We're Rich and We Do What We Want



A DeVos Family Reader

GRIID.ORG

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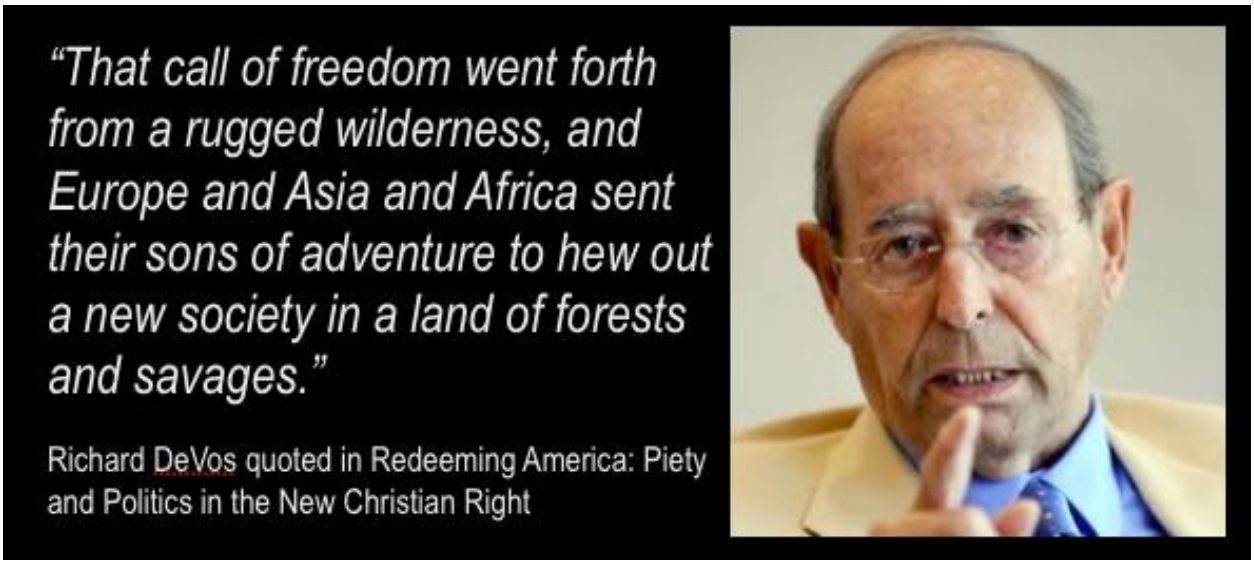
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1. Introduction

In Howard Zinn's monumental book, *A People's History of the United States,* he constantly juxtaposes the amazing things that people did to fight for liberation and the people behind the systems of oppression that social movements were fighting against.

This is exactly why I have spent years monitoring, investigating and critiquing the DeVos Family. They are the most recognizable and powerful manifestation of the systems of power and oppression in West Michigan. Now, I know there are plenty of people who share the belief that without the DeVos Family, Grand Rapids wouldn't be where it is today. I fully agree with that belief, but for reasons that are the exact opposite of those who hold the most powerful family in West Michigan in high regard.

When Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel founded the Amway corporation, they did so by embracing some of the most deeply entrenched lies about this country. Rich DeVos has written numerous books that promote his values. In his book *Believe,* DeVos, in talking about freedom, states, *"that call of freedom went forth from a rugged wilderness, and Europe and Asia and Africa sent their sons of adventure to hew out a new society in a land of forests and savages*."



This statement from DeVos is essentially an affirmation in his belief of Manifest Destiny. For those who don't know, the company that DeVos founded with Jay Van Andel, was originally going to be called The American Way, but was changed to Amway so as to abbreviate their take on Manifest Destiny.

In addition to believing in Manifest Destiny, Rich DeVos is also deeply committed to the values of capitalism, or what he likes to refer to as the free enterprise system. In his book *Believe,* DeVos states, "*The free-enterprise system has outperformed, outproduced any other in the world. It is a gift of God to us, and we should understand it, embrace it, and believe in it."*

The above statement is the perfect encapsulation of what the patriarch of the family, Rich DeVos, believes and is firmly committed to. The DeVos Family is a deeply religious family, regardless of how one defines religious beliefs. The family comes out of the Calvinist tradition and are members of the Christian Reformed Church. However, the DeVos Family, in many ways embraces a form of Christian Reconstruction. Those who practice Christian Reconstruction theology believe that society should be governed by biblical values, rather than secular values. This is exactly why the family has for decades developed relationships and funded organizations that are deeply committed to homophobia, anti-reproductive rights, patriarchy, white supremacy and free market capitalism.

The DeVos Family not only supports these religiously motivated values by their support of certainly organizations, but by their deep commitment to influencing public policy. The family has been one of the largest donors to the Republican Party for several decades now, at the federal, state and local level, as is documented in this collection of articles. In addition to supporting the Republican Party and GOP candidates, they also contribute to organizations that are committed to influencing public policy. In West Michigan, the DeVos Family has been involved in the financing, planning and development of groups like the West Michigan Policy Forum, the Acton Institute and the Right Place Inc. These groups all embrace the capitalist economic system and public policy decisions, which benefits and expands the power of those who make up these groups, including the DeVos Family.

What is ironic about the candidates and public policy that the DeVos Family endorses, is that those same policies end up negatively impacting communities of color, those who identify as LGBTQ, those experiencing poverty and immigrants. The irony is that the DeVos Family foundations end up contributing millions to West Michigan non-profits that provide services to the very same people who are negatively impacted by these neoliberal economic policies.

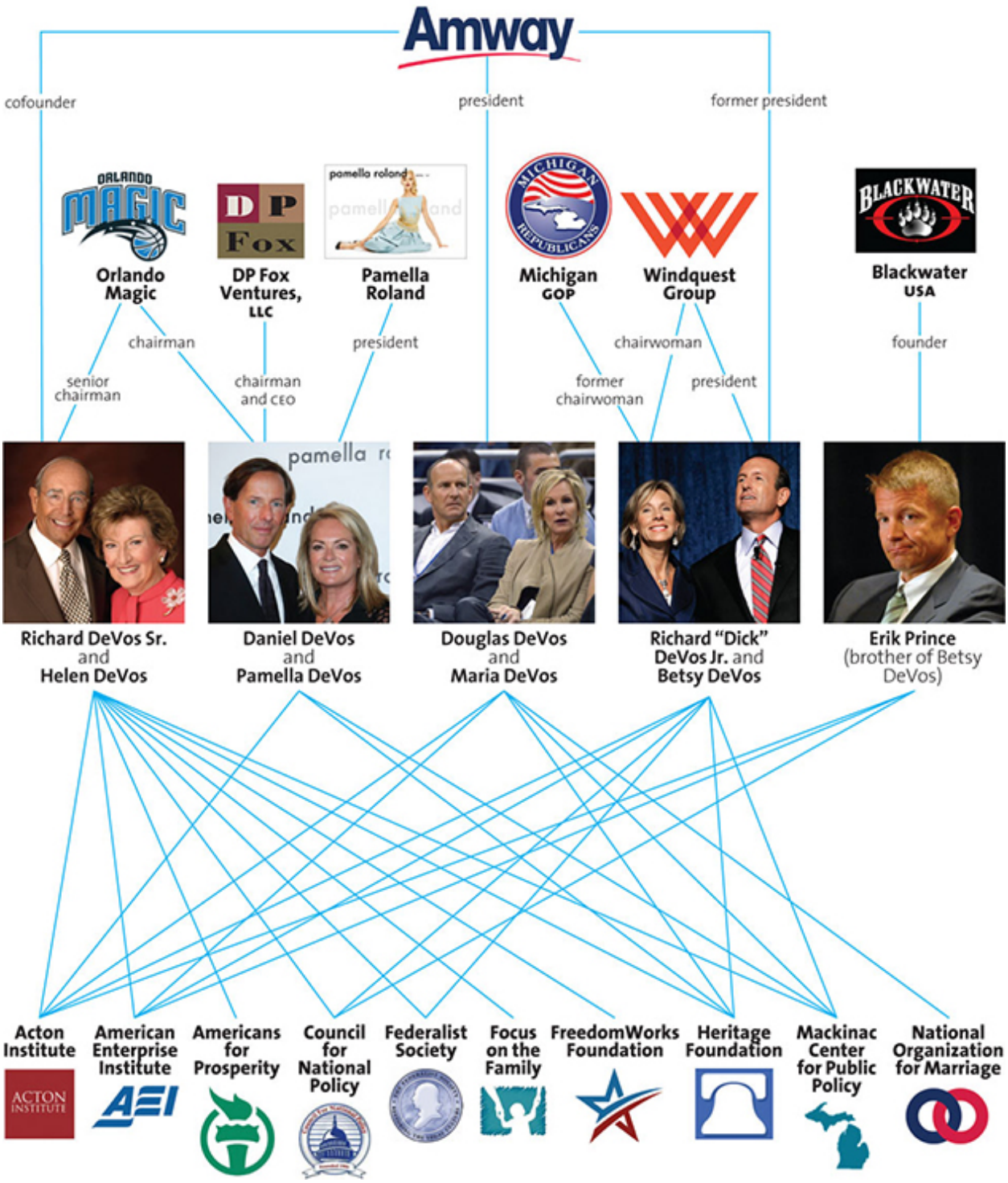
These are the kinds of themes that are explored in the *DeVos Family Reader.* In addition, we look at how the local news media has reported on the most powerful family in West Michigan, which has played a role in creating public misinformation. We also look at the strategic function of ArtPrize and what impact it has had on West Michigan. We argue that in many ways, ArtPrize functions has a great PR tool for the DeVos Family and its goals. In fact, such a belief was confirmed early on in the evolution of ArtPrize, when Sam Cummings, co-founder of CWD (of which the DeVos Family is part of) said, "*Our long-term goal is really to import capital – intellectual capital, and ultimately real capital. And this (ArtPrize) is certainly an extraordinary tool."*

Lastly, we look at Betsy DeVos' ascent to the White House as Secretary of Education in the section listed as Betsy DeVos Watch.

As I stated at the beginning of the introduction, I have spent years monitoring, investigating and critiquing the DeVos Family. This is an ongoing project and the *DeVos Family Reader* will continue to be updated. The contributions to the *DeVos Family Reader* have come from a variety of sources such as the Grand Rapids People's History Project, an Indy newspaper from the 90s called *The FUNdamentalist,* Media Mouse and the Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy.

Also, as stated before, I believe that in order to promote collective liberation and social justice for those most marginalized, we have to understand and resist the systems of power and oppression in this community. Looking into the history and practices of the DeVos Family, provides us with a clear example of how systems of power and oppression function in this community. I am deeply indebted to those who have been involved in this struggle and it is my hope that the *DeVos Family Reader* can be a useful tool in the ongoing struggle for justice.

Editors Note*: Each of the articles included have a hyperlink, which includes more graphics and images that might contribute to more clarification for each article in this collection. It didn't make sense to include every graphic or image, so if you feel there is something missing, click on the hyperlink to view all the accompanying images and graphics.*


Amway
cofounder
president
former president
Orlando Magic
DP Fox Ventures, LLC
Pamella Roland
Michigan GOP
Windquest Group
Blackwater USA
chairman
president
chairwoman
founder
senior chairman
chairman and CEO
former chairwoman
president
Richard DeVos Sr. and Helen DeVos
Daniel DeVos and Pamella DeVos
Douglas DeVos and Maria DeVos
Richard "Dick" DeVos Jr. and Betsy DeVos
Erik Prince (brother of Betsy DeVos)
Acton Institute
American Enterprise Institute
Americans for Prosperity
Council for National Policy
Federalist Society
Focus on the Family
FreedomWorks Foundation
Heritage Foundation
Mackinac Center for Public Policy
National Organization for Marriage

2. Early Critiques of DeVos/Amway

One of the earliest critiques of Amway and American Imperialism – 1971

https://grpeopleshistory.org/2014/08/12/one-of-the-earliest-critiques-of-amway-and-american-imperialism-1971/

Those of us living in West Michigan are not used to any substantive critique of the most powerful company in the area, Amway. Indeed, the only real critiques have been found in alternative news source or Indy Media.

While working on a project to look at anti-Vietnam War organizing in Grand Rapids, we came across this article in a January, 1971 issue of the Calvin College Student newspaper, The Chimes, entitled, Cleaning Out the Third World.

The student who wrote the article, Hubert VanTol, attended a business luncheon on Calvin's campus and heard both Richard DeVos and Jay Van Andel speak. VanTol provides a summary of the Amway philosophy early on in the article, but in the last third states the following:

The most important issue in maintaining a wealthy economy is maintaining the control of the raw materials needed by American industries to keep producing the finished products. The United States simply does not have the raw materials to maintain its wealthy economy. Almost every significant raw industrial resource that American industries use is imported from poverty-stricken Third World countries in African, South America and Asia. Thus, the American Way has a vested interest in maintaining control over the countries from which the resources come. The continuation might be maintained by sheer economic brute force, by political manipulation or rewarding governments which are friendly to us, by CIA-inspired coups who are not cooperative with us or by wars to "maintain freedom" and to "prevent the spread of communism." The United States has a vested interest in keeping these Third World countries in developing their own industries because their is only a limited amount of raw materials available and the United States needs nearly all of it to keep its monster economy moving. So, the American Way, or more specifically the leaders of the American Way, the large corporations and the government leaders have vested interests in keeping those Third World countries poverty-stricken so they cannot gain economic power to resist American economic exploitation.

The student writer then connects this larger critique of capitalism and US Imperialism to Amway by stating:

….because of its name and because of what the purpose of the company seems to be – to sell and promote the excellence of the American Way – the company has become an adequate symbol for every United States business. And Amway stands for those same ideals which have made world-wide exploitation of the poor possible. A fantastic belief in free enterprise without governmental or "socialistic" controls is logically consistent with the outlook that the United States has the right to use the world's resources indiscriminately. A belief in scientific progress is logically consistent with the belief that solutions will always be found for the world's problems before a crisis explodes. A belief that economic strength is the ultimate test of the "rightness" of a system is logically consistent with producing suicidal weaponry at tremendous cost to protect the system, with polluting the world to a slow death, with maintaining slaveholder control over much of the rest of the world in order to maintain the strong economy.

Hubert VanTol may not have envisioned the ongoing growth and political influence that Amway and its founding families would wield in West Michigan or in US domestic and foreign policy, but he certainly had a fairly accurate understanding of the power dynamics that have allowed the Ada-based company to grow. The past is the present.

Students confront Richard DeVos at GVSC in 1977

https://grpeopleshistory.org/2017/08/27/students-confront-richard-devos-at-gvsc-in-1977/

One of our earliest posting here on the GR People's History site, was a student critique of Amway co-founders Richard DeVos and Jay Van Andel by a Calvin College student in 1971.

We recently came across another example of students confront Richard DeVos, which is documented in an alternative student newspaper at Grand Valley State College, a newspaper that existed in 1976 – 1977.

You can check out the alternative student newspaper, known as, The Insider. (Those who provided us with these digital copies were not sure if there were additional issues or not.)

There is a commentary piece that appeared in the May 18, 1977 issue of The Insider, commentary that was responding to a May 6, 1977 Board of Control meeting. (The Board of Control was equivalent to the current Board of Trustees.) This commentary is based on the observations of a student who attended the Board of Control meeting and was directly responding to the comments from Richard DeVos.

In addition, there was an Open Letter, written to Richard DeVos by the President of the All College Student Congress (ACSC), Bob Fritakis. Fritakis also takes issue with what Ricahrd DeVos has to say and makes it clear that students should have a seat on the Board of Control.

Grand Valley Labor News three-part series on Amway from 1980
https://griid.org/2018/09/24/grand-valley-labor-news-three-part-series-on-amway-from-1980/

It would be utterly impossible for people to not know that Rich DeVos died recently. Not only is the West Michigan the news media **still canonizing him**, it is very difficult to even find a critical comment about the co-founder of Amway, apart from the **more honest obituary that GRIID posted**.

In light of that, we thought it would be important to re-post something recently added to the **Grand Rapids People's History Project**.

We recently received a **three-part series of articles written by Michael Johnston**, a Grand Rapids labor historian and former journalist with Grand Valley Labor News (GVLN).

This recently acquired three-part series is important, since Johnston provides important analysis about co-founders Rich DeVos & Jay Van Andel. The GVLN series is also important because it looks at the anti-labor practices of the Ada-based corporation in the late 1960 and early 1970s.

Part I of the series provides more of an overview of the Amway Corporation and its co-founders DeVos and Van Andel. One thing important from Part I in the series is the information about how much media the Amway corporation produces and owns, both in the United States and around the world.

In **Part II** of the series, entitled, *The Right Wing Idol,* Johnston takes a look at the ideological worldview of the Amway co-founders and provides details on who these two members of the capitalist class were funding at the time. This investigation into which organizations DeVos and Van Andel were funding is **similar to our post from the late 1990s**. It is important to have some comparisons in different decades to see how their contributions to Right Wing entities had evolved.

In addition, the picture that accompanies Part II in this series, is from May of 1980, where some 500 people were in Calder Plaza to protest Amway's anti-labor practices (pictured above). Most of those protesting were from various trade unions, but there were also representatives from ACORN – the Association for Community Organizing for Reform Now.

In **Part III** of the series, the writer takes a close look at Amway's anti-union position, beginning with examples from the 1960s, when the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union (part of the AFL-CIO) attempted to unionize the Amway plant in Ada.

This story is particularly interesting since it discusses how Rich DeVos began holding mandatory in plant meetings to counter the union efforts. Part III devotes a fair amount of attention to this dynamic, since DeVos has made this practice of regular meetings with employees an important part of his strategy to undermine workers who attempt to create a union within the company founded on a pyramid scheme.

(A big thank you to Michael Johnston for sharing this series and for allowing us to post it on the Grand Rapids People's History Project site.)

There are Robber Barons in every generation in Grand Rapids

https://grpeopleshistory.org/2014/11/13/there-are-robber-barons-in-every-generation-in-grand-rapids/

When reading radical historian Howard Zinn's, *A People's History of the United States,* it becomes clear early on that one can not talk about social movements without talking about the power structures that those movements fought against.

Whether it was slave owning class, robber barons, war profiteers, White Supremacist power structures or other sectors of power, Zinn makes it clear that every major social movement experienced push back from these structures of power.

Grand Rapids has its own history of robber barons, right from the start. City fathers such as Lucius Lyons and Louis Campau were some of the earliest robber barons, buying up land that had belonged to the local Native community. These men are seen as in competition with each other, but it is also clear that they were both beneficiaries of White Settler Colonialism that was moving westward after the founding of the United States.

Like much of the mid-west, Grand Rapids had its own industrialists, particularly in the furniture industry. Men like Henry Widdicomb (pictured here), were not only the beneficiaries of massive deforestation in the Great Lakes, they also made their wealth

by paying workers low wages. Widdicomb, according to Jeffrey Kleiman, author of *Strike: How the Furniture Workers Strike of 1911 Changed Grand Rapids,* was one of the most vicious in attacking workers during the 1911 strike. Widdicomb also led the charge to bring in scab workers and hire thugs to break the strike.

In more recent decades the robber barons have names like Van Andel, DeVos, Seechia, Kennedy, Frey, Jandernoa, Hunting & Wege, just to name a few. All of these families made their wealth through the labor of working class people and by accessing public funds for private gain. The graph here demonstrations how many of them are part of the same power structures in Grand Rapids.

Probably the most notable contemporary robber baron family is the DeVos family. Co-founders of Amway, the now three generations of DeVos family members have inserted themselves into a great deal of local state and national politics. The DeVos family has been buying elections and influencing policy by spending millions on political campaigns and lobbying. They own a tremendous amount of property in downtown Grand Rapids, most of the hotels and through their involvement in Grand Action, have re-directed millions in public funds (Van Andel Arena, DeVos Convention Center and the Downtown Market) to benefit themselves and the other members of the capitalist class in Grand Rapids.

The DeVos family is so wealthy that they used to own their own island. For years the family owned Peter Island, part of the British Virgin Islands, but more recently have invested heavily in The Cape Eleuthera resort and real estate project, according to an online source.

This should not be a surprise for those who have followed the DeVos family, their excessive wealth and how they flaunt it. The DeVos Family owns one of the world's largest yachts, which they have so arrogantly named Freedom. Below is a picture of the yacht, accompanied by an interior photo. More recently, the family has acquired the yacht know as Seaquest, which is 130 foot long.

Frederick Douglass' point about power conceding nothing without a demand is still relevant today. Indeed, with a growing gap between those with wealth and those in poverty, it is clear that those with wealth will not willingly give it up. As with all generations of social movements, we need to know who the opposition is and be prepared to fight against them, because they sure as hell will not ignore social movements that want substantive social justice.



The Wall of Fame: Wealth and Influence at GVSU

https://grpeopleshistory.org/2015/09/14/the-wall-of-fame-wealth-and-influence-at-gvsu/

When reading radical historian Howard Zinn's, A People's History of the United States, it becomes clear early on that one can not talk about social movements without talking about the power structures that those movements fought against.

Whether it was slave owning class, robber barons, war profiteers, White Supremacist power structures or other sectors of power, Zinn makes it clear that every major social movement experienced push back from these structures of power. Some of the individuals of these power structures in Grand Rapids are enshrined on the walls of one local university.

If one has ever attended an event at the GVSU downtown Grand Rapids Campus in the Eberhard Center, they would inevitably come across what the university calls the Hall of Fame.

On two walls on the second floor of the Eberhard Center there are currently 56 framed photos of people whom Grand Valley State University gives special honor. Most of these 56 individuals have been or are currently part of the local power structure, in that they represent both members of the capitalist class that have either donated large sums of money to the university and often influenced campus policy.

Here is a list of the 56 and the year they were inducted into the GVSU Hall of Fame.

Grand Valley State University used to be Grand Valley States Colleges, consisting of William James, Thomas Jefferson, Seidman School and College IV. William James College (WJC) was very progressive and experimental in its approach to education. WJC attracted faculty from all over the country, including many feminists who developed radical programs like Women, World and Wonder. Some of these women who taught at William James or Thomas Jefferson Colleges (both of which were closed by 1983) were also part of the radical feminist group in Grand Rapids, known as Aradia.

Many of the members of Aradia were also lesbian and were part of an effort in the 1990s to get GVSU to adopt domestic partner benefits. Based on interviews we conducted for the film, A People's History of the LGBTQ Community in Grand Rapids, GVSU was set to adopt domestic partner benefits in 1995. However, word of the proposed policy was leaked to a GR Press reporter who wrote a story, which resulted in pressure from major financial donors (Richard DeVos and Peter Cook) threatening to with hold money if the university adopted such a policy.

A second attempt was made in 2003, to get domestic partner benefits passed at GVSU, but then President Mark Murray blocked the attempt. Murray stated at the time, "As a University that has benefited from very generous support from the private philanthropic community, we must recognize the prevailing views of those who provide such support."

This statement by Murray underscores the power that donors have had on policy at GVSU. This reality is consistent with the kinds of political and economic influence those in the Hall of Fame have had and continue to have in Grand Rapids. Many of those on the Hall of Fame continue to be involved in organizations like Grand Action, The Right Place, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, the Acton Institute and the West Michigan Policy Forum.

Many of those on the Hall of Fame have acquired wealth through the exploitation of others and have used their wealth to advocate for anti-worker policies, have funded anti-LGBT and anti-choice efforts, as has been documented elsewhere and should be seen as part of a larger local power analysis.

For working class people, those who identify as LGBTQ, communities of color and feminists, this Hall of Fame would more aptly be named a Wall of Shame or even a Wall of the Despised, considering the collective harm that has been done by those enshrined on the walls at GVSU.

In addition, we have created a Popular Guide to Wealthy and Influence at GVSU, which you can view by going to this link. **https://griid.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/a-popular-guide-to-wealth-and-influence-at-gvsu.pdf**

AIDS and Activism Part II: Reagan, DeVos and the 1980s crisis

https://griid.org/2012/11/27/aids-and-activism-part-ii-reagan-devos-and-the-1980s-crisis/

Since as early as 1981, AIDS was known to be a deadly disease. Even by 1983, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) had begun a national hotline for AIDS.

Cases of AIDS were being reported in almost every major city in the US beginning in 1982, but the national news media did not report on it until the following year. In fact, the *New York Times*did not make AIDS a front-page story until May 25, 1983.

This delayed reporting on AIDS by the New York Times becomes more striking, when one **considers the following**:

Similarly, the discovery of cyanide-laced Tylenol capsules in the Chicago area in October 1982 prompted a huge spate of press coverage. The New York Times covered the story every day of October, and then ran 23 more stories in November and December. In the end, seven people died from the capsules.

By contrast, The New York Times published only three stories on AIDS in 1981, and only three more in all of 1982, none of which were on page one. Yet by the time of the Tylenol poisonings, 260 Americans had died of AIDS, and 374 more had been diagnosed.

One person who was making AIDS a concern of reporting was Randy Shiltz, a journalist who was assigned to report on AIDS in San Francisco in 1982 for the *San Francisco*

Chronicle. Shiltz was a member of the Gay community and had already written a powerful biography of slain Gay activist and San Francisco official, Harvey Milk.

Shiltz relied heavily on early HIV/AIDS activists like Bill Kraus and Cleve Jones for information and came to the realization that AIDS was a disease impacting thousands and it was a story that outside of the Gay community was either unknown or suppressed. Shiltz eventually wrote his book, *And the Band Played On*, which chronicled the first half of the 1980s and the AIDS epidemic. The book was published in 1987 and spent 5 weeks on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list.

By 1987, 20,000 had died from AIDS and despite the growing epidemic the federal government did not take any formal action until that year. Reagan did appoint the Presidential Commission on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus Epidemic in the summer of 1987; it was later renamed the Watkins Commission, after its chair.

With the appointment of this commission, Reagan was able to appease those who demanded a more sustained federal response to AIDS. He also answered the concerns of the New Right by appointing an AIDS commission that included few scientists who had participated in AIDS research and few physicians who had actually treated people with AIDS. In addition, the commission included outspoken opponents of AIDS education, such as New York Cardinal John O'Connor. O'Connor was not only opposed to AIDS education, he was openly hostile to the Gay community.

Religious Right leader Gary Bauer, who was in the Reagan administration in 1987, said of those appointed by the President:

…..the panel was designed to be "a cross-section of thoughtful Americans" rather than another medical or scientific group that would duplicate dozens of previous efforts. "We intentionally tried to get people from a wide variety of walks of life, and took the risk that there would be disagreements and fireworks," Mr. Bauer said. He also called it "a good group" to deal with such issues as insurance coverage and care for AIDS patients and said he doubted that quarantines, school policy or casual transmission would become a major focus.

The Religious Right was particularly incensed by the AIDS crisis and saw it as purely a result of immoral behavior, especially in the Gay community. Religious Right leaders at the time, such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, equated the deaths with the Gay community as retribution from God for their "sinful" lives. Falwell not only despised the Gay community, he despised the larger society which "tolerated" Gays. Falwell's famous statement was:

"AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals, It is God's punishment for a society that tolerates homosexuals."

Rich DeVos and the AIDS Commission

One of the people appointed to the 13-member AIDS Commission was Amway co-founder Rich DeVos. DeVos was chosen in part because he was one of the largest

financial supporters of the Republican Party, but also because of his role in the Religious Right.

In an interview with MLive a few years ago, DeVos made some pretty revealing comments about his attitudes towards the Gay community while sitting on the AIDS Commission.

When HIV first came out, President Reagan formed a commission and I was honored to be on that commission. I listened to 300 witnesses tell us that it was every body else's fault but their own. Nothing to do with their conduct, just that the government didn't fix this disease. At the end of that I put in the document, it was the conclusion document from the commission, that actions have consequences and you are responsible for yours. AIDS is a disease people gain because of their actions. It wasn't like cancer. We all made the exceptions for how you got it, by accident, that was all solved a long time ago. That's when they started hanging me in effigy because I wasn't sympathetic to all their requests for special treatment. Because at that time it was always someone else's fault. I said, you are responsible for your actions too, you know. Conduct yourself properly, which is a pretty solid Christian principle.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

Not only does DeVos show his homophobic bias, his comments demonstrate his ignorance of the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS. It was within this climate of homophobia and inaction on the part of the federal government that AIDS activism would take a new direction in 1987, with the creation of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP).

Grand Rapids LGBT History: Equal Rights and the Religious Right in West MI

https://griid.org/2011/11/07/grand-rapids-lgbt-history-equal-rights-and-the-religious-right-in-west-mi/

It has become clear over the past 9 months while working on this People's History of the LGBTQ community in Grand Rapids, that one of the main obstacles to achieving equality and justice has been the deeply conservative religious forces in West Michigan.

In looking through the archives of the Network News, we came across an article in 1988 during the early organized efforts to gain legal rights for the LGBTQ community. The article was a re-print from the September 1988 issue of *Grand Rapids Magazine,* which reflected the views of one of the most visible voices from the religious right in West Michigan.

The article cites Jeff Swanson as saying, "***Gay people receive all the equal rights they're entitled to unless someone knows they're Gay***." Network President Gwen DeJong echoes those sentiments and adds that for Lesbian women it is even more risky to be out and a woman.

To counter these notions, the article then cites Richard DeVos Sr. (then CEO of Amway). "***If you are out of it (the mainstream), you're out of it because you choose to be out of it. I don't think it's because you are legislated out of it. You get active, get your gang together, and you'll be heard***."

It seems that DeVos' understanding of civil rights were a bit simplistic in 1988. However, even after people from the LGBTQ community got active, got their "gang together" and fought for equal rights DeVos and his fellow religious conservatives were not content to let these gains go by without a challenge.

One section of the film to be screened on November 17 is based on people's response to the reality of having a very powerful religious right in West Michigan. Numerous people we interviewed acknowledged the power that these religious conservatives have in this community. They have used their influence to pressure politicians one everything from local ordinances to state and national legislation. We learned that when LGBT faculty and staff at GVSU organized for domestic partner benefits in the mid-90s their efforts were defeated because wealthy men like Peter Cook threatened to withhold funding (based on those we interviewed for this history project) for the new medical school being proposed from Grand Rapids if domestic partner benefits were granted.

In addition to what people had to say about their experiences of the backlash from the religious right we did some additional research by looking at the 990s of some of the most powerful anti-gay sectors in West Michigan to see who they were giving money to during the 1990s when lots of LGBT organizing was happening locally. We discovered that several influential families (DeVos and Prince) were giving millions to groups that had an anti-gay agenda and were financing campaigns in the state and around the country to defeat efforts for greater equality.

This kind of financing of anti-gay efforts continues in the present with the DeVos family providing money to defeat an effort of marriage equality in Michigan in 2004 and Florida in 2008.

It seems clear that the fight for greater equality in the LGBTQ community has and continues to be met with serious resistance from the religious right. This is not only and important part of the local LGBTQ history, but should inform any current organizing efforts to achieve justice and equality.

Global Exploiter DeVos tells his Prostitutes about "Working Hard for what you Wish to Achieve."

Reprinted from *The FUNdamentalist* (July 1995)

I don't know about the rest of you, but I am sick and tired of seeing the DeVos, Van Andel, or Amway name plastered all over Grand Rapids: on its buildings, cultural events, and billboards. Certainly the appear in the local monopoly press often enough, especially to talk about their expanding business, but the recent coverage in the Grand Rapids Press was enough to evoke some personal rage and disgust.

From June 9 through the 11th, there appeared four articles on different aspects of the Amway monopoly. The lead story of June 9 promoted all the others. The Grand Rapids press felt it necessary to give front page coverage to the awful dilemma that faced Amway co-founder Rich DeVos. Should he be in Grand Rapids for the Amway convention on Friday, where ex-president and international terrorist George Bush would be speaking, or at game #2 of the NBA finals in Houston, where his team the Orlando Magic was playing? I'm sure that all of you can relate to this dilemma. It really creates stress in our lives when we have to decide between going to our annual convention with the hopes of continuing to amass wealth at the expense of others or going to a basketball game where we also will amass wealth at the expense of others. What to do! Loyal to his political chum Bush, he stayed in town.

To make matters worse, The Grand Rapids press gave DeVos another platform to promote his version of compassionate capitalism, AKA GREED! On the front page of the sports section of Friday the 10th, DeVos is said to have spoken with his basketball players in the same manner that he speaks to his Amway employees. "I always say a few words, sometimes tell a story, sometimes just say a few things about life and being responsible, and working hard for what you wish to achieve." One of the great myths that exists in this world is that if you work hard enough you can make it big. Well Rich, what about the millions of African Americans who labored their whole lives, some with minimal pay, most as slaves, and died poor? What about the millions of European immigrants who labored in the factories in this country, fighting to gain minimal rights, only to die poor? What about the millions of Asian and Latin Americans who have labored in the fields to pick our food and died poor? What about the countless women who have raised children, taken care of all the home work, without pay, who died poor? Pulling oneself up by the bootstraps just doesn't apply in this world. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said "pulling yourself up by the bootstrap doesn't work if you are barefoot." Remember, DeVos is also telling these pearls of wisdom to a group of men who get paid hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars to play games.

The children I work with, both at my job and in my neighborhood, admire one of the basketball players that DeVos owns, Shaquille O'Neil. They admire him because he is good, but they don't understand that he is just a commodity to people like DeVos who buy and sell people all the time with their top down economic philosophy. They also

have these prostitutes sell for them; the Amway distributors door to door and O'Neil, who recently signed a contract to endorse and promotes Nutrilite products, a subsidiary of Amway. The sad thing is that none of the youth in my neighborhood will be like O'Neal and most probably none of them will sell enough Amway products to make it as big exploiters. What is worse is that Rich DeVos doesn't give a shit if these children and their families, many of whom will work hard all their lives, die poor.

A small post convention article also appeared in the Grand Rapids Press on June 11. That article ends with more wisdom from the DeVos family. "I do know I see nothing to stop the Amway growth trend. I'm convinced we will see the Amway story mentioned in history as one of the greatest business successes of all time. It is true that the global trend is to Amwayzie the planet, with fewer that "make it" because of the hard work that others do for them, but my perception of history, as well as that of many of the world's poor, will see Amway as one of the greatest exploiters of all time.

Good people, greed, and the corporate cult(ure): An insider's view of Amway **Reprinted from *The FUNdamentalist* (February 1998)**

https://mediamousearchive.wordpress.com/1998/01/02/good-people-greed-and-the-corporate-culture-an-insiders-view-of-amway/

FUN co-editor Richa interviewed former Amway employee Amy Schatner. Amy's sibling, Sharon Schatner, who was there listening to Amy's complaints during Amy's years at Amway, also contributed. The interview was reviewed by Amy and edited. The book reference is to Stephen Butterfield's 1985 book, "Amway: The Cult of Free Enterprise."

Amy: My aunt worked there and told me about a job opening. I went in and interviewed for this job — I was right out of college — they told me they had something more in line with my career. I got all excited. It turned out to be something where the distributors call in to get their items replaced when they're defective.

So, I got in that way. I stayed there for six months, moved to another department for six months, then another department for about five years, then another. I was there a total of about seven and a half years.

Richa: Did you know anything about Amway when you went to apply there?

Amy: I knew it was a big company out there in the country where my aunt worked, and my brother. I didn't have any preconceived ideas about "corporate America," I just wanted to get a job.

For the most part I pretty much did the same kind of work. I worked directly with the distributors on the phone. I moved up and I moved on. Each promotion gave me more responsibility and was more challenging.

I'll tell about the good things first. They gave me opportunities to learn computer skills that I didn't have before… [long pause] I can't think of anything else!

Sharon: Well, the thing about Amway is, you get in there, they pay so well, they give good benefits, you have such security. I worked there for just a short time, but what I'm saying, once you're in there, it's kind of like a little trap.

Amy: The golden handcuffs. That's a good point, because that is part of why I stayed there. The important thing to note is that I realized, probably in year two, that I wasn't happy, this wasn't where I wanted to be, I didn't see it as my career, I didn't identify myself with my work, and I always knew… I'm out of here any minute now, just any minute now. I never bought into it like all the other people I worked with, I never had the loyalty, the enthusiasm for the company. But, yet, I stayed there seven and a half years.

There were a lot of personal things that kept me there. Fear of failure, fear of success, not really knowing what I wanted to do. I decided at one point I wanted to go to graduate school and get a degree in psychology. So I went through that process, tried hard, and thought I had a strong application. I did not get in. A that point I was miserable enough, backed in a corner enough, so that I was just going to do whatever I had to do to get out of there.

That's how I finally was able to get out of there, and became more blessed than I ever deserved, because I got a job that I love with all my heart. I mean, it's very emotionally taxing and a very hard job, but I love this job.

But anyway, at Amway, there are things that would happen that I would talk about with my coworkers, and they would say, "Just don't think about it." For some people it is the

only opportunity they have. People that live way out, they haven't had educational opportunities…

Richa: Did Amway do things to cultivate or reinforce that attitude, that things should just be accepted without question?

Amy: Yes. Amway does an excellent job of building company loyalty. This is going to sound cynical, but I honestly believe it is not because they really, truly want their people to be happy, but because they know the value the monetary value of having a workforce that loves the company they work for.

I always felt like I was a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. That's kind of how I felt; that that wasn't "the way to be" so blindly loyal and blindly accepting of everything.

Just to give you kind of a funny story, they have these monthly employee meetings where virtually every employee of the entire corporation is invited…

Sharon: It's mandatory.

Amy: No, it's not.

Sharon: Oh? I was never told I had an option.

Amy: Anyway, the president of the company, or the vice-president, addresses everyone on how business is, and people can ask questions. Most often I'd go to these meetings most people in my division did — because it was an opportunity to get away from the drone of work. It was near the holidays, and I came in and all the chairs had this blue sheet. It was a poem about Amway: "I go in every day, this is the way I like to earn my pay…" You know, just the hokiest, "Rich and Jay, hooray! Hooray!" I mean, just like that. I wish I could remember the lyrics. I thought, "What is this?"

Well, it was a song. And they got a piano out, and everybody was asked to sing this song. And I'll be damned if everybody didn't sing this song. I mean, everybody sang it! And they were happy to sing it, and they enjoyed singing it, and I just wanted to disappear! It was just the most bizarre thing. I felt like it was the Third Reich.

Sharon: The crowd behavior thing.

Amy: Yeah. It just didn't seem like there was one person that thought, "This is weird," or even, "This is silly," or something.

Richa: I would think it would have been hard to tell.

Amy: Yeah. But I'm too rebellious, or maybe I'm stupid, but I didn't sing it, and I looked around and it was like, these people are like sheep.

But I worked with some wonderful people, and some friends that I will always have. I just feel at the time they were all mindless, even though I know that's not the case.

I could ramble on for hours, but the bottom line for me, my leaving Amway, feeling it was not a place where I belong, was greed. I worked on the phones with Amway distributors every day, all day. That was the bulk of my work for many years. Near the end of my tenure there, maybe the last two or three years — every once in a while we'd get to travel on these weekend "expos" where distributors would get together and rent this hall and they'd have speakers and they'd have expos of products. Quite a lot of contact with distributors. Greed, and all the ugliness that greed brings. That's what I saw a lot of. That's really what kicked my butt out the door.

Richa: Can you describe specific ways that the greed came through?

Amy: Boy, every subtle and not-so-subtle way. Distributors on the phone would be willing to be just a little dishonest, or just cheat a little bit in order to get more money. Lie to you to try to get from you, as if you had the secret of how to get more money. The distributor functions were… a lot of gold and diamonds. I mean, huge diamonds. In the Amway hierarchy they reach different levels of achievement, and they're all represented by different gems. The highest one is diamond. "Go diamond!" is the battle call. "Go diamond!" everywhere you hear. And diamonds is one of the things people spend their money on.

There's a monthly magazine they have called "The Amagram," and they would always feature a "star" couple. They would be depicted in rolling his with their mansions. The pervading message was "You gotta have more! You gotta have more!"

I've go to say, the two founding fathers, Rich and Jay, I truly believe that they were, and they are, good men with the best of intentions and the highest integrity. The second generation, the very kids, I don't feel that way about. And I don't know if it's because it's just so big now that they can't keep their hands on everything…

Another story: Remember, during the elections, when Amway purchased TV time for the Republican convention for the sole purpose of being able to air the convention? You know, they're a privately held company; they can do that. That's the way our system works in this country; they have that power. But what bothered me was I went to one of those employee meetings, and Dick DeVos stood up there and said they did that — a private donation that they never planned on being publicized — for the sole purpose of wanting to expose more Americans to the democratic process. And I though, "Why can't you just say you're Republicans and you want Republicans to win?" That just really bothered me. And I thought, this guy, he spins things so much as he goes along, that I don't know if he really believes that, or if you spin things for so long you lose any objective perspective.

Sharon: Remember you told me about the meeting where they talked about something with capitalism, where they were trying to win everybody over to their way of thinking?

Amy: Rich wrote this book called "Compassionate Capitalism," which had these different points, and they would do this thing during those meetings where they would show Rich talking about each point, a different one each time. He would talk about what each meant.

Richa: Did people pretty much buy that?

Amy: Oh, yeah, because there's a certain ring of truth in that. I mean, there has to be, otherwise nobody would buy it at all. There's nothing wrong with personal responsibility; it depends on the spin you put on it.

Sharon: It sucks people in with beliefs they've been taught all their lives, and it makes it seem like you're just confirming what everyone knows.

Richa: I remember some of that from the book. It came very much out of a Cold War type of thinking from the 1950s, even though the Soviet Union no longer existed by the time it was published. But did those talks focus more on the personal?

Amy: No, it's definitely economic theory, financial theory.

They are into making money, and they make no bones about that.

This is something that started happening just before I left. You'd hear a lot about "corporate culture"; how very important that was, the corporate culture you were working with, and how we should all "be on the same page."

They have this little thing called "Culture Seminar" where you spend half a day eating doughnuts and drinking coffee and watching videos and doing exercises, about trying to identify with an Amway distributor and who would like to be an Amway distributor. Part of that is watching the video that shows a typical distributor: They're trying to work a full-time job, and take care of kids, and build their business in their spare time. So all their evenings and all their weekends are spent at Amway functions. That's no kidding: I mean all of them. And their kids — I couldn't believe this: The video would show, "Mom, dad, come and toss the ball with me." And mom and dad would sit down and explain that they're building their future, blah, blah, and the son was just kind of, "Whatever." And the weekend comes and they drag him out of town again for this distributor function yet again, and there's the whole problem of the babysitter. The kids are tired, the parents are tired, the babysitter goes home. The kid never did get to toss that ball, but "you've reached a different level, and I understand how great that is, and I'm so proud of you" and we're all just a great big happy family. Then they turn the video off, and I'm thinking to myself, did anybody see how sick and wrong this is? That these kids have no parents? Then I though, okay, maybe I'm the only one that sees it that way; maybe I'm nuts. But somebody did say something; somebody did say, "Boy, I don't know about those kids?"

Richa: I should think it would be hard in that corporate culture to say anything at all critical or questioning.

Amy: Right. It is.

One more story. My department purchased a type of technology that cost almost a million dollars. I don't want to say just what it is or what department because there are still people there that I really care about, and I don't want to see them be hurt. Real expensive technology; state of the art. We were the only ones in the company to have this technology at the time. Well, they wanted to be sure the employees were really going to use it and buy into it. It was a way to help them do their jobs more efficiently and easier. You know, people who have been doing the same job for a few years it's

hard for them to change the way they do things, so it was rather hard to get people to use it.

So they had a meeting to explain this new technology. And during this meeting my boss said, “You have to use this system [X] times a day.” Somebody raised their hand and said, “I don’t need it. I know this stuff.” And she said, “I don’t care, do it anyway. Just use it.” And I said “Why?” (You learn not to ask “why?” because you get slapped in the face; nevertheless I asked, “why?”) And she said, “We have to show that we’re using the system. We have to show the person — you’d know who it was if I said it — we have to prove to them that this is a good investment. We have to show a return on the investment, and we have to do it fast.” And I said, “You want me to lie about how often I use this, and how often I need this?” And the answer was “Yes.” And by that time I had been pushing it, so the answer was, “YES, and PLEASE shut up!”

I’m sure that happens everywhere across America; it’s not unique to Amway.

Richa: That’s the only time such a thing happened?

Amy: That was the only time I was blatantly asked to lie, other than my old supervisor saying, “Tell em I’m not here” kind of thing. And this is from a woman who I respect. She’s a neat lady. I mean, I like her. And I think that it was just another case of, she didn’t just sit down and say, “You know, I’m asking people to lie for me.” She was so intimidated by her manager, and so afraid, that she just did what she though she had to do. And she probably wouldn’t even remember it.

That incident, more than anything else…that was near the end…I though, I can’t do it, I just can’t play the game any more. And there was no way that I could play the game, and sort of melt into the background. They would see it, because the numbers would show that I was not using the system.

Richa: Getting back to the distributors, Butterfield wrote that only 1-2% of distributors ever make, or ever can make, the way Amway’s system is set up, enough money to comfortably support a family. In talking with distributors every day, did they ever indicate that they had an idea of the odds against them? Did they have a sense of the frustration in trying to do that, or the structure that makes it so hard to do that?

Amy: Absolutely. I remember probably four years ago hearing that the average direct distributor earned $30,000 a year. You have to have reached a certain level, and you have to have so many people under you who have reached a certain level, to become a

direct distributor. The vast majority of the people I talked to were not direct distributors; were nowhere near being direct distributors. I mean the vast majority.

Every so often you talk to a high roller, but that was unusual.

I always attributed that to the nature of my job. People who need my help may be somebody who is not as experienced.

But I think there are a lot of people out there who get into the business because they think that they're going to get rich, and they're going to have a nice annual income with moderate effort. And that's just not the case. That's not going to happen. You won't make real money unless you are like, one of those people who are in the video, who puts that much into it.

The whole nature of that, the whole lifestyle, you have to buy into. They want to make their employees more and more thinking like the way their distributors think. You have to think Amway, and breathe Amway, have Am-friends, and Am-products. It scares me! That kind of lack of creativity. It just makes me very uncomfortable. It brings out the worst in people, and that's where you see the greed.

Richa: Did you see that being true for the employees as well; the people you worked with?

Amy: No. The people I worked with were pretty much normal people.

I love the paycheck, but you have to sell your soul for that time and a half because you're smiling and you're acting like, "This new product is just the living end!"

There's always this mystery to me about why people are so willing to throw out their feelings about things and just buy into this. It's not people who just don't have any other opportunities, or people who aren't terribly bright.

Sometimes, they'd send us to meetings, and you'd get to fly, and stay in nice hotels. You'd be there with all distributors representing the corporation, and you'd smile and wave, and they would all want to know about what it's like to work for Amway. On one hand, they think it's so great, but on the other hand, they just can't believe, "Boy, I can't believe, why aren't you an Amway distributor? We know what this business can do!"

These are doctors, a construction worker, an accountant, or something like that… It kind of reminds me of the games with fraternities or sororities, “I’ve got to belong” or something; be part of the group.

Richa: What about these meetings for distributors you mentioned. What would they be telling people?

Amy: People who work at the corporation in a certain department that distributors work with a lot would come on stage, and the distributors would get very excited about these corporate people. If you were a family member — anybody named DeVos or VanAndel — tears would come to their eyes. They were very moved even to be in the same room. They could say or do anything, and [the distributors] were just very thrilled.

I just want to say that all these great and noble reasons for me not working there are not it. I mean, that’s not completely why I am not there. I have to say that the very personal nature of my work was very difficult for me. I’m the sort of person who doesn’t like it when people aren’t fair, and aren’t nice and kind. People aren’t going to be fair, whether it had anything to do with me or not. And just by the nature of my work I had to deal with that and I just didn’t like it. I used to be good at it, but I just didn’t like it.

So maybe, if I had a job that was creative, where nobody asked me to lie, where I did work that I could say I was proud of, and that kind of enriched me, after all I just said, I might still be there.

I took a pay cut to leave that job, and I would take a pay cut to do anything that was better than that; better for me, for my soul.

Richa: When you first applied, did you have any knowledge at all of the fraud, forged documents, dummy corporations in Hawaii to cheat on taxes, that sort of thing that had gone on and gotten a lot of publicity in the corporate media? Or did you learn about some of those things while you worked at Amway?

Amy: That all happened before I came there. When I first came there I wasn’t paying attention to that kind of thing. It just kind of had to slap me in the fact before I woke up. I would hear references to it and people would make jokes about it, but I never really got into that whole story.

There was a sense of people around me that we should be grateful to have a job. We should be grateful we were given the opportunity to work.

Sharon: And to have such a good job, because the company is so good to you. And they do things that make you feel you are very lucky to have a job because you're sitting at a phone or whatever, you're making nine or ten dollars an hour..

Amy: When I left I was making $15 an hour. Now that's a lot of money.

Sharon: And all the benefits and bonuses.

Amy: And some people made more money than that, who didn't have a degree. For them, darn right, they were very grateful.

For me, little things too. Like, I am a vegetarian. I don't eat meat or fish or poultry. To people I worked with, that was a freaky thing! I mean totally freaky, crazy. They'd tease me constantly. Not in a mean way. Just, they'd never let go of the fact that they really felt that was bizarre.

Richa: Did it seem to you, as Butterfield wrote, that Amway had characteristics of a cult?

Amy: You know, a lot of people refer to Amway as a cult. I don't think they are a cult in the sense that most cults are, but the distributors ("distributor organization") use a lot of tactics that are very similar to cults. It is very much a pure world and if you diverge… Anybody who isn't "with" that is either a "negative person," or at their most generous, somebody who "just isn't quite ready yet.

Giving til it hurts others: Another look and Rich DeVos & Jay Van Andel's benevolence – 1998

https://grpeopleshistory.org/2017/02/26/giving-til-it-hurts-others-another-look-and-rich-devos-jay-van-andels-benevolence-1998/

(Our post last week was in reaction to a Grand Rapids Press article from 1998 that featured some information on the philanthropy of Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel. The article is a critique of the GR Press coverage. Today's post is from the same issue of the Summer 1998 of the independent newspaper, The Fundamentalist, where it provides details on some of the organizations receiving money from the Amway co-founder's foundations and what role these groups play in state and national policy.)

"There has always been poverty in the world, and it does not help the situation for men, or nations, of material strength to wallow in some kind of guilt about that fact." Rich DeVos, *Believe*

Imagine the Amway co-founders coming to the Grand Rapids Press and offering them a nice fat check to run a glowing five-piece series on their tremendous benevolence. Sadly, this is exactly what the Press did without even receiving a check from the local robber barons. I did not investigate, but it is safe to say that Amway did not have to pay the Press. Why would it? The Press shares the same values as Rich and Jay, "free markets for us, labor and poverty for everybody else."

One could argue at length why the Press chose to do a series of the DeVos and Van Andel Foundations, a series that practically canonizes them, but I believe it is more important to point out the grave implications that the Amway co-founder's "giving" has for democracy at home and abroad.

To its credit, the Press did obtain the documents that lays out for us the details of which groups received funds from the tow foundations. To not question the integrity and motivation of the organizations receiving these funds however, is just bad journalism.

It is bad enough that the Press did not explain how this "giving" is simply a major tax write off, but to treat the foundation money simply as promoting Conservative and Christian causes is very dangerous. Indeed, it fails to present the very deliberate and conscious effort of the Amway co-founders to promote policies that have resulted in limiting people's access to equality, denied religious freedom, and in some cases, caused the murder of innocent people. What follows is a look at some of the more prominent organizations that have received money from the DeVos and Van Andel Foundations.

Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church

The DeVos Foundation alone gave nearly $14 million over the past seven years to this Florida-based church. Aside from telling us that DeVos and Coral Ridge pastor James

Kennedy play tennis, the Press f=gives us little substance on what role Kennedy plays in the Religious Right across the country.

James Kennedy was an original member of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority organization, a group that has promoted anti-gay policies/anti-gay violence, the notion that women should be submissive to men and that the State of Israel should receive complete support from the US.

Kennedy also serves as a spokesperson for the Promise Keepers and has been a board member of the Coalition for Religious Freedom, a front group for the pseudo-fascist Rev. Moon.

Most disturbing is the Reconstructionist theology that Kennedy and the Amway co-founders endorse. This type of theology believes that civil law should be replaced by biblical law. According to author Fred Clarkson, Kennedy gave a keynote speech at the 1996 American Vision conference and made the following comments:

Nobody has the right to worship on this planet any other God than Jehovah. And therefore the state does not have the responsibility to defend anybody's psuedo right to worship an idol." Eternal Hostility, Fred Clarkson, 1997

Kennedy, who also hosts a national conference, Reclaiming America, has a weekly TV program that airs on 360 stations and five cable networks in the US and Russia, as well as the Armed Forces Network. His 30-minute radio show, Truths that Transform, is heard six days a week on over 300 radio stations. Thus, Kennedy has unlimited access to promote his anti-democratic doctrine.

Michigan Family Forum

Closer to home the Michigan Family Forum (MFF) promotes hatred towards the LGBT community, has close ties to Gov. Engler and has been creating political action committee in churches across the state.

In his book, *The Religious Right in Michigan Politics,* author Russ Bellant states that MFF works closely with James Dobson's Focus on the Family to organize Community Impact Communities. Standard reading material for these groups are Randall Terry's *Operation Rescue*, a fanatically anti-choice text and Fr. Enrique Rueda's, *Gays, AIDS & You,* which teaches hate towards the LGBT community. Another author

recommended is Paul de Parris, whose name appeared on a letter endorsing the murder of Dr. David Gunn by anti-abortionist Paul Hill in Florida.

Because of their political organizing, Gov. Engler has involved MFF in the Michigan Abstinence Partnership, sponsored by the Michigan Department of Public Health. They are also represented on a review committee working on curricula for AIDS/HIV with the State Department of Education.

National Endowment for Democracy

Maybe the least known of the groups that Van Andel has been deeply involved with, was the National Endowment for Democracy, also known as NED. NED was created during the Reagan years as a mechanism to push neoliberal economic policies around the world and funding governments or political parties that would best serve the interest of the US. Allen Weinstein, who helped draft the legislation establishing NED, was quite candid when he said in 1991: "A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA."

Jay Van Andel was on the Board of Directors of the National Endowment for Democracy and served in that capacity while the NED was funding death squad governments in Central America, funding opposition parties in Nicaragua and supporting pro-US dictatorships throughout Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.

The Heritage Foundation

A major recipient from both the DeVos and Van Andel Foundations, the Heritage Foundation is the most active think tank in the US that promotes anti-democratic values. Founded in 1973 by beer baron Joseph Coors (a close friend of DeVos), this organization has promoted White Supremacy and a contempt for the poor.

From 1973 – 82 the Chairman of the board of the Heritage Foundation was former Congressman Ben Blackburn, who said, "voting was not an inherent right but a privilege that should be qualified by some sort of literacy test." In testimony before a House committee Blackburn advocated for publicly hanging housing tenants who fell behind their rent payment.

Most notable has been the Heritage Foundation's promotion of conservative economic programs. They wrote the incoming Reagan administration's policy guide, Mandate for Change, that advocated for the elimination of Food Stamps, Medicare, child nutrition

assistance, farm assistance, legal services for the poor and the repeal of a $1,000 tax exemption for the elderly. Heritage's current director is Ed Feulner. Feulner has been a member of numerous organizations that have supported dictatorships throughout the world. He is a member of the World Anti-Communist League (WACL), which has toes to several death squads in Latin America and the Free Congress Foundation, which is another recipient of DeVos Foundation money.

Free Congress Foundation, Council for National Policy & the Conservative Caucus

These three organizations have missions and board members that overlap. Rich DeVos even served as a board member of the Council for National Policy (CPN) at one time. All three groups have supported US foreign policies that have resulter in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians. The Free Congress Foundation (FCF) actively supported the Contra terrorist forces in the 1980s in Central America, the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet and Islamic fundamentalist groups in Afghanistan, all of which committed massive atrocities against civilians in the 1980s. According to author Russ Bellant, FCF's Paul Weyrich has also involved the organization in the World Anti-Communist League, CIA covert actions and support for Eastern European Nazi collaborators.

The CNP is an organization made up of people like former drug and gun runner Oliver North and R.J. Rushdoony, a Christian Reconstructionist who believes that children should be given the death penalty for disobeying their parents. This group chastised the reagan administration in the 1980s for not being supportive enough of the South African Apartheid government. One board member, Don McAlvany, while on a trip to South Africa in 1989, suggested that someone might want to kill Archbishop Tutu. In the US, the CNP promotes the theories of groups like the Pioneer Fund that believes that Blacks are genetically inferior to Whites.

The Conservative Caucus (CC) is headed by Howard Phillips, who has for years maintained close ties to the John Birch Society. The CC has been involved in many of the same causes as the CNP and the FCF, but one country's politics has been dear to them for years.

Angola has been at the center of the CC's foreign policy concerns for years. CC has backed the terrorist Jonas Savimbi, leader of the group UNITA. UNITA has one of the worst human rights records in all of Africa, according to both Amnesty International and Africa Watch, and has been a political tool of numerous US administrations from Reagan until today. Phillips and the CC have been lobbying Congress for years in favor of UNITA.

Other noted recipients of the “untold million” from the DeVos and Van Andel Foundations are Hillsale College. The President of Hillsdale College, George Roche, also sits on the advisory board of the US affiliate of the World Anti-Communist League. This educational institution has hosted forums with speakers such as Manuel Ayau, a member of Guatemala’s Amigos del Pais, a group linked to the death squads in Guatemala.

Hillsdale also houses the late John Bircher Clarence Manion’s tape collection, with lectures from former Nicaraguan Dictator Anastasio Somoza Hillsdale’s magazine, *Imprimis,* provides a forum for anti-minority views. In one issue they gave space to the director of English Only (another DeVos and Van Andel Foundation recipient) to condemn advocates of cultural diversity and bilingual education. This compliments foundation money that goes to TEACH Michigan and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, which are militantly anti-Public Education groups.

This is only a sampling of the groups that both the DeVos and Van Andel Foundations have contributed to. Even if a small dose of this information had appeared in the GR Press, at least the public would have more to go on before the Amway co-founders were given sainthood.



Free Congress Foundation Board of Directors. Back Row *(left to right):* **Marion Magruder, Jr., Dr. Charles Moser, Ph.D., Jeffrey H. Coors, Paul M. Weyrich, Howard W. Long, John D. Beckett, Dr. Robert H. Krieble. Front Row** *(left to right):* **Michelle Laxalt, Richard DeVos, Dr. Robert J. Billings, Kathleen Teague Rothschild, Thomas A. Roe, James Martin Hill, Jr., Ambassador Faith Ryan Whittlesey.** *Not Pictured:* **Senator William L. Armstrong, Congressman Ralph M. Hall, Stephen Walsh.**

Responding to the GR Press Pro-Amway Propaganda – 1998

https://grpeopleshistory.org/2017/02/19/responding-to-the-gr-press-pro-amway-propaganda-1998/

“Our people are seeking inspiration all the time, as most people are. Some people find it in the Rotary Club, some people find it at church and some people like to go to Amway meetings.” Rich DeVos, in, “The Power of Positive Inspiration,” Forbes 12/9/91

“In many ways Amway is more like a fundamentalist religion than a direct marketing business, with money as the god.” – from Dangerous Persuaders, by Louise Samways

“Now I realize what people mean by Amway Brainwashing; they leave one unable to trust themselves or their capabilities. I have experienced that and it has led to a great lack of self esteem and a diminished self image which I have to work on now on a daily basis just to cope. I have had to seek a doctor’s care and treatment. I have to take medication to deal with the depression as it is too much to deal with at this time without it.” former Amway distributor

In April of 1998, the Grand Rapids Press ran a front page series on the “generosity” of Amway’s two founders, Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel. What follows is the response from the independent newspaper, The Fundamentalist in the summer of 1998.

To read the entire article from 1998 that critiques Amway and the GR Press coverage, click here.

Betsy DeVos’ Connection to War Profiteering in Iraq

https://mediamousearchive.wordpress.com/2004/05/19/betsy-devos-con/

Betsy DeVos, current chair of the Michigan Republican Party, has a little known connection to war profiteering and private security forces in Iraq. Betsy DeVos’ younger brother, Erik D. Prince, is the founder of Blackwater USA, a private security firm currently working in Iraq.

Blackwater USA received some press attention back in late March when four employees of the company were killed and dragged through the streets of Fallujah. However, DeVos' connections to the company were never reported in West Michigan, which is not particularly surprising given the DeVos family's status as major supporters of Republican causes and the local media's continued reverence of the DeVos family. *The Holland Sentinel* printed an article on April 2, 2004 reporting that Blackwater was founded by Erik Prince back in 1996, but did not disclose the Betsy DeVos connection. This connection was first published in an article ("Founder of Blackwater Part of Wealthy Family") in *the Winston-Salem Journal*earlier this month.

Blackwater is typical of the new "corporate military"–an army of private contractors who are being used in increasing numbers–with an estimated 15,000 private contractors doing "security" work in Iraq. Blackwater currently has "millions of dollars in contracts" to provide security in Iraq, including a 21 million dollar contract to provide security for the Coalition Provisional Authority and L. Paul Bremer.

While questions about legal accountability of privately contracted mercenaries were raised back in late April, the question has taken on new significance with the abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison, some of which is reported to have been committed by privately contracted individuals. In countries such as Colombia, where private contractors are being used to fight guerilla forces, contractors have been used to circumvent the Congressionally imposed limits on the US military's actions. In addition, Blackwater has been recruiting soldiers from repressive governments–including former Chilean commandos trained under Pinochet.

Blackwater CEO Avoids Having to Deal With the Press

https://mediamousearchive.wordpress.com/2008/05/20/blackwater-ceo/

Yesterday, May 19, the Economic Club of Grand Rapids hosted CEO and founder of Blackwater Worldwide, West Michigan native Erik Prince. The event–which was sold out–was open to members of the Economic Club, the media, and members of the general public who paid $35 for tickets. Prince spoke to an audience of 750 people in the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel and was seated at a table that included David Van Andel, Richard DeVos, and Dick and Betsy DeVos. Erik Prince's sister, Betsy DeVos, introduced him and told the audience that Erik's life work has been to "protect those who are vulnerable." There was time for a few questions at the end of the talk, but the

media was not allowed to ask any questions and Prince declined to answer at least one of the questions posed to him.

Prince used a PowerPoint presentation for his talk. Its cover page had an image of a military base with bold text that read, “In Support of Security and Peace Everywhere.” Prince began his talk about trying to convince the audience that the use of private military contractors is nothing new and has been part of the US military since the Revolutionary War. He cited several examples including Sir Walter Raleigh, but his favorite example was that of Prussian militarist Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Von Steuben. Prince also mentioned that some of the original firefighters in the US were private contractors, as were some US counterintelligence groups like the Pinkertons. He told the audience that the Pinkertons helped spoil a plot to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln in Baltimore, but failed to mention that the Pinkertons were hired spies for “the Robber Barons” of the 19th and early 20th century and that they were hired to infiltrate and target organized labor.

Next, Prince turned his attention to Blackwater Worldwide and stated that they train 35,000 military/law enforcement personnel annually. He explained that their facility in North Carolina is used by local law enforcement all the time and that consequently it is not “secretive” as Blackwater’s critics charge. Prince then mentioned Blackwater’s involvement with an Afghan counter narcotics program, but fails to mention that since the US invasion of 2001 Afghanistan has become the number one producer of heroin. He also went out of his way to mention that Blackwater flew 11,000 missions in Afghanistan in support of US military last year and that they delivered Christmas packages to the troops. “Some people say they support the troops, well, we really support the troops,” Prince said.

Prince discussed other services that Blackwater provides, including a new vehicle they have developed called the Grizzly Armored Personnel Carrier, which he claims would better protect US troops from roadside bombs. Prince said that he hopes the Department of Defense will invest in their product.

The rest of Prince’s presentation consisted of defending what Blackwater does and how they exist to serve American interests. Prince said that 90% of their employees take an oath to the US and that despite the claims that his private contractors commit abuses, “we go above and beyond what is required” with government accountability. Prince stressed that Blackwater believes in “market efficiencies” and that his organization is best equipped to provide training and logistical support for the “new style of warfare that is being waged around the world.”

Prince ended his presentation by talking about all of Blackwater's "humanitarian efforts," from rescuing US troops to providing disaster relief aid. He even told the crowd that just a few days earlier while in Holland, he received a phone call from three missionaries from West Michigan who were in Kenya. They asked Prince if he could assist them in getting out of that country, since tensions had increased in recent months.

The 40-minute presentation by Prince was over and those in attendance filed out of the room. In many ways, this event was a perfect opportunity for Prince to speak to a crowd that was most likely sympathetic to the work of Blackwater, not so much on partisan terms, but because of the company's "free market" claims. Prince said at one point during his talk that Blackwater was nothing more than a "robust temp agency."

Unfortunately, for the public, the press was not able to able to engage the founder of Blackwater, instead we were sequestered upstairs where we would not even be within eyesight of the war profiteer. Moreover, the press was not allowed to use cameras or tape the event. Prince was therefore able to avoid having to talk about the shooting of Iraqi civilians last September that led to a Congressional investigation. Prince's ability to avoid public scrutiny also means he could avoid talking about his support of and ties to far right groups such as the Family Research Council.

Over the past two years, Mediamouse.org has done numerous stories on Blackwater, Erik Prince, and the Prince family including analyses of the media's coverage of Blackwater and an interview with Jeremy Scahill, the author of the acclaimed book *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*.

3. DeVos Family, Elections & Money

Who are the biggest political donors in Grand Rapids?

https://griid.org/2011/09/15/who-are-the-biggest-political-donors-in-grand-rapids/

Radical Historian Howard Zinn used to say in America you either have organized people or organized money. It is debatable as to whether or not we have organized people in this area, but we certainly have organized money.

Organized money was given an edge on organized people when the US Supreme Court passed **Citizen's United vs the FEC**, which granted unlimited campaign contributions. Corporations and other entities are breaking records of what they are donating and the Center for Responsible Politics is estimating that President Obama might raise more than a billion dollars in his re-election bid.

The Center for Responsible Politics also provides **research tools** so you can see who the biggest political donors are in your area. You can search by state, Congressional district or by zip code. Here is what we found out about who the major donors are in the Grand Rapids area.

In the **49503 zip code** we find that the largest donors in the 2012 election cycle so far are: Peter Seechia $30,800; Helen DeVos $30,400, Richard DeVos $30,400, Dan DeVos $10,000 and Pam DeVos $10,000. The **largest recipients** of this money from the 49503 zip code are: the Republican National Committee $91,600, Justin Amash $36,000, the Republican Party of Michigan $20,000 and Randall Heckman $14,500.

From the **49504 zip code** area the two largest donors are Susan and Michael Jandernoa, both who have contributed $30,800. Jandernoa is the CEO of the Perrigo Company. Their money has primarily gone to the Republican National Committee, $62,100.

In the **49506 zip code** area the largest donors are: JC Huizenga $5,000, Pat Miles Jr. $5,000, Bill Lewis $2,500, Margaret & Paul Potter $2,500 each, Scott Brew $2,500, David and Nancy Kammeraad $2,500 each and James Nicholas $2,000. The largest **recipients of money from the 49503 zip code** are Justin Amash $13,100 and Barack Obama $10,950.

From the **49546 zip code area** (East Grand Rapids) the largest donors are: Calvin College President Gaylen Byker $61,600, Kate Pew Walters $5,000, Attallah Amash $5,000, Marie Amash $5,000, Eric Larsen $5,000 and Marcy Larsen $2,500. The largest **recipients from the 49546 zip code** area are: National Republican Committee $63,100 and Justin Amash $26,970.

The largest donors from the **49512 zip code area** are: John Kennedy (Autocam CEO) $43,300, Nancy Kennedy $15,000, JC Huizenga $12,000 and Keith Klopcic $5,000. The top recipient of money coming from the **49512 zip code** are: Republican National Committee $30,800 and the Republican Party of Michigan $30,000.

There is data for money from the other zip codes in the Grand Rapids area, but the donation numbers are small in comparison to the zip codes already listed. However, this data should give you an idea of who the organized money is coming from and who it is going to from Grand Rapids.

Who is influencing the 2012 Election with money from Grand Rapids?

https://griid.org/2012/02/06/who-is-influencing-the-2012-election-with-money-from-grand-rapids/

The Center for Responsive Politics just updated their database on financial contributions for the 2012 Election cycle.

The **new data** shows that President Obama is way ahead of any of the GOP challengers, having raised $125 million so far. The next closest candidate in terms of money raised is Mitt Romney, who has raised $56 million.

Much has been made of the recent Supreme Court decision knows as **Citizens United**, which has allowed Corporations and other entities to make unlimited donations during election cycles. However, it would dishonest to not recognize that money has always influenced electoral politics in the US and that the richest 1% has always made it a point to buy influence by buying candidates or financing partisan politics.

Looking at the data recently compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics, one can see that there are a small number of people locally who are trying to influence the democratic process by giving large sums of money to candidates and political parties as the nation prepares for another Presidential Election in November.

In the **49503 zip code area** we found that the largest donors in the 2012 election cycle so far are mostly members of the DeVos Family. **Richard DeVos Sr. has contributed $70,900** so far, with his wife **Helen giving an additional $60,400**. **Dick DeVos has contributed $41,300** to date and his wife **Betsy has given $33,300**. The other two sons of Richard DeVos, Doug and Dan have also made sizeable contributions, with **Doug DeVos giving $44,300** and **Dan DeVos throwing in $73,300**. The wives of Doug and Dan DeVos have also contributed to influencing the election with Doug's wife **Maria contributing $31,300** and Dan's wife **Pam chipping in $5,000**. Collectively, these members of the DeVos family have sought to influence the 2012 elections by

contributing **$359,800** so far, with 9 months of giving still ahead of us. It should be mentioned that Peter Seechia has also contributed a sizeable amount, giving $30,800.

The **largest recipients** of this money from the 49503 zip code are: the Republican National Committee ($358,700) and Justin Amash ($61750), with other candidates receiving substantially smaller amounts.

From the **49504 zip code area** the two largest donors are Susan and Michael Jandernoa, who have contributed a combined amount **of $81,600**. Jandernoa is the CEO of the Perrigo Company. Their money has primarily gone to the Republican National Committee and Pete Hoekstra who is running against Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow.

In the **49506 zip code area** the largest donors are Mark (Meijer CEO) and Elizabeth Murray, which have contributed a combined **$40,800** to date. Other sizeable contributors have been **JC Huizenga $5,000** and **Crystal Flash President Thomas Fehsenfeld $5,000**. The largest recipients from this zip code area are again the Republican National Committee and Pete Hoekstra.

From the **49546 zip code area** (East Grand Rapids) the largest donors are: Calvin College President **Gaylen Byker $65,100**, Amway executive **Suzanne Vanderweide giving $30,800** and **Kate Pew Walters $10,000**. The largest recipient from the 49546 zip code area are again the National Republican Committee.

Lastly, the largest donors from the **49512 zip code area** are **John Kennedy (Autocam CEO) $165,800** and **Nancy Kennedy $40,800**. The top recipient of money coming from the 49512 zip code area are the Republican National Committee and the Republican Party of Michigan.

Clearly the largest contributors from Grand Rapids are giving to the GOP, but as we noted earlier the Obama campaign is way ahead of all other contenders. However, it is useful to note whom the big money players are in electoral spending from this city and it speaks to their contempt for anything resembling real democracy.

DeVos Family money fuels the Second and Third Congressional races

https://griid.org/2012/03/22/devos-family-money-fuels-the-second-and-third-congressional-races/

We **reported last month** on West Michigan residents that have given large sums of money to candidates and political parties in an attempt to influence the 2012 elections.

A **new report from the Center for Responsive Politics** shows that President Obama is ahead of all Presidential candidates in terms of PAC money raised and **Obama has raised more than double than any GOP candidate**, with $157 million at the last campaign finances reporting date on February 1st.

In Michigan, there are candidates who have a commanding leading in terms of money raised so far. In the **Senate race**, the incumbent Debbie Stabenow has raised nearly $9 million, with the next closest candidate (Pete Hoekstra) raising just over $2 million.

Stabenow has raised the bulk of her funds from corporations such as Blue Cross/Blue Shield, DTE Energy, GM, Ford, Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan Chase and the women's PAC known as EMILY's List. Hoekstra on the other hand is relying on money specific to West Michigan with major donors like Amway, Autocam, Meijer, Gentex and DP Fox Ventures.

In the 3rd Congressional race, incumbent Justin Amash has raised just shy of **half a million dollars** and no reporting as of yet from either of the two Democratic challengers, Trevor Thomas or Steve Pestka. You can see from this chart here who the main contributors are to Amash to date.

In the **2nd Congressional race**, Rep. Bill Huizenga has raised **$440,420** so far, with no reported Democratic challengers listed. The **bulk of Huizenga's money** is coming from West Michigan as well and a large percentage of it coming from the DeVos family businesses, such as Amway/Alticor, Windquest Group, DP Fox Ventures and the Orlando Magic.

The DeVos Family has contributed over half a million dollars in this election cycle

https://griid.org/2012/07/20/the-devos-family-has-contributed-over-half-of-million-dollars-in-this-election-cycle/

As we have **reported in previous months**, the DeVos family continues to be a major financial funder in the 2012 elections.

According to the most recent data from the Center for Responsive Politics, the DeVos family has contributed collectively just over a half a million dollars so far in the 2012 election cycle – **$571,000**. However, it is important to note that this is just the amount they have collectively contributed from the **49503 zip code** and we all know that most of them have multiple homes in multiple locations.

Here is a breakdown of the DeVos Family 2012 Election cycle contributions:

Dan DeVos	**$87,800**
Richard DeVos	**$85,900**
Dick DeVos	**$71,800**
Betsy DeVos	**$70,800**
Pam DeVos	**$68,300**
Helen DeVos	**$62,900**
Doug DeVos	**$62,800**
Maria DeVos	**$58,300**
Rick DeVos	**$2,500**

The DeVos family members have also used a variety of titles and affiliations when making contributions such as Amway, Alticor, The Windquest Group, RDV Corp, The Orlando Magic, DP Fox Venture, Self-Employed and my favorite…….homemaker. Betsy DeVos actually referred to herself as a homemaker.

By posting this information on how much money the DeVos family has contributed to the 2012 election cycle is not just to make a point about their desire to influence the outcome of the elections, it is also to acknowledge that this is just one tactic they use to influence economic and political policy.

The DeVos family has inserted themselves in many other capacities in order to influence and benefit from political and economic policy, such as owning prime property in downtown Grand Rapids, owning sports teams, funding cultural events, sitting on the board of the Right Place, being part of the Econ Club of Grand Rapids, the One Kent Coalition, the West Michigan Policy Forum, Grand Action and the Regional Air Alliance of West Michigan.

This of course is not an exhaustive list of where DeVos family members or their money is involved, but it does remind us of how much power they wield in West Michigan and why that power must be challenged.

Amway/Alticor is donating to Obama's re-election campaign

https://griid.org/2012/09/04/amwayalticor-is-donating-to-obamas-re-election-campaign/

When people hear the corporate name Amway, all sorts of images and labels come to mind, but one label that doesn't usually come to mind is "supported of Democrats."

It is true that the Amway Corporation has traditionally funded the Republican Party as has the DeVos and Van Andel Families. We noted **back in July** that the DeVos family had already donated over a half a million dollars to the Republicans so far in the 2012 election cycle.

Since 1990, **Amway/Alticor had contributed roughly $8,000 to Democrats** prior to 2012, but have **thus far contributed $46,800 to Democrats** in the current election cycle. Comparatively, the **Republican Party has received $390,900** from Amway/Alticor in the 2012 election cycle, which demonstrates where the bulk of their paying for political influence has gone.

The Democrats who have received funding from Amway/Alticor so far this year have been Congressional candidates David Wu from Oregon ($2,500) and Daniel Adler from California ($3,500). However, what might come as a surprise to some is that President **Barack Obama has received $10,000 from Amway/Alticor** in his bid to be re-elected, **according to the Center for Responsive Politics**. Comparatively, Amway/Alticor has only given $12,750 to Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney so far.

The reason why Amway would give money to Democrats and specifically President Obama, depends on how one views electoral politics in the US. Thos who think it is purely ideological might be confused by this data, but if one sees electoral politics purely in terms of power, then Amway's donation to Obama and other Democrats makes complete sense.

Corporations give money to candidates primarily to buy access and to influence policy. That Amway gave money to Obama's re-election campaign reflects that they want some access if he is re-elected. This is the nature of electoral politics in the US, which is why the corporations that much of the public loathes, such as Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan Chase, Comcast, BP, Coca Cola give to both political parties. These companies, along with most, donate to both parties because they want access and the ability to influence policy no matter who controls the White House or Congress.

Amway, part of coalition that opposes Michigan Energy, Michigan Jobs ballot initiative

https://griid.org/2012/08/30/amway-part-of-coalition-that-opposes-michigan-energy-michigan-jobs-ballot-initiative/

Last week, MLive ran a story with the focus on West Michigan groups that oppose the **Michigan Energy, Michigan Jobs** November ballot proposal.

The story tells readers that Amway and other West Michigan businesses and business associations are formally opposed to the Michigan constitution mandating that 25% of Michigan's energy must be renewable energy by 2025. This business group believes that is a bad approach and that it will not result in the amount of jobs the ballot initiative proponents are claiming.

The only source used in the MLive article was an Amway spokesperson, although the article does link to a previous article about Ottawa County Democrats who support the ballot initiative.

The MLive article fails on many levels. **First**, it does not explore the main reasons for organized opposition to the November ballot initiative. Anyone who knows the philosophical nature of the Chamber of Commerce and many businesses like Amway, would know that they are opposed to most forms of government intervention in the economy. This is an ideological issue, which the MLive writer does not acknowledge or explore.

Second, there is no indication that this is an organized effort to opposed the Michigan Energy, Michigan Jobs November ballot initiative. The West Michigan entities identified in the MLive article are part of a coalition known as CARE – **Clean, Affordable, Renewable, Energy.** This coalition is made up of more than just West Michigan businesses and business association, including:

- Acemco Inc.
- Agape Plastics
- Amway
- Betz Industries
- Eagle Alloy
- The Frederick Douglass Foundation of Michigan
- Grand Rapids Area Chamber
- Great Lakes Die Cast
- Master Finish Co.
- Metal Components, LLC.
- Montcalm Alliance
- Montcalm Commission on Aging
- Montcalm County Panhandle Area Chamber of Commerce
- Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce
- Rothbury Steel
- Steve's Antique Auto Repair
- Sunrise Acre Farms
- Trendway Corp.
- Wyoming-Kentwood Area Chamber of Commerce.

In addition, there are numerous current and former politicians in Michigan who oppose this ballot initiative such as Ken Sikkema, Frank Kelly, Bill Schuette and local state Rep. Dave Agema. Agema has this to say about his opposition to the Michigan Energy, Michigan Jobs ballot initiative:

This will lead to huge increases in your energy bills. Once again, someone will be subsidized with your tax dollars making huge profits at your expense and not producing the jobs they claim. It's an artificial stimulus program that will not work. Since our energy costs will skyrocket, businesses will locate elsewhere to avoid these costs. Instead of creating jobs, we'll lose them. This does not create an environment for businesses to want to come to Michigan. This is a recipe for lost jobs and higher energy costs for all involved. Follow the money and watch who gains.

Lastly, the MLive article fails readers in that is does not seek out any independent or third party voices/perspectives. The lack of a third perspective limits the debate to whether or not to support this particular ballot initiative and omits any possible discussion about any serious energy policy that might operate outside of the current industrial mindset. Serious environmental consequences are not even part of how the debate between these two opposing forces has been framed.

PACs have raised over $34 million so far in Michigan, one DeVos PAC has given $500,000

https://griid.org/2012/10/27/pacs-have-raised-over-34-million-so-far-in-michigan-one-devos-pac-has-given-500000/

According to the Lansing-based group, **Michigan Campaign Finance Network, $34.7 million** has been raised by Political Action Committees as of the most recent campaign finance filing deadline.

The most recent report states in part:

Michigan's top 150 state political action committees have raised $34.7 million through the October campaign finance reports. That total is the lowest recorded since the 2004 election cycle for the state's top 150 PACs.

Rankings were compiled by the nonpartisan Michigan Campaign Finance Network from reports filed with the Michigan Bureau of Elections.

The relatively low total reflects the absence of two PACs that topped the state list the last three election cycles: Coalition for Progress, which topped this list in 2006 and

2008, and the Republican Governors Association Michigan PAC, which the set the record as Michigan's largest PAC ever in 2010.

Another factor contributing to the relatively low total may be the huge volume of money flowing into state ballot committees this year.

The House Republican Campaign Committee leads the list of PACs this year at $2,413,905. It is followed by the House Democratic Fund at $2,012,838.

The rest of the top ten PACs are: Senate republican Campaign Committee, $1,552,849; Michigan Association of Justice PAC, $1,495,502; Michigan Education Association PAC, $1,290,563; Blue Cross/Blue Shield PAC, $1,043,396; Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters PAC, $819,043; Business Leaders for Michigan's SuperPAC, $796,250; United Auto Workers Voluntary PAC, $675,688; and, Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers PAC, $675,688.

Looking at the top 150 PACs in Michigan, one can see the usual suspects in terms of which companies, associations and sectors are trying to use money to influence the electoral outcome.

The state Chamber of Commerce and several regional Chambers have given over a million, trade unions have given over a million, and several political party affiliated groups have done the same.

In addition, energy focused groups like DTE ($544,261), Michigan Petroleum Jobbers ($110,270) and the Michigan Petroleum PAC (68,122) are giving to both oppose Prop 3 and buy influence on oil & gas policy in the state.

Other sectors like the telecom and the automotive industry are buying influence and on the local level the **DeVos family has given $500,000** through their group **Great Lakes Education Project** to push their privatizing/voucher-based education system.

To see a list of the top 150 PACs in Michigan as of now go to **this link.**

DeVos, Donor's Trust and the channeling of money to influence public policy

https://griid.org/2013/02/20/devos-donors-trust-and-the-channeling-of-money-to-influence-public-policy/

Earlier today, **Democracy Now featured a story** on a somewhat hidden group known as Donor's Trust, which has created another layer of influence peddling in US policy and elections.

The featured guest on the Democracy Now segment was John Dunbar, politics editor at the **Center for Public Integrity and co-author of the group's months-long investigation into Donors Trust**.

The article by the Center for Public Integrity report identifies usual suspects that channel money through Donor's Trust, such as the Koch Brothers. However, if one looks at the graphic created by the Center, you can see that the **Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation** is the **second largest contributor to Donor's Trust, giving well over a million dollars.**

The Center for Public Integrity documents that much of the funding from foundations like the DeVos Foundation are channeled to far right Think Tanks, such as the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. Here is what their report says about Mackinac:

*Ten state-level think tanks got a total of $200,000 from Donors Trust to attend ALEC meetings in 2011 including the Michigan-based Mackinac Center and the Arizona-based Goldwater Institute, which introduced a raft of **anti-union model bills** at ALEC's spring 2012 conference.*

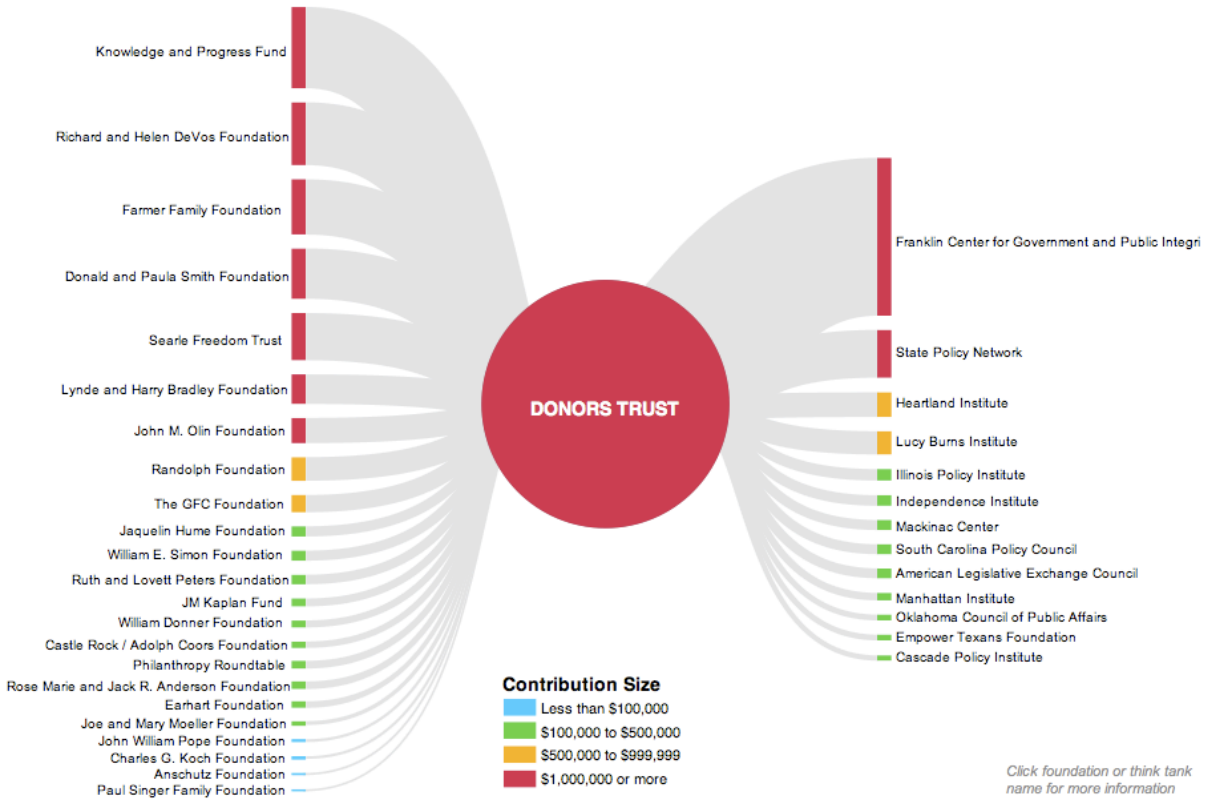
The Mackinac Center has gotten $2.4 million from Donors Trust since 2008, according to the Bridge Project, a liberal think tank.

One Donors Trust grant to Mackinac Center was earmarked for "statehouse reporting" efforts. Mackinac put the money toward a media machine of blogs and research studies making the case for the state's new "right-to-work" law.

The Mackinac Center works closely with other Donors Trust recipients, including the Franklin Center, which counts Mackinac's "media" outlets in Michigan as affiliates.

*The Franklin Center, Mackinac and another major recipient of Donors Trust cash, Americans for Prosperity, co-hosted a day-long training for "**citizen watchdogs**" featuring speakers on "school choice" and "union reform" from the Mackinac Center and Republican state Rep. Tom McMillin, who is also an ALEC member.*

Besides the outright money that people like Richard DeVos give to candidates or the political parties to influence policy and election outcomes, they are finding other ways to channel even more funds from their foundations to an organization that is having a major impact on legislative policy across the country and right here in Michigan.



Buying State Policy: A more honest assessment of the DeVos family political influence

https://griid.org/2015/10/28/buying-state-policy-a-more-honest-assessment-of-the-devos-family-political-influence/

Two days ago **MLive ran a story** that names the DeVos family as the largest single donor to Michigan electoral politics for the 2013-2014 cycle.

The article was prompted by a new report from the Lansing-based watchdog group Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN). The **report**, authored by MCFN director Rich Robinson, is a clear indictment of how money dictates electoral outcomes. The cover of the report (shown here) is pretty clear about what happens to democracy with the financial power of families like the DeVos family.

However, even though the MLive article has a hyperlink to the report, they only include part of the title, which says “a citizen’s guide to the cycle.” The MLive reporter omits the part of the report title that says, “Big Money Dominates Michigan Politics.” This is a subtle point, but relevant nonetheless, since the MLive story just presents a simple data overview of the report without any real analysis of what the implication are for individuals or individual families spending millions of dollars to influence the outcome of elections throughout the state.

The MLive reporter does the obligatory quote from the report’s author, but the one sentence is just a restating of the obvious. “**The DeVos family doesn’t have a peer among individual donors, or as far as interest groups go,” said Robinson.**

Comparatively, the MLive writer asked for a response from the DeVos camp and gave them significantly more print. The response come from Greg McNeilly, who ran Dick DeVos’ failed campaign for the Governor of Michigan in 2006. McNeilly continued to work as a DeVos operative, when he became the Windquest Group’s Chief Operating Officer in 2012. McNeilly also runs one of the DeVos state policy front groups, the **Michigan Freedom Fund**.

Here is the full MLive quote from McNeilly:

“Political speech is the most protected form of speech, and we need more people participating at higher levels. We should applaud anyone who is leading on that dimension and try to encourage greater participation in our great American experiment.”

Buying State Policy

The larger problem with the MLive article is the utter failure to even follow the money trail to see how the money that spent at the state level impacts election results and policy decisions.

The DeVos family political contributions have had clear results in recent years in Michigan. Their totals for the 2013-2014 cycle were **$4,902,055**. Most of that money went to the Michigan Republican Party, with smaller amounts going to individual candidates and other state groups that would lobby on their behalf. Lets take a look at a couple of examples of how this plays out.

This past June, Governor Snyder signed into law **HB 4052**, a law that takes away local control. Why is this relevant, because powerful entities like the DeVos family do not want local communities adopting policies like a living wage, regulations against wage theft or adopting anti-discrimination ordinances that would include or add anti-discrimination protections for the LGBT community.

HB 4052 was introduced by Rep. Earl Poleski (R) and then went to the Committee on Commerce & Trade, which is chaired by Joseph Graves (R). Graves received $9,000 from the DeVos family for his re-election bid in 2014, along with several other members of the Committee on Commerce and Trade. This committee recommended that HB 4052 be adopted and then it was put before the Michigan Senate. The Michigan Senate sent the bill to the Competitiveness Committee chaired by Mike Shirkey (R). Rep. Shirkey received $4,500 from the DeVos family for his re-election bid in 2014, as did several other members of this committee.

Some of the groups that lobby hard for this bill were also recipients of DeVos family money, such as the Michigan Chamber of Commerce ($5,300) and the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce ($30,000). The Michigan Freedom Fund was a major proponent of the legislation and they were funneling money through the **Foundation for Michigan Freedom** to run paid political ads in favor of HB 4052. The bill was signed into law in June of this year.

A second example would be the recent bill that was also signed into law this summer, **HB 4188**. This legislation, often framed as a religious freedom bill, would allow adoption agencies in Michigan the ability to deny LGBT couples/partners/families from adopting.

HB 4188 was introduced by Rep. Andrea LaFontaine (R). Rep. LaFontaine received $8,100 in campaign contribution in 2014 from the DeVos family. Many of the cosponsors of this bill were also recipients of DeVos family funding.

The largest adoption agency in the state of Michigan is Bethany Christian Services. Bethany has been a major recipient of funding from the various DeVos family foundations. For instance, the most recent 990 documents (2013) for the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation show that they contributed $250,000 to Bethany Christian Services. The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation provided $25,000 to Bethany in 2013.

When we look at specific policy outcomes, it becomes clear that the amount of money that families like the DeVos family spend on influencing public policy negatively impacts the lives of millions throughout the state.

West Michigan Political Power

It is also worth noting that of the top 15 financial contributors to Michigan politics in the 2013-2014 cycle, five of them are from Grand Rapids. In addition to the DeVos family, there is Michael & Susan Jandernoa, John & Nancy Kennedy, the Van Andel Family and the Meijer Family.

These families are also connected in other ways, serving on numerous boards together and influencing policy in West Michigan. They collaborated, along with other powerful

people a few years ago, to form the **West Michigan Policy Forum**, which has led the way on numerous state policy changes such as Right to Work, the elimination of business tax and more recently the Michigan road funding issue. This West Michigan connection is also not part of the MLive article, even though it seems like it would be an easy connection to make. But then again, Mlive is not in the business of conducting any kind of substantial **power analysis**, let alone holding power accountable.

DeVos Family
Donations to Michigan Political Committees 1/1/2013 - 12/31/2014

Recipient Committee	Amount
Michigan Republican Party	$2,310,000
House Republican Campaign Committee	$640,000
Senate Republican Campaign Committee	$520,000
Great Lakes Education Project (DeVos Family)	$250,000
Kent Co. Republican Committee	$158,500
Rick Snyder for Governor	$122,430
Bill Schuette for Attorney General	$71,400
James Robert Redford for Justice	$61,200
David Viviano for Justtice	$61,200
Brian Zahra for Justice	$61,200
Grand Rapids Chamber / Friends of West Michigan Business	$30,000
MI Auto Dealers Assn. / MAD PAC	$22,075
Ron Weiser for U-M Regent	$20,400
Friends of Patrick Colbeck	$18,000
Mike Green for State Senate	$18,000
Dave Hildenbrand for State Senate	$18,000
Marty Knollenberg for State Senate	$18,000
Friends of Mike Kowall for State Senate	$18,000
CTE Peter MacGregor for State Senate	$18,000
Jim Marleau for State Senate	$18,000
Margaret O'Brien for State Senate	$18,000
Phil Pavlov for State Senate	$18,000
Wayne Schmidt for State Senate	$18,000
Goeff Hansen for State Senate	$16,000
Ruth Johnson for Secretary of State	$15,600
CTE Jack Brandenburg for State Senate	$14,000
Arlan Meekhof for State Senate	$14,000
Brian Calley for Lt. Gov.	$13,600
Business Leaders for Michigan PAC II (SuperPAC)	$10,000
Tom Barrett for Stete Rep.	$9,000
CTE John Bizon for State Rep.	$9,000
Friends of Darwin Booher	$9,000
CTE Edward Canfield State Rep.	$9,000
Tom Casperson for State Senate	$9,000
Kevin Cotter for State Rep.	$9,000

Recipient Committee	Amount
Friends of Kathy Crawford	$9,000
CTE Donijo Dejonge State Rep.	$9,000
CTE Jeff Farrington State Rep.	$9,000
Friends of Carol Ann Fausone	$9,000
Frank Foster for State House	$9,000
Friends of Daniela Garcia	$9,000
CTE Joseph Graves State rep.	$9,000
Friends of Holly Hughes	$9,000
Joe Hunt for State Rep.	$9,000
CTE Brandt Iden for State Rep.	$9,000
Karl leuter for State Rep.	$9,000
CTE Klint Kesto State Rep.	$9,000
Friends of Lisa Posthumus Lyons	$9,000
CTE Jan Peabody State Rep.	$9,000
John Proos for State Senate	$9,000
Al Pscholka for State Rep.	$9,000
Friends of Randy Richardville	$9,000
Tonya Schuitmaker for State Senate	$9,000
Jason Sheppard for State Rep.	$9,000
CTE Mike Shirkey for State Senate	$9,000
Ken Yonker for State Rep.	$9,000
Nick Hawatmeh for State Rep.	$8,550
CIT FOR Andrea LaFontaine State Rep.	$8,100
Dave Robertson for State Senate	$7,000
Business Leaders for Michigan PAC	$7,000
MI Chamber of Commerce PAC	$5,300
Chris Afendoulis for State Rep.	$4,500
CTE Peter Lund State Rep.	$4,500
Aric Nesbitt for State Rep.	$4,500
CCTE Mike Shirkey for State Senate	$4,500
Friends of Pat Somerville	$4,500
CTE Jase Bolger State Rep.	$4,000
(Dave) Hildenbrand Leadership Fund	$3,000
Friends of Spectrum Health	$1,000
(Lisa) Posthumus Lyons Leadership Fund	$1,000
Total	**$4,902,055**

Source: MI Bureau of Elections

DeVos, Gilbert and friends are still buying elections

https://griid.org/2015/12/15/devos-gilbert-and-friends-are-still-buying-elections/

We are less than a year away from the next Presidential Election and already it is clear that the super rich are buying the election.

This should in no way be surprising to those who have seriously looked at how elections function in the US, but it is always useful to follow the money.

Below is a listing of the top corporate political contributions as of November 16, 2015, according to the **Center for Responsive Politics**.

The top contributor so far is Rock Holdings, which is a subsidiary of Dan Gilbert's company Quicken Loans. Gilbert has been buying up property all over Detroit in recent years and is a major player in the gentrification on the east side of the state. Gilbert's election contributions in Michigan are to the Republican Party and candidates.

Number two on the list is Jon Stryker Architecture, which is part of the Stryker Corporation and Stryker family wealth. The Stryker family has a long history of contributing to the Democratic Party and its candidates, which they continue to do in this cycle. Their support for the Democrats, makes it clear in Michigan, like in any other state that the rich buy elections regardless of party affiliation.

Third on this list corporate purchasing of elections is the Kojaian Companies. The Kojaian Management Corporation owns and operates industrial real estate properties around the state, including near the Grand Rapids airport, Byron Center, Walker, Holland and Zeeland. Their contributions go primarily to the GOP.

The DeVos Family, through the Amway and Alticor business entities are 5th and 11th on the list so far in political contributions for the 2016 cycle. The DeVos family has consistently contributed millions of dollars to the Republican Party and its candidates and is known for influencing public policy, **with a few pieces of legislation in Michigan being the most recent examples**. It should also be noted that the amount of money the DeVos family contributes personally is much larger than that which is contributed through the corporation they own.

Some of the other companies listed also have a long track record of buying influence, either through elections or lobbying around state policy. In a recent report from the **Michigan Campaign Finance Network**, companies that are listed below, such as Dow, DTE, Ford and Quicken Loans (of which Rock Holdings is a part) have all contributed significantly to political action committees in the current election cycle.

Again, this is not new information, but should be a reminder of how elections really function. More importantly, the fact that DeVos, Gilbert and other members of the elite are constantly engaged in a class war and will use whatever means necessary to impose their will on the rest of society.

DeVos Family political money bought legislation in 2015 that allows them to spend even more money to influence Michigan politics

https://griid.org/2016/01/11/devos-family-political-money-bought-legislation-in-2015-that-allows-them-to-spend-even-more-money-to-influence-michigan-politics/

Remember in 2012, when the Michigan Legislature and Governor Snyder decided to ignore what voters had to say about the Emergency Manager ballot issue and pushed through legislation at the last minute? Well, the Michigan Legislature did it again.

Just hours before the last Michigan political session of 2015, Republicans revised a bill that will allow even more money to be pumped into the political process. **Senate Bill 571** was then signed into law by Governor Snyder on December 31st and is now known as Public Act 269.

This new law will allow Political Action Committees and the super rich even greater opportunity to buy politicians and future legislation. Here are a few of the outcomes of Public Act 269:

> Prohibits public bodies like government agencies from distributing information about ballot proposals 60 days before the election.
> Elimination of a February filing deadline for independent and political committees and reestablishment of the requirement to file an annual report covering the period from October 21st through December 31st.
> Effective doubling of the amount of money PACs can donate to candidates for the second time in two years, effective quadrupling the limit since 2013.
> Prohibits corporations from collecting contributions from its employees to a union's PAC.

Point three is particularly worth noting as it means that the amount of money that can be spent in politics will increase……again. Until 2013, individual donors could contribute only $3,400 per cycle, with PACs permitted to give up to $34,000. The amount changed two years ago when the legislature raised those ceilings to $6,800 for individuals and

$68,000 for PACs. **With Public Act 269, the amount that individuals can contribute is up to $13,600 and $136,000 for Political Action Committees**.

This means that the DeVos Family and their disgustingly wealthy friends can contribute more directly to candidates and to PACs. The Michigan legislators who pushed through the revised version of SB 571 were Rep. Lisa Posthumus Lyons (R) and Rep. Kevin Cotter (R). Both of the state politicians had received $9,000 in the last election cycle from the DeVos Family, according to **a report** by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network.

This is at least the third time this year that DeVos Family money has bought legislation in Michigan. We know that earlier in 2015, DeVos Family money paid for HB 4052, which takes away even more autonomy from local governments, particularly around issues such a living wage, wage theft and anti-discrimination ordinances. In addition, DeVos Family money helped pass HB 4188, legislation that allows adoption agencies to discriminate against LGBT families. **We wrote about how DeVos money influenced the adoption of these state laws last fall.**

DeVos Family political operative Greg McNeilly, Chairman of the Michigan Freedom Fund, was gloating over the passing of SB 571, especially since one of the provisions took some power away from unions. McNeilly had this to say:

"It's one of those reforms that I think is positive for the state and allows employers to stay focused on their core business."

What is to be done about the DeVos Family Political Influence?

There is already partisan rumblings from the Democratic Party suggesting that the way to stop these last minute legislative changes is to win the 2016 elections.

However, it seems that whether it is Public Act 269 or Citizens United, there is no real interest from the Democratic Party to take money out of politics. So what is to be done about the political influence of families like DeVos?

There are some tactics, which would be best discussed offline, but one strategy that might actually hurt the DeVos Family would be a boycott strategy. What if there was an organized campaign to boycott the following:

> Boycott all Amway Products
> Boycott ArtPrize
> A Boycott by Non-Profits to accept any DeVos Family Foundation money – you can find this information by going to GuideStar and looking at the 990s of all the DeVos Family Foundations. **http://www.guidestar.org/Home.aspx**

Boycott DeVos owned Hotels in Grand Rapids
Boycott DeVos owned Restaurants in Grand Rapids
Boycott art and cultural organizations that the DeVos Family has funded – Grand Rapids Art Museum, UICA
Boycott organizations where a DeVos or DeVos employee (Awmay, RDV Corp, Windquest, etc) is on the board of directors – Right Place Inc., GVSU Foundation, Grand Action, West Michigan Policy Forum, Alliance for Livability, Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, etc.

In addition, maybe some creative forms of direct action that would disrupt or shut down any of the entities targeted for boycott might also have a significant impact.

The point being, that we can not expect the influence and power of the DeVos Family to simply go away or be lessened simply by operating within the limits of the current political process.

The DeVos Family is once again buying political influence

https://griid.org/2016/04/11/the-devos-family-is-once-again-buying-political-influence/

According to recent **reports from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network**, the DeVos Family has once again out spent virtually everyone in the state when it comes to buying elections.

Based on data from the most recent Federal Election Commission findings, the DeVos Family spent $1.32 million on Super PAC funding. This includes money given to Marco Rubio's Conservative Solutions PAC, A New Day for America PAC (John Kasich), Right to Rise PAC (Jeb Bush) and the CARLY for America PAC (pro-Florina).

The largest chunk of DeVos Family money was donated to Rubio's Conservative Solutions PAC, despite the fact that Senator Rubio has recently dropped out of the race for the GOP nomination. This has not and will not deter the DeVos Family as they continue to be the largest electoral donor in Michigan. The DeVos Family also gives **a substantial amount to the State Republican Committee**, which can decide what races it want to give money to. In many ways, the DeVos Family has been much more interested in state politics, as is evidenced by **recent influence peddling with the state legislature**.

Speaking of buying State Policy

The other major campaign finance issue in Michigan has been the amount of money going to influence state education policy, particularly in Detroit.

The DeVos Family has contributed $1.22 million to individuals and two caucus committees. Betsy DeVos is front and center in the battle to get Charter Schools and private education as "schools of choice." She recently made her views know in a **February opinion piece published in the Detroit News**.

"***The state should "liberate all students from this woefully under-performing district model and provide in its place a system of schools where performance and competition create high-quality opportunities for kids***." The state "***should expand school choice so students could use state education funds at the public or private school of their choice***."

Other potential reforms touted by Betsy DeVos: A-F letter grading for schools; alternative certification for teachers; and a ban on teacher sickouts. Here is where the DeVos Family spent their money on privatizing education in Michigan.

1. House Republican Campaign Committee, $480,000

2. Senate Republican Campaign Committee, $281,000

3. Gov. Rick Snyder, $34,000

4. Lt. Gov. Brian Calley, $20,400

5. Sen. Margaret O'Brien (R-Portage), $19,000

(Tie) 6. Rep. Brandt Iden (R-Oshtemo Twp.), $18,000

(Tie) 6. Rep. Holly Hughes (R-Montague), $18,000

(Tie) 6. Sen. Marty Knollenberg (R-Troy), $18,000

(Tie) 6. Sen. Wayne Schmidt (R-Traverse City), $18,000

(Tie) 10. Rep. John Bizon (R-Battle Creek), $16,000

(Tie) 10. Sen. Mike Kowall (R-White Lake), $16,000

(Tie) 10. Sen. Jim Marleau (R-Lake Orion), $16,00

(Tie) 13. Sen. Peter MacGregor (R-Rockford) $14,000

(Tie) 13. Rep. Klint Kesto (R-Commerce Twp.) $14,000

(Tie) 13. Rep. Tom Barrett (R-Potterville), $14,000

(Tie) 13. Sen. Phil Pavlov (R-St. Clair) $14,000

(Tie) 13. Sen. Goeff Hansen (R-Hart), $14,000

Betsy DeVos is a member of the **American Federation for Children**, a national right wing lobbying effort on privatizing education.

State Senator from Michigan who Introduced anti-Trans Legislation, also a recipient of DeVos money

https://griid.org/2016/05/26/state-senator-from-michigan-who-introduced-anti-trans-legislation-also-a-recipient-of-devos-money/

State Senator Tom Casperson (R-Escanaba) introduced a North Carolina-style bathroom inspection bill right here in Michigan yesterday.

The State Senator from Escanaba has been outspoken on this issue for some time now. Since March of this year, he has been threatening to introduce legislation, after a Department of Education Draft Guidance document, entitled "Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Students" went public.

On March 29, Casperson wrote, *"It is hard to believe that a state board, which is clearly out of touch with Michigan residents, got assistance from equally out of touch unelected bureaucrats to develop such a document to fundamentally change Michigan's public education system without the public's prior knowledge or consent. In the pursuit of social justice, this so-called draft guidance document creates numerous problems, from the elimination of parental authority and notification to threatening student safety and beyond. My bill would stop this policy dead in its tracks."*

More DeVos Funding

Campaign Finance records show that in 2014, the DeVos family contributed **$9,000** to Senator Casperson. In addition, the DeVos family between 2013/2014 was the largest contributor to the Senate Republican Campaign Committee in Michigan, contributing in that 2-year span **$520,000**. The next closest contributor was was Blue Cross/Blue Shield at $60,000.

Petition Against Legislation

There is an online petition attempting to stop Senator Casperson's anti-Trans legislation, organized by Equality Michigan. To sign the petition, click **here**.

The DeVos Family, MLive and the Buying of Elections

https://griid.org/2016/08/01/the-devos-family-mlive-and-the-buying-of-elections/

Last Friday, **MLive posted some information** on which candidates in West Michigan are receiving money from the DeVos family. I say posted some information, because what information was given, was the absolute minimum and required virtually no work on the part of MLive staff.

The MLive posting essentially consisted of slides with a picture of the DeVos family and the candidates they have contributed to just before the August 2nd primary. Each slide has a little bit of text, but the posting provides no analysis, not how many other candidates of political action committees the DeVos family has contributed to in the most recent campaign finance disclosure cycle.

MLive once again demonstrates that they will not challenge or investigate the political and economic influence of the most powerful family in West Michigan.

At a closer and more honest look at the recent campaign donations from the DeVos family reveals that their influence is much greater than what MLive suggests.

First, here is a complete listing of the DeVos family contributions between June 2nd and July 28 of 2016. One can see that there are many more candidates that the family has contributed to beyond West Michigan. It is also evident that the organizations and political action committees they have contributed to have been the real beneficiaries of the DeVos money.

Second, the total amount the DeVos family contributed to influence electoral outcomes in just 56 days is roughly $1.5 million. This means that the family contributed **$26,785 per day** during this 56-day period. In other words, the DeVos family contributed the same amount of money in one day ($26,785) that thousands of people in Grand Rapids make in one year.

Third, the MLive posting provides no analysis or information on what the DeVos money buys in terms of policy. This is the most relevant question for journalists to ask, since rich people don't give money just for the hell of it, but to determine policy outcomes. For example, State Representative Daniela Garcia received $9,000 from the DeVos family on July 14th. One can easily check what the representative from the 90th District is voting for and which bill she is introducing by going to **this link**. Not surprising, Rep.

Garcia has voted to support policies that benefit businesses, policies that negatively impact unions and policies that benefit the push to privatize public education. Any of the candidates, that are incumbents, in which the DeVos family has given money to recently, could easily have been looked at the determine how they vote. This is what real journalism would do.

Fourth, MLive completely ignored the fact that the political action committees and organizations which received the bulk of the DeVos family money in the past two months is a larger issue than what individual candidates receive. It would come as no surprise that the bulk of the DeVos funds during the past two months went to the Republican Party, both at the state and federal level, to spent how they please.

Then there are the funds the DeVos family has contributed to the Great Lakes Education Project and the Michigan Freedom Network, both political action committees that are run by either a member of the DeVos family or a DeVos family operative. Both entities received $250,000 from the DeVos family on July 15.

Betsy DeVos is one of the four board members of the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP). The GLEP is part of a larger national network of organizations that are working to undermine public education. The GLEP is the primary entity work on undermining public education in Michigan and has most recently played a critical role in **state policy decisions on the future of Detroit schools**.

The Michigan Freedom Network is the political action committee of the organization of the **Michigan Freedom Fund**. It's director is Greg McNeilly, a long time DeVos political operative. McNeilly was the campaign manager for the failed gubernatorial campaign of Dick DeVos in 2006. McNeilly is also a board member of GLEP and is the Chief Operating Officer of the DeVos run Windquest Group. McNeilly was quoted in an MLive article from last year, boasting how political donations are the most protected form of speech:

"Political speech is the most protected form of speech, and we need more people participating at higher levels. We should applaud anyone who is leading on that dimension and try to encourage greater participation in our great American experiment."

MLive completely fails to truly inform the public about the power and influence of the DeVos family. Therefore, we should never rely on it as a source to inform us about how power functions. Instead, we need to create our own mechanisms to inform and mobilize the public to challenge power, whether it is private or government power.

West Michigan Congressional Districts Funded by the Rich and Powerful

https://griid.org/2016/08/08/west-michigan-congressional-districts-funded-by-the-rich-and-powerful/

Last week we reported on how much money the DeVos Family spent just 2 months before the August 2nd Primary election. The West Michigan family spent $1.5 million during the 56 day period just prior to the August Primary, which means they spent $26,785 a day to buy candidates and political influence at the state level.

Now we turn to the two congressional districts that make up Grand Rapids and Holland, the 2nd and 3rd Congressional Districts.

These two congressional races have been dominated by Republicans for decades and that trend is not going to change in the near future. According to **OpenSecrets.org**, the Republican candidates (both incumbents) have a huge advantage in funding compared to their Democratic challengers.

In the 2nd Congressional race, Bill Huizenga has raised $1,047,454, compared to $11,235 raised by the challenger, Dennis Murphy. The disparity in campaign funding is roughly the same in the 3rd Congressional race, with Justin Amash raising $561,183, compared to a mere $8,157, raised by Douglas Smith. What is more interesting than the amounts that have been raised in both Congressional Districts is the sources of those campaign contributions.

Again, according to **OpenSecrets**, Bill Huizenga has raised money from some of the wealthiest entities in the state.

One can see from the graph above that the top contributor so far to Huizenga's campaign is the DeVos/Van Andel run Amway/Alticor Inc. at $18,000. This contribution from Amway is more than the total amount raised by the Democratic challenger. The second largest donor to Huizenga's campaign is Rock Holdings, which is the parent company of Quicken Loans, owned by billionaire Dan Gilbert.

Huizenga has also received money from Port City Group, CMS Energy, insurance companies and Koch Industries. Koch Industries is none other than the company owned and run by the **Koch Brothers**, who are in many ways the national version of what the DeVos family is to Michigan.

In the 3rd Congressional race, Justin Amash dominates in fund raising. One can see from the graph above that the largest contributor so far has been Michigan Industrial Tools, which is a company founded by the father of Justin Amash. The second largest contributor is S Abraham & Sons, owned and operated by a wealthy Arab-American family in West Michigan.

The third largest contributor to the Amash campaign is the Windquest Group, which is part of the DeVos family empire. In addition to the Windquest Group, Amway, RDV Corp and DP Fox ventures have also contributed to the Amash campaign and all of them are part of the DeVos family empire.

Other major contributors to the Amash campaign are Wolverine Gas & OIl and Autocam Corp. These two companies are run by some of the richest men in West Michigan, Sydney Jansma (Wolverine Gas & Oil) and John Kennedy (Autocam Corp). **Jansma is a former board member of the Acton Institute and has been a major player fracking throughout Michigan in recent years**.

Kennedy is a major player in West Michigan politics and throughout the state. One can see from the chart on the right that both Kennedy and his wife have contributed to hundreds of thousands to candidates across the state and the fifth largest donor to Michigan Political Committees from 2013 – 2014, according to **a report** from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network. (see chart below) The Autocam Corp CEO sits on the board of the West Michigan Policy Forum and the Acton Institute.

More clear evidence that money from the capitalist class is what determines the electoral process in this country.

DeVos Family has a financial hand in the 10 most contested House races in Michigan

https://griid.org/2016/09/14/devos-family-has-a-financial-hand-in-the-10-most-contested-house-races-in-michigan/

As we **reported last month**, the DeVos Family wants to make sure that the election outcome for Michigan in November works in their favor.

As one of the wealthiest families in Michigan, the DeVos Family knows that contributing so much money to candidates not only increases their chance that their candidates will win, but that their candidates will also pass policy which benefits their interests.

According to the **research conducted by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network**, the DeVos Family has contributed funds to eight of the top ten most hotly contested races for the House in Michigan.

Here are the 8 out of the top 10 most hotly contested races for the House in Michigan and how much money the DeVos Family has contributed:

> **91st House District: Collene Lamonte vs Rep. Holly Hughes – DeVos Family has contributed $9,000 to Hughes**
> **39th House District: Michael Stack vs Rep. Klint Kesto – DeVos Family has contributed $9,000 to Kesto**
> **62nd House District: Jim Haadsma vs Rep. John Bizon – DeVos Family has contributed $9,000 to Bizon**
> **24th House District: Steve Marino vs Dana Camphous – DeVos Family has contributed $9,000 to Marino**
> **71st House District: Rep. Tom Barrett vs Theresa Abed – DeVos Family has contributed $9,000 to Barrett**
> **66th House District: Annie Brown vs Beth Griffin – DeVos Family has contributed $9,000 to Griffin**
> **61st House District: John Fisher vs Rep. Brandt Idem – DeVos Family has contributed $9,000 to Iden**
> **104th House District: Rep. Larry Inman vs Betsy Coffia – DeVos Family has contributed $9,000 to Inman**

DeVos Family now funding mostly out of state elections through PACs

https://griid.org/2016/09/29/devos-family-now-funding-mostly-out-of-state-elections-through-pacs/

According to **data from the Center for Responsive Politics**, the DeVos Family has shifted their political donations from Republican Presidential candidates to Political Action Committee, mostly operating outside of Michigan.

Richard and Helen DeVos have contributed the most, but all of their children and their spouses are also major contributors as of June of this year. Many of the DeVos Family

members had been making sizable contributions to Republican Presidential candidates like Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio and Carly Fiorina. However, as these GOP candidates dropped out, the DeVos Family then shifted their funds to the Republican National Committee, Freedom Partners and American Crossroads.

In the Grand Rapids area, **DeVos Family members were the Top 46 contributors in the current electoral cycle**, ranging from $50,000 with each contribution, to half a million for each contribution. The most recent donation was in June of 2016, which means it is likely that they will contribute a million or more before the November election.

You can see in the graphic above how this election cycle has resulted in significantly larger contributions, since we are in the **Citizens United era**.

The three top recipients of the money from West Michigan, mostly from the DeVos Family, have all received $1,000,000 or more in contributions. The Republican National Committee has received $1,537.805, the Freedom Partners Action Fund has received $1,500,000 and American Crossroads has received $1,000,000 so far in the current election cycle.

Freedom Partners

According to SourceWatch, “Freedom Partners describes itself as a nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(6) chamber of commerce that promotes the benefits of free markets and a free society. **Koch Industries** issued a press release stating that Freedom Partners is legally separate from the corporation, but Freedom Partners is controlled by Koch loyalists such as **Marc Short**. *Politico* describes the group as the **Koch brothers**‘ secret bank. Additionally, a document discovered after the winter 2014 donor meeting revealed extensive one-on-one meetings between donors and representatives of the political, corporate, and philanthropic wings of the Koch world.”

Freedom Partners is currently directing most of their funds to Senate battles in the following states: Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Indiana and Nevada. However, Freedom Partners also provides funding for national groups like the Heritage Foundation and the US Chamber of Commerce, along with local groups like the **West Michigan Policy Forum**. This is another way for the DeVos Family to contribute to West Michigan political organizations, without it being well know that they are the primary funders.

American Crossroads

Again, according to SourceWatch, “American Crossroads is a conservative Super PAC created in 2010 by right-wing political operatives and advised by **Karl Rove** and former **RNC**chairman **Ed Gillespie** to support Republican candidates. Thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court’s January 2010 ***Citizens United*** decision and the related decision in **Speechnow.org v. FEC**, Super PACs like American Crossroads can legally advocate for or against political candidates without restrictions on the amount of money they can raise from individuals and corporations.”

American Crossroads is also closely connected to the US Chamber of Commerce, coordinating strategic efforts and political ad buys in several states throughout the country. American Crossroads is led by President and CEO **Stephen Law**, a former chief lawyer for the **Chamber of Commerce**.

As we have **reported before**, the DeVos Family has contributing significantly to effecting the outcome of elections in Michigan, but it is also clear that they want to influence elections in numerous states as well. The DeVos Family might be based in West Michigan, but their political reach is far and wide.

Despite the headline, MLive article doesn’t really tell us how the DeVos family influences education policy in Michigan

https://griid.org/2016/12/26/despite-the-headline-mlive-article-doesnt-really-tell-us-how-the-devos-family-influences-education-policy-in-michigan/

On Saturday, MLive ran yet another questionable story on the political influence of the DeVos Family, entitled, ***How the DeVos family has helped shape education policy in Michigan***. This story is on the heals of an article that **MLive ran last Monday** that also demonstrates lazy journalism on the leading Grand Rapids news source.

The article is centered around President-elect Donald Trump’s choice for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. However, the story frames the issue in such a way as to soften, even minimize, the level of influence that the DeVos Family has had on education policy in Michigan.

In the second paragraph, the MLive article states:

“In addition to DeVos’ leadership roles for several education policy organizations, she and her family have used their money and influence as a means to **shape major education policy initiatives** in Michigan.”

The article never mentions what leadership roles Betsy DeVos plays in organizations that deal with education policy. It would serve the public well to have a better understanding of organizations like **American Federation for Children** , the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP) and the Alliance for School Choice. Only GLEP is mentioned in the article.

In addition, the hyper-link provided in the MLive article takes readers to a 9 slide piece that does little to illuminate how the DeVos family has shaped education policy in Michigan. A few slides provide brief commentary on the role of the Great Lakes Education Project on Detroit Public Schools, one on the DeVos-led failed attempt to get a school voucher policy adopted in Michigan in 2000, along with several slides that make it sound as if the DeVos family philanthropy is purely benevolent. (See our **article on the political nature of DeVos family philanthropy**)

The December 24 MLive article then talks about three education policy areas in Michigan that the DeVos family has had some influence; Detroit Public Schools, School Choice and Vouchers.

The section on the Detroit Public Schools is the first time in the article that we are informed about the deep involvement of the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP). The MLive story does offer up some numbers on financial contributions by the DeVos family in regards to influencing the Detroit Public School policy outcome and even **links to a Michigan Campaign Finance Network article** about the family's contribution to politicians that influenced the outcome of the Detroit Public Schools policy debate. However, what the MLive article doesn't tell you is that in the November election, 49 of 53 candidates endorsed by GLEP won in the general election for the Michigan House of Representatives. Here is a list of those endorsed by GLEP that won in November.

• District #17: Rep-Elect Joe Bellino (Monroe)

• District #19: Rep. Laura Cox (Livonia)

• District #20: Rep-Elect Jeff Noble (Plymouth)

• District #24: Rep-Elect Steve Marino (Harrison Township)

• District #30: Rep-Elect Diana Farrington (Utica)

• District #32: Rep-Elect Pamela Hornberger (Chesterfield Township)

• District #33: Rep-Elect Jeff Yaroch (Richmond)

• District #38: Rep. Kathy Crawford (Lyon Township)

• District #39: Rep. Klint Kesto (Commerce Twp)

- District #42: Rep. Lana Theis (Brighton)
- District #44: Rep. Jim Runestad (Milford Township)
- District #45: Rep. Michael Webber (Rochester)
- District #47: Rep. Hank Vaupel (Howell)
- District #51: Rep. Joe Graves (Argentine Township)
- District #56: Rep. Jason Sheppard (Temperance)
- District #57: Rep-Elect Bronna Kahle (Adrian Township)
- District #58: Rep. Eric Leutheuser (Hillsdale)
- District #59: Rep. Aaron Miller (Sturgis)
- District #61: Rep. Brandt Iden (Oshtemo)
- District #63: Rep. David Maturen (Brady Township)
- District #64: Rep-Elect Julie Alexander (Hanover)
- District #66: Rep-Elect Beth Griffin (South Haven)
- District #70: Rep-Elect James Lower (Cedar Lake)
- District #71: Rep. Tom Barrett (Charlotte)
- District #72: Rep-Elect Steve Johnson (Shelbyville)
- District #73: Rep. Chris Afendoulis (Grand Rapids Township)
- District #74: Rep. Rob VerHeulen (Walker)
- District #79: Rep-Elect Kim LaSata (St. Joseph)
- District #80: Rep. Mary Whiteford (Casco Township)
- District #81: Rep. Dan Lauwers (Brockway Township)
- District #83: Rep-Elect Shane Hernandez (Port Huron)
- District #86: Rep-Elect Thomas Albert (Belding)
- District #87: Rep-Elect Julie Calley (Portland)
- District #89: Rep-Elect Jim Lilly (Park Township)
- District #90: Rep. Daniela Garcia (Holland)

• District #91: Rep. Holly Hughes (White River Township)

• District #93: Rep. Tom Leonard (DeWitt Township)

• District #94: Rep. Tim Kelly (Saginaw Township)

• District #97: Rep-Elect Jason Wentworth (Clare)

• District #98: Rep. Gary Glenn (Midland)

• District # 99: Rep-Elect Roger Hauck (Union Township)

• District #100: Rep-Elect Scott VanSingel (Grant)

• District #101: Rep-Elect Curt VanderWall (Ludington)

• District #102: Rep-Elect Michele Hoitenga (Manton)

• District #103: Rep-Elect Daire Rendon (Lake City)

• District #105: Rep. Triston Cole (Mancelona)

• District #106: Rep-Elect Sue Allor (Wolverine)

• District #107: Rep. Lee Chatfield (Levering)

• District #108: Rep-Elect Beau LaFave (Iron Mountain)

Lastly, the MLive information on the Detroit Public School issue doesn't reflect anywhere near what independent, grassroots media has reported on this. See this **powerful article from the Voice of Detroit** on how the undermining of public education in Detroit is both an attack on black children and working class families.

School Choice and Vouchers

The remaining two sections of the MLive article are even thinner than the section on the Detroit Public Schools. On the matter of School Choice, the article states, "*DeVos and her affiliated groups also supported a 2011 law that lifted Michigan's cap on charter schools."* Unfortunately, the MLive article provides no specifics in terms of which candidates were provided with funding to promote the increase in the number of charter schools in Michigan.

The section on vouchers merely mentions the failed DeVos-led attempt to get a ballot initiative passed in 2000 that would divert money away from public education to private and religious schools.

While we have come to expect this type of journalism from MLive, it doesn't mean we have to accept it. Time and time again, MLive makes sure that any reporting having to do with the DeVos family doesn't ask any serious questions or even attempts to

investigate the real power and influence they have on education and so many other aspects of life in Grand Rapids and throughout the state.

Buying Endorsements: Rep. Huizenga and Betsy DeVos

https://griid.org/2017/01/16/buying-endorsements-rep-huizenga-and-betsy-devos/

On Thursday, Michigan Republican Congressman from the 2nd District, Bill Huizenga stated on the House floor that he endorsed Betsy DeVos as Donal Trump's choice for Secretary of Education.

MLive reported on Friday that Huizenga was endorsing DeVos. The MLive story has the GOP Congressman as saying that DeVos was, *"passionate and dedicated servant with a big heart for kids" who has made it her life's mission to ensure access to education for all children.*

However, there was no concrete evidence provided by Huizenga to support such a statement and MLive didn't bother to verify the claim either.

That Huizenga endorses Betsy DeVos as Trump's pick for Secretary of Education is in no way a surprise. You can see in the graph below that over Huizenga's career as the 2nd Congressional Representative, he has received more money from DeVos Family-owned entities (Amway & Windquest Group) than any other source as a candidate, **at a total of $128,200**.

This information is not included in Rep. Huizenga's Press Release from last week, nor in the MLive story, even though it seems pretty essential to understanding why the Congressman would enthusiastically endorse Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education.



More Right Wing money gets behind Betsy DeVos nomination for Secretary of Education in Ad Campaigns

https://griid.org/2017/02/07/more-right-wing-money-gets-behind-betsy-devos-nomination-for-secretary-of-education-in-ad-campaigns/

Yesterday, the watchdog organization, the **Center for Public Integrity noted** that two conservative non-profit organizations are spending lots of money to run ad campaigns in states with Senators who haven't as yet completely committed to voting for DeVos.

The two groups are **Club for Growth** and **America Next**. Founded in 1999, Club for Growth has focused much of their energy around economic issues, such as taxes and pushing a pro-capitalism agenda. Club for Growth has also aggressively back candidates running for federal office, candidates like West Michigan's Justin Amash.

According to the Club for Growth website, under the heading, We Are Determined to see Betsy DeVos win confirmation, it states:

The Club for Growth released the following statement from its president, David McIntosh, about its new television ad supporting the nomination of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education:

"The Club for Growth enthusiastically endorsed Betsy DeVos when President Trump nominated her in December, and we are determined to see her win confirmation," said ***Club for Growth president David McIntosh****. "We expected the union-backed liberals to oppose her, but it's especially troubling to see Senators in conservative states who are wavering on her nomination because of union pressure. We're running these ads to make sure constituents understand what's at stake in this nomination battle."*

The Club for Growth is airing TV ads in ***North Dakota*** *and* ***West Virginia****, urging constituents to call their Senator about the DeVos nomination.*

Here is an ad that Club for Growth is running.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

America Next is an organization much newer to partisan politics. Founded in 2015, America Next was started by long-time Republican Bobby Jindal and seeks to influence the federal policy in four main areas: Education, Defense, Energy and Health Care.

In reading the platform they have for Education Policy, one can see why they are spending money to get Betsy DeVos nominated. The **44 page Education Policy report** is a public educator's worst nightmare.

Here is the ad campaign that America First is running to get Betsy DeVos nominated as Education Secretary.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

The Center for Public Integrity article also states:

*The Club for Growth and America Next both didn't respond to a request for comment from the **Center for Public Integrity**. Club for Growth is also running digital ads on Twitter and on websites such as **National Review**. The 45Committee, another conservative nonprofit whose sister super PAC **supported** **Trump** during the 2016 election, has also released a pro-DeVos **web promotion**.*

8 of Michigan's top 26 Families making political contributions in the last election cycle are from West MI

https://griid.org/2017/06/27/8-of-michigans-top-26-families-making-political-contributions-in-the-last-election-cycle-are-from-west-mi/

A **new report** from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, reports that the top 40 families in Michigan contributed a total of $44 million dollars in the last election cycle.

Not surprising, the DeVos Family contributed to the most on that last at $15 million in the 2015 – 2016 election cycle.

However, it is important for those who live in West Michigan to recognize that there were other families in this area that also contributed a significant amount of money to influence the 2015-2016 election cycle. These are all families that make up the local power structure, some have large foundation, many sit on boards of non-profits, others contribute to local colleges and many are involved with groups like the West Michigan Policy Forum, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, Grand Action and the Econ Club.

The amount of money from this list, provided by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, includes federal and state money. At the federal level the families from West

Michigan primarily gave to the Republican Party, but in some cases they provided funds to candidates like Rep. Justin Amash and Rep. Bill Huizenga.

Contributions at the state level have receive less attention, which is unfortunate, since state policy often impacts people more directly than federal policy. For example, here is just a sampling of state laws that have been passed, which was introduced and promoted by lawmakers that the DeVos Family made contributions to:

> In June of 2015 Governor Snyder signed into law **HB 4052**, a law that **takes away control of local municipalities.**
> In July of 2015, Michigan adopted **HB 4188**. This legislation, often framed as a religious freedom bill, **allows adoption agencies in Michigan the ability to deny LGBT couples/partners/families from adopting**.
> **Public Act 269** was signed into law in December of 2015, by Gov. Snyder. This act doubles the amount of money that can be contributed to Political Action Committees and it Prohibits corporations from collecting contributions from its employees to a union's PAC.
> They spent $1.2 million in 2016 to influence policymakers (a total of 15) on the issue of **Detroit School privatization**.

Now, let's look at the other 7 families from West MI that were in the top 26 in the state on political contributions in the 2015 – 2016 election cycle.

Jandernoa Family (42 North Partners, Perrigo) – Contributed $827,500

Kennedy Family (Autocam) – Contributed $723,100

Van Andel Family (Amway) – Contributed $667,300

J.C. Huizenga (National Heritage Academies, Huizenga Group) – Contributed $445,489

Meijer Family (Meijer) – Contributed $386,400

Haworth Family (Haworth Inc.) – Contributed $367,536

Secchia Family (Sibsco) – Contributed $317,380

What we are listing below are some of the committees and State Legislators that these families from West Michigan gave money to in the 2015 – 2016 election cycle. The Michigan Campaign Finance Network provides **a document** that lists the top 40 Families in Michigan, the breakdown for Federal and state contributions and the top recipients.

Top donors to the House Republican Campaign Committee for 2015-2016: DeVos family, $720,000, Kennedy family, $160,000, Haworth family, $80,000, Meijer Inc. PAC, $60,000, J.C. Huizenga, $55,000, Michael Jandernoa, $50,000

Top donors to the Senate Republican Campaign Committee for 2015-2016: DeVos family, $121,000, J.C. Huizenga, $55,000, Meijer Inc. PAC, $40,000, David Van Andel, $40,000

20th House District, Rep. Jeff Noble – DeVos family, $9,000

30th House District, Rep. Diana Farrington – DeVos family, $8,000

32nd House District, Rep. Pamela Hornberger – DeVos family, $9,000

38th House District, Rep. Kathy Crawford – DeVos family, $9,000, Haworth family, $2,000

39th House District, Rep. Klint Kesto – DeVos family, $9,000

41st House District, Rep. Martin Howrylak – Meijer PAC, $2,000

43rd House District, Rep. Jim Tedder – Kennedy family, Autocam, $2,000

45th House District, Rep. Mike Webber – Kennedy family, $2,000

51st House District, Rep. Joseph Graves – DeVos family, $8,200, Haworth family, Haworth Inc., $2,000

56th House District, Rep. Jason Sheppard – Meijer PAC, $3,000

57th House District, Rep. Bronna Kahle – DeVos family, $9,000

61st House District, Rep. Brandt Iden – DeVos family, $9,000, Meijer PAC, $4,000

62nd House District, Rep. John Bizon – DeVos family, $9,000

66th House District, Rep. Beth Griffin – DeVos family, $9,000

70th House District, Rep. James Lower – DeVos family, $9,000, Haworth family, Haworth Inc., $2,000

71st House District, Rep. Tom Barrett – DeVos family, $9,000

72nd House District, Rep. Steve Johnson – Peter Secchia, retired, $1,000, Matthew Haworth, Haworth Inc., $1,000

73rd House District, Rep. Chris Afendoulis – John Kennedy, Autocam, $5,000, Meijer PAC, $3,500

74th House District, Rep. Rob VerHeulen – DeVos family, $9,000, Meijer PAC of Michigan, $2,500, Kennedy family, $2,000, Haworth family, $2,000

77th House District, Rep. Tommy Brann – DeVos family, $9,000, Haworth family, Haworth Inc., $2,000, Michael Jandernoa, 42 North Partners, $1,000, Peter Secchia, Sibsco, $1,000

80th House District, Rep. Mary Whiteford – Haworth family, Haworth Inc., $2,000, Peter Secchia, Sibisco LLC, $1,000, Michael Jandernoa, 42 North, $1,000

82nd Houst District, Rep. Gary Howell – DeVos family, $9,000

85th House District, Rep. Ben Frederick – DeVos family, $9,000, Jandernoa family, 42 North Partners, $2,000

89th House District, Rep. Jim Lilly – DeVos family, $9,000, Haworth family, Haworth Inc., $2,000

90th House District, Rep. Daniela Garcia – DeVos family, $9,000, Haworth family, $3,000, Kennedy family, Autocam, $2,000, Meijer PAC, $2,000

91st House District, Rep. Holly Hughes – DeVos family, $9,000

93rd House District, Rep. Tom Leonard – DeVos family, $9,000

97th House District, Rep. Jason Wentworth – DeVos family, $9,000, Haworth family, Haworth Inc., $2,000

99th House District, Rep. Roger Hauck – DeVos family, $7,000

101st House District, Rep. Curt VanderWall – DeVos family, $9,000

102nd House District, Rep. Michele Hoitenga – J.C. Huizenga, Huizenga Group, $1,000

103rd House District, Rep. Daire Rendon – DeVos family $9,000, Haworth family, Haworth, $2,000

104th House District, Rep. Larry Inman – DeVos family, $9,000

106th House DIstrict, Rep. Sue Allor – DeVos family, $9,000

107th House District, Rep. Lee Chatfield – DeVos family, $9,000, Haworth family, Haworth International, $2,000

108th House District, Rep. Beau LaFave – DeVos family, $9,000, Haworth family, Haworth, $2,000

13th Senate District, Sen. Marty Knollenberg – DeVos family, $3,000

19th Senate District, Sen. Mike Nofs – Meijer PAC, $1,000

28th Senate District, Sen. Peter MacGregor – Michael Jandernoa, $2,000, Meijer PAC, $2,000

29th Senate District, Sen. Dave Hildenbrand – David Van Andel, Van Andel Institute, $2,000

30th Senate District, Sen. Arlan Meekhof – John Kennedy, $50,000, DeVos family, $40,000, Van Andel family, $15,000, Peter Secchia, retired, $10,000, J.C. Huizenga, $10,000, Dick Haworth, $5,000, Meijer PAC, $3,500

32nd Senate District, Sen. Ken Horn – DeVos family, $3,000

Most State Legislators who voted for the new Super PAC bill, have received lots of money from the DeVos Family

https://griid.org/2017/09/25/most-state-legislators-who-voted-for-the-new-super-pac-bill-have-received-lots-of-money-from-the-devos-family/

Last week Governor Rick Snyder signed into law what is being referred to as the Super PAC Bill.

In some ways, this new bill mirrors the federal election funding trend of Citizen's United. However, as the **Michigan Campaign Finance Network** (MCFN) has noted:

*The bill **goes further**, specifically allowing candidates to solicit unlimited contributions to supposedly "independent" Super PACs. It also allows candidates and Super PACs to share certain vendors, like attorneys or other campaign consultants.*

So while an individual donor can give up to $1,000 to a state House candidate's campaign. The candidate could ask the same donor or a corporate entity to give a much larger check to a Super PAC that is going to support the candidate. Because Super PACs can accept corporate contributions, the original sources of their money are notoriously hard to trace.

What this all ends up meaning is that the wealthy capitalist class will have an even greater influence in both electing candidates and legislation that is put forth by the candidates that those with economic power have put in place.

In Michigan, according to the MCFN, the number one non-corporate entity to contribute to candidates for state government has been the DeVos Family. Therefore, we thought it would be useful to look at which members of the Michigan Senate and the House of

Representations have received money from the DeVos Family and which of them voted for the Super PAC bill.

The **Senate Bill 335** passed by a margin of 23 – 12. Of the 23 that voted for the bill, 18 of them have received substantial amounts of money from the DeVos Family during their time in office. Here is the list of those who voted for the Super PAC bill and have received money from the DeVos Family:

Darwin Booher (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Jack Brandenburg (R) has received **$14,000** from the DeVos Family
Tom Casperson (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Pat Colbeck (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Mike Green (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Goeff Hansen (R) has received **$16,000** from the DeVos Family
David Hildenbrand (R) has received **$21,000** from the DeVos Family
Ken Horn (R) has received **$3,000** from the DeVos Family
Joe Hune (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Marty Knollenberg (R) has received **$21,000** from the DeVos Family
Mike Kowall (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Peter MacGregor (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Jim Marleau (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Arlan Meekhof (R) has received **$54,000** from the DeVos Family
John Proos (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
David Robertson (R) has received **$7,000** from the DeVos Family
Wayne Schmidt (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Tonya Schuitmaker (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family

In the Michigan House the Super PAC bill passed by a margin of 62-45. Of the 62 that voted for the measure, 31 have also been recipients of DeVos Family money over the years. Here is that list:

Chris Afendoulis (R) has received **$4,500**from the DeVos Family
Sue Allor (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Tom Barrett (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
John Bizon (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Tommy Brann (R) has received **$9,000**from the DeVos Family
Edward Canfield (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Lee Chatfield (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Kathy Crawford (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Diana Farrington (R) has received **$8,000** from the DeVos Family
Ben Frederick (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Daniela Garcia (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Joe Graves (R) has received **$17,200** from the DeVos Family
Beth Griffin (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family

Roger Hauck (R) has received **$7,000** from the DeVos Family
Pamela Hornberger (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Gary Howell (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Holly Hughes (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Brandt Iden (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Larry Inman (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Bronna Kahle (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Klint Kesto (R) has received **$18,000** from the DeVos Family
Beau LaFave (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Jim Lilly (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
James Lower (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Steve Marino (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Jeff Noble (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Daire Rendon (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Jason Sheppard (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Curt VanderWall (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Rob Verheulen (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family
Jason Wentworth (R) has received **$9,000** from the DeVos Family

In most of the cases where members of the Michigan Legislature didn't receive money from the DeVos Family and did vote for the Super PAC bill, they did receive substantial amounts of money from Michigan Chamber of Commerce and the Michigan Farm Bureau, both of which lobbied for the legislation.

In addition, there were also numerous cases where legislators who did not receive funding from the DeVos Family, but did receive funds from **other families who are part of the West Michigan Power Structure**; such as the Meijer Family, Peter Secchia, Michael Jandernoa and John Kennedy.

However, it seems clear that the DeVos Family, a family who stands to benefit from the new legislation, which will allow for more individual campaign contributions and PAC money to be raised for candidates, will be one of the real winners of the new bill signed last week by Gov. Rick Snyder.

Lastly, so as not to forget Governor Snyder's relationship to the DeVos Family, he has received $142,830 from them since he first ran as Governor for Michigan.

Michigan Senate passes bill to allow Charter Schools to use money raised from property tax: DeVos money supported Senators who co-sponsored legislation

https://griid.org/2017/10/26/michigan-senate-passes-bill-to-allow-charter-schools-to-use-money-raised-from-property-tax-devos-money-supported-senators-who-co-sponsored-legislation/

Last week, **SB 0574** was passed by the Michigan Senate, which would allow Charter Schools to receive funding from property tax money raised in school districts.
An **analysis of the bill states**:

One key to attracting families and businesses to Michigan is building strong school systems. Strengthening Michigan's schools will bolster the State's future workforce and help develop a strong talent pipeline within the State. Charter

schools are a growing part of the educational system in Michigan and contribute to the strength of its communities by providing students with many unique educational opportunities that traditional public schools cannot reproduce.

Another section in the analysis looks specifically at the Kent Intermediate School District, and states:

In Kent Intermediate School District, for example, more than 14,000 students attend public school academies. A recent millage placed before the voters in that ISD will generate approximately $20.0 million over the next 10 years for schools there. If the bill had already been enacted, it could have allowed all students in Kent ISD, rather than just those who attend traditional public schools, to benefit from that money.

Senator Dave Hildenbrand, who introduced the bill was quoted in the **Detroit News** as saying,

"*I introduced this bill because there's over 14,000 public school students in Kent County that are not being treated fairly. They're not receiving the same resources as other public school students in our county.*"

The other Senator co-sponsors of this bill were Senator's Phil Pavlov, Pat Colbeck, Mike Shirkey, Peter MacGregor and Mike Kowall. Together with Sen. Hildenbrand, they have been the recipients of money from West Michigan's wealthiest families, including the DeVos Family, the Meijer Family and John Kennedy. (Source: Michigan Campaign Finance Network **http://mcfn.org/donor-tracking**)

So, on the day before that US Secretary of Education **Betsy DeVos appeared in Grand Rapids at the Acton Institute gala**, the Michigan Senate passing legislation that fits in perfectly with what Betsy DeVos has been lobbying for over the past two decades, the use of public money for charter schools.

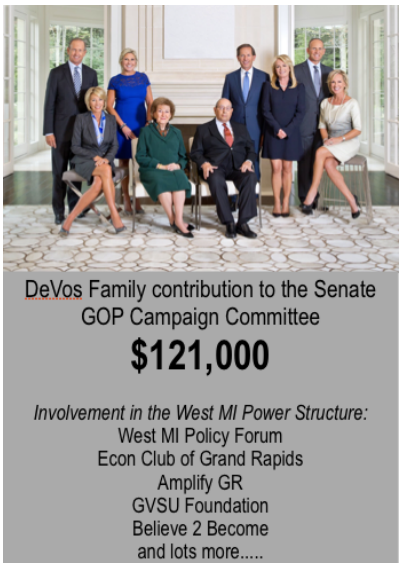
The West MI Power Structure is gearing up for 2018 Election with their money

https://griid.org/2017/11/01/the-west-mi-power-structure-is-gearing-up-for-2018-election-with-their-money/

Yesterday, the Michigan Campaign Finance Network **posted an article** looking at the organizations and families contributing the most money (as of Oct 20, 2017) to the 2018 elections at the state level in Michigan.

The data compiled by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network looks specifically at the campaign contributions that are being funneled through the House Democratic Fund, the Senate Democratic Fund, the House Republican Campaign Committee and the Senate Republican Campaign Committee.

They list several of the members of the West MI Power Structure as major contributors and we decided to to the campaign contributions to date for the state level together, with images and a brief list of some of the other groups these people are involved with in West Michigan. The groups they are involved in not only influence state policy, they influence the economic and political realities in West Michigan.



DeVos supported Michigan Freedom Fund says anti-gerrymandering group is hyper-partisan

https://griid.org/2017/12/21/devos-supported-michigan-freedom-fund-says-anti-gerrymandering-group-is-hyper-partisan/

A few days ago, the group **Voters Not Politicians** delivered 425,000 signatures to Lansing, hoping to get a 2018 ballot initiative that would put an end to gerrymandering of political districts. One organization that is opposing this effort is the Michigan Freedom Fund.

The **Michigan Freedom Fund** was the creation of Greg McNeilly, a DeVos political operative who also serves as the spokesperson for Dick & Betsy DeVos entity know as the Windquest Group. The Michigan Freedom Fund was created by the DeVos operative McNeilly right around the time that Michigan Governor Rick Snyder was deciding to make Michigan a Right to Work state. It is no coincidence that the Michigan Freedom Fund and Right to Work were happening at the same time. The Michigan Freedom Fund is essentially designed to promote and lobby to neoliberal economic reforms and attack working class efforts and labor unions, which becomes clear when you look at **their Facebook page**.

On the matter of the anti-gerrymandering ballot initiative, here is what the Michigan Freedom Fund had to say:

Voters Not Politicians, the organization submitting signatures today to put Michigan redistricting in the hands of partisan bureaucrats, potentially running afoul of the Voting Rights Act, is led exclusively by partisan Democratic donors, activists, and a Democratic trial attorney, according to public records, the Federal Election Commission and the Michigan Campaign Finance database.

According to campaign finance records, 7 of the 10 members of the ballot committee's leadership have donated a combined $5,648 to Democratic candidates and causes, including Mark Schauer, Virg Bernero, Jennifer Granholm, Hillary Clinton, ACT BLUE, and many more. A list of the donations can be found here.

The Committee's President, Katie Fahey, is a former Hillary Clinton activist who made national news last November when she traveled to New York to participate in Clinton's later-scuttled victory party.

Jim Lancaster, the Committee's attorney, is a longtime, prominent Michigan Democratic trial lawyer.

Vice President and Policy Coordinator Nancy Wang, Canvassing and Field Team Director Jamie Lyons-Eddy, Marketing and Communications Director Amelia Quilon, Advisory Council Director Walt Sorg, Outreach and Data Integrity Director Davia Downey, Education Director Lija Hogan, and Finance Director John Hanieski have all

written personal checks to Democratic candidates or causes. Not one has contributed a penny to a Republican cause or candidate.

"Voters Not Politicians has been dishonest with voters from the start," said Terri Reid, President of the Michigan Freedom Fund. "This organization was created by Democrats, run by Democrats, and, undoubtedly, bankrolled by Democrats. Voters deserve better than this kind of partisan masquerade. They deserve transparency. They deserve the truth."

For an organization that is deeply partisan and is run by a DeVos political operative, the Michigan Freedom Fund has no credibility when it comes to calling out groups for being hyper-partisan.

Having said that, the fact that many Democratic Party operates are behind the anti-gerrymandering campaign is disconcerting. If the ballot initiative passes in 2018, it only means that Voters Not Politician's wants to establish an Independent Citizen Redistricting Commission through a state constitutional amendment. However, what is to prevent that Commission from not being made up of partisan representatives and who will oversee their efforts.

West Michigan Elite amongst the largest contributors to the 2018 Election in the State

https://griid.org/2018/02/02/west-michigan-elite-amongst-the-largest-contributors-to-the-2018-election-in-the-state/

The Michigan Campaign Finance Network is already making it clear that **the 2018 Elections in Michigan will be one of the most expensive in state history**.

In the 2018 Election we will see contributions from numerous sectors, including Political Action Committees (PACs), Caucus Committees, Super PACs, outside funding and an increase in individual candidate contributions.

One area, Caucus Committees, not only demonstrates the outrageous amounts of money that have already been raised in Michigan, the data also shows that West Michigan elites are amongst the top contributors to purchasing the 2018 elections.

According to the **data collected** by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, the top two contributors to the **Senate Republican Campaign Committee** are listed as:

- DeVos Family, Windquest Group and RDV Corp, $240,000
- Kennedy family, Autocam, $60,000

This amount of money is just what was raised in 2017 and we can expect even higher numbers for 2018.

In the **House Republican Campaign Committee**, the top three contributors are from West Michigan:

- DeVos Family, Windquest Group and RDV Corp, $240,000
- Nancy and John Kennedy, Autocam, $80,000
- Secchia family, Sibsco, $80,000

The Republicans have raised significantly larger amounts than the Democrats to date for the 2018 Election and that typically translates in to the GOP continuing to dominate state politics. You can see from the chart below, that the Michigan Republicans have raised in the House and Senate Caucus Committees more than double what the Democrats have raised.

DeVos Family is largest political donors in 6 of the 14 Congressional races in Michigan

https://griid.org/2018/07/18/devos-family-is-largest-political-donors-in-6-of-the-14-congressional-races-in-michigan/

There are still nearly 4 months before the November 2018 elections. This means that the campaigns will get uglier over the coming months and the amount of money contributed and spent will be astronomical.

However, let us be clear that the majority of money that has been contributed and will be contributed in the remaining months of the 2018 election cycle, is money that comes from the wealthiest families and industries. This is the case all over the country.

Right here in Michigan, we can see that the money coming in for the 14 separate Congressional races is also coming from the wealthiest families. If we are looking at the wealthiest families in West Michigan, then we need look no further than the DeVos Family, **which has been the largest political contributor in Michigan for years.**

Of the 14 Congressional races the DeVos Family is a major contributor in 6 of those races. There are some races that will not be close and some races that will certainly go Democratic (and have for years), so the DeVos Family strategically spends their money on races that are likely to result in a won for the candidates they are backing.

What follows is **data from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network**, specifically for the six Congressional districts that the DeVos Family is making major contributions:

2nd Congressional District Bill Huizenga DeVos Family Contribution $13,500
3rd Congressional District Justin Amash DeVos Family Contribution $13,500
4th Congressional District John Moolenaar DeVos Family Contribution $13,500
6th Congressional District Fred Upton DeVos Family Contribution $27,000
10th Congressional District Paul Mitchell DeVos Family Contribution $13,500
11th Congressional District Klint Kesto DeVos Family Contribution $5,400
Total DeVos Family Contributions in the Michigan Congressional Races: $77,400

Someone recently asked me why I have it in for the DeVos Family. Any family that can buy elections, but political access and impose public policy on society that fits their ideological worldview should be exposed and resisted, not matter who they are. It just happens that the DeVos Family is at the top of the list from West Michigan. GRIID will continue to expose them and work with anyone who wants to resist their oppressive politics.

Election contributions by zip code in Grand Rapids: DeVos Family is again on top

https://griid.org/2018/08/21/election-contributions-by-zip-code-in-grand-rapids-devos-family-is-again-on-top/

The most recent data is now available for election contributions in the 2017-2018 election cycle.

There numerous sources available to find this data, such as the **Michigan Secretary of State**, the **Michigan Campaign Finance Network** and the **Center for Responsive Politics**.

On the Center for Responsive Politics site, you can also search by zip code and see who is contributing the most to elections in your area. For example, the **49503 zip code**, which includes downtown Grand Rapids, contributes more money than any other zip code in the city. And the large amount of money coming from the 49503 zip code is almost exclusively because of the DeVos Family.

The DeVos Family owns homes all around the country, but they use their downtown Grand Rapids address as the address for political contributions, according to the Federal Election Commission.

The graphic below is a listing of the 10 contributions from the 49503 zip code and not surprising, all of them are from the DeVos Family.

Contributor	Occupation	Amount	Date	Recipient
DEVOS, RICHARD M MR	RETIRED	$1,000,000	02/28/2018	Freedom Partners Action Fund
DEVOS, SUZANNE CHERYL	VP CORPORATE AFFAIRS	$100,000	10/31/2017	Congressional Leadership Fund
DEVOS, DANIEL G	CHARIMAN/CEO	$100,000	10/31/2017	Congressional Leadership Fund
DEVOS, RICHARD SR	RETIRED	$100,000	10/31/2017	Congressional Leadership Fund
DEVOS, SUZANNE CHERYL MS	EXECUTIVE	$66,100	12/28/2017	Republican National Cmte
DEVOS, RICHARD M MR SR	EXECUTIVE	$66,100	12/28/2017	Republican National Cmte
DEVOS, RICHARD M MR SR	EXECUTIVE	$66,100	06/20/2018	Republican National Cmte
DEVOS, SUZANNE CHERYL MS	EXECUTIVE	$66,100	06/20/2018	Republican National Cmte
DEVOS, DOUGLAS L	PRESIDENT	$50,000	10/31/2017	Congressional Leadership Fund
DEVOS, MARIA P MRS	SMALL BUSINESS OWNER	$33,900	10/31/2017	National Republican Congressional Cmte

In this next graphic, you can see who the family is making political contributions to.

Recipient	Amount
Freedom Partners Action Fund	$1,000,000
Republican National Cmte	$738,845
Congressional Leadership Fund	$350,000
Republican Party of Michigan	$281,000
National Republican Senatorial Cmte	$169,500
Amway/Alticor Inc	$53,191
National Republican Congressional Cmte	$49,600
James, John (R)	$44,000
Amash, Justin (R)	$37,350
Upton, Fred (R)	$35,400

Considering what we know about the policies and practices of the Republican Party, the amount of money that the DeVos contributes is exactly why we cannot be seduced by any of their other projects like Start Garden, ArtPrize, AmplifyGR or what their foundations give money to. The amount of harm the DeVos Family contributes to through their support of the GOP creates the poverty and social conditions, which often results in people seeking out social services by organizations that many of the DeVos Foundations fund. This dynamic creates a perfect circle, where the DeVos Family political influence leads to a greater wealth gap divide, which leads to non-profits requesting grant money from the family foundations, which generates lots of great PR for the family and it buys the silence of organizations that claim to be part of the solution.



1. Millions to GOP candidates and committees that support policies which benefit the Capitalist class and punishes everyone else.
2. Use their Family Foundations to fund organizations that provide some relief to individuals experiencing poverty. (Note: they support charity work not solutions to systemic problems)
3. They get high praise for their charity work, with the news media failing to link the consequences of political contributions to social consequences and it buys the silence of non-profits who rely on their money.

9 of the top 30 political donors in the state are from West MI, but the DeVos family is number one on the list
https://griid.org/2019/02/24/9-of-the-top-30-political-donors-in-the-state-are-from-west-mi-but-the-devos-family-is-number-one-on-the-list/

With all of the data from the 2017-2018 election cycle now in, we can finally see who the big money contributors were. Many of the names on the list are familiar to most, especially if you in West Michigan.

In fact, according to a **recent post from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network**, 9 out of the top 30 donors during the last election cycle are from West Michigan.

DeVos family	**$11.3 million**
Kennedy family	**$1.1 million**
Haworth family	**$915,000**
Van Andel family	**$885,000**
Jandernoa family	**$795,000**
J.C. Huizenga	**$762,000**
Secchia family	**$573,000**
Meijer family	**$567,000**
Terri Lynn Land & Dan Hibma	**$450,000**

Many of the people on **this list from West Michigan are also part of the Grand Rapids Power Structure**, in part, because of their own personal wealth, but also because **of the organizations they belong to, organizations which often further their wealth and power**.

Of course, the DeVos family is at the top of this list and has been for years in terms of political contributions from people residing in Michigan. The graph below, provides details of some of the larger contributions that the DeVos family made during the most recent election cycle, with a breakdown funding at the federal and stat level. **Two of the larger PACs the DeVos family contributed were the Great Lakes Education Project (which Betsy DeVos founded) and the Michigan Freedom Network, which is run by DeVos political operative Greg McNeilly**.

One can search on the database provided by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, under the heading **Follow the Money**.

Fulfilling the DeVos Agenda

However, while it is important to look at which candidates/politicians the DeVos family contributed to, it is equally important to look at how they voted. This is important, since the way that the politicians (who received funding from the DeVos family) have voted is completely in step with the ideological values of the most powerful family in West Michigan.

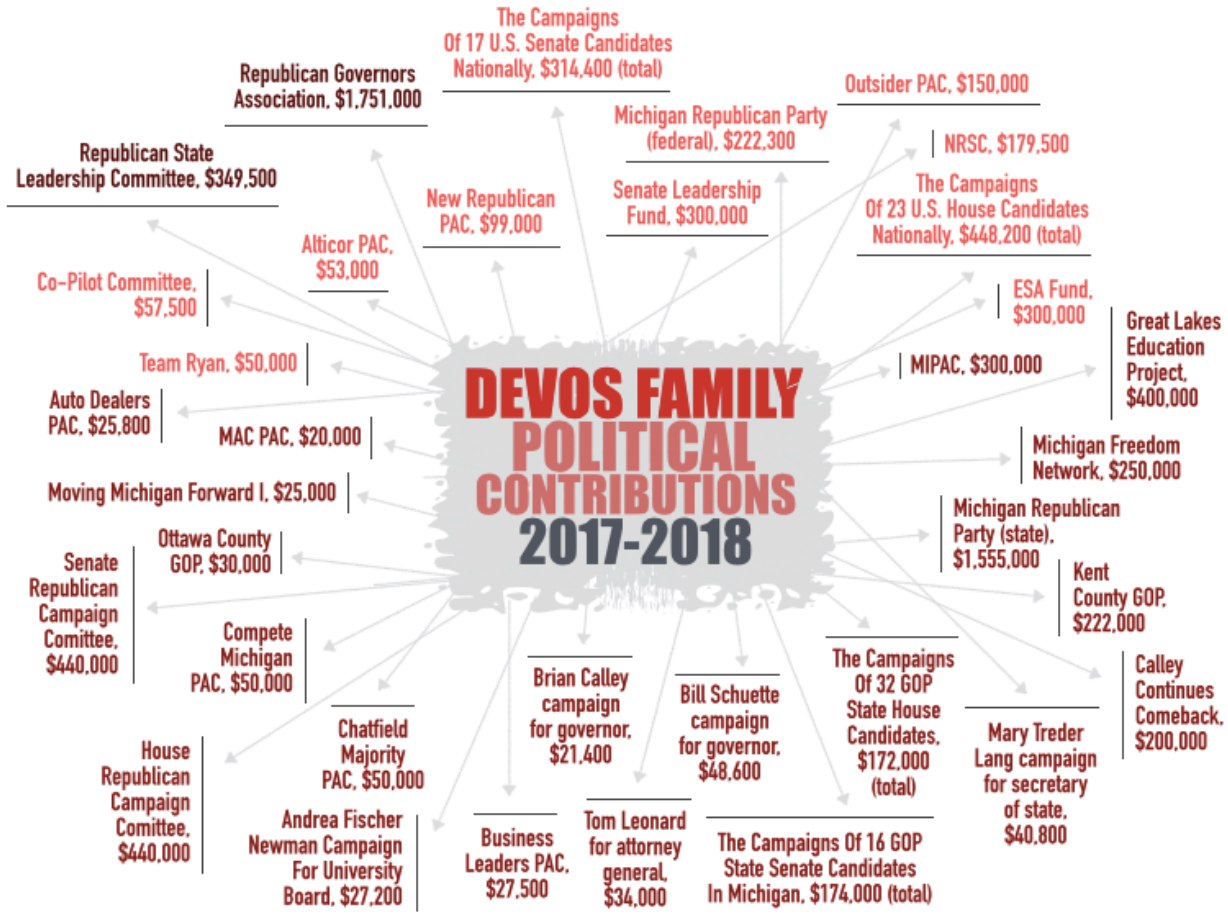
We know that the DeVos family supports charter schools and private schools over public education. We know that the Michigan legislators who have received funding from the DeVos family have voted for directing taxpayer money to charter schools, passed legislation to shift public school teacher pensions away from traditional pension funding to a 401K system.

We know that the DeVos family despises organized labor, so their funded politicians have voted to make Michigan a Right to Work state, have taken away benefits from public sector employees and have undermined unions across the state. In contrast, DeVos funded politicians have voted over and over again for policies that are beneficial to the business community, especially large companies that transfers more public money into the private sector.

We also know that the DeVos family funded politicians have voted to legally allow adoption agencies to prohibit same-sex partners from adopting, plus the same politicians passed legislation to allow for increased campaign contributions to candidates running for office in Michigan.

Lastly, it is important to mention that DeVos-backed candidates have been in favor of the Enbridge's Line 5, which puts the Great Lakes at risk of contamination AND DeVos funded candidates have been absolutely complicit in the racist and ecological disaster that is occurring in Flint.

All of this is what DeVos political money buys in Michigan. So the next time you all want to celebrate ArtPrize, Start Garden, Boxed Water, AmplifyGR or any other aspect of the DeVos empire, remember what this family really represents.



DeVos Family decides to end their financial support of Congressman Amash: What the news media reported and what it omitted

https://griid.org/2019/05/23/devos-family-decides-to-end-their-financial-support-of-congressman-amash-what-the-news-media-reported-and-what-it-omitted/

Whenever the DeVos family does anything, it becomes major news. This is understandable, in part, because they are the **most powerful family in West Michigan**. However, it is also a reflection of how the local news media panders to the family behind the pyramid scheme known as Amway.

The recent news that 3rd Congressional District, Representative Justin Amash, calling for the impeachment of President Donald Trump, has become the biggest news story in the US, since the release of the Mueller Report. While there have been some calls from the Democrats for the impeachment of Trump, no one was expecting a Republican Congressman to do the same.

Rep. Justin Amash, who identifies as a Constitutionalist and a Libertarian, doesn't always vote the same way that most Republicans do. This is partly motivated by Amash's ideological views, but it also has to do with the fact that the 3rd Congressional District has been dominated by the GOP in recent decades. When Vern Ehlers held the same seat, he would vote outside of the GOP framework, particularly on environmental issues. Like Amash, Ehlers was never really challenged, so he could vote outside of party lines, because the district has been considered a "safe" district since Paul Henry first came on the scene in 1984.

This history of the 3rd Congressional District is completely absent from the local news coverage of the DeVos family announcing that they would no longer be contributing to Congressman Justin Amash.

Another aspect of the local news coverage regarding the DeVos family announcement is rather predictable. In looking at the three West Michigan TV station coverage and MLive, the story is driven by what the DeVos family spokesperson (Nick Wasmiller) says in a formal statement. The primary statement reflected in West Michigan news coverage was:

"***DeVos family members have not made campaign contributions to Congressman Amash during this political cycle and based on earlier discussions have no plans to do so."***

"Family members have expressed increasing concerns about a lack of representation for their district, the Third Congressional, and I would say an inability to advance efforts connected to important policy matters."

Like most statements from the DeVos family they are calculating and vague. These comments are calculating, because the DeVos family doesn't do anything on a whim. Whatever one thinks about the most powerful family in West Michigan, they are

strategic and calculating. These statements are also vague, since the DeVos family never fully wants to show their hand. They always hold their cards close to the chest and therefore, only reveal the bare essentials.

West Michigan News Coverage

The **WZZM 13 story**, along with the **WXMI 17 story** are both very short. These stories cite the DeVos spokesperson as a reaction to Amash's call for Trump's impeachment.

The WZZM 13 story also mentions that there are already two GOP challengers for the 3rd Congressional District.

The **WOOD TV 8 story** is a bit longer, since it included a twitter post from Justin Amash on his conclusions of the Mueller Report. The other major difference was that channel 8 cited Kent County Commissioner Jim Saalfeld, who said that what Amash was doing was a publicity stunt for his possible Presidential run.

The **MLive article** was longer than any of the three TV news stories, especially since the MLive reporter actually provided some information about how much money the DeVos family had provided previously to Congressman Amash. MLive cited some data from the 2013-2014 election cycle on how much money the DeVos family contributed, data provided by Craig Mauger, with the Michigan Campaign Finance Network.

However, even though MLive did include some data on DeVos political contributions to Amash, it was a lazy form of journalism, especially since it would be easy to provide comprehensive information on how much money the DeVos family has contributed to Justin Amash since he was first elected in 2010.

According to OpenSecrets.org, the DeVos family has contributed the following to Justin Amash between 2009 – 2018:

Amway/Alticor Inc. $162,205
Windquest Group $89,875
DP Fox Ventures $38,700

By comparison, here is what the DeVos family has contributed to **Rep. Bill Huizenga**, from the 2nd Congressional District during the same time frame:

Amway/Alticor Inc. $122,000
Windquest Group $40,300

The local news media also could have provided data on how much the DeVos family has contributed to Michigan political candidates in recent years, with data provided by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network. Doing so, would provide another example of how much money the family contributes to electoral outcomes in Michigan.

In the election cycle leading up to the last Presidential Election (2015 – 2016), the **DeVos family contributed a total of $14 million.**

In the **2017 – 2018 election cycle**, the amount provided to candidates in Michigan by the most powerful family in West Michigan was $11 million.

In both cases, one can see from the data and analysis provided by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, most of the candidates that received money from the DeVos family ended up winning their election. Again, this family is calculating and strategic.

Therefore, the fact that Amash will no longer be receiving money from the DeVos family is significant. What we do not know for sure, are the reasons why. Again, the statement from the DeVos spokesperson are rather vague, which is by design. It is possible that the call from Amash for the impeachment of Trump is the main reason for the DeVos family to end their financial support for Amash, or they could have already made that decision based on Amash's announcement that he may run against Trump in 2020.

It is possible that both of the reasons factor in to the family's decision to no longer back Amash. What is important to consider, based upon the strategic approach that the DeVos family takes in terms of political contributions, is that any political change that is a threat to their wealth and power will result in a reaction from the family. If the GOP is divided, that is certainly a threat the DeVos's cannot tolerate and they will do whatever it takes to make sure that any politician or candidate that threatens their wealth and influence will incur their wrath. This is the real issue that journalists need to explore, but as of yet have failed to do.

West Michigan has 5 of the top 10 political contributors in Michigan for 2019

https://griid.org/2020/03/03/west-michigan-has-5-of-the-top-10-political-contributors-in-michigan-for-2019/

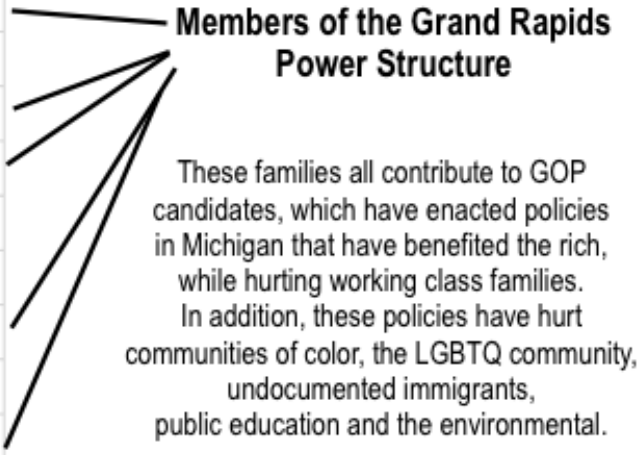
Members of the 1% class in West Michigan continue to assert tremendous influence with electoral politics in Michigan.

The Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN) recently posted **an article** about the top campaign contributors in Michigan for 2019.

This article provides numbers on how state legislators were receiving their funding (individual donor, self-funding or PAC money), along with a breakdown of how much the Republicans and the Democrats raised in 2019, specifically from PAC contributions. In the 2019, the Democrats raised $2.9 million, while the Republicans raised $8.2 million.

In addition, the article provides a list of the top 10 families contributing in 2019, with 5 of the top ten being families from West Michigan. This has been consist for the past 20 years, with the DeVos family always listed as the largest in the past 3 decades. The combined total of the 5 families from West Michigan comes to roughly $1.175 million in campaign contributions for 2019 alone.

The Top Ten Families Donating in 2019		
1	Devos Family	$523,700.00
2	Cotton Family	$319,500.00
3	John & Nancy Kennedy	$206,950.00
4	Peter & Joan Secchia	$205,050.00
5	Moroun Family	$186,725.00
6	Ron & Eileen Weiser	$175,950.00
7	Haworth Family	$142,000.00
8	Bill & Vivenne Young	$130,100.00
9	J.C. Huizenga	$101,650.00
10	Sharif Hussein	$100,050.00



In addition to contributing to the GOP, these West Michigan families sit on the boards of entities like, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, the West Michigan Policy Forum, the Right Place Inc, the Acton Institute, Talent 2025 and many other organizations which promote policies that benefit their friends in the capitalist class, while devastating black and brown communities, indigenous people, the LGBTQ community, undocumented immigrants, women fighting for reproductive justice, public education and the environment.

As we have documented over and over again, these members of the **Grand Rapids Power Structure** also use their foundations to then provide some assistance to the very same communities who have been negatively impacted by the policies adopted by state legislators they fund. This demonstrates the absurdity of the non-profit industrial complex in Grand Rapids, since many of the non-profits would not need to exist if these families were not pushing unjust policies, plus it means that these same non-profits will not publicly challenge the root causes of the injustices they claim to be addressing.

It's all a well oiled machine, which is exactly why these families from West Michigan contribute millions to get policies passed that will primarily benefit their position of power and expand their wealth. This is exactly what West Michigan Nice looks like.

DeVos Family Electoral Contributions: Financing far right politics and political sycophants

https://griid.org/2020/03/17/devos-family-electoral-contributions-financing-far-right-politics-and-political-sycophants/

The electoral process is a highly compromised process, with issues around voter fraud, gerrymandering and the power that the Democratic and Republican parties have when it comes to allowing other political parties from forming.

However, possibly the most problematic aspect of the current electoral process is how members of the capitalist class can dictate what happens via campaign contributions. In West Michigan, one need look no further than the DeVos family, to see how wealth can infect the electoral process.

According to data collected by the **Michigan Campaign Finance Network**, the DeVos family has contributed more money to electoral politics in Michigan over the past several decades than any other family.

However, the DeVos family is also committed to using their vast wealth to influence electoral outcomes across the US, specifically in federal races. According to the Center for Responsible Politics, which tracks political contributions by state, by city and by zip code, the DeVos family dominates campaign contributions for the current electoral cycle. Based on the latest FEC filings, you can see how much the DeVos family has contributed so far to national elections for the 2020 election cycle.

With just these 10 contributions by the DeVos family, they have contributed $1,850,000. That is an incredible amount of money, considering this was only in the top 10 listings for 2019.

Some people might be familiar with the organizations listed as recipients of the DeVos money, but these are not necessarily household names, like America First Action, the Senate Leadership Fund, the Congressional Leadership Fund and Better Future Michigan Fund.

The Better Future Michigan Fund is primarily a fund that has gone to support Republic Senatorial candidate John James, or more specifically to attack his opponent Senator Gary Peters. However, the **website** and the **Facebook page** also seek to discredit proposals like Medicare for All and the Green New Deal.

America First Action is a PAC that also endorses a GOP platform and attacks Democratic candidates. Their mission statement is rather instructive:

For eight long years, America was held hostage by an administration where our hopes, dreams and values were sold, piece by piece. Winning became a bad word and apologies, the norm. Our jobs went overseas, our products made by foreign companies. We no longer were a first place America.

The statement is very misleading, since jobs going overseas has happened under both Republican and Democratic administrations, as well as a GOP or Democratic controlled Congress.

The Congressional Leadership Fund and the Senate Leadership Fund are both designed to gain Republican control of the House and the Senate. In addition, the candidates and the platforms that they promote are platforms that favor the Capitalist

class, disproportionately hurt black and brown communities, to not support expanding worker protections or workplace democracy, do not support the LGBTQ community, are anti-environmental and do not support policies like Medicaid for All.

Since the DeVos family are major contributors to these organizations, they also support the candidates and the policies they put forth, policies that are far right and promote white supremacist, anti-labor and anti-environmental values. Remember this the next time you look fondly on Start Garden, AmplifyGR, Artprize or any of the other DeVos funded projects. The DeVos family is Michigan's #1 Robber Baron family that should be vilified.

Betsy DeVos-created Great Lakes Education Project is endorsing Michigan candidates in the upcoming November election, all committed to adopting a privatized education system using public money

https://griid.org/2020/07/09/betsy-devos-created-great-lakes-education-project-is-endorsing-michigan-candidates-in-the-upcoming-november-election-all-committed-to-adopting-a-privatized-education-system-using-public-money/

After the DeVos-led School Voucher ballot initiative was defeated in 2000, Dick & Betsy DeVos didn't let that defeat stop their plans to undermine public education.

On the heels of the School Voucher defeat, Betsy DeVos created the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), identified as a non-partisan, non-profit entity, "*supporting quality choices in public education for all Michigan students*," according to the **GLEP webpage**.

However, GLEP has been very partisan, by consistently backing mostly GOP candidates, especially those that push for charter schools and using public funding for private education.

Here is a **list of the candidates they are endorsing for the 2020 election cycle**. We include a link to the candidates' largest funders and how many of them received funding from the DeVos family.

17th District: **Joe Bellino**

30th District: **Diana Farrington** **$13,000 DeVos family**

36th District: **Douglas Wozniak**

39th District: **Ryan Berman** **$5,000 DeVos family**

42nd District: **Ann Bollin**

43rd District: **Andrea Schroeder** $**6,000 DeVos family**

44th District: **Matthew Maddock**

51st District: **Michael Mueller** **$6,000 DeVos family**

57th District: **Bronna Kahle** **$14,000 DeVos family**

63rd District: **Matt Hall** **$5,000 DeVos family**

64th District: **Julie Alexander** **$5,000 DeVos family**

65th District: **Sarah Lightner** **$5,000 DeVos family**

66th District: **Beth Griffin** **$14,000 DeVos family**

77th District: **Tommy Brann** **$15,000 DeVos family**

78th District: **Brad Paquette** **$6,000 DeVos family**

84th District: **Philip Green**

86th District: **Thomas Albert**

87th District: **Julie Calley**

88th District: **Luke Meerman**

89th District: **James Lilly** **$15,000 DeVos family**

91st District: **Greg VanWoerkom** **$5,000 DeVos family**

93rd District: **Graham Filler**

94th District: **Rodney Wakeman**

97th District: **Jason Wentworth** **$9,000 DeVos family**

98th District: **Annette Glenn** **$6,000 DeVos family**

99th District: **Roger Hauck** **$12,000 DeVos family**

102nd District: **Michele Hoitenga** **$6,000 DeVos**

106th District: **Sue Allor** **$14,000 DeVos family**

108th District: **Beau Lafave** **$9,000 DeVos family**

110th District: **Gregory Markkanen**

Of the 30 incumbents that GLEP is endorsing, all 30 are Republicans and 19 of them received funding from the DeVos family. However, for those that also received funding from the **Michigan House Republican Campaign Committee**, most of the money also comes from the DeVos family.

GLEP has also endorsed 9 non-incumbent candidates for the Michigan House.

19th District: Martha Ptashnik

45th District: Mark Tisdel

47th District: Meghan Reckling

56th District: T.C. Clements

61st District: Bronwyn Haltom

70th District: Patrick Outman

73rd District: Bryan Posthumus

83rd District: Andrew Beeler

104th District: John Roth

Make no mistake about it, the Betsy DeVos-created Great Lakes Education Project is deeply committed to pushing their education agenda, which pushes more charter schools, more private schools and seeks to redirect public funding away from public education.

DeVos family contributions to GOP super PACs

https://griid.org/2020/09/01/devos-family-contributions-to-gop-super-pacs/

Over the past several weeks, we have been writing about how the DeVos family foundations compliment their political contributions, which furthers their ideological and class war on the American people.

Just recently, the Center for Media & Democracy posted an article entitled, **Conservative Plutocrats Pour Enormous Sums of Money into GOP Super PACs**. The article lists the top 15 individuals/families that have contributed to GOP PACs, with the DeVos family being #15, with a total of $3.5 million in contributions this election cycle. Of course, there are several months to go before the election, which means that the DeVos family is likely to throw even more money into the coffers of GOP PACs.

The article lists four super PACs that the DeVos family has contributed to: the Senate Leadership Fund ($1.2 million), America First Action ($1 million), Better Future MI Fund ($700,000), and the Congressional Leadership Fund ($600,000). This is the only

information provided in the article, so lets take a look at these four super PACs and see who are the recipients of their money, and thus the DeVos money.

Senate Leadership Fund – **according to OpenSecrets.org**, the Senate Leadership Fund has raised over $129 million in the current election cycle, with most of that **money going to producing media, buying broadcast time and administrative costs**. In other words, here the DeVos money is funding the GOP attack ads that are flooding radio and TV stations across the country.

America First Action – a**ccording to OpenSecrets.org**, America First Action has been using the $39 million they have raised so far to also pay for GOP media, specifically attack ads across the country.

Better Future MI Fund – here the DeVos funds are **being used for media buys in Michigan**, to both support the candidacy of John James and to attack Michigan Senator Gary Peters.

Congressional Leadership Fund – **according to OpenSecrets.org**, the Congressional Leadership Fund is also spending the bulk of the $64 million they have raised in this election cycle to purchase media spots around the country as well.

Even though the DeVos contributions to these GOP PACs are not going directly to candidates, they do benefit the candidates to the degree that most of this PAC money is being used to attack GOP candidate opponents, but more importantly, it engages in the ideological and class warfare that the DeVos family has engaged in since the founding of the Amway Corporation sixty years ago.

DeVos money in the 2020 Elections: Part I – Using their companies to buy politicians https://griid.org/2020/10/20/devos-money-in-the-2020-elections-part-i-using-their-companies-to-buy-politicians/

The DeVos family has been a major contributor to the Republican Party over the past 5 decades. For example, in the last Presidential Election cycle (2015 – 2016), the **DeVos family spent $14 million on campaign contributions**.

In this series, we want to look at campaign funding from the DeVos family in the current election cycle, 2019 – 2020. In Part I, we look at campaign contributions that come directly from the companies they own.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, there are two DeVos-owned companies that have made campaign contributions in the 2019-2020 election cycle, RDV Corporation and Amway/Alticor.

Here are some of the campaign **contributions from RVD Corporation**, which have totaled **$4,173,362** for 2019-2020.

John James $77,600
Peter Meijer $44,250
Donald Trump $34,594
Fred Upton $33,600
John Bergman $22,400
Shelley Moore Capito $19,500
John Cornyn $16,800
Ben Sase $16.800
Bill Huizenga $16,800
Bill Cassidy $16,800

Here are some of the campaign **contributions from Amway/Alticor**, for 2019-2020, which totaled **$2,076,260**.

Bill Huizenga $39,250
John James $28.505
Peter Meijer $18,050
Joni Ernst $17.800
Mitch McConnell $16,910
Kevin McCarthy $16,870
Cory Gardner $16,800
Martha McSally $16,800
Dan Sullivan $16,800
David Perdue $16,800

Now, some of these people are first time candidates, but several have been in office for some time, like Trump, Huizenga and McConnell. We know what kind of awful things these men have done – tax breaks to the wealthiest, perpetuating White Supremacy, maintaining a brutal US foreign policy, perpetuating mass incarceration, deregulating environmental laws, and adopting anti-queer/anti-trans policies.

The DeVos family is everywhere in our community, so the next time you think it's nice that they gave money for some project, remember they contributed money to the likes of Mitch McConnell and Donald Trump. Also, remember that these numbers are just what they contributed through their companies. In Part II, we will look at DeVos campaign contributions for local candidates.

DeVos money in the 2020 Elections: Part II – Even at the local level, DeVos money bankrolls candidates

https://griid.org/2020/10/27/devos-money-in-the-2020-elections-part-ii-even-at-the-local-level-devos-money-bankrolls-candidates/

In **Part I** of this series, we looked at how two of the companies the DeVos family owns, Amway and RDV Corporation, have provided significant funding to candidates in the 2020 Election.

In Part II, we take a look at candidates who have received funding from candidates at the local level, often candidates who are not on the public radar, and how much funding they have received from DeVos family members.

Before looking at the data, it is important that we recognize that the DeVos family does not give money to candidates in a random fashion, rather they are very strategic with their money. It would be easy and a mistake to say that they fund all GOP candidates, but this would be a mistake. The DeVos family funds certain GOP candidates because of the strategic role they play in politics. While we may find the DeVos influence repulsive, they are not stupid.

Kent County Sheriff

In August of 2019, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), ended their 8 year contract with Kent County. This was certainly a victory for the immigrant justice movement, yet some might see this as a tactical decision by Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young. The first female Sheriff in Kent County made a decision, after the Jilmar Ramos-Gomez case made national news, to require ICE to have a judicial order to have people detained at the Kent County Jail. **What we wrote in August**, challenged that narrative, making it clear that the immigrant justice movement, led by Movimiento Cosecha, made the ICE contract public and pressured the county to end that contract. The County would not end their contract and made clear that they would continue to cooperate with ICE officials.

With that context in mind, it was instructive to look and see who some of the big campaign contributors were to Michelle LaJoye-Young. According to the county clerk's data, the following members of the DeVos family gave money to Sheriff Young's bid to stay in her position in Kent County:

Doug DeVos $2,000
Maria DeVos $2,000
Suzanne Cheryl DeVos $2,000
Pamela DeVos $2,000
Daniel DeVos $2,000
Richard DeVos $2,000

That is $12,000 that the DeVos clan contributed to Michelle LaJoye-Young's campaign, and if you include another $2,000 from the Executive Director of RDV Corporation, Steve Ehmann, then that total is $14,000.

Kent County Clerk

Lisa Posthumus-Lyons is running for re-election for the Kent County Clerk position, a position that wields a significant amount of power. According to data from the Kent County Clerk's office, the following members of the DeVos family contributed to her re-election campaign:

Doug DeVos $2,000
Maria DeVos $2,000
Suzanne Cheryl DeVos $2,000
Pamela DeVos $2,000
Daniel DeVos $2,000
Richard DeVos $2,000

That makes $12,000 that the DeVos clan contributed to Lisa Posthumus-Lyons campaign, and if you include another $2,000 from the Executive Director of RDV Corporation, Steve Ehmann, then that total is $14,000. See a pattern?

Also worth noting is the fact that Peter Secchia contributed $7,100 to Posthumus-Lyons as well.

Kent County Treasurer

The race for county treasurer is also a strategic battle for the DeVos family. The GOP candidate, Peter MacGregor, has been the beneficiary of lots of DeVos money over the years. In fact, as a State Senator, the DeVos family has been the number one campaign contributor to MacGregor, **according to the Michigan Campaign Finance Network**.

According to the clerk's data, Peter MacGregor has received funding from the following members of the DeVos family:

Doug DeVos $2,000
Maria DeVos $2,000
Suzanne Cheryl DeVos $4,000
Pamela DeVos $2,000
Daniel DeVos $2,000
Richard DeVos $2,000

The total here is $14,000 from the DeVos family to Peter MacGregor, as he seeks to win the seat for the Kent County Treasurer.

There are also 19 Kent County Commission races, but the only ones we could find where the DeVos family contributed were in 2 races. The first was to Mandy Bolter, who is the current Chair of the Board of Commissioners. This makes sense, again, from a strategic point of view, that the DeVos family would fund her campaign, since Bolter gets to influence the agenda for the county. Here is a list of the eVos family members who contributed to her campaign:

Doug DeVos $1,000
Maria DeVos $1,000

Suzanne Cheryl DeVos $1,000
Pamela DeVos $1,000
Daniel DeVos $1,000
Richard DeVos $1,000

In this race the Executive Director for RDV Corporation, Steve Ehmann, also contributed $1,000, making the total DeVos contributions to Many Bolter $7,000.

The only other Kent County Commission candidate to receive campaign contributions from the DeVos family was Lindsey Thiel, who is currently the commissioner for the 11th District. Only one DeVos family member contribute to her campaign, Dick DeVos, who gave $1,000 to Thiel.

When we add up all the money that the DeVos family contributed to races at the Kent County level, they contributed **$50,000** to influence the outcome. This may not seem like a great deal of money local elections, but their contributions as a group were more than any other private entity, with only the Kent County Republican Party contributing more in some of the county races.

DeVos money in the 2020 Elections: Part III – Buying State Legislators

https://griid.org/2020/10/29/devos-money-in-the-2020-elections-part-iii-buying-state-legislators/

In **Part I** of this series, we looked at how two of the companies the DeVos family owns, Amway and RDV Corporation, have provided significant funding to candidates in the 2020 Election.

In **Part II**, we looked at candidates in Kent County who have received funding from then DeVos family. In Part III, we take a look at how much the DeVos family has contributed to candidates running for state office.

We used Michigan Secretary of State Campaign Finance data to see how much candidates and other groups that influence state office have received from the DeVos family.

There were two State House races in Michigan in West Michigan, where the DeVos family made substantial campaign contributions, in the 73rd an 74th House District races. We included Steve Ehmann again, since he is the Executive Director of one of the DeVos companies, RDV Corp.

Brian Posthumus – GOP candidate running for the 73rd District

Doug DeVos $1,050

Maria DeVos $1,050
Suzanne Cheryl DeVos $1,050
Pamela DeVos $1,050
Daniel DeVos $1,050
Steve Ehmann $1,050

Mark Huizenga – GOP candidate running for the 74th District

Doug DeVos $1,050
Maria DeVos $1,050
Suzanne Cheryl DeVos $2,100
Pamela DeVos $1,050
Daniel DeVos $1,050
Richard DeVos $1,050

People might ask, why on two State House candidates? Again, it is important to make it clear that the DeVos campaign contributions are strategic and not random. The 73rd and 74th State Houses Races are important to win in order to maintain Republican control of the State House. The other issue is that the DeVos family also contributed to the House and Senate Republican Campaign Committees, which in turn, fund state candidates. These PACs make determinations on which state candidates to contribute money to, based on the importance of the race and on how hotly contested they are. This is a dynamic we see at the federal candidate level with the DeVos family, where they are more inclined to contribute to PACs than they are to individual candidates. So, look at how much money the DeVos family members contributed to state races through these two GOP PACs.

House Republican Campaign Committee

Doug DeVos $83,950
Maria DeVos $83,950
Suzanne Cheryl DeVos $83,950
Pamela DeVos $83,950
Daniel DeVos $83,950
Richard DeVos $83,950
Steve Ehmann $83,950

Senate Republican Campaign Committee

Doug DeVos $83,950
Maria DeVos $83,950
Suzanne Cheryl DeVos $125,925
Pamela DeVos $83,950
Daniel DeVos $83,950
Richard DeVos $83,950
Steve Ehmann $83,950

The total for the State elections from the DeVos family comes to **$1,217,275,** and that doesn't include state races outside of West Michigan**.** This is the kind of numbers we would expect from the DeVos family, which has been one of the major Republican Party donors across the country and number one in Michigan for several decades. In Part IV, we will look at the DeVos family campaign contributions at the federal level.

DeVos money in the 2020 Elections: Part IV – Buying Federal Candidates

https://griid.org/2020/10/29/devos-money-in-the-2020-elections-part-iv-buying-federal-candidates/

In **Part I** of this series, we looked at how two of the companies the DeVos family owns, Amway and RDV Corporation, have provided significant funding to candidates in the 2020 Election.

In **Part II**, we looked at candidates in Kent County who have received funding from then DeVos family.

In **Part III**, we looked at how the DeVos family members were influencing electoral outcomes through their campaign contributions at the state level.

Today, we will look at their campaign contributions at the federal level.

For this research, we use the data from the Center for Responsive Politics, also known as Opensecrets.org. You can search by zip code or by individual names. What follows is a breakdown of what each DeVos family member contributed to federal candidates during the 2019-2020 Election cycle, including the dollar amount and date. We only include the details on Maria DeVos, just so you can see an example of how many different times a DeVos family member made a campaign contribution during the current election cycle. Imagine someone making that many campaign contributions and at those amounts on a regular basis. These people do live in an entirely different world.

