratings from the state department of education, based on test scores. For private schools receiving more applicants than they could enroll, the law required that they admit students via lottery, which allowed the researchers to compare lottery winners with those who stayed in public school.

They found large negative results in both reading and math. Public elementary school students who started at the 50th percentile in math and then used a voucher to transfer to a private school dropped to the 26th percentile in a single year. Results were somewhat better in the second year, but were still well below the starting point.

This is very unusual. When people try to improve education, sometimes they succeed and sometimes they fail. The successes usually register as modest improvements, while the failures generally have no effect at all. It's rare to see efforts to improve test scores having the opposite result. Martin West, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, calls the negative effects in Louisiana "as large as any I've seen in the literature" — not just compared with other voucher studies, but in the history of American education research.

There's always the chance that a single study, no matter how well designed, is an outlier. Studies of older voucher programs in Milwaukee and elsewhere have generally produced mixed results, sometimes finding modest improvements in test scores, but only for some subjects and student groups. Until about a year ago, however, few if any studies had shown vouchers causing test scores to decline

however, few if any studies had shown vouchers causing test scores to decline drastically.

In June, a third voucher study was released by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a conservative think tank and proponent of school choice. The study, which was financed by the pro-voucher Walton Family Foundation, focused on a large voucher program in Ohio. "Students who use vouchers to attend private schools have fared worse academically compared to their closely matched peers attending public schools," the researchers found. Once again, results were worse in math.

Three consecutive reports, each studying one of the largest new state voucher programs, found that vouchers hurt student learning. Researchers and advocates began a spirited debate about what, exactly, was going on.

Mark Dynarski of the Brookings Institution noted that the performance gap between private and public school students had narrowed significantly over time. He argued that the standards, testing and accountability movement, for all its political shortcomings, was effective. The assumed superiority of private schools may no longer hold.

Some voucher supporters observed that many private schools in Louisiana chose not to accept voucher students, and those that did had recently experienced declining enrollment. Perhaps the participating schools were unusually bad and eager for revenue. But this is another way of saying that exposing young children to the vagaries of private-sector competition is inherently risky. The free market often does a terrible job of providing basic services to the poor — see, for instance, the lack of grocery stores and banks in many low-income neighborhoods. This may also hold for education.

Others have argued that standardized test scores are the wrong measure of school success. It's true that voucher programs in Washington and some others elsewhere, which produced no improvements in test scores, increased the likelihood of students' advancement and graduation from high school. One study of a privately financed voucher program in New York found positive results for college attendance among African-Americans.

But research has also linked higher test scores to a host of positive outcomes later in life. And voucher advocates often cite poor test scores in public schools to justify creating private school vouchers in the first place.

The new voucher studies stand in marked contrast to research findings that well-regulated charter schools in Massachusetts and elsewhere have a strong, positive impact on test scores. But while vouchers and charters are often grouped under the umbrella of "school choice," the best charters tend to be nonprofit public schools, open to all and accountable to public authorities. The less "private" that school choice programs are, the better they seem to work.

The new evidence on vouchers does not seem to have deterred the Trump administration, which has proposed a new \$20 billion voucher program. Secretary DeVos's enthusiasm for vouchers, which have been the primary focus of her philanthropic spending and advocacy, appears to be undiminished.

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Equity Alliance Blog

Mar 2,
2017

[The purported failure of America's schools, and ways to make them better by David C. Berliner](#)

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DAVID C. BERLINER, Regents' Professor of Education Emeritus at Arizona State University, has also taught at many other universities at home and abroad. He is a member of the National Academy of Education, the International Academy of Education, and a past president of both the American Educational Research Association and the Division of Educational Psychology of the American Psychological Association. He has won numerous awards for his work on behalf of the education profession, and authored or co-authored over 400 articles, chapters and books. Among his best known works are the six editions of the text *Educational Psychology*, co-authored with N. L. Gage; *The Manufactured Crisis*, co-authored with B. J. Biddle; *Collateral Damage: How high-Stakes Testing Corrupts American Education*, co-authored with Sharon Nichols; and *50 Myths and Lies that Threaten America's Public Schools*, co-authored with Gene V Glass. He co-edited the first *Handbook of Educational Psychology* and the books *Talks to Teachers, Perspectives on Instructional Time*, and *Putting Research to Work in Your School*. He has interest in the study of teaching, teacher education, and educational policy.

The purported failure of America's Schools, and ways to make them better

For many years I have been writing about the lies told about the poor performance of our students and the failure of our schools and teachers. Journalists and politicians are often our nations' most irritating commentators about the state of American education because they have access to the same facts that I have. They all can easily learn that the international tests (e. g. PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS), the national tests (e. g. NAEP), the college entrance tests (e. g. SAT, ACT), and each of the individual state tests follow an identical pattern. It is this: As income increases per family from our poorest families (under the 25th percentile in wealth), to working class (26th-50th percentile in family wealth), to middle class (51st to 75th percentile in family wealth), to wealthy (the highest quartile in family wealth), mean scores go up quite substantially. In every standardized achievement test whose scores we use to judge the quality of the education received by our children, family income strongly and significantly influences the mean scores obtained.

Similarly, as the families served by a school increase in wealth from the lowest quartile in family wealth to the highest quartile in family wealth, the mean scores of all the students at those schools goes up quite substantially. Thus, characteristics of the cohort attending a school strongly influence the scores obtained by the students at that school.

