United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 7, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary, United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

We write to share with you the letter Senator Whitehouse sent earlier this week to national science teacher organizations and teachers groups, and to express our concern about your statement regarding President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement.

Since becoming Secretary of Education, you have not publicly commented on any administration decisions or policies outside the purview of the Department of Education with one exception. Last week you issued a statement that President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement was an "example of his commitment to rolling back the unrealistic and overreaching regulatory actions by the previous Administration," and that the President was "making good on his promise to put America and American workers first."

This is a quick about-face from your nomination hearing before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. When Senator Whitehouse asked you in January about your views on human-caused climate change, you answered: "The Department of Education does not have any jurisdiction over climate change or climate issues so, if confirmed, I would respectfully defer to my colleagues in other agencies, like the Department of Energy, on these issues. Additionally, the Department of Education is prohibited from dictating curricula in our nation's schools so I respectfully defer to state and local school districts about what they will or will not teach." Between January and last week, you apparently decided to present your views on an issue over which your department "does not have any jurisdiction." In doing so you landed squarely on the side that argues, incorrectly, that climate change science is not settled. Regrettably, this comes as no surprise as your family's foundations have given $6,149,100 to the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty and Mackinac Center for Public Policy since 2001, two organizations notorious for promoting junk science.[1]

Your statement comes on the heels of an effort by the Heartland Institute, another notorious industry front group, to disseminate fossil-fuel industry talking points as curriculum for science teachers across America. On March 28, the PBS program *Frontline* reported that the Heartland Institute is distributing factually inaccurate and scientifically illegitimate materials on climate change to upwards of 200,000 public school science teachers. Heartland Institute's President and CEO was quoted as saying, "We're getting a lot of requests for expert opinion from the White House....That's very new. We haven't had those calls for eight years. Even 12 years."

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[1] Data from IRS Form 990s filed by the Dick & Betsy DeVos Family Foundation, Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, the Dan & Pamella DeVos Foundation, and the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation.

There is good reason for that. As detailed in the enclosed letter, the Heartland Institute has disseminated "alternative facts" and fake science at the behest of its industry funders for decades. It may well be proven to be engaged in fraud. In the 1990s, it teamed up with Phillip Morris to challenge facts about the health risks of tobacco. The tobacco industry's conduct as found to be fraudulent. Using the same strategies, with funding from the Koch family foundations, ExxonMobil, and other fossil fuel interests, the Heartland Institute now seeks to undermine the scientific consensus about climate change.

At your nomination hearing, you were asked whether you would stand on the side of students or with the political entities trying to force junk science into schools. You responded that you, "support the teaching of great science and especially science that allows students to exercise critical thinking and to really discover and examine in new ways." We agree that "great science" and critical thinking are cornerstones of a high-quality education, but that is not achieved with Heartland's industry-funded and possibly fraudulent materials.

It is our sincere hope that neither White House staff nor Department of Education officials have turned to the Heartland Institute on the issues of climate change and climate science, or had any roll in this mailing to educators. To address these concerns, we request that you provide responses to the following:

1) Have any staff members at the Department of Education had contact with individuals associated with the Heartland Institute on climate, science, or science education issues? If so, on what dates did these consultations occur and who did they involve?
2) If the answer to the previous question is yes, please provide copies of all relevant correspondence between you and any Department of Education staff and representatives of the Heartland Institute.
3) Are you or any members of your staff aware of discussions between White House staff members and individuals associated with the Heartland Institute? If so, what were the dates and topics of these conversations and who did they involve?
4) Are any informational resources currently provided through Department of Education (e.g. What Works Clearing House, Teaching Resources page, etc.) created in collaboration with, or reviewed by, anyone associated with the Heartland Institute?

We would appreciate the courtesy of a response not later than June 30, 2017. If you have any questions, or would like to further discuss this request, please contact Senator Whitehouse's Washington, DC office at (202) 224-2921. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator