

What Trump's Cabinet picks tell us

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Donald Trump feuded with the Republican establishment during his presidential campaign, but as president-elect he is mending fences with them, larding his cabinet with billionaires, fans of trickle-down economics, and anti-government, anti-science ideologues. Climate change deniers? Check. Proponents of dismantling public education? Check. Advocates for privatization, lowering taxes for the haves, and keeping the minimum wage low for the have-nots? Check, check and check. I almost wonder if it would be better not to have these agencies than to have people running them who want to turn them against their own missions.

Americans did not vote for what is emerging to be a dangerous, extremist agenda.

Trump voters responded to his mantra of jobs, jobs, jobs, and his pledge to help the little guy and stick it to elites. But that doesn't square with his nomination of business executive Andrew Puzder to serve as secretary of labor. Puzder has shipped jobs overseas, promoted replacing workers with robots and fought increases to the minimum wage for low-wage workers like those at the fast-food restaurants his company owns. His company was fined for wage theft and required to pay back pay to workers after an investigation by the very department he may lead. You don't make America great by trampling workers' right to earn a living.

Trump's nomination of U.S. Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga.) to head the Department of Health and Human Services shows that he intends to strip access to healthcare for millions of Americans, including 8 million children. That's what ending the Affordable Care Act and the Children's Health Insurance Program would mean, if Price gets his way. Price also wants to privatize Medicare by giving seniors a voucher with which to try to buy health insurance, turning the right to healthcare that our seniors now have into a commodity.

Betsy DeVos, Trump's choice to serve as education secretary, has a long record of being anti-public education, a fact that should disqualify her from consideration. She has used her extraordinary wealth to destabilize and defund public schools, while promoting failed private school vouchers and unaccountable for-profit charter schools that have benefited their owners far more than

the children they are supposed to serve. DeVos and her family have poured money into anti-gay causes such as so-called conversion therapy. And they have linked school choice to "greater kingdom gain," coded language for using public funds to support making Christianity—not public schools—the center of communities, something our founders, in the First Amendment's separation of church and state, zealously guarded against.

Largely as a result of her efforts, Michigan—where DeVos focused her attacks on public education—tolerates more low-performing charter schools than just about any other state in the country. About 80 percent of Michigan's charter schools are for-profit—more than any other state. And 67 percent of Michigan charter schools performed worse than neighborhood public schools on the Nation's Report Card, a test administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. It's all about money and ideology, not kids or the quality of education. How does that make America great for the 90 percent of students who attend public schools?

Wilbur Ross, Trump's choice to serve as secretary of commerce, has been called a vulture investor for his practice of extracting profits from troubled companies by slashing jobs, squeezing unions and gutting pensions. Steven Mnuchin, tapped to head the Treasury Department, made a fortune foreclosing on homeowners like a 90-year-old woman targeted for a 27-cent payment error. Not so great, in most people's books.

Whose side is Trump on? When a local union officer who has been leading the fight to save manufacturing jobs called out Trump for embellishing the number of jobs preserved at an Indiana Carrier plant through tax breaks for the corporation, Trump lashed out at him on Twitter. The Twitterverse turned on Trump in a storm of moral outrage, condemning him as anti-worker, dishonest, thin-skinned and a bully.

With evidence of Russian interference in the election, and a president-elect poised to take office despite losing the popular vote by a much larger margin than any other president in history, we have a very divided country. Americans, even those who voted for Trump, did not vote for what is emerging to be a dangerous, extremist agenda that will end up hurting, not helping, many who call our nation home.

It doesn't make America great to undermine public education, undercut workers, restrict access to healthcare or pit people against each other. Standing up for our values and aspirations shows our true greatness. That's what thousands of people will do on Jan. 19, when the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, which includes the AFT and community partners, will stage a Day of Action to protect our students and to fight against the president-elect's agenda to dismantle public education. Nothing is more important than safeguarding our kids' opportunity to live their lives and pursue their dreams free from fear—regardless of their background.



Weingarten speaks last year at a Moral Monday rally in support of public education at the state Capitol in Albany, N.Y.

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