For example, on the mathematics portion of the 2012 [Programme for International Student Assessment](#) (PISA) to test, poor students (among those from lowest quartile in family income), who attended schools that served the poorest families (a school in the highest quartile of those receiving free and reduced lunch), attained a mean score of 425. But wealthy students (in the highest quartile of family income), who attended schools that served the wealthiest families (schools in the lowest quartile of students receiving free and reduced lunch), scored a mean of 528. That's a one-hundred point difference!

Since US scores on PISA were stable from 2012 to 2015, we can also use these scores from 2012 to approximate where wealthy and poor American students rank on the latest administration of PISA. On the 2015 mathematics scale, the difference between scores of 528 and 425 is the difference between our nation being ranked about 7th in the world, or being ranked about 50th!

So what does this teach us? We learn that in the US, wealthy children attending public schools that serve the wealthy are competitive with any nation in the world. Since that is the case why would anyone think our public schools are failing?

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When compared to other nations *some* of our students and some of our public schools are not doing well. But having **“some” failures is quite a different claim than one indicting our entire public school system.** Furthermore, in the schools in which low-income students do not achieve well, we find the common correlates of poverty: low birth weight in the neighborhood, higher than average rates of teen and single parenthood, residential mobility, absenteeism, crime, and students in need of special education or English language instruction. These problems of poverty influence education and are magnified by housing policies that foster segregation. Over the years, in many communities, wealthier citizens and government policies have managed to consign low-income students to something akin to a lower caste. The wealthy have cordoned off their wealth. They hide behind school district boundaries that they often draw themselves, and when they do so, they proudly use a phrase we all applaud, “Local Control!” The result, by design, is schools segregated by social class, and that also means segregation by race and ethnicity. We have created an apartheid-lite, separate and unequal, system of education.

So “fixing” the schools, about which so many of our editorialists and political leaders talk, needs deeper thinking than a knee-jerk reaction to our mean score on any international test. That mean score hides the diversity of our scores by social class and housing tract, and easily misleads us about what solutions might exist. **When our leaders say teachers are not good, we need to point out to them how well some of our students are doing, and that a recent *Mathematica* report for the U.S. Department of Education states that the quality of teachers working in low-income schools is about the same as the quality of teachers working in high income schools. So blaming teachers won’t fix schools that need fixing!**

Likewise, some think our terrible curriculum was to blame for the low mean performance of our students. Thus, in recent years, those critics created the “rigorous” Common Core State Standards (CCSS). **Yet with that allegedly lousy curriculum, wealthy children in public schools that serve wealthy families were easily competitive with the highest scoring nations in the world.** In each state, higher income students use essentially the same curriculum as lower income students. But the higher income students succeeded admirably. So how then can the curriculum be bad? Blaming the curriculum for our purported failures is as illogical as blaming the teachers.

What might work to produce higher achievement for low-income children attending schools that serve low-income families? High quality early childhood experiences; summer school to address summer loss; parent education programs to build skills needed in school; parent housing vouchers to reduce mobility; after school programs such as sports, chess clubs, and robotics; a full array of AP courses; school counselors and school nurses at the ratios their professions recommend; professional development for teachers and establishment of school cultures of professionalism; pay for teachers at parity with what others at similar educational levels receive; and so forth.

Of course, this will all cost money. But most of what is expended by the state will be returned in the form of taxes paid by a higher-skilled work force, lower rates of special education and incarceration, lower health care costs, and other positive economic outcomes associated with the programs I just listed.

What I have suggested for ameliorating the low performance of low-income children, on all our assessments, are characteristics of child-rearing and schooling now present in wealthier communities. Perhaps, then, we should rely on John Dewey to help low-income students succeed, instead of putting our faith in vouchers, charters, test preparation, teacher accountability and the like. To paraphrase just a little, Dewey said: **“What the best and wisest (among the wealthiest) parents want for their children, that must we want for all the children of the community. Anything less is unlovely, and left unchecked, destroys our democracy.”**

Comments

3 Responses to “The purported failure of America’s schools, and ways to make them better by David C. Berliner”

1. W. James Popham on 3/3/17 1:55 PM US/Eastern

No one understands the quality of American schooling as well as Professor Berliner, nor writes as clearly and constructively about this issue than he does. In this essay, his collection of suggested amelioration steps provides us with a wonderful set of “must-do” activities.

2. [James Harvey](#) on 3/3/17 2:05 PM US/Eastern

Excellent commentary, Dave. Many thanks.

3. [Patrick Walsh](#) on 3/3/17 9:09 PM US/Eastern

Thank you so much, David. Always an inspiration to hear your brilliant voice. I will share this as widely as I can.

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The Atlantic

Trump Is Headed for a Budget Battle

The new president is about to learn how difficult it is to get Congress to approve his spending priorities.



OMB Director Mick Mulvaney speaks with reporters during the daily press briefing at the White House in Washington.

Jonathan Ernst / Reuters

MICHELLE COTTLE | MAR 3, 2017 | POLITICS

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SIGN UP

Here's hoping President Trump has enjoyed the early, carefree days of his presidency, when most of his work has involved go-it-alone executive orders, appointments, pep rallies, and grouching about his mistreatment by this or that enemy of the people.

Within the next couple of weeks, things are going to get vastly less breezy, when the White House officially drops its 2018 **"skinny budget" on Congress**. This will give lawmakers their first real peek at Trump's economic priorities—beyond his usual unicorns-for-all pledge to slash taxes while spending willy-nilly on things like infrastructure and immigration enforcement.

