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Fwd: DeVos' clumsy sleight of hand fools no one

1 message

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October Board Meeting

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From: **State School News Service** <j.m.broadway74@gmail.com>
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DeVos' clumsy sleight of hand fools no one

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

[The state seems pretty quiet. Let's look toward Washington today.]

How many federal dollars would USDE Secretary Betsy DeVos' "[Education Freedom Scholarship](#)" (vouchers for students to attend private schools) cost the Illinois school system? Based on the usual formula (share of the U.S. population), Illinois would lose about \$200 million in federal education funds. Ouch.

But how could that be? Betsy has been assuring every audience she speaks to that *it won't cost the government a thing*. All the dollars would come from taxpayers directly, she says - seeming not to notice how that blocks them from bolstering programs that support *public* schools. (Is she really that ditz, or just faking it?)

President Donald Trump has it figured out, however. He's already slashed enough from his federal education budget plan to cover the DeVos voucher scheme. More than enough, in fact. While the vouchers would drain \$5 billion from the USDE allocation, Trump has proposed to reduce that [agency's budget by \\$9 billion](#).

In that event, Illinois' share of the cut would be about \$360 million. *But it won't happen*. It can't, because Republicans in the United States Senate are nervous right now. There's a limit to just how loopy they will act, with elections coming up. Besides that, the Democratic majority in the U.S. House would trash such a budget.

Back in 2017, when Gov. Bruce Rauner vetoed a "clean" evidence-based funding bill for schools, it was clear this critical issue was lost unless a bipartisan compromise could be reached. A rich-guy tax credit voucher scheme *like the one DeVos wants at the federal level* was a major demand of the Republican caucuses.

But it was different from DeVos' proposal in important ways. Its cost impact was much smaller, of course. It would divert a maximum of only \$75 million from the Illinois treasury - not \$200 million or \$360 million. Also, voucher-funding taxpayers would get just a 75% tax credit, not a full dollar-for-dollar credit.

With that, and a few other gestures toward the GOP, the majority Democratic legislature was able to bring a successful end to a struggle that school leaders had waged strenuously for many years. Rauner, who had done everything he could to sabotage the 2017 budget process, then quickly took credit for its success.

Gov. JB Pritzker, you'll recall, opposed the tax credit voucher as a candidate last year. He wanted to repeal it. Although the Democrats *now* have three-fifths majorities in the House and in the Senate, at least a bit of bipartisanship was needed to pass JB's ambitious legislative agenda this year. So the tax credit voucher stayed.

So, how much does Illinois' tax credit law cost the schools? *An argument can be made* that state education spending is unaffected by the tax credit that Illinois millionaires get when they contribute to organizations that give "scholarships" to kids so they can attend religious or secular private schools. Why is that?

It is because, unlike the federal government, public education is one of the few truly big-ticket items funded by a state. A PK-12 public education budget cut - *just so private schools could get the money* - would be quite risky, politically, in a state like Illinois. No, it would be other state programs that would have to take the hit.

Civics lesson: There's *competition* under the Capitol dome in Springfield, especially among high-priority programs. When I was VP of the Illinois Hospital Association years ago, we saw education as our top competitor. Part of my job was to frame arguments that would help us wrest state dollars from the greedy schools.

I wracked my brain for a perfect slogan. It was *health care versus schooling*. I needed something that would capture the essence of that, something that would show - in the hospitals' favor - the public's price to be paid if the schools were to get "our money." The slogan I proposed: "*Better dumb than dead.*" Didn't fly.

Next Monday is "Columbus Day" in America. What will the students learn? Back in my school days, we learned that Christopher Columbus was a great and courageous man, a leader whose insatiable desire to explore the world took him and his fearless crew out to the unknown, across the sea to "discover" America.

Uh oh, is this gonna be one of those bleeding-heart rants about how we should tell students the truth about Columbus, that he was only after the gold and that he launched a horrible war, actually decades of genocide, to get it and he doesn't deserve to have even a street named after him, let alone a whole city in Ohio?

Well, yes. Yes it is. Now, [James Loewen](#) - a Decatur native and prolific truth-teller - agrees that educators should teach children stories about historic figures to help build character, but he does not think we should try to make heroes out of scoundrels from the past who did not demonstrate any character.

Read Loewen's [Lies my teacher told me](#) (I hate the title, too) for some truths (albeit ugly ones) about Columbus and some other historical Americans. Read [Bartolomé de las Casas](#) brief eye-witness account of the [Destruction of the Indies](#) for the views of a pious man who advocated on behalf of the brutally ravaged "Indians."

Oh, what's that? You're already telling kids the truth? Well, good for you!

Speaking of stuff that's probably hard to teach, have you been following the impeachment saga? I have been against impeaching President Trump, not because I think he's innocent of all wrong-doing but because a [potentially worse leader](#) is waiting in the wings. But the Senate would never convict, so what the heck?

Trump's wrong-doing is legend, but he has paid no price. "I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters," [he famously said](#) back in 2016. I don't doubt that Trump could get away with a murder on Fifth Avenue. What I'd like to know is this: has he every done it?

Trump has some nasty things to say about Joe Biden and his son Hunter. My sense is that Trump has a nose for corruption. He's very familiar with the concept. Hunter Biden reportedly knows nothing about natural gas, so [why was he paid \\$50,000](#) per month to sit on the board of a Ukrainian gas company? Sure smells funny.

Do I dislike Joe Biden? Yes. As a guy who spent four Vietnam-era years in the military, I resent politicians who were given [five draft deferments](#) (same as Dick Cheney), then a 1-Y draft status, and now [hang around soldiers](#) as if pretending to be one of them. In this and so many ways, Biden's been [almost as big a liar as Trump](#).

Yes, Biden has suffered much from the loss of beloved family members, and that is to be regretted. But he has capitalized politically, shamelessly, on personal tragedies at every step, throughout his career. He consistently has politicized his victimhood. [And he's still doing it](#). That is also to be regretted.

Last time I denigrated Biden, a friend emailed to insist that ending Trump's presidency should be the "most important" goal for 2020. I agree. My personal opinion is that, yes, if Trump gets four more years as president, it would be disastrous - for education, the environment, the economy, foreign relations - everything.

But Biden is not the only possible alternative. For a while, there were 24 Democrats salivating for a chance to take Trump on. Biden has postured as the "only one who can beat Trump," but that's just more of his embroidery. My sense is that any Democrat who gets nominated will beat Trump - even in the Electoral College.

If I'm wrong about that (as I was wrong four years ago when I advised you not to worry, that there was no way Trump could become POTUS) then any horrible thing is possible. Fortunately, we have plenty of public officials who are always ready to offer their "thoughts" - even their "prayers" - [when it happens](#).

[So *this is what it feels like* to focus on the Washington scene, on politics and news from the national level. Kind of makes a person appreciate the cleaner, fresher political air of Illinois, right? [Oops! Maybe not.](#)]

A reader reacted to the item on CTE in one of last week's epistles:

"A continued emphasis on CTE programs is encouraging to see. It seems that in the late 80s and through the 90s the emphasis was on everyone going to college. No question, learning after high school is important, but the traditional college education is not for everyone. We seem to have seen the light that CTE programs are a viable option for many students that affords them a path and a career where they can have a rewarding and successful life."

My thanks to Michael Schmitz, retired principal, Effingham.

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