Maria DeVos

$5,600 3/19/2019 Mike Rounds (R)

$5,600 3/19/2019 John Moolenaar (R)

$5,600 3/20/2019 Tim Walberg (R)

$5,600 3/20/2019 David Perdue (R)

$5,600 3/21/2019 Bill Huizenga (R)

$5,600 3/22/2019 Paul Mitchell (R)

$16,000 3/23/2019 Lindsey Graham (R)

$5,600 3/26/2019 Tom Cotton (R)

$5,600 3/26/2019 Dan Sullivan (R)

$5,600 3/26/2019 Joni Ernst (R)

$2,800 3/26/2019 Steven Daines (R)

$5,600 3/26/2019 Martha McSally (R)

$5,600 3/26/2019 Thom Tillis (R)

$5,600 3/27/2019 Mitch McConnell (R)

$5,600 3/28/2019 Cyndy Hye-Smith (R)

$5,600 3/29/2019 John Cornyn (R)

$5,600 3/31/2019 Cory Gardner (R)

$5,600 6/27/2019 Bradley Byrne (R)

$5.600 6/27/2019 Bill Cassidy (R)

$5.600 6/30/2019 John James (R)

$11,200 6/30/2019 Ben Sasse (R)

$5,600 6/30/2019 Shelley Moore Capito (R)

$2,800 9/12/2019 Paul Mitchell (R)

$2,800 9/20/2019 Liz Cheney (R)

$20,000 9/30/2019 Republican Party of Michigan

$5,600 9/30/2019 John Bergman (R)

$35,000 10/1/2019 Republican National Committee

$50,000 10/2/2019 Republican National Committee

$5,600 10/30/2019 Donald Trump (R)

$14,400 12/5/2019 Republican National Committee

$5,000 12/5/2019 Majority Committee PAC

$5,600 12/5/2019 Kevin McCarthy (R)

$75,000 12/5/2019 Congressional Leadership Fund

$100,000 12/9/2019 Better Future Michigan Fund

$5,600 12/13/2019 Shane Hernandez (R)

$125,000 12/19/2019 Senate Leadership Fund

$2,800 12/19/2019 Beth Van Duyne (R)

$2,800 12/19/2019 Genevieve Collins (R)

$2,800 12/20/2019 Esther Joy King (R)

$2,800 12/21/2019 Jessica Taylor (R)

$5,600 3/9/2020 Randy Feenstra (R)

$5,000 3/30/2020 Great America Committee

$11,200 3/30/2020 Fred Upton (R)

$11.200 3/30/2020 Peter Meijer (R)

$2,800 3/31/2020 Braley Byrne (R)

$150,000 6/10/2020 Senate Leadership Fund

$50,00 6/12/2020 Congressional Leadership Fund

$200,000 6/12/2020 America First Action

$40,000 6/25/2020 Republican Party of Michigan

$71,000 6/25/2020 National Republican Senatorial Committee

$50,000 9/25/2020 Republican National Committee

$2,800 9/29/2020 Lisa McClain (R)

$5,600 9/30/2020 Paul Junge (R)

$5,600 9/30/2020 Eric Esshanki (R)

$2,800 9/30/2020 Ashley Hinson (R)

$2,800 9/30/2020 Wesley Hunt (R)

$2,800 9/30/2020 Mario iaz-Balart (R)

$2,800 10/7/2020 Tommy Tuberville (R)

Total: **$1,162,000**

Richard DeVos Jr $620,600

Daniel DeVos $1,625,605

Suzanne Cheryl DeVos $1,270,100

Pamela DeVos $27,000

Doug DeVos $735,400

When we tally up all of these DeVos family member campaign contributions, we get **$5,440,705** for the 2019/2020 Federal Elections. This is what power looks like. This is what money buys. It buys, influence, access, loyalty and policy that benefits their financial an ideological interests.

DeVos Election funding in 2020 is primarily about the funding of White Supremacy

https://griid.org/2020/11/01/devos-election-funding-in-2020-is-primarily-about-the-funding-the-white-supremacy/

Over the past two weeks, we have posted 4 articles taking a look at how the DeVos family has utilized their wealth during the 2020 Election Cycle.

In **Part I** of this series, we looked at how two of the companies the DeVos family owns, Amway and RDV Corporation, have provided significant funding to candidates in the 2020 Election.

In **Part II**, we looked at candidates in Kent County who have received funding from then DeVos family.

In **Part III**, we looked at how the DeVos family members were influencing electoral outcomes through their campaign contributions at the state level.

In **Part IV**, we looked at how the DeVos family members were pumping millions into the federal elections through their campaign contributions.

The total amount of money coming from the DeVos family in the 2020 election cycle comes to roughly **$12.7 million**. During the 2018 election cycle, the DeVos family campaign contributions were comparable, which means that have easy contributed over $20 million during the Trump administration.

Now if there is anything that we have learned about this administration in the past 4 years, we have learned that much of what the Trump administration has been about is

the perpetuation of White Supremacy. Now, if we use the definition that is used by the group, Challenging White Supremacy, then that definition would be:

White Supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.

This definition of White Supremacy is the very ideologically driven motivation for the DeVos family's insertion of millions of dollars in every campaign cycle since the Reagan era, and it is the over-riding factor during the past 4 years of the Trump administration.

Over the past 4 years, we have witnessed the expansion and promotion of mass incarceration, the widening of the wealth gap in the US, the further gentrification of our communities, the growing use of police power to suppress any resistance (especially resistance from the Black community) the xenophobic cracked down on the immigrant community, and the growth of domestic terrorism in the guise of "patriotism." During the COVID 19 crisis we have seen this administration use White Supremacy to bailout out Wall Street, while throwing crumbs to the millions of Black, latinx and even poor white families that are facing unemployment, eviction, sickness and even death. This is what the DeVos family has been funding over the past 4 years.

Besides the direct funding of the Republican Party during the last four years, the DeVos family has also utilized the following entities to perpetuate much of White Supremacist policies that have been adopted at the federal, state and local level:

Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, the West Michigan Policy Forum, The Right Place Inc., the Acton Institute, the Mackinac Center, the Michigan Freedom Forum, the Great Lakes Education Project, Grand Action 2.0, Talent 2025 and all of the various family foundations they operation, which we have written about. All of these entities also utilize DeVos family funding and the considerable political influence that the DeVos family has to make sure that policies and practices are in place that are driven by White Supremacy – the maintenance and defense of a system of wealth, power and privilege.

This is what the DeVos family has done for the past several decades and most clearly during the Trump era, the promotion of White Supremacy. Therefore, I ask you how can you even consider defending or supporting in any way the work that is being done in Grand Rapids through the numerous non-profits that that DeVos family contribute to? In addition, how can you support the numerous DeVos created entities that also operated in Grand Rapids, such as ArtPrize, AmplifyGR and Start Garden? The DeVos family bludgeons people with White Supremacy, especially Black people, and then offers entrepreneurial programs, as if to say, "*your problems are not structural, you just haven't been given the opportunity to shine*." This is managerial racism at its finest.

New Michigan House Speaker, Jason Wentworth, has lots of corporate backing, including the DeVos family

https://griid.org/2020/11/06/new-michigan-house-speaker-jason-wentworth-has-lots-of-corporate-backing-including-the-devos-family/

It was announced yesterday, that the new Speaker of the Michigan State House will be Rep. Jason Wentworth, from the 97th District.

Wentworth is former military and a former cop, who was first elected to the Michigan Legislature in 2016. Wentworth won that election with an infusion of $9,000 from the DeVos family and has been bringing in lots of corporate cash every since.

Some of the most notable funders of Rep. Wentworth have been:

Blue Cross/Blue Shield
Small Biz PAC
DOW Inc PAC
Mortgage Bankers Assoc. PAC
Huntington Assoc. Good Gov Fund
Home Depot
Detroit Chamber
Ford Motor Co
DTE Energy
Altria PAC
CMS Energy PAC
Police Officers Assoc. PAC
Chatfield Majority Fund

If you want to search his voting record, which seems to be consistent with GOP leadership, go to this **link**.

The Michigan House is still GOP controlled, 58 – 52. Despite Biden winning Michigan, it did not translate into a majority of Democrats in the State House.

Sources used for Campaign Finance data on Rep. Wentworth: Michigan Secretary of State and **Michigan Campaign Finance Network**.

Tommy Tuberville thinks the US liberated Europe from Socialism during WWII, wins Alabama Senate seat, with lots of funding from the DeVos cartel

https://griid.org/2020/11/13/tommy-tuberville-thinks-the-us-liberated-europe-from-socialism-during-wwii-wins-alabama-senate-seat-with-lots-of-funding-from-the-devos-cartel/

Since the November 3rd election, there have been many things that should be of concern to people who care about social justice and collective liberation.

A great deal of attention has been given to Trump's unwillingness to concede the election results, which is understandable. However, there is another significant issue, which is the fact that the GOP will continue to control the US Senate.

With the continued Republican control of the Senate, they will be able to block or alter potential cabinet positions, along with making it difficult for social justice-oriented policy to be passed.

We can thank that DeVos cartel in part for the continued GOP control of the Senate. The DeVos cartel contributed nearly $1 million to the Republican Senate Leadership Fund, which contributed money to several key GOP Senate candidates, like Tommy Tuberville in Alabama.

Tuberville, the former Auburn football coach, also received $14,000 in campaign contributions from individual members of the DeVos cartel.

During his election victory speech, Tuberville said the following:

> **CTT:** Well, it's it's a little concerning to me that, just a citizen this time last week, I look at it and I see what country I grew up in and what it's meant and the direction that we were going, and it's concerning to me that a guy can run for president of the United States and have an opportunity to win when he leans more to a Socialist type of government, you know, one-payer system in health care, raise taxes 20%, when the other half the country is basically voting for freedom, let us control our own lives, stay out of our life. And that's concerning to me that we're to the point now where we've got almost half the country voting for something that this country wasn't built on. Very concerning and, you know, as I tell people, my dad fought 76 years ago in Europe to free Europe of Socialism. Today, you look at this election, we have half this country that made some kind of movement, now they might not believe in it 100 percent, but they made some kind of movement toward socialism. So we're fighting it right here on our own soil. We've got to decide, you know, over the years which direction we're going, and that part's concerning to me.

Earlier today, the **New York Magazine wrote the following**, in response to Tuberville's comment about the US freeing Europe from socialism during WWII:

*Despite being of an age at which American men pick up military history as if by osmosis, Tuberville did not seem familiar with the politics of the European theater: In his speech, the new senator described how his father took part in "liberating Paris from socialism and communism." While this may be an effort to compare his father's combat experience to his own effort to halt "the doctrine of socialism" in America, the coach's political framework is off. When First Sergeant Charles Tuberville landed in France in 1944, he was part of a campaign to liberate the allied power from the Nazis. Though socialism was in the name of the party that Hitler rode into power, the Nazis were, canonically, fascist. And for students of history aware of the **robust French left** prior to the war, Tuberville's gaffe could accidentally suggest that his father was involved in a different march into Paris in the 1940s.*

This is what America politics has come to, and thanks to the DeVos cartel, we now have people like Tommy Tuberville making policy decisions in the US Senate. This is what money can buy.

GOP proposes anti-trans legislation in Michigan: Every co-signers of the bill has received money from the DeVos family

https://griid.org/2021/03/15/gop-proposes-anti-trans-legislation-in-michigan-every-co-signers-of-the-bill-has-received-money-from-the-devos-family/

On March 10th, GOP Senators in Michigan introduced legislation that is anti-trans.

The proposed bill, **Senate Bill 0218**, was introduced by Michigan Senator Lana Theis and was sponsored by the following GOP Senators: Tom Barrett, Jim Runestad, Roger Victory, Jon Bumstead, John Bison, Kevin Daley, Rick Outman, Aric Nesbitt, Kimberly LaSata, Michael MacDonald, Dale Born and Curtis VanderWall.

The proposed anti-trans legislation would:

"Require that only biological males may compete for a position on and compete on a boys' high school team in an interscholastic activity and only biological females may compete for a position on and compete on a girls' high school team in an interscholastic activity; provide for. Amends 1979 PA 451 (MCL 380.1 – 380.1852) by adding sec. 1146a & repeals sec. 1289 of 1976 PA 451 (MCL 380.1289)."

These kinds of bills are being proposed all across the country at the state level and are being supported by three large historically anti-LGBTQ groups, the Family Policy Alliance, The Heritage Foundation, and Alliance Defending Freedom. According to a **recent article from Political Research Associates**:

*Amid a **spate of legislation** in early 2021 targeting trans-affirming health care for youth and trans and gender nonconforming athletes, Ohio State Representative Jena Powell (R-Arcanum) **announced** this week that she had signed on to The Promise to America's Children, a collaborative effort between the **Family Policy Alliance**, **The Heritage Foundation**, and **Alliance Defending Freedom**. The ten principles set forth a vision for childhood in which comprehensive sex education is banned in schools, teachers aren't allowed to talk about LGBT people, students can openly discriminate against their LGBT classmates and teachers, parents are encouraged to submit their LGBT children to unethical conversion therapy and schools are powerless to protect them, trans student athletes are prohibited from playing sports, trans children are unable to access life-saving trans-affirming care, child-welfare organizations are encouraged to discriminate against LGBT prospective parents, and schools are forced to out LGBT students to their parents, regardless of safety considerations.*

In addition to the national anti-LGBTQ groups that are pushing this type of legislation across the country, all of the sponsors of Senate Bill 0218 have also received substantial campaign contributions over the years from the DeVos family. As we have reported in the past, the DeVos family has consistently financed candidates that take an

anti-LGBTQ stance, anti-union, anti-transparency and pro-Neoliberal economic policies that almost always include austerity measures.

What follows are a list of the GOP sponsors of Senate Bill 0218 and how much money they have received directly from the DeVos family or from the **House** (**$1,880,000**) and **Senate** (**$1,121,000**) Republican Campaign Committees, to which the DeVos family is the number one contributor.

- Senator Lana Theis **DeVos family $12,000**
- Senator Tom Barrett **$30,000, plus Senate Republican Campaign Committee, $507,236 and House Republican Campaign Committee, $448,009**
- Senator Jim Runestad **DeVos family $12,000, plus Senate Republican Campaign Committee, $535,495**
- Senator Roger Victory **DeVos family $2,500**
- Senator Jon Bumstead **Senate Republican campaign Committee, $483,856**
- Senator John Bison **DeVos family $30,000, plus House Republican Campaign Committee, $345,974**
- Senator Kevin Daley **DeVos family $10,000, plus Senate Republican Campaign Committee, $190,883**
- Senator Rick Outman **House Republican Campaign Committee, $168,783**
- Senator Aric Nesbitt **DeVos family $4,500, plus House Republican Campaign Committee, $12,000**
- Senator Kimberly LaSata **DeVos family $12,000**
- Senator Michael MacDonald **DeVos family $10,000, plus Senate Republican Campaign Committee, $648,090**
- Senator Dale Zorn **Senate Republican Campaign Committee, $504,975**
- Senator Curtis VanderWall **DeVos family $9,000, plus House Republican Campaign Committee, $83,825**

In anticipation of Whitmer veto, Michigan GOP has begun a petition campaign to allow the use of public money for private and religious education
https://griid.org/2021/11/07/in-anticipation-of-whitmer-veto-michigan-gop-has-begun-a-petition-campaign-to-allow-the-use-of-public-money-for-private-and-religious-education/

Last week, it was announced that the Let MI Kids Learn ballot committee was forming, in order to begin collecting signatures for a ballot campaign that would essentially support the very legislation that Gov. Whitmer plans to veto.

On October 24, **we reported** on the Senate and House bills that passed in the Michigan Legislature, bills that will do what Betsy DeVos has been attempting to do since 2000, with her failed school voucher ballot initiative.

In the article from late October, we laid out 4 tactics that the DeVos family has been using to get public money to support private and religious education. Those tactics include – the financial backing of candidates who would embrace such policies, to

attacked public teacher unions, to utilize the expertise of far right think tanks in Michigan, and to create their own education-centered non-profit, the Great Lakes Education Project.

"***The passage of this legislation was a test for Governor Whitmer: she could stand with families and children, or she could stand with special interests. Sadly, but predictably, Whitmer chose the special interests – as she always has. But Michigan's constitution gives voters a recourse, and our petition drive will allow voters to expand opportunities for children, even if Whitmer won't***."

The above comment comes **from Rep. Bryan Posthumus**, one of the state legislators that the DeVos family has provided thousands of dollars in campaign contributions. The DeVos family, especially through the group the West Michigan Policy Forum, has continually attacked public teacher unions, which is the second tactic they use. The DeVos-led effort around these bills also has the support of the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**, which is the 3rd tactic they employ. Lastly, the DeVos-created Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP) has been a major **champion of these bills** and will likely support the ballot initiative that the Let MI Kids Learn organization is moving forward with.

Let MI Kids Learn needs to collect 340,000 valid signatures from registered voters for both petitions in six months.

Spokesperson for Let MI Kids Learn, Fred Wszolek was quoted in the **Detroit News** as saying, "*This exciting legislation gives new opportunities to learn to children, and new choices to tens of thousands of Michigan parents. But Gov. Whitmer stands in the schoolhouse door with her veto pen, determined to strip families of any choice, and deny children the money they deserve for educational opportunities. We're just as determined to veto Whitmer's veto with our petition*."

Wszolek is the co-founder of the Lansing-based organization know as **Strategy Works**, has worked on numerous GOP candidate broadcast ad campaigns, but specializes in the passage and defeat of ballot proposals.

Fred Wszolek recently headed up a ballot initiative for **Unlock Michigan**, which is a campaign to prevent the Governor from adopting certain emergency policies, like we saw in 2020, when Gov. Whitmer mandated lockdown orders as a means of minimizing the harm of the COVID virus.

Interestingly enough, the address for the Unlock Michigan campaign – 2145 Commons Parkway, Okemos, MI 48864 – is the same address being used for **Let Mi Kids Learn** campaign. The 2145 Commons Parkway, Okemos address is also the address for Doster Law Offices, PLLC. Doster Law Officers was founded by Eric Doster, who was longest-serving General Counsel in the history of the Michigan Republican Party, having served in this position from 1992 to 2017.

It would seem that the GOP is well organized for the Let MI Kids Learn campaign. It will be interesting to see how the Democratic Party, the MEA and those who are committed to public education respond to the Let MI Kids Learn campaign.

The money behind the candidates in Michigan – Part III: DeVos-funded candidates
https://griid.org/2022/02/07/the-money-behind-the-candidates-in-michigan-part-iii-devos-funded-candidates/
In **Part I** of this series, we look at the campaign contributions for the Governor's race in Michigan, while **Part II** looked at the campaign funding for the West Michigan State Legislature races. Today, we'll take a look at the DeVos-backed candidates based on the most recent campaign finance data, specifically candidates running in Michigan.

According to data from **OpenSecrets.org**, members of the DeVos family and DeVos-owned companies have contributed to the re-election campaign of Rep. Peter Meijer. For the most recent quarter of campaign finance data, **Meijer received campaign contributions** from the following DeVos family members and DeVos-owned entities:

Amway/Alticor Inc. – $5,000

CWD Real Estate – $4,583

RDV Corp – $2,900

Pamela Roland (DeVos) – $2,900

In the **4th Congressional District race**, which now pits Fred Upton against Bill Huizenga (re-districting), there are no DeVos contributions to either candidate. The DeVos family has consistently supported Huizenga, but they may be waiting until the primary vote to contribute to this race.

Based on data from the Michigan Secretary of State's office and their campaign finance requirements, here are the candidates that members of the DeVos family have contributed to, Republican Committees and contributions for the ballot initiatives run by Let MI Kids Learn:

Dick DeVos

MI Senate Republican Campaign Committee – $41,975

Wentworth Majority Fund 2 – $10,000

Kent County Republican Committee – $25,000

Let MI Kids Learn – $100,000

Betsy DeVos

MI Senate Republican Campaign Committee – $41,975

Let MI Kids Learn – $100,000

Doug DeVos

MI House Republican Campaign Committee – $41,975

MI Senate Republican Campaign Committee – $41,975

Kent County Republican Committee – $25,000

Let MI Kids Learn – $50,000

Maria DeVos

MI House Republican Campaign Committee – $41,975

MI Senate Republican Campaign Committee – $41,975

Let MI Kids Learn – $50,000

Daniel DeVos

MI House Republican Campaign Committee – $41,975

MI Senate Republican Campaign Committee – $41,975

Kent County Republican Committee – $25,000

Wentworth Majority Fund 2 – $10,000

Compete Michigan Political Action CO – $10,000

Ottawa County Republican Committee – $50

Pamela DeVos

MI Senate Republican Campaign Committee – $41,975

Cheri DeVos

Kent County Republican Committee – $25,000

Wentworth Majority Fund 2 – $10,000

Adding all of those campaign contributions to just these candidates/ballot initiatives, comes to a **total of $823,208** for the most recent quarter of campaign finance reports. While this is a substantial amount of money, we know that this will increased significantly before the November Election. GRIID will continue to track this information and demonstrate once again that the politics of the DeVos family is far right, supporting candidates and initiatives that hurt BIPOC people, working people, people who identify as LGBTQ, immigrants and other marginalized communities.

Always Follow the Damn Money: How the Grand Rapids Power Structure looks out for their own economic interests
https://griid.org/2022/02/20/always-follow-the-damn-money-how-the-grand-rapids-power-structure-looks-out-for-their-own-economic-interests/

Last Tuesday, the Michigan Senate passed legislation that would provide major tax breaks to corporations.

Senate Bill 0768 was pass in the Michigan Senate completely on partisan lines, with 22 Republicans voting for the bill, while all 16 Democrats voted against.

Not surprising, this legislation was supported by the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and other business associations. What is particularly relevant for those of us who live in West Michigan, is to see how much money members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure have contributed to each of the 22 Senators. We will be using data from the 2018 election, since Senate races happen every 4 years, the same time that the Governor races take place. Not all of the data is in for the 2022 election, so we are limiting this investigation to contributions up to and including the 2018 Elections.

People will often say that this information is "not surprising." While it isn't surprising, it is important to know how much influence members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure have on public policy, which includes how much money they have provided candidates in order to pass legislation that benefits them and other members of the Capitalist Class.

Combined, the Grand Rapids Power Structure has contributed **$35,863,214** to the current GOP State Senators, in order to pass legislation that will be favorable to their business interests.

We will be looking at the Republican Senators who were elected in 2018 and in alphabetical order, listing members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure who contributed to their campaign and how much in 2018, from **FollowtheMoney.org**

Senator Tom Barrett

Rich DeVos – $4000

Dick DeVos – $4000

Doug DeVos – $4000

Dan DeVos – $4000

Maria DeVos – $4000

Cheri DeVos – $4000

Betsy DeVos – $2000

Helen DeVos – $2000

Michael Jandernoa – $2000

Pam DeVos – $2000

John Kennedy – $2000

JC Huizenga – $1500

Senator John Bizon

Dick DeVos – $4000

Doug DeVos – $4000

Dan DeVos – $4000

Maria DeVos – $4000

Cheri DeVos – $4000

Rick DeVos – $4000

Betsy DeVos – $2000

Micheal Jandernoa – $2000

JC Huizenga – $2000

Helen DeVos – $2000

Pam DeVos – $2000

Susan Jandernoa $1000

Peter Secchia – $1000

Jon Bumstead

Dick DeVos – $2000

Doug DeVos – $2000

Dan DeVos – $2000

Maria DeVos – $2000

Cheri DeVos – $2000

Rick DeVos – $2000

John Kennedy – $2000

Micheal Jandernoa – $1000

Kevin Daley

Doug DeVos – $2000

Dan DeVos – $2000

Maria DeVos – $2000

Cheri DeVos – $2000

Rick DeVos – $2000

John Kennedy – $2000

Kenneth Horn

Michael Jandernoa – $4750

Doug DeVos – $2250

Dan DeVos – $2250

Maria DeVos – $2250

Cheri DeVos – $2250

Rick DeVos – $2250

Susan Jandernoa – $1500

Betsy DeVos – $1250

Mark Huizenga

JC Huizenga – $3650

Michael Jandernoa – $3600

Doug DeVos – $3150

Dan DeVos – $3150

Maria DeVos – $3150

Cheri DeVos – $3150

Pam DeVos – $3150

Dick DeVos – $2100

Betsy DeVos – $2100

David Van Andel – $2100

Carol Van Andel – $2100

Ruth Johnson

Dick DeVos – $35,363,233

Betsy DeVos – $133,996

Dan DeVos – $15,135

Pam DeVos – $13,600

Michael Jandernoa – $12,200

Rick DeVos – $10,200

JC Huizenga – $10,050

Stephen Van Andel – $9800

Peter Secchia – $8800

Kim LaSata

Rick DeVos – $4000

Doug DeVos – $2000

Dan DeVos – $2000

Maria DeVos – $2000

Cheri DeVos – $2000

Peter Secchia – $2000

John Kennedy – $2000

Michael Jandernoa – $1000

JC Huizenga – $1000

Dan Lauwers

Michael Jandernoa – $1000

Michael MacDonald

Dick DeVos – $2000

Doug DeVos – $2000

Dan DeVos – $2000

Maria DeVos – $2000

Cheri DeVos – $2000

John Kennedy – $2000

Ed McBroom

Michael Jandernoa – $1000

Dick DeVos – $500

Betsy DeVos – $500

Doug DeVos – $500

Dan DeVos – $500

Maria DeVos – $500

Helen DeVos – $500

Aric Nesbitt

Michael Jandernoa – $3000

Susan Jandernoa – $1000

Rick DeVos – $1000

Rick Outman

Michael Jandernoa – $1500

Jim Runestad

Dick DeVos – $2000

Doug DeVos – $2000

Dan DeVos – $2000

Maria DeVos – $2000

Cheri DeVos – $2000

Rick DeVos – $2000

Peter Secchia – $2000

John Kennedy – $2000

Wayne Schmidt

Doug DeVos – $4250

Dan DeVos – $4250

Maria DeVos – $4250

Cheri DeVos – $4250

Rick DeVos – $4250

Michael Jandernoa – $3500

Dick DeVos – $3250

Betsy DeVos – $3250

Mike Shirkey

Rick DeVos – $4000

Doug DeVos – $3250

Dan DeVos – $3000

Maria DeVos – $3000

Cheri DeVos – $3000

Dick DeVos – $2000

Betsy DeVos – $2000

Peter Secchia – $2000

Jim Stamas

Michael Jandernoa – $2250

Lana Theis

Dick DeVos – $2000

Doug DeVos – $2000

Maria DeVos – $2000

Cheri DeVos – $2000

Peter Secchia – $2000

Helen DeVos – $1000

Pam DeVos – $1000

Rick DeVos – $1000

Michael Jandernoa – $1000

Curt VanderWall

Dick DeVos – $1000

Betsy DeVos – $1000

Doug DeVos – $1000

Dan DeVos – $1000

Maria DeVos – $1000

Cheri DeVos – $1000

Pam DeVos – $1000

Helen DeVos – $1000

Rick DeVos – $1000

Peter Secchia – $1000

Michael Jandernoa – $900

Roger Victory

0

Doug Wozniak

0

Dale Zorn

Michael Jandernoa – $2000

Susan Jandernoa – $1000

Of course, this is just one example of how members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure influence public policy for their own benefit. They are willing to spend money to buy political influence, which results in protecting and expanding their wealth, at the expense of the public.

DeVos family has contributed nearly half a million to DeSantis, making them complicit in the Don't Say Gay bill
https://griid.org/2022/03/31/devos-family-has-contributed-nearly-half-a-million-to-desantis-making-them-complicit-in-the-dont-say-gay-bill/

Earlier this week, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law what is referred to as the "Don't Say Gay Bill."

The bill bans classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through third grade and states that any instruction on those topics cannot occur "in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards, according to the legislation **HB 1557.**

The bill signed into law by DeSantis, has mobilized people in Florida, particularly students, many of which have engaged in protests, such as the one that took place at **Western High School on March 11th**.

In addition, many LGBTQ groups across the country are concerned that other states might also begin the process of introducing this kind of legislation.

West Michigan Connection

As is the case throughout the US, there are numerous anti-LGBTQ organizations, along with a substantial number of Evangelical Christians that also oppose any civil rights or even the acceptance of those who identify as LGBTQ.

In Florida, one anti-LGBTQ entity is Dr. James Kennedy Ministries, formerly known as Truth in Action and Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. Kennedy has been dead since 2007, but he has been one of the most anti-LGBTQ pastors for decades. Kennedy had organized a national conference for the religious rights for years called, "Reclaiming America for Christ."

One newsletter from D. James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries featured a photograph of very young children under the headline "SEX WITH CHILDREN? HOMOSEXUALS SAY YES!" The newsletter asserts "Adult sex with children has been a crucial component of the homosexual movement all along, and officially since the 1993 March on Washington when it was included as a demand (#55) in their famous manifesto."

Over the years, Kennedy emphasized **anti-gay rhetoric**, particularly in his TV ministry. ***He recommended as "essential" the virulent work of R.J. Rushdoony, who believed practicing gays should be executed***.

Considering the strong religious right presence in West Michigan, it should come as no surprise that people like Richard DeVos have been a major donors to anti-LGBTQ groups in Florida.

In 2008, the DeVos family was the largest contributor **($100,000) to the Florida4Marriage group**, which put Amendment 2 on the ballot calling for marriage

between only a man and a woman. The Amendment passed in 2008 and outlawed same sex marriages in Florida until that decision was overturned by the US Supreme Court decision last year.

In addition, the DeVos family owns the Orlando Magic basketball team, which has allowed the arena to be used for Evangelical Christian Faith Nights. These Christian rallies have also provide a platform for anti-LGBTQ organizing in Orlando. (See *Bad Sports*, by Dave Zirin)

Then there is the history of DeVos family members contributing to the political campaigns of Ron DeSantis, both while he was a member of Congress and now as Governor of Florida.

DeSantis first ran for the Governor's seat in 2018 and is currently raising money for re-election in 2022. Here is a list of **DeVos family member contributions during both of those election cycles**, with the likelihood of more contributions before the November Election.

2018

Daniel DeVos – $53,000

Doug DeVos – $53,000

Cheri DeVos – $53,000

Dick DeVos – $53,000

2022

Dick DeVos – $76,159.38

Daniel DeVos – $51,159.38

Doug DeVos – $51,159.37

Cheri DeVos – $51,159.37

This means that the DeVos family has contributed a total of **$441,636** to Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Now, there are many people in the Grand Rapids area that believe that since Richard and Helen DeVos have both died, their children do not embrace the same anti-LGBTQ ideology as their parents. Considering that the second generation of the DeVos dynasty has contributed nearly a half a million dollars to DeSantis, who recently signed an anti-LGBTQ bill, the DeVos family cannot claim to be distancing themselves from their parents hateful anti-LGBTQ ideology. In addition, the DeVos family members have not made any public statement against the "Don't Say Gay" policy now in effect in Florida, thus it seems there are $441,636 worth of reasons to believe that the DeVos family continues to fund anti-LGBTQ policies across the country.

Campaign Finances for West Michigan Congressional Races: How the DeVos family and other members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure keep buying candidates and influencing public policy
https://griid.org/2022/04/28/campaign-finances-for-west-michigan-congressional-races-how-the-devos-family-and-other-members-of-the-grand-rapids-power-structure-keep-buying-candidates-and-influencing-public-policy/

Campaign Finances for West Michigan Congressional Races: How the DeVos family and other members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure keep buying candidates and influencing public policy

The most recent deadline for Campaign Finance data was April 25th. Over the next week, we will be providing some information and analysis on how much money candidates are receiving and who the main contributors are.

West Michigan Congressional Races

With the new re-districting now in place, it is important to look at the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Congressional Districts, since they all fall under the geographic area known as West Michigan.

2nd Congressional District – There are three candidates running for the 2nd Congressional District, John Moolenaar (R), Jericho Gonzalez (R) and Ray Johnson (D). However, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, the only available campaign finance data is for John Moolenaar.

In the current electoral cycle, **Moolenaar has raised $1,420,664**. The largest contributor so far is Dow Inc., which has contributed $95,888. There are other corporate donors, but some of the most notable are West Michigan-based companies such as:

- RDV Corp – $14,100
- Amway/Alticor – $9,800
- DP Fox Ventures – $5,800
- Windquest Group – $5,800
- P DeVos Designs – $5,800

Of course, all 5 of these entities are owned by the DeVos family, thus making them the second largest contributor to Moolenaar after Dow Inc, with a total of $41,300.

3rd Congressional District – There are six candidates running for this seat, with Peter Meijer (R) (incumbent), Hillary Scholar (D), John Gibbs (R), Tom Norton (R), Audra Johnson (R) and Gabi Manolache (R).

The most recent campaign finance date shows that Meijer is far ahead of everyone else in terms of money, with $2,137,150, followed by Scholten with $487,841, Gibbs with $227,502, Norton with $209,809, Johnson with $41,275 and Manolache with just

$6,814. However the only detailed campaign contribution information listed on **OpenSecrets.org** is **for Peter Meijer**.

A large percentage of the contributions to Peter Meijer are from West Michigan, such as:

- Meijer Inc – $32,002
- RDV Corp – $31,900
- Bissell Inc. – $17,400
- Amway/Alticor Inc. – $16,600
- Gordon Food Service – $11,600
- Van Andel Institute – $11,600
- Autocam Corp – $11,600
- Hayworth Inc. – $8,299
- 42 North Partners – $7,250
- Michael Jandernoa – $5,800
- Windquest Group – $5,800
- Wolverine Gas & Oil – $5,800

4th Congressional District – There are six candidates running for this seat that have campaign finance date, all of which are Republicans – Bill Huizenga, Stephen Carra, Sherry O'Donnell, Ezra Scott, Jon Rocha and Gina Johnsen.

Huizenga has raised three times more than the next candidate, with $1,667,751, followed by Carra with $417,666, O'Donnell with $159,834, Scott with $12,871, Rocha with $11,313 and Johnsen with $345.

The only **detailed data is for the incumbent, Bill Huizenga**, with numerous West Michigan contributors, such as:

- Haworth Inc – $23,232
- RDV Corp – $17,400
- Windquest Group – $11,600
- Meijer Inc. – $8,700
- Amway/Alticor Inc. – $6,800
- Pamela Roland/DeVos – $5,800
- Van Andel Institute – $5,800
- Huizenga Group – $5,600

What is instructive is that all of the contributors listed for the three Congressional Districts, are companies owned by the local power structure, such as DeVos, Meijer, Van Andel, Kennedy, Jandernoa, Huizenga and Haworth. However, the largest contributors are from the DeVos family, which comes to a total of $127,200 for the three Congressional Districts in West Michigan. This is consistent with what the DeVos family has been doing since the late 1970s, buying candidates and influencing public policy.

May 3rd Special Election for 74th District Seat, again features a candidate that has received thousands from the DeVos family
https://griid.org/2022/05/03/may-3rd-special-election-for-74th-district-seat-again-features-a-candidate-that-has-received-thousands-from-the-devos-family/

There is a special election on Tuesday, to fill the seat previously held by Mark Huizenga, who is not a State Senator.

Robert Reagan had won the GOP primary, but after he has made some "**controversial comments**," Mike Milanowski Jr. has decided to enter the race as a **Republican write-in candidate**.

Therefore, the May 3rd election for the 74th District seat is now between Reagan, Milanowski and Democrat Carol Glanville. **Glanville**, who is currently a Walker City Commissioner, **doesn't have much of a campaign platform**, but she has raised a fair amount of money as of the **most recent campaign finance data**. Some of the larger campaign donors for Glanville are:

- Julie Brixie Blue Wave Fund – $5,000
- Michigan Education Association – $2,500
- Karla Jurvetson (Physician from California) – $1,050

Robert Reagan has a more extensive issues list, although it is pretty clear that he embraces a T**rump-like platform**. In terms of fundraising, here are the top contributors, based on **recent campaign finance data**:

- Robert Reagan (he has been his largest single contributor so far) – $1,849
- Kristen Buff (Business Coach) – $1,000
- Bonnie Burke (Designer) – $900
- It is also worth mentioning that former State Represented **Dave Agema**, who was far right of even many Republicans at the time, contributed $250 to Reagan's campaign.

Lastly, there is the write-in candidate Mike Milanowski Jr. **Milanowski has no issues listed on his campaign page**, although there is some information on his **Facebook candidacy page**. Milanowski has been endorsed by the **Michigan Manufacturers Association**. In terms of campaign finances, Milanowski has a fairly impressive list of West Michigan power brokers, considering he is a write-in candidate. Here is a list, based on **data from the Michigan Secretary pf State**:

- Pamela DeVos – $1,000
- Cheri DeVos – $1,000
- Maria DeVos – $1,000
- Steve Ehmann (RDV Corp.) – $1,000
- Doug DeVos – $1,000
- Betsy DeVos – $1,000
- Dick DeVos – $1,000
- Dan DeVos – $1,000
- Friends of West Michigan Business PAC (GR Chamber of Commerce) – $1,000

Clearly, the DeVos family wants to see Milanowski win the 74th District seat, since they and one of their RDV Corp managers have collectively contributed $8,000. This provides Milanowski with funds to do online campaigning and mailers for today's vote.

Grand Rapids Power Structure dominates campaign contributions in West Michigan on the eve of Primary Elections

https://griid.org/2022/08/01/grand-rapids-power-structure-dominates-campaign-contributions-in-west-michigan-on-the-eve-of-primary-elections/

Last week, we looked at campaign financing from the most recent state deadlines, first the **State Senate races** in West Michigan, then the **State Representative races**, and lastly the **Kent County Commission races**.

There were clear patterns that emerged in terms of which names of individuals, families and organizations were making the largest campaign contributions. Specifically members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, have overwhelmingly funneled thousands into the campaigns for political seats in West Michigan. What follows is a run down of campaign contributions, from the largest on down, plus there are three more months until the November elections.

- DeVos family $86,550
- Terri Land/Dan Hibma $24,950
- Michael & Susan Jandernoa $20,000
- John & Nancy Kennedy $9,450
- Mark Murray $6,250
- Van Andel family $5,200
- JC Huizenga $4,450

Total GR Power Structure $164,850

- GR Chamber of Commerce PAC $29,900
- Realtors PAC $71,750

There are several things worth noting about these campaign contributions. **First**, most of the money was contributed in the Kent County Commission races, specifically when it came to the DeVos family contributions. Too often we don't think about how influential the DeVos family is when it comes to buying political influence right here in Kent County, but people would be wise to come to terms with that fact.

Second, while the majority of the GR Chamber PAC campaign contributions went to GOP candidates, **9 different Democrats** also received money from them. What is even more interesting about this dynamic, is the fact that the Democrats who received campaign contributions from the GR Chamber PAC, were those who are more likely to win the seats they are running for. This means that the GR Chamber PAC is strategic in

their thinking, making sure that no matter who is in office, they have purchased access and influence.

Third, although they are not exclusively based in West Michigan, the Realtors PAC, which represents the Realtors Association, the very entity which dictates the cost of housing in Michigan, also contributed a sizable amount of campaign money in 2022. This is important, since housing costs are a critical issue facing thousands of families in the Greater Grand Rapids area. Thus, the Realtors PAC also wants to make sure that they have purchased access and influence with candidates in the upcoming election. And like the GR Chamber PAC, the Realtors PAC did primarily contribute to GOP candidates, but they also provided campaign contributions to **8 different Democrats**, specifically Democrats that are more likely to win their seats in November.

Fourth, there are still a few months before the November election, so we can anticipate a whole lot more money from the GR Power Structure leading up to that time. There were significant campaign contributions from the GR Power Structure to candidates who were on the August 2nd Primary, but one that is done, we'll have a clearer picture of the partisan battles that will be on the ballot in November. We will be tracking that information after the October 25th deadline for candidates to report campaign contributions.

Lastly, if we then combine the amount of campaign contributions from the Grand Rapids Power Structure families, the GR Chamber PAC and the Realtors PAC (power structure organizations) – **which are just nine different entities** – we are talking about **$266,500** that are going to candidates running for seats in the Greater Grand Rapids area. This means that these 9 entities will not only have a great deal of influence in the outcome of the 2022 Elections in West Michigan, they will have significant influence with the candidates who become State Senators, State Representatives and Kent County Commissioners through the end of 2024. Lastly, this influence will be driven by what benefits the members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, which is always at the expense of the rest of us, politically, economically and socially. If we ignore their influence, we do so at our own peril.

Trump endorsed Gubernatorial candidate Tudor Dixon received a ton of campaign contributions from the DeVos family and the rest of the Grand Rapids elite

https://griid.org/2022/08/03/trump-endorsed-gubernatorial-candidate-tudor-dixon-received-a-ton-of-campaign-contributions-from-the-devos-family-and-the-rest-of-the-grand-rapids-elite/

As I post this, it looks like Tudor Dixon is going to win the GOP Primary race to face Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in the November Election. The GOP Gubernatorial candidate

list was significantly reduced, since several candidates failed to get enough valid signatures to be on the ballot.

Last Friday, July 29, Tudor Dixon received an official endorsement from former US President Donald Trump, which pushed her ahead of the other Republican Gubernatorial candidates. In a **Press Release that same day**, Dixon wrote:

"It is a great honor to receive President Trump's endorsement and have the strength of our campaign to defeat Gretchen Whitmer further affirmed by his support."

Another endorsement that Dixon received, much earlier than the endorsement from Trump, was an official endorsement from the DeVos family. In a **May 23rd Press Release**, Dixon includes a comment from Dick DeVos:

"The DeVos family have decided to stand with Tudor Dixon as being the next, right governor for the state of Michigan. We think Tudor, as a business leader and a mom, has the experience, the passion, and a plan to put the state back on track."

Based on the most recent Campaign Finance records, the DeVos family and other families who work for the DeVos family, have contributed a substantial amount to Dixon's campaign. Here is the **data from the most recent campaign finance data, which was due on July 25th**:

- Betsy DeVos $7,150
- Doug DeVos $7,150
- Melissa DeVos $7,150
- Suzanne DeVos $7,150
- Dick DeVos $7,150
- Dan DeVos $7,150
- Pamella DeVos $7,150
- Rick DeVos $7,150
- Dalton DeVos $7,150
- Maria DeVos $7,150
- Steve Ehmann (RDV Corp) $7,150
- Jerry Tubergen (RDV Corp) $7,150
- Barb Van Andel-Gaby $7,150
- David Van Andel $7,150
- Carol Van Andel $7,150
- Amy Van Andel $7,150
- Stephen Van Andel $7,150
- Elsa Broekhuizen (Betsy's Mom) $7,150
- Ren Broekhuizen $7,150
- Emilie Wierda (Betsy's Sisiter) $7,150
- Laurie Wierda $7,150
- Craig Wierda $7,150

- Chris Wierda $7,150

The total of the DeVos, Van Andel, Prince/Broekhuizen family contributions comes to a total of **$164,450**, making them the largest single contributing family group to any of the Gubernatorial candidates in Michigan in 2022.

There were other members of the West Michigan elite, which contributed to Dixon's campaign, such as several members of the Haworth family, Mark Murray, Mike & Gayle VanGessel, and members of the DeWitt family. However, the DeVos/Van Andel/Prince/Broekhuizen cartel was head and shoulders above everyone else.

If you go to the **website for Tudor Dixon's campaign**, one can see how her platform aligns with the DeVos/Van Andel/Prince/Broekhuizen cartel, especially on economic, education, abortion and public safety matters. We will continue to follow Dixon and report on her campaign finances just before the November election to see how much more the money her campaign receives from the wealthiest families in our back yard. Lastly, it is always important to point out that the financial support for Tudor Dixon from the DeVos/Van Andel/Prince/Broekhuizen cartel means that they are in agreement with the neo-fascist Donald Trump about who should be the next Governor of Michigan. This is not surprising, since the DeVos family made significant **contributions to Trump in the 2020 Election**, which means the DeVos family endorses all of the White Supremacist and neo-fascist aspects of Trump and his Maga horde.

DeVos family 2022 Election spending means $12 Million worth of harm

https://griid.org/2022/11/06/devos-family-2022-election-spending-means-12-million-worth-of-harm/

For anyone who follows GRIID, you know that one of the things we do is to monitor and critique systems of power and oppression in the Grand Rapids area. These systems of power and oppression are the organizations and families that have a great deal of power over the masses. And of course, the family in this area that has the most power over people, is the DeVos family.

There are numerous ways in which the DeVos family has influence over people, such as their various business and other Capitalist ventures, along with their family foundations. In addition, the other way that the DeVos family exerts power over people is using their considerable wealth to buy politicians, thus buying public policy.

Over the past several decades the DeVos has been a major contributor to the Republican Party, both in the nation and in Michigan. The electoral influence began with Rich DeVos, the co-founder of Amway, but despite the fact that he has been dead for several years, the DeVos family continues to be one of the top election funders in Michigan.

When you add up all the money that each of the DeVos family members contributed at the state level, along with one of their henchmen (Stephen Ehmann – President of RDV Corp.), then include the money they have contributed in Kent County and the City of Grand Rapids for the upcoming election, the total comes to **$12,304,750**.

The campaign contributions made by the DeVos family have gone to candidates, to Political Actions Committees (PACs), Ballot Initiative groups, State GOP committees and the Kent County Republican Committee. Now, this $12 Million and change is just in Michigan, The DeVos family has also contributed millions to political candidates in other states, which you can research at **https://www.opensecrets.org/donor-lookup**. Lastly, there is Dark Money contributions that the DeVos family has made, but are difficult to track since many of these Dark Money groups do not reveal who their contributors are. For more on Dark Money groups, go here **https://www.opensecrets.org/dark-money/basics**.

Below is a breakdown of the Electoral contributions made by members of the DeVos family (and Stephen Ehmann), for the State, County and Grand Rapids elections. All of the $12 Million and change is funding candidates and ballot initiatives that are Republican or Republican-leaning (in the case of non-partisan races and ballot initiatives). The candidates and the ballot initiatives they have given campaign funds to will lead to policies that do real harm in Michigan, Kent County and Grand Rapids. Here is a list of what this harm looks like:

- Anti-Abortion
- Anti-labor union
- Homophobia
- Transphobia
- Undermines Public Education
- Perpetuates environmental disaster
- Creates more poverty
- Perpetuates White Supremacy
- Perpetuates Settler Colonialism
- Promotes Privatization
- Religious bigotry
- Promotes US Imperialism

Think about what this harm means the next time you attend something funded by the DeVos family, the groups that rely on their foundation money or their names on buildings that you pass by. One cannot separate the charitable contributions the DeVos family makes and all of the systemic harm they cause through their businesses and their election funding.

DeVos family campaign finance breakdown

Maria & Doug DeVos – $4,256,900

Betsy DeVos – $3,562,550

Cheri DeVos – $1,668,500

Daniel DeVos – **$1,457,700**

Pamella DeVos – **$565,800**

Dick DeVos – **$400,000**

Stephen Ehmann – **$313,500**

Kent County Commission races – **$60,900**

GR City Commission 1st Ward – **$9450**

GR City Commission 3rd Ward – **$9450**

Billionaires spent more money in the 2022 Elections than in any previous campaign cycle, with the DeVos family leading the way in Michigan https://griid.org/2023/05/16/billionaires-spent-more-money-in-the-2022-elections-than-in-any-previous-campaign-cycle-with-the-devos-family-leading-the-way-in-michigan/

According to a **new report from Americans for Tax Fairness**, US Billionaires spent over $1 Billion in the 2022 Midterm Elections, which is the most the Billionaire class has ever spent during any election cycle.

In the introduction to this new report, it states:

Billionaires have plenty of money with which to try to buy elections, their net worth increased by 58% to a staggering $4.7 trillion during the roughly three years of the pandemic alone. The failure of America's tax system to fairly tax the income and wealth of billionaires leaves the with lots of excess cash to spend on candidates and causes. Meanwhile, the breakdown of campaign-finance controls since the Supreme Court's notorious Citizens United decision in 2010 has made it easy for tycoons to translate their economic clout into political power.

Billionaires in Michigan also contributed significantly to this increase in campaign funding by Billionaires, with Dan Gilbert, the Stryker family, and Hank & Doug Meijer among those who influenced the 2022 Elections. However, of all the members of the Billionaire Class in Michigan, the DeVos family contributed the most in the 2022 Midterm Elections.

As **we documented in November of 2022**, the **DeVos family spent $12,304,750** to influence electoral outcomes, and that was just in Michigan. The DeVos family has also contributed millions to political candidates in other states, which you can research at **https://www.opensecrets.org/donor-lookup**. Lastly, there is Dark Money contributions that the DeVos family has made, but are difficult to track since many of

these Dark Money groups do not reveal who their contributors are. For more on Dark Money groups, go here **https://www.opensecrets.org/dark-money/basics**.

The Americans for Tac Fairness report concludes by saying:

We must end the vicious cycle of the ultra-wealthy using their vast fortunes to exploit a broken campaign finance system to support candidates who will cut their taxes, allowing them to amass even greater wealth which they can use to continue the process. When billionaires throw huge sums of money into elections, they shape the debate to their liking and in the process distort what limited form of democracy that exists in the US.

Of course, like all necessary changes, this will have to happen from the bottom up, since neither the Republican or Democratic Parties are interested in limiting the role that the Billionaire Class plays in Electoral Politics or Public Policy.

Mike Pence and Betsy DeVos talk conservative values, but the 2024 Election is the immediate goal https://griid.org/2023/06/04/mike-pence-and-betsy-devos-talk-conservative-values-but-the-2024-election-is-the-immediate-goal/

Last Wednesday, at Meijer Gardens, **the Russell Kirk Center** hosted a conversation between former Vice President Mike Pence and former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. The theme of the conversation was, What Do Conservatives Believe?

All four of the major daily Grand Rapids-based news agencies, **MLive**, **WOOD TV8**, **WZZM13**, and **WXMI 17**, all covered the event. There were two main points in the local news coverage, the first of which was what Mike Pence had to say about what conservatives believe. In one example, from WOOD TV8, Pence stated: "*First and foremost, I really do believe that free enterprise and a free market, has created the greatest standard of living in the history of the world. Ensuring and preserving a limited government is an essential element to preserving the free market*."

In all four of the news agencies coverage, there was no attempt at verifying or questioning what Pence had to say. For instance, when Pence said, "*that free enterprise and a free market, has created the greatest standard of living in the history of the world."* There was no effort by the channel 8 reporter to verify such a claim, which is patently false. In 2022, **US News & World ranked countries** with the best quality of life, where the US came in 21st.

2024 Presidential Election Endorsement?

However, the topic that all four news outlets spent the most time on was the fact that Mike Pence had announced that he was running for US President in 2024, with much of this coverage framed as the standard horse race election coverage. Some of the local news agencies also include some polling amongst the announced 2024 Republican Presidential candidates.

Then there is the fact that Betsy DeVos appeared with Pence. The DeVos family approval of candidates carries substantial weight, especially in Michigan, where they have been the leading campaign contributor to the GOP for the past several decades. While Mike Pence was speaking at an event organized by the Russell Kirk Center, it was days before his official announcement as a candidate for President in 2024. Having the approval and the endorsement of the most powerful family in West Michigan would benefit such an announcement with many of the GOP faithful.

Betsy's brother-in law, Doug DeVos also had **Mike Pence on his podcast show, Believe**, last November, when Pence was out on his book tour. GRIID wrote about Pence being on the Believe podcast show. Here is a bit of what we wrote in response to their conversation about what leadership was:

The first thing that Mike Pence said about leadership, was that it was a gift "we get from God." Pence then went in to talk about his foundation of leadership, which is knowing who one is. For Pence, he is first a Christian, then a Conservative and lastly a Republican.

Pence then said that he aspired to embrace a servant leadership model. DeVos then chimed in saying that leadership is having a sense of humility. Ok, how it it that these two rich, white, deeply privileged people can say shit like this with a straight face. Are they just saying it because this is what those who look up to them want to hear, or do they really believe this crap?.

More recently, Doug DeVos had **another GOP Presidential candidate on his podcast**, someone who is not nearly as well known as Mike Pence. Vivek Ramaswamy spoke with Doug DeVos in late April, and like most of the guests on Believe, Ramaswamy is an entrepreneur who is deeply committed to Capitalism and Conservatism. Just look at his Presidential campaign site, specifically his platform, what he refers to as America First 2.0 – **Vivek's 25 Policy Commitments to Take America First further than Trump**.

It is worth mentioning that in 2016, the DeVos family was not a fan of then candidate Donald Trump. The DeVos cartel decided to throw their support behind another political dynasty, by backing Jeb Bush to become the 45th President. However, the GOP faithful chose Trump, primarily because he provided them with an open license to embrace and practice White Supremacy and White Nationalism.

Just days before the 2016 Election, Trump came to West Michigan to hold a rally. Another member of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, **Peter Secchia, spoke that day and sent a message to the DeVos family and other major GOP donors, saying**: *"I have a message for the Bushes and Mitt Romney, If you don't want to support Donald Trump: Shut up! If you don't know where you are today, you're a loser."*

This was a bit of a jab directed at the DeVos family, but Secchia also knew that the DeVos family had already put their substantial financial resources behind the GOP Presidential nominee, Donald Trump. The DeVos family did the same thing in 2020, where **they contributed $1,162,000 to federal candidates, which included Donald**

Trump and Trump endorsed candidates. What this has taught us is that even if the DeVos family doesn't get to finance a Presidential candidate that is aligned with their ideological values, they will still put money behind the GOP nominee.

We don't know for sure how much the Mike Pence conversation with Betsy DeVos was about creating the necessary optics in West Michigan to lay the ground work for a Mike Pence Presidential run. And since other members of the DeVos family have provided a platform for other GOP Presidential candidates, they may simply be providing opportunities for Republican candidates to talk about the things that are most important to them – God, Capitalism and Country. One thing is for certain, the DeVos cartel will end up backing whomever wins the GOP Presidential nomination in 2024.

Buying Elections: 2024 DeVos family campaign contributions to key Kent County elected positions https://griid.org/2024/02/04/buying-elections-2024-devos-family-campaign-contributions-to-key-kent-county-elected-positions/

The deadline for election campaign finances were due this past Wednesday, January 31st. As it has been a practice of GRIID for several years now, we plan on post several articles in the coming days specific to the most recent round of campaign finances that are for the 2024 Elections.

Kent County elected positions will be part of the 2024 Elections, with County Commission races and other more administrative positions. Since there have been so few announcements by candidates to challenge Kent County Commissioners, there wasn't much campaign finance activity. However, the four main administration positions that people get to vote on – County Clerk, County Treasurer, County Prosecutor and the Kent County Sheriff – all had significant campaign contributions reported for this most recent filing deadline.

To access the Kent County Campaign Finance records click on **Campaign Finance Report**, then you will have to do a search by candidate.

Kent County Clerk – Lisa Posthumus Lyons

Lisa Posthumus Lyons is the current Kent County Clerk and her campaign finances for the most recent filing can be found **here**. Lyons has raised $97,954.37 since October and she has spent $3,043.47. The total number of contributors was 117, although the bulk of the total amount raised are from just a few large donors.

Largest Contributions

- TGIF Victory Fund – $10,000
- Cheri DeVos – $8,325

- Steve Ehmann – $8,325
- Doug DeVos – $8,325
- Maria DeVos – $8,325
- Dick DeVos – $8,325
- Betsy DeVos – $8,325
- Daniel DeVos – $8,325
- Pamela DeVos – $8,325
- Joan Secchia – $4,000
- Mark Murray – $3,100
- Jim Williams – $2,604.10
- John Kennedy – $2,000
- J.C. Huizenga – $1,200
- Tom Bylenga – $1,200
- Dave Dishaw – $1,050
- Jo DeMarco – $1,040.82
- Mike Ellis – $1,000
- Mark Bissell – $1,000

The total amount of contributions from the lop 16 donors equals $92,794. This means that the remaining 101 contributors gave only gave $5,160 collectively, which is around 5% of what Lyons raised in campaign contributions

Kent County Treasurer – Peter MacGregor

Peter MacGregor is the current Kent County Treasurer and his campaign finances for the most recent filing can be found **here**. MacGregor has raised $121,893.39 since October and he has spent $4,098.69. The total number of contributors was 149, although the bulk of the total amount raised are from just a few large donors.

Largest Contributions

- TGIF Victory Fund – $10,000
- Cheri DeVos – $8,325
- Steve Ehmann – $8,325
- Doug DeVos – $8,325
- Maria DeVos – $8,325
- Dick DeVos – $8,325
- Betsy DeVos – $8,325
- Daniel DeVos – $8,325
- Pamela DeVos – $8,325
- Daniel Hibma – $8,325
- Heather Lombardini – $8,325
- Joan Secchia – $4,250
- Jim Williams – $2,104.10
- Charlie Secchia – $2,000
- John Kennedy – $2,000
- J.C. Huizenga – $1,200
- Tom Bylenga – $1,200

- David Bilardello – 1,020.82
- Lucas Middleton – $1,000
- Martin Spaulding – $1,000
- Mike Ellis – $1,000
- Mark Bissell – $1,000

The total amount of contributions from the lop 22 donors equals $111,024. This means that the remaining 133 contributors gave only gave $10,869 collectively, which is less than 10% of what MacGregor raised in campaign contributions.

Kent County Prosecutor – Chris Becker

Chris Becker is the current Kent County Prosecutor and his campaign finances for the most recent filing can be found **here**. Becker has raised $104,578.39 since October and he has spent $1,182.55. The total number of contributors was 105, although the bulk of the total amount raised are from just a few large donors.

Largest Contributions

- TGIF Victory Fund – $20,000
- Cheri DeVos – $8,325
- Steve Ehmann – $8,325
- Doug DeVos – $8,325
- Maria DeVos – $8,325
- Dick DeVos – $8,325
- Betsy DeVos – $8,325
- Daniel DeVos – $8,325
- Pamela DeVos – $8,325
- Joan Secchia – $4,000
- Charlie Secchia – $2,000
- John Kennedy – $2,000
- Jim Williams – $2,000
- Mike Ellis – $1,000
- Mark Murray – $1,000
- Tom Bylenga – $1,000
- Mark Bissell – $1,000

The total amount of contributions from the lop 18 donors equals $100,000. This means that the remaining 87 contributors gave only gave $4,578 collectively, which is around 4% of what Becker raised in campaign contributions.

Kent County Sheriff – Michelle LaJoye-Young

Michelle LaJoye-Young is the current Kent County Sheriff and her campaign finances for the most recent filing can be found **here**. LaJoye-Young has raised $94,478.39 since October and she has spent $1,355.97. The total number of contributors was 103, although the bulk of the total amount raised are from just a few large donors.

Largest Contributions

- TGIF Victory Fund – $10,000
- Cheri DeVos – $8,325
- Steve Ehmann – $8,325
- Doug DeVos – $8,325
- Maria DeVos – $8,325
- Dick DeVos – $8,325
- Betsy DeVos – $8,325
- Daniel DeVos – $8,325
- Pamela DeVos – $8,325
- Joan Secchia – $4,000
- Charlie Secchia – $2,000
- John Kennedy – $2,000
- Jim Williams – $2,000
- Mike Ellis – $1,000
- Mark Murray – $1,000
- Tom Bylenga – $1,000
- Mark Bissell – $1,000

The total amount of contributions from the lop 17 donors equals $90,000. This means that the remaining 86 contributors gave only gave $4,478.39 collectively, which is less than 5% of what Becker raised in campaign contributions.

When the Grand Rapids Power Structure buys elections

As anyone can see from the data we have provided here the electoral process is automatically corrupted by the influx of large sums of money by members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure. You have 8 members of the DeVos family contributing a total of **$264,000** for just 4 Kent County elections, plus we still have 9 months till election day.

Of course, the close associates of the DeVos family, like the Secchia family, John Kennedy, Mark Murray, Mark Bissell and several others are also part of the Grand Rapids Power Structure and are playing their part in determining public policy in this community. Also, in case people were wondering, the **TGIF Victory Fund** has some of the same funders that are listed above, it's just another avenue for the Capitalist Class to dictate politics in this community. I know that we were all taught in 8th grade civics class the notion of, "one person, one vote," but that is not how real electoral politics is played and never has been.

Follow the Money: In Kent County the Prosecutor, Clerk, Sheriff, and Treasurer are largely funded by the rich and powerful

https://griid.org/2024/07/29/follow-the-money-in-kent-county-the-prosecutor-clerk-sheriff-and-treasurer-are-largely-funded-by-the-rich-and-powerful/

There are elected positions in Kent County that are often overlooked during election cycles. These positions wield tremendous power in this area around issues such as policing, transparency, mass incarceration, and finances, yet they rarely get scrutinized.

I am talking about the Kent County Prosecutor, the Kent County Sheriff, the Kent County Clerk, and the Kent County Treasurer.

Besides not talking about this position, we often overlook at their campaign finances during election cycles, which are quite instructive. Leading up to the August 6th Primary, here is how much the incumbents have raised for these Kent County positions:

- **County Clerk: Lisa Postumus Lyons – $133,682.37**
- **County Prosecutor: Chris Becker – $112,656.39**
- **County Sheriff: Michelle LaJoye-Young – $121,531.39**
- **County Treasurer: Peter MacGregor – $176,136.32**

What is even more instructive is the list of top contributors to each of these incumbents.

These lists are nearly identical. It's as if all the people on these lists got together to conspire. Not really, this is just how systems of power and members of the Capitalist Class operate. They want to control us in every way possible. Until we come to terms with these dynamics things will not fundamentally change. No I'm not talking about running candidates against them, I'm talking about dismantling these systems and creating a more humane, a more just and a more joyful way of coexisting in this community. Another World is Possible!

West Michigan donors make up half of the top 25 contributors to the Michigan Republican House and Senate Committees

https://griid.org/2024/07/31/west-michigan-donors-make-up-half-of-the-top-25-contributors-to-the-michigan-republican-house-and-senate-committees/

All week long I have been providing documentation on campaign finances around candidates for political races in **Grand Rapids** and **Kent County**, along with the group behind the Hotel Tax ballot initiative, the **Destination Kent Committee**.

I will be posting campaign finance data for State House races that are in West Michigan as well, but before I add that piece, I wanted to share some very interesting data as it relates to West Michigan and the GOP campaign contributions for the entire state.

There are two GOP groups that are consistently the largest recipients of campaign contributions during elections cycles, the House Republican Campaign Committee and the Senate Republican Campaign Committee.

According to data from the site **https://www.transparencyusa.org/**, the top 25 contributors to both of the Republican groups mentioned above are contributors from West Michigan during election cycles from 2017 to the present. What follows is the **data for the top 25 contributors to the House Republican Campaign Committee** over the last 8 years. I will highlight the people/orgs that are from West Michigan.

- **Maria & Doug DeVos** – $691,300.00
- Wentworth Majority Fund – $603,530.82
- Matt Hall PAC – $590,100.00
- **Daniel DeVos** – $345,650.00
- **John Kennedy III** – $345,650.00
- **Nancy Kennedy** – $345,650.00
- **Richard DeVos Jr.** – $345,650.00
- **Suzanne Cheryl DeVos** – $345,650.00
- **J. C. Huizenga** – $335,650.00
- **Mary Whiteford** – $327,620.00
- Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers State PAC – $309,200.00
- Republican State Leadership Committee – $305,650.00
- Ron Weiser – $303,675.00
- **Matthew Hayworth** – $293,875.00
- Michigan Realtors SuperPAC – $287,225.00
- **Richard Hayworth** – $274,875.00
- **Pamella DeVos** – $265,650.00
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan PAC – $260,475.00
- Michigan Republican Party – $250,850.00
- Matthew Moroun – $247,825.00
- DTE Energy PAC – $246,975.00
- **Meijer PAC** – $236,975.00
- **Michael Jandernoa** – $236,875.00
- **Luke Meerman** – $233,500.00
- James Nicholson – $228,950.00

You can see that there are **14 of the top 25** contributors to the House Republican Campaign Committee that are from West Michigan.

Now let's look at the data for the **top 25 contributors to the Senate Republican Campaign Committee** over the last 8 years. I will highlight the people/orgs that are from West Michigan.

- **Maria & Doug DeVos** – $593,550.00
- **Aric Nesbitt** – $543,025.00
- Compete Michigan PAC – $415,089.68

- James Stamas – $337,950.00
- **Richard DeVos Jr.** – $336,775.00
- **J C Huizenga** – $335,650.00
- **John Kennedy III** – $301,700.00
- **Daniel DeVos** – $296,775.00
- **Suzanne Cheryl DeVos** – $296,775.00
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan PAC – $283,975.00
- DTE Energy PAC – $280,000.00
- Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers State PAC – $272,925.00
- Michigan Realtors SuperPAC – $267,950.00
- Ron Weiser – $262,000.00
- **Meijer PAC** – $251,975.00
- **Nancy Kennedy** – $241,700.00
- Matthew Moroun – $238,950.00
- Wayne Schmidt – $236,550.00
- Heather and Ronald Boji – $230,000.00
- **Michael Jandernoa** – $228,000.00
- Curtis VanderWall – $222,325.00
- **Pamella DeVos** – $216,775.00
- **Stephen Ehmann** – $216,775.00
- Growing Michigan Majority Fund – $212,550.00
- Republican State Leadership Committee Michigan PAC – $207,750.00

Here you can see that there are **12 of the top 25** contributors to the House Republican Campaign Committee that are from West Michigan, just shy of half.

What we can clearly see is that in terms of campaign contributions to the two largest Republican committees in Michigan, the House Republican Campaign Committee and the Senate Republican Campaign Committee, those from West Michigan dominate in terms of money. Sort of adds another layer to the notion of West Michigan Nice!

Follow the Money: DeVos money dominates campaign funding for numerous Kent County positions

https://griid.org/2024/10/30/follow-the-money-devos-money-dominates-campaign-funding-for-numerous-kent-county-positions/

There is a **recent political ad**, an ad which is promoting five Republican officials, all of which are up for re-election. The ad is paid for by a group named **Maintain Our Majority** and they have been a lot of in kinds for local Republican candidates in the Kent County area.

The five that are up for re-election are – Lisa Posthumus Lyons, Chris Becker, Peter MacGregor, Michelle LaJoye-Young and Ken Yonker. In four of the 5 races there is a Democrat that is challenging them, but the most that any of them have raised in campaign funds is just a fraction of what the GOP incumbents have raised.

What follows in the amount raised by the five Republican incumbents – most of which comes from the DeVos family, plus I will provide a listing of the top donors through the most recent campaign finance data.

Lisa Posthumus Lyons has raised a total of **$132,682.37.** Her opponent, Scott Urbanowski has only raised $8,455.94. The top contributors to Lyons are:

- TGIF Victory Fund – $10,000
- Cheri DeVos – $8,325
- Steve Ehmann – $8,325
- Doug DeVos – $8,325
- Maria DeVos – $8,325
- Dick DeVos – $8,325
- Betsy DeVos – $8,325
- Daniel DeVos – $8,325
- Pamela DeVos – $8,325
- Joan Secchia – $4,000
- Mark Murray – $3,100
- Michael Jondernoa – #,000
- Jim Williams – $2,604.10
- John Kennedy – $2,000
- J.C. Huizenga – $1,200
- Tom Bylenga – $1,200
- Dave Dishaw – $1,050
- Jo DeMarco – $1,040.82
- Mike Ellis – $1,000
- Mark Bissell – $1,000

Chris Becker has raised a total of **$131,956.39**. His opponent, Steve Draft-Peppin, has only raised $600. The top contributors to Becker are:

- TGIF Victory Fund – $20,000
- Cheri DeVos – $8,325
- Steve Ehmann – $8,325
- Doug DeVos – $8,325
- Maria DeVos – $8,325
- Dick DeVos – $8,325
- Betsy DeVos – $8,325

- Daniel DeVos – $8,325
- Pamela DeVos – $8,325
- Joan Secchia – $4,000
- Charlie Secchia – $2,000
- John Kennedy – $2,000
- Jim Williams – $2,000
- David Van Andel – $2,000
- Carol Van Andel – $2,000
- Mike Ellis – $1,000
- Mark Murray – $1,000
- Tom Bylenga – $1,000
- Mark Bissell – $1,000

Michelle LaJoye-Young has raised a total of **$131,531.39.** She is running unopposed. Her top contributors are:

- TGIF Victory Fund – $10,000
- Cheri DeVos – $8,325
- Steve Ehmann – $8,325
- Doug DeVos – $8,325
- Maria DeVos – $8,325
- Dick DeVos – $8,325
- Betsy DeVos – $8,325
- Daniel DeVos – $8,325
- Pamela DeVos – $8,325
- Joan Secchia – $4,000
- David Van Andel – $2,500
- Carol Van Andel – $2,500
- Charlie Secchia – $2,000
- John Kennedy – $2,000
- Jim Williams – $2,000
- Mike Ellis – $1,000
- Mark Murray – $1,000
- Tom Bylenga – $1,000
- Mark Bissell – $1,000

Peter MacGregor has raised a total of **$177,015.51.** His opponent, Daniel N'Kombo, has raised no money. The top contributors to MacGregor are:

- TGIF Victory Fund – $10,000
- Cheri DeVos – $8,325
- Steve Ehmann – $8,325
- Doug DeVos – $8,325
- Maria DeVos – $8,325
- Dick DeVos – $8,325
- Betsy DeVos – $8,325
- Daniel DeVos – $8,325
- Pamela DeVos – $8,325

- Daniel Hibma – $8,325
- Heather Lombardini – $8,325
- Joan Secchia – $4,250
- Jim Williams – $2,104.10
- Charlie Secchia – $2,000
- John Kennedy – $2,000
- J.C. Huizenga – $1,200
- Tom Bylenga – $1,200
- David Bilardello – 1,020.82
- Lucas Middleton – $1,000
- Martin Spaulding – $1,000
- Mike Ellis – $1,000
- Mark Bissell – $1,000

Ken Yonker has raised a total of **$142,636.35**. His opponent, Matthew Morey, has raised no funds. The top contributors to to Yonkers are:

- TGIF Victory Fund – $10,000
- Cheri DeVos – $8,325
- Steve Ehmann – $8,325
- Doug DeVos – $8,325
- Maria DeVos – $8,325
- Dick DeVos – $8,325
- Betsy DeVos – $8,325
- Daniel DeVos – $8,325
- Pamela DeVos – $8,325
- Richard Steigenga – $4,500
- Joan Secchia – $4,000
- Jim Williams – $2,104.10
- Charlie Secchia – $2,000
- John Kennedy – $2,000
- Craig Newhoff – $1,500
- Tom Bylenga – $1,200
- Mike Ellis – $1,000
- Mark Bissell – $1,000

When the Grand Rapids Power Structure buys elections

As anyone can see from the data we have provided here the electoral process is automatically corrupted by the influx of large sums of money by members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure. You have 8 members of the DeVos family contributing a total of **$330,000** for just 5 Kent County candidates.

Of course, the close associates of the DeVos family, like the Secchia family, John Kennedy, Mark Murray, Mark Bissell and several others are also part of the Grand Rapids Power Structure and are playing their part in determining public policy in this community. Also, in case people were wondering, the **TGIF Victory Fund** has some of the same funders that are listed above, it's just another avenue for the Capitalist Class to dictate politics in this community. I know that we were all taught in 8th grade civics

class the notion of, “one person, one vote,” but that is not how real electoral politics is played and never has been.

The financial investment Dick DeVos made in the 2024 elections are paying off

https://griid.org/2024/12/16/the-financial-investment-dick-devos-made-in-the-2024-elections-are-paying-off/

“*My family is the largest single contributor of soft money to the national Republican Party. I have decided to stop taking offense at the suggestion that we are buying influence. Now I simply concede the point. They are right*.” Betsy DeVos

The election in Michigan ended with the Republicans regaining control of the State House in Lansing. The Democrats had won a trifecta after the 2022 election, but that will end beginning next year, as the GOP will now control the State House.

In response to the Republicans winning back the Michigan State House, Dick DeVos has shared his thoughts on the outcome of the election and what it means on his website **dickdevos.com**.

In a post from November 11th, Dick DeVos wrote an article entitled, **Republican House majority means good things for Michigan**. What I want to do is provide a little deconstruction of the article and correct some of the misinformation in the DeVos’ post.

One of the most glaring things about the post from Dick DeVos is that he never provides any sources or verification of the claims he makes. For instance, in the 2nd paragraph of the article, DeVos writes about what the Democratic-controlled State Legislation has done:

They’ve weakened small businesses, driven jobs and population out of the state, and made our neighborhoods less safe. They stripped workers’ rights by repealing Right-to-Work, raised taxes on Michigan families and small businesses amid record inflation, passed California-style energy mandates that increased costs while reducing reliability, handed billions to big corporations, and removed accountability and transparency in our schools, which rewarded their friends in the teacher’s union but hurt our kids.

Those with economic and political power rarely feel the need to substantiate claims they make, since this is one of the perks of being rich and powerful. The point about stripping workers' rights by repealing the Right-to-Work policy is worth saying something about. If this policy was so anti-worker, then why did **10,000 workers show up to the State Capitol in 2012 to protest against the Right-to-Work policy that Governor Snyder put in place?** In addition, it should be mentioned that Dick DeVos and his friends with the West Michigan Policy Forum were the main organization that **pushed a Right-to-Work policy for Michigan beginning in 2010, when they brought in Rick Berman to speak at their annual policy conference**. Lastly, it is worth noting that the Mackinac Center for Public Policy think tank was also working to craft a Right-to-Work policy for Michigan and **one of their main funders has been the DeVos family**.

Later in the article DeVos writes:

My family has called Michigan home our entire lives. We chose the state to build businesses, invest in our community, create jobs and raise our own families — and we want it to succeed.

First off, states to not succeed or fail, people do. There is no such things as a Michigan economy. There are only economies that are made up of people or entities like businesses. What Dick DeVos really means by wanting Michigan to succeed is that he wants to perpetuate Capitalism and economic policies that promote Capitalism. **Capitalism has been very good to people like the DeVos family, which has tons of investments, owns multiple businesses and benefits from publicly funded projects in Grand Rapids**. Second, while it is true that Michigan is the home base of the DeVos family, they own houses in other states, specifically in Florida, and have for decades.

Later in the article DeVos says he talked with Republicans who are, "nurses, business owners, law enforcement professionals and long-time community leaders." This is not exactly a diverse list of people who live in Michigan, plus it is unlikely that Dick DeVos comes in contact with many working class residents from Michigan.

Near the end of the article, DeVos then makes this statement, "***Electing a Republican majority in the state House is just the first step in getting Michigan back on track***." What Dick failed to mention is that **his family was collectively the single largest contributor to the Republican Party and Republican candidates in the 2024 election**, which GRIID documented on November 3rd. In fact, if you can look at how much money Dick DeVos personally contributed to Republican candidates in Michigan in 2024 (**$296,175.50**) at **this link**.

Lastly, I want to point out that this is not a partisan issue for me. I have not been very happy with what the Democratic Party has done in the past two years in Michigan, despite having control of the Governor's office and the State House & Senate. In November of 2022, I wrote a **three part series entitled, What Kind of Change Do We really want to see in Michigan**, but most of what I included in those articles have not come to fruition.

Editors note: The source of the Betsy DeVos quote at the beginning of this article comes from a 2017 article in Politico. **https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/01/betsy-dick-devos-family-amway-michigan-politics-religion-214631/**

4. DeVos Family and West Michigan Politics

The Privilege of Richard DeVos

https://griid.org/2010/01/20/the-privilege-of-richard-devos/

I forced myself to go hear Amway co-founder Rich DeVos give a lecture today as part of **Calvin College's January Series**. It's important to hear people with power, especially for independent media, since one of the fundamental tenets of journalism is to scrutinize power.

DeVos focused on his most recent book, *Ten Powerful Phrases for Positive People.* The phrases are not anything new or terribly enlightening, they are just phrases that we all have been taught by parents or teachers at some point in our life. Phrases like, "you can do it," "I believe in you," "I trust you," and "I respect you."

DeVos shared personal stories about how he has tried to apply each of the ten phrases he wrote about in his book and much of the discourse was framed in his interpretation of the Christian faith. DeVos kept saying, "*our task as Christians is to be life enrichers.*"

However, as he kept sharing stories and reflecting on his own life I couldn't help but think about what a privileged life he has led. When I say privileged I don't mean, "what a privilege it is to be here." I am talking about the kind of privilege that few people in the world have, privilege that comes with wealth and power. DeVos has been a millionaire then billionaire for more than 50 years. He has traveled around the world countless times and has had access to those in political power for decades.

Several times he shared stories about conversations with US presidents and other stories about interactions with prominent business leaders. DeVos even had the arrogance to begin his talk by thanking the crowd for such a warm welcome and then saying that it surprises him sometimes because, "***a prophet is never welcomed in his own country***." That phrase was historically attributed to the Hebrew prophets because they challenged and condemned the power structures of their day.

As he kept talking and trying to weave small pearls of wisdom with his phrases he would eventually say things that to this writer really reflected who Rich DeVos is. When talking about the phrase "I need you," DeVos mentioned that Amway was sending supplies to Haiti because "***the Haitians need us***." He also added that we shouldn't give them

everything because then they won't learn to do for themselves. Apparently, DeVos think that Haitians are just chronic charity cases who are only looking for handouts.

When discussing the phrases "I believe in you," DeVos shared the story about how he went to the Grand Rapids Press once to chastise then editor Mike Lloyd for criticizing the amount of money Arendt Lubbers was receiving as the GVSU President. DeVos said we need men like Lubbers and then said he was upset with the way that Wall Street executives were being treated now. "***Wall Street people have done a great deal to build up this country.***" DeVos went on to say that he was recently talking to former President Clinton and expressing his frustration with Obama and his "anti-Wall Street" positions. I'm not sure what DeVos means since the Obama administration has been fine with handing over billions of taxpayer's dollars to **bailout Wall Street** for their corrupt financial practices.

Another phrase that DeVos mentioned was "Thank You." During his reflections on this phrase he talked about how he was against the most recent government push for health care reform. He said, "***we tried all kinds of things to defeat it and then along came this guy from Massachusetts. The hand of God is so evident***." DeVos was referring to the recent victory of Republican Scott Brown who is replacing a seat in the Senate vacated by the death of Edward Kennedy. It is believed that Scott's victory will signal a defeat of the President's health care plan in the Senate.

The last phrase that DeVos touched on was, "I Love You." In reflecting on this phrase DeVos recounted how much family support he received while in England where he had a heart transplant. At one point DeVos went as far as saying that the new heart was a gift from God. Apparently his financial wealth had nothing to do with it.

DeVos finished his talk by reading a Christian bible phrase and a story about how he told a group of US Marines recently to keep the quote on a piece of paper while serving in the next tour of duty. The phrase was, "Rejoice in the Lord always." I wondered to myself if this is what these young men would be thinking while shooting Afghani civilians.

In the end I was glad I went. This way I could share with some people a perspective that is not likely to appear in any of the other news media in West Michigan, as is evidenced in a **short piece that appeared on the *Grand Rapids Press*** online source this afternoon.

Erik Prince gives canned speech at Tulip Time Festival in Holland

https://griid.org/2010/05/05/erik-prince-gives-canned-speech-at-tulip-time-festival-in-holland/

The Holland Tulip Time Festival officially kicked off today with a luncheon attended by roughly 800 people. An event that was originally closed to media, the Tulip Time Festival Committee changed their mind and allows news agencies to attend the luncheon to hear the founder of Blackwater, Erik Prince.

GRIID was at first scrutinized by the media liaison and then questioned by the Holland Police Department, only eventually to be "cleared" as a legitimate news entity.

Prince spoke for no more than 30 minutes and gave a somewhat dispassionate, pre-written speech. He spoke about his family roots and growing up in Holland, but emphasized how his family made it through tough times without any government assistance.

This theme of "self-sufficiency" was spread throughout Prince's speech and he took every opportunity to criticize what he called big government that is rife with bureaucracy. At one point Prince quoted Ronald Reagan who said once that the most frightening words were, "I'm the government and I'm here to help."

Prince also talked about American values and what made this country great – liberty, entrepreneurship and hard work. He said that what makes this country great was embodied by something that happened in 1969, the year that he was born, the Apollo mission. He contrasted this with another event in that same year that reflected what he saw as something that has attacked the moral fiber of this country – Woodstock.

Prince spoke briefly about his decision to join the military, eventually becoming a Navy Seal. He said, "It was the best job I ever had." After Prince left the military he eventually got the idea to start Blackwater. Prince says he was inspired to create the internationally known private mercenary group because of what he saw as a lack of action from the US during the Rwandan genocide.

Prince responded to what he called his critics by saying that the US was founded on the help of private military contractors and that what Blackwater does was consistent with what has always existed in America.

The former Navy Seal said his company was contracted by the US Government after the USS Cole was attacked in 2000. Ever since then, according to Prince, his company has not received one cent from any grant money or other US tax money. The fact is, that every time the US government gives **contracts to Blackwater**, they do so with public taxpayer money.

Prince said that his company was called upon 40,000 times to protect diplomats and reconstruction contractors in Iraq and that not one of them was ever injured. However, Prince failed to mention the **civilians that his private soldiers killed in Iraq** and the role that Blackwater has played in a **targeted assassination campaign involving the CIA in the Af-Pak War**.

Prince beamed with pride when he said that Blackwater continues to train "security personnel" from countries like Egypt and Pakistan. He also boasted of the amount of cargo that Blackwater has brought to US troops in Afghanistan. Again, Prince failed to mention that his company was **caught stealing US weapons in Afghanistan through one of its contracting partners Paravant**.

Prince also talked about **Blackwater's role after the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina**. Prince said they provide some relief work early on in New Orleans, but eventually was hired by private companies to do security work, companies like Wal-Mart.

Holland's native son did not miss an opportunity to trash the US government, especially now that it "just wants to spends its way out of trouble." Prince said that US taxpayers are saddled with debt and that there seems to be more "class war going on." He also said that the lack of free market principles hinders our country's ability to compete with India and China.

Prince concluded his remarks by reflecting on what makes this country great – liberty and the free market. This may have been the most honest thing he said during his speech, especially since Blackwater has made money from militarism.

The luncheon crowd gave Prince a standing ovation, but not everyone there today supported the Holland native. Outside of the Hope College Fieldhouse about 75 gathered to protest Prince's visit. We had a chance to interview some of those who came out to express their disgust with the Tulip Time Festival's decision to invite the war-profiteer.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm4_RtpmR_Q

Blackwater author, Jeremy Scahill addresses packed audience in Holland

https://griid.org/2010/05/06/scahill-addressed-packed-audience-in-holland/

Last night, Jeremy Scahill, investigative journalist and author of the book ***Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army***, spoke in Holland to over 200 people. Scahill's talk was just hours after **Erik Prince spoke at the Tulip Time Festival luncheon**.

Scahill began by saying that the message that Prince gives for the public is different than what he gives to private, conservative groups like the one at U of M, **which was taped and sent to the Nation magazine**, the publication Scahill writes for.

Much of what Scahill said in his talk is in the analysis he wrote about a few days ago for the Nation, which is worth **reading in its entirety**. One point that the journalist emphasized throughout the night was that using private mercenary forces means there is no accountability for the politicians who don't want to be held accountable.

Scahill wasn't just referring to Bush & Cheney, but to the current members of Congress and the Obama administration. In fact, Scahill said that under President Obama, private military contractors have increased in Afghanistan, from 70,000 a year ago to 104,000 today.

The ***Blackwater*** author also said that Prince uses people who have worked in the intelligence community – the CIA, FBI and DEA. Blackwater provides body guards for US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry and to other US diplomats when traveling to Afghanistan. This means that members of Congress, when visiting Afghanistan on a fact finding mission, the same Congress which has been investigating Blackwater, is guarded by that private mercenary group when in Afghanistan.

Scahill says that when the FBI investigated the Iraq killings from 2007, in which Blackwater was accused of killing innocent Iraqi civilians, the FBI agents were going to be guarded by Blackwater personnel. Blackwater controls four forward operating bases in Afghanistan, according to Scahill and even bragged that they have the closest base to Pakistan. Blackwater was responsible for making the biggest drug bust ever in Afghanistan and they called in air strikes from NATO. Scahill asks the rhetorical question – "how can a private company call in air strikes from NATO?"

Scahill mentioned that during Prince's talk at the Tulip Time Festival that the Blackwater CEO said that no one has died who was being protected by Blackwater security people. The author said that there were 8 CIA agents killed in Afghanistan recently who were under the protection of Blackwater.

Then Scahill tells the story about an Iraqi, Mohammad Kanani. Kanani welcomed US troops in 2003 when they arrived in Baghdad and was a supporter of the US occupation. In 2007 he took his son near downtown Baghdad one day where they came to a stop at an intersection. Gunfire opened and people were killed, and Kanani's car was shot and his son was hit. The Iraqi man got out of his car to go to the other side and saw his son's limp body. "***My son, my son, they've killed my son***," he cried out. His brain had been shot out. The people that shot Ali Kanani that day were Blackwater mercenaries. This story that Scahill was recounting was **Nisour Square shootings**, where 17 Iraqi civilians were killed by Blackwater personnel. Scahill said we never hear the details of these killings, because the media in this country does not really care about the lives of innocent people that US soldiers and mercenaries take in these wars.

Scahill went on to say that they originally offered Mohammad hey $10,000 in compensation for the loss of his son. Originally said no, but later he said yes and gave half of the money to the US military to pay for a soldiers' funeral. The US courts let the Blackwater personnel responsible for the killings go free. Mohammad Kanani said that the only thing he wanted was a public apology from Erik Prince, because Prince had

said during the Congressional hearings that he believes that some Iraqis kill themselves so that they can collect money from the US government. Mohammad was so outraged by this statement that he demanded an apology, but Prince said that his company does not make apologies.

There is one legal case still open from the Nisour Square killings being held in North Carolina. Scahill said that recently Blackwater asked US Attorney General Eric Holder to step in and take responsibility for the deaths. He Private mercenary company even said they should be tried in Afghanistan under Sharia law since that is the legal system there.

What about the four Blackwater emplyees who were killed in Falluja? All of them were decorated veterans put in a ridiculously dangerous situation. The families wanted to know what happened that day. Blackwater stonewalled them. Blackwater executives told them they would have to sue the company to get the information, which they did. In turn, Blackwater sued the families for violating the contract that the men had signed.

Scahill concluded his remarks by saying that we could talk until we are blue in the face, but the problem is not just Blackwater, it is a thirst for militarism and US imperial wars. He said that there is a push to privatize all aspects of our country – education, health care, etc and until we address that and the incredible power that corporations wield in this country, we will not solve the problem of companies like Blackwater.

This comment was the most important thing that Scahill said all night, but it was not a statement that people wanted to address during the Q&A. Most of the questions were specific to Blackwater and Prince and not the larger power structure that Scahill exposed.

Lastly, I think it is worth pointing out that at the Price talk yesterday there were dozens of news reporters in attendance. For the Scahill lecture I only saw a reporter from the *GR Press* and the *Holland Sentinel*. The **Press article** was very short and had virtually none of the analysis Scahill provided in his talk. The *Holland Sentinel* had not posted a story on their website by the time we posted this story.

West Michigan Elites host policy forum

https://griid.org/2010/09/16/west-michigan-elites-host-policy-forum/

Today and tomorrow marks the West Michigan Regional Policy Forum in Grand Rapids. This is the second summit that seeks to build on the work of the **first summit held in 2008.**

The summit brings together many of the local economic and political power players, such as the DeVos & Van Andel families, Peter Seechia, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, local CEOs, lawyers and government leaders.

Secchia gave the open comments and began by taking a swipe at the Governor Granholm and vague remarks about the political climate that he claimed supports their platform. Seechia began with a progress report on the goals that the group came up with in 2008. Those goals are:

> Governance: Eliminate the MBT with corresponding spending cuts.
> Workforce of the Future: Implement a right-to-work status for Michigan.
> Health Care and Life Sciences: Increase funding for providers with effective prevention practices.
> Manufacturing and Design for the Future: Streamline the permitting process within state government.
> Attraction and Retention of Talent: Update funding mechanisms for transportation infrastructure.

Seechia claims that candidates who support the elimination of the MBT will be elected in November. Seechia believes that the ground is now fertile for pushing for a right-to-work policy for Michigan and trashed the GR Press for editorializing against it, despite the fact that the **Press articles on the subject were biased in favor of the anti-union policy.**

Seechia points to the ongoing development of “medical mile” as evidence of the success of point number three, but did not provide any commentary on goal 4 and 5. Seechia concluded by saying that they have made much progress on the goal set forth in 2008.

Seechia gave the microphone over to Doug DeVos who continued to present information about the goals and objectives of the policy forum. DeVos spent quite a bit of time on the theme of “quality of life.” DeVos said that what the forum’s work is really about was “quality of life,” which is an interesting comment considering that DeVos comes from the wealthiest family in the area. His comments also ignore **high-levels of poverty and growing number of unemployment and under-employment**.

DeVos then made an interesting comment when he said that in a recent conversation with Bill Clinton, the former President in relation to his “relief work” in Haiti, that what “Haitians needed was economic development and not looking for a hand out.” This statement not only is clear lie, it omits the **well-documented history of US military and economic intervention in Haiti.**

The first invited speaker of the day was Michael Flemming, President of the **American Chamber of Commerce Executives**. In a strange Orwellian way, Flemming’s talk was about how to do grassroots lobbying.

Flemming began with a joke, which in many ways reflected his attitudes about the economy and workers. The joke he claimed was from Minnesota and what they felt about people in Iowa. "***Iowans don't give their workers coffee breaks because they are afraid they won't have enough time to retrain them."***

Flemming believes that there are five fundamental points for "grassroots lobbying." **First**, is that businesses have to take positions and not remain neutral on policy. **Second**, businesses and trade associations need to have a broad perspective on economic and policy matters. What Flemming meant by that is business needs to not just think about profits in and of themselves, rather they need to see that thinking about public education may be relevant for the future of their business.

Third, business must adopt a regional strategy, which is what this forum is all about. Flemming also said that doing regional policy is more important than branding regional economies. The **fourth**imperative, according to Flemming, was that it is no longer about mass movements, but developing influence and influential's. He said the business community needs to underwrite the "grassroots" working being done on policy matters.

The **fifth** and final imperative is that this strategy needs to work collaboratively with local governments. As Flemming talked about this issue what he really meant was the importance of what the business people refer to as private/public partnerships. This is really code for what people in Third World countries know as structural adjustment, where public services are defunded and privatized.

Flemming then gave some points about how to move forward with these 5 grassroots lobbying principles. He said people need to lead without authority, which he said was that since people in the business community are not elected they just need to lead because it is the right thing to do. Flemming gave Gandhi as an example of a leader who led without authority, which is an accurate example, but I find it hard to believe that most people in the room were aware of **Gandhi's views on economics**, which would be in clear conflict with those of the West Michigan Policy Forum.

Amway endorses US/Korea Trade Agreement

https://griid.org/2010/12/06/amway-endorses-uskorea-trade-agreement/

On Friday, the **Obama administration announced** that the US and South Korea had reached an agreement on a trade policy that essentially replicates NAFTA.

This decision by the Obama administration is a betrayal of what was promised during the campaign about trade policy and a betrayal of working people in this country. Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch Director Lori Wallach confirms this in a **statement release on Friday**:

"Choosing to advance Bush's NAFTA-style Korea free trade agreement rather than the new trade policy President Obama promised during his campaign will mean more American job loss and puts the White House at odds with the majority of Americans who, polling shows, oppose more-of-the-same job-offshoring agreements.

Merely tweaking the "cars and cows" market access provisions of Bush's NAFTA-style Korea trade pact but leaving in place the offshoring-promoting foreign investor protections is a slap in the face to the majority of Americans who, according to repeated polls, oppose the same old trade policy that has cost millions of American jobs."

The White House also **posted statements of support** from government and business leaders on Friday. One of those statements is from Doug DeVos, the current President of Amway. "***Like most companies, we support a more competitive playing field. This new trade agreement allows Amway to continue meeting aggressive growth targets, and gives a much needed boost for all export business in Michigan***."

This statement from Amway shouldn't surprise us since they don't even chose to make the claim that this trade agreement will create jobs, it is merely about "*meeting aggressive growth targets*." The US Chamber of Commerce is a bit more subtle in their approach and uses that tired old line that the US/Korea Trade Agreement will,"***create thousands of new jobs, advance our national goal of doubling exports in five years, and demonstrate that America is once again ready to lead on trade.***"

This is the exact same rhetoric that the Obama administration uses in his announcement on Friday and it indicates that the Democratic White House is taking cues from the Chamber of Commerce.

Interestingly enough, as the **progressive blog Firedoglake reports**, most of the major unions in the US have been silent on the US/Korean trade agreement. However, there was one major union that took a stance on this trade agreement – the UAW. According to Firedoglake **the UAW supports the trade agreement**. UAW president Bob King flew back from Europe and was greeted by Obama himself when he got off the plane, no doubt to get the auto worker president to give his support for the anti-worker legislation. Working people who are in unions which gave millions to elect this President should be asking what the hell they have won as workers since the beginning of 2009?

One Kent Coalition memo and the future of local politics

https://griid.org/2011/03/04/one-kent-coalition-memo-and-the-future-of-local-politics/

Last week we reported on the presentation by the One Kent Coalition to the Kent County Commission. The private sector coalition was proposing a new form of government that would consolidate Grand Rapids with other municipal bodies to have more of a metropolitan form of government.

At the presentation last week the One Kent Coalition spokes person did not provide many details and avoided the issue of transparency even when asked who was part of the coalition and where their funds are coming from.

The names of those on the coalition were revealed shortly after the meeting. The list includes: Tom Butcher (GVSU), Nyal Deems (former EGR mayor), Betsy DeVos, Dick DeVos, Jeanne Englehart (GR Chamber), David Frey (Grand Action), Kurt Kimball (former GR City Manager), David Leonard (Spectrum Health Corp.), Greg McNeilly (Windquest Corp.), Marge Potter (former Kent County Comm.), Jared Rodriguez (West Michigan Policy Forum), Milt Rohwer (Frey Foundation) Peter Secchia, Peter Wege, Kate Pew Wolters, Tim Wondergem and Andy Guy (Wondergem & Associates).

When asked about a timeline for when this proposed change of local government might happen the One Kent Coalition spokesperson said that they had hoped that the State Legislature would approve an amendment this fall, which would allow for voters in Kent County to decide on the matter in 2012.

Earlier this week Grand Rapids Press reporter Jim Harger did a follow-up story on the One Kent Coalition and even posted a memo from the group that lays out the metropolitan government proposal.

What is revealing about the memo is that it states on three different occasions that the One Kent Coalition envisions a November 2011 vote on this issue, instead of a whole year later. So why the discrepancy? Are people with the One Kent Coalition not wanting to be very forthcoming with their plans?

In addition to the issue of when voters might weigh in on this matter there is one other point from the memo worth mentioning. In the last paragraph it states, "*The metropolitan authority would be except from several existing statutes that are viewed as barriers to streamlining the efficiencies of government or the consolidation of departments, offices and personel. However, with respect to existing contracts, and collective bargaining agreements, those contract agreements would continue in place until their cuurent length of term. The legislation would not alter vested pensions or retirement rights or merit system employment benefits but does not restrict future changes.*"

It is important to note that this group is thinking about collective bargaining and government employee pensions. Since many of the people on the One Kent Coalition are involved in the **West Michigan Policy Forum and that group wants Michigan to be a Right to Work** state it is safe to assume that they would not endorse the unionization of employees within this "metropolitan authority." That they say "but does

not restrict future changes" should be seen for what it is, their intention to make the kind of changes that will diminish the rights that union labor has.