At that point, stuff starts getting real.

To clarify, what the White House is handing over is not a full budget proposal. It is a “skinny budget,” which sounds like some god-awful low-calorie sludge you’d order at Starbucks, but is in fact a general overview of the president’s spending priorities for the 2018 fiscal year. As Trump budget director Mick Mulvaney stressed at a press briefing Monday, the outline will not address entitlement programs such as Social Security or Medicare; it will not tackle tax reform; it won’t get into any specifics on infrastructure; and it won’t attempt any sort of revenue projections. It will merely provide “topline” numbers on discretionary spending that the various agencies will be expected to abide by.

In other words, most of the really bloody fights will come later. Even so, there will be enough meat on these bones to start a brawl or two. Case in point: Trump’s proposed cuts to the State Department have moved Republican Senator Lindsey Graham to declare the package “dead on arrival.” So that debate promises to be lively.

More broadly, the basic structure of the blueprint—in which Trump wants to add \$54 billion in defense spending by whacking an equivalent amount from non-defense programs—would blow up the 2011 sequestration agreement (which split cuts evenly between defense and non-defense programs) and thus require a change in the law in order to even be considered. But we’ll get to all that fun in a minute.

The practice of submitting a skinny budget is relatively new. The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 requires the president to send Congress a spending plan early in each new session. The exact deadline has been tinkered with over the decades. Until 1990, however, it fell so early in January that, during presidential transitions, the decamping president was obligated to submit a budget on his way out the door, which could then be revised by his successor. (So it was that Ronald Reagan filed the underlying budget for George H.W.’s first year in office, as Carter had for Reagan, Ford had for Carter, and so on.) Under Bush 41, the official deadline was loosened just enough—from early January to early February—to enable the outgoing president to leave this duty to the incoming one, which promptly became the standard.

Practically speaking, of course, it would be madness for a fledgling White House to try to hammer out a full budget in its first couple of weeks. Thus was born the skinny budget. During their first February in office, Clinton, Bush 43, and Obama each provided a budget overview to Congress in conjunction with their first joint address to lawmakers. Such overviews typically run in the digestible 100-200- page range, rather than the doorstep-sized full budgets submitted in the spring.

(Some of the astute among you will notice that Trump has missed the early

February deadline even with his skinny budget—as did those before him. As is so often the case in Washington, deadlines are forever being pushed and tweaked and ignored to the point where one might wonder why Congress bothers to keep them on the books. But that is a topic for another day.)

Already, the skinny budget is making the rounds in the executive branch. On Monday the White House sent the numbers out to federal agencies and departments in a process known as “passback.” Along with the topline amounts they are being allotted, agencies received suggestions from Mulvaney’s Office of Management and Budget on how to hit those numbers. After spending a few days

reviewing the proposal, agency officials will come back to OMB with their thoughts on where the cuts—or, in the case of the Pentagon, the additional billions—should be directed. Serious appeals go up the food chain to Mulvaney or even the White House.

Further details will be fleshed out, and the budget office hopes to hand lawmakers a final outline by March 16. As Lindsey Graham’s DOA comment indicates, the White House can look forward to many spirited exchanges about its skinny budget even with lawmakers from its own party. Democrats, meanwhile, are working themselves up into a lather over the core structure of the proposal.

Specifically, popping the sequestration cap off the defense budget would require at least 60 votes in the Senate. That means recruiting a handful of Democrats to the cause. But adding billions to defense while not simply keeping a lid on non-defense programs but specifically slashing them by an equivalent amount will play poorly with Democrats. (Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer has already been raising holy hell about it.) White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer has expressed confidence that Democratic Senators will decline to play partisan politics with national security—suggesting that the past several weeks have taken a greater toll on Spicer’s grasp of reality than originally thought.

To be sure, Trump fancies himself the shrewdest of negotiators. And perhaps his full budget will indeed turn out to be a bipartisan work of art. In the meantime, even the skinniest of budget outlines gives lawmakers a nice fat target to rally opposition around until the final package lands in May—at which point, the real Beltway carnage can begin.



News, Straight to the Point

5 Points: Why Trump's Budget Plan Might Be In Bigger Trouble Than You Think

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AP Photo / Evan Vucci

By ALICE OLLSTEIN Published MARCH 6, 2017, 6:00 AM EST

14973 Views

Even though Republicans now control the White House and both chambers of Congress, that doesn't mean they will have an easy time agreeing on and implementing a plan to fund the government going forward.

Though we are still a couple weeks away from seeing the actual text of the President's budget blueprint, many controversial pieces of the plan have been revealed, including a \$54 billion hike in military spending, and deep cuts to the State Department, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Coast Guard, among other departments and agencies.

Already, signs of revolt are emerging on Capitol Hill, and top budget experts warn of an array of legal and political obstacles standing in Trump's way.

Here are 5 points to keep in mind as the budget battle unfolds:

1 We could be headed for another government shutdown.

In 2011, Congress passed the Budget Control Act, which set strict spending caps on both the military and domestic agencies, the dreaded sequestration. Under that law, it would be illegal for Congress to boost spending on the former by making cuts to the latter.

"You have two pots of money and you can't exchange between the two," Stan Collender, a former top staffer on the House and Senate budget committees, told TPM.

That means Trump would have to convince 60 members of the Senate to vote to raise the cap just on the military side. Democrats will in all likelihood present a united opposition front, and such a bill can't pass without them. Several Republican lawmakers have admitted that this gambit is impossible.

"I don't think you'll get 60 votes to just lift it on defense only," Lindsey Graham (R-SC) told TPM on Wednesday.



The 2013 government shutdown over Obamacare

So what's a tried-and-true way to get lawmakers to vote for something they hate? Attach it to a must-pass bill to keep the government running or to raise the debt ceiling. Such an opportunity is coming up in late April, when Congress either has to pass a continuing resolution to continue funding the government or risk another federal shutdown. They'll get another bite at the apple this summer, as Congress must vote to raise the debt ceiling by August or September or risk a national default.

"I definitely think we're headed for another clash and possibly a shutdown," said Bill Hoagland, who worked for decades for the Senate Budget Committee. "I don't think we'll default on our debt. We never have before, and they must know it would be a black mark on Republicans if we did."

2 Trump's other options involve breaking the law.

Faced with that daunting 60-vote threshold, the administration may be forced to explore other options. According to Collender, "the only options are outside the law or questionable."

"This is an administration that has been signaling that they won't let the law stop them from doing what they want to do," he said. "They'll look for extra-legal ways to get it done."

One of those extra-legal options would be ordering the Office of Management and Budget to simply ignore the Budget Control Act. Another would be to put the \$54 billion in new defense spending in the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) fund—the pot of money for the nation's active wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that is not subject to budget caps. If the money is then not used for those wars, this would violate the law.

Trump's newly confirmed budget director Mick Mulvaney was adamantly opposed to the Pentagon using OCO to get around budget limits when he was a member of Congress, but he may have had a change of heart since joining the Trump administration.

3 Trump is targeting popular programs that Republican lawmakers want to protect.

To get anywhere close to the \$54 billion in cuts to non-defense discretionary spending needed to fund a similar-size increase for the Pentagon, Trump would need to cut about 10 percent of every single federal program and agency, outside of the entitlement programs Trump has vowed not to touch.

The cuts, explained Hoagland, would target the areas that have already been the hardest hit over the past five years. "There has already been nearly a 14 percent decrease in non-defense discretionary spending since 2011," he said. "To go even further would involve severely cutting things like NASA, the Small Business Administration, Amtrak, the Job Corps, Head Start, and Pell Grants. Cutting things like that I call 'eating your seed corn.' It would really hamper economic growth."

Usually ones to cheer cuts to federal funding, some Republicans have become so troubled that particular programs are on the chopping block that they are already speaking out against Trump's plans.



Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID) told reporters this week that he's concerned the plan to cut a full quarter of the EPA's budget would have a devastating impact on the ground. "Much of what they do is state and local grants for clean water and clear air and that kind of stuff," he said. "I don't know if you want to cut that."

Congressional opposition is even stronger when it comes to the State Department, which Trump has proposed cutting by more than a third.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) bluntly told reporters that a budget with such cuts could "probably not" pass the Senate. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) blasted the proposal, telling TPM that cutting funding for diplomatic envoys, global health initiatives and other State Department programs "makes us less safe, puts our diplomats at risk, and destroys soft power. You need soft power to win the war."

Simpson said many of his Republican colleagues, even those remaining silent for the time being, will stand up against the cuts when the time comes to debate and vote on the budget. "There is more to our government than just defense," he added. "Congress will make their voice known on this. The middle-of-the-road people want to see government work."

Budget experts like Collender, however, are skeptical that Trump will listen to the lawmakers' concerns. He predicts that instead of a collaborative process, Trump will push forward with his plan and attack any Republicans who stands in the way. "I'm not sure the Trump administration cares much about the Republican caucus on the Hill, and would just as soon throw them under the bus to get what it wants," he said.

4 It's impossible to analyze the budget while we're still in the dark on taxes, infrastructure, and health care.

The Trump administration is moving full steam ahead with this budget before lawmakers have clear guidance on plans to radically overhaul the tax code, spend an additional trillion dollars on infrastructure, and repeal the Affordable Care Act. Each of these could have a huge impact on how much money is available has to spend, yet they're being discussed separately from the budget itself.

This, says Joel Friedman with the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, makes no sense. "You need to pull all these pieces together to look at the totality of what they're doing," he said. "The problematic thing is that the budget we're going to see doesn't pull all those things together. They're only focusing on the appropriative part, which isn't the full story."

Despite boasts from Republicans earlier this week that the plan to repeal and replace Obamacare will rapidly move forward very soon, deep divisions and uncertainties remain. GOP leaders are currently keeping their draft plan under lock and key in the basement of the Capitol, barring Democrats and most Republicans from reading it. They also plan to push for a vote before the Congressional Budget Office has an opportunity to crunch the numbers and announce what the bill would cost and how many people would lose or gain insurance.

The CBO's analysis of the 2015 Obamacare repeal bill, which conservatives on Capitol Hill say they want to emulate this time around, found that it would increase the federal budget deficit by \$137 billion over a decade.

Without knowing the economic forecast this time around, lawmakers may have a hard time voting to approve either a massive spending cut or a large increase.



5 The ghost of Ronald Reagan.

Budget experts say the country has not seen anything remotely like Trump's plan for decades, and the most recent historical analogue is the first budget of President Ronald Reagan, which similarly slashed domestic social programs to fund a gargantuan increase in military spending.

As you may remember, that didn't work out so well.

The deficit soared, government spending and the number of federal workers increased despite Reagan's promises to bring them down, shuttered federal programs **had to be reopened**, and number of people living in poverty **shot up**.