Lack of Transparency Impedes Local Government Consolidation Study Group

https://griid.org/2011/06/15/lack-of-transparency-impedes-local-government-consolidation-study-group/

Yesterday, the second meeting of the **committee to study the One Kent Coalition local government consolidation proposal** met in downtown Grand Rapids.

This local group of appointed members was given the task of coming up with recommendations in response to the One Kent Coalition's local government consolidation proposal……..or maybe it wasn't.

Much of the meeting was spent by committee members discussing what their actual task was and whether or not the September deadline was an adequate amount of time for them to honestly assess the prospects of local government consolidation.

Steve Crandall, a corporate human resources specialist was the facilitator for yesterday's meeting. When Crandall stated that the group was tasked to look at the feasibility of the One Kent Coalition proposal, County Commissioner Roger Moran said the charge should be to question the proposal. Cascade Township Manager Bill Cousins agreed with Moran and Harold Hamilton (GR City Planning Comm) said he was "freaked out," since he thinks that if the proposal passed in would leave Grand Rapids with no functioning central government. He supports consolidating services, but not government.

David Leonard, general counsel for Spectrum Health and a member of the One Kent Coalition, said, "*shouldn't it be up to the voters to decide whether or not this is a good proposal*?"

Moran responded and said that the One Kent Coalition met for a year in secrecy with no elected officials so he does not trust what their intent is. Former Grand Rapids City Commissioner Mary Alice Williams said she agreed to come to the table to decide whether this was a good idea, but after the first meeting the mandate is how do we move and implement this proposal. "*It seems that from the One Kent group that this study group was a necessary evil, a speed bump in the process of it moving forward*." She said she doesn't object government consolidation in principle, but that more information needs to be presented.

Wyoming City manager Curtis Holt said the language of the legislation that the One Kent Coalition put forth has been decided so it seemed that the task of this group was somewhat ambivalent He stated that the One Kent folks think government consolidation will be good for economic growth, but they have offered no serious data to support such a claim.

Again, Commissioner Moran spoke up and stated that he thinks that is doesn't matter that this group says, "*since the legislation is so far down the line it has already been decided.*"

Harold Hamilton stated that he thinks the process needs to slow down. "*The September deadline given to us by Nyal Deems at the last meeting is too quick*." Mary Alice Williams asked what do the One Kent Coalition members think about the issues people are raising, if they are going to go ahead with their endeavor no matter what this group's decides even if they disagree with the proposal.

One Kent Coalition member Marge Potter avoided the question by talking about how Grand Rapids and Detroit are very similar. She also stated that she had submitted some "research for the group" on what other counties like Kent have done around the issue of government consolidation. Crandall agreed with Potter by saying this process is really about looking at "best practices," but that did not address the question as to what the intent on the One Kent Coalition was and what they have been doing for the past year.

David Leonard said that the One Kent Coalition has submitted nothing more than a legislative proposal and that there is "no conspiracy." Other members of the One Kent Coalition group present said that they regard "*this group's work as very important in what will be introduced into legislation*." Again, this sentiment did not address the question of what the group has been doing for the past year, where their funding has come from and whether or not they have hired a lobbyist to push the legislation in Lansing.

Tom Butcher, general counsel for GVSU and a member of the One Kent Coalition spoke in very lofty terms about the importance of thinking about what local government might look like in 25 years from now. He mentioned the economic benefits and the decision-making powers that could come with government consolidation and challenged the group to think about social justice in this community, although he never defined what social justice meant.

Former State Representative Jerry Kooiman says that the next meeting should include information on the history/background of the One Kent Coalition, plus Mayor Heartwell and County Commissioner Sandy Frost Parish should also be there to address their thoughts and concerns on the proposal.

Wyoming City Manager Curtis Holt said, "***this group needs to be assured by the One Kent Coalition that the conclusions they come up with need to be respected and that no legislation will move forward before the group comes up with some recommendations***."

There was no commitment to this request from Holt, but there was consensus that the One Kent Coalition would make a presentation to the group at the next meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for the downtown campus of **GVSU on Wednesday, June 29 at 4:00PM in room 202 E.**

After the meeting this writer spoke with Grand Rapids City Commissioner Rosalynn Bliss who stated that the One Kent Coalition has retained Rusty Merchant to be a lobbyist for their state legislation proposal on local government consolidation, despite claims by some of the One Kent Coalition members that they had not hired anyone at this point. **Merchant has a history of lobbying** for the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and other business groups at the state level.

After sitting through two hours of discussion it seemed very apparent to this writer that the advisory group was not in agreement on the purpose of this group's task and there was significant concerns, even mistrust, over what the real intent of the One Kent Coalition was. Whenever these concerns were raised members of the One Kent Coalition present avoided any direct response and failed to provide clear transparency on what the group has done up to this point. The meeting on the 29th might provide some clarification for these concerns and we plan to be there and report on what is presented and discussed.

Update on One Kent local government consolidation proposal

https://griid.org/2011/08/16/update-on-one-kent-local-government-consolidation-proposal/

It has been a month since we last reported on the One Kent Coalition proposal to consolidate local government into one unit.

The One Kent Coalition is made up of area powerbrokers such as Dick & Betsy DeVos, Peter Seechia and David Frey, just to name a few. Ever since they first made public their proposal this group has come under scrutiny since there has been a lack of transparency and concerns about their motives.

The One Kent Coalition has generally stated that they want to make the area government more consolidated to be efficient, but more importantly they want to become more of an economic force in the country. However, a **memo was revealed in March**, which demonstrated other motives.

The memo from the group demonstrates two things. **First**, it shows that they want the issue to be on the ballot as soon as possible, which means less public dialogue. **Second**, the memo shows that the kind of government consolidation they are proposing would undermine public employee unions.

However, the local government consolidation group has not met in over a month because both the county and city government are frustrated with the One Kent Coalition group. Grand Rapids City Commissioner Bliss sent me a message saying that the county government is doing its own investigation of the issue and the Grand Rapids City government is actually working to oppose the draft legislation that the One Kent Coalition has drafted.

The draft is **38 pages** long and is by no means easy to read. The draft legislation is calling for this new metropolitan government to be run by a CEO, a Chief Executive Officer, who would have executive power and would be elected by the public. There would also be a metropolitan commission who would adopt ordinances and budgets and be given legislative powers.

We will continue to watch this issue and report on the legislation once it is introduced at the state level. However, one thing that this process should tell us is that people with economic and political power don't care about what the public thinks and will do whatever they can to keep their actions hidden from us no matter what.

One Kent Proposal reviewed and discussed at GR City Commission meeting

https://griid.org/2011/09/27/one-kent-proposal-reviewed-and-discussed-at-gr-city-commission-meeting/

This morning the Grand Rapids City Commission addressed ongoing concerns around the **One Kent Coalition proposal** to create a new regional government body.

The One Kent Coalition is moving forward in their pursuit to get the proposed legislation introduced in the State House before the New Year, but Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell wishes they would change course. "*I want to use this public forum today to urge the One Kent group to step back and work with local governments, instead of moving forward with the State legislation*."

Other City Commissioners expressed concerns as well. Second Ward City Commissioner Rosalynn Bliss said she is not convinced that the proposed legislation would be good for the community, "it's too partisan and it gives to much power to the Executive Officer." Bliss is referring leadership position in the proposed One Kent legislation, where **the new metropolitan government would be run by a CEO**. Ruth Kelly echoed these comments by saying it is important to have as much transparency as possible and to avoid a government structure that would great more polarization with partisan influence.

In addition to the commission's comments, there was a presentation by City staff and two lawyers who agreed to review the One Kent proposal. A **12 – page memorandum** was submited that outlines 58 different aspect of the One Kent proposal that the review committee raised questions about. Some of these questions dealt with the executive power that the metropolitan leader would have, the lack of clarity on collective bargaining agreements for government employees, the districting process, the new government's relationship to the existing city charter, the large number of political appointments and how this proposal would be voted on.

The observations in the review that were presented are both important and relevant for the City to move forward on how they deal with issues of possible consolidation. In addition, the review of the proposed legislation again makes clear that there are numerous undemocratic aspects of the One Kent proposal, which should need to be exposed and debated before any legislation can be adopted.

One side note worth reporting is that the City Commission adopted a resolution to fund a study with Grand Rapids, Kentwood and Wyoming on the possibility of consolidation of police and fire services between these three local governments. The total cost of the study is $265,000, with the City of Grand Rapids contributing $69,000.

More importantly, there are three private entities contributing significantly to the study of local government services consolidation – the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation ($50,000), the Grand Rapids Community Foundation ($50,000) and the Frey Foundation ($27,000). This should raise flags for anyone paying attention, since both the DeVos and Frey families are members of the One Kent Coalition. The funding that both of these foundations provide should raise the question, is there are conflict of interest with funds coming from families that have a vested interest in seeing local government consolidation happen?

DeVos funded think tank Acton Institute on the move in Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2012/02/27/devos-funded-think-tank-acton-institute-on-the-move-in-grand-rapids/

Last week, Rapid Growth Media (RGM) posted a **short article** about the Acton Institute's announcement that they would be buying and moving into the Wim-CAT building on the corner of Sheldon and Fulton Street in downtown Grand Rapids.

The RGM story focused on the new location, but also including some commentary from an Acton representative on the future use of the space they purchasing. The only comment about the Acton Institute referred to the group as, "*a faith-based proponent of free-market economies worldwide.*"

Considering the history of their founder and current President Robert Sirico and the organization itself is one of supporting far right positions, it is worth taking a critical look at what the **Acton Institute** is about and who they are aligned with.

The organization was founded in 1990 by Fr. Robert Sirico, whom at the time was a Paulist Priest working with the Catholic Information Center in downtown Grand Rapids. Sirico had already aligned himself with the more reactionary sectors within the Catholic Church on issues such as US policy towards Latin America, particularly in opposition to **the Liberation Theology movement**.

My first encounter with Sirico was a forum we organized in Grand Rapids in 1991 to debate Liberation Theology in Latin America. It was clear that Sirico sided with the Vatican in its opposition to Liberation Theology as was manifested by the witch hunt that then Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict) engaged in by silencing and marginalizing Latin American Catholic clergy, a topic explored in numerous books and most recently in *The Pope's War: Why Ratzinger's Secret Crusade Has Imperiled the Church and How It Can Be Saved.*

The Acton Institute's decision to take a position against Liberation Theology stems mostly from its promotion of free-market capitalism. Liberation Theology advocated for justice for the poor and a redistribution of wealth. The Grand Rapids-based think tank believes that capitalism is the best remedy for economic equality, despite the historical track record of capitalism leaving a path of suffering, exploitation and inequality in its path.

The Acton Institute supports economic policy that promotes deregulation of the economy and austerity measures (similar to what Michigan is experiencing under Gov. Snyder). It is no surprise then that the DeVos family has been a big supporter of the Acton Institute, with Betsy DeVos previously serving on the Board of Directors and the **DeVos family being major donors to the think tank**. Richard DeVos Sr. was also given the Faith and Freedom Award from the Acton Institute in 2010. You can see from the graphic below the interlocking systems of power that connect the DeVos family and the Acton Institute.

The current **Board of Directors** at the Acton Institute is a mix of corporate CEOs and religious leaders, such as Calvin College President Gaylen Byker, J.C. Huizenga of the National Heritage Academies (advocates the **privatization of public education**), John Kennedy (Autocam), Sidney Jansma (Wolverine Gas & Oil Corp) and John Gordon (Gordon Food Service).

The Acton Institute also has a history of denying global warming and taking a very critical attitude towards much of the focus of environmental justice work throughout the world. According to the website **Exxon Secrets**, **the Acton Institute has received over $300,000 from Exxon/Mobil since 1998 to engage in anti-global warming propaganda.** One way the group has used this money was to organizing public

screenings of a climate denial film, which they showed at the Wealthy Street Theater in Grand Rapids a few years back.

The Acton Institute's Environmental Stewardship **web page** links to the **Cato Institute**, **Competitive Enterprise Institute**, the Free-Market Environmental network, Green-Watch, the **Heartland Institute** and the **Heritage Foundation**. All of the entities linked from the Acton Institute web page take a pro-business, anti-regulation, anti-worker, anti-environmental position and influence both state and federal policy.

Considering this history, we thought it would be useful for people to understand a bit more about the Acton Institute and have some background on the think tank that will be sharing a building with the West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology.

The Ford Airport, Dick DeVos and global sustainability

https://griid.org/2012/02/22/the-ford-airport-dick-devos-and-global-sustainability/

Earlier today **MLive reported** that Dick DeVos addressed an audience of 80 businessmen, some with the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and some with the Regional Air Alliance of West Michigan.

The article essentially states that DeVos was calling for more regional businesses to utilize the Ford International Airport. The article cites DeVos who claims that there is no reason for regional business people to use any other airport, because the Ford airport is the most cost effect.

The MLive reporter did not verify such claims made by DeVos and the only other person cited in the story was Joseph Tomaselli, who chairs Ford Airport's Board. Interestingly enough, Tomaselli is the CEO of the Amway Grand Hotel, one of the DeVos owned hotels in Grand Rapids and a member of the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority (DDA). Another example of the inter-locking systems of power in this city.

Dick DeVos is the Chairman of the **Board of Directors of the Regional Air Alliance of West Michigan**, which also has representatives from OXFORD Partners, Meijer, Treystar Group and Passageways Travel joining DeVos on the board.

In addition, there are numerous private and public entities listed as **members and supporters** of the Air Alliance, such as Amway, Autocam, Gentex, Herman Miller, Metro Health, Rockford Construction and another DeVos owned entity The Windquest Group. Several area universities are also members along with the Grand Rapids Press. This begs the question as to why a news agency would be a member or supporter of an organization whose main goal is to get more people to travel by plane from the Ford International Airport. The Grand Rapids Press membership in the Regional Air Alliance

of West Michigan also calls into question the credibility of their reporting on the Alliance and area air travel in general.

Beyond the incestuous nature of the power brokers in this story, the other issue not addressed by the reporter was the question of ecological sustainability. DeVos and his business network often makes the claim that they practice environmental sustainability. If this is truly the case, how does increased air travel fit into the notion of sustainability?

The British journalist and environmental writer George Monbiot in his important book ***Heat: How we can stop the planet burning****,* devotes a whole chapter on the ecological costs of air travel. Monbiot states:

There are two reasons why flying dwarfs any other environmental impact a single person can exert. The first is the distance it permits us to cover. According to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, the carbon emissions per passenger mile "for a fully loaded cruising airliner are comparable to a passenger car carrying three or four people". In other words, they are about half those, per person, of a car containing the average loading of 1.56 people. But while the mean distance travelled by car in the UK is 9,200 miles per year, in a plane we can beat that in one day. On a return flight from London to New York, every passenger produces roughly 1.2 tonnes of carbon dioxide: the very quantity we will each be entitled to emit in a year once the necessary cut in emissions has been made.

The second reason is that the climate impact of aeroplanes is not confined to the carbon they produce. They release several different kinds of gases and particles. Some of them cool the planet, others warm it. In the upper tropo-sphere, where most large planes fly, hot, wet air from the jet engine exhaust mixes with cold air. As the moisture condenses, it can form "contrails", which in turn appear to give rise to cirrus clouds – those high wispy formations of ice crystals sometimes known as "horsetails". While they reflect some of the sun's heat back into the space, they also trap heat in the atmosphere, especially at night; the heat trapping seems to be the stronger effect. The overall impact, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is a warming effect 2.7 times that of the carbon dioxide alone.

In addition to the environmental costs of air travel, it is important to keep in mind the primary reasons for air travel and those costs to the environment. The number sector of society that travels is the business community, which more often than not are traveling to do business deals that will further deplete resources, create a larger gap between the 1% and the 99% and contribute to global warming.

When Dick DeVos and his circle of business aren't traveling to make deals that will land them more money they are flying long distances to vacation at exotic locations. For DeVos, this is not done on regular commercial airplanes, he flies on private planes owned and operated by the DeVos Family.

DeVos Family funds another new "development" entity coming to West MI

https://griid.org/2012/02/21/devos-family-funds-another-new-development-entity-coming-to-west-mi/

Yesterday, MLive reporter Jim Harger posted **a story** about the Detroit-based Urban Land Institute's (ULI) announcement that they were opening up a branch office in Grand Rapids.

This brief article was a "happy piece" about the ULI and the organization's thoughts on moving to Grand Rapids. One of their representatives said, "*The resurgence of downtown Grand Rapids, the exciting redevelopment of downtown Benton Harbor, the Lansing riverfront redevelopment and the revitalization of downtowns in Battle Creek, Kalamazoo and Holland are just a few examples of the transformative activities in our region*."

According to the **Urban Land Institute website**, "*the 30,000 members worldwide represent the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprises and public service. As the pre-eminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information and experience among local, national and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places*."

Such a statement requires one to ask **who will be benefiting from these "better spaces."**

The Urban Land Institute is essentially made up of real estate professionals seeking to invest in urban centers around the world. Their **Board of Directors** is made up of sme of the most powerful real estate people/companies in the world. According to ULI they focus on 5 areas of urban development:

Resort and residential
Retail and destination development
Office and industrial development
Transportation and parking
Real estate finance and capital markets

The Urban Land Institute also has a **foundation**, which channels money into projects that primarily benefit real estate development and has **partnerships** with other foundations and financial entities such as Bank of America.

Bank of America is also a **sponsor of the Urban Land Institute**, along with many other major economic players in the country and the DeVos Family, which is listed as a Gold Sponsor.

The DeVos Family's financial support of ULI makes complete sense, especially since they own a tremendous amount of downtown Grand Rapids property, with new investments like the **purchasing of the old Morton House apartments building**, which is slated to be another hotel. The Morton House did provide low income housing to people in Grand Rapids for years, but the DeVos purchase forced those people to relocate.

It also makes sense for the DeVos Family to financially support a non-profit entity like the Urban Land Institute, which can provide the research and advocacy to bolster other land deals in Grand Rapids down the road. Such an entity fits in with the strategic scheme of Rick DeVos and his family funded project known as ArtPrize.

The Urban Land Institute recently endorsed the transfer of state taxpayer funds to remove buildings on the south end of downtown Grand Rapids to make way for the new "Urban Market" that is now underway. The Urban Market is a project spearheaded by Grand Action, a Dick DeVos-founded entity that was behind the Van Andel Arena construction and other downtown development projects.

Unfortunately, the readers of MLive would not as easily connect the dots on the DeVos/ Urban Land Institute relationship, since their article did not bother to investigate the real function of this real estate front group.

Amway is the beneficiary of more corporate welfare from Michigan

https://griid.org/2012/05/24/amway-is-the-beneficiary-of-more-corporate-welfare-from-michigan/

The **Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)** announced yesterday that the Amway Corporation is the recipient of $1.6 million in corporate welfare.

The $1.6 million will be used to build a new manufacturing facility to expand their vitamin production capacity. The MEDC said that the Ada-based corporation chose to build the new facility in Ada, despite looking at other locations around the country. No doubt the $1.6 million in corporate welfare was a major incentive to expand in Ada.

So, the company that is based on a pyramid scheme and rabidly embraces a free market ideology, is once again the beneficiary of public funds so they can expand. The

DeVos funded **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** is constantly beating the drum of government deregulation, privatization of public services and the current austerity measures being implemented by Gov. Snyder. While Amway doesn't want tax money to support public services and public employees, they don't hesitate to hold their hand out to get public money for their private gain.

The MEDC announcement includes comments from Amway executives as well as comments from Birgit Klohs, President and CEO, The Right Place, Inc. Klohs states, "*Amway's investment is very encouraging to The Right Place, and to the region as well, as this announcement demonstrates that manufacturing remains strong and growing in West Michigan.*"

Of course The Right Place would salute more corporate welfare going to a West Michigan company, since that is one of its major functions, to assist the business community to become more profitable. Not surprising, the **Chairman of the Board for The Right Place is Doug DeVos, the President of Amway**.

LGBT organization calling for Boycott of Amway

https://griid.org/2012/08/03/lgbt-organization-calling-for-boycott-of-amway/

Today, the California-based LGBT group Rights Equal Rights announced that it was **calling for a boycott of Amway/Alticor**, because of "its President and company owner
Doug DeVos' **$500,000** contribution to the National Organization (NOM) for Marriage."

The Rights Equal Rights website also states, "*A global boycott of Amway will let others know that there are consequences for giving massive
amounts of money to take away the rights of a minority. We will be closely watching the donors who contribute to the anti-gay sides of the four upcoming November 6th marriage elections in Minnesota, Maryland, Maine and Washington State.*

This is not the first time that a member of the DeVos family has providing funding to defeat marriage equality or other LGBT rights struggles around the country. The Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation and the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation have also provided significant amounts of money to previous anti-gay campaigns, such as defeating marriage equality in Florida and funding anti-gay groups like Focus on the Family and the American Family Association. We obtain this information through their foundation

990s, which were used for the **documentary film** we produced on the history of the LGBTQ community in Grand Rapids.

Locally, we learned in the **Grand Rapids People's History of the LGBTQ Community** that Richard DeVos threatened to pull funding for a new building project at GVSU in 1995, when it was reported that the university was planning on providing domestic partner benefits to their faculty and staff.

The Rights Equal Rights organization sent Doug DeVos a **letter** expressing their outrage over the Amway President's financial support of NOM and provided the following list of Amway/Alticor brands and subsidiaries that the organization is asking people to boycott.

Amway – Family of Brands

Atmosphere
Artistry Skin Care Products
Beauty Products Sold Through Amway
Fragrances
iCook
Jewelry and Apparel
Laura Mercier®
Legacy of Clean Home Care Products
Nutrilite Health Products
RéVive
Ribbon
Water Systems Sold Through Amway
XS Food and Beverage Division

Real Estate

DP Fox Ventures, LLC, a diversified management company with interests in real estate, transportation, and sports and entertainment

Access Business Group LLC

Alticor Corporate Enterprises

Interleukin Genetics
Gurwitch Products
Metagenics

Hospitality & Fitness

Amway Hotel Corporation
Amway Grand Plaza Hotel
JW Marriott Grand Rapids
Courtyard by Marriott Downtown Grand Rapids

Peter Island Resorts
RDV Sportsplex
MVP Sports Clubs in Michigan and Florida

Professional Sports

Orlando Magic – National Basketball Association (NBA) Orlando, FL
Grand Rapids Griffins – American Hockey League (AHL) Grand Rapids, MI

Fox Automotive Group

Delta Imports – Porsche, Audi and Subaru, Grand Rapids, MI
Fox Acura – Grand Rapids, MI
Fox Buick GMC – Comstock Park, MI
Fox Ford Mazda – Grand Rapids, MI
Fox Honda – Grand Rapids, MI
Fox Hyundai Kia – Grand Rapids, MI
Fox Nissan – Grand Rapids, MI
Fox Saab – Grand Rapids, MI
Fox Powersports of Kentwood – Aprilia, Arctic Cat, Piaggio, Qlink, Vespa, Genuine Scooter, MotoGuzzi, Yamaha, Grand Rapids, MI
Fox Shawmut Hills – Can-Am, Sea-Doo, Ski-Doo, Suzuki, Yamaha, Honda Powersports, Honda Power Equipment, Kawasaki, Grand Rapids, MI
Grand Rapids Harley-Davidson – Hudsonville, MI
Fox Collision Center – Grand Rapids, MI
Quick Lane Tire & Auto Center – Kentwood, MI
Fox Ford Lincoln of Cadillac – Cadillac, MI
Fox Toyota of Cadillac – Toyota, Scion, Cadillac, MI
Fox Grand Traverse – *Ford, Lincoln, BMW, Mazda*, Traverse City, MI
Mercedes-Benz of Traverse City – Traverse City, MI
Fox Collision Center – Traverse City, MI
Fox Charlevoix – **Buick**, **Cadillac**, **Chrysler**, **Dodge** , **Jeep**, **RAM**, **Gem**, Charlevoix, MI
Fox Charlevoix Ford – **Ford**, **Lincoln**, Charlevoix, MI
Fox Collision Center, Charlevoix, MI
Fox Negaunee GM – **Chevrolet**, **Buick**, **GMC**, Negaunee, MI
Fox Negaunee Chrysler – **Chrysler**, **Dodge**, **Jeep**, **Ram**, Negaunee, MI
Fox Collision Center – Negaunee, MI
Fox Marquette – **Ford**, **Lincoln**, Marquette, MI

The Boycott Amway/Alticor campaign also has an **online petition to sign**, provides a **number to call Doug DeVos** and is asking for people to spread the word on the boycott.

Dick & Betsy DeVos fund Broadway play written by a sweatshop profiteer about the founder of an ultra conservative church

https://griid.org/2012/08/22/dick-betsy-devos-fund-broadway-play-written-by-a-sweatshop-profiteer-about-the-founder-of-an-ultra-conservative-church/

Yesterday, **MLive posted an article** about Dick & Betsy DeVos deciding to provide financial support for the Broadway play *Scandalous*, written by Kathie Lee Gifford.

The article calls the move by Dick and Betsy their "entry" into Broadway, as if this was a new venture for them.

The play they are funding is about a woman who was an evangelical and the founder of Foursquare Church, which has grown significantly since 1930s, but has maintained its hyper-conservative roots.

The MLive story mentions that this is not the first time that Dick and Betsy DeVos have decided to fund the arts and culture, with increasing amounts of money going to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. and their financing of son Rick's annual event, ArtPrize.

However, the article doesn't explore why Dick and Betsy have decided to fund arts and culture. Instead, the MLive story refers to other articles in the ***New York Times*** and the **Huffington Post**, neither of which explores their motivations.

Nearly two years ago, we posted an article by artist Richard Kooyman, entitled **What is ArtPrize**, where Kooyman explores why he thinks the DeVos family has shifted to art & culture. Kooyman believes that the DeVos' interest in art and culture is connected to the rest of the family philosophy of promoting capitalism and conservative religious values.

There are also aspects of the DeVos/Gifford/Foursquare partnership that are completely ignored by the MLive article.

First, there is no mention of Kathie Lee Gifford's history of profiting from sweatshops in Central America. In 1996, Charles Kernaghan, with the National Labor Committee (MLC), investigated where Gifford's brand name clothing was being manufactured and discovered that a factory in Honduras was using teenage girls to sew her clothes for little pay and under horrendous working conditions.

Gifford went on TV, cried and then said she would make sure such practices never happened again. **Three years later** it was discovered that Gifford continued to profit off of sweatshop labor, when the NLC found her clothing line being made in sweatshops in El Salvador.

This is relevant information as Gifford's play is about a woman who promoted a certain kind of religious values, yet she herself has a history of exploited women workers abroad. It is also relevant in that the DeVos family has been a proponent of trade policies that have both benefited their company and created exploitative practices, such as the one that Gifford and Amway have profited from.

Second, there is no exploration about what the Foursquare Church has become and its relationship to the politics of DeVos and Gifford. Foursquare Church continues to promote hyper-conservative religious values such as anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage and the dominance of Christian values in public life. Former Foursquare pastor Jack Hayford, now the head of Kings College and Seminary, embraces Dominion theology, a theology that believes that religious doctrines should govern civic life. Essentially, those who embrace Dominion theology in the US would like to replace the US system of laws with the 10 Commandments. Hayford and other Foursquare leaders have also been involved with the patriarchal Christian movement known as the Promise Keepers.

It's no surprise then that Dick and Betsy DeVos would finance a Broadway play written by a Sweatshop profiteer that promotes the story of the founder of an ultra-conservative Christian Church.

West Michigan Policy Forum Day II: Three Wealthy CEOs talk "downtown development"

https://griid.org/2012/09/13/west-michigan-policy-forum-day-ii-three-wealthy-ceos-talk-downtown-development/

The second day of the West Michigan Policy Forum began with comments from the Chairman of Haworth, Matt Haworth. He talked about how his company doesn't refer to their workers as employees, rather they are "members." This reflected another linguistic slight of hand that makes workers feel as if they are valued, without having any power, especially since they are not unionized.

Haworth also provided a summary of the first day themes and what day two will entail. He also facilitated some online voting by attendees around the issue of what would be on Michigan's November ballot. This very public voting, once again demonstrated that this forum is highly political and even reactionary, since the online voting overwhelmingly showed opposition to the Protect Our Jobs ballot, the Home Health Care ballot and the Renewable Energy initiative.

Morning Session – Day 2

The first session of day two maintained a similar pattern, by having another journalist facilitate this session. Carol Cain, with a Detroit CBS affiliate, was joined by Dan Gilbert, Chairman, Rock Ventures and Quicken Loans, Dan Loepp, President and CEO, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Dick DeVos, President, Windquest Group. The theme of this discussion was Branding Michigan: Why Strong Cities Matter.

Dick DeVos started by emphasizing the importance of developing the downtown of any city in order for them to thrive. Loepp and Gilbert affirmed this notion and Loepp talked about the decision of Blue Cross/Blue Shield to move their office to the old Steketees building in Grand Rapids.

Carol Cain lobbed another softball at Dick DeVos by asking how easy it was to rebuild downtown Grand Rapids. Dick said that in West Michigan people agree publicly and disagree privately. DeVos said it was a matter of scale, but failed to acknowledge that his family has been one of the largest beneficiaries of downtown development, with hotel expansion, offices, Grand Action projects and the money maker that is ArtPrize.

Dan Gilbert talked about purchasing buildings in downtown Detroit, because of "this commitment" to reviving the core of Detroit. Gilbert couldn't even remember how many buildings he owned and of course was not asked if his buy of property would lead to **accelerated gentrification**.

DeVos also talked about the phases of development in Grand Rapids, which began with major investment in large buildings, followed by retail, followed by entertainment, then housing and finally education. He emphasized the importance of improving education in core city areas, which was interesting, since everyone in the room certainly knows that what **Dick and Betsy mean by education is private education.**

Ultimately, this session was a love fest amongst three wealthy CEOs who are reaping the benefits of using public policy to redirect public money to help re-develop downtown areas of major cities across the state. The all stated that the market should have barriers put before it, but they welcomed government handouts in the form of corporate welfare.

A Grand Rapids Power Analysis

https://griid.org/2012/09/11/a-grand-rapids-power-analys/

This information was presented at an event hosted by the Bloom Collective on September 8 and is re-posted here with the help of several Bloom Collective members.

The presentation began with the premise that in order for institutional or systemic change to take place in any community, people must have a clear understanding of who has power, both economic and political power.

The first slide shared was on understanding the Hierarchy of Power, which is included here.

The hierarchy of power believes that private economic power is the strongest form of power and that this sector of power uses political power to control state power. What is meant by political power is the idea to influence state policy through money and political leverage, which is often manifested in the relationships that private power has, the amount of assets and the associations and boards that it occupies.

Once the idea of a hierarchy of power was established, there was a discussion of who represented private power in Grand Rapids. There certainly are large, global corporations that have a presence in Grand Rapids, such as JP Morgan Chase Bank, AT&T, Coca Cola, Veolia and General Motors. These companies have power in that they can demand tax breaks and subsidies for setting up shop in the area, but they rarely influence local policy on a more regular basis.

The families, individuals and associations that were identified as having the real power in this community includes (but is not limited to) the following: DeVos, Meijer, Van Andel, Cook, Seechia, Michael Jandernoa, John Kennedy, David Frey, Sam Cummings, Huntington, the GR Chamber of Commerce, The Right Place Inc., The Econ Club of Grand Rapids, the West Michigan Policy Forum, Grand Action and the Downtown Development Authority (DDA).

These are the families and entities that through individual wealth or collaboration too often dictate the outcome of policies, economic development and major cultural dynamics that impact the entire community.

The easiest example is the DeVos Family. Their collective wealth and assets is astounding. You can see here how much they own and can get a more detailed listing at this **link**.

In addition to the wealth & assets that the DeVos Family holds, they influence policy through direct contributions to political parties/candidates or campaigns. According to data provided by the **Center for Responsible Politics**, we determined that the DeVos family had collective given **over half a million dollars** in the 2012 election cycle by July.

Other examples of members of the DeVos family influencing policy are the recent donation of **$250,000 by Richard DeVos to Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker in his bid to defeat a recall campaign** and a **$500,000 donation by Doug DeVos to the National Organization for Marriage (NOM),** a lead organization that fights marriage equality across the country. On a more local level, the DeVos family has given money to

influence the politics of local universities and colleges, religious institutions, hospitals and non-profits.

In addition to the power that individual families have because of their vast amount of wealth, they also have power through formal associations. If one were to look at who sits on the boards of entities like the **Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce**, **Grand Action**, the **Econ Club of Grand Rapids**, the **West Michigan Policy Forum** and the **Right Place Inc**., one can see the wealthiest and most powerful people occupying those boards. One can also begin to see that certain names appear over and over again, thus creating what could be called interlocking systems of power. Here is a graph to illustrate these interlocking systems in Grand Rapids.

These are the organizations and associations that the wealthiest families use to dictate policy in this community. We have seen this historically with the development of downtown Grand Rapids over the past 20 years, whether it was the construction of the arena, the convention center and now the so-called “urban market.”

Understanding that private economic and political power is greater than state power, we can then see how the state more often than not operates to maintain the social stratification created by the local elites. Through police, the courts and the jail, the state will deal with disproportionately poor and minority communities by putting them in the Prison Industrial Complex. This is not to say that the state does no “good,” such as libraries and public transportation, but the good/bad binary that has been created by the power structure doesn’t allow us to see how power functions. Of course, the state does some “good,” but the point here is that its primary function is to act on behalf of private power and not allow the masses to really have a say in social and economic policies.

The media also plays the same role, since the media is part of the power structure, based on who owns them. However, even most reporters will not question the power structure, since they have either internalized the values of the system or engage in self-censorship in order to protect their job. Very little local media is owned locally and when they do report on those with power, the news is often bias, framed in the good/bad binary and sometimes the news media acts as sort of a PR outlet for power.

This brings us to the last level in the hierarchy of power, the NGO, Social Services sector. More often than not what one sees with non-profit organizations and social services, entities that are dealing with the consequences of private power’s quest for more power – poverty, various forms of discrimination, poor health, destruction of the environment – is that these NGOs will not question the reasons why people are poor, are suffering from bad health or are the victims of discrimination and oppression.

One of the reasons for this failure to get to the root of problems within the NGO sector is because most often non-profits think that the current system is more or less fine and only needs some minor reforms. This is why many people will say that in Grand Rapids, “we do charity real well, but not justice.” There are social service agencies and charitable services all over this community, but they are not a threat to the existing

power structure. This is exactly why the wealthy elites in this community often donate large sums of money to these non-profits, because they not only will not have their power threatened, it actually creates the illusion that they are doing “good.”

Radical sociologists identify the social service and non-profit sector as the first line of defense against social uprisings. If your organization or agency can provide charitable assistance to people, then they are less likely to direct their rage towards systems of power. In a sense, much of the social service and non-profit world acts as a buffer between the disenfranchised masses and the power elite or as the Occupy Movement would call them, the 1%.

This is exactly why virtually all those individuals and families who make up the 1% in Grand Rapids have their own foundations. Foundations are first and foremost a way to put one’s wealth into a non-taxable status, but it also serves as a way to create an illusion of concern, redirect attention away from social inequality and to engage in population management.

The power structure often gives money to programs that serve the “needy” as a way to guarantee that those most disenfranchised not only will not rise up against the power structure, but will actually come to see them as people they admire. We can see this all throughout West Michigan, where the DeVos, Prince, Meijer and Van Andel families are viewed with great admiration. The fact that working class people will speak highly of the local power structure is an amazing feat of propaganda that would make Joseph Goebbels blush.

The discussion at the Bloom Collective ended with looking at the function of ArtPrize within a local power analysis. People were able to deconstruct the role this art event played within that hierarchy of power and who the real beneficiaries were of the annual event.

This is Class Warfare: New Cartoons take on the DeVos Family and Amway

https://griid.org/2012/10/11/this-is-class-warfare-new-cartoons-take-on-the-devos-family-and-amway/

We recently received the cartoons below by someone who calls themselves a “guerilla artist” and goes by the name Thaddeus Bobo. This artist said he has been inspired by the propaganda work done during WWII and more recently the work of David Rees, who created the fabulously satirical book *Get Your War On* in 2001.

We asked Thaddeus Bobo a few questions about the work that is critical of the DeVos Family and Amway and have included all five of the cartoons below.

GRIID – What inspired you to create these cartoon messages about the DeVos Family?

I actually work at Amway. I see the struggles of the people on the production floor every day. I hear how their kids are struggling to get into decent colleges, how they worry about sick parents whose retirement funds has been ransacked by Wall St, how they constantly worry about where the money for the next unexpected bill is going to come from.

The fact that Rich Devos spent over $200,000USD supporting Citizens United speaks volumes about his respect for the average worker on his production floors. Supporting the anti-union activities of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker actively hurts working men and women and their families who are just trying to make a fair wage for their honest labor. These are people just like the ones working at Amway every single day. Many of them are too busy worrying about paying the mortgage to spend much time learning about the DeVos family's efforts to erode the quality of life for the average middle class American. I felt that I had to do something to express my frustration, and hopefully in a creative way that got people to laugh, to think, to question things for themselves.

GRIID – Will there be other work from AARDVARK Press about the local 1%?

Yes, for sure. I think tackling a few local politicians would be on the agenda, as well as local business owners like Tommy Brann espousing extremist views in the media.

GRIID – Do you have any plans on distribution at this point?

Nothing formal at this point. I was hoping to participate in a local diy 'zine fest this spring that a few local activists have been dreaming up. I have no experience getting published, but would absolutely love to explore that as an option.

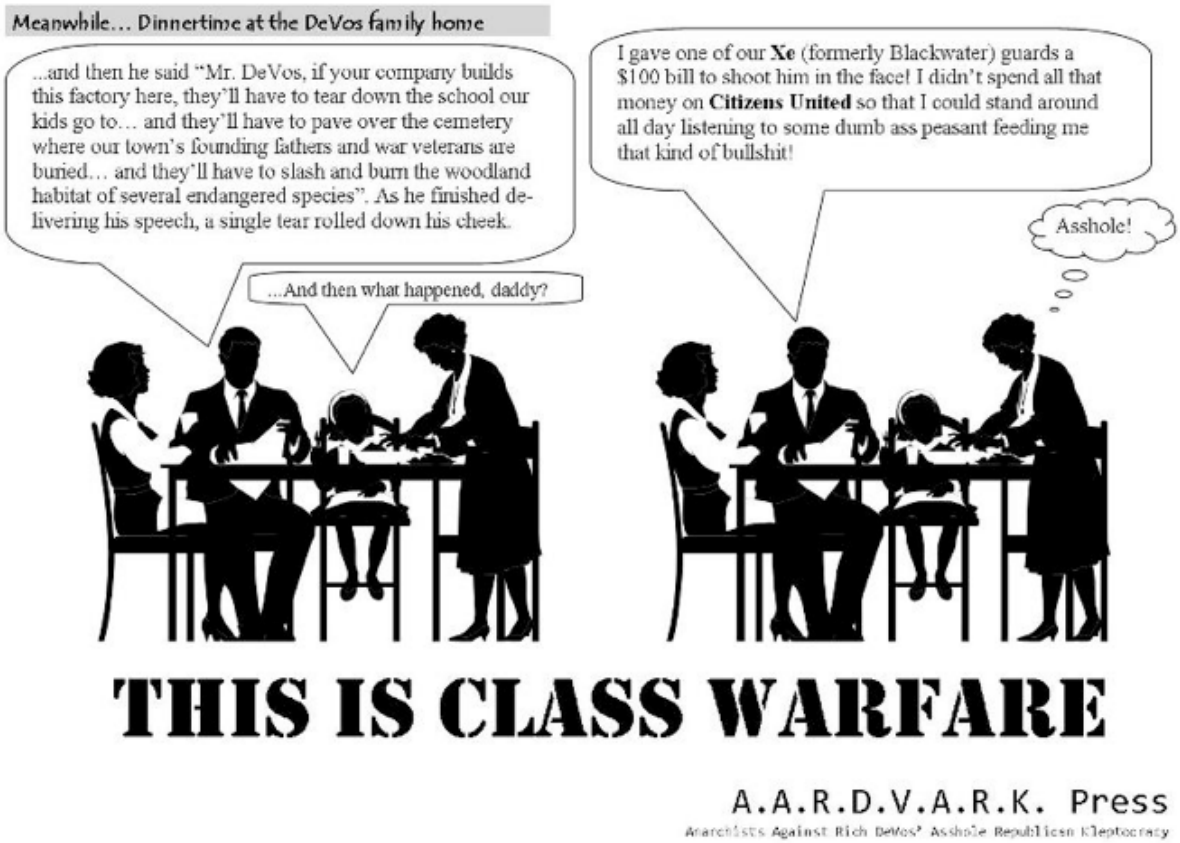
GRIID – There are plenty of working class people who also support the DeVos family "philanthropy." Do you think that what you are doing offers a counter-narrative to the corporate media commentary on the DeVos family and other local robber barons?

I absolutely do feel that I am pointing out some of those unspoken truths, and in a way that uses humor to shed some light on some seriously un-funny situations.

In regards to the DeVos family, there is almost a "don't bite the hand that feeds you" mentality that I think speaks volumes about the collective insecurity about not being a "real city" that seems to be prevalent in this town. I am glad that the DeVos family built a children's hospital in Grand Rapids, it is undeniably a great thing. Altruism isn't really a factor in these great contributions to our city. The DeVos family, Meijer family, Steelcase,

Wolverine and other benefactors gain an enormous amount of social equity, and influence as a direct result of their actions.

Additionally, that great gesture is also tempered by actions like the $500,000 dollars Doug DeVos donated to fight against gay marriage. Its common knowledge that a certain percentage of the population falls into the LGBT community, so it stands to reason that Amway's workforce of over 5,000 people has a few hundred people that Mr. DeVos has directly insulted. These types of conflict that the DeVos family "benevolently" inflict upon us should be questioned. People should ask "who really benefits from this action?"



Right to Work: Brought to you in part by the DeVos Family

https://griid.org/2012/12/07/right-to-work-brought-to-you-in-part-by-the-devos-family/

As people are still reeling from news that the state legislature passed a Right to Work bill for Michigan, some sources are saying that Gov. Snyder will sign the bill into law, despite his previous claims that it would be bad for the state.

One source that is saying that Snyder will make Michigan a Right to Work state is the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**, which euphemistically calls Right to Work, Freedom to Work.

Not only is the Mackinac Center a source for this news, they are in many ways the architect behind the push for Right to Work legislation in Michigan. The Mackinac Center was involved in the introduction of Right to Work laws in Indiana in the past year and they have been leading the charge in Michigan, even before Snyder became Governor. **The Mackinac Center also has a long history** of pushing for privatization and other pro-capitalist policies ever since the right wing think tank formed in 1987.

It is also important for those of us who live in West Michigan to recognize that the Right to Work policy that Michigan is about to make into law is a policy that many business leaders in the area have been championing, none more so than members of the DeVos family.

Richard, Dick and Betsy DeVos have also been major donors of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy according to **SourceWatch**, **Right Wing Watch** and **stories we have posted in the past.** In addition, all of these sources also document that the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation and the Van Andel Family have been donors to the Mackinac Center as well, making West Michigan a major source funding for the right wing think tank.

Besides funding the main architect behind Right to Work policies in Michigan, West Michigan elites like the DeVos family are deeply involved in the creation of the West Michigan Policy Forum, which since 2008 has been pushing for Right to Work legislation in Michigan.

We reported on the West Michigan Policy Forum in 2010, when they brought **anti-union strategist Rick Berman to Grand Rapids** and the focus on Right to Work policies **at this year's conference as well**.

If indeed, Right to Work becomes policy in Michigan, much of the blame lies with the role that West Michigan elites have played in funding and pushing such a policy. Remember this the next time someone talks about the "philanthropy" of DeVos and company, especially since Right to Work policies are really an attack against working people.

The money connection between ArtPrize and the Right to Work law in Michigan

https://griid.org/2013/01/15/the-money-connection-between-artprize-and-the-right-to-work-law-in-michigan/

For months we have been attempting to get the 990 financial reports from ArtPrize for 2011, but every time we would send a request we were ignored.

Fortunately, this is public information and the online Non-Profit resource, GuideStar, **posted the 990s for ArtPrize from 2011.**

We have written in pervious years about the **political economy of ArtPrize** and who were the main funders of ArtPrize, both **primary sources and sponsors.**

The 990 for ArtPrize in 2011 is consistent with the first few years, in that the primary funding source is the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation**.

According to the 990 for 2011, the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation have provided ArtPrize with $5.2 million. There is some income from merchandize and sponsors, but the bulk of the money is provided by the foundation of the parents of Rick DeVos.

Additional financial information worth noting is that there were three "independent contractors" used by ArtPrize in 2011 – On Stage Services ($192.852), Square One Design ($152,617) and Pomegranate Studios ($559, 327). Independent is a loose term to use considering that Square One Designs does lots of other DeVos family business work (Amway, Windquest & Reserve Bar) and Pomegranate Studios is run by the DeVos family.

One last aspect of the financials of ArtPrize is based on a question that is asked of non-profit entities in the 990 form, section IV, which asks – ***Did the organization engage in direct or indirect political campaign activities on behalf of or in opposition to candidates for public office?*** The answer that ArtPrize put for this was no, which is technically correct. However, this does not mean the public shouldn't reconsider the significance of such a question, particularly as it relates to what the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation funds.

After the Michigan Legislature pushed through a Right to Work law in December it was revealed that **Dick & Betsy DeVos have been major funders of Rights to Work policies**, primarily through their contributions to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. The Mackinac Center has been pushing Right to Work policies in Michigan for years and was one of the main architects for the state's new law.

Dick & Betsy DeVos (along with other DeVos family members) have been part of the work of the West Michigan Policy Forum, which has made Right to Work one of its main

priorities, since the group was founded in 2008. Right to Work policy was a significant part of the **last conference, held in September of 2012.**

What this all means is that the same people who fund ArtPrize are the same people that made Right to Work a law in Michigan. This should raise lots of questions for all of us, whether you are a supporter of ArtPrize or not. ***What is the significance of the relationship between people who funded a 19 – day art event in downtown Grand Rapids and the same people who attack workers and unions in Michigan?***

Another way to frame this is by asking what is the significance of those who engage in cultural management who also engage in the management of public policy? The DeVos family understands the importance of public relations and ArtPrize is in many ways a PR coup for the family. How could anyone be critical of people who put on such a large cultural event as ArtPrize?

It's not a question of whether or not there are any positive outcomes of ArtPrize. The world is not black and white and we must avoid looking at the world through a binary lens of good and evil. Instead we have to think critically about the nuances of how systems of power work.

If labor unions and other sectors of Michigan want to come to terms with how the Right to Work law came into being, they are going to have to grapple with the strategic use of DeVos family money. Such grappling will have to go beyond the simplistic GOP vs Democrats analysis and see how their funding strategies are primarily about wealth accumulation and social management.

If I wanted to **fight back against the Right to Work policies**, I would use ArtPrize as a forum to challenge the DeVos family's political and economic influence.

Econ Club GR speaker says Right to Work is just the beginning of greater "economic freedom"

https://griid.org/2013/01/28/econ-club-gr-speaker-says-right-to-work-is-just-the-beginning-of-greater-economic-freedom/

The speaker at today's Econ Club of Grand Rapids luncheon event was Dr. Robert Genetski, talking on the topic of Right to Work laws and economic freedom.

In some ways it seems a bit ridiculous to bring a speaker in to talk about Right to Work policies, not just because Michigan has made Right to Work a law, but because

Genetski was addressing a predominantly business audience made up of the same circles of people who have been pushing for Right to Work policies for years.

The people who are **active members of the Econ Club of Grand Rapids** are also some of the **same people who are involved in the West Michigan Policy Forum**, which has made Right to Work a priority since its founding in 2008.

However, despite Michigan becoming the 24th State to adopt Right to Work Laws, the Econ Club and its members are not content and want to push even further to implement more business-friendly neoliberal economic policies.

This was evident even in the comments by Dick DeVos, who introduced the guest speaker today. DeVos said that it was an "***Historic moment when Michigan enacted the Right to Work law and what Michigan did was more expansive than what Indiana and other recent Right to Work states have done***."

DeVos also made it a point to say that "union bosses" will be working hard to renew contracts in the state, since the Right to Work law made it so existing contracts will expire this year. DeVos showed his anti-union bias in the opening remarks and made it clear that the agenda of the Econ Club of Grand Rapids was to continue to work towards changing state policy that will be beneficial for the capitalist class.

Genetski's presentation was very **similar to the one he gave at the West Michigan Policy Forum in September in Grand Rapids**. He chose to call Right to Work policies Freedom to Work, because his whole mantra was that the greater economic freedom individuals have, the more prosperous individuals and nations will be.

Genetski didn't provide much evidence for his position and even stated early on that the kind of free market economy he advocated for is what God wanted for all of us, so we can all be prosperous. Such a statement no doubt played well to the West Michigan business community.

The speaker looked at Right to Work policies across the country and offered up comparisons between states with those policies and those without and where they were economically. Not surprising Genetski believes that those states with Right to Work laws and more business-friendly tax policies had better economies. Genetski also made it clear that the other factor, which determined economic prosperity, was states that had lower numbers of union members in their workforce.

Michigan, Genetski believes, will be able to turn things around economically when union power is weakened and tax policies will be redone. He blamed the economic problems in Michigan on bad tax policies and union control, but said that under Gov. Snyder things are changing.

Genetski also said he was disturbed by the proposed tax hike for road repair, which he says would raise the state tax rate 17% above the national average. "*The state should*

take the money from other areas instead of new taxes," which is code for cut spending on social programs and state worker salaries.

Genetski is nothing more than a pundit for the business class and even argues for the **privatization of Social Security.** None of this should be surprising, since Genetski is an **"expert" with the Heartland Institute**, a **Right Wing Think Tank that is heavily funded by the Koch brothers and promotes the idea that global warming is a hoax.**

It is paramount that people who care about economic justice and the future of Michigan, not only understand the deep commitment that the business class has to the acquisition of greater wealth, but factor this understanding into to their **strategies for fighting back** that go well beyond electoral politics.

When Dick DeVos says he wants to do something about public education it should scare the shit out of us

https://griid.org/2013/02/06/when-dick-devos-says-he-wants-to-do-something-about-public-education-it-should-scare-the-shit-out-of-us/

Yesterday, **WOOD TV8 ran a story** that began with the display of drawings of what the new entertainment facility at the BOB in downtown Grand Rapids will look like.

The story quickly turned into cheerleading for the group that worked on getting public funding for the BOB's expansion, **Grand Action.** Grand Action was formed in 1991 and has made it their stated goal to develop the downtown of Grand Rapids.

This development has included the arena, the convention center, the civic theater, medical mile and more recently the downtown "market." What the channel 8 story does not mention, and what local news people generally fail to report on, are the tactics in which Grand Action has used over the years and who are the primary beneficiaries of their projects.

One tactic that Grand Action has used over the years is to use public funding on these projects, without public input. We reported on the **millions of public dollars** that has been obtained by Grand Action in the course of the acquisition of the property and the construction of the new downtown market.

When it comes to beneficiaries of these downtown projects, all one has to do is look at who owns the hotels, bars, parking areas and other venues that have made a great deal of money due to the Grand Action projects. The DeVos family has certainly expanded

their empire, especially with their near monopoly of the hotel business, but others businesses have also benefited tremendously. Not surprising, some of these **other business owners are also involved with Grand Action**, which is just another reflection of the **interlocking systems of power in Grand Rapids.**

DeVos and Public Education

The other aspect of the WOOD TV8 story, which was very instructive, was the commentary by Dick DeVos about public education in Grand Rapids. DeVos is quoted as saying, ***"They have been failing miserably, frankly, and it has got to change. I'm encouraged by new leadership, but we need action."***

Anyone hearing or reading such a statement who hasn't bought the propaganda of the DeVos family, would either be rolling on the ground in laughter or fuming with rage. The fact that the channel 8 reporter doesn't ask a follow up question to such a statement is also telling.

It is no secret that Dick and Betsy DeVos have not only given millions of dollars to fund private schools, but they have provided an equal amount of dollars to undermine public education by **funding school voucher schemes** and charter schools.

In 2002, Dick DeVos gave a speech to the conservative think tank, the **Heritage Foundation**. In that speech DeVos lays out a strategy for attacking and undermining public education. Here is the text of that speech:

"Where's the battle going to be fought, for the future? In my view it will be, and at this point it needs to be, fought at the state level–utilizing vehicles such as GLEP and others nationally but ideally these organizations must be constructed locally. They need to be constructed with individuals such as the staff we had in Michigan, who were intelligent and connected with the local grassroots politics of what was going on, that had the relationships, the insights, and the political sensitivity to know what was happening.

And so while those of us on the national level can give support, we need to encourage the development of these organizations on a state-by-state basis, in order to be able to offer a political consequence, for opposition, and political reward, for support of, education reform issues.

That has got to be the battle. It will not be as visible. And, in fact, to the extent that we on the right, those of us on the conservative side of the aisle, appropriate education choice as our idea, we need to be a little bit cautious about doing that, because we have here an issue that cuts in a very interesting way across our community and can cut, properly communicated, properly constructed, can cut across a lot of historic boundaries, be they partisan, ethnic, or otherwise.

And so we've got a wonderful issue that can work for Americans. But to the extent that it is appropriated or viewed as only a conservative idea it will risk not getting a clear and a fair hearing in the court of public opinion. So we do need to be cautious about that.

We need to be cautious about talking too much about these activities. Many of the activities and the political work that needs to go on will go on at the grass roots. It will go on quietly and it will go on in the form that often politics is done – one person at a time, speaking to another person in privacy. And so these issues will not be, maybe, as visible or as noteworthy, but they will set a framework within states for the possibility of action on education reform issues."

Lastly, it is important to note that in the channel 8 story DeVos says he is "encouraged" by the new leadership at the GRPS. Indeed, there have been several superintendents that have been willing to push a neoliberal agenda for the Grand Rapids Public Schools for over a decade.

This neoliberal agenda has resulted in several rounds of school consolidation, the elimination of some important programs, privatizing the busing system, attacking the teachers union and drastically downsizing staff. It is no wonder that DeVos would be "encouraged" by such actions, since it fits in well with his own plans.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

Grand Rapids DDA plan to give DeVos owned RDV Corp $317,000 tax abatement to redevelop Morton House put on hold

https://griid.org/2013/02/13/grand-rapids-dda-plan-to-give-devos-owned-rdv-corp-317000-tax-abatement-to-redevelop-morton-house-put-on-hold/

At this morning's Downtown Development Authority (DDA) meeting, the members of the committee were scheduled to approve the recommendation that the DeVos/Rockford Construction redevelopment project of the old Morton House move forward.

I talked with DDA member Jim Talen who didn't know why the RDV Corp redevelopment proposal was pulled from the agenda and City Staffer Eric Pratt said he couldn't say why it was no longer on the agenda. When asked about if the matter would be on next month's DDA agenda, Pratt said he didn't know and that it might depend on Rockford Construction, which released a statement today, which we could not find on their website or online anywhere.

The Morton House used to provide housing for low-income residents in a federally subsidized program that served roughly 200 people for several decades.

The **DDA staff recommendation** was to offer the RDV Corp a 10-year tax abatement under what is know as OPRE, Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Exemption. Under such

a plan, RDV Corp would not have to pay the estimated $31,700 property taxes per year or $317,000 over ten years.

The RDV Corp proposal is to redevelop the property to create what they referred to as 100 “market value residential units.” The reduction from 200 previous units would suggest that the housing units would be much bigger and target urban professionals. Indeed, the DDA estimates that said resident in the new RDV Corp facility would spend $2 million in the downtown area.

On this matter the DDA document states:

The addition of 100 new market-rate residential units on Monroe Center will infuse approximately $2 M in annual consumer spending potential into the core of Downtown, which will grow the demand side of retail feasibility, again consistent with the goals Framework Plan.

Such comments reflect the trickle down theory of economics, that as long as people are spending money, some of it will trickle down to the rest of the community. However, we know that such notions don’t actually work and what is really happening in this case, the DeVos/Rockford Construction project to redevelop the old Morton House, is that the spending will benefit the downtown business owners, which is a small group of people, many of which have close ties to the DeVos family businesses – hotels, restaurant/bar, sports teams and of course ArtPrize.

Free Market for everyone else, not for us

Equally important in this story is the fact that despite the DeVos family commitment to the idea of the “free market,” they don’t often practice it themselves. Why would a corporation that promotes business solutions to social problems, meaning everyone should be an entrepreneur, accept massive tax subsidies from the City of Grand Rapids, when they in principle don’t want the government to interfere with the “free market?”

The truth is that the DeVos owned businesses have always welcomed massive tax breaks and subsidies for their business ventures, thus welcoming the Nanny state when it benefits them. When can working class people take advantage of the same kinds of tax breaks and subsidies for their contributions to society?

Some might argue that working class people already have “entitlements” in the form of Social Security and Medicaid, but those pale in comparison to corporate subsidies. In addition, the social benefits such as social security and Medicaid are constantly under attack by reactionary Think Tanks like the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** and the **Heritage Foundation**, both of which have been recipients of DeVos funding.

The reality is that the free market is really something that the likes of DeVos want imposed on the general public, but not themselves. If most major corporations did not benefit from tax breaks, government subsidies and taxpayer funded services such as roads, **most of them wouldn’t last in the real free market.**

Your Wealth is Causing My Poverty: Grand Rapids Poverty numbers up, but we still love all the shiny new development

https://griid.org/2015/12/07/your-wealth-is-causing-my-poverty-grand-rapids-poverty-numbers-up-but-we-still-love-all-the-shiny-new-development/

On Friday, **MLive posted a story** based on new data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The article states early on, "***Statewide, more than one out of every six people are living in poverty, a 17 percent increase from the previous 5-year period***." In Grand Rapids, the data shows that **26.7% of the population is experiencing poverty** according to the 2014 data, which is up from 21.9% from 2009.

The article also states that medium income levels in Grand Rapids fell by 8 percent over the last 5 years.

How is this so? I mean, don't we always hear about how Grand Rapids is the best place to raise a family and how the economy here is doing so great? There is not a week that goes by where there is a new story about a new "development project" and that there a housing boom in Grand Rapids. Even the headline from the MLive article says, *Michigan's poverty rate soars as income drops* ***even in economic rebound,*** *census shows.*

Even in the economic rebound. However, the question we must always ask ourselves when such seemly contradictory claims are made is, WHO is benefiting from the economic rebound and WHO are the growing number of people experiencing poverty?

These are questions that the MLive story do not ask. In fact, the people they do cite in the story are from the Chamber of Commerce, a state demographer and someone from the Michigan League for Public Policy. Each of the three people who were cited do not shed light on why poverty is increasing across the state, nor who it is disproportionately impacting.

More Than Statistics

The MLive story does link to federal standards for income levels that categorize who lives in poverty. These numbers are inadequate however, since poverty is about so much more than income.

For those who experience poverty, income is just one indicator for quality of life. But lets be real, the income levels for poverty are also pretty ridiculous and it is clear that those who determine such numbers have never experienced poverty themselves. Does anyone really believe that if you earn just over $11,770 a year you can survive? Rental costs keep going up, as do food costs, transportation and health care. Increasingly, people have to make choices between eating and heating, or eating and transportation. In other words, for those who live in poverty, it is a constant battle with limited options one has.

Then there is the experience of those in poverty with the charity services sector. People are often scrutinized by the social service system and made to feel shame about experiencing poverty. This speaks to the emotional and psychological toll of living in poverty, which underscores the point that it is so much more than just income levels.

Poverty and Race

Another failure of the MLive article is the lack of investigation into whom this increase of poverty in the state and in Grand Rapids is affecting. Statistically we know that communities of color, immigrants, refugees, people with disabilities and LGBTQ youth experience higher levels of poverty than do those who hold all kinds of social and economic privilege.

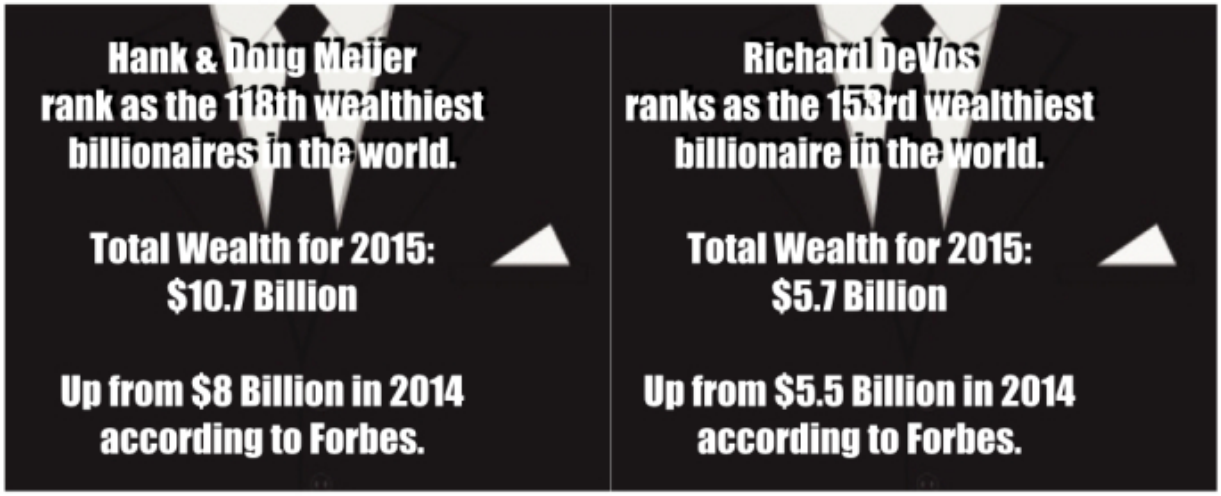
Some of the most **recent data from Kids Count**, shows that the percentage of children in Michigan experiencing poverty in 2014 was 23% for the entire population. For White children the percentage experiencing poverty is 16%, while African American children experiencing poverty is 47% and 32% for Latino/a children. The astronomically higher numbers of poverty for communities should be a clear indicator that poverty is disproportionately a result of institutionalized racism and White Supremacy.

Wealth and Comfort for some means poverty for others

Back to the question of how can poverty be increasing during an “economic rebound.” First, it is important to point out that phrases like economic rebound or economic growth are misleading. Such terms distract us from the harsh reality of economic systems, particularly the current system of Neoliberal Capitalism.

NeoLiberal Capitalism is based on the notion that some will benefit at the expense of others. In September, the latest **Forbes Richest people for 2015** has the Meijer brothers list at 58th richest in the world at $7.9 Billion and Richard DeVos at 84th on the list with $5.7 Billion. The combined wealth of these two families and that of a few others in West Michigan is greater than the combined wealth of everyone else living in this area.

However, those who have accumulated tremendous wealth aren't the only ones contributing to the increase of those living in poverty in Grand Rapids. There is another class of people who are aspiring to accumulate more wealth, those who have six-figure salaries or more who also contribute to poverty creation. This is a professional and entrepreneurial class of people who embrace the system of Neoliberal Capitalism. We hear about these people all the time as well, since they are the ones starting new businesses, sitting on local boards or participating in some new philanthropic venture. These are the 40 Under 40 crowd who not only are benefiting from the poverty of others, but act as a buffer for the super wealthy, since they perpetuate the notion that we just need to come up with creative ways to help those in poverty. This class of people are the executive directors of agencies that convince those in poverty that they just need more opportunities to achieve success. Don't question the economic system or the structural causes of poverty, just get people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps or get your friends to spend more of their money that will benefit the creative class, who will donate a portion of their business earnings to charitable programs that helps us all feel good and divert us from having to think about the systemic causes of poverty.



According to the 2015 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book: Over half a million children in the state lived in families with income below the poverty line.

Fuck the Rich No War But Class War

It is impossible to have justice and equity as long as the DeVos family has power

https://griid.org/2016/02/04/it-is-impossible-to-have-justice-and-equity-as-long-as-the-devos-family-has-power/

We have written a few articles recently about the kind of political, economic and cultural influence the DeVos family has in West Michigan.

In September we posted an **Indy Media Guide to ArtPrize**, which looks at the deeper function of the annual spectacle in Grand Rapids. On October 1, we looked at the **relationship of Rick DeVos to the same political forces that his parents and grandparents have.**

On October 28, we provided a detailed look at **how the DeVos family influences state legislation**, by grossly outspending everyone to buy politicians that will support their reactionary policies. On January 5, our post critiqued **MLive's weak reporting on DeVos family foundation donations** and made it clear that they only contribute with clear political objectives. These are only the most recent posts that look at the political power the DeVos family wields in Grand Rapids and across the state.

The power this one family has is astounding and there is no evidence that this will change anytime soon. If one looks at the most recent campaign finance data from **OpenSecrets.org** for the **49503 zip code**, you can see that the largest donors based on the maximum amount one can donate each time are members of the DeVos family. In fact, **of the top 200 donations from the 49503 zip code, 199 of those are from a member of the DeVos family**. The only non-DeVos contributor in the top 200 donations was Hank Meijer. This means that the DeVos family has contributed hundreds of thousands for the 2016 election cycle and will likely exceed a million dollars before the November election.

Collectively the DeVos family donates to entities like the Republican Party of Michigan, Jeb Bush's Right to Rise PAC, the Upper Hand Fund and various state and Congressional candidates. A great deal of these funds are going to key races and candidates that the DeVos family plans to use to continue to push through legislation that meets their agenda. Rumors are already swirling that getting school voucher legislation passed will be a a focus for 2016.

But effecting legislation is just the tip of the iceberg for the DeVos family. They use their tax havens, known as foundations, to influence economic, social and cultural outcomes in West Michigan. In addition, they sit on various boards and are apart of numerous entities (Grand Action, West MI Policy Forum, Right Place Inc.) that also use their power

to push for things like the transfer of public money to private projects, with a recent example being the Downtown Market.

Collectively the DeVos family is worth around $10 billion. Ten Billion. Imagine what that amount of money could be used for in Grand Rapids. We could probably eliminate homelessness, hunger and poverty. Everyone could own their own home and not have any debt. Health care expenses could be taken care of and people would not have to agonize over weather or not to pay the heating bill or buy groceries this month. In other words, their wealth could be used to end a great deal of suffering……but that is not what they plan to do with it.

The point to all of this is not to single out the DeVos family, they are merely a local example of how the current economic and political systems function and who they really serve. Living in an economic system of Neoliberal capitalism means that there will be a small percentage of people who have a disgusting amount of wealth, while the masses live on the edge. Families like the DeVos's didn't become wealthy by their own efforts, rather through exploitation of workers, the environment and the use of a political system to redirect public money and pass policies that benefit their bottom line.

Which brings us to the title of this posting. Do you really think that there can be justice and equity as long as the economic system of neoliberal capitalism and the neo-fascist political system (as embodied by families like the DeVos's) are allowed to exist?

Movements for social justice and revolutionary transformation have always had to come to terms with the function of systems of oppression and power. As the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass said, "***Power concedes nothing without a demand***." Slavery in the US was not ended because plantation owners one day decided to let blacks go free or because someone reasoned with them. Slavery was ended because slaves rose up and won their freedom, often by killing the slave master and burning the plantation.

Workers in the US did not win an 8 hour work day, better wages, benefits, workers compensation, the end of child labor, etc., because bosses gave these things to workers. Workers had to organize, fight, risk arrest, risk being beaten, jailed or even killed in order to win even marginal labor rights.

The revolutionary uprisings by communities of color from the 1950s til today are what brought about any substantive change for those communities. The political and economic system gave them nothing, they had to fight, organize, go to jail, risk being lynched, fired from their jobs, evicted from their homes or end up being murdered in order to make the gains they have made. None of it was a gift.

I know there are those who say that we should focus on what we can do for ourselves, what kind of justice we can create for ourselves and not worry about the power and

influence of these systems of power and oppression that are embodied by the DeVos family. I agree that we need to always be figuring out what kind of world we want to live and and what it will look like. I agree, that we need to create justice in our homes, our neighborhoods and in our lives. We can do the work of building community gardens, worker run operations and housing collectives. We can make our homes places of hospitality for those with no place to live and spaces where patriarchy, white supremacy, ablism and exploitation are not tolerated.

BUT. We cannot ignore that there are forces who need injustice, inequity and exploitation to maintain their power and privilege over others. Do you really think it is possible to work for a transformative society and not challenge the systems of oppression and power symbolized locally by the DeVos family? We have to do both, because power concedes NOTHING without a demand.



Thoughts on the reactions to the DeVos Family Power article

https://griid.org/2016/02/08/thoughts-on-the-reactions-to-the-devos-family-power-article/

Last Thursday, I posted an article headlined, “it is impossible to have justice and equity as long as the DeVos family has power.”

The article got about 3,000 hits over the past 4 days on the GRIID site, plus an additional 60 shares on Facebook. There were a variety of reactions, which are worth discussing here, since they reveal some interesting aspects of our current political climate.

Hate mail and irrational outrage

As I have come to expect with any posting that exposes or challenges our understanding of power, especially in West Michigan, there were responses where people made threats or wrote rants that were often difficult to follow. Often these sorts of responses use derogatory name calling as part of the rant and sometimes suggest that if I don’t like it here I should move to North Korea. This is a curious response, since I never said that I didn’t like it here and I fail to see how they equate my critique with a desire to go to North Korea. Regardless of the lack of logic, what the hate-driven responses usually want, is to draw you into an endless argument that leads no where, sort of like the MLive comment section, which should be avoided at all cost.

Strategic Annoyance

A second kind of response takes the form of trying to deceive you by creating what appear to be bogus blogs that hyperlink to the GRIID site. I have received dozens of such notifications where a GRIID article is hyperlinked on another blog and all of these hyperlinks have to do with something specific to one of the members of the DeVos family, particularly the information we have about the various **DeVos family foundations**. What is curious about these blogs is that they all celebrate the benevolence of the DeVos family, which is interesting, since the hyper links from the GRIID site have a very critical analysis of those family foundations. I find it hard to believe that there are dozens of blogs out there with writers waxing eloquently about the wonders of the DeVos family. Instead, it seems like this is a tactic that is used by media & PR people who work with or support the DeVos family to annoy anyone who questions their politics. Thankfully, one can avoid approving the hyperlinks by having their wordpress settings reflect pre-approval.

Internalizing the dominant narrative

A third reaction is somewhat disturbing, but not surprising, considering the role that commercial news media and other institutions play in determining the dominant narrative about powerful families like the DeVos's. As we have been documenting for over the past 20 years, West Michigan news media presents the DeVos family as being pillars of the community, generous philanthropists and even the main reason for reviving the downtown of Grand Rapids.

One common retort is, "where would Grand Rapids be without their generosity?" Such a response is understandable, since this is how commercial media presents the DeVos family, but such a reaction is based on a faulty and simplistic narrative. There is rarely any mention of how much public money the DeVos family is able to utilize for their many endeavors – ArtPrize, the Downtown Market, the Arena, etc.; no critique of the function of the funds they use for social engineering through their tax havens, known as foundations; and there is even less coverage of the political funding they engage in that **does concrete harm to working class families, the LGBTQ community, public education and secular society in general**.

However, what is more disturbing than the mimicking of this dominant narrative by a broad range of people is when working class people, even people who are struggling, internalize the dominant narrative. What is equally important is that many of these working class people who defend the DeVos family also identify as liberals. I'm not suggesting that liberals can't or shouldn't internalize the dominant narrative about people with power, instead I merely want to point out that liberals often embrace the dominant narrative as zealously as those who identify as conservative, despite the fact that such support negatively impacts their own well being.

Liberals with Power & Wealth?

A fourth, and final response, also comes from progressives who really like it when we post articles that are critical of the DeVos family. Often, the commentary that follows the liking or sharing of such postings make it clear that their distain for the DeVos family is based on their own partisan bias. This is instructive for two reasons. First, when we post critiques directed at the DeVos family we make it clear that the issue is not the conservative nature of their politics or their devotion to the GOP, the critique is directed at the nature of power their wield.

The second reason such responses are instructive is that it reveals the fact that these progressives have no real problem with individuals, families or institutions wielding the kind of power that the DeVos family does, as long as it fits their worldview. So rarely have I come across people who roundly condemn the DeVos family political influence and then apply the same condemnations to people like George Soros or any number of the liberal billionaires like Bill Gates or more recently Mark Zuckerberg. This kind of thinking is dangerous because it means progressives don't question how "rich liberals"

acquired their wealth and more importantly, it means that they ultimately don't question systems of power and oppression like capitalism, white supremacy and Imperialism, which equally important to rich liberals and rich conservatives alike.

Such contradictions can clearly be seen currently in the push by liberals and progressives to encourage and often shame others into voting for candidates like Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. Advocating for Democrats at the federal level often results in having millions of people spend lots of time and donating hundreds of millions of dollars to support a corrupt and undemocratic political process that will not fundamentally challenge the kind of power exemplified by the DeVos family. In fact, all this energy and money often results in fortifying the very systems of power and privilege that Rich, Dick, Betsy and the rest of the DeVos clan are constantly fighting to maintain.

The narrative of Grand Rapids is one of White Supremacy: Sponsored by Start Garden

https://griid.org/2016/03/02/the-narrative-of-grand-rapids-is-one-of-white-supremacy-paid-for-by-start-garden/

It is common place to see sponsored messages show up in your Facebook feed. People, most often with economic privilege, will pay to spread their message beyond their friend-base.

The other day I saw a sponsored message from the local venture capitalism entity started by Rick DeVos, Start Garden. The sponsored message, shown here, was a posting from the tech-business, **SalesPad.**

The sponsored message was a blog posting from SalesPad entitled, **5 Reasons to Move or Expand Your Business in Grand Rapids, Michigan.** Let's take a look at the 5 reasons and see what kind of narrative they have created about Grand Rapids.

1. Constant Growth

The narrative begins with a focus on growth, specifically economic growth, by saying, "Grand Rapids is the ninth "fastest growing economy in the US." The source for such a claim is an **MLive story from January of 2015** based on a report from the Brookings Institute. The narrative from both MLive and SalesPad never defines growth, but more importantly they never ask the question of "growth for whom?"

While Grand Rapids is booming for some sectors, it also means that a s**ignificant portion of the population here still living in poverty**. Based on recent US Census

data, nearly 30% of the population of Grand Rapids is living in poverty. Those disproportionately impacted by the poverty are communities of color.

The Wall Street Journal in October of last year ran an article that looked at the 10 worst US cities for Black Americans and Grand Rapids was number 5. The data they cite looks at employment, unemployment, median household income and the increased risk of going to jail.

Another article that shows that the "growth" in Grand Rapids does not benefit Black people comes from Forbes magazine, which stated that of the 52 largest cities in the US, Grand Rapids is the second worst for Blacks.

When people talk about the economy being a growth economy, one should always ask for whom.

2. Nickname: Beer City

Breweries are not much of a selling point if you are experiencing poverty. Oh, it would also be good to ask if any of the "over 40 breweries- that's a craft beer" are owned by people of color.

3. Entertainment

The narrative lists ArtPrize, Meijer Gardens and Founders Brewing Company's Founders Fest as the list of entertainment sources which makes Grand Rapids such a good place to start a business. I've written plenty on **what is problematic about ArtPrize** and the other 2 entertainment sources given just continues a narrative that really speaks to the young, white professional class and not to working class families.

4. Convenient Business-ing

This reason is essentially a promo for the Gerald R. Ford Airport.

5. Old meets New

Reason number 5 is in many ways the most instructive in terms of how we understand the narrative that SalesPad has created. The narrative states:

The first trading post was put up in 1826 by a man named Louis Campau, who later bought what is now Grand Rapids for just $90. Today, buildings are being renovated, houses and apartment communities are being built and the culture appears to be thriving.

What is instructive is the use of Louis Campau as an example of entrepreneurship. Campau was indeed a businessman and a shrewd one at that. His presence along the Grand River in the 1820s was the direct result of settler colonialism, where Europeans were entering tribal territory with the goal of taking it over. Campau was just part of the

first wave of settler colonists to occupy land which was inhabited by the Anishinaabe. To say that Campau bought Grand Rapids for $90 only perpetuate a narrative of settler colonialism and ignores the narrative of the native communities that lived in the area now known as Grand Rapids in relative peace before Europeans invaded.

Reason number five also acts as a meta-narrative for the first four reasons, since it seeks to legitimize why people should start or bring businesses to Grand Rapids. In many ways, the 5 reasons should be seen as a White Supremacist and Neo-Liberal Capitalist narrative, which is exactly why it was fitting that Start Garden paid for the sponsored message that featured the narrative about Grand Rapids from SalesPad.

Richard DeVos has another school named after him because he gave them millions

https://griid.org/2016/05/19/richard-devos-has-another-school-named-after-him-because-he-gave-them-millions/

Last week, Northwood University dedicated a new school of management. Not surprising, it was named after Amway co-founder, Richard DeVos.

Richard DeVos has donated millions to Northwood University over the years through the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation. In fact, the private school, which is dedicated to "developing the future leaders of a global, free-enterprise society," also has other DeVos connections.

Dan DeVos graduated from Northwood with a BA in 1980 and since 1997 is on the Northwood Board of Trustees. The university gives out an Outstanding Business Leader award every year, since Northwood, "*firmly believes that American business leaders deserve the highest forms of personal recognition for their contributions to this great nation and the world*." Richard DeVos won the award in 1983, Dan DeVos in 2007 and Dick DeVos won it in 2014.

The second generation of DeVos family members have also contributed to Northwood through their family foundations. According to the most recent 990s that are available on Guidestar, the Dan and Marie DeVos Foundation gave $1,312,500 in both 2013 and 2012. The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation contributed $200,000 in both 2013 and 2012.

The DeVos Family's commitment to Northwood University comes as no surprise, especially when considering what the university claims as its core values. The **school's website** proudly displays the values as follows:

We believe in:

> the advantages of an entrepreneurial, free-enterprise society.
> individual freedom and individual responsibility.
> functioning from a foundation of ethics and integrity.
> promoting and leveraging the global, diverse and multi-cultural nature of enterprise.

Translated, what these values mean is that Northwood University, like the DeVos family, believes that capitalism should dictate how society functions, that government should get out of the way of "the market" (except when they need tax breaks, subsidies or want to privatize more of the public sector) and that freedom and responsibility really means our class has freedom and everyone else but us needs to be responsible. The notion that the DeVos family is ethical would make most reasonable people fall out of their chairs laughing, and "promoting and leveraging the global, diverse and multi-cultural nature of enterprise" just means that they welcome all cultures and races to be part of the capitalist system.

The dedication to the school named after Richard DeVos was reported on **MLive last week**, where the commercial media entity played their normal role of being nothing more than a cheerleader for the DeVos family.

Is Grand Rapids really better off with the likes of DeVos?

https://griid.org/2016/06/09/is-grand-rapids-really-better-off-with-the-likes-of-devos/

Over the years I have observed that when GRIID posts articles critical of the local power structure, particularly about the DeVos family, people give some of the most interesting responses.

The dominate response goes something like this; "Where would Grand Rapids be without the generosity of the DeVos family?" It is an interesting question. Where indeed would Grand Rapids be without the DeVos family or any other members of the **local power structure?**

So here are our top reasons why we disagree with the idea that Grand Rapids is better off with the likes of DeVos, Seechia, Jandernoa, Kennedy, Meijer, etc.

These families and individuals promote and fund a tremendous amount of hate. For decades, many of the families and individuals that make up the local power structure have promoted and funded hate. Maybe the most obvious has been the anti-LGBT efforts led by the **DeVos** and **Prince** families. They have funded hate to support ballot initiatives, to block ballot initiatives and to fund organizations committed to spiritual violence and the social oppression of those who identify as gay, Lesbian, bisexual and transgender. Listen to the anti-LGBT message from Richard DeVos.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

2. *The local power structure does harm locally because they are the primary beneficiaries of neo-liberal economic policies*. Let's be clear, the local elite are primarily interested in their own well being. They have made massive amounts of money through exploitation and have used the legislative process to divert public funds, taxpayer money, for subsidies and for funding their own pet projects. The families and individuals that make up the Grand Rapids power structure has made billions of dollars off the backs of other people. We can stop with the nonsense about them being job creators or wealth creators. Wealth is actually created by those who do the work, not those who collect the profits.

These same families and **individuals also manipulate the political system to increase their wealth and to divert more public money to support their interests**. This is why they contribute significantly to political campaigns and participate in groups like the **West Michigan Policy Forum**, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and The Right Place inc.

3. *The local power structure was instrumental in making Michigan a Right to Work state*. The West Michigan Policy Forum made it a goal from the organization's inception, to attack unions and workers by **making Michigan a Right to Work state**. Such an attack on working class individuals and families demonstrates their disregard for people who are not part of the ownership class. The individuals and families who are power of the local power structure have a long history of engaging in anti-worker and anti-union activities, as is evidenced by their funding of neo-liberal capitalist entities such as the American Enterprise Institute, The Heritage Foundation, The Mackinac Center for Public Policy, the Acton Institute and the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

4. *Grand Rapids would have a stronger public school system if many of the local elites would stop funding campaigns to undermine public education*. Dick and Betsy DeVos

have been some of the national leaders behind policies to **undermine public education**.

Researcher Rachel Tabachnick identifies Betsy DeVos as the Four Star General of the School Privatization Movement, in an article she wrote for the Political Research Associates. The article states:

Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State described Betsy DeVos as the "four-star general" of the school privatization movement shortly after DeVos announced the formation of the "new" American Federation for Children (AFC) in March 2010. As Boston noted, the American Federation for Children was not new, but a rebranding of an organization called Advocates for School Choice.

The American Federation for Children is now the umbrella organization for two nonprofits that have been at the center of the pro-privatization movement for over a decade. In addition to the renamed Advocates for School Choice, it includes the Alliance for School Choice, formerly known as the Education Reform Council. Both entities received extensive funding from the late John Walton, one of the Wal-Mart heirs. The boards of the two related entities included movement leaders Betsy DeVos–scion of a Christian Right family who married into the Amway home goods fortune–William Oberndorf, Clint Bolick, John Kirtley, Steve Friess (son of Foster Friess), James Leininger, John Walton, and Cory Booker.

These two nonprofits–Alliance for School Choice, a 501(c)(3) and Advocates for School Choice a.k.a. American Federation for Children, a 501(c)(4)– provided over $17 million in grants to 35 other national and state-level pro-privatization nonprofits from 2006 to 2010. These grants represented a significant portion of the total budgets for many of the state organizations. Today Betsy DeVos and John Kirtley are the chair and vice chair of both boards.

5. *Don't the Grand Rapids political and economic elites donate to local causes*? These families and individuals do provide money from their foundations to some local organizations. However, the tend to only fund groups that do not conflict with their politics and it gives the illusion that they are great philanthropists. The reality is much different. Foundations are a tax haven for the rich, it acts as a propaganda tool to divert public attention from focusing on how they acquired the massive amounts of wealth they have and the philanthropic contributions are another way of participating in social management. (see *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*.)

In addition, the amount of of money donated by these wealthy individuals and families pales in comparison to the amount of money they give to organizations and candidates. On top of that, the groups and candidates they fund promote policies that actually contribute to the root causes of social problems, like poverty, that some of the non-profits groups who are recipients of their foundation money are claiming to combat.

6. *Haven't these wealthy families been part of reviving downtown Grand Rapids*? If one thinks about the building of the arena, the convention center, the downtown market and other major construction projects over the years, rich people often are given credit for their creation. However, in every single project there have been massive amounts of public money, federal, state and local money that has also made these projects a reality, often without public consent. Also, the "revival" of downtown Grand Rapids has also been driven by the fact that the economic elite will also make tremendous profits, since so many of them owned so much property downtown – hotels, office spaces, restaurants, etc. The revival of downtown Grand Rapids and its ongoing gentrification ultimately serves the interests of the local power structure, a reality that can be seen with the spectacle called **ArtPrize.**

7. *Imagine what the combined wealth of the local power structure could do to alleviate poverty in Grand Rapids*? According to the **Forbes list of wealthiest people** on the planet for 2016, Hank & Doug Meijer are worth $8.2 billion and Richard DeVos is worth $4.7 billion. With the combined wealth of these individuals, which is roughly $13 billion, imagine what could happen if that wealth were in the hands of the most vulnerable people in Grand Rapids. With $13 billion, which is only part of the total wealth of the rest of the power structure, no one in Grand Rapids would be homeless, or go hungry, be malnourished or be denied access to health care. With $13 billion dollars there would be affordable housing for everyone, free college tuition and funding for fighting climate change.

Lets us really imagine what this kind of funding could do for Grand Rapids. In fact, if we had an economic system that was not based on making profits for the wealthy few, but one that would radically alter how we lived in this community, imagine what we could do.

These are just some of the reasons why I don't buy the idea that Grand Rapids is better off with the likes of DeVos.



Creating an anti-LGBTQ climate: The Orlando shooting and West Michigan connections

https://griid.org/2016/06/14/creating-an-anti-lgbtq-climate-the-orlando-shooting-and-west-michigan-connections/

The tragedy and injustice of what took place in Orlando, Florida over the weekend is almost too difficult to write about. What does one do in the face of such hate and violence?

The news media has already done tremendous harm in how they are framing the issue. It's either about guns, the identity of the shooter or it is about the outpouring support that is being demonstrated all across the country and the world.

What the news media is not doing is offering much substantive analysis of why this happened, and more importantly, the historical context for this kind of repression against a marginalized population. One of the best things I have seen so far is this amazing

video, **Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement**, which gives critical voice to queer and trans people of color. The video is also powerful, because it properly frames the Orlando shooting in an historical context.

Creating a homophobic, transphobic climate

As the voices in the Trans and Queer Liberation Movement make clear, this violence has been going on for centuries and is properly named in the video as White Supremacy. White Supremacy is too often ignored, downplayed or denied as a major factor in the current level of violence and repression that communities of color face.

White Supremacy takes on many forms, such as an economic, legislative, religious and cultural form. All of these dynamics play a role in creating, maintaining and normalizing the violence and repression that so many people of color face. Add to this, queer and trans people of color and the level of systemic and structural violence increases exponentially.

For instance, many people in the case of the Orlando shooting, are grateful for the role that law enforcement plays. However, what communities of color and what queer and trans people of color have understood for a long time, is that the use of state violence is a **false solution**.

This brings us to some of the larger context of what has been happening in Orlando and throughout the state of Florida, in terms of creating a climate of hate against those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer.

Let's be clear that this kind of hate is happening everywhere, but for the purposes of the article, let's just focus on Florida.

The Southern Poverty Law Center's **Hate Map**, identifies three main anti-LGBTQ groups operating in Florida; the American College of Pediatricians, Liberty Counsel and Dr. James Kennedy Ministries.

The American College of Pediatricians has only been around since 2002 and is **essentially a hate group that targets transgender youth**.

The Liberty Counsel, which is based in Orlando, has been around since 1989 and plays a more integral part of the **religious rights ongoing war against the LGBTQ community**. The founder of Liberty Counsel, Matthew Staver, came from Jerry Falwell's Liberty University. The organization works closely with other religious right groups, such as Dr. James Dobson's group, Focus on the Family, committed to blocking the rights of the LGBTQ community.

Liberty Counsel is also the former home of Matt Barber, the viciously anti-gay pundit who now runs a right-wing propaganda site, BarbWire. Matthew Staver, the

organization's founder, once compared pro-equality Republicans and those who don't share social conservatives' priorities to cockroaches.

Recently, Staver's wife, Anita, ***announced that she would start carrying her Glock .45 into the bathroom in response to Target saying it would not discriminate against transgender customers.***

Liberty Counsel is an aggressively anti-gay organization, praising repressive anti-gay legislation in other countries and arguing that it is immoral for the U.S. government to encourage other countries to decriminalize homosexuality. **Liberty Counsel also represents** the rabidly anti-gay activist Scott Lively, who has campaigned against legal equality for LGBT people in the U.S. and around the globe.

The other major anti-LGBTQ entity in Florida, is Dr. James Kennedy Ministries, formerly known as Truth in Action and Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. Kennedy has been dead since 2007, but he has been one of the most anti-LGBTQ pastors for decades. Kennedy had organized a national conference for the religious rights for years called, "Reclaiming America for Christ."

One newsletter from D. James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries featured a photograph of very young children under the headline "SEX WITH CHILDREN? HOMOSEXUALS SAY YES!" The newsletter asserts "Adult sex with children has been a crucial component of the homosexual movement all along, and officially since the 1993 March on Washington when it was included as a demand (#55) in their famous manifesto."

Over the years, Kennedy emphasized **anti-gay rhetoric**, particularly in his TV ministry. ***He recommended as "essential" the virulent work of R.J. Rushdoony, who believed practicing gays should be executed***.

The West Michigan Connection

Considering the strong religious right presence in West Michigan, it should come as no surprise that people like Richard DeVos have been a major donors to anti-LGBTQ groups in Florida.

In 2008, the DeVos family was the largest contributor to the **Florida4Marriage group**, which put Amendment 2 on the ballot calling for marriage between only a man and a woman. The Amendment passed in 2008 and outlawed same sex marriages in Florida until that decision was overturned by the US Supreme Court decision last year.

In addition, the DeVos family owns the Orlando Magic basketball team, which has allowed the arena to be used for Evangelical Christian Faith Nights. These Christian

rallies have also provided a platform for anti-LGBTQ organizing in Orlando. (See *Bad Sports*, by Dave Zirin)

Fore more than three decades, the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to Kennedy's ministry on an annual basis. Although the DeVos family no longer contributes to Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, the millions of dollars they have donates over the years to anti-LGBTQ groups in Florida played a significant role in creating a climate that legitimized and normalized violence and hate directed at the LGBTQ community.

Start Garden and the appropriation of ecological discourse

https://griid.org/2016/06/23/start-garden-and-the-appropriation-of-ecological-discourse/

"*The economy, as it is now, prescribes plunder of the landowners and abuse of the land."* *Wendell Berry*

Three years ago we posted an article entitled **Arrogance and the Creative Class in West Michigan**.

The article is a critique of the creative class in West Michigan, but it is also a response to the appropriation of ecological language by local members of the creative class, referring to the how they are "tending the local economic rainforest."

The use of ecological language is an important PR tool increasingly used by the capitalist class based on the notion that if you use green language or words like sustainability, then people will think that what you are doing is somehow for the greater good.

However, author Heather Rogers, who points out the major flaws of green capitalism in her book *Green Gone Wrong,* makes the following point:

"When a firm such as DuPont saves billions by reducing its energy footprint, it will funnel much of that money right back into making more goods to sell to more clients. Staying competitive demands production may go down, its scale of production will continue to escalate."

Start Garden's Ecosystem

Facebook has been featuring sponsored ads recently from Start Garden that seeks to refer to the service they offer as a kind of ecosystem. These ideas are reflected in 2 short videos they produced entitled Ecosystem Part One and Two.

Both videos begin with the same introduction, with images of downtown Grand Rapids and accompanied by a voice over stating, "*A city deliberate about creating opportunities for entrepreneurs, is committed to building an ecosystem*." Such a statement is followed by the idea that social, intellectual and financial capital are what makes up this venture capitalist ecosystem.

After the introduction to the Ecosystem video **Part One**, we are then introduced to three business partners that utilize the physical space and resources of Start Garden. First, we hear from a woman who works for the Cultural Intelligence Center. This organization works with clients to help them be better prepared to "relate and work effectively in culturally diverse situations." This of course means they want to promote diversity and cultural sensitivity. However, what good does this do for the staff of businesses, when the businesses themselves are engaged in oppressive and unsustainable practices?

Looking at their client list, one can easily draw some conclusions about how practicing cultural intelligence only benefits institutions by making them feel better about themselves while they pillage the planet. Here is just a sampling of their **client list**: the Department of Defense (DOD) – how does cultural intelligence benefit the world when the DOD engages in criminal acts on a daily basis around the globe; Coca Cola – another entity that makes billions while **extracting water resources around the globe** and by supporting the **murder of labor organizers**; Walmart, McDonalds, Starbucks, Shell, Amway, Cargill and Bank of America. If this is what it means to be part of a Start Garden ecosystem, then we are all in serious trouble.

Another person who speaks in Part One of the video is a guy who is with OXX. OXX is the maker of a coffee machine that is marketed as being "The World's Toughest Coffee Maker." More importantly, OXX is a subsidiary of the DeVos business consortium known as **The Windquest Group**. So, maybe that is what Start Garden, owned by the DeVos Family, means by an ecosystem, since they internally promote their own brands.

In the Start Garden video **Ecosystem Part Two**, viewers are introduced to Bruce Thompson, President of Urbaneer. This video only features the work of Urbaneer, which has the following statement of purpose on their website. "*URBANEER's pre-fabricated components, wall systems and multi-purpose furnishings allow for more efficient construction while reducing real estate costs and providing a better occupant experience. URBANEER envisions a solution to affordable market-rate housing, aging-in-place, the changing healthcare landscape and a range of other space challenges."*

Thompson founded Urbaneer with the CEO of Rockford Construction Mike VanGessel. This makes complete sense when you look at the video images used in the Ecosystem Part Two video, which features examples of Urbaneer's work in collaboration **with Rockford Construction projects** along Bridge St, images that include the new brewery and the market rate apartments on Bridge and Alabama St.

Looking at the blog on Urbaneer's website, one can read about their role in the renovation of the The Morton. The Morton is also a Rockford Construction project, in partnership with the DeVos family's RDV Corp. In the **blog posting Urbaneer states**, "The building once housed the Morton Hotel, which was built in the late 1800s. Rockford Construction began renovations in 2012 to create 99 apartments and a limited number of condominiums." What is omitted in the blog post is that the Morton House was used for Section 8 housing for decades and that the DeVos owned RDV Corp was given **$317,000 in tax breaks** by the Downtown Development Authority to re-develop the Morton House.

So it seems that not only is Start Garden's appropriation of the word ecosystem an insult to the very notion of what a real ecosystem is, their videos make it clear that their definition of an ecosystem is really a closed system that facilitates their ability to promote their own interests and that if the rest of the West Michigan capitalist class.