"Reagan found that his budget went too far too fast and increased the deficit by too much," said Collender. "He had to backtrack. He signed four tax increases after that."

Collender worries that if he found himself in a similar situation, Trump may not be willing to take the steps Reagan took to contain the damage. "I don't think Trump is the same kind of president as Reagan. He's not as experienced in government, and I don't think he feels the same level of responsibility," he said. "I think he is more willing to break the china."

CUT OFF YOUR NOSE

The psychology of punishment is key to why people vote against their own interests, says an Oxford neuroscientist

Olivia Goldhill | February 25, 2017



📷 Crockett says she saw signs of the desire to punish among those who voted against the political establishment. (Reuters/ Joshua Roberts)

Donald Trump would not be US president without the votes of many, including [Obamacare enrollees](#) and [immigrants](#), who are likely to find themselves worse off because of his policies. To some Democrat supporters, this widespread voting against self-interests can seem impossible to understand. To Molly Crockett, a neuroscientist and experimental psychologist at Oxford University, it makes perfect sense.

Crockett studies the psychology of punishment and has found that, rather than accept what they see as an unfair scenario, people will often choose to punish others—even at a personal cost to themselves. This

desire to punish, she believes, can motivate those who feel they're getting a bad deal to vote against the political establishment, regardless of whether the alternative is truly a better option.

The "ultimatum game"

A classic way of studying the human desire to punish is through lab variations of the "ultimatum game." In this set-up, one player is given money and has the option of splitting it with a second player. That second player can accept the portion of money offered or reject it. If they reject it, neither player gets a penny.

This experiment has been studied for close to 40 years and researchers have found that if the first player offers the second less than 30% of the total sum, most second players will see that as an unfair deal and reject it. They'll forgo all money themselves in order to punish the first player.

Crockett sees the popular support for Trump and Brexit as real-world examples of the punishing behavior she observes in the lab. "Some of the expressed sentiments of voters in both the [Brexit] referendum and the US election did suggest there was a motivation to punish there," she says. "That's certainly not going to be the case for all voters, but quotations that I've read from some are consistent with the things people say in our experiments, when they're treated unfairly and they prefer to punish rather than be at the end of a bad deal."

Revenge and punishment can be addictive

Crockett's experiments have worrying implications. Firstly, her brain imaging studies show that the act of punishing engages the part of the brain that signals reward. It's the same brain area that's hijacked by addictive drugs. "Certainly the raw ingredients are there, behaviorally and neurally, for expressing moral outrage to have an addictive quality," says Crockett.

She also found that people often justify their actions by saying they were trying to teach a moral lesson, rather than because the act of punishing feels good. (This remains true even when a punishment is carried out in secret, and the recipient will never know of their punishment to absorb its lesson.) In retrospect, we tend to assign a moral motive to actions that are essentially vengeance.

"Data suggests that people are telling themselves and others that they're punishing for moral reasons when in fact the motivations are more complicated than that," Crockett says. "The motive to harm someone who you perceived has harmed you is a very strong force."

So, for example, a desire to punish immigrants that you perceive as having taken something from you could be reframed as an effort to create safety. It will come as no surprise, given the fractured state of politics around the world, that people inflict harsher punishments on those from different social groups.

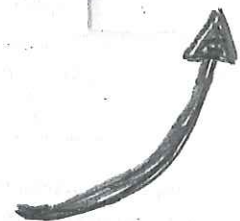
Stressful times and social media make us want to punish people

But if humans have always had this desire to punish, why would it only become so politically obvious in recent months? Crockett's work shows that serotonin levels affect punishment motivations and, given other research suggesting that long-term stress affects serotonin production, it could be that stressful large-scale events (such as an economic recession) increase the desire to punish.

Social media is another troubling factor, with the potential to further fuel the desire for revenge. "I see social media as tapping into punishment motive in a couple of ways that may be harmful," says Crockett. "We know that punishing engages the brain's motivational circuitry and there's an immediately gratifying aspect to punishment. When you express outrage on Facebook or Twitter, not only do you get the immediate satisfaction of posting that but you also get repeated and amplified reinforcement of that behavior because people like what you say, they share it, they re-post it—and it creates a highly self-reinforcing cycle."

This behavior is apparent across the political spectrum, Crockett says. "I do see, on both sides, people getting sucked in to repeatedly shaming, expressing outrage," she says. "This reinforces itself and it further drives people apart... I'm very worried about the way things are headed."

There are no clear answers on how to reduce the desire to punish, but Crockett believes that being aware of this tendency can help temper knee-jerk acts of vengeance. Punishing others feels good in the short term, and we cannot ignore this uncomfortable truth. But if we don't curb that tendency, the longterm consequences could be punishing for us all.



Nathan L. GonzalesFollow: [@Nathan L. Gonzales](#)nathanlgonzales@gmail.com**Gonzales**

House Republicans Shouldn't Get Too Comfortable in Majority

Number of competitive races could balloon before Election Day



More Republican seats could become legitimate takeover targets for Democrats in reaction to a polarizing and unpopular President Donald Trump, Nathan L. Gonzales writes. (Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call)

Republican gerrymandering has put the House majority out of reach for Democrats, we're told. But even though the initial playing field of competitive races is probably too small for the GOP to fall into the minority, Republicans shouldn't get too comfortable. The playing field could expand dramatically over the next 20 months.

[Inside Elections](#) (formerly The Rothenberg & Gonzales Political Report) rated 43 House races as competitive in its initial 2018 ratings. That total includes 28 seats held by Republicans and 15 seats held by Democrats.

Democrats need to gain 24 seats to regain the House majority, which means they would need to win all but four of the competitive districts to get to 218. That's possible, but not likely.

What's more likely is that the playing field could expand in reaction to a polarizing and unpopular President Donald Trump with more Republican seats becoming legitimate takeover targets for Democrats.

Favorable GOP congressional maps in Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Florida, for example, have limited Democratic takeover opportunities for most of the decade. But those maps were drawn to withstand political storms, not a tsunami.

An advertisement for Northwestern University's Public Policy and Administration program. It features a blue background with a photograph of a crowd of people in the top right corner. The text reads: "BECOME A Change Agent. Earn your master's degree online or on campus. Northwestern PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION School of Professional Studies. SUMMER QUARTER APP DEADLINE: APRIL 15 >"

The president's party has lost House seats in 18 of the last 20 midterm elections, with an average loss of 33 House seats in those 18 cycles. And there is some precedent for a shifting playing field under the right conditions.

In January 2009, The Rothenberg Political Report listed 33 competitive seats (23 held by Democrats and 10 held by Republicans). Over the course of almost two years, the playing field ballooned to 107 competitive seats (98 Democratic seats and just 9 Republican seats) before Election Day, after the cycle spiraled out of control from President [Barack Obama](#) and his party. Democrats lost 63 House seats in 2010.

In February 2005, the Report listed 23 competitive races (16 Republican seats and 7 Democratic seats). By November 2006, the playing field expanded to 62 seats (57 Republican and 5 Democratic) and Republicans lost 30 seats.

The Report hadn't yet started its traditional rating system for House races at the beginning of the 1994 cycle. But by Election Day, 141 House seats were rated as competitive, including 95 Democratic seats, 45 Republican seats, and one held by an independent. Democrats lost 54 seats that fall.

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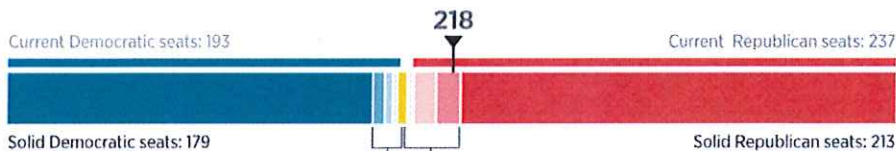


It's not clear whether the 2016 presidential results represent a trend or an aberration in key districts. And there isn't a guarantee that voters will blame congressional Republicans in the same way they typically hold the president's party responsible for executive action (or inaction).

For now, Democrats are in for a district-by-district slog against a slate of tough GOP incumbents, even those who represent Clinton districts. But a combination of Democratic enthusiasm and Republican apathy could create a midterm wave against GOP candidates and a larger slate of competitive seats.

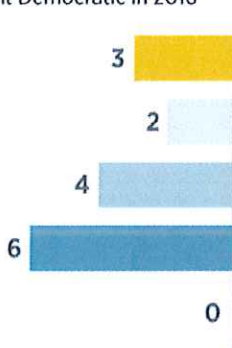
House Seats in Play in 2018

The midterms might seem far away, but re-election is on members' minds as they cast votes this year. The initial battleground of competitive House races, as rated by Inside Elections with Nathan L. Gonzales/Roll Call, is probably too small for Democrats to gain the 24 seats they need for a majority. But there is plenty of time for the playing field to expand.



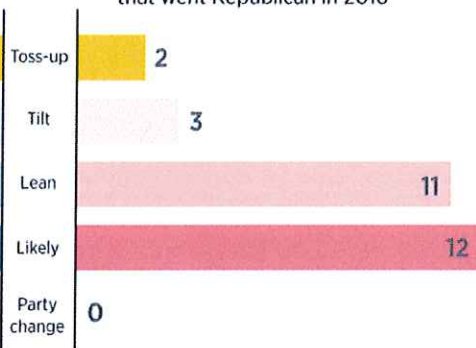
15 Democrats to watch

Race ratings for in-play seats that went Democratic in 2016



28 Republicans to watch

Race ratings for in-play seats that went Republican in 2016



Who's in play?

Seats that went Democratic in 2016

TOSS-UP

District	Incumbent	2016 vote
Arizona 1	Tom O'Halleran	50.7%
New Hampshire 1	Carol Shea-Porter	44.3%
New Jersey 5	Josh Gottheimer	51.1%

TILT DEMOCRATIC

District	Incumbent	2016 vote
Florida 7	Stephanie Murphy	51.5%
Nevada 3	Jacky Rosen	47.2%

LEAN DEMOCRATIC

District	Incumbent	2016 vote
Florida 13	Charlie Crist	51.9%
Minnesota 1	Tim Walz	50.4%
Minnesota 7	Collin C. Peterson	52.5%
Minnesota 8	Rick Nolan	50.3%

LIKELY DEMOCRATIC

District	Incumbent	2016 vote
California 24	Salud Carbajal	53.4%
California 7	Ami Bera	51.8%
Illinois 10	Brad Schneider	52.6%
Iowa 2	Dave Loebsack	53.7%
Pennsylvania 17	Matt Cartwright	53.8%
Wisconsin 3	Ron Kind	uncontested

Seats that went Republican in 2016

TOSS-UP

District	Incumbent	2016 vote
Minnesota 2	Jason Lewis	47.0%
Texas 23	Will Hurd	48.3%