Who knew the City of Grand Rapids is giving taxpayers money to a DeVos-owned business?

https://griid.org/2016/09/20/who-knew-the-city-of-grand-rapids-is-giving-taxpayers-money-to-a-devos-owned-business/

We recently discovered that the City of Grand Rapids signed a contract with SG Ecosystem Inc, one of the DeVos-owned entities, in April of 2016.

In the **Memorandum of Understanding**, the City of Grand Rapids states it gave the DeVos-owned business entity $362,500 on April 1, 2016 and will will give an additional $181,250 on October 1, 2016 and another $181,250 on January 1, 2017. This means that by March of 2017, the City of Grand Rapids will have given $725,000 of taxpayer money to the DeVos-owned entity known as SG Ecosystem Inc.

SG Ecosystem Inc. is an outgrowth of Start Garden, created by Rick DeVos in 2012 as a venture capital funding source for those seeking to start new businesses. Start Garden has evolved, however, with a for-profit fund called Wakestream, the Start Garden Foundation (formerly known as eMerge West Michigan) and SG Ecosystem

Inc., which has the contract with the Grand Rapids Smart Zone, run by the city of Grand Rapids.

According to a Start Garden **Media Release**, they have been working on this project of diverting public money with GVSU and the Grand Rapids SmartZone Local Development Finance Authority. Mike Morin, CEO of the new Start Garden Ecosystem, said in the same Media Release, "Start Garden has taken risks on people who want to take risks, and our region has benefitted from it. As the needs and demands of entrepreneurs change, we are adapting the ecosystem's traditional public and private structures." Which is just another way of saying, they wanted to divert public money to the private sector.

"We created eMerge to be the non-profit, go-to resource for early-stage entrepreneurship support in West Michigan, and its programming has brought new visibility and awareness to the needs of entrepreneurs within the ecosystem. By combining our forces with Start Garden, we can further realize our efforts that will create a stronger talent system for West Michigan." This statement is from Mike Jandernoa, chair of eMerge West Michigan, member of Talent 2025's CEO Leadership Council and a part of the Grand Rapids power structure.

This Media Release from Start Garden was sent out by Brian Burch, who has also been the PR guy for ArtPrize (another skilled mechanism for diverting public money to the private sector) and a Holland City Council member who voted against including LGBTQ people in the city's anti-discrimination ordinance.

Many of those who sit on the board of the **Grand Rapids** SmartZone Local Development Authority Board are people who have a strong interest in promoting neoliberal capitalism and the diversion of public money into private coffers. Some of these board members are with the Right Place Inc, the Van Andel Institute, the Michigan Small Business Development Center (run by the GVSU Seidman School of Business) and the CEO of the GRAM.

None of this is surprising, however. In fact, it is celebrated as good financial sense even amongst progressives. This is a direct result of economic austerity measures, meant to weaken the state and make it more submissive to the private sector. Reduce public services, privatize public services and divert funds from the public to the private because it is more "efficient." **Those are some of the defining elements of what makes up Neoliberal Capitalism.** In this case, brought to you by the DeVos Family.

Major ArtPrize sponsors host Conference in Grand Rapids: West Michigan Policy Forum wants to end public sector employee pensions in Michigan

https://griid.org/2016/09/27/major-artprize-sponsors-host-conference-in-grand-rapids-west-michigan-policy-forum-wants-to-take-public-sector-pensions-in-michigan/

Every two years, the West Michigan Policy Forum (WMPF) hosts a major conference to articulate the goals of the most powerful members of the local capitalist class. I use the term capitalist class, because that is who makes up the WMPF and because their stated goal is to engage in class warfare, i.e., implement policies at the state level that will negatively impact working class families and benefit the business class.

In pervious conferences, they made cutting the state business taxes a goal, as well as making Michigan a Right to Work state. Both of those goals have been accomplished.

The policy goal of this year's conference was to push further for even more draconian austerity measures at the state level, with particular emphasis on dismantling pensions for public sector workers.

In the first morning session of the West Michigan Policy Forum conference yesterday, David Walker, former Comptroller General of the United Sates and head of the U.S. Government Accountability Office, presented a study recently conducted by the multinational corporation PricewaterhouseCoopers. The study looked at seven municipalities in Michigan with the basic conclusion that public sector pensions are what is destroying municipal budgets. In fact, Walker, author of the book *Comeback America: Turning the Country Around and Restoring Fiscal Responsibility,* referred to public sector pensions as a "liability" for cities.

The undermining of public sector employee pensions is not a new thing in Michigan. Governor Snyder has made it part of his larger Neoliberal agenda to do away with public sector pensions and other benefits. It has been part of **Snyder's plan to offer revenue sharing to municipalities** only if they met certain requirements, one of them being the attack on public sector employee benefits. The **bus driver**'s union in Grand Rapids has been fighting this very issue for nearly two years.

After the presentation by David Walker, based on the PricewaterhouseCoopers study, there was a panel discussion with four of the five panelists being unabashedly in favor of more austerity measures being adopted by municipalities. Leading the charge for cities adopting more austerity measures was John Kennedy, President and CEO of Autocam Medical. Kennedy has been with the West Michigan Policy Forum since its inception and a major player in the local capitalist class.

Another cheerleader for the elimination of public sector employee pensions was the City Manager of Port Huron, James Freed. Freed believes that the function of governments is to promote free markets and free enterprise, which will lead to “free people.” This whole theme was reinforced in the afternoon when Governor Snyder himself address the West Michigan members of the capitalist class.

The keynote speaker for this gathering was Star Parker, President of the Center for Urban Renewal and Education (CURE). The theme of her talk was, “Market-Based Policies that are Helping Win the Fight Against Poverty.” Star Parker was the perfect fit for this conference, since she not only believes in the invisible hand of the market, she is the perfect person to deliver such a message, since she is an African American woman.

The Center for Urban Renewal and Education mission is to, “***Address issues of race and poverty from a Christian conservative perspective***.” Their **national advisory board** is made up of people from the Heritage Foundation the Family Research Council, the Liberty Cousel and the Ashcroft Group.

The Agenda of CURE are the following:

• Pro-Life

• Traditional Family

• Capitalism

• Ownership Rights

• School Choice

• Personal Retirement Accounts

• Market-based Healthcare

• Charity Choice

Star Parker is a regular on far right radio talk shows, like the Rush Limbaugh show, Sean Hannity and Bill O’Reilly. She once said that **marriage equality contributes to the failing of public education.** CURE is also a pro-Zionist organization that condemns the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions (BDS) campaign.

However, the main reason why Star Parker addressed the capitalist class of Grand Rapids yesterday, was because of her zealous devotion to market-based solutions to poverty, to education and to government fiscal responsibility.

Before the end of the day, the audience also got to hear from two of the second generation members of the DeVos family, Dick and Doug, but they also heard from liberal capitalists like Fred Keller (Cascade Engineering) and Faye Richardson-Green with Richardson-Green Consulting LLC.

What those who claim to believe in collective liberation and social justice should take from this gathering of the local capitalist class is, they are well organized and tend to get the policies they want at the state level. It would be a mistake to simply ignore them or dismiss them as part of the "rightwing." The local capitalist class is embedded in so much of what takes place in West Michigan, which is exactly why this area has the **largest wealthy gap in the entire state**.

Peter Secchia, the Grand Rapids Power Structure and the practice of buying silence

https://griid.org/2016/11/03/peter-secchia-the-grand-rapids-power-structure-and-the-practice-of-buying-silence/

"*Those who own the country ought to govern it*." John Jay 1777

Electoral politics are often brutal, deceptive and often result in strange bedfellows. This has always been the case in the United States, since the founding fathers constructed a nation that would institutionalize inequality.

The spectacle of electoral politics makes for great headlines, with a cast of characters that seem right out of a Marvel comic book. Yet, those who run the country are happy to keep us entertained and distracted with the electoral spectacle.

Take for example the most recent visit to Grand Rapids by the Donald Trump campaign. The **MLive coverage of the Trump rally on Monday**, was just the most recent example of how electoral politics is nothing more than spectacle, with pictures politicians and loyal GOP voters.

However, there are always hidden gems in such coverage. Former Ambassador to Italy, local businessman and member of the Grand Rapids power structure, Peter Secchia, had some very instructive things to say about contemporary electoral politics. During the Trump rally at the Delta Plex, Secchia is quoted as saying, *"I have a message for the Bushes and Mitt Romney, If you don't want to support Donald Trump: Shut up! If you don't know where you are today, you're a loser."*

Such smash mouth rhetoric seems like what you might hear at a WWE event, but this is the norm for contemporary electoral politics in the US. It shouldn't surprise us, especially when we consider the source.

Peter Secchia has made millions off of other people's labor and as a member of the Grand Rapids power structure he has waged war on the masses, what Henry Giroux has referred to as, "the expendable class." Giroux is referring to working class people, the poor, communities of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, those on the margins. The very same people that Donald Trump derides and the very same people that Peter Secchia has contempt for.

Secchia may not use the same language that Trump uses to belittle people, but the policy goals of Peter Secchia have the same results. Secchia has engaged in this policy work most recently through the West Michigan Policy Forum, which is made up of the West Michigan power structure. What this group has been calling for since its inception in 2008 has been for the elimination of the state business tax, passing a Right to Work law in Michigan, pushing for greater austerity measures by local & state government, the privatization of public services and most recently, **the elimination of public sector employee pensions**.

Once we come to terms with what Secchia and the rest of the capitalist class is really about in West Michigan, we realize that what he had to say at the Trump rally was not all that surprising.

However, the world of electoral politics becomes even more insidious when we look at how it creates strange bedfellows.

Just last week, during the Mayor's Tree Planting event, one saw Peter Secchia being photographed with Grand Rapids Mayor, Rosalyn Bliss. In the photo here, you can see Secchia with the mayor, but what is more interesting is that they are holding Thank You cards expressing gratitude for Rich and Helen DeVos. Why did the city find it necessary to say thank you to the local oligarch's? According to the City of Grand Rapids:

"***The DeVos Tribute Grove features a plaque honoring Richard and Helen DeVos for all they have done to beautify and grow our city into what it is today. The plaque also expresses the community's deep gratitude and love for the couple."***

Secchia did participate in the tree planting event, but more importantly he was engaging if the politics of access. During the last campaign for mayor in Grand Rapids, Secchia, along with several other members of the local power structure (JC Huizenga, Kate Wolters, Scott Brew, Bill Bowling, Robert Woodhouse, Sam Cummings, Doug DeVos, Steve Van Andel, Scott Bowen, Dan Bowen, Sharon Bowen, Mark Breon, Friends of West Michigan Business, Ray Kisor, Mark Murray, Scott Wierda, Thomas Cronkright,

Josh May, Lawrence Duthler, Arnold Mikon, Mark Sellers, Realtors Political Action Committee, GR Firefighters Union, GR Police Officers Labor Council all contributed between $500 and $5000 to Bliss's campaign, according to **Campaign Finance records through Kent County**.

Campaign money buys access, but it also buys silence and compromise. In this case, it means that the policies that Peter Secchia (through the West Michigan Policy Forum) promotes and the things he said at the Trump rally will not be challenged by local elected officials, particularly the Mayor. The war on working class people will not be challenged, nor will the misogynist, white supremacist language and policies of the local power structure be challenged. In a sense, Secchia telling GOP people who don't support Trump to Shut Up, is exactly what he is saying to local politicians who believe they have to "be strategic" and not alienate those who not only own the city, but govern it.



What Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary Might Look Like

https://griid.org/2016/11/21/what-betsy-devos-as-education-secretary-might-look-like/

Since last Wednesday, it has been announced that Donald Trump included Betsy DeVos as a potential nominee for Secretary of Education.

Dozens of news sources have affirmed the possible Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education nomination. Betsy DeVos, who is married to Dick DeVos, is the sister of former Blackwater CEO, Eric Prince.

Many people in West Michigan have contacted me with this announcement wondering what it would mean for Betsy DeVos to have a more direct education policy role to play if she was given the job of Secretary of Education and this article is meant as a response to such questions.

However, in addition to looking at what it might mean to have Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary, it is important that we also look at how the news has framed the potential nomination and what background has been provided into the role that Betsy DeVos has played nationally on the privatization of public education.

How the News Media frames a possible DeVos as Education Secretary

There have been dozens of news stories with the Trump announcement of a possible Betsy DeVos appointment as Education Secretary. Some of those stories have come from Michigan sources, as would be expected, but there have also been news stories from DC-based sources.

The Hill on November 15 has the following commentary about Betsy DeVos.

DeVos is a billionaire GOP donor, and her family has been a mainstay in party politics for decades. She once served as the head of the Michigan Republican Party and is the current chairwoman of the American Federation for Children, an education advocacy group pushing school-choice-friendly policies.

The DeVos family made its wealth by helping found the direct-selling company Amway. And while the family has given millions to Republican causes, it was not an early Trump backer.

A source familiar with DeVos's thinking said that while she originally supported Common Core standards at the state level — and funded a group, the Great Lakes Education Project, that promoted such standards — she opposed Common Core once it became federalized.

The Washington Times provided a brief comment on November 19, stating:

At the private golf club, Mr. Trump has meetings scheduled with former D.C. schools chief Michelle Rhee and school-choice advocate Betsy DeVos, who are considered in the running for secretary of education in the Trump administration.

Of all the DC beltway sources, the **Washington Examiner** provides the most substantive coverage, providing some background information, an interview between Philanthropy magazine and DeVos, along with the video here that provides some interesting insights into how Betsy DeVos frames her work in education, where she talks patronizingly about poor families, how her organization changes policy at the state level and how education that is within the context of the marketplace is the most effective way to teach children today.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

Closer to home there has been plenty of stories, but with limited information. The best story to date has been a **Detroit Free Press article**, which at least provides some basics into Betsy DeVos' interest in education policy and at least mentions two of the main groups she is part of, the **American Federation for Children** and the Great Lakes Education Project. This was also the first article that made it clear how school voucher programs would be funded, by stating, *vouchers that would allow students to attend private schools at public expense.*

There was a **second Detroit News article**, but most of it was spent on getting the perspective of the Michigan GOP Chairman, Saul Anuzis.

Lastly, there have been a few MLive articles on the possible Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary, with the most substantive **piece written by Brian McVicar**. However, the McVicar article is still quite limited and provides no analysis of what DeVos and the organizations she is part of are working on in regards to dismantling public education.

Why is Trump interested in Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary?

One of the political arenas that Dick & Betsy DeVos have distinguished themselves in is their interest in promoting private schools, charter schools and school voucher policies.

Schools and non-public school campaigns have received sizable amounts of funding from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation between 2008 and 2010. Groups such as the **Alliance for School Choice**($50,000), the Educational Freedom Fund ($305,000) and the Florida School Choice Fund are just some of the anti-public school groups to receive money from the couple's foundation.

Researcher Rachel Tabachnick identifies Betsy DeVos as the Four Star General of the School Privatization Movement, in an **article** she wrote for the Political Research Associates. The article states:

Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State described Betsy DeVos as the "four-star general" of the school privatization movement shortly after DeVos announced the formation of the "new" American Federation for Children (AFC) in March 2010. As Boston noted, the American Federation for Children was not new, but a rebranding of an organization called Advocates for School Choice.

The American Federation for Children is now the umbrella organization for two nonprofits that have been at the center of the pro-privatization movement for over a decade. In addition to the renamed Advocates for School Choice, it includes the Alliance for School Choice, formerly known as the Education Reform Council. Both entities received extensive funding from the late John Walton, one of the Wal-Mart heirs. The boards of the two related entities included movement leaders Betsy DeVos–scion of a Christian Right family who married into the Amway home goods fortune–William Oberndorf, Clint Bolick, John Kirtley, Steve Friess (son of Foster Friess), James Leininger, John Walton, and Cory Booker.

These two nonprofits–Alliance for School Choice, a 501(c)(3) and Advocates for School Choice a.k.a. American Federation for Children, a 501(c)(4)– ***provided over $17 million in grants*** *to 35 other national and state-level pro-privatization nonprofits from 2006 to 2010. These grants represented a significant portion of the total budgets for many of the state organizations. Today Betsy DeVos and John Kirtley are the chair and vice chair of both boards.*

Dick DeVos has his own history with pushing for privatization of public schools, a subject we looked at in **an article written after DeVos commented that the Grand Rapids Public Schools might need some attention**. Even though Betsy might be the new Secretary of Education, her husband would certainly play a role, along with both the DeVos and Prince families.

In 2002, Dick DeVos gave a speech to the conservative think tank, the **Heritage Foundation**. In that speech DeVos lays out a strategy for attacking and undermining public education. Here is a video of that speech:

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

"That has got to be the battle. It will not be as visible. And, in fact, to the extent that we on the right, those of us on the conservative side of the aisle, appropriate education choice as our idea, we need to be a little bit cautious about doing that, because we have here an issue that cuts in a very interesting way across our community and can cut, properly communicated, properly constructed, can cut across a lot of historic boundaries, be they partisan, ethnic, or otherwise." ***Dick DeVos***

The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation is also an important indication of where the couple provides funding to undermine public education. First, there is the DC-based entity called the **Alliance for School Choice**. In 2013, they contributed $250,000 to this group, which promotes the privatization of public education.

Another anti-public education source for DeVos philanthropy is the Foundation for Excellence in Education ($100,000 in 2013). Betsy DeVos sits on the **board of directors**, along with Condoleezza Rice and the board president, Jeb Bush.

Lastly, there is the Great Lakes Education Foundation, which has also received substantial funding from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation. ($200,000 alone in 2013) The Great Lakes Education Foundation is a source of funding that supports the **Great Lakes Education Project**, of which Betsy DeVos is also a board member, along with the DeVos political operative, Greg McNeilly.

Then there are the funds the DeVos family has contributed directly to the Great Lakes Education Project which received $250,000 from the DeVos family on July 15 of this year.

Betsy DeVos is one of the four board members of the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP). The GLEP is part of a larger national network of organizations that are working to undermine public education. The GLEP is the primary entity work on undermining public education in Michigan and has most recently played a critical role in **state policy decisions on the future of Detroit schools**.

DeVos funding of the Great Lakes Education Project just paid off in the most recent election. GLEP announced that 49 of 53 candidates endorsed by the education advocacy group were successful in yesterday's general election for the Michigan House of Representatives. **GLEP-endorsed candidates winning yesterday include 25 re-elected incumbents and 24 new legislators**.

Betsy DeVos would certainly fit in the new Trump administration, despite the fact that no one in the DeVos camp gave money directly to the Trump campaign. And even if the Trump administration decides to pick someone else, you can bet that Betsy DeVos will play a role in helping to craft federal policy in the same way she has played a critical role in forming education policy in many states throughout the country.

Why is the GRPS Superintendent praising Betsy DeVos as Trump's choice for Education Secretary?

https://griid.org/2016/11/28/why-is-the-grps-superintendent-praising-betsy-devos-as-trumps-choice-for-education-secretary/

Last Wednesday, in an **article that appeared on MLive** about Trump's choice for Education Secretary, Teresa Weatherall Neal, superintendent of Grand Rapids Public School district, endorsed and even praised Betsy DeVos as Trump's choice for Education Secretary. Here is part of what that MLive article stated:

Neal says she has worked closely with DeVos since she began her job five years ago. The relationship started with DeVos asking for a meeting.

"She wanted to know what I was going to do, what was my plan for the children in the district," said Neal. "I appreciated her asking the question. She was part of the transformation that we have done in the district."

When Neal said she needed the expertise of a superintendent coach, DeVos picked up the tab, and she continues to send notes of encouragement.

The DeVos clan, especially Amway President Doug DeVos and his wife, Maria, have channeled millions from their foundations to programs that align with Neal's goals.

Neal acknowledges the toll Michigan's school of choice policy has taken on urban school districts like her own over the past 22 years when the lawmakers set it in motion with school finance reform in 1994.

"It has been hurt by choice (but) we have also become a much stronger district and able to compete," Neal said.

Over the past two decades, the district has lost 8,000 students, closed 35 buildings, eliminated 1000 positions and cut more than $100 million from the budget, according to the district's spokesman John Helmholdt.

Under Neal, the district's graduation rates have climbed and chronic absenteeism have dropped, Helmholdt added, although they're still below state averages.

Neal thinks DeVos can hold up GRPS as a model of what can be done at other struggling districts.

“I’m really excited for the children across the nation,” Neal said. “She has been a wonderful supporter of GRPS and our transition plan. She knows education. She knows what it is going to take in order for our kids to be helped.”

Some have questioned DeVos family involvement in the district and public education in general since they have educated their children in privately-funded Christian schools.

Neal sees the politically conservative family’s focus on education as their commitment to the “greater social good.”

The praise that Teresa Weatherall Neal gives to Betsy DeVos should should raise red flags for anyone who care about public education in Grand Rapids. There are several statements in the MLive article that should tells us something about the Grand Rapids Public Schools, the role of the DeVos family and the GRPS and the programs that align with GRPS that are supported by the DeVos family and the rest of the local power structure.

However, it is first important to acknowledge that the Grand Rapids Public Schools have been facing tremendous adversity for decades. Some of the main causes of this adversity has been the decades long White Flight, where white families moved out of the district or have chosen to send their kids to other schools. Another cause has been the state-level systematic defunding of local school districts, which the DeVos family has contributed immensely by getting legislators in Lansing that promote their education policies. Lastly, the lack of school funding, coupled with the poverty-level income of many families in the Grand Rapids Public School district has laid the ground work for the privatization of education that Betsy DeVos champions.

There was an acknowledgement in the MLive article that the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation has contributed directly to the Grand Rapids Public Schools. Based on the 990 documents available, the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation has contributed money to the GRPS and programs that align with the school district.

The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation contributed between 2012 – 2014 contributed **$1,509,120 directly to the Grand Rapids Public Schools**. If you add the money they contributed to the University Prep Academy, located on South Division, the President of Amway and his wife contributed **$550,000** during the same 3-year period.

Then there are programs that align with the GRPS, such as the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation, which provides grants to the GRPS. The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation has contributed **$1,496,413 to the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation**. **Maria DeVos also just happens to sit on the board of this foundation.**

The Grand Rapids Initiative for Leadership (GRIL) is a faith-based youth leadership development program that offers trainings through the GRPS at both Union High School and Ottawa Hills High School. This program is really an offshoot of the **DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative** and is one of the main partners in the GRIL. Doug and Maria DeVos contributed **$58,000**between 2012 – 2014 to the Grand Rapids Initiative for Leadership. The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation also gave **$20,000** between 2012 – 2013.

Another faith-based initiative is the Believe 2 Become program, which works directly with the Grand Rapids Public Schools. There is no direct connection that we could find to the DeVos family, but many of the other programs the DeVos family supports are partners of this project.

A few other projects, which align with the goals of the GRPS, are First Steps Kent and Talent 2025. First Steps Kent provides resources for early childhood efforts in Kent County. The Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation is one of the **major funders** of this project, contributing $803,000 between 2012 – 2014. Doug DeVos is the Chair Emeritus for First Steps Kent and **many of the Commission members** make up the local power structure.

Lastly, there is the group Talent 2025. This group is made up of CEO's who want to create and develop talent for their own interests. The GRPS is also part of this effort, which ultimately wants to prepare students to be part of the workforce. The **leadership of this group** is also made up of the local power structure, with some DeVos family involvement.

So, you can see why Teresa Weatherall Neal expressed such admiration for Betsy DeVos being chosen as the Secretary of Education. The DeVos family is deeply embedded in the Grand Rapids Public Schools, through their funding and the organizations they have had a hand in creating.

West Michigan Policy Forum Endorsed Legislation seeks to eliminate Public School Teacher Pensions in Michigan

https://griid.org/2016/11/30/west-michigan-policy-forum-endorsed-legislation-seeks-to-eliminate-public-school-teacher-pensions-in-michigan/

It is possible that before the end of the year, the Michigan Legislature might push through a bill that will effectively end public school teacher pensions.

We wrote about this issue in **September**, when the major policy issue that the right-wing West Michigan Policy Forum made ending public sector employee pensions the main issue to get passed in Michigan.

The West Michigan Policy Forum has been instrumental in getting several state policies passed since their inception in 2008, such as making Michigan a Right to Work state, eliminating the business tax and now they are calling for the end of public school teacher pensions.

The proposed legislation, known as **HB-5218** in the House and **SB 102** in the Senate would eliminate traditional pensions and replace it with 401k-type plans allowing investment firms to make billions managing them. The **Michigan Education Association** has stated that, "This is a nation-wide attack, led by Enron billionaire Tom Arnold, whose Arnold Foundation is **flooding right wing think tanks across the nation** with funding to do this work. The Enron meltdown cost public pension funds $1.5 billion in losses."

In Michigan, the West Michigan Policy Forum and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy has been pushing the same message, which is all in the name of fiscal responsibility. "Fiscal responsibility," is really just code for austerity measures and ultimately an attempt to break unions.

The **recent announcement from the the Trump camp that Betsy DeVos has agreed to be the Secretary of Education** in his administration, provides even more momentum, since Betsy DeVos and the DeVos family has made the dismantling of public education a priority for years. Many of the Michigan legislators who have backed both the House and the Senate version of the bill are endorsed by the DeVos run **Great Lakes Education Project.**

Various organization, particularly unions are attempting to prevent the Michigan Legislature from making this happen. The **Michigan AFL-CIO has sent out an action alert, asking people to sign this petition.**

However, it will take more than petitions to stop this Neoliberal plan to undermine teacher pensions. The unions and their supporters will need to engage in various forms of direct action if they are to put a stop to ongoing class warfare being wage by the Republicans and their Democratic Party collaborators.

GRPS School Board Members remain silent on Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary

https://griid.org/2016/12/05/grps-school-board-members-remain-silent-on-betsy-devos-as-education-secretary/

Last week we posted an article asking the question of why the Grand Rapids Public Schools Superintendent, Teresa Weatherall Neal, had responded so favorably to Donald Trump's choice for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos.

The article was meant to raise questions and look at the what Superintendent Neal stated were ways in which what the DeVos family was doing in the Grand Rapids School District aligned with Neal's goals.

I spoke with one GRPS board member on the phone who affirmed the analysis in the article, but two other board members felt that the article was misleading.

Last Tuesday, I sent the following e-mail to every member of the GRPS Board:

As a GRPS School Board Member, I would like to know what your reactions are to 1) the announcement that Betsy DeVos has been named as Secretary of Education, and 2) what impact might that have on GRPS?

If you could respond be the end of the week, that would be great. I plan to post your responses in their entirety on the griid.org blog.

I received two responses via e-mail. Pastor Nathaniel Moody and Monica Randles both replied with the message No Comment.

The remaining 7 members of the Grand Rapids Public School Board – Jen Schottke, Wendy Falb, Maureen Quinn Slade, Dr. Jose Flores, John Matias, Raynard Ross and Tony Baker – did not respond to our questions.

There continues to be a national outcry against Betsy DeVos becoming the Secretary of Education.

Lisa Graves with the Center for Media and Democracy wrote a solid piece on the Trump pick for Secretary of Education, entitled, **5 Things to Know about Billionaire Betsy DeVos, Trump Education Choice.**

Democracy Now, also ran an important piece last week about Betsy DeVos, with several guests, but featuring Diane Ravitch, former Education Secretary and author of several books on the privatization of public education in the US.

It is unfortunate that the Grand Rapids School Board members are unwilling to take a position on the choice of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, especially considering that it could mean further efforts to undermine the public school system throughout the country.

The Wealth and Deception of Betsy DeVos

https://griid.org/2017/01/23/the-wealth-and-deception-of-betsy-devos/

One good thing about Betsy DeVos being chosen as Donald Trump's choice for Secretary of Education, is that we are now getting some glimpses of the vast amount of wealth she and her husband Dick have.

On Friday, MLive reported that Betsy DeVos, "in a letter to ethics officials at the U.S. Department of Education, said she would divest from 102 entities within 90 days of her confirmation."

This is one of the first times we have seen this level of disclosure from any member of the DeVos family. MLive even **posted the letter** that Betsy DeVos send to ethics officials at the Department of Education, which included the list of entities she claims she would divest from. This disclosure is required by the federal government, but it is worth reading.

MLive, however, did not provide any additional information on the companies that Betsy DeVos currently has investment in, nor of the entities that she is either a trustee of or a director of. MLive also failed to mention what seemed obvious in the Senate confirmation hearings, where she said that the 990 form that listed her as on the board of her mother's foundation (Elsa Prince) was a "clerical error." Jeremy Scahill, author of the book on Betsy's brother's former mercenary group, Blackwater, made it clear that **Betsy lied during the confirmation hearing.**

In the most recent 990 (2015) provided on Guidestar, Betsy (Elizabeth) DeVos is clearly listed as a Vice President of her mother's foundation, as you can see below.

In addition to the letter that Betsy DeVos sent to the ethics officials at the Department of Education, we were able to find another document, which also lists entities that she has either investments in, is the director of or a trustee of. This list is much more detailed and actually provides (in some instances) the value of the entity and the income that Besty DeVos gets from her association with said entity. You can find that document **here**, which we encourage our readers to share.

Rich People Applauding Billionaires at Grand Rapids Econ Club event: Betsy and Dick DeVos share a moment

https://griid.org/2017/01/24/rich-people-applauding-billionaires-at-grand-rapids-econ-club-event-betsy-and-dick-devos-share-a-moment/

Yesterday, MLive ran the following headline, **Shinola leader's comments about Detroit education draws applause for Betsy DeVos.**

The article was based upon a talk given by billionaire businessman Jacques Panis, founder of Shinola, a manufacturer based in Detroit.

After his lecture, Panis was joined on stage by Dick DeVos, since this was an Econ Club of Grand Rapids event. However, MLive doesn't bother to mention it was an Econ Club event until about half way through the article.

Panis was critical of the Detroit Public School system, which is why he got such an applause. The very same people who support the privatization of public education and the Great Lakes Education Project are the same people who have endorsed Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary. So, of course the people who make up the capitalist class in Grand Rapids (those who are members of the Econ Club) applauded the Detroit businessman for making critical comments about Detroit's Public Education system.

The MLive reporter did fail to mention that Betsy DeVos through her Great Lakes Education Project was the leader behind the campaign to get the Michigan Legislature to further influence public education in Detroit, based on solid reporting by the **Michigan Campaign Finance Network**.

However, the MLive story goes on to quote Dick DeVos:

"I dare say you have a partner in your quest for a better education for all Americans right here in the room with us," he said in a nod to his wife, Betsy DeVos, who was sitting in audience.

Ok, so you have an event that is hosted by the Econ Club, which is made up of the Grand Rapids capitalist class, who invites a speaker that trashes Detroit Public Schools and then is joined on stage by Dick DeVos, who, along with Betsy are two of the biggest proponents of privatizing public education in the country. The audience of local elites applauds the Detroit billionaire and the West Michigan billionaire and that is what is called journalism in this town.

Start Garden adds Ethnic Diversity, but offers same old Capitalist opportunities for the few

https://griid.org/2017/02/02/start-garden-adds-ethnic-diversity-but-offers-same-old-capitalist-opportunities-for-the-few/

Last Thursday, the DeVos-owned project known as Start Garden, headed by Betsy DeVos' son Rick DeVos, announced they would be hiring two new people in order to promote more minority business opportunities in Grand Rapids.

Start Garden hired Darel Ross, former co-executive director of Linc and Jorge Gonzalez who has been executive director of the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce since March 2015.

The **Start Garden Press Release**, in part stated:

The vitality and future of our entrepreneurial ecosystem, however, requires local leaders in economic development with deep knowledge of the disparities and challenges faced in diverse entrepreneur communities. This helps ensure that the economic benefits of entrepreneurship can be realized by people of all backgrounds and experience.

On **Monday, MLive reported** on this new announcement from Start Garden, wherein Ross and Gonzalez said, "they are looking forward to having the additional resources to remove barriers to entrepreneurship across the board."

The MLive article also mentions the 2015 Forbes ranking that put Grand Rapids the worst city in the US in terms of Blacks economic well being. The above comments from Ross and Gonzalez suggest their addition to the Start Garden staff will somehow be able improve minority businesses opportunities in Grand Rapids.

We don't doubt that Start Garden will be able to increase the number of minority owned businesses in Grand Rapids, but the **Forbes article from 2015** wasn't just talking about minority owned businesses, it was talking about the average income of Black households. The Forbes article stated that Black median household income was only 59% of what White median household income is.

Hiring two economic development leaders from minority communities was certainly a smart move by Start Garden. It adds lots of PR value to the organization. However, Black Capitalism, like White Capitalism, will only benefit a small percentage of people in the black community and will NOT do much of anything to alleviate the deep poverty that thousands of black families find themselves experiencing in Grand Rapids. An important historical analysis of how capitalism will not benefit the mass of black working class families can be found in Manning Marable's book, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America.*

Hiring Gonzalez makes sense considering his leadership in the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, but Ross's hiring may not seem quite as clear. However, when one considers that the largest funders to Linc have been members of the DeVos family.

According to the most recent 990s from the Doug and Pamela DeVos Foundation, between 2012 and 2014, that foundation provided roughly **$3.2 million dollars to Linc**. This is because the organization's primary function is economic development.

Public money for Private gain

The MLive article also states:

The new focus by Start Garden comes as the organization is completing a year-long restructuring to take over managing Grand Rapids SmartZone. Overseeing SmartZone gives Start Garden an opportunity to take advantage of state and federal economic develop dollars to work with more businesses.

As we reported in September **https://griid.org/2016/09/20/who-knew-the-city-of-grand-rapids-is-giving-taxpayers-money-to-a-devos-owned-business/**, Start Garden (by March of 2017) will receive $725,000 of taxpayer funds from the City of Grand Rapids to run the SmartZones program.

CWD and the West MI Power Structure: Part II

https://griid.org/2017/04/17/the-west-mi-power-structure-part-ii/

Last month we posted an **article about the West Michigan Power Structure** that did not specifically involve the DeVos Family. We looked at people like Peter Seechia, John Kennedy, Michael Jandernoa and Mark Murray.

In Part II of our look at the West Michigan Power Structure we look at three men who make up CWD Real Estate Investment – Sam Cummings, Scott Wierda and Dan DeVos.

CWD was in the news last Thursday, after the **Grand Rapids City Commission voted unanimously to approve** $2.3 million in reimbursements through brownfield funding for a new hotel project. In addition, the **Downtown Development Authority awarded CWD an additional $895,000 in tax abatements this past February**.

According to the MLive story, the new hotel will be run by the Amway Hotel Corp. This should come as no surprise, considering that Dan DeVos is one of the three men running CWD, but also because of the relationship the company has with other DeVos family members and their role in the West Michigan Power Structure in general.

Sam Cummings, Scott Wierda and Dan DeVos all were involved in business and investment before CWD was created. Cummings has previously been involved in Second Story Properties, Wierda was a co-owner of Jade Pig Ventures and Dan DeVos is the CEO of DP Fox Ventures. CWD was founded in 2008 and since then has amassed a significant amount of real estate property throughout West Michigan. According to the CWD website, they own more than 3 million square feet or retail and urban office real estate in the area.

Funding Republican Priorities

Another aspect of the CWD trio is their funding of GOP candidates and priorities. **Wierda** and **Cummings** have spent less money than DeVos on political contributions, but it is significant funding non the less.

Dan DeVos has contributed several hundred thousand dollars in recent years to GOP candidates and to the party itself. Such contributions from the three men are not just ideological, they are strategic in terms of how it benefits their growth as a real estate investment company.

Interlocking systems of power and influence

Cummings, Wierda and DeVos are also deeply connected to organizations, sitting on boards or committees in order to use their financial clout to influence local politics and culture.

Sam Cummings has been involved in the Economic Club of Grand Rapids, the Michigan Association of Realtors, currently sits on the Aquinas College Foundation Board, is a GVSU Foundation Trustee, was a Trustee at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, a former board member of The Right Place Inc and former Grand Rapids Art Museum Foundation Trustee. Cummings was also instrumental in the **failed Grand Prix races in downtown GR back in 1996.**

Scott Wierda is also involved in the Econ Club of Grand Rapids, the Michigan Association of Realtors, is a vice-chair of the Michigan State Housing Authority, sits on the GVSU Foundation board of Trustees and used to be a Trustee of the Grand Rapids Art Museum Foundation.

Dan DeVos sits on the boards of organizations that differ from both Cummings and Wierda. DeVos is on the board of the Econ Club of Grand Rapids, Family Outreach Center, Hope Network, Norwood University, the West Michigan Sports Commission, the Orlando Magic Youth Foundation and the Grand Rapids Youth Foundation.

ArtPrize and CWD

Lastly, it is worth looking at the relationship that CWD has with the Rick DeVos-led project ArtPrize.

CWD is a major sponsor of ArtPrize and has been for years. The motivation for supporting ArtPrize should be evident, since their downtown properties stand to make a ton of money from patrons and venue fees. CWD has properties in prime locations throughout downtown Grand Rapids, which provides the company with a constant revenue stream during ArtPrize and lots of exposure and all the free PR that comes with the annual art spectacle.

In the second year of ArtPrize, Sam Cummings was quoted as saying:

"***Our long-term goal is really to import capital – intellectual capital, and ultimately real capital. And this (ArtPrize) is certainly an extraordinary tool."***

One last connection between CWD and ArtPrize, is the fact that Scott Wierda's wife, Rebecca Wierda, sits on the ArtPrize board.

All of these connections, the political, financial and cultural connections, are what makes CWD and their founders an integral part of the West Michigan Power Structure.

Workforce Development, Talent Management and Neo-Liberal labor speak: Believe 2 Become report reveals how business views students in West Michigan

https://griid.org/2017/05/23/workforce-development-talent-management-and-neo-liberal-labor-speak-believe-2-become-report-reveals-how-business-views-students-in-west-michigan/

Last December, we wrote **an article responding to the praise that GRPS Superintendent,** Teresa Weatherall Neal, was giving to Betsy DeVos for her "support" for Grand Rapids Public Schools.

A major part of the reason that Neal was singing Betsy DeVos's praises was because we noted how much money the DeVos Family had donated to the various programs West Michigan's most powerful family had help to start. These programs, are in many ways, connected to the main goals that the DeVos Family espouses, which are inserting religion in the public sphere and promoting neo-liberal capitalist principles.

One of the projects the DeVos Family has had their hands in and provided a substantial amount of funding to, is the GRPS-supported project, Believe 2 Become. The Believe 2 Become initiative is funded by the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation. According to the most recent 990s, the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation has increased each year the amount of money they have donated to Believe 2 Become.

A new report from Believe 2 Become reflects to worldview of the DeVos Family and many other members and organizations that make up the Power Structure in West Michigan.

The report, **Workforce Opportunity in West Michigan:Connecting a Qualified Workforce to High-Growth Opportunities**, demonstrates that the local power structure sees students primarily as workers they can make money off of.

The contemporary business community uses terms like talent management and workforce development, but these are essentially modern terms for what 19th century writers would refer to as wage slaves.

Look at these comments from Business Leaders and you can see how they view students:

Each of these members of the capitalist class make it clear that the function of education is to prepare people to be good and obedient workers.

The talent management group **Talent 2025**has identified these three goals (on the right) for West Michigan, if the economy is to grow.

These goals are instructive, since they make it clear that education should serve business interests, corporate funding should drive greater economic opportunities and the education system should change, meaning it should become more privatized to serve business needs.

It is crucial that we all not buy into the Orwellian use of language and promote talent creation, talent management or workforce development. This language is simply meant to deceive us into believing the lies of an economic system that only benefits a small percentage of people.

We could make our own three goals or recommendations about how to discern and resist the power of the business community in West Michigan.

> We should not see students/youth as a talent pool that primarily serves business interests. Instead, we should see students/youth as people who deserve to live in a world that is not driven by the profit motive.
> We should recognize that when the business community talks about growing the economy of West Michigan, what they really mean is to grow it for themselves. All their talk about low-unemployment rates is contradicted by the fact that 25% of the population of West Michigan lives in poverty. The percentage of those living in poverty increases to nearly 30% if we are talking about communities of color.
> We need to develop autonomous, grassroots and community-based efforts that are built on cooperation and redefine an economy that serves all people and preserves ecosystems.

In other words, we need to both resist the current economic system, while at the same time begin to develop new economies that are based on justice, equity and ecological integrity.

The DeVos Family now wants to remake part of a southeast Grand Rapids neighborhood

https://griid.org/2017/05/29/the-devos-family-now-wants-to-remake-part-of-a-southeast-grand-rapids-neighborhood/

Over the past several years, we have seen the impact that developers and investors are having on the gentrification of neighborhoods throughout Grand Rapids.

The Wealthy Street corridor, Michigan Street, the Belknap neighborhood, Bridge Street and West Fulton are just a few examples of neighborhoods that have seen the cost of rent rise dramatically, houses being torn down, families being displaced and the new development projects primarily benefiting the business/professional class.

There are now plans under way in the Southtown area of Grand Rapids, specifically the area that is bordered by Hall St. to the North, Burton St. to the South, Division St. to the

West and Fuller/Kalamazoo to the East. Some people also refer to this area as the Boston Square neighborhood and the Cottage Grove business district.

One of the entities that is pushing for the re-development of this area is the Rockford Construction Company. **Last year it was revealed that the major Grand Rapids development company had already drafted a blueprint for the area without the knowledge of those who actually live in that neighborhood**.

The other major player to surface with an interest in the Boston Square neighborhood/ Cottage Grove business district is a lesser-known organization called AmplifyGR. AmplifyGR is a non-profit organization recently created by the DeVos entity known as RDV Corporation.

AmplifyGR has a website, but there is very little content found at the site. However, there is more information about what AmplifyGR has been up to, based on city documents, mostly from the Southtown Corridor Improvement District minutes. Those minutes (1/18/2017) include the following information about AmplifyGR:

Jon Ippel and Brad Mathis shared that over the last nine months, Rockford Construction, in partnership with the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, has been developing Amplify GR. Their focus area, which overlaps the Southtown CID, is from Burton St SE to 28th St SE and S Division Ave to Kalamazoo/Fuller Ave SE. Amplify GR will be opening an office in the community and partnering with existing organizations to address issues faced by the community. They developed this model based on the Purposeful Communities model in Atlanta. They plan to begin community engagement in February, 2017. This is anticipated to long term work (15+ years). (Full presentation added to the agenda packet.)

Commissioner Senita Lenear talked about the long-term, community benefit of ownership, both of homes and businesses. Commissioner Lenear asked Mr. Mathis to speak to the property acquisitions that they have made in the focus area. Mr. Mathis shared that Rockford Construction has purchased roughly 12 buildings, the most visible being the former Dexter Lock factory at 1601 Madison Ave SE.

It should be noted that the Doug Maria DeVos Foundation have also been the primary funders of LINC.

This new partnership between Rockford Construction and the DeVos family should raise lots of red flags to anyone who has seen **what Rockford has done on Bridge St and the near westside of Grand Rapids** in recent years. Such a partnership should also raise red flags for those who are aware of the**pro-capitalist, anti-worker, anti-LGBTQ, anti-public schools history of the DeVos family.**

What follows is the AmplifyGR presentation that was mentioned in the minutes of the 1/18/2017 meeting:

What is most alarming about the AmplifyGR presentation information is the neo-liberal capitalist language such as entrepreneurship, “defined neighborhood” and “cradle to career educational excellence.” The cradle to career educational excellent is code for charter schools, schools of choice and privatized education and the rest of the language reflects a certain form of paternalism, which suggests that those who currently live in the neighborhood just can’t improve their situation on their own.

In the March 15, 2017, Southtown Corridor Improvement District meeting minutes it states:

Jon Ippel gave the update of Amplify GR hiring of Willie Patterson, formerly of LINC, to continue the work of identifying key areas of partnership. Amplify is focused primarily in the Boston Square and Cottage Grove areas. They are working on partnering with communities on developing and repositioning underutilized properties, working with the local schools, and increasing affordable housing. J. Ippel emphasized that they want to respect the work that has been and being done by others. They are looking to partner with orgs and people such as LINC, Seeds of Promise and Oakdale Neighbors already doing this work.

First phase of community engagement led by W. Patterson is a survey in partnership with Seeds of Promise and Oakdale Neighbors. In spring larger meetings looking to identify the opportunities and assets available to see out the vision.

Longer term they are asking how do they reposition the properties in Boston Square and Cottage grove in a way that provides employment to people living in Southeast Grand Rapids.

Helen Harp asked about a timeline of when things start. J. Ippel stated that the survey begins in April. They will move into office space in Boston Square in 2 weeks. They hope to have a better sense of when community meeting can be set within the coming few weeks.

H. Harp asked about joining the Area Specific Plan (ASP) surveys with Amplify GR’s survey. Com. Senita Lenear noted that it may to be done at the district level.

Pat Pulliam voiced the concern of the ongoing planning process with the ASPs while at the same time developers are going forward with their projects and their own visions. Without the ASP vision being laid out and developers already moving ahead, particularly on parcels that are being built by right, there is potential for conflict.

It was suggested that it would be good to have Amplify work closely with Planning Dept. to get the concerns and vision of the communities as well as sync up the different timelines.

P. Pulliam noted that given that they are beginning the process again this was an opportunity to get the communication, planning and engagement right. Concern of development getting ahead of the actual planning and solidifying the vision, particularly given that the CID is large and each Business district is unique. Com. S. Lenear recommended that Amplify be sure to work closely with the CID and get the timeline together in order to give Amplify more credibility when engaging the community as a new organization.

J. Ippel spoke on the urgency given the needs of housing and employment but was willing to work in partnership. Com. S. Lenear noted that it may be necessary to do the project well and correctly since there will always be urgency and the ramifications of getting it wrong will be felt for a long time.

It seems clear from these minutes that AmplifyGR wants to move forward quickly and not have to be bothered by the tedious process of public and resident input, because there is an "urgency."

All of these developments are taking place somewhat under the radar and should concern all of us who care about justice and equity. The group **Grand Rapids Homes for All is hosting a meeting with AmplifyGR** on **Thursday, June 8, from 6 – 8pm** at the Baxter Community Center. Come with questions, come with concerns and lets not allow the DeVos family to dictate the future of yet another part of the city of Grand Rapids.

DeVos Created AmplifyGR cancels meeting with GR Homes for All

https://griid.org/2017/06/01/devos-created-amplifygr-cancels-meeting-with-gr-homes-for-all/

Yesterday, the DeVos-created group AmplifyGR sent an e-mail to the group Grand Rapids Homes for All cancelling the meeting that was scheduled for June 8 at the Baxter Community Center.

Here is the message that AmplifyGR sent:

I wanted to let you and the Grand Rapids Homes for All team know that we will need to reschedule our June 8 meeting scheduled until July/August.

We have been working with City Commissioners to host a neighborhood meeting in late June to share information with residents on Amplify GR's goals, planning process, partnerships and real estate transactions. Once that meeting happens, we would like to reschedule with Grand Rapids Homes for All and work with you to maximize attendance and discuss how our goals align for creating and maintaining quality housing for all.

I apologize for the disruption, but hopefully we can identify an opportunity to continue the conversation in July/August.

Sincerely, Jon Ippel

The GR Homes for All **Facebook event** made it clear that the AmplifyGR group was funded and created by the RDV Corporation, which is part of the DeVos family holdings.

The fact that AmplifyGR canceled this community meeting raises questions about what it is that they don't want the public to know, particularly those who will be most impacted by the development plans they are working on as it relates to the Boston Square and Cottage Grove neighborhood areas, **as we reported on Tuesday.**

If indeed a public meeting will be taking place in the Southtown neighborhood area, how will that meeting be run and who will be facilitating it? Once a meeting date is known, we will post information about it so that people can attend, ask the necessary questions and raise concerns about the process so far, which appears to favor the Rockford Construction/DeVos-led development project at the expense of residents.

It is not yet known if the Grand Rapids Homes for All meeting will still be held on June 8. Once we know for sure, we will update this post.

The DeVos Family now wants to remake part of a southeast Grand Rapids neighborhood: Part II

https://griid.org/2017/06/06/the-devos-family-now-wants-to-remake-part-of-a-southeast-grand-rapids-neighborhood-part-ii/

Last week we reported on the organization known as AmplifyGR, an organization that is a non-profit, **created by the DeVos family's RDV Corporation**.

We reported that AmplifyGR was working with Rockford Construction Company and the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation to develop parts of the Southtown neighborhood area, particularly, the Boston Square area and part of industrial area surrounding Cottage Grove SE.

In the March 15, 2017, Southtown Corridor Improvement District meeting minutes it states in part, "***Longer term they are asking how do they reposition the properties in Boston Square and Cottage grove in a way that provides employment to people living in Southeast Grand Rapids**."*

While these minutes reflect the notion that AmplifyGR and Rockford Construction want to provide employment opportunities to people in the area, Rockford Construction had purchased more than two dozen properties in these neighborhoods more than a year before these pronouncements were made at the Southtown Corridor Improvement District meeting.

We Call it a Land Grab

In the first map (below), you can see that Rockford Construction (according to the most recent data available on the Grand Rapids Parcel Viewer map) owns thirteen properties in the Boston Square area. The land that Rockford Construction owns in this area is fairly substantial and makes them the largest land owner along the Kalamazoo corridor in the Boston Square neighborhood.

In this second map below (according to the most recent data available on the Grand Rapids Parcel Viewer map), one can see that the Rockford Construction Company now owns fifteen lots in the Cottage Grove area between Jefferson and College SE. In this instance, Rockford Construction, along with the Notions Marketing Corporation.

This means that as of right now Rockford Construction owns 28 properties in the target area for development, as proposed through the information presented by AmplifyGR. In addition, what this information suggests is that for at least a full year before AmplifyGR began to "engage" the community, Rockford Construction was quietly buying up property with the intention of developing the Boston Square and Cottage Grove areas.

Here is where resident are at a disadvantage. Developers, like Rockford Construction, do not come to residents in neighborhoods to present an idea before they develop plans or buy property. It seems that the only just thing to do would be for residents to have an equal say in what happens to their neighborhoods before plans are being developed or property is being purchased by an outside entity.

Now, this may seem unrealistic in a world where property ownership is held sacrosanct, but such a process would limit the power that developers, land speculators and investors have in the process.

What AmplifyGR is really doing, and what it was designed to do (in my opinion), is to amplify the voices of developers and investors who have purchased land in the Southtown area, without telling residents, thus creating a power dynamic that favors those with wealth.

In this instance, with an imbalance of power, what recourse do residents have if they do not want what AmplifyGR, Rockford Construction or the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation is selling? Residents could organize and ban together to create and **community land trust**, which takes time and is no easy task or they could organize to publicly resist these forces through an informational campaign that would seek to get the larger community behind them to stop the proposed plans laid out by AmplifyGR, **as we reported on last week**.

AmplifyGR already pulled out of a scheduled meeting with **Grand Rapids Homes for All that is scheduled to be held at the Baxter Community Center on June 8**. However, this seems like an important opportunity for people who are concerned about the economic and political forces like Rockford Construction and members of the DeVos family who want to redesign an entire neighborhood. One of the best ways to defeat power is by shinning the light on what they are doing, along with resistance to whatever plans they want to impose on residents of that area.



DeVos-created Amplify GR to host meeting June 29 on development plans in Southtown

https://griid.org/2017/06/12/devos-created-amplify-gr-to-host-meeting-june-29-on-development-plans-in-southtown/

The DeVos-created organization, AmplifyGR, will be hosting a meeting on **June 29, from 6 – 7:30pm at the Living Word Church, located at 1534 Kalamazoo Ave. SE.**

In the past two weeks, we have posted two stories about the DeVos/Rockford Construction plans to re-develop parts of Southtown.

In our **May 29 article**, we primarily provided information on the meetings and planning that AmplifyGR has been participating in, meetings that have largely been limited to planners and policy makers. The May 29 article also provides details of the vision that the DeVos/Rockford Construction tandem has for parts of the southeast area of Grand Rapids.

On June 1st, we reported that AmplifyGR had **canceled a scheduled meeting** they were invited to that was being hosted by GR Homes for All. That meeting was cancelled in part because of the fact that AmplifyGR was clearly presented as a DeVos-created entity, something that they were not transparent about on either their **website** or their **Facebook page**.

Last week, we then posted **part two of our initial article on the DeVos/Rockford Construction collaboration** to redesign parts of Southtown, with details on how many properties they had purchased in preparation for their development plans.

Now the June 29 meeting has been scheduled. The AmplifyGR facebook page says that the meeting is being hosted by the two Third Ward City Commissioners (Lenear and Allen) and AmplifyGR. The description also says that Doug DeVos, from the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation will speak, followed by the CEO of Rockford Construction, Mike VanGessel.

The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation are financing this re-development project, although we do not know how much money they are investing in the project, since their foundation will not have to legally post their 990 financial disclosure documents for another two years. However, we do have information on what the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation has been funding in recent years that are relevant to the AmplifyGR discussion.

First, the person who is working for AmplifyGR, Willie Patterson, used to work for LINC, which has received more funding from the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation since their founding than any other source.

Second, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation has invested significantly in "educational" projects in Grand Rapids, often in conjunction with the Grand Rapids Public Schools. Their foundation has been the primary funding source for the Believe 2 Become project, which has been a way for the DeVos family to inject religion into the local public schools, along with the Grand Rapids Initiative for Leadership, which is an even more overtly faith-based program that works with the GRPS. This "educational" funding is relevant, since one of the components of the Southtown development vision is education. Education, with the DeVos context means private, charter or faith-based programing with a public school system.

Lastly, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to ideologically driven organizations, such as the National Organization for Marriage (NOM), which has been a leader in opposing marriage equality in the US. More importantly, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation regularly funds groups like the **Acton Institute**, the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**, the **Heritage Foundation** and the **American Enterprise Institute**, all of which support neoliberal economic policies that harm working class families and communities, like the neighborhoods being targeted in the AmplifyGR plans.

After Doug DeVos and Mike VanGessel speak at the June 29 AmplifyGR meeting, there will be a presentation of the development plans, "***followed by the opportunity for neighborhood residents and business owners to ask questions and learn how to stay involved in the ongoing planning in the community by the City of Grand Rapids and AmplifyGR***."

This last sentence suggests that what is being developed is more or less a done deal and that the June 29 meeting is designed merely to inform people what they will be doing. Let's face it, a meeting that only lasts 90 minutes, includes comments from politicians, Doug DeVos and the CEO of Rockford Construction, followed by a presentation of the AmplifyGR project, won't allow for much time for people to speak up. In reality, the June 29 meeting is a managed meeting, **like so many other meetings led by developers**, and is not really designed for public input, rather it is just to create a perception that they want to hear from the community.

Doug DeVos and Friends say they want to create opportunities, but they really just need skilled workers to help them make more profits

https://griid.org/2017/06/21/doug-devos-and-friends-say-they-want-to-create-opportunities-but-they-really-just-need-skilled-workers-to-help-them-make-more-profits/

Last month we **posted a story** about a **new report** from the local group Believe 2 Become about Workforce Development. The report was arguing the need to create more "opportunities" for students, but tended to focus on building stronger relationships between the business community and the schools.

The Believe 2 Become report also references the talent management group **Talent 2025**, which has identified these three goals for West Michigan, if the economy is to grow. Below is what Talent 2025 is suggesting and our own translation of what they are proposing.

In the report there are also quotes from representative of the local power structure. You can see what Doug DeVos says here, which is really a way of saying, "***we need more skilled workers in order to increase our profits***."

Recently, the Believe 2 Become report was the focus of gathering of local power brokers, who came together to discuss ways in which to facilitate a deeper relationship between schools and the business community.

Here is the video that provides a summary of the invitation only gathering that took place at Meijer Gardens. Pay close attention to which voices are heard.

Believe 2 Become Workforce Development Conference

Jeff Smith

It's interesting that there are three women who set up the video, who are then followed by several people who make up the West Michigan Power structure, particularly Doug DeVos, Rockford Construction CEO Mike VanGessel, Peter Haines from the Ottawa Intermediate School District, Shana Welch from Mercy Health, Kenyatta Brame with Cascade Engineering, President of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce Rick Baker, Kevin Stotts with Talent 2025 and Teresa Weatherall Neal – Superintendent of the Grand Rapids Public Schools.

The most instructive thing shared in the video is when Doug DeVos says that the people to fix the workforce shortage problem are in this room. Again, people with power making decisions for the rest of us, because they know best what we need and what we want.

Rockford Construction has been working on the Southtown Development Project since at least 2014

https://griid.org/2017/06/26/rockford-construction-has-been-working-on-the-southtown-development-project-since-at-least-2014/

In our ongoing coverage of DeVos-led AmplifyGR group and their partner, Rockford Construction, we want to continue to ask relevant questions and raise the level of awareness about those who are part of the local power structure are planning to do in neighborhoods across the city.

In **our original story**, we looked at what the AmplifyGR/Rockford Construction efforts were proposing in the Southtown area of Grand Rapids. We reported that over the past 6 months AmplifyGR and Rockford Construction have been meeting with city planners and people who make up part of the Southtown Corridor Improvement District committee.

In **Part II** of this series, we looked at the number of plots that Rockford Construction has already purchased in both the Boston Square Area and the Cottage Grove area. We made the point in this post that AmplifyGR is really a project that amplifies the voices of developers and investors who have already created an unequal power dynamic by virtue of how much land they control in the target areas.

In **our third article on AmplifyGR**, we wanted to alert people to a meeting that AmplifyGR was hosting on June 29, shed some light on the process and provide some information on the entity that is financing AmplifyGR – the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation.

In today's post we continue to want to raise relevant questions about the AmplifyGR project.

Last year, we ran **a story about a Rockford Construction development plan** that had created some controversy at the time, because they already had a proposed plan before even discussing the development idea with people who actually live in the target neighborhood. The development project became public when someone from Linc

posted information on Facebook and in their online news section. The online news piece is entitled, ***Rockford Construction's "Hushed" Plan for Southeast Redevelopment Brought to Light*** .

The "Hushed Plan" that Linc is talking about is a 43-page document, ironically titled, **Complete Neighborhood**. We revisited that document, in light of the recent revelations that Rockford Construction was working with AmplifyGR. AmplifyGR has stated that their proposal for the Boston Square area is based on the **Purpose Built Communities** model. In re-reading the Rockford Construction document, they mention that they had attended a Purpose Built conference and were working with consultants from that organization. On pages 6 – 7 of the Rockford Construction document it states:

Purpose Built Communities, led by Greg Giornelli, has provided support to the Grand Rapids team in a number of ways:

Strategic Planning Session – Greg Giornelli visited Grand Rapids to review the fundamentals of the Purpose Built Model and to assist in goal-setting. While the pillars of Purpose Built are foundational for every member community, each neighborhood bring its own unique challenges, and each community must craft its own approach to solving problems.

Members of the Grand Rapids team attended the Purpose Built Conference in September, 2014. Other Purpose Built Members were in attendance and topics ranged from neighborhood resident engagement to early childhood brain development. Of note was the wide variety in both the physical characteristics of each neighborhood and the organizational approach to implementing strategies.

So, it seems clear that Rockford Construction has been working on a plan to re-develop part of Southtown since 2014, based on their own report comments about meeting with folks from Purpose Built Communities. Three years later, they appear to be ready to implement such a plan, even before those who live in the target area even know what the hell is going on.

We also looked closer at the land purchases that Rockford Construction has been making in the Southtown area, particularly the Boston Square neighborhood and the Cottage Grove area. Below you can see which parcels they have purchased, for how much and in what year.

All of the property purchases combined is an estimated $10 million that Rockford Construction has spent on the land in the two areas of Southtown. This is an incredible amount of money and one wonders if the company has that kind of money to spend or if they have other financial backers?

One thing that isn't clear from the 2015 Rockford Construction document is who will ultimately maintain control over all this property in the Southtown area, not how much the company stands to profit off of such a plan. The company clearly is motivated by profits, so it will be interesting to hear what their CEO has to say about this at the public meeting on June 29.

The report does provide a Mission Statement, which is worth reprinting here:

What the mission statement says to this writer is that this is all just another neoliberal capitalist scheme that will make money off of poverty, while attempting to present the proposed development and Rockford Construction as Saviors of the neighborhood.

What if instead, people were to make a counter proposal back to Rockford Construction and AmplifyGR. The community proposal could go something like this: How about all the land you have purchased, and the additional money that investors are willing to throw at this project, were given to those who live in the community to be put into a Community Land Trust (CLT). This CLT would be completely under the control of those who lived in the neighborhood, could provide tremendous financial opportunities for home owners and tenants in the area and could lead to community based ideas for how best to move forward. If Rockford Construction and the DeVos-created AmplifyGR really wanted these neighborhoods to truly prosper, then they wouldn't have a problem transferring all those assets over the the people who live there.

AmplifyGR meeting received a lot of push-back from the community on plans to re-develop parts of southeast Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2017/06/30/amplifygr-meeting-received-a-lot-of-push-back-from-the-community-on-plans-to-re-develop-parts-of-southeast-grand-rapids/

Last night an estimated 200 – 250 people showed up to the community forum organized by AmplifyGR. The event was scheduled to go from 6 – 7:30pm, but lots of people showed up early.

It was clear that AmplifyGR has no shortage of money, since staff and volunteers were all wearing AmplifyGR t-shirts. Upon entering the door to the church (where the event was held) people were encouraged to fill out an information card or place dots on sheets of paper that listed some areas of concern.

In the church sanctuary, where the forum was being held, it had the feel of a concert or an awards ceremony, with the big stage all lit up and AmplifyGR logos projected on multiple screens.

The event did start promptly at 6pm, with city commissioners and the AmplifyGR team and funders on stage to start the show. The pastor of the church welcomed people and was followed by comments from the two Third Ward City Commissioners, Dave Allen and Senita Lenear.

Both of the commissioners generally spoke in support of the AmplifyGR project, although at one point Commissioner Lenear said, "*We don't want what happened on Wealthy St. to happen here, We know that people could no longer afford to live in that neighborhood*." This statement received lots of verbal affirmation and applause from people in attendance.

After the commissioners spoke, Doug DeVos then took the mic and addressed people in attendance. You can view the 6 minutes and 15 second comments by the Amway President. DeVos shared an Amway story, spoke about their involvement with Believe 2 Become (which is primarily funded by the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation) and that they have been involved with many of the non-profits in the Boston Square area. DeVos says that he just wants to be a better neighbor by partnering and collaborating with the people who live there. If this is the case, why would **AmplifyGR/Rockford Construction have spent the last 3 years purchasing roughly $10 million worth of property in the area**, yet most people are unaware of it?

Following DeVos was the CEO of Rockford Construction, Mike VanGessel. VanGessel shared a bit of his background and then talked about the development end of the project, except that he didn't really talk about any of the actual development end of the project, despite the fact that representatives from Rockford Construction have been meeting with members of the Southtown Corridor Improvement District since January of this year, with plans they had for the area. None of the **slides that were presented to those who sit on the Southtown Corridor Improvement District**, were shared with those who came to hear about AmplifyGR.

The next speaker was John Ippel, who is the director of AmplifyGR. We also taped what Ippel had to say in the video below. Ippel talked a bit about an open house that AmplifyGR held in May, where people shared concerns about improving education and having access to affordable housing. What Ippel failed to say is that these issues were already the focus of their plan, before listening to concerns from people in the community. This slide was shared as early as January with the Southtown Corridor Improvement District, which clearly articulates a vision for what AmplifyGR wants to see happen.

Ippel also mentions that the AmplifyGR project wants to utilize the Purpose Built Communities Model. Again, what was not shared was the fact that the Purpose Built Community Model is not driven by residents, but former politicians, business people and non-profit professionals. One interesting aspect about the **Purpose Built Communities model that was used in Atlanta**, was that a 650 unit public housing complex was torn down and replaced by a mixed-use model. People who lived in the public housing were invited to come back, but 13% of the families were not allowed to come back because of lack of employment or because of felony records.

A few other members of the AmplifyGR team spoke after Ippel, but after all of them had spoken, there was a mere 45 minutes for people to ask questions or make comments. Well, sort of. The Q&A process that was used, only allowed for people to write down questions on cards, but this was never stated at the beginning of the forum, so people were scrambling to get cards that they could fill out. On top of that, there were a few people from AmplifyGR who had all the cards and were clearly sorting them and selecting which ones they wanted to have read.

What is it about those with power not wanting to actually hear from people who have questions or comments? It is extremely important for people to hear those who have questions, not just for the content, but the way in which people say what is on their minds.

This process demonstrated to many in the room that this event was highly orchestrated and managed so that AmplifyGR could determine the parameters of the dialogue that would take place. However, after just a few questions were read, people began to challenge the process and make it clear that the responses provided by those on stage were vague or avoided the questions completely. People began speaking from their seats or the back of the room, thus defying a process that excluded or marginalized voices.

The AmplifyGR people were clearly frustrated and flustered by the audience response. In addition, there were several people there who came with small signs with words like gentrification, Done Deal or Opportunity for Whom? written on both sides, so that those on stage and those in the audience could read what was being held up.

Some of the more poignant questions that were asked were, “What is your definition of what affordable housing really means?” This question was never really answered and at one point VanGessel said that people could go to the State of Michigan’s website to see what affordable housing meant.

Another question asked, “why create another group instead of supporting Linc?” This question elicited a loud applause from the audience. Again, the response was vague and evasive.

Another important question that was asked was, “Will there be an opportunity for residents and neighborhood businesses to have a chance to own, instead of Rockford Construction owning everything?” Again, people from the community applauded and gave verbal affirmations.

As the forum ended it became clear to many people that despite AmplifyGR’s efforts to control the direction of the meeting, people from the community were not going to play along. People asserted themselves in such a way as to suggest there was significant discontent with how the meeting was organized and how little their concerns were actually heard.

There will be another meeting held on July 27, although no location has been provided. People can check the **AmplifyGR Facebook page** for updates and once we know, we will certainly post the location on this site.

AmplifyGR: How to “create opportunities” when you hold all the power

https://griid.org/2017/07/10/amplifygr-how-to-create-opportunities-when-you-hold-all-the-power/

During the **AmplifyGR town hall meeting that was held on June 29**, many of the speakers kept on stating that they wanted to create opportunities for the people in the Southtown area.

The CEO of Amway, Doug DeVos said he wanted to create opportunities for people in the area. Mike VanGessel, the CEO of Rockford Construction Company said he wanted to create opportunities and every speaker representing AmplifyGR also wanted to create opportunities for people living in the Boston Square area.

I have been thinking about this theme for the past few weeks and what it truly means when the DeVos Family says they want to create opportunities for people. In thinking about this theme, there are three responses that seem worth discussing when thinking about what it truly means when a member of the DeVos Family says they want to create opportunities for people.

First, it is important to acknowledge that when a member of a family that is worth billions says they want to create opportunities, we should be rather skeptical. How did

the DeVos Family make its money, but by creating a company built on a pyramid scheme that exploits both the workers they hire and uses the human beings who sell their products.

We are all aware of the model that Amway uses, which is to get people to sell their product and to get those same people to find more people who want to do the same. This process creates a hierarchical structure, wherein those who recruit new sellers make money off of those they recruit. The few that are on top, those referred to as Diamond level distributors, will make a a ton of money just by virtue of the fact that they recruited people, who recruited people to sell Amway products. This dynamic does not create opportunities for people, but instead it creates benefits for the few, while most people do the hard work and end up with little to show for it. This essentially is the economic system of capitalism that we all live under.

Second, when the DeVos Family says they want to create opportunities for people, we need to seriously examine how much political influence they have in this community, in Michigan and the rest of the country.

The DeVos Family spends millions of dollars on every election cycle, just like they during during the 2015 – 2016 election cycle, as has been well documented by the Lansing-based organization, the **Michigan Campaign Finance Network.**

This political spending by DeVos Family is designed to elect officials that are committed to the same ideological framework they embrace; which puts its emphasis on a neoliberal capitalist economic model, a reactionary social model and an exclusionary religious belief system.

The neoliberal economic model the DeVos family embraces supports a deregulated system, where there are no checks and balances by government structures at any level. However, at the same time, that the DeVos Family doesn't want government to interfere with their ability to make as much money as they want, they also buy elected officials that promote tax policies which provide huge benefits to the wealthy and transfer more public money to the private sector – what we call subsidies.

The reactionary social model that the DeVos Family promotes is one that dismantles any form of a welfare state. This means they do not think that the government should provide any kind of safety net for those who are unemployed, disabled or struggle to meet basic needs like food and health care. This reactionary social model has resulted in policies like **making Michigan a Right to Work state**, which undermines the ability of labor unions to organize workers; it means **dismantling public sector pensions** and other benefits, which recently happened to Michigan teachers; it means **denying same sex couples from adopting in Michigan** and attempting to limit equal access to members of the LGBTQ community; and it means attacking the public education system and redirecting public money to support charter schools and private education systems

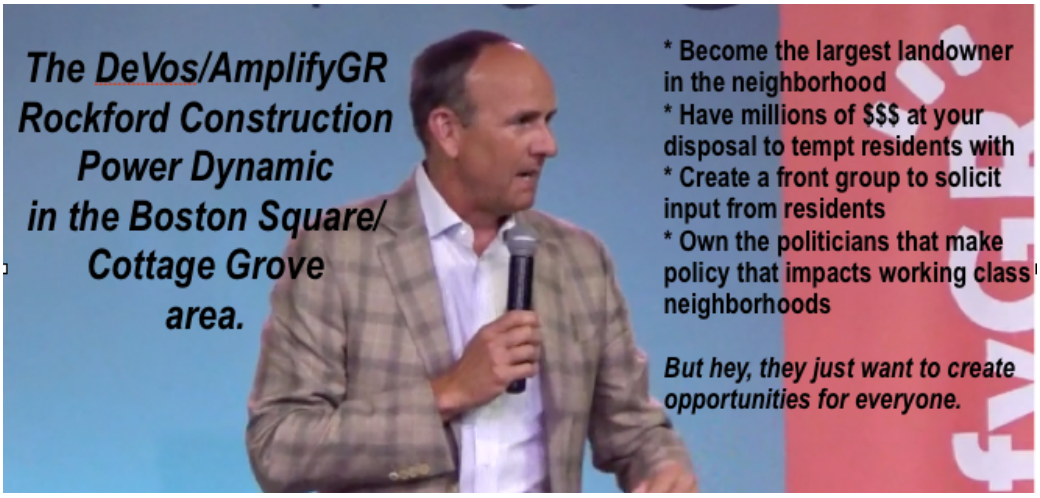
through voucher programs, **like what we have seen happening in Detroit in the past year**.

Therefore, the kinds of policy the DeVos Family has imposed on the rest of us through their financial support for political candidates, disproportionately takes away opportunities for working class people and communities of color, like the Boston Square neighborhood.

Third, the very fact that the DeVos Family has created AmplifyGR to promote this neighborhood re-development project should gives us all cause for concern. Besides the reasons we have already stated, what the AmplifyGR project does is that it creates an unfair and unjust power dynamic. It is bad enough when people with worth billions of dollars come into your community and say they want to provide you with opportunities, but they also have created a front group that they have been less than transparent about, to solicit input from residents about what they want. On top of that they (Rockford Construction and the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation) have purchased dozens of properties in the area, which makes them the single largest land owner in the Boston Square/Cottage Grove neighborhoods.

So, the DeVos Family/Rockford Construction Company controls a large portion of land in the Boston Square/Cottage Grove area, they have millions more they can invest to "create opportunities" – jobs, housing, etc., they have a track record of causing harm to the very people they claim to want to help and then they want to solicit input from the local residents? This is the kind of power dynamic they have created and bring to the residents of the Boston Square/Cottage Grove area.

What the DeVos Family/Rockford Construction Company has done is to come into a neighborhood that has been de-industrialized, has high rates of poverty and has suffered the consequences of decades of White Supremacy. And yet they have to audacity to say they simply want to help.



Individual behavior, not collective liberation: Why DeVos Family foundation funding compliments AmplifyGR

https://griid.org/2017/07/17/individual-behavior-not-collective-liberation-why-devos-family-foundation-funding-compliments-amplifygr/

During the **AmplifyGR-hosted meeting on June 29**, Doug DeVos stated that he and his wife have been, "active in many of the non-profit agencies that are here in this neighborhood."

This statement prompted me to look at the 990 documents from all of the DeVos Family foundations to see how much money they have collectively contributed to non-profits that are based in the neighborhoods that AmplifyGR is operating or those that do work in those neighborhoods.

We found several non-profits that are currently operating in the area that AmplifyGR is targeting with their development plans. I then sent an e-mail to each of the organizations that are working in the designated area and have received DeVos Foundation money to ask them the following two questions.

First, does your organization have a position on the AmplifyGR development proposal for the Boston Square & Cottage Grove areas in the southeast part of Grand Rapids?

Second, your organization is listed as having been a recipient of funds from a DeVos Foundation between 2013 – 2016 (the most recent 990s available). Since your organization relies on DeVos Family funding, is there financial pressure to support the AmplifyGR development proposal? (**Note**: I looked at the **990 documents from 2013 – 2016** for the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation, the Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation and the CDV5 Foundation, founded by Cheri DeVos)

What follows is a listing of the organizations I contacted, what their response was, a summary of the kind of work that they do and how much money they received from DeVos Foundations between 2013 – 2016.

Baxter Community Center's mission "seeks to reveal God's love by responding to human needs in its community through effective programs and partnerships." Baxter Community Center provides a variety of social services, educational services and skill building opportunities.

The Executive Director of Baxter Community Center, Melanie Beelen, responded to the questions by saying: "1. Baxter Community Center does not have a position on the Amplify GR proposal. It is our understanding that at this point, they are still collectively

getting information from others. 2. We have not received any pressure one way or another from the DV families regarding Amplify GR." There are two Amway representatives who sit on the Baxter Community Center Board.

Exhalta Health (formerly Health Intervention Services) "was established in 1996 by local physicians, nurses, social workers, pastors, and business people to serve underprivileged women with faith-centered medical care. The acronym HIS was created to represent the Christian motivation for service." The Executive Assistant Theressa Hoekstra responded to our questions by saying, "We have had no pressure from the AmplifyGR group."

Restorers Inc. mission "is to show Christ's love by promoting long-term sustainable change in families and neighborhood. We do this through unified committed relationships between community and church so that greater dignity and quality of life are achieved." They provide entrepreneur programs for people wanting to start their own business, youth mentoring programs and work closely with Believe 2 Become. Restorers Inc. did not respond to our questions.

SpringGR is an entrepreneurial training program located in Grand Rapids, MI. This program provides training, mentoring, and networking opportunities designed for aspiring entrepreneurs from neighborhoods of few entrepreneurial opportunities to develop a thriving business. SpringGR works closely with Start Garden, one of the businesses projects that Rick DeVos runs. SpringGR did not respond to our questions.

Oakdale Neighbors is a Christian community development organization. Its goal is to create a neighborhood of grace and vitality by discovering, developing, and connecting skills and resources. Their response was: "Oakdale Neighbors has not taken a formal position on the development proposal. We try to build productive relationships with many partners and potential partners in the city." I did speak with Tom Bulten from Oakdale Neighbors on the phone and he informed me that AmplifyGR had contracted with Seeds of Promise and Oakdale Neighbors to go door to door in the area and conduct a survey of residents. Oakdale Neighbors does list the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation and CDV5 Foundation as two of its partners.

Jubilee Jobs' mission "is to serve Christ by equipping and empowering the economically underserved toward self-sufficiency, emotional healing, and spiritual renewal." Jubilee Jobs has a representative of Amway on its Board of Directors and lists Believe 2 Become as a community partner. Jubilee Jobs did not respond to our questions.

The **Grand Rapids Urban League** provides a variety of social services, like housing, education and employment. The mission of the Grand Rapids Urban League is to provide the means to empower African Americans and other minorities to achieve economic self-reliance, parity and civil rights. The Grand Rapids Urban League did not respond to our questions, but we did find something interesting on their website. You can see from this graphic that the CEO of Rockford Construction, Mike VanGessel, which is part of the AmplifyGR project, was given the Drum Major for Justice award.

Madison Square Church is part of the Christian Reformed Church. They have numerous ministries in the community, including youth and missions projects, particularly in Liberia. Pastor David Beelen responded to the questions by stating: "*We do not have a position from our church in support of Amplify. And, although we are listed as getting funds from DeVos we were simply providing a fiduciary*

oversight function for one of our former pastors, Samuel Reeves, who is now pastoring in Liberia, West Africa and has used those funds to build and support a medical clinic there. DeVos foundation has not applied pressure for us to support Amplify nor do I perceive pressure from them to support it. On the contrary, we have used our place in the Madison community to pressure them to hold meetings, be fair to our neighbors and do their work in a manner that is just to our parish."

Linc Up, formerly Lighthouse Communities Inc, is an economic development entity, that also is involved in housing, education and some advocacy work. Linc Up has relied on DeVos Foundation money for most of its existence, until last year when the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation stopped providing funding. A great deal of the DeVos funding over the years was to contract with Linc Up to implement the Believe 2 Become program. Linc Up Executive Director Jeremy DeRoo responded to the questions with these comments: "*In terms of Amplify GR I haven't seen something that I would consider a "development proposal" but have heard them say they want to fill underutilized industrial space with businesses that will hire locally. They also want to develop a large track of land in Boston square into something that will include affordable housing and more business opportunities. They are also going to be starting a community engagement process at the end of the month to hear what the best way to do all that is. LINC supports community driven processes that successfully create local jobs and affordable housing.*"

The Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF) is a non-profit housing organization that rehabilitates existing housing and builds new housing. Their mission statement says, *"At ICCF, we believe God desires our community to be a healthy and vibrant place for all people to have opportunity to flourish and have safe and beautiful homes they can*

afford." ICCF did not respond to our questions. The organization does utilize as its primary construction partner, Rockford Construction, which is part of the AmplifyGR project.

It is also important to mention Believe 2 Become, a program which not only provides a mechanism for inserting faith-based dynamics in the Grand Rapids Public School system, it provides a means to develop workforce talent, as their most recent report acknowledges. **Both Doug DeVos and Mike VanGessel are intimately involved in Believe 2 Become.** We include some of their comments about Believe 2 Become here. It is also important to note that the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation has been the largest contributor to Believe 2 Become, which was already mentioned, is a partner with several of the entrepreneurial programs listed above.

It seems clear that the kinds of organizations that the DeVos Family foundations are funding that are working in or based in the southeast part of the city that is being targeted under the AmplifyGR project are social service agencies, Christian groups and organizations focused on entrepreneurial opportunities. What these organization don't do is provide any real analysis of systemic oppression or skill building for challenging systems of power. This seems rather obvious when one considers that the DeVos Family and their foundations are rooted in power, thus they would not want to provide funding that in anyway undermines their own power and this is exactly what the AmplifyGR project is all about…….not challenging systems of oppression and systems of power.

AmplifyGR to host second community meeting on July 27

https://griid.org/2017/07/21/amplifygr-to-host-second-community-meeting-on-july-27/

The DeVos-funded, Rockford Construction partnered group, AmplifyGR, announced yesterday that they will be hosting a second "community listening meeting" on **Thursday, July 27 at the same location** as the first meeting. The doors open at 5:30pm, with the meeting beginning at 6pm,

We reported on the first meeting, a meeting that received a fair amount of push-back from the community. We were all told at that meeting that they would find a larger venue to host the second meeting and that they would be adding new information to the AmplifyGR site. Instead, the meeting is being held at the same location and the only thing that AmplifyGR has added to their website was the maps of the two locations in which they are targeting.

These maps, unfortunately do not provide very clear details on the actual properties that have been purchased by Rockford Construction, unlike the maps we have provided in pervious postings (shown below) and the MLive article, **which provides pictures of the properties they have purchased**.

Since the first meeting, we have also written two additional articles based on comments that Doug DeVos made at the first meeting. The **first article** was a response to the notion that what AmplifyGR wants to do is to provide opportunities to people in the Boston Square area. We challenge that notion by making the point that since DeVos has so much political and economic power, it makes it extremely difficult for people to be treated as equals at the table.

The **second article** was a response to the claim that DeVos gave when he said that they have already invested a great deal into the southeast part of Grand Rapids, where AmplifyGR is operating. Upon investigating that claim we discovered that there were numerous non-profits that have received financial support from one of the many DeVos family foundations. We ask those groups if they had a position on AmpligyGR's plans and what kind of influence the DeVos family had in the work they do, since they have received funding from them.

Opposition grows at second AmplifyGR meeting, but even if the majority of the people opposed the project AmplifyGR director says they would still move forward

https://griid.org/2017/07/28/opposition-grows-at-second-amplifygr-meeting-but-even-if-the-majority-of-the-people-opposed-the-project-amplifygr-director-says-they-would-still-move-forward/

There were two things that were incredible about tonight's community meeting hosted by AmplifyGR.

First, almost everyone of the the people who spoke during the roughly 80-minute public comment time, were critical of what AmplifyGR was doing, skeptical of the process or outright opposed to what AmplifyGR has in mind to do.

From the very get go, people were not mincing words about what they felt about AmplifyGR, Rockford Construction and the DeVos family. Community Activist LaDonna Norman told the AmplifyGR people sitting up front, "***stop making our community look stupid***." Norman was referring to what AmplifyGR was doing and acting like they had nothing but good intentions. LaDonna then went on to name what was happening and that the whole thing was essentially, "***DeVos owned. Everyone involved is bought and paid for by the DeVos Family***."

The facilitator then asked the audience how many people agreed with this sentiment. Lots of people clapped or shouted out. When the facilitator asked how many people did not share Norman's perspective, there were only a few who spoke up. However, what was interesting is that the facilitator then said, that the response was evenly split. This kind of denial or attempt to control the narrative was thick throughout the night.

Another African American woman says she is currently homeless. She used to pay $500 a month for a 3 bedroom place to rent. Now she can't find the same thing for less than $1,000 and actually is is 3 times the cost for what she used to find. She wants to stay in this community, in this neighborhood. She asks AmplifyGR if they are going to have real affordable housing that does not have all these restrictions.

Then there was a question about supporting existing black owned businesses in the neighborhood and how people did not want to see another Starbucks come in. AmplifyGR's response was to focus on providing entrepreneurial support through Start Garden, which is yet another DeVos run entity.

Tempest Warfield, an afro-Latina, just made it plain when she given the chance to speak. She spoke passionately and called out who is running this process. She said that a lot of what this boils down to is race and class. "***People want to just stay in their homes, but people are feeling bullied by the wealthiest family in the area. People want to keep their homes and leave a legacy for their kids. We do have purpose here, even if it doesn't look like it to the DeVos family***." John Ippel, from AmplifyGR, responded by saying he gets it. Tempest came right back and said, "be careful about practicing white savior politics."

Other people were asking about AmplifyGR's commitment to elevating civil rights or asking would the new development cause zoning changes or property taxes to rise. The AmplifyGR folks didn't directly answer those concerns, but the community made sure they answered, after several people shouted, "***you didn't answer the question***."

Allison Colberg, with the Micah Center, said there is a huge fundamental problem with the story that is being told. AmplifyGR is framing thing whole effort as "*the AmplifyGR area*," when in fact it is not there area. Alllison provides a sharp analysis of what is going on through a White Supremacy lens – that the making of policy and other forms of systemic racism took wealth from black people. "***The community should be in charge. We broke and it is based on a history. So put some duct tape on it and just listen***."

There were several other critical and challenging comments made by people throughout the rest of the evening, some from using the microphone, while others just shouted it out from their seats. Then Ken Miguel-Cipriano made an interesting statement that was also in the form of a question. He asked if the majority of people in the community were opposed to what AmplifyGR wanted to do, would they honor that is close up shop? Ken then said, "***how about if 70% of the people opposed it***?"

This brings us to the second incredible thing that was said during the meeting. The Executive Director of AmplifyGR, John Ippel responded by saying, "***even if 70% of the community opposed this, we would just have to get back up and move forward and do it better***." You could heard several people in the audience gasp in horror and the level of arrogance they heard coming from the AmplifyGR person.

This sentiment from AmplifyGR, was affirmed at the end, when the facilitator ask the three men seated on stage what their take-aways were from tonight. Each of them responded by saying that they were looking forward to more community engagement and working with neighbors. It is as if they didn't care that there was significant opposition at this second community forum.

Afterwards, there were lots of small conversations taking place and the ones this writer overheard reflected both the level of community opposition to the AmplifyGR project, as well as being shocked by the level of arrogance displayed.

This is far from being a done deal. The next meeting is September 7. We'll keep you posted.



Boxed Water, Greenwashing and the DeVos Family support for racist water policies in Michigan

https://griid.org/2018/04/19/boxed-water-greenwashing-and-the-devos-family-support-for-racist-water-policies-in-michigan/

More and more corporations are trying to present themselves as caring about the environment. These corporations use slick advertising campaigns and try to deceive us into thinking that we can consume our way out of the environmental crisis we have made.

Greenwashing is a term that eco-activists have used for several decades now, in an attempt to expose the hypocrisy of capitalism. Green Capitalism is especially visible around the time that we celebrate earth day. In fact, corporations have pretty much hijacked earth day, by trying to convince us that they too care about the planet. Nothing could be further from the truth, since what drives capitalism is labor exploitation, profits and exponential growth……none of which is sustainable.

A great example of greenwashing in the West Michigan-based product known as **Boxed Water**. Boxed Water markets themselves as a product that is Better For Our Planet. The company's main argument is that buying water in plastic bottles is bad for the planet, so buy water in a box, which is completely recyclable.

While I would agree that buying bottled water is highly problematic, buying water in a box is just as deceptive.

First, water is essential to life. It should not be a commodity, but something that all life has access to. Second, the energy spent manufacturing the boxes, putting water into the boxes, shipping it and marketing the product could all go away if we just stuck to drinking water from a tap.

Third, for those who argue that tap water is not safe, then we should put our energies into fixing the water delivery system that comes from a municipal water infrastructure to homes, schools, hospitals, etc.

Fourth, Boxed Water, by their own admission, uses water from Lake Michigan, via their Holland plant. The company also has another facility in Utah.

Fifth, Boxed Water does use a filtration process, claiming that their water is more pure. Ok, so why don't they apply this filtration process to all municipal water systems, so that we can all drink healthier water? Ah, but then the company could

not make a profit.....and therein lies the problem. Well, at least one of the problems.

I'm sure that most people are well aware that Boxed Water is just one of the companies that is part of the **Windquest Group**. The Windquest Group is part of the DeVos Family empire and is specifically part of what Dick & Betsy DeVos own, along with Melissa DeVos and Rick DeVos.

Part of the irony of the DeVos Family owning Boxed Water, is that they are major contributors to Govenor Rick Snyder and many other state politicians that have supported the recent decision to grant the Nestle Corporation rights to **steal more water from Michigan for their Ice Mountain bottled water brand**. These same politicians have also engaged in the criminal acts being committed in Flint, where residents of that city STILL do not have access to clean, drinkable water.

The Flint water disaster is a direct result of having an emergency management system, which essentially takes power away from local communities and puts it in the hands of people that the state government choses.

This downsizing and privatizing of local government is also one of the main goals of the DeVos Family, both through their direct campaign contributions and through groups like the Chamber of Commerce and the West Michigan Policy Forum, which makes the privatization of government services their goal.

Another example of the DeVos effect on water is the **Emergency Management system in Detroit**, which has privatized some of the water services and made it a priority to shut water off to thousands of homes of mostly African Americans.

Like Flint, the Detroit water crisis is a deeply racist policy by design. Now, which politicians are responsible for these policies.....the very same politicians whom the DeVos Family has so zealously supported.

What the DeVos Family Sells



What the DeVos Family Buys

Politicians that:

give corporations unlimited
access to water resources for profit

privatize municipal water systems
and then shut water off to people who
are struggling to survive

promote Emergency Management governance that
take away local government power and
disproportionately impact poor communities of color,
like in Flint, Detroit and Benton Harbor

Source: mcfn.org/donor-tracking



Governor Snyder and Rick DeVos

Betsy DeVos and the Covert Privatization of Grand Rapids Public Schools: Part I

https://griid.org/2018/06/12/betsy-devos-and-the-covert-privatization-of-grand-rapids-public-schools-part-i/

(*The following three part series, was written by Jack Prince. Jack is a retired educator with 30 years experience on the High School and college level. He spent 10 years as a teacher with the Grand Rapids Public Schools.*)

Michigan is number one in the country with for profit charter schools. The following is an excerpt of the Montgomery Securities Group explaining to corporate America the lure of privatizing education. Author Jonathan Kozol quotes “The education industry, according to these analysts, represents in our opinion the final frontier of a number of sectors once under public control” that have either voluntarily opened or, they note in pointed terms, have “been forced” to open up to private enterprise. Indeed they write, “The education industry represents the largest market opportunity” since health-care services were privatized during the 70’s.

From the point of view of private profit, one of these analysts enthusiastically observes, “The K-12 market is the big enchilada. With the yearly public spending in the hundreds of millions alone in Michigan, neoliberals like Betsy DeVos have long appreciated the profit motive associated with the golden equation “Public money for private profit.” Betsy DeVos, along with President Donald Trump have made promoting charter schools and taxpayer funded vouchers a centerpiece in their educational philosophy and platform. That charter school proclivity is reflected in their proposed education budget, which clearly hurts public schools and college students. A summary of the rejected proposed 2018 education budget indicated DeVos’ priorities:

cut public education funding by 13.6%
cut 1.2 billion from after school programs
cut 27 million from art education
cut IDEA (special education by 13.3 million
cut 2.1 billion from funding to reduce to reduce class size and support professional development
cut 700 million in college loans for low income students *

The savings that would have been realized by these cuts were intended by the DeVos educational department to be channeled back to private and/or religious schools that are unaccountable to public review.

In 2013 K-12 Inc. the largest private charter school in the country with an enrollment of over 100,000 students took in 730 billion from taxpayers for online virtual computer instruction. These virtual charter schools exist here in Grand Rapids, such as the for profit Nex Tech charter school at 801 Broadway, where students are forced to go when the public schools are closed. DeVos’ proposed 2018 budget would have given more than 1 billion more to such virtual online schools along with private school vouchers.

Betsy DeVos’ penchant to undermine public education through the entrenchment of privatization can be seen empirically beyond her education budget machinations .Not knowing what IDEA is or believing that schools should have guns in case of grizzly bears, are mere indications of DeVos’ pervasive ignorance and lack of basic preparedness and yet they are insignificant to the main tenet of her ideology. **An ideology that was present in her family decades ago lying in wait like a time bomb here in West Michigan.**

Betsy DeVos’ economic prowess was derived from her father, a fundamentalist conservative businessman, who made it rich developing the ubiquitous lighted sun visor in Holland Michigan. In the 1980’s the Prince family merged with one of the most venerable conservative families in the U.S. when Betsy married Dick DeVos , whose father Rich, is the co-founder of the multilevel marketing firm Amway, distributor of home products, regularly plagued with accusations that the company is run like a cult and is nothing more than a sophisticated pyramid scheme.*

Betsy DeVos would go on to chair Michigan Republican Party from 1996-2000. Her husband Dick DeVos was the GOP candidate for governor in 2006. Previously the

DeVos family spent upwards of 3 million in 2000 pushing to implement school vouchers in Michigan. Betsy's brother Erik Prince, in parallel with Betsy's penchant to privatized education, had his own privatization endeavor with the U.S. army. Erik was the creator of the largest private military industrial company, Blackwater Worldwide, with the $500,000,000 inheritance from his father Edgar. Recently Erik proposed to Donald Trump that the United States have a private mercenary army to fix Afghanistan, a country we've been at war with since 2001.* Imagine the conversation around the Thanksgiving table at the DeVos' 22,000 square foot home in Holland Michigan with Betsy asking Erik how his privatizing of the American army is going with Erik countering with the question of how her privatizing of the public education system is coming, followed by "pass the stuffing please." Prince and DeVos, like Trump, use their wealth to exert political influence and advance ideological visions that are harmful to U.S. democracy and public institutions. The Prince-DeVos family is yet another example of Trump bringing in wealthy friends to corrupt the foundations of American public life.*

Investment intertwined with political cause is a trademark of Betsy and Erik Prince. Consider the comment from Elizabeth Warren at DeVos' confirmation hearing "It is difficult to imagine a worse choice to head the department of education-Betsy DeVos doesn't believe in public schools, her only knowledge of student loans seems to come from her own financial investments connected to debt collectors who hound people struggling with student loans and despite being a billionaire she wants the chance to keep making money off shady investments while she runs the department of education."

Clearly privatization is an icon for the Prince family. Patriarchal father **Edgar and mother Elsa donated millions** to support the conservative fundamentalist political goals, including the Family Research Council, which has become one of the leading religious right groups active in organizing against gay rights and promoting state sponsored prayer along with vouchers for religious schools.*

The legacy of vouchers in Betsy's family history translates into an array of initiatives to induce privatization. It is worthy to consider that privatization of all public institutions is a mainstay in conservative ideology which has cached the Prince family legacy for decades here in West Michigan. The next logical inspection is to see how DeVos' influence has promulgated in West Michigan and specifically in the Grand Rapids Public Schools, and consider the extrapolation of her ideology nationally now that she presides as the Secretary of Education.

Betsy DeVos and the Covert Privatization of Grand Rapids Public Schools: Part II

https://griid.org/2018/06/13/betsy-devos-and-the-covert-privatization-of-grand-rapids-public-schools-part-ii/

On May 7th a group of protestors, special education parents from the Disability A Team, challenged GRPS board members to explain their position on how their public superintendent could support Betsy DeVos, the most anti public school secretary of education in history. This challenge came after reading Neal's quote, "Neal thinks DeVos can hold up GRPS as a model of what can be done at other struggling districts." "She knows education." "She knows what it's going to take in order for our kids to be helped." Neal sees the politically conservative family's focus on education as their commitment to the, "greater social good". Neal was the sole superintendent from Michigan willing to go to Washington D.C. to support DeVos in her confirmation hearing for the secretary of education position. Of course this trip was to be paid for by DeVos.