TILT REPUBLICAN

District	Incumbent	2016 vote
California 49	Darrell Issa	50.3%
Florida 26	Carlos Curbelo	53.0%
New York 19	John J. Faso	54.1%

LEAN REPUBLICAN

District	Incumbent	2016 vote
California 10	Jeff Denham	51.7%
California 25	Steve Knight	53.1%
California 39	Ed Royce	57.2%
Colorado 6	Mike Coffman	50.9%
Georgia 6	Vacant	61.7%
Iowa 1	Rod Blum	53.8%
Nebraska 2	Don Bacon	48.9%
New York 22	Claudia Tenney	46.5%
Pennsylvania 16	Lloyd K. Smucker	53.8%
Pennsylvania 8	Brian Fitzpatrick	54.4%
Virginia 10	Barbara Comstock	52.9%

LIKELY REPUBLICAN

District	Incumbent	2016 vote
Arizona 2	Martha E. McSally	57.0%
California 21	David Valadao	56.7%
California 48	Dana Rohrabacher	58.3%
Iowa 3	David Young	53.5%
Kansas 3	Kevin Yoder	51.3%
Maine 2	Bruce Poliquin	54.8%
Minnesota 3	Erik Paulsen	56.9%
New Jersey 7	Leonard Lance	54.1%
New York 24	John Katko	60.6%
Pennsylvania 6	Ryan A. Costello	57.2%
Pennsylvania 7	Patrick Meehan	59.5%
Texas 7	John Culberson	56.2%

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Politics

Report Shows 'Untapped Power' of Constituent Advocacy

Showing the local effects of legislation can better influence lawmakers

Posted Feb 13, 2017 11:43 AM



Bridget Bowman
@Bridget Bowman

Trump Questions Schumer-Putin
Doughnut Moment

Trump Joint Address Spotlights
Deep Partisan Divide

Week Ahead Includes Trump
Address, Cabinet Confirmations



People react to Rep. Jason Chaffetz as he speaks during a town hall meeting at Brighton High School, Thursday, Feb. 9, 2017, in Cottonwood Heights, Utah. Hundreds of people lined up early for the town hall with Chaffetz on Thursday evening, many holding signs criticizing the congressman's push to repeal the newly-named Bears Ears National Monument in southern Utah. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer)

Citizens from across the country have jammed the Senate phone lines in recent weeks, making their voices heard on President Donald Trump's Cabinet appointments. But a new report suggests there are more effective ways to influence legislators.

The Congressional Management Foundation on Monday released a new report, entitled "Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement," that highlights more than a decade's worth of its surveys that show how citizens can best influence lawmakers. According to the group's research, citizens who show up in person and are well-prepared with facts and arguments can have a sizable impact on undecided legislators.

"Unfortunately, most Americans believe their voices don't make a difference. This research proves that their voices do make a difference, and they can magnify their voices by using more effective advocacy techniques," wrote the report's authors, Bradford Fitch and Kathy Goldschmidt, both of the CMF.

Between August 2004 and July 2016, the foundation conducted nine surveys of congressional staff and four surveys of citizen advocates, generating more than 1,200 responses.

Its findings showed that direct interactions between lawmakers and staff can have a profound impact. In 2004, 2010, and 2015, more than 90 percent of congressional staffers said that in-person constituent visits could influence a lawmaker, especially one who is undecided on an issue.

The report highlighted the effect of direct meetings between lawmakers and staffers and constituents. But recent flare-ups at town hall meetings across the country have also demonstrated the impact of constituents who show up and make their voices heard.

For instance, last week, House Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Jason Chaffetz faced a packed auditorium of protesters in Utah who questioned why the Republican congressman was not investigating the president's potential ethical violations.

Videos of town hall meetings from other parts of the country have also sprung up with constituents confronting GOP lawmakers about their plans to do away with the 2010 health care law, and what will happen if Republicans in Congress repeal sizable portions of the law.

[Sensenbrenner Admonishes Crowd to be Respectful]

The confrontations at town hall meetings can lead to tense exchanges. Over the weekend, Wisconsin Republican Rep. [Jim Sensenbrenner](#) told a constituent who interrupted another to “wait your turn.”

Chaffetz, who left his town hall after being shouted down, later dismissed the protesters. In an [interview with the Desert News](#), Chaffetz said they were brought in from elsewhere and were “more of a paid attempt to bully and intimidate.” Some Republican congressmen, like [John J. Duncan Jr.](#) of Tennessee and [Chris Collins](#) of New York, have written off having town hall meetings entirely.

[Chaffetz Hears Jeers and Cheers at Town Hall]

This kind of interaction over Cabinet nominations during town hall meetings is not typical, said Fitch, the president of the Congressional Management Foundation. He said congressional engagement is usually facilitated by an advocacy organization that encourages its members to contact lawmakers about a specific bill.

But Fitch said phone calls and emails are not necessarily the most effective ways of communicating with legislators — and neither is a confrontation.

“When you’re yelling, Congress isn’t listening,” he said.

To have a productive meeting with lawmakers and staff, the CMF report noted the benefits of coming prepared.

For instance, 91 percent of staffers said including information about the local impact of legislation was helpful, but only 9 percent said constituents frequently included this information during discussions.

Surveys of staffers also found that it is important for constituents to include their own reasons for supporting or opposing a piece of legislation, a specific request for the lawmaker, and a personal story relating to the legislation.