One board member indignantly responded to the question. She mentioned that she personally didn't like DeVos but added it's laughable to think DeVos has anything to do with this district! She failed to answer of what she thought Neal's support to Devos meant and what ramifications that could have on school policy at GRPS!

The same question was posed by local journalist Jeff Smith over a year ago in succinct fashion: As a GRPS board member, I would like to know what your reactions are to 1. The announcement that Betsy DeVos has been named as secretary of Education and 2. What impact that might have on GRPS? **No response was ever given to that most pertinent and relevant question.** Considering the $67,000 dollar personal gift to Neal from Betsy Devos (a woman who affirmed we expect a return on our investment when asked about her donations). The question seems more then pertinent to the parents and taxpayers of this district. Has not the GRPS Board of Education noticed the national outcry from public school leaders who see DeVos's efforts as categorically designed to undermine the public school system **throughout the country**. The board members lack of response and accusation that the entire DeVos connection to GRPS was a laughable issue seems more than irresponsible and professionally inept.

If privatization is Betsy's obsession, GRPS should make her very happy beginning with the privatization of the school bus fleet in 2005. The GRPS Board of Education voted in the spring of 2005 to privatize its school bus service in a move to supposedly save the district 18 million over 5 years. In reality the private company cost more monetarily and especially in service. More alarming was the drivers employed by GRPS had agreed to lose their family's health insurance that would have completely covered the supposed district deficit at that time. Regardless of the concession, the Board of Education pushed through the privatization. Later it was discovered that the owner of Dean Transportation was the son in law of our influential senator who was tight with the DeVos Family and prominent in West Michigan politics.

P.E.S.G. is a privatized substitute teacher company, which claims to be the leader in educational staffing. Before its creation in 2007 the state of Michigan substitutes were part of the State teacher retirement system and were controlled by individual school districts. That district relationship with the subs engendered personal knowledge of the teachers so valuable for effective knowledge of the teachers so valuable for effective placement. The local school secretaries knew who would fit in specific classrooms with particular needs. That personal relationship stopped when in 2007, Henry Bledsoe was

approached by a human resource director from a West Michigan school district as well as an attorney according to MLive. It is assumed that the HR director was from Grand Rapids Public Schools since they were the original and only school that contracted with PESG for some time. The initiation of privatized subs at Grand Rapids Public School began the entire states privatization of substitute teachers. The HR director that visited PESG to start this privatization worked for the company upon leaving GRPS. Additionally, worrisome is the fact that Mr. Bledsoe, as owner of Benefit Management Administration, was ordered to cease and desist from continuing to sell fraudulent health insurance policies by the State of Michigan. The employee benefits company at 6307 84th Street is the same address as PESG and sold policies that had no underlying insurance, according to the state office of Financial and Insurance Regulations. Substitute teachers were privatized by a businessman with no background in education caught in an insurance scam! How fortunate for the owner of the Benefit Advisory Group to initiate an entire regions substitute teachers transfer of state retirement benefits to his own benefit 401 plans. The substitute teachers lost their future chance for vested retirement while the districts lost the personal relationships with the subs and sacrificed their responsibility of oversight. As with the bus drivers on immediate decline in sub performance was seen after the privatization. One West Michigan School accurately assessed the damage to the teacher's retirement fund by eliminating the thousands of contributions according to the Muskegon Chronicle. The Grand Haven School Board is wary that a surge in third party contracting might undermine the state retirement system by reducing contributions. The teacher's retirement fund has been a target for anti-public school legislatures for years. In fact, **a major proponent of eliminating teacher pensions, is the West Michigan Policy Forum, which was created, in part, by members of the DeVos Family.**

In the future when the state insists the retirement pension being paid to teachers be reduces 30 to 40% as they did in Illinois because of a shrinking fund remember the withdrawn substitutes. The most damaging aspect is the complete substitute teacher shortage as mentioned in the MLive article of April 3, 2017: Substitute teacher shortage expected to continue to be an ongoing problem. This problem has been caused by companies that strive for profits for their investors by keeping subs pay low. The dismal condition of privatized subs today can be tied to the advent of PESG and its first involvement with GRPS. Grand Rapids has recently dropped PESG and gone with another private company.

Oakdale Elementary is one of the many examples of public GRPS buildings that have been privatized. There are a number of techniques used to camouflage the transition from public to private components of the GRPS district. Some of the most blatant are to be found at Oakdale Elementary and the former Vandenberg School on Lafayette Street where the direct sale to charter schools is easy to trace. A more insidious technique is to form charter schools under the partnership with big business and call them centers or innovation schools. University Prep is a prime example of this technique. Both the Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center, a full-fledged charter school and University Prep, insists on being called public schools. This tendency to have charter schools or

elements of charter schools at GRPS is certainly indicative of Betsy DeVos' ideology as she has mentioned recently that traditional public schools and charter schools should be thought of as part of the same public system. This comment is particularly irksome to public school educators because the two types of schools are managed differently and subject to different rules and regulations. This clandestine blending or partnership technique produces such subtle differences that no one notices that the Discovery Center is a full-fledged charter school with its own private principal and superintendent and is still called a GRPS public school. When recently asked, the president of the GREA wasn't even aware that the teachers at the Discovery Center are privately hired and paid by the charter school. One of the manifest differences indigenous to GRPS is that while being called public many of their buildings require a "test in" qualification to enter. This is not an aspect of public schools traditional policy. Public schools allow open enrollment and do not entangle entrance with any test in qualifications; such as that found at the Blandford Elementary, and other buildings within GRPS. Students are not put on a waiting list subject for entrance based on a computer lottery pick in a traditional neighborhood school.

Oakdale was a fine neighborhood public school with open enrollment for decades. It is now the home of 500 privatized students in the Timberline Charter Academy (NHA) K-5. Suspicious circumstances surrounded in the NHA obtaining the GRPS properties. Developer, Bruce Michael, owner of Ojibway Development flat out deceived the city according to then Major Heartwell as he had promised to transform the GRPS building into apartments but instead, immediately after purchasing Oakdale, Lexington and Eastern Schools, sold them to the charter school NHA for the same exact price. Obviously he was not the only one deceiving Grand Rapids citizens. Consider why a developer would sell the properties hours after the purchase from GRPS for the same price for No Profit! It seems someone had worries over the awareness by the public of a public school selling buildings directly to a charter school company. Another question was pointed out in a MLive article: "For many the question is how many students will the (new charter) siphon from Grand Rapids Public Schools? When the NHA deal was revealed Grand Rapids school leadership said it wasn't competition. Five hundred privatized students would seem to almost anyone as competition but it doesn't appear that Grand Rapids Public really cares as the district has lost 8,000 students in a little over a decade. There is an epidemic of transformation (code for privatization) occurring in the city of Grand Rapids and its symptoms are clear: they close public and they open private!

Another example of charter establishment was the sale of Campau Elementary (a beloved neighborhood school) to Covenant House Michigan, another for-profit private charter school from Detroit Michigan. Again from MLIve; The Charter School draws students desperate for a last chance from throughout the region but significant numbers of students at S.E. Career Pathways which was a Grand Rapids Public School were also labeled as last chance students and were provided with a curriculum and staff to implement their last chance at graduation. The writer knows this because he taught there. GRPS students at S.E. were sent letters from GRPS informing them it was

mandatory to attend the newly opened charter school based on their G.P.A. Today Covenant House has 320 students. Many of them would have been GRPS students.

*The Griid 2016, griid.org

*Mackinaw Center Grand Rapids found Privatizes Busing Michigan Education Report

*MLIve September 25, 2009 State Orders Benefit Management Administrators INC. To stop selling….

*MLIve December 26, 2017: Privatizing Substitute Teachers is a Growing Trend

Betsy DeVos and the Covert Privatization of Grand Rapids Public Schools: Part III

https://griid.org/2018/06/14/betsy-devos-and-the-covert-privatization-of-grand-rapids-public-schools-part-iii/

Grand Rapids Schools sells its' property at bargain prices. The Vandenberg building went for 400 thousand on a lot of nearly three acres. The lot alone is worth more than 400K. Shawnee Park was sold to a private Christian school for 50 K less than the appraised value in 2014. After the contentious sale of Oakdale, Lexington, and Eastern schools, school board Vice President Maureen Slade said, "We learned our lesson, referring to the sale of the Shawnee Park and Hillcrest Schools. Evidently the lesson she referred to was gained after the Oakdale School ended up in a charter schools' hands and was mentioned in an Feb. 11th 2014 MLIVE article.

It would be embarrassing to be fooled again with an immediate transfer to a charter school like the transition Bruce Michael pulled off to **National Heritage Academies**. NHA has opened a large number of charter schools in Kent County like the one at Oakdale where it clearly competes for GRPS students and the state per pupil funding that travels with them. Evidently inherent in the lesson mentioned by the GRPS board member is that charter schools do compete with public as NHA currently has over 500 students that when added to the Child Discovery Center students we find a large number of displaced public teachers and retirement fund payments. This is clearly damaging to the public school system and for a public school defender such as a superintendent or a public school board to enhance that conversion is unconscionable.

Grand Rapids Christian, the largest private school association in Michigan, has been given $350,000 by the DeVos' resulting in naming the worship and art center after the billionaire family. DeVos gave Potters House $200,000, another private Christian school here in Grand Rapids.* From the New York Times we read: "*It is hard to find anyone more passionate about the idea of steering public dollars away from traditional public*

schools than Betsy DeVos. For nearly 30 years she has been an activist and Republican fund raiser. She has pushed to give families taxpayer money in the form of vouchers to attend private and parochial schools, pressed to expand publicly funded but privately run charter schools and tried to strip teachers unions of their influence."*

While stripping unions of their influence does not curiously appear to upset the local GREA or statewide MEA the animosity certainly exists between DeVos and AFT President Randi Weingarten." Meanwhile Weingarten characterized the rift between the two sides as a David versus Goliath battle. Historically she said school choice efforts were rooted in a desire for segregation.

This privatization and disinvestment are only slightly more polite cousins of segregation. We are in the same fight against the same forces who are keeping the same children from getting the public education they deserve. And what better way to pave the path to privatize education than to starve public schools to the breaking point, then criticize their shortcomings and let the market handle the rest. All in the name of choice.* *That's patently false, DeVos said adding that wealthy people can choose to move to areas with good schools or pay tuition for private schools.** We must note that GRPS adds "your choice" to its' school logo. The MEA has little or no equivalency to other unions attacks against DeVos, a fact which seems to indicate the pervasiveness of DeVos control in West Michigan and particularly here in Grand Rapids.

Mrs. DeVos's efforts to expand educational opportunity in her home state and across Michigan have focused little on existing traditional schools and almost entirely on establishing newer more entrepreneurial models (like University Prep) to compete with traditional schools for support and money. Her donations and advocacy go almost entirely toward groups seeking to move students and money away from what Mr. Trump calls "failing government schools."

The cavalcade of privatization at GRPS continued with the transformation of Walkes Juvenile Detention Center where GRPS had instructed students since the program's inception. This school was only another part of the total elimination of most of GRPS's alternative education programs. The program director at the center when asked why they discontinued their relationship with GRPS after decades of instruction, his response was because we never saw the GRPS principal in our building. Today, the Kent County juvenile center is totally privatized with a private teaching company obliterating more public school positions and adjoining retirement contributions.

GRPS closed Creston High School in 2013 after a 110 year Polar Bear tradition and neighborhood home for students. Deposed students were forced to find other schools or go to the GRPS Center of Innovation School at Central High School. Current students were to be accepted without qualifications but the preceding classes would not be accepted without qualification at Central. This was coupled with the fact that the students would now have to travel from their neighborhood to Central daily. That inconvenience, and break with a 100 year neighborhood history, was supposedly because of a lagging enrollment of 600 students which was replaced with a whopping 700 students. From MLive: *when GRPS superintendent Teresa Neal pitched her*

*proposal to close 10 schools as part of a restructuring plan, the biggest pushback came from closing the old Creston High School.**

The traditional high school at Creston was replaced by the recipient program at Central High School which had also been in existence since 1911. It was converted to one of the famed centers of innovation in 2007. Like the other center of innovation it has limited seats where enrollment had been opened for decades. Also like its' counterpart U prep, it remains an unrated school, according to U.S. News, not subject to state measurements. These educational traits are not indigenous to public schools. Two main objectives of non public schools are to control enrollment and escape academic measurement and evaluation.

Park School located at 1150 Adams Street had been a highly successful GRPS alternative ed school serving pregnant and new mothers and was totally unique to West Michigan. The property was sold to Rockford Construction partnering with Doug and Maria DeVos. The school with its' large playground was sold for a real bargain in the contested gentrification location known as Boston Square. According to Monica Scott in an MLive article of Aug 16, "T*here were initial concerns about community input and gentrification following the leaked information of the sale. But Teresa Neal again gave her assurances that there will be very intentional inclusion (except pregnant mothers) at all neighborhood stakeholders and an extensive community engagement process*. * " *The purchase of Park School is just one part of a larger plan, one that will have direct benefit to GRPS particularly Dickinson Academy*", according to Neal. Dickinson needs all the help it can get as according to Greatschools.org it rates Dickinson below average in school quality compared to other schools in the state with this warning, "*test scores at this school fall far below the state average. Students at this school are making less academic progress given where they were last year, compared to similar students in the state*." *Only 11% are proficient in math and only 14% are proficient in English. It's hard to imagine how terminating the alternative ed service to pregnant girls benefited the students at Dickinson.

Perhaps the most extreme example of public private turnover has taken place at the Vandenberg building on the corner of Wealthy and Lafayette street. The long time neighborhood school was sold directly to a private charter school called Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center in 2010. "John Helmholdt, GRPS spokesman said the sale price was below the property's appraised value of $550,000. The Child Discovery Center is listed as a GRPS public school. It is however its' own private district and the GRPS moniker is deceptive for a reason. At the same BOE meeting that voted unanimously to sell the Vandenberg property, it also pushed for advantageous charter school reforms. GRPS BOE pushed for a new classification of "charter like" schools that would operate within existing low performing public school districts like their own. The prize for GRPS was according to MLive article of 1/3/11, that the new platform "*would broaden school choice for districts like GRPS without shifting state pupil/funding to charter schools, district leaders said*.* Helmholdt again said "*we should have the ability to open innovative schools that maybe have charter like features, but they're done within the system*." In layman's terms the charter like features mean the GRPS schools could enjoy the controlled enrollment of charter schools plus the avoidance of evaluation from

public school measures and still collect public monies. One has to marvel at the term charter like schools but now realize years later that moniker has resulted in a district that is saturated with charter like aspects to the detriment of students, teachers and taxpayers. The Discovery Center Charter School boasts that it has its' own superintendent, principal and teachers. Lisa Heyne is the superintendent not Teresa Neal. The Discovery Center is a totally private school listed as a GRPS school and has siphoned off nearly 500 students from potentially GRPS. Most amazingly the only connection the Discovery Center has with GRPS is that it was chartered to be a private charter school by GRPS. The clearest indication of a district in league with the proliferation of private schooling is when they actually charter one of them. It is simply incredible to realize that sitting in the heart of GRPS district is a privatized charter school, pretending to be a GRPS public school. The necessity to obfuscate Discovery Center's real identity is symptomatic of the entire district's proclivity to disguise and justify its' privatization from bus drivers to school buildings.

University Prep at 512 Division is another representative of the much ballyhooed Center of Innovation within GRPS, which was built entirely with private business money primarily from the DeVos family. University Prep is a prime example of one of Helmholdt's charter like schools as it operates by **a board of accumulated business leaders**. This hybrid business/public partnership allows the desired effect of getting public money for private invested influence. This exchange of purchased control by business and the corporate world may look innocuous at the ribbon cutting ceremonies, but let's check the results at U.Prep. Remember, thanks to John Engler, any charter school in Michigan can be called a public school but like University Prep they are subject to different rules and non- regulations, escaping public scrutiny and accountability. According to Great schools.org this is U Prep's ratings: *The school is rated below average in school quality compared to other schools in the state. Students at U. Prep perform below average on test scores compared to state average test scores.* U Prep amazingly has below average college readiness measures and yet it sells itself as a school preparing students for college? U Prep also has below average results in how well it's serving its' disadvantaged students. Test scores at UPrep compared to state averages:

Math: 6% State average:35%

English 16% State Average 45%

Science 6% State average 28%

Scores indicate percentage of proficiency. Again according to Great schools.org "this school is below key measures of college and career readiness." Remember high graduation rates don't mean much if students are graduating without the course work and test scores they need to succeed.* To add to this dismal disclosure U.S. News evaluates U Prep as 91% of students not proficient in math with GRPS at 82% overall not proficient in math. In reading U.Prep was at 64% non proficient with the district at the same low 64% non proficient."* Evidently U. Prep scores are not the exception at GRPS. These scores are to be found at many of the buildings. It's inconsequential how

many business funded theme schools you open if you are producing students who can't read! It would appear that GRPS has adopted a policy of test-in requirements for enrollment at a number of schools to try and raise these scores in lieu of actually tackling reading instruction. At Blandford Elementary for example students need to pass a Reading/Math test to qualify for entrance. The district then uses a computer lottery system for final admission. A true public school makes no delineation based on academic levels for admission. To enter your neighborhood school didn't rest on a computer lottery luck system. The slow and assiduous conversion of GRPS public required great care and skill to disguise the pockets and components of privatization.

Cambridge Education had a hand in that conversion. Cambridge is part of a large private consulting company from Mott Macdonald in Great Britain. Cambridge was sent to GRPS as a gift from the DeVos' in April of 2012. As a result of a private paid business led audit of GRPS, Cambridge Education revealed that the district needed to restructure. In August 2012, the audit done by Cambridge Education revealed the district needed to restructure to deliver a better education to students reflecting current student population and to save money. That December the school board approved superintendent Neal's district restructure known as the transformation plan. It should be noted that the origin of this so called restructure plan was a private for-profit company and not the result of some personal educational philosophy and awareness of superintendent Neal. Somehow this plan became her plan when the name was changed to the transformation plan. Almost immediately the newly named plan garnered the support of local conservative politicians. "State Rep. Lisa Posthumus Lyons R Alto and Sen Dave Hildenbrand R-Lowell Twp. have written letters supporting the Grand Rapids superintendent and school board's planned major overhaul of the district to improve achievement and finances."* Someone should send both these politicians the recent Greatschooling.org evaluations of the newly formed schools as a result of this transformation.

Lyons, chair of the house education committee, said, "*if the district's transformation is approved, embraced and fully implemented in a timely fashion, it could very well set the standard for the entire state*."* How prescient Lyons could have added for the entire nation if she knew her friend DeVos would be heading the Department of Education.

After the December vote the district was subject to Cambridge oversight and within a few months the dismantling of the alternative Ed program would commence. Also **Teach For America** (TFA) was introduced and invited to the district before being soundly attacked by teachers at Union High School. The district had to back off of the TFA initiative which had been a directive from Cambridge. Unfortunately, that was the only initiative that was reversed. It is more than relevant to remember the transformation plan was conceived in the bowels of a corporate backed consulting firm that costs millions of dollars for a district that was already top heavy with the number of administrators per student and pay. Did they need million dollar consultants from the U.K? Evidently like Teresa Neal who needed a coach hired by Betsy DeVos as she began her tenure, the entire cadre of administrators, parents, teachers along with Teresa Neal and her cabinet, GREA and school board needed leadership training to understand the transformational concept. No problem as corporations again filled the gap with

Steelcase foundation granting 1.2 million to train in unison this wide spectrum of educators who needed instruction to implement a program emanating from and for local corporations.*

Brave voices have spoken out about these overt and covert practices that are slowly eroding the public school milieu at GRPS. According to Board member Jose Flores, Grand Rapids Public Schools has the highest rate of pay for its' administrators in Kent County. It is higher than the 20 other Kent County schools for 5 straight years and as Flores points out it is extensive and damaging to the indigenous students of this district. Special needs children could be better served by reducing administration costs in any district. We all should be concerned about 49 administrators making over $90,000 a year and 26 more making over $100,000. Meanwhile, he adds, we can't even match state or national academic performance levels. It is not acceptable that nearly 75% of our 3rd graders can't read, Jose lamented.

Rich Fink former MEA officer and president of Jenison's teacher union for 20 years had these words to share: "*one merely needs to look at Grand Rapids Public Schools to see the DeVos influence. Slowly and systematically the public schools are being dismantled and turned into public charters within the system*. The process is slowly and quietly segregating students based on academic abilities requiring applications to be filed to be considered, and finally leaving those whose academic abilities are below the standard no real choice. This is Betsy's hidden agenda. Provide money and opportunity to the best and brightest and leave the remainder of the students in those underfunded "public schools" because that is all they really deserve!

An anonymous non-instructive union member worker at GRPS for over 20 years stated that he has witnessed privatization creeping into his department and other areas of supportive roles. Along with privatized service workers like bus drivers, custodians, and clerical staff he warns we are now seeing skilled workers like the plumbers and carpenters being replaced with private companies. It just keeps spreading he stated, "*we even now are privatizing our truck usage*. *There was a time our warehouse had thousands of school items that we supplied the whole district with. Today it's only a few hundred items he added because the rest has been privatized. It all adds up to loss of jobs and we know it,* he lamented.

Grand Rapids Schools has become a beehive of privatization with only a public school banner over it. To not meet state academic performance levels is an indicator of failure as the state averages themselves have dropped precipitously since the advent and epidemic of charter schools, with Michigan 4th graders at the bottom of national reading levels. To constantly bang the graduation celebration drum while remaining oblivious to Dr. Flores' admonition or Jeff Smith's inquiries along with a chorus of others is irresponsible on the part of the GRPS board. It is time to realize where the leadership of this district gets its'' bread buttered and what its' true objectives are. Whose education philosophy are they trying to inculcate? Does it not merit a reply to the question, has DeVos money bought influence with the superintendent of this district and by extension its' board? The question may remain unanswered and maybe laughed at by the board

members but the blatant evidence of that implemented philosophy resonates across this district!



Grand Rapids Power Structure: The DeVos Family

https://griid.org/2018/05/17/grand-rapids-power-structure-the-devos-family/

On Monday, we began our revision of the **current Grand Rapids Power Structure**, with an overview of where Grand Rapids is right now in terms of who has power in this community.

When we say who has power, it is important to note that we mean power over. A local power analysis is designed to investigate who has power over – who oppresses, exploits and engages in policy that benefits them to the exclusion of everyone else – the majority of people living in Grand Rapids.

As we noted in the previous post, we believe that private power – individuals and organizations – have the most power over people in this community, based on the hierarchy of power chart. Private power primarily relies on economic and political power and the family that has the most of that kind of power is the DeVos Family.

In terms of the DeVos Family, we have to start with the patriarch, Richard (Rich) DeVos. Rich is one of the co-founders of the pyramid scheme known as Amway. For the past 45 years, Rich DeVos has been using his wealth to influence economic, social and political realities in this community.

Rich DeVos and his now deceased wife Helen, have contributed more to the Republican Party than any other person in Michigan in the last several decades. The millions of dollars that Rich DeVos has contributed to the national and state GOP has had a tremendous influence in shifting politics to the right on numerous issues. According to the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, the DeVos Family as a whole have contributed **$82 million since 1999**.

This amount of money injected into State politics buys a tremendous amount of influence and there are clear examples of how the DeVos Family has influenced policy. (see our **examples from 2016**)

The most powerful family in Grand Rapids also has financed Kent County Commissioners and candidates running for office in Grand Rapids. You can find out which candidates by going to the County Clerk's Campaign Finance **link**.

The mechanisms that the DeVos Family uses the most to influence public policy, besides money, is their role in the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and the West Michigan Policy Forum. Both of these entities have been promoting economic policies that benefit the wealthy, attacks unions, promotes privatization and supports patriarchal, homophobic and white supremacist values.

In Grand Rapids, the DeVos Family has used their wealth and influence to promote the development in downtown Grand Rapids. This process began when they purchased the old Pantlind Hotel and changed its name to the Amway Grand Plaza. Since that time the family has purchased and developed land in downtown Grand Rapids, now owning

numerous hotels and office space for their various projects, including the Windquest Group, RDV Corp and ArtPrize.

The DeVos Family also used the group Grand Action to dictate downtown development and re-direct millions of public dollars to finance the Van Andel Arena, the downtown convention center, the downtown market and the restoration of the Civic Theater.

Another major area of influence is the various family foundations. These foundations support far right groups around the country and in Michigan, like the Acton Institute and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, but they also use their foundation money to finance non-profits. DeVos Family funding of non-profits in Grand Rapids, has numerous benefits for the most powerful family in the city.

First, the foundations fund most of the major educational institutions in the area – GVSU, Calvin College, GRCC, Davenport University, Christian Schools and the Grand Rapids Public Schools. This funding of the major education centers in Grand Rapids allows the DeVos Family to have influence in the direction of each of these entities, such as GVSU's failure to provide domestic partner benefits in the 1990s to the pro-charter, privatization policies that even the GRPS has adopted.

Second, the DeVos Family Foundations have contributed to numerous liberal entities that provide social services in the community. The financing of these entities serves to have a say in managing social policy, which puts the focus on individual behavior, rather then on a systems analysis of social problems. In addition, funding local non-profits guarantees that these non-profits will NOT ever take a public position against the economic and political actions of the DeVos Family, which contributes to poverty, gentrification and white supremacy in the community. Lastly, funding local non-profits has a PR benefit, since many people in this community will take the position that, "where would Grand Rapids be without the DeVos Family.

One additional way that the DeVos Family influences economic, social and political realities in Grand Rapids, is by sitting on Boards or having their people occupy those positions, thus providing an additional mechanism of influence and control of area policy. Some of the more notable entitles that the DeVos Family has people placed on local boards or act as partners are: Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, West MI Policy Forum, The Right Place Inc., Talent 2025, First Steps Kent, GVSU Foundation, Grand Rapids Art Museum, Experience GR, etc.

For a more full account of the history of the DeVos Family and their influence of the political, economic, social and cultural realities of Grand Rapids, check out our **DeVos Family Reader**.

More evidence that Rick DeVos embraces his family's ideological legacy

https://griid.org/2018/05/31/more-evidence-that-rick-devos-embraces-his-familys-ideological-legacy/

For years I have been hearing from people in the community, some who even identify as progressives, that Rick DeVos is different from his parents and grandparents.

The first time that someone suggested that Rick DeVos was different than his family's right-wing history, was just before the first year of ArtPrize. I was told that I just needed to sit down and talk with him and I would see that he was different.

I responded to this claim that unless he has distanced himself from his family's money and was willing to publicly come out against their stance on issues like gay marriage, labor unions, public education, religion, politics and capitalism, then he is not really operating any differently than the rest of his family.

Rick solidified his continuation of the DeVos Family ethos, when he founded (with Dick & Betsy's money) 5 x 5 Night and Start Garden. Venture capitalism and entrepreneurism are easy when you come from billionaire parents and grandparents, but Rick wanted to make his own mark in that arena. His most recent project is **WakeStream Ventures**.

However, if one needed more evidence that Rick DeVos, the son of Dick and Betsy and the grandson of Rich and Helen, was embracing the family's ideological history, then one need to look no further than the fact that Rick DeVos is now a board member of the **Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty.**

Rick DeVos follows in his mom's footsteps, as a board member of the Acton Institute. Betsy DeVos' mother, Elsa Prince Broekhuizen, is also a current board member. In addition to serving on the board of directors, DeVos Family members have given millions of dollars to the Acton Institute over the years.

By now serving on the Acton Institute board, Rick DeVos further solidifies his commitment to the same right wing, pro-capitalist and religiosity that his family has embraced for decades. After all, the Acton Institute values the wedding of religion and capitalism, which works beautifully for the DeVos Family to justify their wealth and their politics.

The Acton Institute despises organized labor, public education, has taken hundreds of thousands of dollars from Exxon/Mobil to promote climate denial, supports US imperialism and regularly posts anti-Islamic articles on their blog.

Therefore, one cannot sit on the board of an organization that zealously embraces a far right ideology and not support those same principles. The guy who once said he just wants to see "crazy shit happening all over Grand Rapids," is nothing more than a neo-liberal capitalist, who defends an anti-union, anti-muslim, anti-public education and US imperialism ethos. Rick DeVos is clearly following in the footsteps of Rich, Helen, Dick and Betsy DeVos.

Managing Michigan Politics: Greg McNeilly, the DeVos Family and the November Elections

https://griid.org/2018/10/14/managing-michigan-politics-greg-mcneilly-the-devos-family-and-the-november-elections/

Last week, the West Michigan Policy Forum posted a link on their Facebook page that directs people to an opinion piece in the Detroit News, written by Michigan Freedom Network Director and DeVos Family operative, Greg McNeilly.

McNeilly was the campaign manager for the failed gubernatorial campaign of Dick DeVos in 2006. McNeilly is also a board member of GLEP and is the Chief Operating Officer of the DeVos run Windquest Group. McNeilly was quoted in an MLive article from last year, boasting how political donations are the most protected form of speech:

"Political speech is the most protected form of speech, and we need more people participating at higher levels. We should applaud anyone who is leading on that dimension and try to encourage greater participation in our great American experiment."

What McNeilly is really says is that those with the most wealth really really determine the outcome of elections, or as the first Chief Justice of the US, John Jay once said, "***Those who own the country, ought to govern it***."

Like John Jay, McNeilly understands that those with real power in the US are the owners, members of the private sector, not the politicians. One only need to look at **who the largest political donor in Michigan has been for the past 20 years**, the family that McNeilly works for, the DeVos Family.

McNeilly's Opinion piece in the Detroit News

The article written by McNeilly for the Detroit News is entitled, **Don't Hijack Michigan's Constitution**. Wanting to appear as if he supports the state's constitution, McNeilly's opinion piece is really just a way for him to demonstrate his obedience to the DeVos Family and tell everyone to vote No on all three Ballot Proposals in November.

McNeilly's analysis of the three ballot proposals are weak and he provides no evidence to back up his claims. A good way to begin looking at anything that will be on the ballot this November, is to look at who is financially backing the ballot proposals.
The **Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN) has good data** on this.

For instance, McNeilly says that, "*Proposal 2 provides for more run-away government spending."* However, McNeilly fails to let people know that some of the largest contributors to the no vote on Proposal 2 are the Michigan Chamber of Commerce PAC and member of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, John Kennedy. According to MCFN, Enbridge Energy (Line 5 through Michigan) has been the largest contributor to the Michigan Chamber of Commerce PAC for 2017-2018. Enbridge Energy embodies John Jay's philosophy that those who own the country ought to govern it.

Managing Michigan

In McNeilly's Detroit News opinion piece, he begins by stating:

Forty days from now all of Michigan's votes will be cast. Michigan will elect new management. Really new management. None of Michigan's top executives (governor, secretary of state and attorney general) will have done their job before. Two-thirds or more of the Legislature will also be new on the job.

If one was to look at this statement, one might be tempted to think about McNeilly's comments through a partisan lens. This is understandable, especially since the DeVos Family is deeply committed to the Republican Party and the other two groups that McNeilly is directly involved with, the **Michigan Freedom Network** and the **Great Lakes Education Project** have both made clear who they are endorsing in the November Election.

However, while I find McNeilly's reference to politicians as managers of the state disgusting and reprehensible, it is not a completely inaccurate statement. Representative Democracy is tremendously limited and it provides an easy opportunity for those with tremendous wealth to dictate who runs government, at any level.

In Marina Sitrin and David Azzellini demonstrate in their important book, *They Can't Represent Us!: Reinventing Democracy From Greece To Occupy,* liberal democracy is actually a barrier to full public participation in the ongoing developments in society. Too often, people of good will accept the notion that representative democracy is the best that we can do and if we just get enough people to vote for "our candidates" then things will be just fine.

Such sentiment is naive and will prevent us from ever envisioning and creating the kind of society that is built upon the values of collective liberation and revolutionary love.

DeVos money, AmplifyGR, a new brewery and the future of Southeast Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2018/11/27/devos-money-amplifygr-a-new-brewery-and-the-future-of-southeast-grand-rapids/

In **September, MLive posted** a pretty solid article about what AmplifyGR was up to these days, especially since it has been over a year now that they cancelled the community forums they were hosting, meetings where the DeVos funded project had been receiving a **great deal of push back**.

At the **second AmplifyGR community forum**, the director of the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation created entity said, "***even if 70% of the community opposed this, we would just have to get back up and move forward and do it better.***"

AmplifyGR has indeed, moved forward. The organization has moved forward by avoiding the messiness of having community forums and decided to turn to what they refer to has more personal way to engage the community. In the **MLive article published in September**, AmplifyGR's director John Ipple stated in that article that the mission of the organization was to "***promote prosperity in a part of Grand Rapids that hasn't shared in the economic rebound unfolding elsewhere in the city."*** Such a statement is consistent with the DeVos philosophy of capitalism, but we should always ask ourselves, prosperity for whom?

That same MLive article also pointed out that AmplifyGR has been giving out food baskets, doing turkey give-a-ways and promoting more local business development in the area. The MLive article also quotes Fran Dalton, with the Garfield Park Neighborhood Association who said, "***she views Amplify as "a real possible resource and benefit to the community," but contends the group does not want to pursue its development efforts "under the watchful eye of the community."***

In February, we posted an article about how AmplifyGR was hosting Start Garden's 100 Ideas project, where people could come and pitch business ideas. A group of Start Garden selected people would vote on the best ideas and give $20,000 to each of those projects.

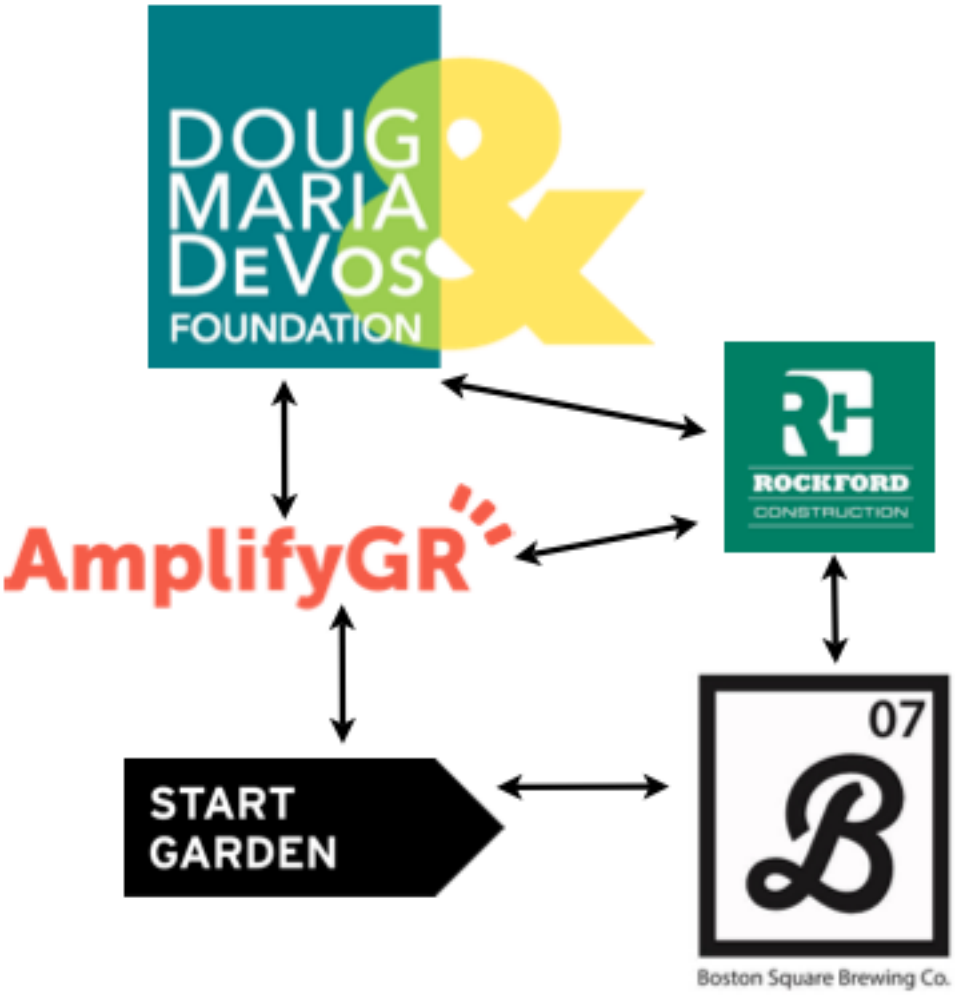
One of the projects submitted was by **two African American men who wanted to start a brewery in the Boston Square area**. Why not, white folks shouldn't be the only ones profiting off of the creation of new breweries, right?

However, it is worth looking a bit at the connections and relationships that made all of this happen, since it seems that hose involved are connected. So, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation created AmplifyGR, which is partnering with the Rockford Construction Company, which technically purchased the 32 properties in the AmplifyGR targeted area. Start Garden, which is also a DeVos family creation, hosts a "let's fund some business ideas event." One of the men involved in the Boston Square Brewing Company project, which received $20,000 from Start Garden at an event hosted at AmplifyGR, also works for Rockford Construction. Terry Rostic, co-owner of the Boston Square Brewing Company, is the Project Manager of Human Resources at Rockford Construction.

But, there is more to this than just the interlocking connections between all the players involved. There have been many people from the African American community that have been meeting and discussing issues around why the Southeast part of the city is the least developed. One group, which goes by the hashtag #SEGR on Facebook, has been looking at ways to prevent or minimize the effects of gentrification in the the part of Grand Rapids with the largest African American population.

I reached out to Rev. Jerry Bishop, who is involved with the group #SEGR. Rev. Bishop is the pastor of LifeQuest, which is also based in the southeast part of the city. I asked him what he thought about the new brewery that was announced for the Boston Square area and this was his response:

In short, it's not in any way a vendetta against the Visionaries for the brewery. Rather, its a consistent position of wanting less alcohol/vices in that area. More than a year ago a meeting was held on our campus with staff from Amplify and a line up of urban pastors that agreed that Olivers Liquor Store should be removed if a authentic redevelopment was to happen, much like how Speedy Mart was eliminated on Wealthy and Fuller. It would be disingenuous to advocate for the removal of Olivers and then usher in a brewery. There has been more than one discussion on this.



This comment also gets to another aspect of having an entity like AmplifyGR plant itself in a neighborhood which it has not been a part of and yet it has purchased 32 properties for redevelopment. The question is, who gets to decide what happens in southeast part of Grand Rapids? During the larger AmplifyGR forums that were being held in 2017, several people were promoting the idea that DeVos/AmplifyGR/Rockford Construction could just give over all the land they purchased, which could allow the neighborhood to put it in a Community Land Trust and then take the time to let the people who live there decide what to do with the land. Some might even say this is a forum of reparations, where those from the white community who have benefited from white supremacy and

capitalism for so long, could pay reparations to the black community and let them do as they see fit. Why do white people and white run organization always think they know what is best?

Lastly, it is also important to note that several members of the DeVos family and specifically Doug & Maria DeVos (which funded the creation of AmplifyGR) recently gave money to Cindy Hyde-Smith (see below), the Senator from Mississippi, even after she made racist comments about going to a public hanging and off handed remarks about supporting voter suppression. This is no marginal issue and it should be discussed openly, especially since Doug & Maria DeVos has funded and created AmplifyGR to push their own agenda in the southeast part of the city. More importantly, the DeVos family contributes millions to the Republican Party and the policies they have imposed on the public are disproportionately oppressive for black communities.

What if this dynamic and the other issues raised here were discussed in an open forum, where there could be more accountability? Transparency and accountability doesn't just happen, we have to make it happen and then support those doing the work to bring these issues to light. DeVos money can back businesses by black people, but they will

never support black people fighting for racial justice and an end to white supremacy!

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48 HOUR NOTICE OF CONTRIBUTIONS/LOANS RECEIVED

(See Reverse Side for Instructions)

To be used to report all contributions (including loans) of $1000 or more, received within 20 days of the election.

1. NAME OF COMMITTEE IN FULL: Cindy Hyde-Smith for US Senate
ADDRESS (number and street): PO Box 2930
CITY, STATE, and ZIP CODE: Jackson MS 39207

continuation page

2. NAME OF CANDIDATE: Hyde-Smith, Cindy, , ,
3. OFFICE SOUGHT (State and District): Senate MS
4. FEC IDENTIFICATION NUMBER: C00675348

5. IS THIS AN AMENDMENT? [X] NO, THIS IS A NEW FILING [ ] YES, IT AMENDS THE NOTICE FILED ON ____/____/____

A. FULL NAME, MAILING ADDRESS AND ZIP CODE	Name of Employer / Occupation	Date (month, day, year)	Amount
DEVOS, DANIEL, G., , 126 OTTAWA AVE NW STE 500 GRAND RAPIDS MI 49503-	RDV CORPORATION Transaction ID : TX13746 EXECUTIVE	11/23/2018	2700.00
B. FULL NAME, MAILING ADDRESS AND ZIP CODE	Name of Employer / Occupation	Date (month, day, year)	Amount
DEVOS, DOUG, , , 126 OTTAWA AVE NW STE 500 GRAND RAPIDS MI 49503-	ALTICOR Transaction ID : TX13747 EXECUTIVE	11/23/2018	2700.00
C. FULL NAME, MAILING ADDRESS AND ZIP CODE	Name of Employer / Occupation	Date (month, day, year)	Amount
DEVOS, MARIA, , , 126 OTTAWA AVE NW STE 500 GRAND RAPIDS MI 49503-	HOMEMAKER Transaction ID : TX13748 HOMEMAKER	11/23/2018	2700.00
D. FULL NAME, MAILING ADDRESS AND ZIP CODE	Name of Employer / Occupation	Date (month, day, year)	Amount
DEVOS, PAMELLA, , , 126 OTTAWA AVE NW STE 500 GRAND RAPIDS MI 49503-	HOMEMAKER Transaction ID : TX13754 HOMEMAKER	11/23/2018	2700.00
E. FULL NAME, MAILING ADDRESS AND ZIP CODE	Name of Employer / Occupation	Date (month, day, year)	Amount
EGAN, CHRISTOPHER, F., , 116 FLANDERS RD WESTBOROUGH MA 01581-1072	CARRUTH CAPITAL Transaction ID : TX13758 PRESIDENT	11/23/2018	2700.00

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FEC FORM 6 (Revised 07/2011)

Betsy DeVos and the Covert Privatization of Grand Rapids Public Schools: Part IV

https://griid.org/2018/12/16/betsy-devos-and-the-covert-privatization-of-grand-rapids-public-schools-part-iv/

(This post was written by Jack Prince, who wrote the previous articles in this series, **Part I**, **Part II** and **Part III**.)

The opening of the school year here in Grand Rapids was marked by the gala unveiling of the new Grand Rapids public museum building at 54 Jefferson Avenue Southeast. This new building is an expansion of the program started in 2015 which is located at the Van Andel Museum Center overlooking the Grand River.

Before continuing in this effort to expose inherent School segregation in the Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS), it needs to be stated that the Grand Rapids Public Museum school is a misleading moniker as the museum itself is rented and controlled from the city by a business Consortium designed and pushed by the DeVos power structure.

To imagine it as a haven for public education objectives is whimsical with its private school proclivity. The building at 54 Jefferson has undergone an expensive renovation including money from the public /private Corporation donations and from a GRPS fundraising campaign.

Additionally the district was awarded 10 million dollars from the **XQ Institute**. Grand Rapids was one of 10 School's nationally to receive money from the business orientated Institute of which half of the recipients were charter schools.

In 2017, a star-studded one-hour long long national broadcast headed by Justin Timberlake, with a bevy of celebrity cameos, attempted to convince America that the nation's high schools needed to redesign in line with the business objectives of an Institute formed by Laurene Powell Jobs, the Widow of business magnate Steve Jobs.

To promote their desired changes a $1,000,000 carrot was dangled in the face of cash-strapped US school districts. From **EdSurge** we read:

If the point of the Extravaganza was to promote change it missed the mark by airing tired arguments that public schools have stayed static through the decades and consequently glossing over the extraordinary hard work of millions of teachers.

The star-studded Primetime event, paid for by the same group that plastered its name all over the doors of the building at 54 Jefferson, had entertainers quip with the show's premise that high schools are a system that hasn't changed in 100 years. That maintenance however clashes with education historians mentioned in the EdSurge article.

Education historians interviewed by **Chalkbeat**, where it was said that while the basic setup of schools has remained largely intact the democratization of access to high school along with the different skills and subject kids learn constitute big shifts. Valerie Stross education writer for the *Washington Post* bemoaned the use of celebrities to push a faulty narrative.

Clearly what was once a successful education system funded by public tax dollars for public benefit and led by non-corporate professors and universities, has experienced damaging changes with public funding being replaced by private funding. Now instead of a Level Playing Field of opportunity, there is a funding system diametrically opposed to that along with propaganda coming from the corporate world with their attached agenda.

The influence from neighborhoods and parents locally has been eradicated and replaced with more and more corporate oversight including at 54 Jefferson Street. The Jefferson School looks more like a lavish Motel on the ground floor and does not have typical classrooms. The two-story building is very modern with bright flexible spaces designed to encourage collaboration and innovation.

Simultaneously, another building in the district opened on August 27th with no renovation or Fanfare. Westwood Middle School reopened with a physical plant that has seen no renovation or facelift for years. Even more worrisome the middle school which houses more students than the museum school, was teaching as of early October with 30% of its positions manned by full-time Subs. That is not the case at the Grand Rapids public museum school where all classes were filled on the first day with full-time teachers and will remain filled by full-time teachers for the entire year unlike Alger middle, Union High School or Westwood which yearly allows classrooms to be manned by substitutes for the entire school year.

Evidently none of the money used to refurbish the eighty-year-old museum school building could be used to simply hire teachers at livable wages at the Westwood building. The neglect at Westwood may be responsible for the very low academic proficiency registered at Westwood Middle located at 1525 Mount Mercy Drive Northwest Grand Rapids where only 5% of the 358 students are proficient in math and 13% in English.

These dismal numbers are supplied by the nationally respected evaluation service called **greatschools.org**. Even more worrisome is the warning from Great Schools that this school is falling far behind other students in the state and that this school may consequently have large achievement gaps. Great Schools continues their assessment by stating, "*students at The school are making far less academic progress given where they were last year compared to similar students in the state*."

Very little progress with low test scores at Westwood mean students are starting at a low point and are falling even farther behind their peers in other schools. Compare the

opening day at the new Museum school where 300 dignitaries including mayor Bliss filled the beautiful lobby at 54 Jefferson with the worn lobby at Westwood where there were no balloons or millionaires patting themselves on the back. A gala scene indicative of the corporate world's incursion into public education should be alarming particularly when we remember when the primary educational philosophy was to first and foremost address the problems at struggling schools and the students there in. That philosophy has been atrophied today as the germination of educational philosophy does not emanate from the offices of university education departments but rather the boardrooms of corporate headquarters such as QX.

The renovation at 54 Jefferson Street, which has been primarily a business led endeavor, was also given a magnanimous gift from the city selling the building to GRPS for a single dollar. The city also gratuitously gave $52,000 to renovate a parking lot at the corner of State and Jefferson. In addition the city gave money to restore a small park adjoining the parking lot. The park is called a pocket park. Downtown Grand Rapids inc, contributed $51,573 for improvements. The architect for the park and parking lot project is King Scott with Lott3Metz Architecture along with landscape architect Viridis Design Group, and construction manager, Rockford Construction. With such a phalanx of contributors over such a long period of time for such prestigious and expensive professional design and construction it would seem someone could have donated money to replace the broken furnace at Union High School. The students and faculty have had to endure space heaters for two winters at Union High School while the expensive workmanship was being put on with gold trim At 54 Jefferson.Ironically Union High School is just a stone's throw or step down from Westwood Middle. This summer City High School, located in the old Creston High School building on Plainfield, has been completely air-conditioned.

Union high School unfortunately after decades of heat fatigue has received no funding for air conditioning. This priority difference is only one of many that exists between the regular public school buildings and the business/district nexus school buildings. The disparity is a prime reason for the academic proficiency weakness in the less preferred schools. A correlation can be quickly drawn between the physical building environment and academic performance. A spending correlation can also be easily derived at with the same results.

Westwood Middle School has opaque plexiglass windows surrounding the school except in the teachers' lounge or rooms directly surrounding the main school entrance. The plexiglass was not the original school windows. The opaque windows inhibit vision out of the classrooms, and more importantly to GRPS, prohibit vision into the classrooms obscuring a chaotic school. Many of the classrooms are out of control and the emotional fatigue of the teachers both at Westwood and Alger Middle means that each year most of the teaching staff leave only to be replaced with first year teachers and subs.

Compare that reality with the teacher retention rate next spring at the GRPMS. One of those teachers from Alger 5 years ago categorically claimed that the MEAP score for math proficiency registered .000 on test scores with reading nearly as low. Funding, teacher safety and class size with academic proficiency at these struggling schools should be receiving the attention rather than the district's trophy business backed buildings.

The disparity of help to these buildings is matched by the initial unfairness of admittance to these cherry picked schools, where GRPS school leaders have said dogmatically that half of the students from within GRPS boundaries were selected for GRPMS by lottery and were currently attending charter or private schools. According to MLive, another 15% of the students at GRPMS came from outside of the district . These students did not come from Union or Ottawa. They instead were derived from charter or private schools alien to the GRPS district. Lottery selection means that the district can pick students from test scores and other demographics by hiding behind a supposed random luck of the draw lottery.

Therefore what exists in GRPS is a non public school procedure for admission in many buildings. There exists an exception to the traditional open door policy previously indigenous to all public schools called test in. This aspect for admissions is symptomatic to the charter/public school nexus, particularly by having to test in. A new word has been coined indicative of this phenomenon called *testination*.

Enrollment, unequal funding and teacher retention, have had a combined impact on the educational priorities within GRPS. The stark and definable difference of educational atmosphere and opportunity latent within GRPS is easily recognized. The students at GRPS need the advocacy and protection of the district's leaders and they are not getting it. There are other indicators of priority variances which have resulted in a segregated system at GRPS which will be exposed in continuing articles.

Longtime DeVos operative and former Michigan Representative, now works for Betsy DeVos in the Department of Education

https://griid.org/2019/01/14/longtime-devos-operative-in-the-michigan-legislator-now-works-for-betsy-devos-in-the-department-of-education/

Last Tuesday, the **US Department of Education announced that Daniela Garcia will be the** Director of Outreach in the Office of Communications and Outreach.

Garcia was first elected to the Michigan House of Representatives in 2014 and served for four years in the 90th District, which includes Holland, Hudsonville and Zeeland. Last year, Garcia campaigned for the 30th District Senate seat in Michigan, but lost to fellow Republican Roger Victory.

Daniela Garcia during her years in the State House was financially backed by the DeVos family, receiving thousands of dollars to represent part of West Michigan. DeVos money was contributed from several members of the family to Garcia, plus Garcia received money through the Great Lakes Education Project, founded by Betsy DeVos.

Garcia was a member of the Education Reform, Health Policy, and Elections and Ethics committees. It was her role on the Education Reform Committee where she pushed for policy that was crafted by the DeVos Family, the Great Lakes Education Project and the West Michigan Policy Forum.

Garcia had received the endorsement of the Great Lakes Education Project in 2014, 2016 and 2018 to represent West Michigan. As a member of the Education Reform Committee she was instrumental in the push to remake the Detroit Public Schools along lines pleasing to the charter school industry and she the primary sponsor of two bills in the Michigan House package in 2016, which postponed the Detroit Public School's return to local governance and all but obliterated the collective-bargaining rights of Detroit teachers.

Garcia was a huge proponent of Charter Schools in Michigan, **voted for an end to pensions for teachers in the public school system (pushed heavily by the West Michigan Policy Forum)**and she also voted for the A to F Grades, Rankings, and Designations for Public School bill, which was pass last month during the Lame Duck session.

The fact that Betsy DeVos chose Daniela Garcia to come work at the Department of Education, makes complete sense. Garcia has not only demonstrated a loyalty to the DeVos family, she has demonstrated a loyalty to one of the DeVos family's main policy objectives, Education Reform.

The Acton Institute invites AmplifyGR to talk about what they are doing in Grand Rapids and there is no mention of who created the non-profit

https://griid.org/2019/02/03/the-acton-institute-invites-amplifygr-to-talk-about-what-they-are-doing-in-grand-rapids-and-there-is-no-mention-of-who-created-the-non-profit/

On January 24, the **far right think tank, the Acton Institute**, hosted a presentation by Ashanti Bryant, the education project manager for AmplifyGR.

Bryant's presentation lasted only 30 minutes, which was followed by a Q & A session. However, throughout the entire event, whether it was the introduction give by an Acton

representative, the presentation or the Q & A, not one word was mentioned about how AmplifyGR came about two years ago. To some this might not seem like a strange thing, but consider the following. The DeVos family has contributed millions of dollars to the Acton Institute over the past 25 years and Betsy DeVos sat on their board of directors at one time, along with her mother Elsa Prince. Betsy's son, Rick DeVos, now sits on the Acton board. With all of the connections to the DeVos family, it would seem that at an Acton Institute event, there would be some mention of the connection between the most powerful family in West Michigan and AmplifyGR. Unfortunately, the connection was not made.

You can watch the presentation by Ashanti Bryant at **this link**, but it wasn't very compelling, especially since he basically read a powerpoint presentation. However, I watched the presentation and found it instructive enough to share some analysis of what Bryant had to say. Before doing so, it is important to point out that Ashanti Bryant's background in education is as follows. Bryant used to be a principal at Grand Rapids Christian Schools and he has been a consultant to both private and charter schools.

Purpose Built Communities

Ashanti's presentation centered around Purpose Built Communities, the model that AmplifyGR has been pushing since its creation 2 years ago. The AmplifyGR Education Director began by quoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, offering up two quotes that were both fairly innocuous.

Bryant then talked about concentrated poverty, plus gave national and regional statistics. He also spoke about the history of racial segregation in housing and education and cited Richard Rotherstein's book, *The Color of Law.*

The AmplifyGR Education Director then talked about the 49507 zip code in Grand Rapids and referenced Todd Robison's book, *A City within a City: The Black Freedom Struggle in Grand Rapids, Michigan.* Up to this point, the information that Bryant shared was solid and relied on great sources, but then came the punch line. There was no call for racial justice, for an end to White Supremacy or for reparations for the African American community in Grand Rapids. Instead, Bryant suggested that the way to overcome all of this historical racism in Grand Rapids was what AmplifyGR was promoting, the Purpose Built Communities model.

However, unlike the Purpose Built Communities model that has been used around the country, with an emphasis on housing, education and wellness, AmplifyGR has added a fourth component, what they call jobs and entrepreneurialism. Within this model, Bryant said that there needs to be a backbone organization, an organization that can act as an anchor for the implementation of the Purpose Built Communities model. You guessed it, AmplifyGR is the backbone organization in this case.

In many ways the Q & A portion of the presentation was the most revealing. A white guy told a story about a wealthy person wanting to move back into an area of Detroit that had suffered from disinvestment and then said that this guy was being accused of gentrification. Bryant's response to this comment was, "*We at AmplifyGR avoid using the word gentrification. We believe in a diversity of incomes living together, but we prefer to call it investing in the community*."

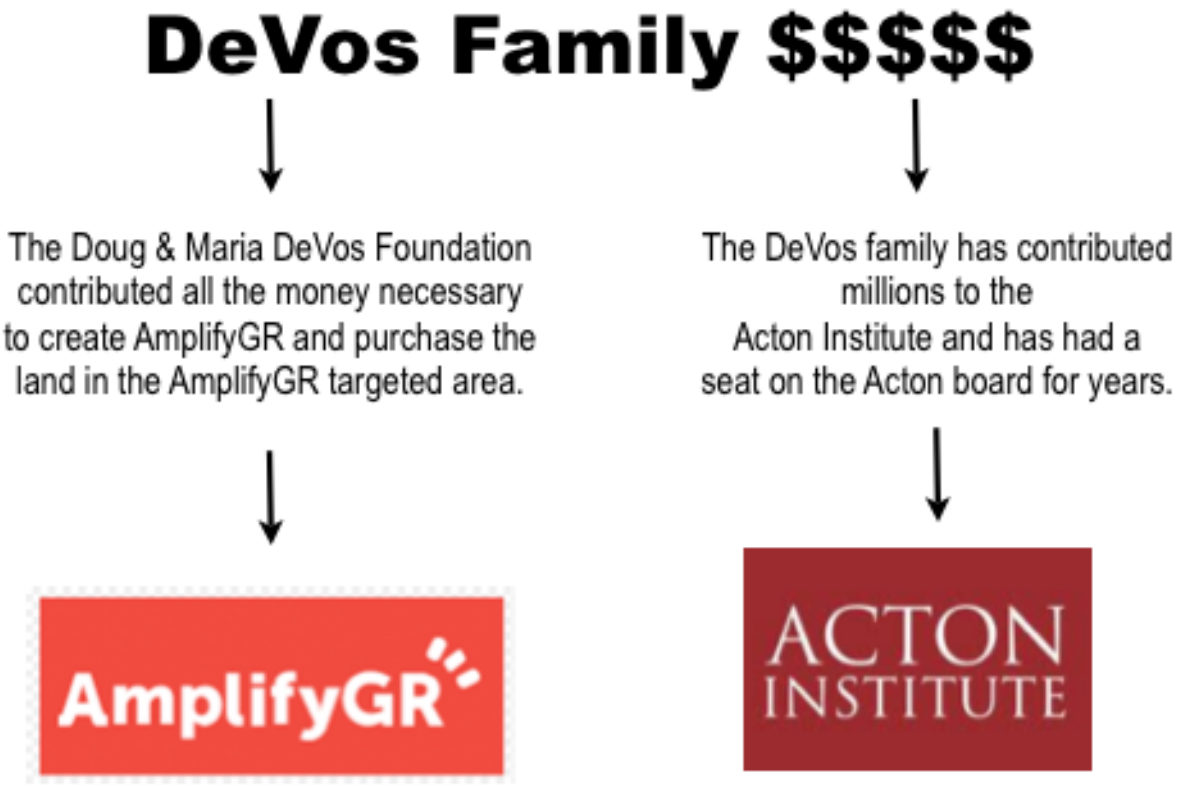
In response to the question about job and business creation, Bryant said that AmplifyGR plans to bring 1,000 new jobs to the area. As of today, there are 4 new businesses and 100 new jobs created, according to Bryant, but he never qualified how well those jobs paid.

The only education question that was asked had to do with whether or not AmplifyGR was pushing Charter Schools as an education solution. Bryant said that in their model, they partner with three education centers, with Heritage Academies, GRPS and Hope Academy. Both Heritage Academies and Hope Academy are Charter Schools and the GRPS is Charter School friendly.

Bryant was then asked how AmplifyGR did community engagement. He said they started out doing town hall meetings, but then said he would not recommend doing town hall meetings, since he just provided people with an opportunity to vent frustrations. Bryant said they now host resident meetings, which are small and allows AmplifyGR the opportunity to focus on the Purpose Built Communities model. Of course Bryant would say don't do town hall meetings, **because AmplifyGR was called out repeatedly during the three town hall meeting that were held in the summer of 2017**.

The last question had to do with how AmplifyGR was utilizing the private sector for their work. Bryant mentioned that Rockford Construction was involved early on. Unfortunately, **Bryant failed to mention that Rockford Construction had purchased dozens of properties in the Boston Square and Cottage Grove areas in 2017**, spending **millions without resident input.**

So, you have an AmplifyGR presentation at an Acton Institute event and there is no discussion about the millions of dollars that the DeVos family has contributed to the Acton Institute, not the fact that the DeVos family created AmplifyGR and bankrolled the purchase of dozens of properties in the AmplifyGR target area, without resident input. But that's ok, because they are in that neighborhood to "help."



Group that spent the most to oppose Voters Not Politicians ballot initiative is run by a DeVos operative
https://griid.org/2019/02/06/group-that-spent-the-most-to-oppose-voters-not-politicians-ballot-initiative-is-run-by-a-devos-operative/

As the dust settles on the 2018 election, data continues to come out about which groups funded what ballot proposals.

The Michigan Campaign Finance Network does an amazing job of following the money in Michigan electoral politics and their **most recent article** has some interesting analysis about who was behind the 2018 Michigan Ballot initiatives.

What I found most interesting is that the group that spent the most money opposing the Voters Not Politicians ballot initiative, was the Michigan Freedom Fund. The entity created by the Michigan Freedom Fund, designed to defeat Voters Not Politicians, was **Protect My Vote**.

You can see from the graphic here that the Michigan Freedom Fund was the largest contributor to this effort. The President of the Michigan Freedom Fund is Greg McNeilly,

who also happens to be the Chief Operating Officer of the Windquest Group. The Windquest Group is one of the DeVos family's business entities.

McNeilly, while he ran Dick DeVos' failed gubernatorial run in 2006, once boasted how political donations are the most protected form of speech:

"Political speech is the most protected form of speech, and we need more people participating at higher levels. We should applaud anyone who is leading on that dimension and try to encourage greater participation in our great American experiment."

Such a statement reflects McNeilly's allegiance to the DeVos family fortune.

However, the main issue her, with the new data from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, is that the group that spent the most money to defeat Voters Not Politicians was a group that was essentially created by DeVos family money and is run by their most trusted political operative, Greg McNeilly. This is just the most recent example of how DeVos money infects electoral politics and promotes anti-union, anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ and pro-business policies in the state. Remember that, the next time you are tempted to think that the DeVos family does so much good for West Michigan.

The Time I confronted Rich DeVos on being a billionaire

https://griid.org/2019/02/11/the-time-i-confronted-rich-devos-on-being-a-billionaire/

A new report was just released showing that the richest 0.00025 percent of the American population now owns more wealth than the 150 million adults in the bottom 60 percent.

The **report** comes from the National Bureau of Economic Research and was authored by Gabriel Zucman.

The wealth gap in the US has been growing in recent decades and the top 400 richest people, those featured in the annual Forbes 400 report, are continuing to amass disgustingly large amounts of wealth. There are over 500 billionaires in the US alone and several of them live in West Michigan, including the Meijer and DeVos families.

I have written a great deal about the wealth of these two families, particularly the DeVos family. However, I have never shared a story about the time that I confront Rich DeVos about his wealth at a book signing in 2004.

The Grand Rapids Press had run an article about DeVos' new book entitled, *How to Be Like Rich DeVos: Succeeding with Integrity in Business and Life.* The article that the Press ran had a picture of Michael Jordan, Mother Theresa and Jesus, but the picture of DeVos was larger than the rest of them. The article also mentioned that DeVos would be at a book signing at Schuler Books on 28th Street, so some of us decided to go.

When we arrived at the bookstore, people had already lined up to get a copy of the book signed by the Amway co-founder. A friend of mine and I decided to grab other books to get signed. My friend grabbed the book *Robbing Us Blind: The Return of the Bush Gang and the Robbing of America* and I grabbed a leather-bound copy of the King James Bible.

We decided to stand in line by not right next to each other, so as not give ourselves away since people may have recognized us. My friend greeted DeVos first, who was puzzled by the book title that my friend wanted him to sign. DeVos said, "yeah, I guess some people can be too greedy," and signed the book anyway. We later auctioned the book off for a fundraiser.

When I finally got to the table, I hand DeVos the bible I had brought up and he said, "You want me to sign your bible," and I said, "sure, why not." He began to sign it and I said I saw the article in the GR Press that had you picture, along with Jesus, Michael Jordan and Mother Theresa. I ask him, "how did you feel about having a larger picture than Jesus?" DeVos said, "I did think it was a little strange, but it was out of my hands." He went back to signing the bible and then I asked him, "So, what do you think about that gospel quote, which says that it is harder for a man to get into the Kingdom of Heaven than it is for a camel to go through an eye of a needle." DeVos was getting ready to respond, when his body guard, a rather large man, grabbed my arm and said, "that's enough," and pulled me away from the table.

Those who are billionaires are engaging in unjust and criminal behavior, especially while so many are suffering from lack of healthy food, health care, housing and other basic human rights. For more on the history and politics of the DeVos Family, see our **DeVos Family Reader**.

DeVos Political Operative Greg McNeilly is also promoting the West Michigan Policy Forum's scheme for road funding by using teacher pension funds

https://griid.org/2019/07/19/devos-political-operative-greg-mcneilly-is-also-promoting-the-west-michigan-policy-forums-scheme-for-road-funding-by-using-teacher-pension-funds/

Last week, we **posted an article** about a proposal from the West Michigan Policy Forum to borrow money from the Michigan Teachers Pension Fund and use it to pay for the roads throughout the state.

We stated the following:

First, in 2016, the **West Michigan Policy Forum was backing legislation** that would remove the decades-long contractual agreement between the State of Michigan and the teacher union to remove the state as the primary source to pay teacher pensions and transfer that responsibility to the market. That legislation was adopted, which means the traditional pensions have been eliminated in terms of how they get paid and are replaced with 401k-type plans leaving the teacher pensions in the hands of the speculative capital market. At the time, the **Michigan Education Association** stated that, "This is a nation-wide attack, led by Enron billionaire Tom Arnold, whose Arnold Foundation is **flooding right wing think tanks across the nation** with funding to do this work. The Enron meltdown cost public pension funds $1.5 billion in losses."

Second, the West Michigan Policy Forum has not been shy about their efforts to undermine unions, such as the 2016 legislation to attack the teacher unions and more recently, **their push to undermine public sector unions**, by calling health care benefits and pensions of government employees "unfunded mandates" as well.

Therefore, what Chase Bolger and the West Michigan Policy Forum is now proposing, is to take money from the Teacher Pension Fund (money that was previously guaranteed by the State and now is placed in the speculative capital market) and place that in the speculative capital market in order to make money to pay for the roads. Not only does the West Michigan Policy Forum see the speculative capital markets as the financial savior of us all, they are ultimately interested in pushing Neo-Liberal economic austerity measures in order to weaken the public sector.

Now, the West Michigan Policy Forum is pushing the same idea, which their friend and fellow DeVos-operative Greg McNeilly proposed in an **opinion piece in the Detroit News**.

McNeilly was the campaign manager for the failed gubernatorial campaign of Dick DeVos in 2006. He is also a board member of Great Lakes Education Project (created by Betsy DeVos) and is the Chief Operating Officer of the DeVos run Windquest Group.

McNeilly, who once said that the wealthy people who contribute large amounts to elections should be applauded for their efforts. McNeilly also called rich people funding candidates, "t***he most protected form of speech***."

In his opinion piece, McNeilly also referred to teacher pensions as an "unfunded liability," which is essentially code for, "we don't like unions," even though teacher pensions have been honored for decades by states across the country.

In addition, McNeilly also states:

One important detail that's important to remember, using pension obligation bonds represents a pension- and classroom-funding plan more than a road-funding plan. The $980 million in additional cash flow per year would be in the state's school aid fund, offsetting the $540 million that could be moved from the current sales tax on gasoline into roads, and providing another $440 million on top of that each year that could be spent to either further pay down teacher pension debt or poured directly into Michigan classrooms.

McNeilly is not only endorsing the idea that the West Michigan Policy Forum has put forth, he is willing to use money from the Teacher Pension Fund to invest in the market in order to pay for the roads. In other words, the DeVos political operative is willing to gamble with teacher pension funds to pay for the roads, while at the same time continuing to promote neoliberal economic policies in the state, which has eliminated a business tax and gives greater control to the 1 percent, like McNeilly's boss, the DeVos Family. Sounds like a solid plan, doesn't it?

The New Gilded Age in Grand Rapids: Why so few, control so much

https://griid.org/2019/10/24/the-new-gilded-age-in-grand-rapids-why-so-few-control-so-much/

We are living in an era that could easily be described as the New Gilded Age. A small faction of the world's population controls over half of the world's wealth.

This vast wealth gap was confirmed in a recent document published by the **Global Wealth Report**, which says that the number of millionaires has grown to 47 million. The report also stated that this growing class of rich people, which makes up 0.9% of the world's population, now controls nearly half of the global wealth, estimated to be $361 Trillion.

In many ways these numbers make it difficult to even fathom the vast amounts of wealth that so few have, while billions struggle to survive. If we just looked at Kent County, we know that there were at least **600 millionaires in 2014**, compared to just 407 in 2010. There are also a few billionaires living in Kent County, with names that are familiar to most.

The DeVos and Meijer families are both worth billions. According to Forbes, Doug & Hank Meijer are worth **$10.7 Billion** and the now deceased Richard DeVos was worth **$5.7 Billion** upon his death. We don't know the combined wealth of all the DeVos family members, but if we just look at the wealth of the two Meijer heirs and Richard DeVos, the total comes to **$16.4 Billion**.

Now there are roughly 200,000 people who live in Grand Rapids. If we divided up the wealth of these two families amongst the entire population of Grand Rapids, that would mean that every person, not every household, every person would get $72,500. For some people this may not seem like a great deal of money, but there are tens of

thousands of people in Grand Rapids who make less than $72,500 a year and that amount of money would radically improve their quality of life.

How about housing? If we say that on average a house in Grand Rapids goes for $200,000, 72,500 homes could be purchased with the wealth of Meijer and DeVos. This would mean that 72,500 homes could be paid for, which would mean pretty much all of the homes in the city, since the average family size is 4. This would eliminate homelessness, people having to work 2 jobs to pay rent, people facing foreclosure or having to decide if they have heat in the winter or can afford their current mortgage.

Imagine what $16.4 Billion would do to cover health care costs for people in Grand Rapids? How about paying for a mass transit system that would radically reduce the need for cars in the city? $16.4 billion could pay for solar energy for the entire city. $16.4 Billion could provide every student who is currently in K-12 with free college tuition. What would $16.4 Billion do to pay for dealing with lead exposure for children in Grand Rapids, making sure that every family ate healthy food or that no senior citizen had to worry about paying for prescription drugs. $16.4 Billion would go a long way to pay for reparations for African Americans in Grand Rapids. Hell, $16.4 Billion would wipe away the debt of every African American in Grand Rapids, pay for a new home, health care costs, education and pretty much anything else, just from the wealth of these two families.

Now, if so much could be done to not only alleviate suffering in Grand Rapids, from the wealth of just two families, plus the few other billionaires and the 600 millionaires in Kent County, but could radically improve the lives of everyone living in Grand Rapids, then wouldn't it stand to reason that so few people controlling so much wealth is an absolute injustice.

In addition, the class of people, the millionaires and the billionaires are constantly buying politicians to keep re-directing more public money into their pockets. So, the question we should be asking ourselves is why are we not rioting? Do we actually think that this much wealth was actually earned by these two families? We know their names and they have addresses.

A Public Hearing is scheduled for January 9 at the City Planning Commission for the DeVos created and financed AmplifyGR proposed development project

https://griid.org/2020/01/02/a-public-hearing-is-scheduled-for-january-9-at-the-city-planning-commission-for-the-devos-created-and-financed-amplifygr-proposed-development-project/

On Thursday, January 9th at 1pm, there will be a public hearing at the Grand Rapids Planning Commission for a new development project being proposed by AmplifyGR in

the Boston Square neighborhood. The public hearing will be held at 1120 Monroe Ave NW in the city's Development Center, in the Public Hearing Room on the 2nd floor.

This is the first concrete proposal that AmplifyGR has submitted to the City, since the public first became aware of their existence in May of 2017. **GRIID was the first to write about AmplifyGR** and the fact that is was a creation of the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation. AmplifyGR had been meeting with the Southtown Corridor Improvement District, based on documents we found from January of 2017. However, most of the people in the Boston Square neighborhood were completely unaware of the fact that the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation had been funding this new entity called AmplifyGR and was working **with the Rockford Construction Company to purchase 22 separate pieces of property** at the cost of $10 million. You can read **a breakdown of the property costs for all 22 pieces of land at this link**.

It is important to recognize that the DeVos/Rockford Construction land grab took place with little knowledge of residents in the area, yet AmplifyGR wants people to trust that they have the best intentions. Are we to believe that the wealthiest family in West Michigan has nothing but noble intentions? The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation and Rockford Construction Company, both white-owned and operated entities, have nothing but good intentions by spending $10 million to purchase land in a mostly black neighbor?

In **late June of 2017, AmplifyGR held its first public meeting**, with over 200 in attendance. People came with lots of concerns and questions about what was happening in their neighborhood without their knowledge. **A second meeting was then held in late July of 2017**, with even more pushback from the community. At one point during this second public meeting, someone asked what if there was 70% opposition to this project? The Executive Director of AmplifyGR, John Ippel responded by saying, "***even if 70% of the community opposed this, we would just have to get back up and move forward and do it better***." You could heard several people in the audience gasp in horror and the level of arrogance they heard coming from the AmplifyGR spokesperson.

After a few more meetings, AmplifyGR decided to put an end to public meetings and try a new tactic to engage people. After cancelling other public meetings AmplifyGR posted on the website the following statement:

"***Still, those of us on the front lines agree: If going slower is the price of getting this right… of NOT repeating the mistakes of the past… it's worth it. You're worth it. Our community is worth it. And our commitment and passion to achieving the above priorities has never been greater."***

One could certainly conclude that the DeVos create/funded entity was going to do whatever it is they set out to do, regardless of community pushback.

This tactical shift, by not holding town hall-style meetings, has been effective. What AmplifyGR has done is to hold open door gatherings, where there are refreshment, displays of project proposals and people there to answer questions from anyone who

has them. What this means is that people don't hear the questions or concerns being voiced by other people, since the interaction is more one on one. The problem with this meeting style is that it not only prevents people from hearing important questions/ objections, it denies people the opportunity to hear questions/objections that maybe they had never thought of. In addition, if there are people who raise hard questions, it is easier to isolate them, since they are asking these questions without any public response.

According to AmplifyGR, they have held three of these kinds of meetings, which were coordinated by the PR firm Lambert. You can read their **FAQ document for the meetings here**.

A few days ago, **MiBiz reported** on the proposed AmligyGR project. In that article, it states that AmplifyGR, "*has worked on the plans for the redevelopment project with Boston Square Together, which includes **Oakdale Neighbors**, a community development organization; the **Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative**; and the **Boston Square Neighborhood Association**."*

The Boston Square Neighborhood Association only has a Facebook page and there is no information on who sits on their board of directors. Oakdale Neighbors and the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative have both received substantial amounts of funding from various DeVos family foundations. Between 2013 and 2017, **Oakdale Neighbors has received a total of $273,500** from the DeVos family and the **Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative has received $1,070,800** from the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation alone. It would be hard for any reasonable person to think that either of these entities is not compromised in this process.

The Grand Rapids Planning Commission already has a packet for the January 9th public hearing, which you can **read here.** The pages that are specific to the AmplifyGR development proposal can be found on pages 67 through 343. Most of the documentations is made up of traffic data, but is was instructive to see that on pages 71 – 74, **Kurt Hassberger** has signed several documents giving permission to AmplifyGR to rezone parts of the Boston Square neighborhood. These page refer to Hassberger as the being connected to an entity called Boston Square Residential LLC. Hassberger is in fact **legal counsel for the Rockford Construction Company**, the same company that bought all of the property in the Boston Square neighborhood for $10 million in partnership with the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation. Upon further investigation, I found that **Boston Square Residential LLC's address** is 601 First Street NW, Grand Rapids, 49504, which is also the address for Rockford Construction.

The Public Hearing is Thursday, January 9 and 1pm, 1120 Monroe Ave NW in the city's Development Center, in the Public Hearing Room on the 2nd floor. This would be a great time for people to ask some poignant questions or make statements. GRIID will be there to report on the public hearing.

What about Reparations for the Boston Square neighborhood?

https://griid.org/2020/01/08/what-about-reparations-for-the-boston-square-neighborhood/

(*What follows is a letter I sent to the GR Planning Commission in response to the DeVos-created AmplifyGR proposal.)*

I am writing to you today to urge you to not approve the development proposal from AmplifyGR. My objections to the AmplifyGR 9-acre proposal for the Boston Square neighborhood are as follows:

First, do we really want to allow the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family, dictating development projects in neighborhoods throughout this city? So few people can spend more than $10 million to purchase the land they did in the Boston Square neighborhood. They purchased this land in 2015, but residents of that neighborhood did not find out about it until they went public with the non-profit they created in 2017, AmplifyGR. For all their talk about this proposal being led by community input, the DeVos-created AmplifyGR staff fail to acknowledge that the community had no say in their land grab in 2015. This is an important point I believe, since it means that the acquisition of $10 million worth of property in the Boston Square neighborhood puts the DeVos family in a position of power over the residents of that neighborhood. There is no equity or justice when one family can own this much property and then claim that they want to do right by the residents of the Boston Square neighborhood.

Second, another important point about the DeVos family is that they are worth billions. Their collective net worth is not easy to determine, but based on public documentation their collective worth is an estimate $10 billion. Of course, much of their family wealth was created through the Amway Corporation, which recruits individuals with a get rich quick message that is really nothing more than a pyramid scheme, where a few people at the top get rich off the work of others. See Stephen Butterfield's book, *Amway: The Cult of Free Enterprise.*

Third, the DeVos family also uses their wealth to influence public policy, at the federal, state and local level, primarily by contributing to candidates who will further their policy agenda in Kent County, in Lansing and in DC. According to the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, the DeVos family has contributed over $100 million to politicians since 1999. The politicians that the DeVos family has contributed to have consistently done the following:

> Keep minimum wages well below what people can actually live off of.
> Undermine and attack labor unions.
> Making tax laws to favor the super rich, while punishing working class families.
> Making Michigan a Right to Work State.
> Supporting politicians that voted for the deregulation of industries like banking.
> Supporting politicians who voted for bailing out Wall Street.

Getting school districts to no longer be financially responsible for public teacher pensions. They are attempting to do the same to public sector/government employees in the State of Michigan right now.
Pressuring local municipalities to provide massive subsidies to developers, which is means transfer public money over to companies like Rockford Construction.
Pushing for the privatization of public services.
Attacking public education in favor of Charter and other Private School systems.

All of this is to say that the billionaire class, like the DeVos family, has contributed significantly to creating a massive wealth gap in Grand Rapids. Now, they want to come to a neighborhood that has experienced tremendous poverty and disinvestment, which the DeVos family contributed to, all so they can play the savior role.

I understand what it is like to live in a neighborhood that has experienced disinvestment and structural racism. I lived in the Forgotten Corner Neighborhood on the near Southeast side of Grand Rapids for 27 years. I saw what happen to my neighborhood that has now been completely gentrified. The residents of the Boston Square neighborhood deserve to have better and affordable housing. The residents of the Boston Square neighborhood deserve to live in a community that is free of crime and free of predatory landlords. The residents of the Boston Square neighborhood could have all of that and more.

Reparations

Instead, I would propose something that would give the residents of the Boston Square neighborhood what they deserve AND remove the DeVos family from having any influence over the future of that neighborhood. The $10 million that DeVos/Rockford Construction has spent on land in the Boston Square area could be given directly to the people who live in that neighborhood, in a Community Land Trust or however the people who live there decide. In addition, the DeVos family could give an additional $20 million to the residents of the Boston Square neighborhood, money that has been taken out of the neighborhood over decades by the very same policies that the DeVos family has benefitted from. What I am suggesting is that the **DeVos family pay reparations ($30 million)** for the financial harm they have caused in neighborhoods like the Boston Square neighborhood. This would not only give those residents complete and total control over their future, it would fulfill an element of justice for communities who have historically been disenfranchised by white collar theft and institutionalized racism. Once the reparations are paid, AmplifyGR could dissolve, especially since the residents of the Boston Square neighborhood won't have any need for such an entity.

The AmplifyGR proposal, conflicts of interest and the value of a Community Benefits Agreement

https://griid.org/2020/01/13/the-amplifygr-proposal-conflicts-of-interest-and-the-value-of-community-benefits-agreements/

On Thursday, the number of people who came to the GR Planning Commission meeting to weigh in on the DeVos-created AmplifyGR development proposal, spill out into the hallway. In fact, the Planning Commission had to set up a TV on another floor, just so people could hear what was being said during the proceedings.

The Planning Commissioners began with what is standard, asking if there is any potential conflicts of interest with the commissioners. One commissioner, Zack Verhulst, said that his father works for Rockford Construction. Another commissioner asked if he had talked to his father about this project and the commissioner said, no. No one on the Planning Commission had any further questions and it was then decided that there was no conflict of interest.

What those in attendance of the GR Planning Commission Public Hearing might not have known is that Rockford Construction, along with the DeVos Foundation, had begun the process of buying up properties in 2015 (spending roughly $10 million) without the knowledge of residents in the Boston Square area, until AmplifyGR went public in the 2017.

As to the conflict of interest, the planning commissioner was not only related someone with Rockford Construction, the person in question is Mike Verhulst, who is the Vice President of Rockford Construction. Rockford Construction stands to profit handsomely, if the City of Grand Rapids approves the project. Rockford Construction's CEO, Mike VanGessel, was present at the GR Planning Commission meeting as well, although none of the news media mentioned this and they completely ignored the potential conflict of interest with Planning Commissioner Zack Verhulst.

Some of the **news media did report** that there were people in support of the project, as well as detractors. This writer counted 12 people who spoke in favor of the project and 8 people who voiced opposition. Those opposing the project brought up issues of displacement and gentrification, but the most consistent comment was to ask the Planning Commissioners to hold off on making a decision, since many people felt like there were too many unanswered questions about the project, or that too many residents in the surrounding area had not been engaged in the process. The public comment period was messy at times, even uncomfortable, but democracy is often messy, especially when people could only have three minutes to express themselves.

There were also several supporters of the project who used the argument that those who aren't from the neighborhood should either not have a say or that some of the anti-AmplifyGR voices were the loudest. It is difficult to determine who the "loud" anti-AmplifyGR voices are, since they haven't really been reported on in the news media. In contrast, I would argue that the loudest voices in this entire process are the ones with the most power, the DeVos/Rockford Construction/AmplifyGR voices. They are the ones

who have engaged in a massive land grab in the area and they are the ones who have dictated the process from 2015 until now.

On the issue of not allowing people who are not from the neighborhood to have a say in this process, it is instructive that it is rarely acknowledged that DeVos and Rockford Construction are not from the neighborhood either. I do think that what happens in the Boston Square area and in Southtown in general, should be decided primarily by those who live in that area. I have stated this repeatedly **in recent posts, but I also think that there are other ways for the residents of the Boston Square area to get what they want without subjecting themselves to the dictates of the private sector**.

However, those who presented from the AmplifyGR team made it clear that they would be seeking state funding for the housing projects they wish to develop in the Boston Square area. If they are seeking to use public money (likely millions by the time the project is completed), then it seems reasonable that the public should have a say in how their tax dollars will be used to support projects like the AmplifyGR development proposal. To argue that the public should not have a say in how public dollars are used is just another form of Neo-liberal capitalism, which essentially give primacy to the private sector.

In reading much of the commentary on the AmplifyGR proposal on social media, one suggestion that keeps coming up is that those who live in the Boston Square area should seeking a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA). For people who live in neighborhoods where development projects are being proposed, a CBA is a way for people to leverage their collective power to get certain things/agreements in the process. This **link** provides some clear examples of what a Community Benefits Agreements could look like.

A Community Benefits Agreement might be the best possible outcome for those who live in the Boston Square area, but the proposed development from the DeVos-created AmplifyGR still has to get approval from the Grand Rapids City Commission. It does seem likely that the GR City Commission will support the proposal, especially with recent news coverage around the lack of investment in the southeast part of Grand Rapids. We will continue to follow this story as it unfolds and let people know when the AmplifyGR proposal goes before the City Commission.

Will the new AmplifyGR Director of Economic Opportunities assist residents to create unions or a Community Benefits Agreement?

https://griid.org/2020/02/24/will-the-new-amplifygr-director-of-economic-opportunities-assist-residents-to-created-unions-or-a-community-benefits-agreement/

Last week, the DeVos-created and DeVos-funded organization AmplifyGR, announced that they hired a new staff person, someone who will, according to Facebook

page, *"further build a business community that is reflective of the neighborhoods we serve."*

Danielle M. Williams was hired by AmplifyGR to be the new Director of Economic Opportunities. According to the **AmplifyGR website**:

"With the addition of Danielle to our team, Amplify GR is poised to continue connecting entrepreneurs with the resources needed to build their businesses," said Jon Ippel, executive director for Amplify GR. "Danielle's expertise will be an asset in strengthening economic pathways for neighbors, as she has been an integral player in large corporate teams, nonprofit structures and local municipal work. Her experience working in these environments is valuable to our partnerships with businesses and community entrepreneurs."

Williams started her own consulting agency in 2017, **DMWilliams Consulting, LLC**. Based on the information from the consulting firm website, the new AmplifyGR employee has most of her experience working with the business community.

The AmplifyGR website also says of the new position that Danielle Williams will have, stating:

As Director of Economic Opportunities, Williams will identify and help activate business ownership and employment opportunities for neighbors. Williams will work with employers to ensure their business practices align with the organization's employment goals including:

Employing neighborhood talent
$15 per hour wage with benefits
Career advancement opportunities
Felon-friendly hiring

Each of these four things sound good on paper, but how will they translate into reality? How will this new position be able to leverage what workers will based on the four things listed above?

This new position, along with all of the other AmplifyGR staff job descriptions is very focused on creating businesses and entrepreneurs. This of course is not surprising, since this is exactly what the DeVos family was founded on with the Amway corporation.

The best way to leverage employee power is to form a labor union. Labor unions have 150 years of experience in working to get better wages, benefits and to create workplace democracy. If workers from the neighborhood are hired, what guarantees will they have that the businesses that will be partnering with AmplifyGR will hire ex-felons, provide a minimum $15 an hour wage or employment advancement opportunities? Michigan is an employment at will state. This means that an employer may generally terminate an employment relationship at any time and for any reason, unless a law or agreement provides otherwise. If people were unionized, then they would have more power to fight against termination of employees.

However, it is not likely that a DeVos-created and DeVos-funded entity such as AmplifyGR would help residents of the Boston Square Neighborhood to be part of a union. We can conclude this, since the DeVos family has a long history of opposing labor unions of any kind. In addition to opposing labor unions, the DeVos family was instrumental in passing a Right to Work law in Michigan in 2012, pushing to eliminate public education teacher pensions and working to fight against public sector employee benefits throughout the state. The DeVos family does this by financing candidates which share the same contempt for unions as the DeVos family does and by also crafting anti-union policies through organizations like the West Michigan Policy Forum.

Unions would also be extremely beneficial to those who live in the southeast part of Grand Rapids, where AmplifyGR operates, in terms of housing. A tenant union would be a powerful tool to fight against predatory landlords and property management companies, which are not being challenged anywhere in the city of Grand Rapids.

Some of these ideas were suggested during the 2017 town hall forums that AmplifyGR hosted, along with a whole other host of ideas, like Community Land Trusts and a Community Benefits Agreement (CBE). A Community Benefits Agreement fits in with neighborhood control, which could include the four areas that AmplifyGR says their new staff person would try to implement. In fact, a CBE agreement could include many more demands and it is something that should be pursued for the future viability of the neighborhood. Before any development happens, residents could demand a Community Benefits Agreement before agreeing to what it is that AmplifyGR has proposed to do in the Boston Square Neighborhood.

Based on the 3 community meetings that AmplifyGR held in 2019, centered around their 9-acre development proposal, there are just 2 references to jobs in their **27 page document**. Those two references to jobs were, jobs in the neighborhood and “good paying jobs.” Neither of these references expanded to what local jobs or good paying jobs meant, which is exactly what a Community Benefits Agreement could do for those who live in the Boston Square Neighborhood.

The City of Grand Rapids has yet to make a decision on the AmplifyGR proposal and before they do make a decision there will likely be a public hearing on the matter. Pushing for a Community Benefits Agreement is still possible. A community Benefits Agreement could provide the kind of long-term leverage that residents of that neighborhood will need, especially when faced with the deep pockets of the DeVos family.

The Educational Network of Greater Grand Rapids is another front group for the DeVos family’s commitment to a Neo-Liberal Education model

https://griid.org/2020/02/26/the-educational-network-of-greater-grand-rapids-is-another-front-group-for-the-devos-familys-commitment-to-a-neo-liberal-education-model/

Has anyone ever heard of a group called the **Educational Network of Greater Grand Rapids**, as known as EDNET?

The Educational Network of Greater Grand Rapids has only been around since 2017 and states that their purpose is to, "*support teachers and administrators in providing excellent and equitable educational experiences for all children in Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and Wyoming."*

The mission statement sounds nice and all, but are the school districts themselves supposed to provide the necessary support to teachers and administrators?

Upon further examination of EDNET, their website states that this project is an initiative of the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation. Notice that it doesn't say that EDNET is funded by the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, but ***is an initiative of the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation***.

This certainly made me suspicious when I read who was behind the organization. Upon further **investigation** I read the following:

We partner with nationally acclaimed organizations to bring new insights, strategies, and resources to urban educators and administrators in public, private, and charter schools here in West Michigan. And we connect schools across districts to facilitate the sharing of transformative thinking and resources.

Ok, so what nationally acclaimed organizations does EDNET partner with? There are three national organizations that EDNET partners with:

Leading Educators
West Michigan Leadership Academy
New Teacher Center

Leading Educators says that they began in 2008 in New Orleans, after Hurricane Katrina. Their website doesn't talk about what exactly they did during that time period, but numerous writers have documented that the public school system in New Orleans was dismantled and has been replaced primarily by Charter Schools. (See Naomi Klein's ***The Shock Doctrine***)

Leading Educators **works with 8 cities across the country**, including Grand Rapids. Here is what they have to say about Grand Rapids:

*With the support of the **Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation**, Leading Educators expanded to Greater Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the first cohort of principals and teacher leaders began training in the summer of 2017. Our approach is the backbone of an ambitious strategy to significantly increase academic achievement among*

economically-disadvantaged young people who attend the nearly 120 district, charter, and religious schools in the Greater Grand Rapids urban area. This work uses the greatest asset within Grand Rapids' urban schools—experienced educators—by supporting up to 300 teacher leaders along with their principals and district administrators. This approach will provide approximately 2,400 classroom teachers with self-driven professional development opportunities, ultimately impacting 40,000 students.

In looking at who funds Leading Educators, you guessed it…..The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, **listed with other Neo-Liberal Education funders** such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.

The West Michigan Leadership Academy **says** that it, "*works to build the capacity of school and system leaders in West Michigan to envision and enact the structures, systems, and practices necessary to realize equitable outcomes for all students."*

The West Michigan Leadership Academy is actually part of the NYC Leadership Academy, which just has a subsection on their website for the West Michigan Leadership Academy. One of the major funders listed for the NYC Leadership Academy is he Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation.

The third partner listed by the Educational Network of Greater Grand Rapids is the New Teacher Center. The work of the New Teacher Center sounds very similar to the other groups working with EDNET, stating:

NTC is dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders. We build capacity within districts and district partners to drive student learning, teacher effectiveness, and teacher and leadership development. We do this by providing PreK-12 teachers and school leaders with the skills and supports needed to create optimal learning environments that accelerate students' academic and social emotional success.

The New Teacher Center also does policy work, particularly at the state level. In 2018, they **received a $12.8 million grant from the Department of Education**, and while the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation is not listed as one of their funders, **some of the same ideologically-driven foundations are major donors**.

What the Education Network of Greater Grand Rapids means to this writer is that it exists as an entity that was started by the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, partners with other national groups that are either funded by the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation or other rich people who share the same commitment as DeVos, to the Neo-Liberal Education model. If you or someone you know is involved in the Educational Network of Greater Grand Rapids, you might want to ask them exactly why they are participating in a project for teachers that was started by a family that has consistently been opposed to public education and has provided millions of dollars to candidates who can alter state policies on education, particularly in Michigan.

The COVID-19 crisis in Grand Rapids and the Wealth of the Meijer & DeVos families

https://griid.org/2020/04/02/the-covid-19-crisis-in-grand-rapids-and-the-wealth-of-the-meijer-devos-families/

It has been clear since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that the US government has decided to not really meet the needs of the public, particularly those most vulnerable to contracting the virus.

The so-called stimulus bill, while providing some mild relief for millions of Americans, was mostly a massive bailout for Wall Street, corporate America and the investor class. The current crisis has further exposed the fallacies of capitalism and the priorities of the federal government. There is not a lack of funding to make sure that everyone is safe, has access to health care, food and other basic needs during this crisis. The issue then, is about priorities, particularly how the Capitalist class is prioritized at the expense of everyone else.

In Grand Rapids, there are thousands of people who are out of work, don't have enough food and are faced with housing costs they cannot meet. There are hundreds who are homeless, and thousands who are faced with potentially high health care costs if they get tested for COVID-19. There are literally thousands of people who are worried about whether or not they can afford to be tested, thus increasing the likelihood that many will not get tested out of fear they will go into massive debt over health care costs. This is very, very frightening. People should not have to worry about the costs of testing for the virus and they should not have to worry about have equal access to health care resources should they test positive.

However, the hospitals in Grand Rapids are already acknowledging that they may not have adequate resources to handle the potential numbers of infected. This reality also exposes the failure of the for-profit health care system, which puts profits above the well being of people. Here again, it is not a matter of money, but of priorities.

For instance, if we look at the wealth of the two richest families in Grand Rapids, the DeVos and Meijer families, which according to the 2017 Forbes 400 list, was a **combined wealth of $12.6 Billion**. Doug & Hank Meijer were worth $7.2 Billion in 2018 and Richard DeVos was worth $5.4 Billion in 2018, the same year he died. Now, this doesn't include the wealth of the other DeVos family members, which would easily put **the total over $15 Billion between these two families**.

What the combined wealth of the Meijer and DeVos family could translate into, is that NO ONE in Grand Rapids would have to worry about not working during the COVID-19 crisis, EVERYONE would have access to testing, proper health care, food, housing and any other basic needs. The JW Marriott just announced that they were closing, which means there are hundreds of empty bed that could be used by individuals and families who are facing a housing crisis right now. The wealth of the Meijer and DeVos families

could translate into our ability in Kent County to truly flatten the curve and minimize the number of deaths from COVID-19.

Unfortunately, we know that the Meijer and DeVos families will not give up significant amounts of their combined $15 Billion in order to save lives in Kent County. These two families have demonstrated for decades that they are more interested in maintaining and expanding their wealth than they are in the well being of all residents of Kent County.

People reading this might be saying, “well, it’s their money, they can do what they want with it.” **First**, this completely ignores the fact that these two families made their wealth off the labor of others. **Secondly**, and more to the current crisis, the Meijer and DeVos families do not have the right to maintain their disgusting amounts of wealth, while hundreds or thousands in Grand Rapids die from the COVID-19 virus. Their failure to act in the midst of this pandemic would be their real legacy.

As an alternative, if you are willing to contribute a few dollars to provide some relief to people who are currently struggling to survive in Grand Rapids, please consider donating to the **Grand Rapids Area Mutual Aid Network**.

Who is behind the AmplifyGR COVID-19 Relief Fund?

https://griid.org/2020/04/14/who-is-behind-the-amplifygr-covid-19-relief-fund/

On Monday, the DeVos-funded entity, AmplifyGR, announced that they were now providing some relief funding due to the COVID-19 crisis.

The relief funds will be available only for those who live in the neighborhoods where AmplifyGR operates, namely the Oakdale, Boston Square, Madison Square area in the southeast part of the city.

For those who live in the neighborhoods that AmplifyGR serves, there are also some restrictions. According to what AmplifyGR posted on their Facebook page, those who qualify for COVID-19 relief funds must meet the following qualifications:

> A registered address in the Oakdale/Boston Square, Madison Square or northern Garfield Park neighborhoods
> Recently became unemployed or laid off,
> Had an annual household income $50,000 or less before being laid off
> Worked at a business with 250 employees or less.

The announcement also stated the following:

A generous group of Kent County residents have partnered with a nonprofit called the Family Independence Initiative (FII) to create a fund for families that are experiencing financial hardship because of COVID-19. Amplify GR, is piloting this program with FII to identify families who may need some financial assistance during this time. This is a great opportunity to CONNECT neighbors who are experiencing financial hardship to a cash assistance fund.

Now, we don't know who the group of generous Kent County residents are that are partnering with the Family Independence Initiative, but based on what the philosophy of the Family Independence Initiative is, we could make some sound conclusions.

The **Family Independence Initiative** states on their website that they want to "make poverty escapable." Sounds good, but when you investigate further, the Family Independence Initiative (FII) is all about providing capital to families in poverty so they can create wealth, primarily through entrepreneurism. In other words, the FII works with family experiencing poverty, as long as they want to start businesses. There is nothing on the FII site that discusses the massive wealth gap that exists in the US, labor exploitation, how the tax structure has been created by the wealthy to serve the wealthy, and there is nothing about how structural racism and slavery have resulted in African Americans being screwed by capitalism from the beginning. Since structural racism and White Supremacy are not something the Family Independence Initiative are opposed to, they don't advocate reparations for African Americans.

However, the COVID-19 Relief Fund that is being offered through AmplifyGR, is different than what the Family Independence Initiative normally does. These new funds, specifically for people affected by the coronavirus, are being distributed through a partnership between Stand Together and the Family Independence Initiative.

Stand Together, which is really the Stand Together Foundation, is an entity created by Charles Koch, of the Koch Brothers. The goal of the Stand Together Foundation is to, "break the cycle of poverty by supporting the creative solutions of individuals and communities around the country. Our goal is to help effective, high-performing social entrepreneurs maximize impact—to help them help more—by bringing a business-like approach to the social sector." Sound familiar?

The Stand Together Foundation and the Family Independence Initiative are partnering together to provide direct cash assistance to families during COVID-19, using the tag line "GiveTogetherNow#.

Now, I am all in favor of people receiving any kind of relief because of the COVID-19 crisis, but it is instructive to me that all the entities involved – AmplifyGR, the Family Independence Initiative and the Stand Together Foundation – are organizations that are funded by some of the most conservative families in the country – the Koch family and the DeVos family. More importantly, both the Koch and DeVos families have been shoving public policy down the throats of people in this country, public policy that has been anti-labor, anti-government regulation, anti-public education, anti-poor and racist as hell. Therefore, it is important that we recognize and come to terms with who is actually behind this COVID-19 relief fund and what their broader agenda might be.

The DeVos Family's strategic use of the Kent County Relief Fund

https://griid.org/2020/04/29/the-devos-familys-strategic-use-of-the-kent-county-relief-fund/

Two weeks ago, we posted **an article about a COVID-19 relief fund that the DeVos-funded AmplifyGR organization** had announced. We noted in that article that the relief project was in partnership with the Family Independence Initiative and the Koch brothers created group, Stand Together.

In that initial announcement from AmplifyGR, they stated:

A generous group of Kent County residents have partnered with a nonprofit called the Family Independence Initiative (FII) to create a fund for families that are experiencing financial hardship because of COVID-19.

Well, we now know that the "generous group of Kent County residents," is actually referring to members of the DeVos family. The project is called the Kent County Relief Fund and the funding has come from 4 different DeVos family foundations – the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation**, the **Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation**, the **Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation** and the **CDV5 Foundation**.

Now, it's not just the funding that the DeVos family is providing, the address for the Kent County Relief Fund is 48 Fountain St. NW, Grand Rapids, which is the address for the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation.

As of a few days ago, the Kent County Relief Fund post an **update** stating that the fund had given away all of its available resources. People still apply, but they will be put on a waiting list. The **update** also noted that the Kent County Relief Fund has given $1,679,000, which seems like a lot of money. However, considering the wealth of the DeVos family, this is like contributing $20 for most of us. In fact, **as we reported 10 days ago**, the DeVos family members, and all other millionaires and billionaires in Kent County, will get on average $1.7 million (each) in a tax break as part of the Care Act. Therefore, between the four DeVos foundations that have providing the funding for the Kent County Relief Fund, they would collectively be receiving $6.8 million in tax breaks for doing nothing. It seems to be that the DeVos foundations should provide another $5 million to the relief fund, since they got these funds from an unjust tax policy that was crafted by the same politicians that the DeVos family funds through campaign contributions.

There are also several other important things to point out about the Kent County Relief Fund.

First, the **application process for the Kent County Relief Fund** has very similar conditions that we see in other charity-based assistance. People have to present some form of government issued ID and provide tax returns or a recent pay stub. This kind of

scrutiny carries with it the same shame-based conditions that those experiencing poverty too often experience.

Second, **the community partner list provided on the Kent County Relief Fund's website** is very instructive. These nonprofit supporters and partners are not just random entities, rather they were deliberately selected since virtually all of these groups have some major DeVos connection.

This means that of the 23 partners working with the Kent County Relief Fund, 20 of them have a direct connection to the DeVos family. The only nonprofits partners that do not have a direct DeVos family connection are Dwelling Place, River City Scholars Charter Academy (part of the National Heritage Academies – J.C. Huizenga) and Michigan Works.

The fact that the majority of nonprofit partners working with the DeVos-created Kent County Relief Fund should tell us something. First, the DeVos family is very strategic and does not like working with entities that they cannot control. Second, most of these groups are Christian in orientation, which is what the DeVos family prefers. Third, the nonprofits are not known for challenging systems of power and oppression in Grand Rapids, which means they do not exist to fight the structural or root causes of the problems of the people they serve.

Lastly, while I am glad for the families that have received the $500 funds provided by the Kent County Relief Fund, but make no mistake about it, this project is designed only as a form of charity. More importantly, the very people that the Kent County Relief Fund has provided money to, are the same families who have been negatively affected by the policies that were created by the politicians that the DeVos family has funded over the decades, policies which have benefited the millionaire/billionaire class and punished poor families, especially families of color.

No amount of money that the DeVos family contributes to charity groups through their foundations can undo the harm that their political funding creates

https://griid.org/2020/05/14/no-amount-of-money-that-the-devos-family-contributes-to-charity-groups-through-their-foundations-can-undo-the-harm-that-their-political-funding-creates/

Over the years one of the major points we have been making about how the DeVos family uses their money, is that while their foundations provide funding to social service and charity organizations, the amount of money they give to political candidates with the Republican Party is to push policies that actually create the social, political and

economic conditions that results in people having to utilize social service & charity-based resources.

The most recent election cycle demonstrates not only how much money the DeVos family contributes to the GOP, but what their money is buying in terms of policy.

In doing a search on the site **OpenSecrets.org**, I found 39 entries for DeVos family members just in the first quarter of 2020. The family members listed are Dick DeVos, Doug DeVos, Dan DeVos, Maria DeVos, Pamela DeVos and Cheri DeVos.

The total amount contributed by these members of the DeVos family in the first quarter of 2020 to Republican candidates and a Republican committee was $130,800. Of course, this amount doesn't include money the contributes to PACs, Dark money groups like Donor's Trust or funds to candidates running for state and local offices. Here is a breakdown of the candidates and committees that the DeVos family members contributed to just in the first quarter of 2020:

Great American Committee $30,000
Peter Meijer $22,400
Randy Feenstra $16,800
Jessica Taylor $14,000
Esther Joy King $16,800
Genevieve Collins $16,800
Beth Van Duyne $14,000

Looking at where the members of the DeVos family contributed their political money certainly reveals a great deal to confirm the point made at the beginning of this article. The **Great American Committee**, "*supports candidates and elected officials who fight with the President in making America Great again, and is led by our Chairman, Vice President Mike Pence*."

There is a place on the Great American Committee site to make contributions and only links to the twitter account of President Trump and Vice President Pence. The Trump administration has made it a point to increase the gap between the very rich and everyone else, thus pushing more families into poverty. In addition to the economic harm, his administration has openly promoted White Supremacy, misogyny, ablism, homophobia/transphobia and contempt for immigrants. The amount of harm this administration has done is hard to quantify, but this is exactly what the DeVos family is paying for – violence, harm, hatred and suffering.

We could stop there to make our point about how the DeVos family finances candidates that once elected push policies that hurt working people, immigrants and the black community, but lets at least look at the candidates they contributed to in the first quarter of 2020.

Peter Meijer is running for the 3rd Congressional District in Michigan. If you look at **his issues page**, you can see clearly what the DeVos family members are paying for – anti-abortion, merit-based immigration policies, defense of gun owners, small government,

deregulation of the economy, a tax system that benefits the super rich, school choice, militarized border and emphatic support for Israel.

Randy Feenstra is running for the 4th Congressional District of Iowa. **Randy says** he is a champion of taxpayers, wants to stop illegal immigration, protect Christian values and protect gun owners.

Jessica Taylor was running for a Congressional seat in Alabama, but lost in the primary. Taylor hates Socialism and **regularly used a flamethrower in her videos**, with a Trump sticker prominently displayed. This is what members of the DeVos family were endorsing with their money.

Esther Joy King is running for the 17th Congressional District of Illinois. **Her priorities are** supporting agribusiness, supporting a market-based health care system, continuing the anti-immigration policies of the Trump administration, for the US to be the world's military leader, the system of capitalism, opposing women's reproductive rights and supporting gun owners. This is what the DeVos family members are endorsing with their money.

Genevieve Collins is running for the 32nd Congressional District of Texas. Her **website features Genevieve exercising**. **On the issues**, Genevieve is committed to the economic system of capitalism, school choice, a strong military, a market-based health care system, defense of Israel, a continuation of Trumps immigration policies, opposes women's reproductive rights and supporting the fossil fuel industry, particularly in Texas.

Beth Van Duyne is running for the 24th Congressional District of Texas. Her website says she is a Christian, Conservative, Mother. Beth doesn't have issues listed, **but writes**:

I've been asked what prompted me to run for public office; the answer is simple – my children. We live in a very fragile time for our nation, our families, and the future of the American Dream. Socialism is on the rise, our border crisis has never been worse, and we face constant threats from hostile nations willing to use cyber-attacks, nuclear weapons, and terrorist jihad. When I think about my two children, I want them to have the same opportunities in life that I did; I want them to be able to grow up safe and proud of our country.

This is also what the members of the DeVos family are buying with their money, which is to say they are buying hatred of immigrants, hatred of the LGBTQ community, white supremacy, capitalism, US imperialism and an end to women's reproductive rights.

No amount of money that the DeVos family contributes to charity groups through their foundations can undo the harm that their political funding creates.

The Billionaire class continues to grow during the COVID-19 pandemic, even in Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2020/05/20/the-billionaire-class-continues-to-grow-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-even-in-grand-rapids/

A new report from the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) shows that the wealth gap in the US continues to grow, with more billionaires, many of which have been profiting from the COVID-19 crisis.

The report, entitled, **Billionaire Bonanza 2020: Wealth Windfalls, Tumbling Taxes, and Pandemic Profiteers**, demonstrates that the economic system of capitalism benefits a very small percentage of people, people who use their wealth and power to exploit everyone else and to make sure that their wealth will continue to expand with their ability to purchase public policy.

Here are just 2 key indicators from the report about the Billionaire class:

> Between 1990 and 2020, U.S. billionaire wealth soared 1,130 percent in 2020 dollars, an increase more than 200 times greater than the 5.37 percent growth of U.S. median wealth over this same period.
> Between 1980 and 2018, the tax obligations of America's billionaires, measured as a percentage of their wealth, decreased 79 percent.

The analysis of the report also provides us with critical information that tells us who really runs this country. The first critical analysis point has to do with how the billionaire class buys policy, which benefits their interests.

In their 2018 study, Billionaires and Stealth Politics, political scientists Benjamin Page, Jason Seawright, and Matthew Lacombe found that billionaires overwhelmingly favor cutting their own taxes and reducing social safety net benefits. Their political contributions, whether they go to Democrats or Republicans, reflect these preferences. Billionaire dollars, in short, are fraying our social safety net. To add to the insult: ***Working-class Americans now pay, after the billionaire-backed GOP tax cuts, a higher percentage of their income in taxes than billionaires****.*

*Billionaires are paying millions to dodge billions in taxes, a dynamic that leaves far fewer resources available to support programs that help ordinary people. Multimillionaires and billionaires are bankrolling an entire "****wealth defense industry****" of professionals — tax lawyers, accountants, wealth managers — who help hide mega fortunes in offshore tax havens and dynasty trusts. With trillions in otherwise taxable income stashed overseas, middle- and working-class taxpayers who lack access to these tax-dodging mechanisms are left covering a larger share of the U.S. tax burden.*

A second major point in the reports analysis contrasts the increase in the number of billionaires in the US, along with the amount of wealth they now control and then contrasts that with average US families.

In 1990, there were 66 billionaires in the US, but in 2020 there are 614. The report states:

Between 1990 and 2020, the U.S. billionaire class has seen its net worth increase over 1,130 percent. Meanwhile, U.S. median household net worth between 1989 and 2016 grew by a mere 5.37 percent. Billionaire wealth has grown 210 times faster than median wealth.

When you contrast the wealth of the billionaire class with everyone else, it is rather astounding.

The concentration of wealth at the top contrasts starkly with the number of households living on the edge. Even before the current economic crisis, a growing number of U.S. households had zero or negative net worth (meaning they owed more than they owned). These "underwater" households increased as a share of the U.S. total from 15.5 percent in 1983 to 21.2 percent in 2016. For people of color, the trend has been even more disturbing. Over 32 percent of Latino families and 37 percent of black families have zero or negative wealth.

A third major point in the IPS report makes it clear that there are several of the members of the billionaire class that have been profiting from the COVID-19 pandemic. From the report:

This year's Forbes report examines billionaire wealth as of March 18, 2020, a bit later than the February dates fixed upon in the magazine's previous 33 annual reports. By April 5, two-plus weeks after March 18, U.S. billionaires had seen their collective wealth rise back to $3.017 trillion, and by April 10 their wealth had surged to $3.229 trillion, surpassing the 2019 level. Between March 18 — the near bottom point of the pandemic financial swoon — and April 10, 2020, U.S. billionaire wealth rebounded by $282 billion.

The Jeff Bezos Wealth Surge is an unprecedented dynamic in the history of modern markets. Tracking Bezos' wealth requires a real-time hour-by-hour tracker. As of the publication of this report, Bezos' wealth has increased over $25 billion since January 1, 2020 and $12 billion since February 21st, 2020, the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to a recent piece on CommonDreams.org, despite Bezos $30 billion increase in wealth since January 1st, 2020, his company Amazon will stop paying workers the $2 an hour wage on June 1st, that the workers won on March 16th at the beginning of the pandemic.

In addition to Jeff Bezos, other billionaires that have profited from the COVID-19 pandemic are Elon Musk (Tesla CEO), Eric Yuan (ZOOM CEO), Steve Ballmer (former Microsoft CEO) and John Albert Sobrato (Silicon Valley real estate mogul).

Grand Rapids Billionaires: DeVos and Meijer

The DeVos and Meijer families are not the only billionaires in Grand Rapids, but they are the wealthiest and the families that have tremendous political influence.

According to the 2017 Forbes 400 list, the **combined wealth of these two families was $12.6 Billion** – Doug & Hank Meijer were worth $7.2 Billion in 2018 and Richard DeVos was worth $5.4 Billion in 2018, the same year he died. Now, this doesn't include the wealth of the other DeVos family members, which would easily put **the total over $15 Billion between these two families**.

What the combined wealth of the Meijer and DeVos family could translate into, is that NO ONE in Grand Rapids would have to worry about not working during the COVID-19 crisis, EVERYONE would have access to testing, proper health care, food, housing and any other basic needs. The JW Marriott just announced that they were closing, which means there are hundreds of empty bed that could be used by individuals and families who are facing a housing crisis right now. The wealth of the Meijer and DeVos families could translate into our ability in Kent County to truly flatten the curve and minimize the number of deaths from COVID-19.

Unfortunately, we know that the Meijer and DeVos families will not give up significant amounts of their combined $15 Billion in order to save lives in Kent County. These two families have demonstrated for decades that they are more interested in maintaining and expanding their wealth than they are in the well being of all residents of Kent County.

Yes, it is true that the DeVos family has contributed a few million to the **Kent County Relief Fund**, but that is like you and I donating $10.

People reading this might be saying, "well, it's their money, they can do what they want with it." **First**, this completely ignores the fact that these two families made their wealth off the labor of others. **Secondly**, and more to the current crisis, the Meijer and DeVos families do not have the right to maintain their disgusting amounts of wealth, while countless numbers of people in Grand Rapids die from the COVID-19 virus. **Their failure to act in the midst of this pandemic would be their real legacy**.

If we don't want the DeVos family to own our community, then we need to take away their political an economic power

https://griid.org/2020/09/09/if-we-dont-want-the-devos-family-to-own-our-community-then-we-need-to-take-away-their-political-an-economic-power/

Over the past several weeks we have written a **5 Part series** on the contributions of the DeVos family foundations based on 2018 data from the online resource GuideStar.

We talked a great deal about how their foundation contributions are strategically aligned with their political contributions, in order to further their ideological interests and to wage class warfare on the masses.

Today, we want to take a more systems approach to looking at the five DeVos family foundations, by looking at how these foundations are financially beneficial to the DeVos family.

First, it is important to note that the DeVos family foundations have millions in assets, while only contributing a small percentage of their assets on an annual basis. For instance, in 2018, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation had $71.5 million in that foundation, but only contributed just under $9 million that year. We nee to understand that one of the reasons that members of the Capitalist Class put their money in foundations is to avoid having to pay taxes on that wealth.

Tax policy since the 1950s has increasingly benefited members of the Capitalist Class, and the funding that Congress has provided since the pandemic began, has primarily benefited the wealthiest. In **April, we reported on** how the super rich, because of tax policy loop holes, would benefit massively from the Cares Act.

We wrote:

*More than 80 percent of the benefits of a tax change tucked into the **coronavirus relief package** Congress passed last month will go to those who earn more than $1 million annually, according to a report by a nonpartisan congressional body expected to be released Tuesday. This information is based on the research done by group known as the **Joint Committee on Taxation** (JCT), a nonpartisan Congressional body. **Forbes reported** that the 43,000 millionaires and billionaires in the US will get on average $1.7 million because of the Cares Act.*

Of course, the DeVos family is the wealthiest in Grand Rapids, so they would benefit the most from this policy decision.

Now, lets be clear, the DeVos family and their billionaire friends have a ridiculous amount of money. **In May of this year, we wrote** about the wealth of the DeVos and Meijer families an what that could mean for Kent County:

The DeVos and Meijer families are not the only billionaires in Grand Rapids, but they are the wealthiest and the families that have tremendous political influence.

*According to the 2017 Forbes 400 list, the **combined wealth of these two families was $12.6 Billion** – Doug & Hank Meijer were worth $7.2 Billion in 2018 and Richard DeVos was worth $5.4 Billion in 2018, the same year he died. Now, this doesn't include the wealth of the other DeVos family members, which would easily put **the total over $15 Billion between these two families**.*

What the combined wealth of the Meijer and DeVos family could translate into, is that NO ONE in Grand Rapids would have to worry about not working during the COVID-19 crisis, EVERYONE would have access to testing, proper health care, food, housing and any other basic needs. The JW Marriott just announced that they were closing, which means there are hundreds of empty bed that could be used by individuals and families who are facing a housing crisis right now. The wealth of the

Meijer and DeVos families could translate into our ability in Kent County to truly flatten the curve and minimize the number of deaths from COVID-19.

Unfortunately, we know that the Meijer and DeVos families will not give up significant amounts of their combined $15 Billion in order to save lives in Kent County. ***These two families have demonstrated for decades that they are more interested in maintaining and expanding their wealth than they are in the well being of all residents of Kent County.***

It is important that we see the wealth of families, like the DeVos family, not just about money, but about power. I was on a panel a few years back, at a national non-profit conference that was being hosted in Grand Rapids. The panel session was entitled, ***Grassroots Responses to Big Philanthropy: Grand Rapids Activism in the Shadow of Amway, ArtPrize and DeVos****.*

The basic premise of what I discussed in this panel session was that the DeVos family uses their wealth in an extremely strategic fashion, with some of the main goals being:

Contribute funding to organizations that share their ideological worldview.

Use the contributions to non-profits as PR leverage, despite the fact that none of those non-profits are challenging the root causes of the injustice they have organized around.

Use the contributions to religious groups, centers of education and non-profits in order to manage content and practices in such a way as to discourage these entities from being involved in fighting systems of power and oppression.

One of the reasons why I chose to monitor and investigate the power of families, like the DeVos family, is because it is important that we understand how systems of power and privilege function, and I can't think of a better example in West Michigan than the example of the DeVos family.

Any social movement that is ultimately a threat to the power structure has to do two things. First, they have to do a power analysis, preferably in their own community, and that would require us to look closely at the DeVos family. The other thing that social movement need to do, in order to make those in power very nervous, is to work towards taking that power away, both economic and political power.

This would mean lots of education, political resistance work, exposing the DeVos family, AND it would mean redistributing the wealth they acquired over the last 50 years. How we redistribute their wealth, is best left to discussions/planning sessions for people who really want to make this happen.

With thousands of families struggling with the pandemic economy in Grand Rapids, Grand Action is proposing a downtown Amphitheater

https://griid.org/2020/10/07/with-thousands-of-families-struggling-with-the-pandemic-economy-in-grand-rapids-grand-action-is-proposing-a-downtown-amphitheater/

Last Saturday, it was reported by several of the dominant news sources in West Michigan, that the people who run Grand Rapids are still working on adding a large amphitheater and a soccer stadium.

The two primary entities involved in this effort are Grand Action and the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority. However, there are several other organizations involved, like the Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., the Right Place Inc. and Experience Grand Rapids. All of these entities are made up of first & second tier members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure.

MLive reported on this story and said that one possibility for where the amphitheater could go would be where Charlie's Crab sits, including the adjacent parking lot. The MLive article also reported:

The property at 63 Market Ave. is owned by a limited liability company with the same address as RDV Corporation, the DeVos family office. A nearby surface parking lot is owned by the Amway Hotel Corporation.

"It's too big a parcel and too important to the future of the city to be developed independently," Frey said of the two pieces of land. "It has a spectacular potential for the next big phase of what this city's all about."

Unfortunately, MLive did not contact the RDV Corporation (DeVos-owned) to ask if 63 Market LLC was indeed a DeVos-owned property. I think it is pretty safe to assume that DeVos does own this property, along with the adjacent parking lot. In addition, since **Grand Action** is involved in this project, that means Dick DeVos will be directly involved.

Equally important is what David Frey (also a member of the GR Power Structure) has to say in the MLive article, specifically that the parcel shouldn't be "developed independently" and "It has a spectacular potential for the next big phase of what this city's all about."

When David Frey says that this development project should happen independently, what he really means is that ***those of us who run the city will make the decisions about this project, we'll donate some money, but we'll get taxpayers to foot the bulk of the costs to make the amphitheater a reality***.

When David Frey says this project has a spectacular potential for the next big phase of what this city's all about, he means that this is what the local power structure wants the city to be about. On the matter of the next big phase, Frey is actually referencing 2016

study that Grand Action had done to look at how to make Grand Rapids a tourism and entertainment destination, something we reported on that year. Unfortunately, MLive failed to mention that the amphitheater and the soccer stadium were not new ideas, but part of a larger plan make more profits for the members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure.

When we reported on the Grand Action tourism and entertainment study in 2016, we made a point about how those plans were happening in the midst of a major housing crisis in Grand Rapids. Today, it would be appropriate to say that the members of Grand Action are planning to get the public to pay for their projects, while thousands in Grand Rapids are still facing eviction, unemployment and food insecurity, all in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic. This is what we call good old fashioned Class Warfare!

Grand Rapids invests over $6 million for private development in downtown, while Southeast Grand Rapids experiences disinvestment: We call this Structural Racism

https://griid.org/2020/11/11/grand-rapids-invests-over-6-million-for-private-development-in-downtown-while-southeast-grand-rapids-experiences-disinvestment-we-call-this-structural-racism/

Last month, **we reported** on how some groups in the Grand Rapids Power Structure were planning to move forward with a proposal to build a large amphitheater in downtown Grand Rapids.

We also reported that the land in question for the proposed amphitheater was owned by the DeVos family, specifically the old Charlie's Crab restaurant and the adjacent land & parking area. One of the properties is owned by 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC, which was not verified by local news sources, but 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC is in the same address that houses the DeVos businesses and the various DeVos family foundations – 126 Ottawa Ave NW, Grand Rapids.

As of Tuesday, we now know more details about this proposal, which is even more insidious. During the Grand Rapids City Commission's Committee of the Whole meeting on Tuesday morning, the City approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), whereby the Amway Hotel Corporation, 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC, the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority and the City of Grand Rapids, have agreed to enter into a private-public agreement to build a 14,000 seat outdoor amphitheater.

Now, in order to do this, the City will have to vacate some of their properties, just south of a US 131 highway offramp, along Market Avenue. As is shown on the map here, the land north of the US 131 highway offramp is owned by the Amway Hotel Corporation and 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC, which will likely be used for parking. The new

14,000 seat amphitheater will be located, according to City documents, at the 201 Market Avenue SW location, also shown here on the map. In addition, the City would give up their property located at 509 Wealthy SW, which is the property on the corner of Wealthy and Market Avenue.

This whole process is designed to free up the land along the Grand River for commercial development. The MOU states:

This innovative public/private partnership is an economic recovery project that will remove a critical barrier to redevelopment of properties along the Market Avenue corridor, including the City's 15.8 acre 201 Market Avenue property and the 4.3 acre property located at 509 Wealthy Street. Proceeding in this way reduces construction conflicts and helps ensure timely availability of the properties for redevelopment without this encumbrance.

The cost of freeing up land for commercial development is an estimated $18,636,585, which will be divided up by three entities. The private entities – the Amway Hotel Corporation and 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC would contribute $7,383,942, the Convention/Arena Authority would contribute $5,000,000 and the City of Grand Rapids would pitch in $6,252,643. However, as **MLive reported**, Grand Action 2.0 would be the primary private entity leading the charge for the amphitheater and other commercial development along the Grand River and Market Avenue.

To be clear, the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County created the Convention/Arena Authority, which technically makes in a public entity. However, looking at who sits on the board of the Convention/Arena Authority, we'd be hard pressed to consider it public. Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority – Steve Heacock (Grand Rapids Whitewater), Birgit Klohs (Right Place Inc.), Charlie Secchia (SIBSCO), Floyd Wilson (Cancer & Hematology Centers of Western Michigan), Rosalynn Bliss (Mayor, Grand Rapids), Lew Chamberlin (West Michigan Whitecaps), and Richard Winn (Amway Hotel Corporation).

Whether or not the Convention/Arena Authority is public, we do know that the City of Grand Rapids is willing to invest $6,252,643 to free up land along the Grand River for commercial development, which would include a 14,000 seat outdoor amphitheater.

So what does this announcement that the City of Grand Rapids is willing to spend $6,252,643 of public money for private development in the downtown area mean? It means that the City of Grand Rapids is not really committed to equity and racial justice, as they claim. Why is it so easy for the City to use over $6 million in public money to benefit the private sector in downtown Grand Rapids, yet is unwilling to **invest that amount and more into the southeast part of Grand Rapids**, at part of the city that has economically suffered for decades, which also happens to be where the majority of African Americans live? The answer must be because of systemic and structural racism. What else could it be?

Grand Action 2.0 speaker provides update on new development vision for Grand Rapids: Whiteness, Grand Rapids as a destination and Disaster Capitalism

https://griid.org/2020/11/23/grand-action-2-0-speaker-provides-update-on-new-development-vision-for-grand-rapids-whiteness-grand-rapids-as-a-destination-and-disaster-capitalism/

Over the past month, there has been more and more information coming forth about Grand Action 2.0 and their desire to build an amphitheater along the Grand River and Market Avenue SW.
In **October, we reported** on how some groups in the Grand Rapids Power Structure were planning to move forward with a proposal to build a large amphitheater in downtown Grand Rapids.

We also reported that the land in question for the proposed amphitheater, was owned by the DeVos family, specifically the old Charlie's Crab restaurant and the adjacent land & parking area. One of the properties is owned by 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC, which was not verified by local news sources, but 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC is in the same address that houses the DeVos businesses and the various DeVos family foundations – 126 Ottawa Ave NW, Grand Rapids.

On November 10th, we reported on updated details about this proposal, which is even more insidious. During the Grand Rapids City Commission's Committee of the Whole meeting on Tuesday morning, the City approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), whereby the Amway Hotel Corporation, 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC, the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority and the City of Grand Rapids, have agreed to enter into a private-public agreement to build a 14,000 seat outdoor amphitheater. You can read the details of this agreement from our previous article on this topic, which means that the City of Grand Rapids will spend over $6 million to move offices they have on Market Avenue, just south of the off ramp of US 131, in order to make space for the proposed amphitheater.

On Monday, Grand Action 2.0 brought to town John Kaatz, who works for Conventions, Sports & Leisure International (CSL). Kaatz spoke at the Econ Club meeting, which are meetings that are primarily attended by members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure and the business & professional class from West Michigan.

Dick DeVos and Carol Van Andel, as key members of Grand Action 2.0, both made comments before the scheduled speaker. Grand Action initiated this whole process and Dick DeVos made it clear that Grand Action 2.0 and this current riverfront development conversation was really started in 2016, when they **paid consultants to produce a study about expanding the tourism & entertainment industry in Grand Rapids** and how to attract and retain talent, which is code for how does GR attract the professional and business class to the area……which is also code for White people.

John Kaatz (CSL) then appeared on screen and began to talk more about this new development process and which key stakeholders his company engaged. You can see

from the image here, who CSL considers to be stakeholders, which is code for those with economic and political power. The list does not include the public, but as Kaatz said, “potential customers.”

Kaatz then laid out 3 main issues, based on what Grand Action 2.0 wants to see happen:

> ***Future investment and expansion opportunities that will help preserve and expand the competitive position of the DeVos Place Convention Center.***
> ***Potential development of a new multi-purpose soccer stadium in Grand Rapids that will allow for a higher level professional play, as well as various other sport and entertainment activities.***
> ***Potential development of a new large-scale amphitheater in Grand Rapids, partnered with numerous cultural, entertainment, adventure and other assets that can improve quality of life for regional residents and attract new visitors.***

Addressing the first point, Katz said the convention center could add a TV production studio, food & beverage operations within the convention space, specifically for locally sourced products.

On the matter of the second point, developing a plan for a soccer stadium, Kaatz said they are looking at maybe using spaces like the downtown post office, Calder Plaza or other area spaces for expansion. Kaatz also said there would need to be an ownership group, someone to own the team, and that the USL – United Soccer League – is interested in Grand Rapids.

In regards to an Amphitheater, Kaatz could envision maybe 25 concerts a year, maybe picnic at the pops, plus booking other business events at the site. He also said the space should be a community gathering space, that doesn’t necessary need the Amphitheater for events like PRIDE or beer festivals.

Kaatz then talked about what else could go on the site, such as commercial development, which would put activities right on the water front. Kaatz made it clear that this whole development project will tie into the Whitewater project, which would include other activities, like an Urban water park, space to relax, for picnics and an outdoor adventure center.

The Econ Club event was then opened up to a Q&A portion that was facilitated by former Gov. Engler Press Secretary John Truscott. Actually, Truscott did not allow anyone to verbally ask questions and he controlled the content of the questions that were sent to him, often re-phrasing what was asked.

Tom Welch, from Fifth Third Bank and co-chair of Grand Action 2.0, also made it clear that this larger project would follow the public/private partnership, which really means that the private sector gets to be the primary beneficiary, with the public meaning local government, who will provide public dollars, without public input.

There were a few other questions that seemed rather inconsequential and than **Dick DeVos** wrapped up the comments by stating that, "***this is the perfect time to develop ideas***." DeVos then said he saw COVID as a "hiatus." This comment not only demonstrates that he gets to see the pandemic from a highly privileged position, while thousands contract the disease in Kent County and the death toll climbing daily. Dick DeVos then said he has his own term for COVID, but said he wouldn't share what it is. As someone who has followed the DeVos family for decades, I would speculate that Dick DeVos sees the pandemic as a form of **Disaster Capitalism**, which means that the private sector will be able to capitalize on the harm an push things through that will benefit those with power, while the rest of us are just trying to survive.

AmplifyGR wants to use public money on property demolition for a new company that they are unwilling to even disclose the name of https://griid.org/2020/12/03/amplifygr-wants-to-use-public-money-on-property-demolition-for-a-new-company-that-they-are-unwilling-to-even-disclose-the-name-of/

On Tuesday, December 1st, MLive posted an article with the headline, ***Amplify GR seeking $2.2M in incentives to demolish vacant factory, construct office building***.

The MLive story claims that the DeVos-created group, AmplifyGR, is asking the City of Grand Rapids to provide $2.2 million of public money for a demolition of a vacant building at 1601 Madison SE, which sits on a 10 acre lot.

The **City's Economic Development Team document for December 1st, pages 4 – 12**, provide some additional details on the AmplifyGR-led project. The City document and the MLive article both mention that there would be the creation of 26 new jobs at an average wage of $21.57 per hour. This is somewhat misleading, especially since we don't know what this company pays the administrators, office staff or data entry employees. The company could pay some people $30 an hour and other employees $11.00 an hour, which would make the average wage roughly $21 per hour.

The MLive article also states that 30% of the 26 new persons (7 employees) hired would have to be from the 49507 zip code. The boundaries for 49507 are Franklin to the north, 131 to the west, 28th street to the south and Sylvan to the east. Since AmplifyGR is only asking for 30% of the new people hired to be from that zip code, why not narrow the area down to the Boston Square neighborhood area, especially since it only means 7 new jobs?

Then there is the issue of anonymity, since the company that is proposing to purchase the property at 1601 Madison SE nor AmplifyGR is willing to reveal the name of the company. It would seem that knowing which company might be moving to the 1601

Madison SE location would be an absolutely necessary requirement before moving forward on this or any project. The City of Grand Rapids and the public has a fundamental right to know the name of this company. Transparency must be a priority, especially in this case, where they are asking for public funds to be used.

The next step in this proposal is for AmplifyGR to go before the city's Brownfield Redevelopment Authority on Dec. 9. The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority has a board, which is made up primarily of people from the business community, which reflects a serious bias.

Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

Stanley Wisinski – Real Estate, Kristine Bersche – Natura Architectural Consulting, Guillermo Cisneros – Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Lynn Rabaut – retired, Troy Butler – Thacker Sleight, John VanFossen – Meijer Inc., Renee Williams – Huntington Bank, Kim McLaughlin – Wolverine Building Group and Joshua Verhulst – Tech Defenders.

If the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority votes to support AmplifyGR's request for $2.2 million in public money for the for this project, it will then go to the City Commission for approval, which would not be until after the New Year.

Earlier this fall, the City of Grand Rapids voted to approve the 9-acre development proposal for the Boston Square neighborhood, which will also rely on public funding, specifically through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, for a housing development project. It's instructive that AmplifyGR continues to ask for public money on their projects, especially since the DeVos-created entity, which is working in tandem with Rockford Construction, **has already spent over $10 million to purchase properties in the Boston Square area**. The question we should be asking is, why would the DeVos family and Rockford Construction, through their surrogate AmplifyGR, need to use public money, when they are both disgustingly wealthy?

AmplifyGR project for 1601 Madison SE still has yet to name the business involved in this project, even though they are asking for public funds https://griid.org/2021/02/16/amplifygr-project-for-1601-madison-se-still-has-yet-to-name-the-business-involved-in-this-project-even-though-they-are-asking-for-public-funds/

In **early December**, MLive reported that AmplifyGR and it's development partner Rockford Construction would be asking the City of Grand Rapids to provide $2.2 million of public money for a demolition of a vacant building at 1601 Madison SE, which sits on a 10 acre lot.

In that same MLive article, it was reported that a new business would be building at that 1601 Madison SE location, but that the business had not yet been named. The MLive

article also quoted the Director of AmplifyGR as saying, "***We're hoping that by the end of the year we can be a little bit more public with that. So hopefully it's a matter of weeks and not months.***"

AmplifyGR has also presented information about the proposed project for 1601 Madison SE, to the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and the Fiscal Committee. Today, on Wednesday February the 17th, they will present the same information to the Southtown Corridor Improvement Authority, as can be see on **pages 20 – 44 of the Southtown Corridor Improvement Authority agenda packet**.

In this most recent presentation by AmplifyGR and Rockford Construction, they still have yet to name the future business that will be located at 1601 Madison SE, despite the fact that the Director of AmplifyGR stated over tow months ago that it might be just a matter of weeks before they go public with that information.

Since the AmplifyGR/Rockford Construction project will be using public money, the public most definitely has a right to know which business will be occupying 1601 Madison SE. The Southtown Corridor Improvement Authority presentation for this Wednesday, **still does not include any information as the the name of the business that will occupy 1601 Madison SE.** The only new information included in the Southtown Corridor Improvement Authority agenda packet for February 17, can be seen on page 24. Here, shown above, you can see that the applicant for the project is Kurt Hassberger, representing 1601 Madison LLC and that Rockford Construction will be the General Contractor for the project.

In **looking up 1601 Madison LLC**, it was an entity that was registered in 2015. The Agent is listed as Kurt Hassberger and the address for 1601 Madison LLC is listed as 601 FIRST ST, GRAND RAPIDS MI 49504. The thing is, 601 First St NW is the address for Rockford Construction. Now, **when we first reported on the DeVos-created AmplifyGR entity**, we noted that all of the properties that Rockford Construction had purchased in the Cottage Grove Industrial Area, were properties that were owned by various LLCs owned by Rockford Construction, shown here on the right.

We then noted in a **June 26th, 2017 article**, that Rockford Construction spent **$1,888,500 on the 1601 Madison SE property**, which is less than the cost of the **$2.2 million** they are asking for from the Brownfield Development Authority.

Again, where public funding is involved, people should be demanding complete transparency, as in the case with the AmplifyGR/Rockford Construction project at 1601 Madison SE.

The new Grand Action Riverfront study and White Settler Colonialism
https://griid.org/2021/02/28/the-new-grand-action-riverfront-study-and-white-settler-colonialism/

Last week, **Grand Action 2.0 released a 4 page study** with recommendations on how to further develop along the Grand River, with an emphasis on the east side of the river, with heavy concentration in the downtown area.

The study has the usual corporate rhetoric of diversity and green space, along with the usual tokenism efforts to "**engage the community**."

This effort on the part of Grand Action to further develop the downtown part of the city has been going on for decades, with the **most recent wave beginning in 2016**, with another study they commissioned to promote entertainment and tourism along the river.

This process of developing along the river escalated with the **DeVos land grab and proposal to construct a 12,000 seat amphitheater last October**. The process involved the usual public/private partnership model – the private sector gets the public to cough up lots of money, while the private sector pockets the bulk of the profits.

In November, there were more details about this process, where it was announced that millions would go to the project for the amphitheater, while Black neighborhoods continued to be either divested or received minimal investment funds from both the City government and the private sector, **a process we named as Structural Racism**.

Then in late November, **Grand Action 2.0 hosted an event with a speaker to talk about more ways to attract tourists to GR**, with lots of talk about engaging Stakeholders. At that event, Dick DeVos stated that during the COVID crisis, "***this is the perfect time to develop ideas***." It's perfect for him and the rest of the members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, since they are not struggling to survive and not having to worry whether or not the COVID virus will harm their families. This is the thing about this class of people, they can talk about making the river front area accessible to people, but they fail to recognize that leisure is a luxury that thousands in this community can't really afford, especially when so many families are facing eviction, food insecurity, unemployment, employment with non-livable wages and limited access to health care.

With this most recent study, we could discuss what is fundamentally wrong with the process and how it will disproportionately benefit the business class. However, instead to going down that path, I think what we all need to come to terms with is that the land that they are talking about developing along the Grand River, was taken from the Indigenous communities who had been living along the river long before Settler Colonialists arrived.

Maybe we need to start talking about how White Europeans who came to the area we now call Grand Rapids and how they: 1) disrespected Indigenous spiritual traditions by trying to convert them – **the earliest Settler Colonialist were Catholic and Baptist Missions**; 2) used legalized violence, also known as treaties to take land, such as the **Treaty of Washington in 1836**, which allowed Settler Colonialists to acquire an additional 13,837,207 acres of land; and 3) to displace most of the Indigenous population through force, coercion and attrition.

In addition to taking this land, Settler Colonialists have been doing serious harm to the Grand River in this area over the past 2 centuries, by polluting the river with industrial waste, constructing damns, using the river for logging purposes during the heyday of the furniture industry and constructing a highway system that crisscrosses over the river. Now, Settler Colonialists want to re-develop the area along the river, despite the decades of harm we have done. In fact, it is wrong to refer to the Grand Action proposal as re-developement. Instead, we should be using the term that Eco-Feminist Vandana Shiva has coined, maldevelopment. She argues that "maldevelopment"—the violation of the integrity of organic, interconnected, and interdependent systems that sets in motion a process of exploitation, inequality, and injustice—is dragging the world down a path of self-destruction, and threatening survival itself.

Do we really want to put our trust in Grand Action 2.0? Do we really want to put our faith in the most recent iteration of White Settler Colonialism?

How is it that we allow groups like Grand Action 2.0 to get away with the shit they do?

https://griid.org/2021/03/21/how-is-it-that-we-allow-groups-like-grand-action-2-0-to-get-away-with-the-shit-they-do/

There are many definitions of the term stakeholder, but most often, when used by those in positions of power it usually means, "*denoting a type of organization or system in which all the members or participants are seen as having an interest in its success*."

The organization known as Grand Action 2.0, recently published their plans/wish list for further development in downtown Grand Rapids, development that is primarily about attracting tourists to the area. In fact, the document is referred to as **Venue & Attraction Development for Grand Rapids**.

On the last page of this document, there is a listing of all the Interviewed Stakeholders. If we are using the working definition of stakeholder listed above, ***those included in the Grand Action 2.0 document are almost all groups that would have an interest in the success of the development plan.***

What follows is a list of the 57 stakeholders that were interviewed, with a hyperlink included for those who many not be familiar with the entity. However, in most cases the hyperlink takes you to the leadership or Board of Directors of the entity listed, so you can see how in most cases there is a small sector of the community, specifically representing the Grand Rapids Power Structure, which dictate do much of what happens not only in downtown Grand Rapids, but throughout the city.

After that, we want to organize the 57 entities under the following groups: DeVos family run, other entities that make up the Grand Rapids Power Structure, entities with DeVos family representation on its board of directors, businesses that would profit from the Grand Action 2.0 development plans, government entities, stakeholders that were

included because of their tourist appeal, and stakeholders that were included because they represent the optics of community.

AHC Hospitality **https://www.ahchospitality.com/properties**

Amway **https://www.amwayglobal.com/**

ASM Global **https://asmglobal.com/p/our-story**

Bluewater Audio & Video **https://bluewaterav.com/**

Brigham Consulting **https://www.brighamconsulting.com/**

City of Grand Rapids **https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Home**

Colliers **https://www.colliers.com/en/about#56bf90ae-53a7-4c31-b4e4-57fc4c0298a4** (Global Real Estate Company)

CWD Real Estate **https://www.cwdrealestate.com/**

DGRI **https://downtowngr.org/about/dgri**

Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation **https://www.dbdvfoundation.org/**

DP Fox Ventures **https://www.dpfox.com/**

Experience Grand Rapids **https://www.experiencegr.com/contact-staff/board-of-directors/**

Fifth Third Bank **https://www.53.com/content/fifth-third/en.html**

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park **https://www.meijergardens.org/storage/docs/21-024_Board_of_Directors_Web_Update.pdf**

Frey Foundation **https://freyfdn.org/founders-and-trustees/**

Gerald R. Ford International Airport Authority **https://www.grr.org/airport-board**

GR Community Foundation **https://www.grfoundation.org/about/trustees-committees**

GR Mobile **https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Boards-and-Commissions/Mobile-GR-Commission**

Grand Action **https://www.grandaction.org/who-we-are**

Grand Action 2.0 Executive Committee **https://www.grandaction.org/who-we-are**

Grand Rapids Ballet **https://grballet.com/about/board-directors/**

Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce **https://www.grandrapids.org/your-chamber/board-of-directors/**

Grand Rapids Community College **https://www.grcc.edu/about-grcc/leadership-administration/board-trustees**

Grand Rapids FC **https://grandrapidsfc.com/**

Grand Rapids Next Gen Advisory Board **https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Boards-and-Commissions/The-Mayors-Next-Gen-Advisory-Board**

Grand Rapids Opera **https://www.operagr.org/board-of-trustees/**

Grand Rapids Symphony **https://www.grsymphony.org/board**

Grand Rapids Urban League **https://www.grurbanleague.org/board-of-directors**

Grand Rapids Whitewater **https://grandrapidswhitewater.org/funding/**

Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority **https://www.vanandelarena.com/p/about/about-caa**

Grand Valley State University **https://www.gvsu.edu/boardoftrustees/**

Jandernoa Foundation **https://www.open990.org/org/383083625/jandernoa-foundation/**

John Ball Zoo **https://www.jbzoo.org/about/board**

Kent County **https://www.accesskent.com/Departments/BOC/members.htm**

Kent County Hotel Advisory Board **https://www.kentcountyhospitality.org/hotel-advisory-board/**

Keystone Fund **https://keystonefund.org/revenue-source/**

Live Nation Michigan **https://www.livenationentertainment.com/leadership/**

Major League Lacrosse **https://majorleaguelacrosse.com/news/2019/2/25/about-mll.aspx**

Michigan Travel Commission **https://www.michigan.org/board-members#asset-aid-19976**

Midwest United **https://www.midwestunitedfc.com/boardofdirectors**

Northland United Soccer Club **https://northlandunited.org/current-board-members/**

NWSL **https://www.nwslsoccer.com/leadership-team**

Orion Construction **http://orionbuilt.com/about-us**

Osteria Rossa **http://osteriarossa.com/about/**

Pioneer Construction **https://www.pioneerinc.com/our-team**

Premier Productions **https://www.premierproductions.com/about**

Progressive AE **https://www.progressiveae.com/overview/people/**

Rockford Construction **https://rockfordconstruction.com/team?drawer%5B0%5D=department-corporate**

SJC Alliance **https://www.scjalliance.com/culture/our-team/**

Steelcase Foundation **https://www.steelcasefoundation.org/staff-and-trustees/**

Terryberry **https://www.terryberry.com/about-us/**

The Right Place **https://www.rightplace.org/about-us/board-of-directors**

United Methodist Community House **http://www.umchousegr.org/about-us/our-board/**

Van Andel Enterprises **https://www.linkedin.com/company/va-enterprises-llc**

Van Andel Institute **https://www.vai.org/leadership/trustees/**

Wege Foundation **https://wegefoundation.com/trustees/**

West Michigan Sports Commission **https://www.westmisports.com/board**

Western Michigan Hispanic Chamber **https://westmihcc.org/board-of-directors/**

Who these Stakeholders really represent

DeVos Family run entities – AHC Hospitality, Amway, Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation, DP Fox Ventures and CWD Real Estate (partial ownership).

Other Grand Rapids Power Structure Stakeholders – CWD Real Estate, DGRI, Experience Grand Rapids, Frey Foundation, GR Community Foundation, Grand Action, Grand Action 2.0 Executive Committee, Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority, Grand Valley State University, Jandernoa Foundation, Orion Construction, Pioneer Construction, Progressive AE, Rockford Construction, Steelcase Foundation, The Right Place, Van Andel Enterprises, Van Andel Institute, Wege Foundation and the Western Michigan Hispanic Chamber.

Stakeholders with DeVos Board Representation – DGRI, Experience Grand Rapids, Grand Action, Grand Action 2.0 Executive Committee, Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, Grand Rapids Community College (funding), Grand Rapids Symphony, Grand Rapids Whitewater (funding), Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority, Grand Valley State University, Kent County Hotel Advisory Board, The Right Place, West Michigan Sports Commission and the Western Michigan Hispanic Chamber.

Businesses that would likely profit from the Grand Action 2.0 development plans – AHC Hospitality, Bluewater Audio & Video, Colliers, CWD Real Estate, Orion Construction, Pioneer Construction, Progressive AE, and Rockford Construction.

Government entities – City of Grand Rapids, GR Mobile, Grand Rapids Next Gen Advisory Board, Kent County, and Michigan Travel Commission.

Stakeholders with tourist and venue appeal – Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids Opera, Grand Rapids Symphony, Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority, and John Ball Zoo.

Stakeholders that are community-based – Grand Rapids Urban League and United Methodist Community House.

The Rich get Richer and everyone else pays for it

In a March 10th **WOODTV8 story**, it was reported that the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) approved steps to create a new oversight group for the Grand River "development plans." While the Grand River development plans are not the same as the Grand Action 2.0 Venue & Attraction Development for Grand Rapids document, these projects overlap and involved the same stakeholders, ie, representatives of the Grand Rapids Power Structure.

In the WOODTV8 story, one DDA board member, Greg McNeilly, had reservations about having " too many oversight groups over time." McNeilly, who represents the DeVos owned Windquest Group at the DDA meetings, is also the President of the Michigan Freedom Fund. It's not surprising that **McNeilly, who has been a DeVos operative for years**, would verbalize his objection to too much oversight, but he really shouldn't worry about this, since it is likely that whatever oversight group is put in place, will represent the DeVos and other Grand Rapids Power Structure member interests quite well.

Lastly, as thousands of families in Grand Rapids continue to face eviction, food insecurity and unemployment, the Grand Action 2.0 plans will continue to move forward without a hitch. In fact, those behind the Grand Action 2.0 plans, along with the stakeholders involved in the project, are delighted that so many people are busy just surviving, since that means they are not pissed off and organized against the Grand Action 2.0 plans to use public money to development more of the downtown area, which will lead to expanding the wealth of the members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure. If those who were struggling to survive knew what those in power were up to, it might look a whole lot like what happened on May 30th last year, when the police could not control the thousands of people who mobilized with righteous indignation against police repression and the concentrated wealth that exists within the Capitalist Class in the downtown area. The question for groups doing work outside of the non-profit industrial complex is, "**how can we mobilize the disenfranchised to bring down the Grand Rapids Power Structure?**"

Betsy DeVos created group Great Lakes Education Project, pushes misinformation about Schools and COVID
https://griid.org/2021/04/12/betsy-devos-created-group-great-lakes-education-project-pushes-misinformation-about-schools-and-covid/

Over the past few months, the Executive Director of the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), Beth DeShone, has been engaging in misinformation, particularly as it relates to Governor Whitmer. DeShone has been with GLEP since 2011, but prior to that she was a campaign consultant for Dick DeVos when he ran for Governor in 2006.

In **March**, DeShone wrote this:

Earlier this month, Governor Gretchen Whitmer wielded her veto pen as a weapon against Michigan students. In a brazen and broadside attack against local kids, she senselessly vetoed $87 million in critical COVID-19 relief funding for Michigan schools, and slashed another $10 million earmarked for summer school programs.

What GLEP doesn't tell you is that Gov. Gretchen Whitmer **signed HB 4048** releasing federal COVID relief funding for schools as laid out below, but announced she was **vetoing HB 4049** – the bill limiting gubernatorial epidemic powers around school closure and athletics which the Republican Legislature tied to the release of $840 million in those federal funds. You can also read exactly why Whitmer vetoed HB 4049, by going to **this link**.

In addition, **according to the Michigan Education Association**:

*GOP leaders in the House and Senate have attached strings to hundreds of millions of dollars in COVID relief funding sent by Congress in December – **withholding disbursement of more than $840 million** unless Gov. Gretchen Whitmer relinquishes executive power to close schools and shut down athletic events in a health crisis. The Legislature also is refusing to supply districts with lower Title I enrollment (who didn't benefit as greatly from federal relief fuding) up to $450 per-pupil in additional state funding if they did not offer at least 20 hours of in-person learning by March 22 – in effect, punishing communities devastated by the pandemic by denying them the money needed to fund safety equipment and protocols.*

Then **on April 9**, the GLEP Executive Director said the following in response to Governor Whitmer's public address on the same day:

"The last time Governor Whitmer suggested closing things for a few weeks, her lockdown lasted a year. Now she's suggesting closing schools again just as the spring assessment window opens, with billions of federal dollars waiting to help students and schools. While students are locked out of classrooms, we've seen too many fall into a crisis of despair. Our kids deserve better from Governor Whitmer and the public school bureaucracy. They deserve safely open classrooms."

Again, DeShone engages in misinformation, since Gov. Whitmer was not ordering the shift from in person learning to online learning, but merely encouraged it, especially considering that the COVID vaccine is not available for 16 and under, which would include most of the K-12 school students.

On April 5th, the Bridge Magazine reported that COVID cases among school students had gone up 47% in a two-week period, resulting in numerous school districts going back to online learning. **https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-health-watch/michigan-school-covid-outbreaks-surge-47-2-weeks-some-return-remote** The same goes with Michigan High School sports, where athletes who have contracted COVID is also on the rise. Again, **the Bridge Magazine wrote**:

More than 100 boys and girls high school basketball teams — about one in 12 in the state tournaments — had to drop out of the first round because of positive COVID tests or quarantines, according to the Michigan High School Athletic Association.

The Great Lakes Education Project can complain all they want, but to claim that sending children back to school is what they deserve, just doesn't sync with the recent data about the increase of school age COVID cases, nor the fact that Michigan in the worst in the country over the last month regarding COVID infection rates. Leave it to a DeVos created and funded entity to make life worst for students and families across the state.

Longtime DeVos Family operative, Greg McNeilly, is defending the Enbridge Corporation's Line 5
https://griid.org/2021/05/20/longtime-devos-family-operative-greg-mcneilly-is-defending-the-enbridge-corporations-line-5/

Last Friday, Greg McNeilly, Chairman of the Michigan Freedom Fund, posted a comment on the organization's blog, entitled, **Party Like It's 1979**.

The blog post was making a cheeky remark about the Colonial Pipeline shut down and that Michigan might also be experiencing a rise in gas prices, especially if Gov. Whitmer "gets her way."

McNeilly goes on to write:

This week the Governor bowed to the radical environmentalists in her political base, and ordered Enbridge energy to shutter their Line 5 pipeline. It's a move that would take 540,000 barrels per day of light crude oil, light synthetic crude oil and natural gas liquids out of the state and away from the region.

It's unfortunate that McNeilly, and other commentators, use the term radical in a negative way. A more honest understanding of the term radical, means to get to the root

of something. However, McNeilly uses the term radical to suggest someone who is an extremist.

Not only does McNeilly misuse the term radical, his suggestion that Gov. Whitmer is bowing to radical environmentalists is simply ridiculous. Whitmer campaigned against Line 5 during her 2018 run for the office, plus virtually every mainstream environmental group in the state endorses the shutdown of Line 5. More importantly, indigenous communities throughout the Great Lakes area, which have been at the forefront of the campaign against Line 5, are not extremists. In fact, for Greg McNeilly to refer to Indigenous people as radical environmentalists is not only dead wrong, it is highly problematic. Does McNeilly, the Republican operative, really want to marginalize indigenous people in the Great Lakes area? If so, he is marginalizing the very people who have lived in harmony within the Great Lakes for thousands of years.

Such tasteless rhetoric from Greg McNeilly is not unusual for him. McNeilly is not only the Chairman of the Michigan Freedom Fund, he is the Chief Operating Officer for **The Windquest Group**, which is owned by Dick and Betsy DeVos.

In 2006, McNeilly served as campaign manager for Michigan gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos.

McNeilly was also Executive Director of **Choices for Children**, a Michigan-based group that was working to undermine public education. In addition, McNeilly currently serves on the Board of Directors of the DeVos-created **Great Lakes Education Project**, which also seeks to undermine public education and replace it with privatized education.

McNeilly is also on the Board of Directors of the **Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority**, which is a non-elected entity that uses public tax dollars to promote downtown GR and fund development projects for the business community.

Again, saying that Gov. Whitmer is bowing to radical environmentalists on the potential Enbridge Line 5 shutdown is nothing more than political theater. If there is anyone that should be considered extremists on this issue, it's McNeilly, for his longtime work as a DeVos-family operative, and the Enbridge Corporation, which constantly puts the Great Lakes ecosystem at risk with their pipelines.

DeVos controlled Amphitheater Project using public money will be voted on at the February 9th Grand Rapids City Commission meeting

https://griid.org/2021/02/07/devos-controlled-amphitheater-project-using-public-money-will-be-voted-on-at-the-february-9th-grand-rapids-city-commission-meeting/

On Friday, **MLive reported**, "*that the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention Arena/Authority (CAA) approved an option agreement with the city to purchase part of a 17-acre stretch of property along the Grand River*."

In **October, we reported** that Grand Action 2.0 was planning to move forward with a proposal to build a large amphitheater in downtown Grand Rapids.

We also reported that the land in question for the proposed amphitheater, was owned by the DeVos family, specifically the old Charlie's Crab restaurant and the adjacent land & parking area. One of the properties is owned by 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC, which was not verified by local news sources, but **63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC is in the same address that houses the DeVos businesses and the various DeVos family foundations – 126 Ottawa Ave NW, Grand Rapids.**

On November 10th, we reported on updated details about this proposal, which is even more insidious. During the Grand Rapids City Commission's Committee of the Whole meeting on Tuesday morning, the City approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), whereby the Amway Hotel Corporation, 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC, the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority and the City of Grand Rapids, have agreed to enter into a private-public agreement to build a 14,000 seat outdoor amphitheater. You can read the details of this agreement from our previous article on this topic, which means that the City of Grand Rapids will spend over $6 million to move offices they have on Market Avenue, just south of the off ramp of US 131, in order to make space for the proposed amphitheater.

Friday's MLive article cites someone from the Convention Arena Authority and it's partnership with the City on this project, **but fails to mention** the other entities involved in the project, which we listed above, which includes the Amway Hotel Corporation and 63 Market Avenue Holdings LLC, both of which are controlled by the DeVos family.

The MLive article also states that the City Commission will be deciding on this project and its use of public money, at their February 9 meeting. However, while the City Commission will be voting on this matter, they will be discussing it at the February 9 Committee of the Whole meeting, which is where these decisions are usually made. The **Agenda Packet for the Committee of the Whole meeting, on pages 10 – 12**, provides further details about the project and then Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Committee of the Whole recommends the adoption of the MOU, which suggests this is merely a formality and the City will once again use public money to support a project that the Convention Arena Authority will likely control.

It should also be reiterated that the Convention Arena Authority, which manages the Van Andel Arena, DeVos Place and the DeVos Performance Hall, is made up of a seven member Board of Directors. The representation of that board consists of 6 people from the corporate world and Mayor Bliss, which should tell you about who really benefits with this kind of representation.

At the Grand Rapids City Commission on the evening of February 9, they will be voting to approve this project. This matter is part of the Agenda for that meeting, so public

comment for this project – **where public money will again be used for private benefit** – will be towards the beginning of the City Commission meeting.

Another DeVos investment venture: More for the Capitalist Class, to hell with everyone else

https://griid.org/2021/02/18/another-devos-investment-venture-more-for-the-capitalist-class-to-hell-with-everyone-else/

On Sunday, the business-centered publication **MiBiz, posted a story about a new Capital Investment Fund that is being spearheaded by Doug & Maria DeVos**.

According to MiBiz, "*The DeVoses' **Continuum Ventures LLC** has partnered with Grand Rapids-based **Auxo Investment Partners** to manage the new Michigan Opportunity Fund*." For those unfamiliar with **Continuum Ventures LLC**, it is the investment company for Doug & Maria DeVos, their children and their children's spouses.

The focus of the DeVos investment company, Continuum Ventures LLC, is reflected on their website, with these three areas of focus:

- **Business:** Focused on business ownership and investments that drive mutual benefit and value to our customers, employees, communities and shareholders.
- **Community:** Committed to helping people realize their potential and building vibrant communities for a better tomorrow.
- **Civic Engagement:** Engaged champion and advocate for good public policy that breaks down barriers that inhibit success and advancement of people.

It is worth deconstructing these three areas. When the DeVos family says Business and Community, they really mean the **business community**. Their commitment to wealth accumulation has been demonstrated for decades, initially though the Amway Corporation, then RDV Corporation, the Windquest Group, DP Fox Ventures and CWD Real Estate Investment, just to name a few. The DeVos family didn't amass billions over the years because they care about community the amassed their wealth by exploring workers, using their Amway pyramid scheme and by buying political candidates to further their interests. When the DeVos family says **Civic Engagement,** they really mean buying politicians who will implement public policy that benefits their interests and the other members of the Capitalist Class. During the last election cycle, **the DeVos family contributed millions to the GOP, including substantial contributions to the re-election of Donald Trump**. See more details in our publication A DeVos Family Reader at this link. **https://griid.org/reports/**

In the MiBiz article, Doug DeVos is quoted as saying he wants to support businesses financially and by connecting them to other community partners, which means to other people who are part of the Capitalist Class and the Grand Rapids Area Power Structure.

Two groups that DeVos cites in the article are the **West Michigan Policy Forum**, where he serves on the board of directors, and the **Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce.** GRIID has been monitoring both of the groups for more than a decade and these two groups have demonstrated over the over how they are committed to wealth accumulation for the Capitalist Class while promoting public policy that disproportionately harms workers, the Black Community and other communities of color.

One of the initial investors in the *Michigan Opportunity Fund* is Roger Penske, the 83-year-old chairman of Bloomfield Township-based Penske Corp. According to **OpenSecrets.org**, Roger Penske has **also contributed millions to the Republican Party**, which is a clear indicator to where his allegiances are……with the Capitalist Class. Don't be fooled by this new DeVos investment fund and their claims to care about community. Looking at their track record should tell us who they consider community and who they don't really consider at all.

Betsy DeVos-created Great Lakes Education Project says CDC recommendation for students to wear masks in school is purely political https://griid.org/2021/08/15/betsy-devos-created-great-lakes-education-project-says-cdc-recommendation-for-students-to-wear-masks-in-school-is-purely-political/

In late July, the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), released the **following statement**:

"This is the worst kind of politics being played on our children. After an emotionally, mentally and physically exhausting school year locked out of classrooms by the likes of Governor Whitmer and the education union bosses, our children are now faced with this latest attack by the CDC.

*"This is nothing more than the next step in a line of attacks on families and students. Even in May, **emails obtained through FOIA** revealed that the American Federation of Teachers lobbied and influenced CDC guidelines on the reopening of schools.*

"We are left to wonder what science is leading the CDC decision-making on masks for school-aged children with this new recommendation a week after President Biden speculated that new mask mandates might be coming."

The narratives that groups create, especially around the COVID pandemic, are very instructive. No one denies that it hasn't been hard on students, parents and teachers during the pandemic, but to suggest that the CDC is playing politics is just ridiculous. GLEP makes lots of claims about union bosses and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), but only offers FOIA obtained e-mails, which suggested that the AFT influenced the CDC policy on school reopening. However, what the GLEP Press Release fails to acknowledge is that their organization has consistently endorsed Republican State Legislators, as well as influencing those same politicians

with **campaign contributions over the years**. Who again is playing politics with the lives of students in Michigan?

In addition, the CDC is just making a recommendation and not adopting a mandate on school-aged children being required to wear masks while attending school. A recommendation doesn't carry the force of law, but it does reflect that with the growing number of delta variant cases across the country, that wearing a mask while indoors is simply sound public health policy.

The Centers for Disease Control have clear and comprehensive guidelines on COVID and K-12 Schools, which you can find at this **link**. Here are some of the major recommendations for K-12:

- Students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction in the fall 2021 is a priority.
- Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
- Due to the circulating and highly contagious Delta variant, CDC recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.
- In addition to universal indoor masking, CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, such as when schools cannot fully re-open while maintaining these distances, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as screening testing.
- Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection are also important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.
- Students, teachers, and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- Many schools serve children under the age of 12 who are not eligible for vaccination at this time. Therefore, this guidance emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies (e.g., using multiple prevention strategies together consistently) to protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, and other members of their households and support in-person learning.
- Localities should monitor community transmission, vaccination coverage, screening testing, and occurrence of outbreaks to guide decisions on the level of layered prevention strategies (e.g., physical distancing, screening testing).

All of these recommendations appear to be sound and have prevention and public health concerns as the main focus. Is having the well being of students, teachers, school administrators and parents playing politics or just smart public health?

Acton Radio show features 3 Billionaires talking about Education https://griid.org/2021/07/13/acton-radio-show-features-3-billionaires-talking-about-education/

The Acton Institute for the Study of Religious and Liberty hosted a discussion on June 30th, for their radio show called Acton line, which included 3 billionaires – Sal Kahn, Jeff Sandefer and Betsy DeVos.

The discussion that these 3 billionaires had about education was what one might expect from people who have tremendous economic privilege. Essentially, what they all were saying is that the traditional approach to education is wrong and that the more we can make education centered on individual students and the more creative we can be with educational approaches, the better off students will be.

Betsy DeVos argues that if parents had the resources to send their children to a school of their choosing, then that would make a huge difference, especially since, "we provide too many resources now in a system that doesn't work." When asked about educational models that works, DeVos conveniently cites only private school examples, including her husband school, the West Michigan Aviation Academy.

Another example that Betsy cited was Journey Academy, which is located in Ada, Michigan, where 2 of her grand children attend. Journey Academy is a Christian School and is one of the 250 Acton Academies that exist around the world. Acton Academies were founded by the moderator of the Acton radio show, Jeff Sandefer.

Sandefer had made his money from an energy firm he started, Sandefer Capitol. Sandefer also created the Acton School of Business, which features all white educators. **https://www.actonnga.org/teachers/** Sandefer calls Texas his home, where he acted as an economic advisor for former Governor Rick Perry. Sandefer was also on the board of the Texas Public Policy Forum, which is a Koch-funded entity, that pushes policies that are anti-union, pro-privatization and all of the usual Neo-Liberal economic policies. **https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Texas_Public_Policy_Foundation**

Getting back to the Journey Academy, where Betsy DeVos' grand children attended, it is worth noting that one of the main educators is Antonio Tendero. Tendero used to be Director of the Middle School at Potter's House, a school that the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has channel hundreds of thousands of dollars to. In addition, Tendero was also part of the Stockbridge Boiler Room, a westside Conservative Christian entity that has also been the beneficiary of lots of DeVos money.

As we suspected, even though Betsy DeVos is no longer in Washington, DC, she has continued to push private, charter and faith-based systems of education and to undermine any and all forms of public education, along with attacking public teacher unions. This is what Betsy DeVos did for 30 years prior to being the US Secretary of Education, and this is what she will no doubt continue to promote, now that she is back in the private sector.

Doug DeVos' faux populist rhetoric of celebrating "we the people" is deceptive, since he really means "we own the people" https://griid.org/2021/09/20/doug-devos-faux-populist-rhetoric-of-celebrating-we-the-people-is-deceptive-since-he-really-means-we-own-the-people/

What do you call a West Michigan Billionaire who tries to use populist language? You call him a hypocrite.

This is exactly what Doug DeVos, the President of RDV Corporation, attempted to do in a recent article posted on the Grand Rapids Business Journal site, entitled, **A Question for Constitution Day**.

DeVos writes in the article, in reference to the US Constitution:

From the moment those words were written, it was obvious: America fell short. Our country has allowed terrible wrongs to exist, most notably slavery. Such injustices made "we the people" more hope than fact. They concentrated power in the hands of a few, despite the moral mandate to empower the many.

Doug DeVos then goes on to name three social movements, the Abolitionist Movement, the Women's Suffrage Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, referring to them as a form of "American empowerment."

Ok, so why does everyone with tremendous privilege hide behind the US Constitution? The history of the US has always been about concentrated power, both political and economic. Doug DeVos and his family have been part of the same power structure he identifies, since Doug's father co-founded the pyramid scheme known as Amway.

However, once DeVos moves beyond is faux populist rhetoric, he reveals more about what he really values……often in a contradictory way. DeVos writes, "*To start, our elected officials have asserted control over ever more of daily life.*" While there is a grain of truth to this, Doug DeVos and his family have funded hundreds of politicians at the local, state and federal level, the very same politicians he is criticizing.

DeVos then advocates for, in a very round about way, states rights or what might be called local control. This strategy is what the far right has embraced for decades, from

the Koch Brothers, to the **American Legislative Exchange Council**, to the **State Policy Network** and the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**. This strategy has been pushed by the far right for the explicit purpose of undermining any positive federal policies, such as voting rights, LGBTQ equality, worker rights, environmental laws, etc.

Doug DeVos wants us to think that the is beyond a right/left dichotomy, when in fact he and his family have been deeply committed, for decades, to a far right agenda that seeks to undermine the same kinds of social justice movements he identifies in his article on the Grand Rapids Business Journal site.

To further explore why Doug's rhetoric of faux populism is such bullshit, lets look at the track record of Doug DeVos and his family when it comes to embracing far right political and economic policies. It is also worth noting that these policies are often supported by his own theological framework, one that is rooted in a mixture of Calvinism and Christian Reconstructionism.

- In the 2020 US Election cycle, the **DeVos family alone contributed $12.7 million** to political candidates (primarily GOP), **including Donald Trump**. In 2018, **Doug DeVos personally contributed thousands of dollars to a Senator from Mississippi, Cindy Hyde-Smith**, who joked about going to a public hanging, saying she would be in the front row.
- Doug DeVos is a member of the West Michigan Policy Forum (WMPF), which crafts state policy and then lobbies elected officials in Lansing. The WMPF pushed for eliminating a business tax, helped get Michigan to become a Right to Work State, undermines labor unions, undermines public education and opposes Reproductive Justice and greater equality for the LGBTQ community. How again, does his money and lobbying role with the WMPF seek to thwart the control that politicians have over us???
- Based on a **2017 FOIA document**, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation gave money to the Grand Rapids Public Schools, specifically to the district to have them get services from businesses, many of which are anti-Public Education.
- The DeVos family was an integral part of the One Kent Coalition, which was made up of wealthy and influential people from Kent County, who wanted to get rid of the current local government system and have just one governing body for all of Kent County. According to the One Kent Coalition documents, they were advocating for the government to act as a CEO. **https://griid.org/2011/08/16/update-on-one-kent-local-government-consolidation-proposal/**
- In 2018, Doug DeVos, and then Senator Joe Biden, awarded Liberty Medals to George W. Bush and his wife at the annual National Constitution Center event. Awarding George W. Bush a Liberty Medal is like giving a member of the KKK a diversity award. (1:01:26 into the **video**)
- The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation providing the funding for both the creation of AmplifyGR, but also to purchase dozens of properties in the southeast side of Grand Rapids **before telling any of the predominantly Black residents of that area**. Listen to the rhetoric from Doug DeVos in a video at **this link**, during an AmplifyGR town hall that received lots of pushback. In fact, the pushback was so great that DeVos and his minions decided to cancel move aways from town hall

meetings and get people to buy into a framework for development that they were controlling from the very beginning.

Doug DeVos ends his article in the Grand Rapids Business Journal with the claim that he is all about the notion of “we the people.” If that were the case, why would he and his family spend millions every year to get people to buy into their worldview, whether they be politicians or non-profits. When people like Doug DeVos say “we the people”, they really mean, “we own the people.”

Like his father, Doug DeVos wants us all to just Believe: A member of the Grand Rapids Power Structure and his Podcast
https://griid.org/2022/02/27/like-his-father-doug-devos-wants-us-all-to-just-believe-a-member-of-the-grand-rapids-power-structure-and-his-podcast/

In early December, Doug DeVos, the head of Amway and RDV Corp, announced that he was going to host a podcast. The name of the podcast would be called Believe!

Calling his podcast Believe! Is a nod to his deceased father who wrote a book by the same title in 1975. Richard DeVos Sr. wrote Believe!, according to the publishers blurb, “***as a fresh and much-needed reaffirmation of the tried and true traditional values that can make you the success you want to be***.” The tried and true traditional values of which the DeVos patriarch spoke of was his brand of Conservative Christianity and a deep belief in the system of free market Capitalism.

The DeVos belief in Capitalism has worked out well for the family, initially with the creation of the pyramid scheme known as Amway and it’s cult-like approach to selling products. The DeVos family has since diversified, adding new companies, creating a massive investment portfolio to go along with the numerous family foundations – another scheme to hide some of their wealth from being taxed and to engage in social management of populations that are in need of their philanthropy, since they have spent millions of dollars to influence public policy that has created a massive wealth gap over the past 50 years.

Doug DeVos says that he was starting this podcast to talk about his values, to inspire people to Believe, and to communicate the idea that anyone can do anything if they set their mind to it. Ok, so why is it that people, especially rich bastards, always have such a perky optimism? And I don’t mean the perky optimism of Mrs. Maisel, I mean the kind of optimism that is born out of class privilege, where you see the world as something to conquer no matter how many lives you destroy in the process.

Anyway, Doug DeVos’ podcast has produced 4 **episodes** as of this writing. The first episode doesn’t seem to count, since Doug is interviewed by two of his children. However, the next three episodes provide us with a clear indication of what this show is really about.

Episode #2 features Alan Smolinsky, who is identified as a serial entrepreneur and the owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers professional baseball team. The theme of that conversation centers around the question, “What is the American Dream?” So, episode #2 is two rich guys talking about the American Dream, while the majority of the people who live in this country are experiencing what Malcolm X referred to as the American Nightmare.

Episode #3 features Blake Masters, who is identified as a Tech Entrepreneur and a S**enate Candidate in Arizona**. Doug and Blake talk about silicon valley, the future of tech and entrepreneurism in the US. Also, Blake Masters is exactly the kind of candidates that the DeVos family likes to make massive campaign contributions to. For those who are interested, Blake Masters wants secure borders, believes that police are under attack, that crime is out of control, opposes Critical Race Theory, and believes that public schools for progressive indoctrination.

Episode #4 features Michael Anton, a research fellow at the hyper-conservative Hillsdale College. Anton also writes for the **Claremont Institute**, which is a far right think tank. One of his more recent articles is entitled, **The Case for Trump**, which makes complete sense, since Anton was a national security official in the Trump administration.

I remember an interesting observation from the late John Trudell, the former national spokesperson for the American Indian Movement, who was also a poet and a musician. Trudell once said that those in power always want us to believe in lies they tell. They want us to believe in a Western, Christian world view which has taken our land from us. Ironically, Trudell says, that the word Believe itself contains the word lie within it.

The Believe! Podcast from Doug DeVos has so far featured people who are aligned with his religious views, other members of the Capitalist Class and those who defend the far right ideological values that are the very embodiment of the DeVos family. So, instead of blindly believing anything that people like Doug DeVos have to say, lets adopt solid critical thinking skills, skills which will allow us to see through the lies those in power want us to BeLIEve!

Amway announcement to pause operations in Russia is really their way of throwing a tantrum for not being able to continue to peddle their soap and vitamins
https://griid.org/2022/03/17/amway-announcement-to-pause-operations-in-russia-is-really-their-way-of-throwing-a-tantrum-for-not-being-able-to-continue-to-peddle-their-soap-and-vitamins/

On Tuesday, numerous local news agencies reported that Amway, like many of companies, was pulling out of Russia because of their invasion of Ukraine.

MLive was one of the local news agencies that reported on the Ada-based company's decision to no longer do business in Russia. MLive also linked to the actual statement that Amway put out, which is significantly different that what most news agencies are reporting.

Here is a **link to the Amway announcement**, but we are also including the text here below, in case the company decides to remove their announcement.

Amway *is powered by people – especially the inspiring, entrepreneurial and caring employees and* ***Amway*** *Business Owners (ABOs) who live our values every day across the world.*

Seeing the global ***Amway*** *family step forward and care for those who have left* ***Ukraine*** *in search of safety and shelter, and those who have stayed behind, has once again shown the heart of* ***Amway*** *and the strength of the bonds we share. Our team members who remain in* ***Ukraine*** *are also donating our healthy food and beverage products, personal care items, and dietary supplements to people in harm's way, and to local hospitals and charities.*

The reality of our business is that we have friends, colleagues and ***Amway*** *Business Owners in both countries who have worked together for years in harmony with a common purpose. However, the continuing war, along with the global legal and operational environment, makes it impossible to continue business as we have been in* ***Russia****, and so we are announcing the immediate suspension of product imports and will be pausing other operations as well.*

Hope – along with Freedom, Family and Reward – is one of our four Founders' Fundamentals. We have upheld these ideals for more than 60 years, including through very challenging times in different parts of the world. It is our sincere hope that peace will prevail, and that we can return to fully supporting operations and opportunity for all who are a part of the ***Amway*** *family.*

What is striking about this statement, although not surprising, is that Amway makes their announcement primarily about themselves, rather than taking a principled stance to no longer do business in Russia.

First, the opening paragraph, along with the fourth paragraph centers the ideology of Amway, never saying anything about Russia and Ukraine. In the entire statement, Amway includes their own name six different times, and only names Ukraine twice and Russia once.

Second, when talking about Ukraine in the second paragraph Amway talks about how they are caring for those that left. The thousands of Ukrainian refugees are fleeing the violence brought about by Russia's invasion and ongoing occupation. Amway then centers the fact that they are donating their own food and beverage products, making it all about them as opposed to the horrific plight of Ukrainian civilians. None of the language in that second paragraph conveys to realities nor the horror that Ukrainians are facing.

In the **third** paragraph, Russia is finally mentioned, but the Amway announcement doesn't mention the invasion, nor the bombing, and nothing about the death of Ukrainians. The paragraph once again centers Amway business owners who apparently have been working in "harmony." The statement then says:

*However, the continuing war, along with the global legal and operational environment, makes it impossible to continue business as we have been in **Russia**, and so we are announcing the immediate suspension of product imports and will be pausing other operations as well.*

In this sentence, Amway finally uses the term war, but then quickly makes it about not being able to do business there, which is why they are suspending "product imports" and "pausing other operations." There is no mention of the international condemnation of the Russian invasion nor the position that the US government has taken.

The **fourth** and final paragraph yet again centers the company, even taking the opportunity to promote their founding values. Amway concludes by timidly hoping that peace will prevail, not because it will stop the bombing and the killing by the Russian army in Ukraine, but so the company can, "can return to fully supporting operations and opportunity for all who are a part of the **Amway** family."

So, Amway does their best to avoid demonstrating any real solidarity with the Ukrainian people, nor do they empathize with the harsh realities that civilians are facing in Ukraine because of the Russian invasion. What Amway does do, is to constantly promote themselves and their capitalist values. In the end, the Amway corporation is not pausing operations because of human rights, they are only pausing operations because it would be an embarrassment to continue doing business in Russia. If Russia and Ukraine negotiate a peace settlement, you can bet that Amway will be back in Russia, attempting to create more little capitalists, regardless of the repressive political realities under the Putin regime.

The City of Grand Rapids unanimously approved the new $116M land purchase for Amphitheater project: Why those who run the City always get what they want
https://griid.org/2022/03/30/the-city-of-grand-rapids-unanimously-approved-the-new-116m-land-purchase-for-amphitheater-project-why-those-who-run-the-city-always-get-what-they-want/

At Tuesday Grand Rapids City Commission Committee of the Whole session, city officials unanimously approved the next phase in the process to make the 12,000 seat amphitheater a reality.

The presentation by the the Assistant City Manager used lots of slides and lots of progressive language, but it failed to address who was really driving this whole money making scheme – often referred to as development – from the very beginning. You can

watch the **video**, where the discussion about the Amphitheater project begins at 2 hours and 15 minutes in.

The amphitheater project, along with other money making interests, was a project that came from Grand Action 2.0. You remember, the private entity that came up with the idea of building the downtown arena and the downtown market. Grand Action 2.0 is currently being led by Dick DeVos, Tom Welch and Carol Van Andel, along with a bunch of other **power brokers that make up the Executive and Advisory Committee**.

We first reported on the latest money making scheme from Grand Action 2.0 back in **October of 2020**, with a headline that read, With thousands of families struggling with the pandemic economy in Grand Rapids, Grand Action is proposing a downtown Amphitheater.

We followed up on the initial article and wrote a second piece in **November of 2020**, focusing on how much public money would be used and how this same kind of public funding for a single project doesn't happen in neighborhoods with a majority Black and Brown residents.

In **late November of 2020**, Grand Action 2.0 brought in a speaker and consultant to talk about the amphitheater project and other riverfront money making plans as well. One thing that was discussed was the importance of talking with stakeholders. Stakeholders is often code for those who have power and privilege, as is evidenced by the majority of those who were invited to give input in the graphic here.

The next GRIID article on the amphitheater project was published in **February of 2021**, where we talked a bit about some of the land being used for this project was owned by the

DeVos family. In addition, we discussed how the Convention Arena Authority (CAA) was run by people who are connected to the Grand Rapids Power Structure or represent other corporate interests.

Then in **June of 2021**, we posted another article looking at an updated cost of public money for the amphitheater project and wondered how the city could continue to justify this kind of public money that will benefit those who are already disgustingly rich during a time that the pandemic was raging thousands of people were potentially facing eviction in Grand Rapids.

We think it is important to refer to the past articles we have posted, especially since the local commercial news media has not asked these kinds of questions, not challenged who are the player pushing for these money making schemes along the riverfront.

Beyond the fact that this project was driven by Grand Action 2.0, a **second point** to discuss the the amount of public money being used in the process with limited public input. After the announcement of the riverfront money making project, the City agreed to pay $6,252,643 for the sewage system upgrade/relocation along Market Ave. The City then agreed to spend $2 million to convert Market Ave. into a downtown street. Then

there was the $7.45 Million the City agreed to pay for the relocation of the Kent County Road Commission site. Lastly, the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority or the Grand Rapids Brownfield Authority would borrow $20 million to finance the project. All together, that means **the City, which includes the DDA, would spend roughly $35.7 Million of public money, with little public input**.

A **third** point to make here, is to ask the question, **when was the last time that the City of Grand Rapids spent $35.7 Million on a project that would specifically benefit the Black community or any other marginalized community in this city?** In fact, we could expand this question to include the amount of money that is estimate to be spent on the larger 31 acre riverfront development (includes the amphitheater), which is $500 Million. **When was the last time the City of Grand Rapids spent $500 Million to benefit the BIPOC community in this city?**

Fourth, during the Committee of the Whole meeting, there was a great deal of discussion and affirmations around the fact that, 1) there would be between 1500 – 1700 new housing units included in the riverfront development project (including affordable housing), and 2) that there would likely be a built in mechanism to funnel some of the profits from this project into the City's Affordable Housing Fund. I'm glad that they are thinking about affordable housing, but they are missing the point here. When construction companies decide to build "affordable housing," they always apply for state funds (meaning public funds) to subsidize their total costs. This is great for construction companies and private developers, **but the problem with affordable housing is not just the construction costs, it is the fact that there are thousands of people living in this city that do not make a livable wage.** The real solution is to make sure everyone has a livable wage, since even the affordable housing is a lot more expensive that many can afford.

This brings us back to the primary beneficiaries of this project, those connected to Grand Action 2.0 and the other members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure. Since they are the primary owners of the land/property in the downtown area, they will reap the profits of the amphitheater construction, since it will make Grand Rapids an even more attractive destination city for tourists. (Several City officials made reference to Grand Rapids being a destination city during the discussion on Tuesday.) Grand Action 2.0 Executive Committee members control most of the hotels downtown, many restaurants, bars and non-city controlled parking. This is why these people push these kinds of projects, because they will be the primary beneficiaries in the long run. Plus, these are the same people who spent millions on electing candidates at the city, county, state and federal level, politicians that vote for public policies to benefit the billionaire class, the military industrial complex, the prison industrial complex, give a pass to corporate polluters, attack unions, promote systemic racism and harm the LGBTQ community.

Now, several City officials did say that will have inclusive and equitable plans in the larger riverfront development moving forward, which means they want to give contracts to as many minorities companies as possible. I certainly wouldn't discourage this, but the fact is that most BIPOC people are not business owners, they are workers. The City

can use all of the equity and inclusion language they want, but it will not impact most BIPOC or white working class people.

Lastly, the amphitheater project has been called one of the transformational projects in the City of Grand Rapids. Maybe it is time we start asking ourselves why development projects/money making projects are considered transformative instead of immigrant justice work, dismantling White Supremacy, ending poverty, food sovereignty or smashing homophobia and transphobia work as transformational? There is nothing transformational about projects that primarily benefit those who already have the most economic and political pow in this city.

Why we need to confront the Anti-Abortion Cartel in West Michigan, and other strategies outside of the political duopoly

https://griid.org/2022/05/16/why-we-need-to-confront-the-anti-abortion-cartel-in-west-michigan-and-other-strategies-outside-of-the-political-duopoly/

There was a recent article at the online independent news site, The Intercept, entitled, **A "WOODSTOCK" FOR RIGHT-WING LEGAL ACTIVISTS KICKED OFF THE 40-YEAR PLOT TO UNDO ROE V. WADE**.

This article provides an excellent overview of the origins of the anti-abortion movement in the United States, a movement that is rooted in religious fanaticism. The author of the article is Ilyse Hogue, who also wrote the book, *The Lie That Binds,* from which the article was taken. The article looks at the group the Federalist Society and a more recent organization, the **Alliance Defending Freedom**, which is mostly a group of lawyers who claim to defend individuals and entities on religious grounds, when in fact they are really committed to imposing Far Right Christian values on the rest of society.

Since the "leaked" Supreme Court document, I have been thinking about the West Michigan version of the 40-year war against abortion and who are the major players in the Greater Grand Rapids area, institutions and individuals that have played a major role in attempting to undo the legal framework of Roe v. Wade.

Churches and other Religious Institutions

Beginning in the late 1980s, the antiabortion attacks certainly escalated in Grand Rapids. Operation Rescue, the anti-Abortion group led by Randall Terry, came to Grand Rapids on several occasions beginning in the late 1980s. Protests and efforts to stop women from choosing to have an abortion were intense and often confrontational, as you can see from this Grand Rapids Press article above.

There are literally hundreds of churches in West Michigan that embrace an anti-abortion stance, some evangelical, some Christian Reformed, along with the Catholic Church.

Many of these churches would include information about protests and other so-called Pro-Life actions happening in Grand Rapids, Lansing or in Washington, DC.

As a more centralized entity, the Catholic Church has been firm on its stance against abortion. The Catholic Bishops in Grand Rapids since Roe v. Wade became law, have been consistently conservative on social issues, particularly on abortion. This means that there is entrenched opposition to abortion, with a structural mechanism to disseminate information around the issue of abortion and how people can become actively involved in opposing it. Catholic Church bulletins regularly include information about Right to Life rallies or action alerts on upcoming votes at the state and federal level as it relates to the issue of abortion.

There is also the Christian Reformed Church and while it is less centralized than the Catholic Church, their position on abortion has also **been consistent in their opposition since 1972**.

Then there are the numerous Evangelical Churches and independent churches, which are part of the larger Religious Right Movement in West Michigan. These churches have also consistently opposed abortion and have taken part in rallies and action to oppose reproductive choice. One example is The Ridge Covenant Church, where the pastor does regular video, such as **this one**, where he condemns abortion.

In addition to churches, there are other religious institutions that have also been part of the anti-Abortion movement. The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty has not only been opposed to abortion since their founding in 1990, they regularly provide analysis and information on their website that condemns abortion and endorses legal action, like their support of the Alliance Defending Freedom. The **Acton Institute led the charge to endorse Trump's Supreme Court nominee, Amy Cone Barrett**, who has been part of the Catholic group known as People of Praise, which believes that women should be subordinate to men.

Other religious entities that have provided support for the anti-abortion position is the Catholic Radio station, **Holy Family Radio**, which is 1140 AM and 98.3 FM in Grand Rapids. This radio station amplifies the anti-abortion positions on a regular basis and includes as one of its underwriter, Right to Life.

Funding the anti-Abortion Movement

Additionally, there are thousands of religious people in West Michigan that make regular contributions to Michigan Right to Life. More importantly, there are several members of the West Michigan elite that have collectively contributed millions of dollars to anti-abortion groups and other "family-values" organization that want to keep women in a subordinate role in society, which also means they do not want women to have bodily autonomy. In Russ Bellant's book, *The Religious Right in Michigan Politics,* he cites the DeVos family, Peter Cook, the Prince family, the Van Andel family and the DeWitt family as major funders of the anti-abortion movement. Many of these same families continue to make significant financial contributions to anti-abortions groups like Right to Life.

These families fund anti-abortion efforts in two ways. **First**, they collectively have provided millions of dollars to political candidates and to the Republican Party, which has consistently opposed abortion and have weakened women's access to abortion at the state level for the past four decades. The DeVos and Prince families have consistently funded Pro-Life candidates, candidates who have become members of Congress, along with State legislators, thus consistently pushing for policy that weakens access to abortions. According to the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, **between 1999 and 2016, the DeVos family contributed $81 Million to the Republican Party**.

The **Second** way that these families fund the anti-abortion movement, is through their foundations. Again, the DeVos family has been consistently the largest funder of the anti-abortion movement from West Michigan, which not only has included funding to groups like Right to Life, it means funding "pregnancy resource centers," and other groups like Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, the Acton Institute, the Alliance Defending Freedom, the Council for National Policy, the Federalist Society, Hiilsdale College, and many other groups that include opposition to abortion as part of their work/mission.

We have been tracking the various **DeVos Family Foundations since 2013**, where they have collectively contributed millions to organizations that oppose abortion.

If the reproductive justice movement is serious about keeping abortion legal and safe in the US, then they need to come to terms with the groups organizing against and bankrolling the anti-abortion movement. Recent rallies have been primarily held at Calder Plaza, but it might make sense for them to hold rallies outside the DeVos family headquarters in downtown Grand Rapids (200 Monroe NW) or the Catholic Diocese/ Cathedral location on South Division, just north of Wealthy St. This would not only provide an opportunity to educate people about the Anti-Abortion Cartel in West Michigan, it would force these groups to have to respond to their role in funding hate and harm.

In addition, of the few rallies that have been held in Grand Rapids in recent weeks, there have been numerous Democratic Party politicians and/or candidates who have spoken and advocated for people to vote Democratic if they want to save Roe V. Wade or minimize the harm being done at the state level. However, advocating for the electoral strategy has not been terribly effective since Roe v. Wade was adopted. Too often we forget that Roe v. Wade was adopted during the Nixon Administration, primarily because of a strong women's social movement.

Likewise, the electoral strategy doesn't always measure up, especially when Speaker of the House, **Nancy Pelosi, who is backing the anti-Choice incumbent Henry Cuellar in Texas**, over the more progressive primary challenger Jessica Cisneros. More importantly, as **Margaret Kimberly writes on Black Agenda Report**, the Democrats have had numerous opportunities to codify abortion rights into federal law, by passing legislation like the Freedom of Choice Act, which the Obama Administration promised to do, but never did.

I will conclude with some insightful analysis by Natasha Lennard, **writing for The Intercepted**, who says:

*Democrats in Congress should have long ago codified the right to abortion access, as the party's left flank has **urged**, but they didn't. If they don't act now to end the filibuster and pass abortion protection laws, they will deserve something approaching the same level of blame directed at anti-abortion Republicans.*

*After Texas passed an effective abortion ban last year, which was ruled unconstitutional by a state judge in December, President Joe Biden vowed to "launch a whole-of-government effort" to protect the right to abortion in the state. We are yet to see any such effort, even though, as I **wrote** at the time, there are a number of steps his administration could immediately take.*

If — and this really is an if — the fear of a nationwide abortion ban and the shock of Roe's undoing galvanizes Democratic voters in November, these will once again be votes against a greater evil, rather than votes the Democrats have earned. Just as today's Democratic Party has refused to take the lead on this issue even as abortion access has fallen apart in so many places, they will not take the lead now. Instead, it is up to us — it always has been.