Having a specific request is key to how groups could harness the current energy that has citizens jamming the Senate phone lines and crowding constituent meetings.

“What we’ll have to see are specific proposals that members of Congress will have to make choices on and that citizens can hold legislators accountable on,” Fitch said. “That, all of our research shows, is another component of great advocacy — that there is a specific ask.”

Fitch said groups could also look to foster more sustained engagement with lawmakers

He cited a case study, noted in Monday’s report, in which the foundation partnered with Feeding America, a national food bank network, to train constituents on how to engage with lawmakers and their staff. Those people became trustworthy sources for staffers.

“It wasn’t by yelling. It was by preparing, it was by studying. It was by learning about the member of Congress,” Fitch said. “It was calmly and politely and persistently interacting with them on a regular basis over a period of years.”

The report’s authors also encouraged advocacy groups to include citizens in their lobbying efforts. They recommended that groups develop metrics to measure their relationship-building efforts, and take time to teach citizens how to be more effective advocates.

LOGOOTEER COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION

Learning today Leading tomorrow

FACES OF IMPACT AID

Quick Facts:

- Loogootee Community School Corporation (LCSC) is a public district in southwestern Indiana that serves 845 students from the towns and rural areas in the western half of Martin County.
- **Crane Naval Support Activity Base (located in our district) takes up a large amount of our land that would normally be taxed.**
- Impact Aid dollars in the annual amount of around \$300,000 are a critical source of funding.
- Impact Aid is placed in our General Fund that supports classroom expenses including teacher salaries.
- Impact Aid makes up 6.5% of our General Fund revenue. **Losing Impact Aid would create massive cuts throughout our district.** (NOTE: LCSC has cut \$2.6 million from our General Fund since 2005).

IMPACT AID EFFECTS:

1. Lower Teacher - Student Ratios = Better readers and higher test scores:

Although LCSC has increased our class sizes dramatically in recent years due to cuts in state revenue, **we have been able to use Impact Aid money to keep our lower elementary class sizes at a ratio of 18:1.** Shannon Wagler and Brittney Bateman are two examples of additional teaching positions LCSC is able to offer to lower our class sizes. **Loogootee Schools ranked 8th out of over 400 districts in Indiana on ISTEP testing in 2015-16.** Loogootee Elementary is rated an "A" by the IDOE.

2. LCSC Student Service Program:

Without Impact Aid, LCSC would have only 1 counselor for all students K-12. Because of Impact Aid, LCSC offers our students a full-time Youth First (YF) Social Worker - Elizabeth Christmas. YF places social workers in schools to provide prevention and early intervention services for at-risk students who are assisted in areas including: school behavior problems, peer relationship difficulties, depression and home life conflicts.

During this past school year alone, **Elizabeth served our students in the following ways:**

- 1334 teacher and administrative consultations regarding students
- 661 total students served
- 560 individual meetings with students
- 285 parent consultations to assist with parent - child relationships
- 73 classroom presentations
- 1 student life saved who was hours from committing suicide

Loogootee Community School Corporation thanks our senators and representatives for your continued support through Impact Aid.



Brittney Bateman, Teacher



Elizabeth Christmas, Social Worker



Shannon Wagler, Teacher



Federal Lands Impacted Schools Association

Education For Children, Fairness for Taxpayers

Spring Meeting—March, 2017 Quick Take

Funding is our Number #1 Issue.

- CR continues funding thru April 28th
 - CR does not give any increases from appropriators....or cuts....
 - FY 17 Budget needed
 - Don't cut NON-Defense to pay for Defense Increases
- **BEFORE ELECTION:** The Senate Appropriators approved a \$2M increase for Federal Properties as a part of a proposed Omnibus Spending Bill.
 - (114th Congress Appropriations Chairs Rep. Tom Cole-OK and Sen. Blunt-MO may still want their efforts to mean something).
- FY 18 starts in October, 2017—Sequestration reductions return...**BOTH** Defense & Non-Defense
- Before October 2017 new Debt Ceiling crisis (Congress approves America's payment of already incurred debt which in the past was held up by some members of Congress to get budget changes. This is how Sequestration happened.)

Hill Message Points of Emphasis:

- Impact aid is a **local control** program provides federal dollars directly to school.
- Impact aid is bi-partisan and both sides of the aisle can boast agreement.
 - Both sides agreed before the election that Impact Aid (including 7002) should receive an increase, Congress should keep that in mind when determining appropriations.
- Public school constituents (nearly 95% of American children attend public schools) are increasingly concerned that school choice/vouchers will take money from their public schools. Schools which they overwhelmingly like and want to continue to see funded.
 - Congress just dealt with ESSA and remember all of the political fall out from those discussions. Does Congress really want to revisit this firestorm?

FLISA Handouts: Hill visit's one-pager and talking including references to federal obligation and our awesome website: www.FLISA.org

- There is also an encouragement for the staffer to contact FLISA schools so that schools can include the Member's joining the Impact Aid Coalition in **school and community newsletters**. 34/36 Retained in Senate, 76/88 in House.

New Congress Assembles: This spring a whole new staff to get familiar with our message both new faces and new committee assignments

Help needed with FRO April 26-27th...start planning now to attend

Action Plan work is important to keep momentum going...add your voice.

- Expand message of FLISA to more members of Congress
- Refine our message
- Plan for Next Steps this Spring...gonna get ugly

Thank You Letter: NEEDED: Collector (Tuesday) and Distributor (Wednesday)