Since we cannot rely on Democratic leaders, we must — following the example of organizers on the front lines of this struggle — work around the law, exploiting the coming interstate jurisdictional chaos around abortion law that the end of Roe will bring into even sharper relief. The fight for free and accessible abortions has always required solidarity, risk, and cunning. To keep reproductive justice alive, we must fight on terrain beyond the law, in contravention of certain laws, or in post-Roe legal gray areas.

One such group that is operating outside of the establishment framework is **Rise up 4 Abortion Rights**.

Sources used for this article:

- *The Religious Right in Michigan Politics, by Russ Bellant*
- *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right, by Jane Mayer*
- *Shadow Network: Media, Money, and the Secret hub of the Radical Right, by Anne Nelson*
- Spiritual Warfare, by Sara Diamond
- *The Lie That Binds, by Ilyse Hogue*
- Without Apology: The Abortion Struggle Now, by **Jenny Brown**

DeVos-led Amphitheater Project will likely receive $30 Million in State public money, with no public input

https://griid.org/2022/06/05/devos-led-amphitheater-project-will-likely-receive-30-million-in-state-public-money-with-no-public-input/

On Friday, MLive posted a story with the headline, **Grand Rapids leaders 'very hopeful' state budget will include $30M for riverfront amphitheater**.

The MLive article basically includes comments from a number of the players involved in the 12,000 seat outdoor amphitheater project, all of which are celebrating the fact that the State Budget includes $30 Million for this project.

The first source cited in the article is that of Birgit Klohs, former CEO of the Right Place Inc., and now the vice chair of the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA). Her comment was , "The amphitheater is the next big placemaking project in Grand Rapids."

The rest of those cited in the article are two representatives of Grand Action 2.0, State Representative David LaGrand and Thomas Albert, along with State Senator Mark Huizenga. Each of those cited offer up pleasantries about the amphitheater project without any real evidence. Rep. David LaGrand even makes the claim, "*I think this is the opposite of pork. I think this is an investment in the community. This is not quick giveaways. This is making Grand Rapids a better place to live and work*."

Ok, but where is the evidence. How is $30 Million of public money, which is going to a project that will be managed by the Convention Arena Authority and was crafted by Grand Action 2.0 going to make Grand Rapids a better place to live and work? How?

This is the kind of shoddy journalism we have come to expect from MLive, where any and all development projects are greeted with enthusiasm, especially if they receive public funds. If we had honest journalism in this city, then it would be easy to find the common denominator in the 12,000 seat outdoor amphitheater project that has been present since this idea first became public in 2020. The common denominator has always been the DeVos family.

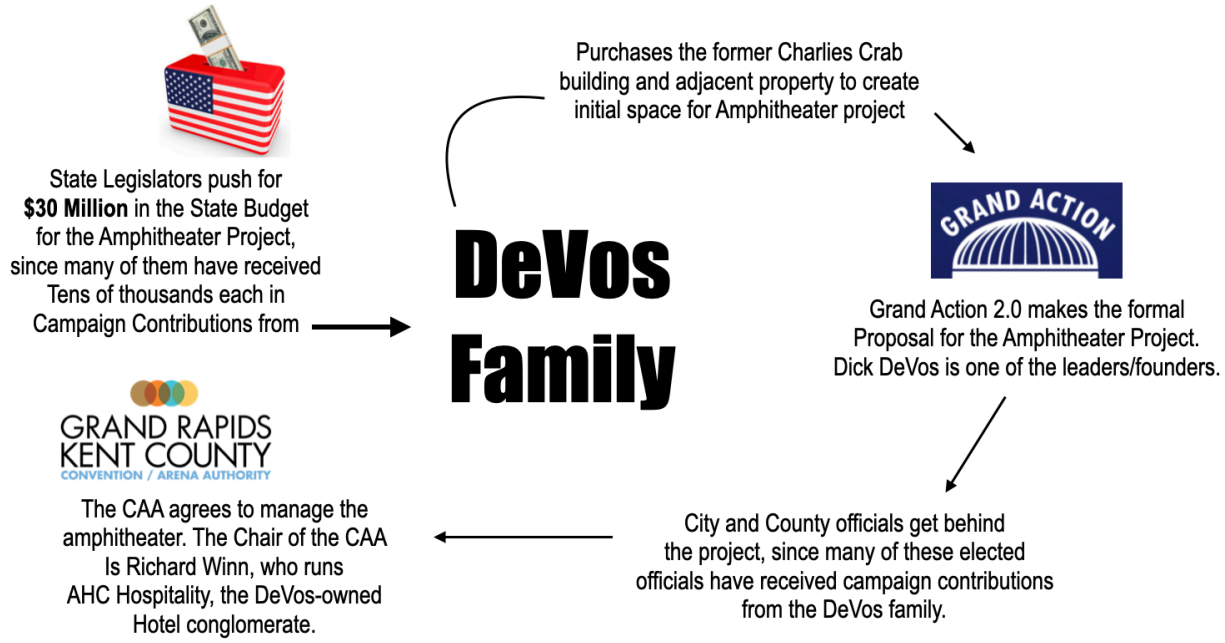
This whole project is projected to involve $119 million, between the City of Grand Rapids, the Convention and Arena Authority, the DeVos-owned 63 Market St LLC, and now the State of Michigan. This is a great deal of money, which demonstrates that when a multi-billionaire family, the DeVos family, wants something, they usually get it. Sure, building an outdoor amphitheater will bring more people, including more tourists to Grand Rapids, which means more money will be spent in the city. But, we must always ask ourselves who are the primary beneficiaries of such projects?

The primary beneficiary will be the DeVos family, since they own several hotels in the downtown area, a restaurant and a wine bar. The other beneficiaries will be other major property owners in the downtown area, many of which are part of the Grand Rapids Power Structure. Parking dollars go to the City of Grand Rapids and Ellis Parking. Most of the restaurants and bars owned in the downtown area are owned by those who own multiple establishments. It is true that all of the bars and the hotels rely on workers, but

those workers will generally not see an increase in pay, which means the majority of the money will go to the ownership class, some of whom are millionaires and billionaires.

The graphic here below illustrates how the DeVos family is essentially the primary factor in making the amphitheater project a reality.

One last aspect of this project that has also not been explored by the dominant commercial news media, is the fact that $30 Million of State funds, which are public dollars, will likely go to this entertainment-project. When was the last time that state and local officials were able to easily get $30 Million that would go directly to the thousands of families in Grand Rapids that are struggling to pay rent, who have little to no health care, are food insecure and are suffering from exploitation and systemic racism in this city? Yet we are told that the Amphitheater will make Grand Rapids a better place to live and work.



Sources used for this post and graphic:

https://griid.org/2020/10/07/with-thousands-of-families-struggling-with-the-pandemic-economy-in-grand-rapids-grand-action-is-proposing-a-downtown-amphitheater/

https://griid.org/2021/06/17/millions-for-an-amphitheater-while-tens-of-thousands-in-grand-rapids-face-poverty-eviction-and-structural-racism/

https://griid.org/2020/10/27/devos-money-in-the-2020-elections-part-ii-even-at-the-local-level-devos-money-bankrolls-candidates/

https://www.transparencyusa.org/mi/candidate/thomas-albert-can/donors?cycle=2017-to-now

https://www.transparencyusa.org/mi/candidate/mark-huizenga-can/donors?cycle=2017-to-now&page=1

https://www.devosplace.org/p/about1/about-caa

Doug DeVos podcast guest says that the 1619 Project is frightful: Dismissing the history of anti-Blackness in the US and Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2022/06/20/doug-devos-podcast-guest-says-that-the-1619-project-is-frightful-dismissing-the-history-of-anti-blackness-in-the-us-and-grand-rapids/

Earlier this year, **GRIID wrote a piece about a new podcast** that is hosted by one of our local billionaires, Doug DeVos.

In that article about the podcast hosted by Doug DeVos, we wrote:

The Believe! Podcast from Doug DeVos has so far featured people who are aligned with his religious views, other members of the Capitalist Class and those who defend the far right ideological values that are the very embodiment of the DeVos family. So, instead of blindly believing anything that people like Doug DeVos have to say, lets adopt solid critical thinking skills, skills which will allow us to see through the lies those in power want us to BeLIEve!

We continue to monitor the show's content and the guests that DeVos invites. One guest caught our attention, so we thought is was important to write about what Dr. Larry Arnn, the President of Hillsdale College had to say. The main theme of the interview between Doug DeVos and the Hillsdale College President was, **Why Should Students Love America?**

The President of Hillsdale College engages in what most scholars refer to as American Exceptionalism. American Exceptionalism is the idea that the US as a country is unique and special and should be seen as a model for the rest of the world. This sentiment is reflected in the conversation between Dr. Arnn and Doug DeVos, since neither of them mention anything about the US genocidal policies directed at the First Nation's people that lived here way before the Europeans invaded these lands.

The Hillsdale President does acknowledge slavery, but just in passing. Interestingly enough, Dr. Arnn then spends a great deal of time talking negatively about the 1619 Project, stating:

You know, the New York Times has done that frightful 1619 Project. And they claim that the movement of the founding of America from the colonies forward was in the direction of perpetuating slavery.

The President of Hillsdale College then cites Gordon Wood as the leading US Historian, so as to contradict the claims made by the 1619 Project. This theme is not really explored by DeVos or his guest, since both are not interested in a serious exploration of the more honest history that the 1619 Project explores, particularly as it related to the centuries long practice of systemic racism in the US and how it has impacted the Black community in particular.

While DeVos and his guest make backhanded comments about Critical Race Theory, they fail to mention that Hillsdale College has developed their own curriculum to counter the 1619 Project. The Hillsdale project is called **The Hillsdale 1776 Curriculum**, which is a very sanitized and whitewashed version of US history.

What we can learn from this episode of the podcast from Doug DeVos, is that he endorses and celebrates a view of US history that denies, ignores and minimizes the deeply racist history of the US, a history that continues til today. This is significant in two ways. First, Doug DeVos is the head of the Amway Corporation and he has contributed millions to the Republican Party and GOP candidates that promote and push for public policy to deny public education teachers to teach Critical Race Theory.

Second, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation provides millions in funding to projects in Grand Rapids, like AmplifyGR. AmplifyGR operates in a predominantly Black neighborhood, which begs the question, does Doug DeVos's belief about US history, particularly the history of racism, influence how his foundation contributions are used? If Doug DeVos vehemently disagrees with Critical Race Theory and the 1619 Project, shouldn't the residents of the Boston Square Neighborhood be made aware of his views on racism?

Acton Institute interview with Betsy DeVos on her new book that promotes an ideological agenda that hides behind buzzwords like School Choice

https://griid.org/2022/06/24/acton-institute-interview-with-betsy-devos-on-her-new-book-that-promotes-an-ideological-agenda-that-hides-behind-buzzwords-like-school-choice/

Former US Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos, has a book out. The book is entitled, *Hostages No More: The Fight for Education Freedom and the Future of the American Child*.

Just a few days ago, the far right Think Tank, the Grand Rapids-based Acton Institute, **interviewed DeVos about her new book**. The interview is worth listening to, even though the Acton podcast host couldn't contain himself with his glee in interviewing Betsy. I say it's worth listening to, since I believe that those of us who oppose the likes of Betsy DeVos, need to familiarize ourselves with the arguments and ideological principles that she embraces. If people just plainly reject something, without understanding it, that is not only intellectually inadequate, their rejection might also be based on faulty assumptions, which often leads to faulty responses.

After listening to the interview that the Acton Institute conducted with Betsy DeVos and after reading much of her new book, here are some of my overall responses.

First, DeVos believes that the US public education system is in deep trouble. I agree. The system of public education in the US is deeply dysfunctional and quite often perpetuates harm. I know this from my own experience of going through the K-12 public school system, along with my own critical reading of its history and the work that I have done with groups like Grand Rapids for Education Justice (GREJ). While working with GREJ, we determined that there is a two-tiered school system within the Grand Rapids Public Schools, where a smaller number of students get preferential treatment, while the bulk of GRPS students have limited resources, so much so that the GRPS is content to just graduate them, but not provide them with the necessary tools to be fully human and to fully participate in this society. The difference between groups that want to improve public education and people like Betsy DeVos, is that she wants to fundamentally alter public education, if not dismantle it. In fact, much of the two tiered system with the GRPS, is in part due to the **influence that Betsy DeVos and other members of her family have had in that system, particularly the former Superintendent**. Also, see our 3 part series entitled, **Betsy DeVos and the Covert Privatization of Grand Rapids Public Schools**.

Second, Betsy DeVos regularly uses – in her book and during her 30-year commitment to undermining public education – buzzwords and phrases that are often unsubstantiated. For instance, DeVos will say that the biggest roadblock to education reforms are the teacher unions. This primarily is driven by the fact that DeVos and other members of the Capitalist Class despise organized labor. In fact, teacher unions are one of the only reasons why public schools have not already been dismantled in the US. Other phrases that Betsy uses regularly are "government runs schools," that the "public school curriculum teaches students to hate the country," and that public education offers no "school choice." DeVos then uses personal stories to support such claims, stories that are nice and all, but never back up with hard data. In addition, the phrases she uses, to the extent that they are even remotely true, are due to the fact that she and the **anti-Public Education network she has helped to create over the past few decades**, has been somewhat effective in their efforts.

Third, in the Acton Interview and further explored in her book, DeVos takes aim at certain issues around public education that she uses to attack them. The pandemic has been a great opportunity to attack public schools and teacher's unions, in part because of **how school systems dealt with school closings and masking policies**. DeVos

claims that parents have become more involved in their children's schools, which is true, but DeVos fails to mention that this attack of public education has been primarily orchestrated by certain groups that are also part of the anti-Public Education network across the US. For example, parents in Kent County came to school board meetings and government meetings to rage against the system, but **this didn't happen in a vacuum**.

Fourth, the claim that public school curriculum teaches US students to hate the country, is not only ridiculous, it is unfounded. Betsy DeVos claims that the US Constitution is unique and that American Democracy is the best form of government on the planet. To the degree that teachers get students to critically assess such claims and to look at US history through a critical lens, is not teaching students to hate the US, it is teaching students important critical thinking skills. A Betsy DeVos funded and created entity, known as the Michigan Freedom Fund, has **railed against Critical Race Theory** over the past years, as has the anti-Public Education Network across the country. In addition, while Betsy DeVos claims to celebrate the US Constitution, she and her family have been **providing millions in funding to the National Constitution Center, which her brother Doug DeVos is a board member of**. The National Constitution Center has its own version of celebrating the US Constitution, one that ultimately protects power, especially from an increasingly organized public.

Fifth, the former US Secretary of Education spends a whole chapter in her book talking about an idea she created years ago, which she re-packaged while in the Trump Administration, known as Education Freedom Scholarship. This was essentially code for school vouchers, but DeVos and the people around her were smart enough to re-brand it using the word freedom. DeVos announced this program in **March of 2019**, and has continued to push for it around the country, but particularly in Michigan. The revised language for the campaign to use public money for private and charter schools, is called **Let MI Kids Learn**. To date, it is yet to be determined if this effort will get enough signatures to put it on the November 2022 Ballot.

Lastly, Betsy DeVos claims to be a proponent of free speech, particularly on college campuses. However, her idea of protecting free speech is driven by **her desire to protect the speech of those she agrees with, which is primarily those who side with power**. However, Betsy DeVos's claim that she support freedom of speech on college campuses, hold no water, especially when looks at what she said at a **speech she gave at Hiilsdale College in October of 2020**. DeVos spoke about the evils of socialism, stating:

Too many today—especially among our rising generation—don't seem to understand the dangers of such a view. They somehow have come to believe that socialism is the cure, not the deadly disease it really is. Tragically, it's because no one has taught them differently. And worse, some have been indoctrinated to believe not in themselves, but in government.

Betsy then goes on to say:

*So, the **unholy mob** thinks our economies need redistributing. It thinks our Constitution needs rewriting. It thinks our families need restructuring. One prominent group was explicit about its desire to "disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure." That's taken right from the old Marxist playbook. It admits the goal is to "[do] away with private property and [educate] children on a communal basis, and in this way [remove] the two bases of traditional marriage."*

DeVos was a bit more candid about her views, considering this was a Hillsdale College audience, but also because she knew that the Trump Administration was on the verge of being defeated in the November 2020 Election.

A day after the attempted coup by Trump supporters in 2021, Betsy DeVos formerly resigned from her position as Secretary of Education. We wrote about **her letter of resignation**, and stated in part:

*The fact that DeVos is trying to distance herself from what happened at the US Capitol on Wednesday is also a desperate attempt to deflect the fact that the **DeVos family spent millions in the last four years to elect Republicans**, many of which have encouraged the White Nationalist who attempted the coup, plus they contributed to Trump's re-election in 2020.*

Lastly, it is worth saying that Betsy's resignation is just another attempt by those who have benefited from Trumpism to try to save face. The reality is that the resignation of Betsy DeVos was a cowardly act, in a long line of cowardly acts that she and the rest of the Capitalist Class have been committing for a very long time.

In the end, Betsy DeVos will be using her book tour as another opportunity to mobilize people to join her in the fight against Public Education, just as she has done for the past 30 years. As I have said before, I have nothing but contempt for the likes of Betsy DeVos and her family, but it would be a serious mistake on our part to dismiss her as some sort of a nutcase. The DeVos family is indeed ruthless, but they are not stupid.

Latest Amway announcement on ending operations in Russia is all about the loss of markets

https://griid.org/2022/06/30/latest-amway-announcement-on-ending-operations-in-russia-is-all-about-the-loss-of-markets/

In **March**, we posted our response to Amway's announcement that they were temporarily suspending operations in Russia and Ukraine because of the Russian invasion

In that post from earlier this year we stated:

So, Amway does their best to avoid demonstrating any real solidarity with the Ukrainian people, nor do they empathize with the harsh realities that civilians are facing in Ukraine because of the Russian invasion. What Amway does do, is to constantly promote themselves and their capitalist values. In the end, the Amway corporation is not pausing operations because of human rights, they are only pausing operations because it would be an embarrassment to continue doing business in Russia. If Russia and Ukraine negotiate a peace settlement, you can bet that Amway will be back in Russia, attempting to create more little capitalists, regardless of the repressive political realities under the Putin regime.

Three and a half months later, the Ada-based global marketing giant has made another announcement about finally ending their operations in Russia. Here is their **full statement**:

Earlier this week, we shared with our employees and Amway Business Owners (ABOs) that Amway's global Board of Directors has made the decision to cease operations in Russia. This follows our announcement on March 14th, 2022, on the suspension of product imports.

This is the first time in Amway's 63-year history that we have left a market. What makes this such a heartbreaking decision is our enduring belief in offering an economic opportunity, meant for everyone. After exploring all possible options, we have reached a point where economic, technological, organizational, and operational circumstances have made it impossible for us to operate in Russia.

Beginning July 1, we will be thoughtfully and responsibly winding down our operations there. We are focused on providing support to those impacted by this decision; and on treating all with openness, dignity, and respect while meeting our contractual and statutory obligations.

Amway employees and ABOs in Russia have been a part of our family for 17 years and we are endlessly grateful to them for their dedication and for inspiring us with their entrepreneurial spirit.

This latest announcement is worth deconstructing, something that local media sources like **MLive** will not do.

First, like in their March 2022 announcement, Amway makes it all about them. In their brief statement, Amway uses their own name four times. In addition, Amway center's their business owners in Russia.

Second, the pyramid scheme company further's their narcissism by saying, "***This is the first time in Amway's 63-year history that we have left a market***. ***What makes this***

such a heartbreaking decision is our enduring belief in offering an economic opportunity, meant for everyone."

Third, never does the Amway announcement discuss the difficulties that the Russian invasion of Ukraine – which continues to divert public money for militarism rather than human needs – has caused regular Russia people, whom they claim to champion. There is also no statement of solidarity with the Russian or Ukrainian people, both of whom are suffering from the violence of the invasion and the economic consequences of that invasion. **No, we are sad because we are missing out on pushing our products in a market!**

This latest Amway announcement is rather instructive, especially since it exposes the core of the Amway business ethos, which is nothing more than the ethos of Capitalism. It all comes down to expanding markets and profit margins, without even a hint of humanity or solidarity for the people of two countries that will be impacted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, nor the role that the US and NATO are playing to expand their area of influence. Maybe Amway can recoup their profit loses in Russia by become the official sponsor of the US military and their NATO allies. Soap and vitamins for everyone!

Wanted for funding the criminalization of Abortion: The DeVos Family

https://griid.org/2022/07/07/wanted-for-funding-the-criminalization-of-abortion-the-devos-family/

This is the first in a series of WANTED posters, looking at individuals, families and organizations in West Michigan that have contributed significantly to the criminalization of abortion and the undermining of reproductive justice.

The DeVos family has probably done more than any single family in West Michigan to contribute to the criminalization of abortion. The DeVos family undermines the efforts of reproductive justice through their money and political influence.

First, the DeVos family funds the anti-abortion movement through their foundations – the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, the Dan & Pamella DeVos Foundation and the CDV5 Foundation. The DeVos family has been consistently the largest funder of the anti-abortion movement from West Michigan, which not only has included funding to groups like Right to Life, it means funding "pregnancy resource centers," and other groups like Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, the Acton Institute, the Alliance Defending Freedom, the Council for National Policy, the Federalist Society, Hiilsdale College, and many other groups that include opposition to abortion as part of their work/

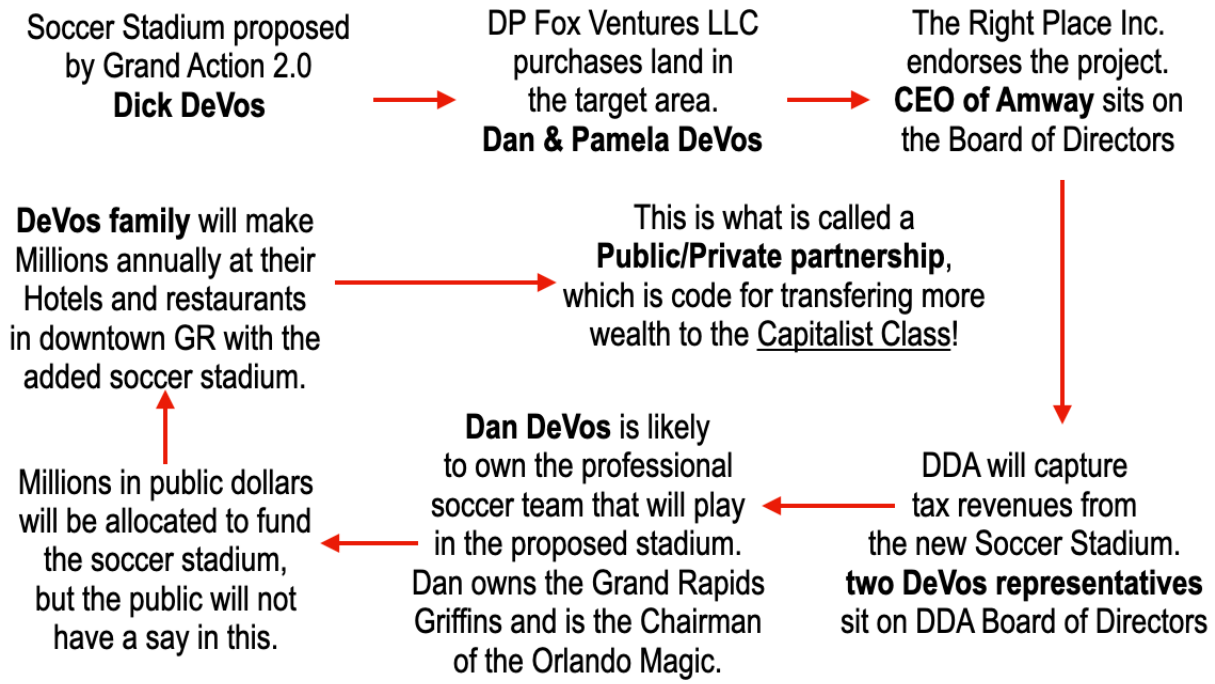
mission. To see the history of their foundation contributions, you can download our document, a **DeVos Family Reader**.

Second, the DeVos family has provided millions of dollars to political candidates and to the Republican Party, which has consistently opposed abortion and have weakened women's access to abortion at the state level for the past four decades. According to the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, **between 1999 and 2016, the DeVos family contributed $81 Million to the Republican Party**. In 2018, the **DeVos family contributed $11 million, leading up to the 2018 Election** and in 2020, GRIID documented that they **contributed $12.7 million in the 2020 Election**. This means that the DeVos family has contributed **a little over $100 million since 1999** to Republican candidates, all of whom are endorsed by Right to Life and are staunchly committed to opposing abortion.

We encourage you to share this poster and consider directing some of your rage at the recent US Supreme Court ruling to overturn Roe v Wade towards the DeVos family. We know where they live and where their headquarters are located in downtown Grand Rapids.

Proposed soccer stadium in downtown Grand Rapids is a study in how the DeVos family gets what they want – ownership and massive profits

https://griid.org/2022/09/08/proposed-soccer-stadium-in-downtown-grand-rapids-is-a-study-in-how-the-devos-family-gets-what-they-want-ownership-and-massive-profits/



Do you ever feel like members of the Capitalist Class in Grand Rapids get to do whatever the hell they want to? Well, it sure seems that way, which is exactly why GRIID attempts to monitor and write about people and organizations that we identify as being part of the Grand Rapids Power Structure.

On September 1st, **MiBiz reported** that the group that is behind the soon to be realized outdoor amphitheater, Grand Action 2.0, is now looking to potentially develop land between Pearl and Bridge St on the near westside for a soccer stadium. A rendering of the potential site can be seen at the bottom of this article.

The MiBiz story also points out that the DeVos family (specifically DP Fox Ventures LLC) recently purchased 407 Pearl St. NW for $3.175 million. DF Fox Ventures LLC is one of the DeVos family holdings that is run by Dan and Pamella DeVos. The fact that Dan DeVos is behind the purchase of this property, which is one piece of a potential site for a new soccer stadium, makes complete sense, especially since Dan DeVos is the chairman of the NBA team, the Orlando Magic, is co-owner of the Grand Rapids Griffins and was owner of the now defunct arena football team, the Grand Rapids Rampage.

In Dave Zirin's book, ***Bad Sports: How Owners Are Ruining the Games We Love***, he discusses how wealthy sports team owners are constantly manipulating municipal governments and city residents to get them to provide massive subsidies for the construction of sports venues, like arena's and stadiums. Zirin mentions how the DeVos family squeezed taxpayers in Orlando, when they wanted a new arena for their Orlando Magic basketball team. Zirin writes:

"And he's (DeVos) is getting $1 billion in taxpayers' money to build the arena. That sends a bad message. Indeed. At its core, the DeVos model could be characterized as theft of public funds that turns teams and arenas into slush funds for radical right politics."

The MiBiz article cites Grand Action 2.0 spokesperson, Kara Wood, who used to work for the City of Grand Rapids. The article also cites Nick Wasmiller, who is the Director of Communications at RDV Corporation, even though the MiBiz article refers to him as a "DeVos Family spokesperson." In addition, the article cites a memo about the potential soccer stadium, which was produced by the Right Place Inc., which has the current CEO of Amway on their Board of Directors and is a member of the Grand Rapids Power Structure.

On Wednesday, **MLive also wrote** a story about the potential soccer stadium, although they didn't really have any new information about the project. MLive did reach out to other contacts to get some feedback on this story, such as the PR firm Truscott Rossman. John Truscott was the Press Secretary for Michigan Governor John Engler, and he sits of the Board of Directors of the Grand Rapids Economic Club. Truscott Rossman also does PR work for the West Michigan Policy Forum, which is also a member of the Grand Rapids Power Structure.

Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. was also cited in the MLive article, as was a spokesperson for the City of Grand Rapids, along with Grand Rapids Mayor Bliss, who was quoted as saying, that "***she was "excited about a project of this scale and the vibrancy it could add to our city and region***."

Now, we all know that whenever Grand Action does a project, that the public ends up paying a significant portion of the cost, whether that is tax breaks by the city or the State of Michigan. This has been the case with every major project that Grand Action has been behind since they were founded. Here is a list of the Grand Action projects that have received significant public funding:

- Van Andel Arena
- DeVos Place
- Meijer Majestic Theater
- MSU Secchia Center
- Grand Rapids Downtown Market
- Downtown outdoor Amphitheater project – still in process

Despite the fact that the public has contributed large sums of money to these projects, and will to the soccer stadium, the public has no say in the matter. There will be no public vote on whether a soccer stadium gets built, nor who will own it. If the soccer stadium get built on in the area between Pearl and Bridge St., it will certainly have an impact on traffic, the need to create additional parking, and the likely displacement of existing residents or small businesses in the area. This kind of displacement has happened before.

In the mid-1990s, when the Van Andel Arena was being built, that project took over existing City owned parking lots. At the same time, there was a development proposal in the works where the proposed soccer stadium might go on the westside. In the mid 1990's, Jack Buchanan Jr. had the idea of re-developing the near westside. Buchanan bought up roughly 60 homes, continued to rent those spaces, but did nothing to maintain those properties. People were then forced to leave those rental properties, because Buchanan had plans to re-create that area, with office and residential space for members of the professional class. However, before all of the residents in the area had left, Chuck Peterson and myself, using equipment from GRTV, had interviewed a dozen different residents, all of which told us that Jack Buchanan Jr had not maintain the rental units. Some of those properties were so bad that when it rained, water would leak into the homes where people were living. People also told us that they were offered a 20 inch TV and one months rent if they agreed to leave and sign a non-disclosure agreement.

However, the project became too costly, so Buchanan ended up selling the land to the City of Grand Rapids, which constructed parking lots they needed because of the parking spaces that were displaced by the Van Andel Arena. **Buchanan later tried to defraud the State of Michigan** in another development project and went to jail in 2011.

The point of sharing this information is to say that the land that is being eyed as a potential site for the proposed soccer stadium, has a long history of rich people making bank, while screwing over working class families.

Downtown Grand Rapids has an interesting history, with its origins being Settler Colonialism and the displacement of Indigenous communities. Since then downtown Grand Rapids has been a major hub for those with political and economic power to make and remake that part of the city, regardless of what the public thinks. Downtown Grand Rapids is like a playground for the members of the Capitalist Class, where they get what they want or they'll throw a temper tantrum. And what they want is to continue to get the public to pay for their playground projects, while they sit back and watch their wealth exponentially increase. We should see the proposed soccer stadium as just the most recent example of the Capitalist Con, with the DeVos family being the primary beneficiaries.

The DeVos/Grand Action 2.0 Amphitheater will officially be run by the Kent County Convention Arena Authority

https://griid.org/2022/11/15/the-devos-grand-action-2-0-amphitheater-will-officially-be-run-by-the-kent-county-convention-arena-authority/

We first heard about the plans for a 14,000 seat outdoor amphitheater back in October of 2020, when Grand Action 2.0 first announced the plans.

We have also written the following articles as this project has unfolded:

Grand Rapids invests over $6 million for private development in downtown, while Southeast Grand Rapids experiences disinvestment: We call this Structural Racism

Grand Action 2.0 speaker provides update on new development vision for Grand Rapids: Whiteness, Grand Rapids as a destination and Disaster Capitalism

DeVos controlled Amphitheater Project using public money will be voted on at the February 9th Grand Rapids City Commission meeting

How is it that we allow groups like Grand Action 2.0 to get away with the shit they do?

Millions for an Amphitheater, while tens of thousands in Grand Rapids face poverty, eviction and structural racism

DeVos-led Amphitheater Project will likely receive $30 Million in State public money, with no public input

Tuesday morning, during the Grand Rapids City Commission Committee Meeting of the Whole, City Officials approved the mission statement of the Amphitheater, which you can read about in the **Committee of the Whole Agenda packet, pages 9 – 11**.

Before getting to the mission statement, it is important to look at what real function the Amphitheater will play. On page 9 of the agenda packet, it reads:

*"The property that the City will sell to the CAA is part of a **larger corridor redevelopment plan**, which will include a mix of uses, public access to the riverfront, and other features reflecting the Grand River's restoration as a key **place-making opportunity** for the city.*

*The CAA and City continue to make progress on the steps necessary to complete the purchase, including creation of separate parcels dividing the city-owned property into smaller parcels for sale. Design and financial planning for the amphitheater continues through **a partnership of Grand Action 2.0, the DDA/DGRI, the City, the CAA and other stakeholders."***

To be clear, this project has always been about re-developing the Market Avenue corridor, from Fulton St. all the way down to Godfrey SW. There are already plans to turn an old warehouse into high end apartments, with plans to include lots of restaurants and other commercial establishments along that route.

You also can see from the above text that City Officials are using the "place-making" terminology, which was widely adopted by cities across the country after Richard Florida wrote his 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class.* Since then, Florida's ideas have received a ton of criticism, mostly with the claim that his ideas helped to usher in a new wave of gentrification throughout North America. Florida even acknowledge this reality, with his 2018 book entitled, *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class-and What We Can Do About It.* Unfortunately, Grand Rapids City Officials have yet to acknowledge that gentrification exists in Beer City USA.

The last thing worth pointing about about the text is the listing of the now normalized Public/Private partnership group involved in the Amphitheater plans, even though there is the mysterious "other stakeholders" listed. Stakeholders is nothing more than code for people and organizations with power that primarily function to maintain economic dominance and political power.

Amphitheater Mission Statement

To encourage economic development within the West Michigan region, create jobs and provide a facility for entertainment, enjoyment and benefit of the residents in an economical manner with a priority of facility fiscal responsibility through the delivery of events that are primarily entertainment related with a secondary emphasis on artistic and community activities and public events.

The mission statement includes all of the usual vagueness of mission statements, like create jobs and benefit all residents. They never clarify if these new jobs will pay a living wage, with benefits nor do they provide any clarity on the cost of admission for a concert or other entertainment-based events.

The mission statement for the Amphitheater is nothing more than the latest project in a continuing effort to transform downtown Grand Rapids into a playground for the privileged and a destination place for tourism. It will primarily provide economic benefits for those who are already economically well off, plus the ongoing development is likely to impact the Grandville Avenue corridor and the Black Hills neighborhood. I'm not someone who gambles, but I would bet on who the real beneficiaries of the Amphitheater project will be in 5 to 10 years.

Doug DeVos had a conversation on his podcast about leadership with Mike Pence, Mike F**king Pence

https://griid.org/2022/11/17/doug-devos-had-a-conversation-on-his-podcast-about-leadership-with-mike-pence-mike-fking-pence/

On the **October 25th episode of Doug DeVos' podcast Believe**, he discussed the topic of what it means to be a leader, with former Vice President, Mike Pence.

For the next 48 minutes, DeVos and Pence talked about what they thought leadership was all about, even though I had a hard time identifying what they hell they were really talking about. I would not recommend listening to the show yourself, but if you have 48 minutes to waste, then by all means. What follows are a few observations that I took away from their conversation.

For the first two and a half minutes Pence talked about the fact that he has been an admirer of Doug and the DeVos family for years. Then, DeVos return the admiration, which quickly turned into a love-fest.

The first thing that Mike Pence said about leadership, was that it was a gift "we get from God." Pence then went in to talk about his foundation of leadership, which is knowing who one is. For Pence, he is first a Christian, then a Conservative and lastly a Republican.

Pence then said that he aspired to embrace a servant leadership model. DeVos then chimed in saying that leadership is having a sense of humility. Ok, how it it that these two rich, white, deeply privileged people can say shit like this with a straight face. Are they just saying it because this is what those who look up to them want to hear, or do they really believe this crap?.

Doug DeVos then asked Pence, “how do you avoid bad judgment or pitfalls?” Pence responded by saying it all has to do with how you begin your day. Pence said, he began his day with prayer and reading the Bible.

DeVos then asked Pence how he puts principles into action. Pence said he was involved in the group **Advancing American Freedom**, which is essentially a group of mostly former Trump Administration people, along with other far right Republicans. Their principles and goals are just more of the same.

Finally about two thirds into the conversation, Pence said this about Donald Trump, **“*Trump was a great leader and great personality.*”** So much for distancing himself from the former President and now Presidential candidate. It is incredulous that Pence could say this about a man who engaged in so much hateful rhetoric, on top of the loathsome policies that oppressed so many and rewarded so few.

Doug DeVos then asked about the pandemic and leadership from the Trump Administration. The response from Pence had me listening in disbelief. Pence said that Trump did something that was historic, which was to suspend travel from China. The former Vice President then said they need a broad range of counsel on the pandemic, so they listened to experts, like people from the CDC. Pence then went on to say the following about the Trump Administration. “***We saved thousands, if not millions of lives in those early days***.” I don’t know what is worse, the fact that Pence was literally creating a fictional history of how the Trump administration responded to the pandemic, or the fact that Doug DeVos said nothing to question or challenge this assertion. On the conservative side of the numbers, there was an Associated Press article with the headline, **Shameful’: US virus deaths top 400K as Trump leaves office.**

The conversation on leadership ended with DeVos and Pence talking about how the US leads the world. DeVos asked the question, “How does American leadership impact the world?” Pence responded by saying that America is the indispensable leader of the world, and that the world looks to America and counts on America for leadership. Again, are they saying this to satisfy their listeners or because they really believe this shit?

At the very end of the conversation, Pence makes a plug for his new book, which is an autobiography, entitled, *So Help Me God!* All I could think about was, this is the phrase my mother would use when she was anger with us kids. “*So help me God, wait til your father gets home.*“

In the end, I do believe that what Pence and DeVos were saying throughout the conversation was not just for listeners, they both really believed every word they were saying. This is one of the things about people who embrace religious ideology. Of course they believe what they said, because they think that God talks to them and justifies all the horrible shit they do in the world. I’m rich because God wants me to be. I hate gays because God told me so, Women are murderers if they have an abortion, because….yeah, God.

People like Doug DeVos and Mike Pence live lives that are so insulated from the real world, that they have no idea about the harm they cause, nor the pain and suffering that countless people experience because of their ideological bullshit.

Is the DeVos family getting involved in another land deal in Grand Rapids, this time in the 2nd Ward?

https://griid.org/2022/11/17/is-the-devos-family-getting-involved-in-another-land-deal-in-grand-rapids-this-time-in-the-2nd-ward/

Updated version of this story, with new information added on November 23rd from someone who contacted GRIID.)

As readers on this blog will know, anytime the DeVos family gets involved in purchasing property, especially for future housing projects, the public should be very concerned about such projects.

In 2017, when the DeVos/Rockford Construction Company partnership spent millions to buy up several dozen properties in the Third Ward, specifically the Boston Square Neighborhood. All of this happened without resident knowledge. The DeVos/Rockford Construction land grab in the Third Ward was then followed by the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation's creation of AmplifyGR, which was charged with implementing DeVos-family values, such as creating entrepreneurs, educational opportunities outside of the Public School system and taking advantage of public money to achieve said goals. You can read all of the GRIID postings on the DeVos/Rockford Construction/AmplifyGR project at this link **https://griid.org/tag/amplifygr/**.

We recently learned of a land purchase by the DeVos family in the Second Ward, just east of the Kent Country Club on Diamond and Country Club Dr. NE. **MiBiz posted an article on November 8th**, which read in part:

The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy recently awarded a total of $1.73 million in brownfield grants for three redevelopments on contaminated properties in West Michigan.

The brownfield grants include $1 million for the Boston Square Together project in Grand Rapids, $430,000 for a multi-building apartment project in Grand Rapids' Creston neighborhood, and $300,000 for a condominium development at 815 Verhoeks St. in Grand Haven.

The state agency awarded the grants to the city of Grand Rapids' Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and its Economic Development Corp. as well as the Grand Haven Brownfield Redevelopment Authority. The local entities plan to allocate the funds to the three redevelopment projects.

The grants will fund demolition, environmental investigations, disposal of contaminated soil and the installation of barriers and ventilation systems beneath future buildings to prevent potential exposure to residual contamination.

*Jacey Shachter, president of **Metric Structures LLC** and developer of the Country Club Place project in the Creston neighborhood, said the $430,000 in brownfield funding is an important step for the project. The $8 million project would contain two apartment buildings with multiple levels, but a unit count is still undetermined, Shachter said.*

"We like to do infill community development," Shachter told MiBiz. "This is right in the Creston neighborhood, it's been vacant for a long time and we like a good puzzle to figure out how we can add value and activate some of these infill sites."

The development would be located on two parcels at 1603 Diamond Ave. NE and 1600 Country Club Drive NE. The plan calls for demolishing a 1,189-square-foot existing building on the site, allowing for the removal of contaminated soils underneath.

*Affiliates of **RDV Corp.**, the family office for the DeVos family, purchased both properties for $270,000 in June 2021, according to property records. **Artesian Group LLC**, registered to Angel Gonzalez, is the former property owner.*

"The City of Grand Rapids Economic Development Corporation is grateful to EGLE for their investment in the cleanup efforts of this project," Jonathan Klooster, executive director of the Grand Rapids Economic Development Corp., said in a statement. "Our partnership continues to make urban infill projects like this financially feasible and helps to incrementally increase housing supply in our community."

*Shachter hopes to break ground on the project in spring of 2023. Grand Rapids-based **MEM Designs LLC** serves as the project designer.*

In looking at who actually purchased the land, which the MiBiz article refers to as, "Affiliates of **RDV Corp.**, the family office for the DeVos family, we were able to find this information from this City of Grand Rapids link **https://bsaonline.com/?uid=115**. If you put in 1603 Diamond Ave. NE, it says that the owner of the property is 1600 COUNTRY CLUB LLC, which is located at 4940 Cascade Rd SE, Suite 220, Grand Rapids, MI 49546. Guess what entity has an office at 940 Cascade Rd SE, **CDV5 Property Management**, which is run by Cheri DeVos.

People with wealth and those involved in land grabs, often create LLCs to hide their identity. CDV5 Property Management purchased the property in June of 2021. If you enter 1600 Country Club Drive NE, you get the same information, that it was purchased by 1600 Country Club LLC, which is Cheri DeVos' property management company. In addition, it is important to note that Jacey Shachter, who is the president of **Metric Structures LLC** (the developer for the housing project mentioned in the MiBiz article), is the daughter of Steve Ehmann, the husband of Cheri DeVos and co-owner of **CDV5 Property Management**. As is the case with many DeVos family companies and projects, they often contract with other family members, which keeps the wealth in house.

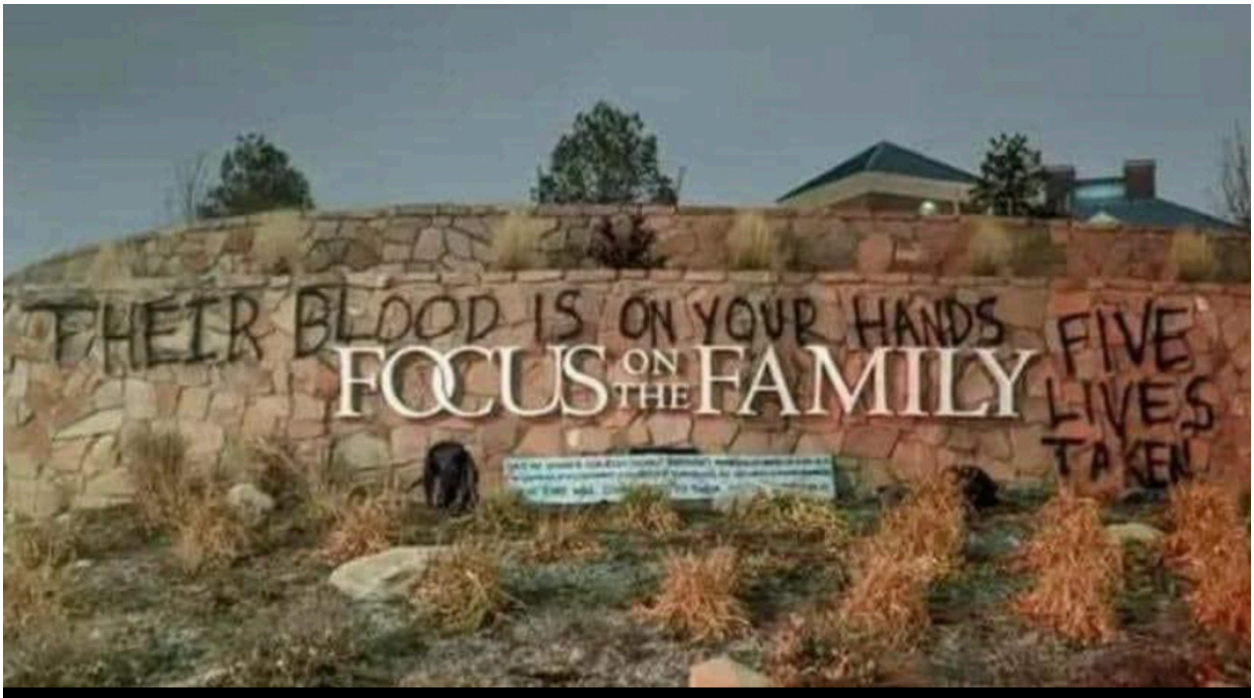
The 1603 Diamond NE property has an old commercial building on the site, but the land listed as 1600 Country Club Drive NE is a vacant lot.

Lastly, it is important to note that the property currently owned by the DeVos family is a beneficiary of the brownfield development funds, which is public money, for environmental clean up for the land they now own. You can also bet that when this land is developed, it will also likely submit a request to the Michigan State Housing Development Authority for more public funds to develop the property. Now, we don't know if the DeVos family when end up owning the new housing project, but if they do, they will double dip for public subsidies, while profiting from either the management of the developed property or the sale of it after the development is complete. Isn't Capitalism wonderful……..at least for the rich.

Group that spray painted a message to Focus on the Family after Club Q shooting, calls out the DeVos family for their role in fostering an anti-LGBTQ ideology

https://griid.org/2022/11/27/group-that-spray-painted-a-message-to-focus-on-the-family-after-club-q-shooting-calls-out-the-devos-family-for-their-role-in-fostering-an-anti-lgbtq-ideology/

It has been a week since a lone gunman entered Club Q in Colorado Springs, Colorado, shooting and killing at least five people and injuring 25 others.



The group which spray painted this message released a statement, identifying the DeVos family as a major supporter of the anti-LGBTQ ideology of groups like Focus on the Family.

As with most mass shootings, US officials make vague pronouncements, offer condolences and make promises to enact "tougher gun laws." US President Joe Biden did acknowledge, "*that the LGBTQI+ community has been subjected to horrific hate violence in recent years*." Unfortunately, **Biden never addresses the root causes of the horrific hate violence directed at the LGBTQI+ community**.

However, more radical LGBTQ groups, particularly those that identify as queer and trans, have been calling out the source(s) of all of the violence directed at them. The site **It's Going Down**, posted an image that many people are sharing on social media, where people spray painted graffiti on the wall of the complex for the far right group, Focus on the Family.

The graffiti states, ***Their Blood is on Your Hands – Five Lives Taken!***

Unfortunately, the accompanying statement that went with the image taken of the Focus on the Family complex, is often not included with the image. The group that is claiming responsibility for the spray painted message released the following statement:

"It is important to us that you understand why Focus on the Family must be held accountable for the ramifications of their hateful theology. You have likely seen the onslaught of anti-trans legislation, of which Focus on the Family is a huge proponent, both in funding and propaganda. With an alarmingly expansive network, they work closely with powerful entities, such as the DeVos family, to promote and fund this anti-trans legislation. Focus on the Family's goal is to eradicate queerness. Tactics they use to achieve this include indoctrination, media saturation, falsified research, and conversion therapy. We encourage you to continue to investigate the many examples of their culpability, which can be found front and center on their own website."

GRIID has been monitoring the kind of support from the DeVos (and Prince and Van Andel) family, which is reflected in this statement. In 2016, when the the shooting at the Pulse Night Club happened in Orlando, Florida, **GRIID wrote a response** talking about the role that the DeVos family has played in creating an anti-LGBTQ culture, which normalizes violence against those in lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans and queer communities. In more recent posts, we have also made the connection to the funding of the DeVos family and how it fosters anti-LGBTQ violence, specifically in the Republican candidates they have endorsed. Here is just a sample of some of those recent posts:

GOP proposes anti-trans legislation in Michigan: Every co-signers of the bill has received money from the DeVos family

DeVos family has contributed nearly half a million to DeSantis, making them complicit in the Don't Say Gay bill

Republican Representatives introduce a vicious anti-trans bill in the Michigan State House

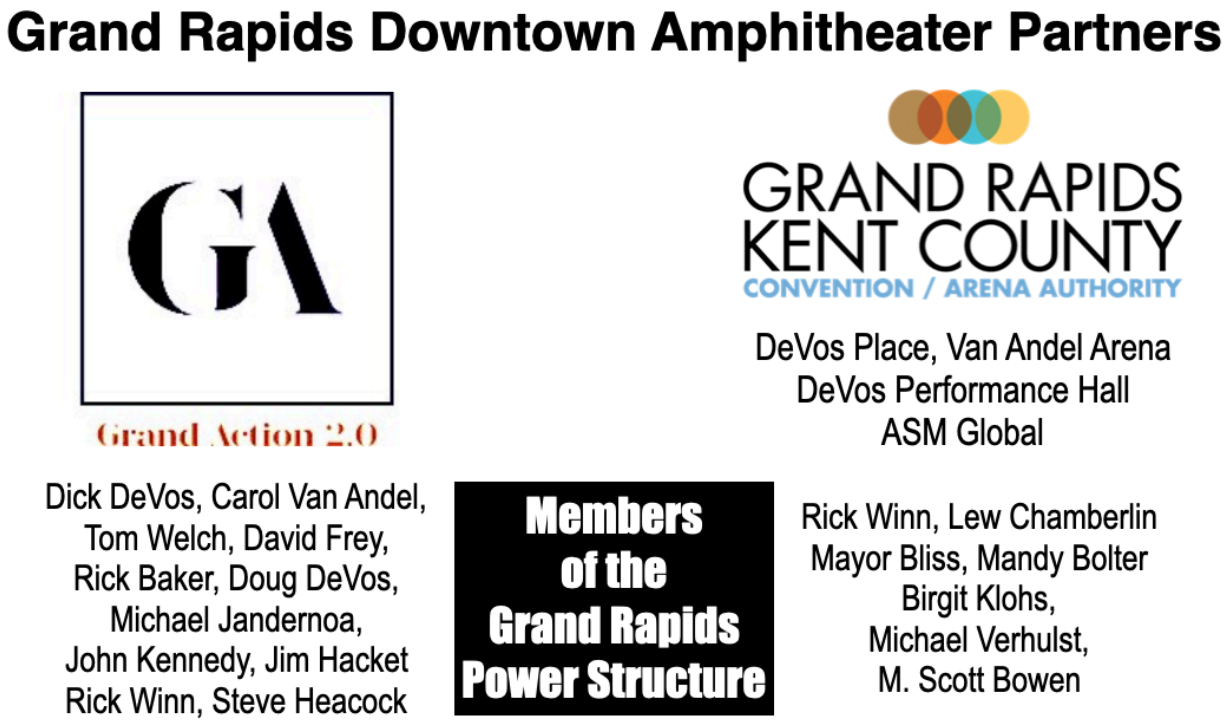
Now, Grand Rapids likes to claim that they are all about equity and inclusion, but think about this for a moment. There are some 800 churches in Grand Rapids, yet there are

only a few that have publicly stated that they support and welcome the LGBTQ community. If you go to the site **https://www.gaychurch.org/find_a_church/** and put in Grand Rapids, Michigan, you can see that there are 30 churches listed as open and affirming. 30 out of 800, while pitiful, is not because of a lack of education, but a reflection of the fact that this city, and West Michigan as a whole, is deeply rooted in heteronormativity, which means it is inherently anti-LGBTQ. A major contributing factor in the heteronormativity in this city is because of the role that the DeVos/Prince/Van Andel/Cook families and other members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure play in fostering an anti-LGBTQ culture.

So instead of vague statements or thoughts & prayers for those who were killed at Club Q or the Pulse, or potentially at places like Rumors right here in Grand Rapids, why don't we organize a real solidarity action that exposes the DeVos family in the same way as the queer activists did in Colorado?

Agreement between Grand Action 2.0 and the Convention Arena Authority on the amphitheater is an agreement between those who run Grand Rapids https://griid.org/2023/02/05/agreement-between-grand-action-2-0-and-the-convention-arena-authority-on-the-amphitheater-is-an-agreement-between-this-who-run-grand-rapids/

On Friday, it was reported by at least two local news sources that a formal agreement has been made between Grand Action 2.0 and the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA).



The agreement in question has to do with Grand Action 2.0's push for an outdoor amphitheater in Grand Rapids, which the Convention/Arena Authority will operate once the amphitheater is operational in 2025, **according to MLive**.

In both the MLive article and a **news story on WOODTV8**, the primary source cited is Kara Wood, who is the executive director of Grand Action 2.0. However, both news sources failed to mention that Kara Wood used to be the Economic Development Director for the City of Grand Rapids. Woods was hired to be the ED of Grand Action 2.0 last year and has a history of supporting projects that involve the DeVos family, such as **Start Garden being on the payroll of the City of Grand Rapids to promote more business development in Grand Rapids**. GRIID received this information from Kara Wood when she was working for the City of Grand Rapids in 2016.

Both news stories mention that this is a public/private partnership, which means that lots of public money will be used in the process of developing the amphitheater, without public input, as we have reported on since 2020 in the article here:

DeVos controlled Amphitheater Project using public money will be voted on at the February 9th Grand Rapids City Commission meeting

How is it that we allow groups like Grand Action 2.0 to get away with the shit they do?

Millions for an Amphitheater, while tens of thousands in Grand Rapids face poverty, eviction and structural racism

DeVos-led Amphitheater Project will likely receive $30 Million in State public money, with no public input

The coverage also mentions that there will be plans to further develop the Market Ave corridor where the amphitheater will be located, which also means that certain developers, businesses and members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure will be the primary beneficiaries. The DeVos family is the primary driver in this project, and they do engage in such projects by making sure that plenty of public dollars will be used for development and construction. After the Market Ave corridor is fully developed, the public will not share in the profits that the DeVos family and other members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure will pocket. This is how neoliberal capitalism works – get the public to pay up front, while the private sector reaps all the profits.

DeVos Family expands their wealth, thus allowing them to increase their influence politically, socially and culturally in Michigan https://griid.org/2023/03/21/devos-family-expands-their-wealth-thus-allowing-them-to-increase-their-influence-politically-socially-and-culturally-in-michigan/

When Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel started the Amway Corporation, they had no idea what it would mean decades later in terms of the influence they would have in West Michigan and beyond.

Rich DeVos became a major player in the Religious Right beginning in the 1970s, then in the 1980s his role in the Republican Party was elevated, not just because of his campaign contributions, but in how he was able to normalize Religious Right values into the party, resulting in having a say in policy, like his appointment to President Reagan's AIDS Commission in 1987.

The next generation of the DeVos family saw a significant evolution, not that the family's values changed, nor their commitment to Capitalism, but how the children of Rich DeVos began to diversify the wealth of the family.

The Amway Corporation gave birth to RDV Corporation, which was run by Doug DeVos. Dick and Betsy DeVos built the Windquest Group, Dan DeVos took control of the family's sports teams and built Fox Motors, and Cheri DeVos Ehmann developed what became CDV5. All of this diversification began in the late 1980s and continues to expand right up to the present.

For instance, within the past few weeks, the DeVos family has expanded their wealth in several of the areas listed above. According to **an article in MiBiz**, Fox Motors Group LLC has widened it's reach in the southeast part of Michigan, acquiring three new dealerships and a collision center in metro Detroit. "***With the latest deal, the Fox Motors portfolio includes 43 locations in Michigan and Illinois, representing 48 automotive and powersports brands***."

Just last week it was announced that Doug and Maria DeVos bought a majority stake in boat dealership of which they have been longtime patrons. Here **MiBiz reported**, "***The Doug and Maria DeVos family office Continuum Ventures LLC, based in the Grand Rapids suburb of Ada Township, on Friday closed on a majority investment in Hudsonville-based Action Water Sports.***"

Then on **March 3rd, it was announced** that the DeVos family has sold the Peninsular Club building in downtown Grand Rapids for $6.4 Million. The sale of this building made complete sense, especially since the DeVos family has moved most of the business operations into the old Fifth Third Bank building on the corner of Monroe and Lyon in downtown Grand Rapids. This includes Ottawa Private Capital LCC, which is the families major investment firm, plus they moved all of the family foundations into the same location.

All of this is on top of the DeVos family's role in other major development projects in Grand Rapids over the past year. For instance, the **new outdoor**

amphitheater project is dominated by the DeVos family, which will be built along the Grand River in the near future. Also within the last year, it was announced that there is a new **proposed soccer stadium in downtown Grand Rapids**, which has involved a land deal with the DeVos family. One last DeVos-led development project example, has to do with a **proposed housing project in the northeast part of Grand Rapids**, off of Diamond Street, which is being managed by **CDV5 Property Management**.

Now, all of this diversification of the DeVos family wealth, apart from expanding their billions, plays a critical role in their ability to influence government policy, social outcomes, especially through the non-profit world, along with their cultural influence. Let's look at their political influence first.

DeVos Family Political Influence

The DeVos family has been the single largest donor to the Republican Party in Michigan since the late 1980s, according to the Michigan Campaign Finance Network. Just within the last two election cycles, which included the **2020** and **2022** elections, **the DeVos family contributed just short of $25 million** – $12.7 million in the 2020 elections and $12 million in the 2022 elections. These campaign contributions include federal candidates, state candidates, county candidates, City Commission candidates and ballot initiatives.

In addition to using their money to buy politicians, the DeVos family members often sit at the table of organizations that also work to influence public policy. These organizations include the West Michigan Policy Forum, the Right Place Inc. or the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, the DeVos family, but it also involved DeVos family representatives who sit on the Convention Center Board, DGRI, the Downtown Development Authority, the Action Institute Board, Talent 2025 and a whole array of organizations and committees that influence public policy.

DeVos Family Social Policy Influence

When it comes to social policy or social outcomes, here is where the DeVos family uses its considerable wealth that has been channeled into the various family foundations. There is the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation, the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, the Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation and the CDV5 Foundation. All of these foundations have millions of dollars in assets, which is a great way to avoid paying taxes, plus it gives them considerably control over social policy and social outcomes, particularly their contributions to non-profits.

The various DeVos Family Foundations influence social policy and social outcomes in two major ways. First, they use foundation money to finance groups like the Acton Institute, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, the American Enterprise Institute, Focus on the Family, and dozens of education institutions, where they influence an emphasis on promoting entrepreneurial Capitalism. The other way the DeVos Family Foundations influence social outcomes is through their funding of non-profits like Start Garden, AmplifyGR, the Education Network of Greater Grand Rapids, ICCF, Family Promise, and a whole array of non-profits, some that also promote entrepreneurial Capitalism and others provide individualized social services. What this does is that it creates a culture of collusion and silence. When non-profits take money from DeVos foundations they are colluding in pushing entrepreneurial Capitalism, plus they buy the silence of groups that provide social services. When I say they buy the silence of social service non-profits I mean their grant money to social service groups keeps these groups from speaking out on how the DeVos political contributions influencing public policy, which widens the wealth gap, while their foundation money them provides temporary relief to social service non-profits to serve people who are impacted by the public policy imposed on society by the DeVos family and other members of the Capitalist Class.

DeVos Family Religious/Cultural/Entertainment Influence

The third and last area of influence that the DeVos family has in West Michigan are the areas of Religious, Cultural and Entertainment arenas, which sometimes are intertwined. The Religious influence can be seen in how much money they contribute to religious groups and institutions. Then there is the overall religious influence, which permeates everything they do, thus inserting their brand of Christianity into all arenas of life. The Cultural influence is felt with projects like ArtPrize, Start Garden and AmplifyGR, which weaves religious and entrepreneurial Capitalism to make justify wealth accumulation and to allow them to say that people who are not successful in life, it's because they don't Be-**lie**-ve!

The Entertainment influence can certainly be seen in some of the areas of religious and cultural arenas mentioned previously, but it is most prominent in their ownership of sports teams and their control over venues like the Convention Center, the Arena, the Grand Rapids Art Museum, previously held influence over UICA, Artprize, and what is likely to become the new outdoor amphitheater. Of course the beauty of all of these projects is that they get the public to subsidize or underwrite a great deal of the cost, while the DeVos family gets to pocket a

great deal of the profits from all of the spectator based, consumer culture endeavors they have their fingers in.

Thus you can see how the DeVos family expansion of their wealth, allows them to influence elections, which influence public policy, which allows them to expand their wealth. Then you can see how the DeVos family wealth expansion allows them to influence social policy and social outcomes, which also provides a buffer for them to minimize and manage potential public outrage against their wealth expansion. Lastly, you can see how the DeVos family wealth expansion influences Cultural/Entertainment aspect of our community, sort of a Bread & Circuses approach to social control, plus it provide yet the last full circle of wealth expansion, since all of their cultural/entertainment projects are often subsidized by public money and have built-in money making components, which make for more profits and expanded wealth.

Private Jet users, like the DeVos family, create more pollution than people traveling on commercial flights: Reason #31 for why I have nothing but contempt for the DeVoses https://griid.org/2023/05/10/private-jet-users-like-the-devos-family-create-more-pollution-than-people-traveling-on-commercial-flights-reason-31-for-why-i-have-nothing-but-contempt-for-the-devoses/

The urgency around trying to work towards a more just and sustainable world for all life is no simple or easy matter. However, there are some fundamental truths that we have to come to terms with, like the fact that the wealthiest nations and the richest people on the planet cause a great deal more harm than the majority of the world's population.

For instance, in a November 2022 report from Oxfam entitled, **Carbon Billionaires: The investment emissions of the world's richest people**, states:

The investments of just 125 billionaires emit 393 million tonnes of CO2e each year – the equivalent of France – at an individual annual average that is a million times higher than someone in the bottom 90 percent of humanity.

Just last week, the Institute for Policy Studies released a new study entitled, **High Flyers 2023: How the Ultra-Rich Private Jet travel costs the rest of us and burns up the planet**. Here are just a few of the major findings in that report:

- Private jets emit at least 10 times more pollutants than commercial planes per passenger.
- Thousands of municipal airports in the U.S. are funded by the public, but many primarily serve private and corporate jets.

- Since the start of the pandemic, private jet use has increased by about a fifth and private jet emissions have increased more than 23 percent, according to a recent study.

The DeVos Family and their fleet of jets

It is always difficult to find out details about the wealth of the DeVos family, primarily because they don't believe in full transparency and because they have diversified their wealth and assets in such a way as to make it difficult to track.

There was an interesting **article from Business Insider in 2018**, with a headline that read, Education secretary Betsy DeVos owns a fleet of 12 private jets and 4 helicopters. In that article it states:

***According to Forbes**, the DeVos family owns a fleet of 12 private jets — 1 Boeing Business Jet, 5 Gulfstream G550's, 1 Gulfstream G450, 2 Bombardier Challenger 350's, 3 Cessna Citation CJ4's — and four helicopters.*

We also know that while she was the Secretary of Education, **Betsy DeVos used her own private jets to travel as Education Secretary**, rather than using commercial planes.

Then there is the fact that the global corporation that Rich DeVos founded with Jay Van Andel, the Amway Corporation, also has a fleet of private jets and other planes, with **their own hangar** at the Kent County Airport.

The Amway corporate jets get even more use than the private jets owned by the DeVos family, primarily because the Amway jets are used by more people, particularly the people who are near the top of earners in their notorious pyramid scheme. In addition, the Amway Corporation has partnered with other commercial airline companies to offer exclusive trips to Amway distributors for Amway conventions. One example was the **partnership with the Emirates, the world's largest international airline**, which transported over 6,500 distributors and company representatives to Dubai.

Then there is the Charter School scheme that Dick DeVos runs, the West Michigan Aviation Academy. The West Michigan Aviation Academy, located at the Kent County Airport, is a school designed to create more pilots, but it also encourages more private jet/plane ownership and use. In the past, **Dick DeVos has complained about his Charter School not getting enough public funding**.

Therefore, on top of the fact that the DeVos family:

- Makes massive political contributions to GOP candidates/politicians, which adopt policies that do tremendous harm to working class families, immigrants, the LGBTQ community and BIPOC people in general;
- Uses their foundations to funnel millions to far right groups like Focus on the Family or think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute or the Mackinac Center for Public Policy;

The DeVos family and the Amway Corporation – just on the matter of air travel – emit at least 10 times more pollutants than anyone else who books a flight from the Kent County Airport. Lastly, besides travel for pleasure, the DeVos family uses their private jets to travel to places to meet with other disgustingly rich people to figure out new ways to expand their wealth and to exploit and oppress more of the world's population, while creating more pollution and perpetuating Climate Change. Reason #31 for why we should have nothing but contempt for the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family.

Grand Rapids Amphitheater forum: Misleading economic impact numbers and no discussion on how much public money would be funding this 31 acre project https://griid.org/2023/06/13/grand-rapids-amphitheater-forum-misleading-economic-impact-numbers-and-no-discussion-on-how-much-public-money-would-be-funding-this-31-acre-project/

On Monday, a headline from MLive read, **Parking, sound generate conversation at Grand Rapids amphitheater open house**. This article was based on a public forum that Grand Action 2.0 held regarding the 12,000 seat amphitheater that will begin construction in May of 2024.

I get that issues like sound and parking are of concern to people, particularly those who live near the proposed Market Ave SW site, but the MLive story, like most of the coverage since 2020, when the first announcement of the about the amphitheater, has always talked about the project in favorable terms without asking larger, more investigative questions.

I attended the zoom meeting on Monday, which was held earlier in the day, with only a dozen people participating, not including a Grand Action 2.0 spokesperson and two people with Progressive AE, the firm that is doing the design for the project. The session only lasted 30 minutes and provided very little new information. I was the only non-business person on the zoom call.

The Progressive AE person had lots of fancy slides to show, but not much information, particularly on what the project will cost or how much public money was going to be used. However, I do want to address some of the content in the slides, plus a few additional points that have pretty much been ignored since we first learned about the amphitheater proposal in 2020.

In the first slide, with the heading Economic Impact, we are led to believe that the amphitheater project will be good for the economy. I would argue that these numbers are misleading at best, even irrelevant to most people in Grand Rapids. First, $7 million in annual wage earnings doesn't tell us much since, we do not know how many people will benefit from this $7 million. Like many of these projects, a large percentage will go to those in charge, which will be booking the musical acts and managing the site. The people who tend to maintain the space, those who take tickets or work concessions often do not make a living wage. Second, there are numbers for job creation, but again,

we don't know if they are full-time or part-time, if they pay a living wage, what kind of benefits will people get, etc. Third, there is this $490 Million projected economic impact for the City over a 30 year period. Again, no mention of how much of that money will go to downtown hotels, restaurants, private parking companies, bars, etc. We know who owns most of the companies that will be the primary beneficiary of this 30 year economic impact and it won't people those who are currently experiencing poverty or housing insecurity.

In this second slide we are provided with another laundry list of so-called benefits from this development project – more housing, river activation, local, minority-owned pop-up restaurants, shops, etc, plus the added claim that the whole project "will generate lasting community and cultural enhancements." I'll address housing in the next slide, but lets start with minority-owned pop-ups, etc. It seems rather fashionable for projects like these to make claims about hiring Black contractors or claiming it will create minority-owned business opportunities. Such claims are part of the whole DEI rhetoric that ultimately doesn't benefit the majority of people from BIPOC communities. If the City of Grand Rapids and Grand Action 2.0 really want to do something that would benefit BIPOC communities, how about giving the **"expected to exceed $116 million"** cost of the amphitheater to BIPOC communities and let them do what they want with it.

In this third slide, we see a more detailed look at the larger development project, both of the amphitheater and the adjacent areas, particularly proposed housing. Now, the previous slide it says mix-income housing, but that is rather vague and often means that a very small percentage of the housing will be listed as "affordable." So, we don't know if these will all be apartments or condos. More importantly, we don't know how much the rent will be for the proposed apartments. Then there is the issue of a private developer being involved with the land just south of the amphitheater, where it says 300 – 400 units, 600 spaces. During the Progressive AE presentation, the design firm spokesperson said that this was going to be a private developer project, without any additional information. All of us on the zoom were given an e-mail of one of the Progressive AE representatives, so I sent them a message, asking who this private developer was. I have yet to hear back. Lastly, there is the issue of what impact will this development project have on neighborhoods, particularly to the south, along the Grandville Avenue corridor or the Black Hills neighborhood. Both of these neighborhoods are primarily Latino/a and Latinx, with medium to lower incomes. What impact will the cost of housing in the new 31 acre Market Avenue corridor have on these adjacent neighborhoods? Will raise property taxes and rental costs? Will it begin a process of gentrification? These questions have not been explored in the presentations by Grand Action 2.0 and Progressive AE, nor the commercial news media, but these questions need to be explored.

Lastly, I wanted to address the issue of how much public money is going into this ever growing development project. When **GRIID first wrote about this issue in the fall of 2020**, I made the point that these types of projects are met with such enthusiasm by the business community and local government officials. However, the same kind of enthusiasm and funding is rarely applauded when it comes to investing in BIPOC communities.

More recently, **I looked at how much this project will cost the public and I came up with $58 million from local and state government, which means it's public money**. On top of that it was **reported in the business press** that Grand Action 2.0 will be seeking brownfield development incentives. This means that public money will be used to clean up the site, before new development happens, which translates into even more public money being directed to the amphitheater project, even though the public has no say it the matter. But this is always the case, since such projects are always designed to benefit the wealthiest people who want to continue to create a downtown play space for themselves and to entertain other privileged people – ie tourists, who come and spend money at businesses in the downtown area that are primarily owned those with deep pockets.

Rockford Construction's commitment to the principle of Profits Over People, got them the $12 Million contract to manage the redevelopment of Lyon Square

https://griid.org/2023/09/18/rockford-constructions-commitment-to-the-principle-of-profits-over-people-got-them-the-12-million-contract-to-manage-the-redevelopment-of-lyon-square/

In August, GRIID post an article entitled, **$12 Million to redevelop a small riverfront park in Grand Rapids is more money than the amount of money the City has set aside for their Affordable Housing Fund**.

In that GRIID article from August 9, we wrote in part:

However, the point I want to make is that compared to several years of putting together an $11.5 Million budget for Affordable Housing, the City of Grand Rapids approved $12 Million to redevelop a small downtown park with one simple vote. The $12 Million for Lyon Square will not be used for housing, but for a park space that will primarily benefit tourists and members of the Capitalist Class.

Now imagine for a moment that the DeVos family would foot the bill for the Lyon Square project and the $12 Million that the City will now be borrowing, would instead go directly to affordable housing. Affordable Housing is a relative term, but let's say that for a new modest home for a family of 4, it would cost $250,000. With $12 Million, the amount they will be spending on redeveloping a small park, that amount of money could cover the cost of building a $250,000 home for 48 families.

Forward 5 weeks and we read in the **Agenda Packet for the Community Development Committee for September 19 (pages 5 – 8**), that Rockford Construction is being awarded $12 million dollars in a Professional Services Agreement for Construction Management services for Lyon Square.

In the Agenda Packet of the Community Development Committee for September 19th, it states:

A Qualification Based Selection (QBS) process was used to solicit respondents and evaluate final procurement of a construction manager by an evaluation team consisting of City staff, Amway Hotel Corporation representatives, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc. (DGRI) staff, and ASM Global representatives. The evaluation team selected Rockford Construction Co. (Rockford) as the highest qualified firm from a short-listed group of respondents. Subsequently, as part of the QBS process, a proposal was received and, on February 12, 2019 (Proceeding No. 88470), the City Commission approved preconstruction services for Rockford. Having completed those services, they are now prepared to move into the construction work based upon subcontractor bids received on August 10, 2023.

So, an evaluation team made up of City staff, Amway Hotel Corporation representatives, DGRI and ASM Global chose Rockford Construction to receive the initial funding in 2019. Now, GR City staff have always been partial to those with deep pockets, so no surprise that they would choose Rockford Construction. The Amway Hotel Corporation choosing Rockford Construction is a no-brainer, considering the longterm relationship/ partnership that the DeVos family has had with Rockford Construction. The **DGRI Board of Directors** is primarily made up of representatives from entities that make up the Grand Rapids Power Structure, which also includes a staff member of Rockford Construction. ASM Global manages the Van Andel Arena and DeVos Place, which are under the control of the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA). The CAA is also represented by members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, and includes Michael Verhulst with Acrisure Benefits, but he was the Vice President of Rockford Construction from 2017 – through April of 2022.

Companies like Rockford Construction often are chosen because they are part of the inter-locking systems of power in this city. Besides the fact that Rockford Construction is part of the GR Power Structure, they also get these kinds of contracts because of their ideological commitments to Capitalism. This has been on full display in the past 9 months, since Rockford Construction has been front and center to the profits over people dynamic with how downtown Grand Rapids Companies have responded to the unhoused population. Specifically, Rockford Construction has been a complete backer of the interests of the downtown business community that was manifested in the **Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce ordinance proposal** in December of 2022, followed by the **letter of endorsers of said ordinance proposal**, followed by the backing of the City of Grand Rapids ordinances (a modified version of the GR Chamber's proposal) adoption this past July.

The CEO of Rockford Construction was present when the City adopted the two ordinances that will further criminalize the unhoused. I posted **an article the following day**, which included these comments: Right after the vote to adopt the criminalizing ordinances, I got up to leave. Sitting two rows behind me was Rockford Construction's CEO Mike VanGessel. VanGessel was sitting with another white guy and I just simply said, "***well boys, you got what you wanted and what you paid for.***" VanGessel is part of the Chamber of Commerce and is the chair of the municipal council, which represents 130 businesses downtown. VanGessel didn't bother to speak during public comment, as he would prefer to let his money speak for him.

The fact that Grand Rapids will award a total pf $10,321,660 with a total amount not-to-exceed $12,462,996 to Rockford Construction is completely expected, considering the company's relationship to the interlocking systems of power in Grand Rapids and their deep commitment to the principle of Profits Over People.

Purchasing naming rights and following the legacy of the DeVos & Van Andel families: Acrisure and the primacy of free market capitalism in Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2023/09/24/purchasing-naming-rights-and-following-the-legacy-of-the-devos-van-andel-families-acrisure-and-the-primacy-of-free-market-capitalism-in-grand-rapids/

On Friday, it was announced by **all of the area commercial news sources** that Acrisure had purchased the naming rights for the downtown outdoor amphitheater. Grand Rapids Mayor, Rosalynn Bliss gushed over the announcement, saying on Facebook, "*Super excited about this announcement today and the progress we are making on the amphitheater! We are so fortunate that Acrisure calls Grand Rapids home*."

The announcement was made at the Grand Rapids Downtown Market, which makes complete sense, since the market, like the new amphitheater, **used mostly public money for a facility that primarily catered to business class interests**.

Acrisure purchased the naming rights for the new amphitheater for $30 million. To put this into perspective:

- The **City Affordable Housing Fund is currently $17.5 Million**.
- **Acrisure is currently valued at $25 Billion**, which means that purchasing the naming rights at $30 million is like most of us contributing $20 and then getting our name on a building.
- When Acrisure moved their headquarters to Grand Rapids, they were provided **$7 million in economic incentives**.
- The $30 Million from Acrisure for naming rights for the outdoor amphitheater is equal to the cost of rent for a year for 1,042 families, if those families monthly rental fees were $2000.

Following the legacy of Grand Rapids Oligarchs

In a **separate MLive story related to the Acrisure naming rights purchase**, the reported shared the following from the company's CEO Greg Williams:

*During Friday's event, **Williams paid tribute to the DeVos and Van Andel families**, saying he's learned from their history of community involvement and philanthropy.*

“At the end of the day, we’re just following the lead that you and your families had established years ago,” he said, addressing members of the two families. “I’ve learned from what you’ve done, and I think this community obviously has been a huge benefactor. Hopefully, Acrisure can continue that role and play a role in some of those things going forward.”

Such a statement is rather instructive. If we are to be honest about what the DeVos and Van Andel families have done with their money over the years, what their legacies are, then we can draw some conclusions about what Acrisure might want to emulate in Grand Rapids.

The DeVos and Van Andel families have done the following:

- Made their initial billions in the form of a **pyramid scheme** known as the Amway Corporation.
- Have been the **largest campaign contributors to the GOP in Michigan since the 1980s**, which has translated to public policies that have been devastating to working class families, BIPOC families and other communities that are exploited under neoliberal capitalism.
- They have used their wealth to **imposed their ideological values** on the rest of the city, values that have done concrete harm to the LGBTQ community, promoted the privatization of public services, attacked reproductive rights, undermined public education, have subjected all of us to their brand of Christianity, and increased the wealth gap in Grand Rapids.
- Using their wealth to influence City and County officials to design the the downtown in ways that will primarily benefit their interests. Plus, they have done this hiding behind **so-called Public/Private partnerships**, meaning that they get the public to cough up millions for their pet projects without public consent or public input.

As for Greg Williams, who is CEO and Co-Founder of Acrisure, his **current net worth is $56.5 million**. Now, that is a meager amount, especially compared to the DeVos and Van Andel families, but Williams no doubt has greater aspirations.

In regards to what it is that Acrisure does, well it’s not entirely clear. Acrisure often refers to themselves as an insurance brokerage. However, the company also states that they offer retirement and cyber services, along with tech-driven financial services. In other words, Acrisure doesn’t produce anything, they only provide services that ultimately rely on market forces and speculative capital.

Greg Williams did sign on to **the letter in support of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce ordinance proposal** to criminalize the unhoused last December. It would appear that the Acrisure CEO is indeed following the same political and business model as the DeVos and Van Andel families.

A negative view of Christianity, legalized pot and people's lack of faith in institutions is why America is in chaos, claims Doug DeVos' podcast guest

https://griid.org/2023/09/25/a-negative-view-of-christianity-legalized-pot-and-peoples-lack-of-faith-in-institutions-is-why-america-is-in-chaos-claims-doug-devos-podcast-guest/

It has been about 10 months since I last **posted about Doug DeVos's podcast called Believe!**. In the podcast, DeVos interview former US Vice President and Presidential Candidate in 2024, Mike Pence. In true Orwellian fashion, DeVos and Pence were both talking about "leadership."

There have only been five new podcasts in the past 10 months, but you have to remember that Doug DeVos is very busy figuring out ways to continue to expand his family's wealth.

In today's post, I want to talk about one of the more recent **podcast from September 6th**, with Aaron Renn as the guest. Renn used to be a senior fellow at the **Manhattan Institute for Policy Research**. The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research is a far right think tank that was founded by Reagan's CIA Director, William Casey. Like most far right think tanks, the Manhattan Institute opposed Critical Race Theory, LGBTQ equality, was a big supporter of the US War on Terrorism, plays a significant role in denying Climate Change and is a member of the American Legislative Exchange Council. However, the think tank's bread and butter is to promote free market capitalism.

Since Renn left Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, he joined the more Christian-focused organization known as **American Reformer**. As an example of where the American Reformer is coming from, here is an excerpt from their most recent article about 10 days ago, entitled, **Manning the cultural ramparts**. Here is the first paragraph in that article:

Despite the lawlessness, violence, and anarchy that was unleashed by Floyd's death, America did not fundamentally change on that day. What had been there under the surface for quite some time, however, was revealed in all of its ferocious malice. May 25th, 2020 was, as it were, the storming of the Bastille of the American left's cultural revolution. It is a revolution still underway, though there are some encouraging signs that a counter-revolution has begun.

Apparently, the problem all along has been the American left, not the cops, not structural racism, not debilitating poverty of the corruption that permeates electoral politics.

The topic of discussion between Renn and Doug DeVos is, When Did The World Start Going Crazy? In the synopsis that is provided about the show it states:

Aaron Renn blames the 1960s. That's when traditional morality began to decline, going from a positive thing to a neutral thing in people's lives. Now the situation is even worse:

morality is largely viewed in a negative light – with disastrous effects on people's health and happiness.

Here are some of the main comments in the discussion and my responses.

- Christianity used to be the norm and Christian morality was the dominant view in the country. Now, Christianity is viewed negatively. I would argue that Christianity as an institution began to be more questioned and rightfully so. More importantly, the dominance of Christian values in the US is still very present, particularly in major institutions.
- People who identify as Christians in a public way are marginalized or stigmatized. Renn doesn't really provide concrete evidence to support this claim. My experience as someone who used to identify with Christianity and then rejected it, is that, particularly in West Michigan, in most circles, cultural, social, etc. is that being outwardly Christian does not marginalize you, it makes you part of the club. I work at Hope Network, which is a Christian non-profit. I don't know how many times that when people ask me something about myself and I talk about the years I spent in Latin America, they just assumed I was doing missionary work. My response used to be I did human rights work, but now I say, I was actually doing work that was anti-missionary work. See my documentary, **Reversing the Missionary Position: Learning Solidarity on Mayan Time**.
- Doug DeVos asks what are the implications for us today with a country that is falling apart? Some of Renn's response was that there are too many single moms or that marriage rates are falling. And of course, he thinks that this has a great deal to do with the "decline of Christianity." Renn only offers antidotes, without any real analysis.
- At about 38 minutes into the conversation, Doug DeVos raises the question of "why am I here?" DeVos then says that if people don't have faith, then how can they cope in the world or feel like they have meaning. This observation really struck me as a very infantile view of the world and of one's self. Again, my experience is just the opposition. When I no longer identified with Christianity (or any spiritual tradition) I began to be even more fully human and the world was a much more interesting and exiting place.
- At around 45 minutes in DeVos and Renn began to talk about immigration, sort of the Ellis Island dynamic, where the country became more tolerant. I would suggest that there is a much different narrative about new immigrants, a narrative that is presented in the book, *American Intolerance: Our Dark History of Demonizing Immigrants*.
- DeVos then wants Renn to talk about Grand Rapids, even though Renn is not from here. This hasn't stopped Renn from talking about Grand Rapids, as he does in an article from 2018 in the online publication City Journal, entitled, **Manufacturing a Comeback**, Grand Rapids has become a midwestern economic star and is generating new industrial jobs. This article is essentially looking at Grand Rapids through a pro-business lens, where the DeVos and Van Andel families are thought of as gods.

- At 54 minutes into the conversation, Renn then decides to gush about the DeVos family, saying that they are deeply rooted in this community. Renn uses the example of when Calvin had a new President come in and wanted to do a capital campaign to get rid of a $25 million debt. He said the Calvin President was able to raise the money in 8 months, where people with money came forward and didn't want their name on a building. **First**, the effort was to pay off a debt, not to build a new building. **Second**, most of the names of buildings on Calvin's campus has the name of particular religious families with very deep pockets.

Like all of Doug DeVos's guests, Renn provided little analysis, made vague claims about what's wrong with this country and blamed it on the lack of Christianity in society. And like all guests, Renn did not want to speak ill about the US, but he did heap a great deal of praise on free market capitalism, something that made Doug DeVos very happy.

Bipartisan Resolution in the Michigan House to condemn Hamas is the focus of the DeVos-created group Michigan Freedom Fund's ridiculous post

https://griid.org/2023/10/15/bipartisan-resolution-in-the-michigan-house-to-condemn-hamas-is-the-focus-of-the-devos-created-group-michigan-freedom-funds-ridiculous-post/

On Thursday, the DeVos-created and funded organization, the Michigan Freedom Fund (MFF), posted an article entitled, **Michigan House Democrats Join Tlaib in Refusal To Condemn Hamas**.

It is important to point out from the get go, that several Michigan House Democrats have **co-sponsored the resolution** to condemn Hamas, so the headline for the MFF post is misleading.

The MFF post begins by stating:

*Michigan House Democrat leadership join the ranks of extremists like US Rep. Rashida Tlaib by refusing to condemn the horrifying Oct. 7 attack on innocent Israeli citizens. State Representative Bill Schuette introduced a **Resolution** condemning the attacks that claimed over a thousand lives, including **25 Americans**, and left thousands more injured. The resolution also calls for the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The resolution was blocked by House Democrat Leadership in defiance of some of their own caucus members who signed on to the resolution.*

This is an interesting post for numerous reasons. First, the MFF post in primarily interested in condemning the Michigan Democratic Party leadership, specifically Rep. Joe Tate. Second, the MFF post also mentions Michigan's Congressional Representative Rashida Tlaib, who has been an outspoken supporter of the Palestinians since she has been a member of Congress. However, Tlaib stated on Wednesday, in a comment quote in **Michigan Advance**:

“I do not support the targeting and killing of civilians, whether in Israel or Palestine,” Tlaib first told the Advance on Wednesday. “The fact that some have suggested otherwise is offensive and rooted in bigoted assumptions about my faith and ethnicity.”

Therefore, it seems that the MFF post is not honest and not accurate about what they are claiming about Michigan Democrats. It is true that House Majority leader Joe Tate chose to send the resolution to the Government Operations Committee, but that doesn’t mean that the resolution is dead.

Another point worth making has to do with Rep. Bill Schuette, who proposed the resolution condemning Hamas. In **a statement he wrote last week**, Schuette said,

“There can be no equivocation here. Broad and watered-down statements do not suffice. An atrocity occurred in Israel last weekend. Hamas, a terrorist organization targeted civilians, children and U.S. citizens. Hundreds are dead, hostages remain in captivity. To not speak on this issue is an abdication of our moral responsibility.”

It is always instructive to see such statement made, especially when they invoke the notion of “moral responsibility.” Rep. Shuette, like the Republican Party as well as the majority of the Democratic Party, has never condemned the Israeli terrorist attacks against Palestinians living in Gaza, not in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014 or 2021. These attacks by the Israeli military not only targeted civilians, but destroyed hospitals and other civil society structures, which according to International Law are war crimes.

It’s always about the other side

The Michigan Freedom Fund Communications Director, Mary Drabik, who wrote the post for the MFF on October 11th, that Michigan is home to “over 85,000 Jews and around 2,500 Israelis,” although she doesn’t source those numbers. What Mary Drabik fails to mention is that **Michigan is also home to thousands of Arab Americans, including Palestinians**.

Having said all of this, the issue of some Democratic politicians not outright condemning Hamas is instructive, especially since the Democratic Party is also unhappy with members of Congress like Rep. Rashida Tlaib and Rep. Cory Bush. In an article in The Intercepted, it notes that Democratic Party members who are closely aligned with largest Pro-Israel lobby group, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), are the ones going after Tlaib and Bush. **You will recall that** one of the challengers to Rep. Tlaib, Janice Winfrey, had “secured contributions from United Democracy Project, a super PAC tied to American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the pro-Israel lobbying group.”

This is the dilemma of the Democratic Party, which has consistently supported Israel, both in principle and with billions in military aid. This blind support for Israel is not reflected in the growing number of Americans in recent that support the Palestinian struggle. When the Democrats attack their own for not standing with Israel, it further underscores the hypocrisy of US foreign policy in the Middle East.

Instead of celebrating those with power and influence, we need to challenge their power and influence: Another list of mostly rich white people

https://griid.org/2023/11/02/instead-of-celebrating-those-with-power-and-influence-we-need-to-challenge-their-power-and-influence-another-list-of-mostly-rich-white-people/

In the past GRIID has critiqued the 200 most powerful business leaders in West Michigan, with an initial article in 2021, entitled, **Power Over or Power With: A Power Analysis of the top 200 most powerful business leaders in West Michigan, according to the Grand Rapids Business Journal**.

Last year, GRIID once again provided some analysis of the claim from the Grand Rapids Business Journal with our article entitled, **The 200 Most Powerful Business Leaders of 2022: Celebrating those who are responsible for making sure that Structural Racism and Economic disparities are normalized**.

With Crain's Detroit taking over the Grand Rapids Business Journal and MiBiz, Crain's Grand Rapids Business has continued the top 200 tradition, calling this year's 200, **The 200 Most Influential Leaders**. The brief text that introduces the top 200 for 2023, reads in part:

*Consider the Grand Rapids 200 our "who's who" of **power brokers** across the West Michigan region, whether in manufacturing, banking, philanthropy, economic development or a host of other key industries. It's important to note that the people profiled in the Grand Rapids 200 did not ask to be included. Rather, this is our editorial team naming the 200 most influential business leaders in West Michigan. We based the selections purely on our news judgment.*

It seems clear to me that what Crain's Grand Rapids Business means by influential are those who act as power brokers, an assessment I would not argue with. The only difference is that while Crain's Grand Rapids Business sees these people as vitally important to their world, I view them as an impediment to real equity and liberation. Consider this, that most of the people listed in the 200 most influential are people who make between 6 and 10 figure salaries. Most of the people on this year's list do not do anything to disrupt the systems of power and oppression that exist in West Michigan, in fact, most of them seek to maintain the systems of power and oppression, and many of them profit from the oppression and exploitation.

What follows is very limited analysis of each of the categories and the people they include. However, if one reads the GRIID blog enough, one can see that there is substantial analysis of each of these sectors on a regular basis.

News coverage of the proposed soccer stadium fails to ask the more important questions that will impact the public in Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2023/10/09/news-coverage-of-the-proposed-soccer-stadium-fails-to-ask-the-more-important-questions-that-will-impact-the-public-in-grand-rapids/

On Friday, during the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA) meeting, the proposal to have a soccer stadium in downtown Grand Rapids became more formalized.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was agreed upon by the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA) and Grand Action 2.0. The MOU states in part:

That the CAA determines to enter a Third Memorandum of Understanding with GA2.0 for the purpose of reaching an agreement regarding the development, funding, construction, ownership, and operation of the Soccer Stadium, and the Chairperson of the Board is authorized and directed to execute said agreement, in a form approved as to substance by the Board Chair, and as to form by CAA legal counsel, contingent upon the CAA's authority as set forth in the CAA's Articles of Organization and Operating Agreement, as amended, and as may be amended.

To read the entire MOU between Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA) and Grand Action 2.0, you can go **here**. (pages 33 – 38)

The major news entities that reported on the Friday Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority were, **MLive**, **WOODTV8** and **Crain's Grand Rapids**.

The reporting is what we have come to expect from the local news media, especially when it has to do with major development projects like the outdoor amphitheater, and now the proposed soccer stadium, which is that local news agencies don't even question what such a project means, who benefits and who will have to pay for it. Most of the local news coverage focuses on superficial details, like where the soccer stadium will be located. However, the Crain's Grand Rapids article, there is a more honest comment from Doug Small, who is the president and CEO of Experience Grand Rapids. Small states:

"*Any professional sport that we have here allows us to continue carrying on the Grand Rapids brand throughout the nation and the world, hopefully. It's just another opportunity to get our name out there, so I'm excited for that. I think we've got a very robust soccer fan base here. It's nice to see that the fanbase get rewarded with a team of the caliber they are looking to bring in here*."

However, the most important part of the Crain's Grand Rapids article was this sentence, "***Developing a soccer stadium has long been discussed by Grand Rapids officials as a way to drive economic development***." The question we need to be asking ourselves is, economic development for whom? In addition, we need to be asking questions like:

- How much public money will be used to support such a project and will the public have any say in the use of public money for a private project?
- Who will own the soccer stadium and the team, once all of this is in place?
- Why can't the City of Grand Rapids adopt a model of community ownership, which would not only allow for potentially thousands of people to own shares in the stadium/team – which is a model that the Green Bay Packers use – or an ownership model where the City manages the soccer stadium/team, with an oversight board represented by people other than the usual suspects, and profits generated from the operation of the soccer stadium/team be used to support housing costs for families who are housing insecure.

Unfortunately, we cannot rely on City or County officials to raise these kinds of questions or propose alternate models of ownership, or the idea that we don't even need a soccer stadium and that truly affordable housing or other of the many pressing issues this city faces should be prioritized. Imagine what it would be like to live in a city where housing security, dismantling racism and promoting environmental just were prioritized over such things as the branding of Grand Rapids, promoting tourism and the transfer of public funds to members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure (reflected in the graphic above that **GRIID created over a year ago**.)

Once the DeVos family bought the Big Boy property downtown, we should have known then, where the soccer stadium would go https://griid.org/2024/02/26/once-the-devos-family-bought-the-big-boy-property-downtown-we-should-have-known-then-where-the-soccer-stadium-would-go/

When the most powerful family in West Michigan wants something, they usually get it. On September 1st of 2022, **MiBiz – now Crain's Grand Rapids** – first reported that Grand Action 2.0 began their push to get a soccer stadium in Grand Rapids.

In that same article, it was also mentioned that one of the DeVos family entities – DP Fox Ventures LLC – had acquired 407 Pearl St. NW, the site of the Big Boy restaurant on Pearl St. In addition, the article states that the acquisition of the Bog Boy property was on July 28th, a little more than a month before the Grand Action announcement.

The only Grand Action 2.0 person cited in the September 1 article was Kara Wood. Before joining Grand Action 2.0, Kara Wood worked for the City of Grand Rapids. I first found out that Kara Wood worked for the City of Grand Rapids, when **she sent me a copy of a contractual agreement between the City and the DeVos-run entity known as Start Garden**. Wood was named as the Executive Director of Grand Action 2.0 in May of 2022, just a few months before the DeVos acquisition of the Big Boy property, followed by the announcement of the proposed soccer stadium.

Interestingly enough, in the **article from September of 2022**, Wood stated, “Grand Action 2.0 has “multiple” sites under consideration for a soccer stadium. “We are in such early stages, it would be extremely premature to assume that would be the location at this point” for a soccer stadium, Wood said. Of course they intended to use the land connected to the Big Boy property acquisition, which is exactly why the DeVos family purchased that land. It is true that I despise everything about the DeVos family, but they are not stupid. Everything that the most powerful family in West Michigan does is strategic, it has a purpose, even if that purpose is to make massive profits at the public’s expense.

I say all of this as context for the most recent Grand Action 2.0 announcement, as reported in Crain’s Grand Rapids, with the headline, ***Developer files construction plans for Grand Rapids soccer stadium***. The Crain’s article states, “*Grand Action 2.0 has filed formal construction plans with the city of Grand Rapids for an 8,500-seat soccer stadium, marking at least a $108 million investment on the city’s west side*.” Therefore, **what I stated in an article GRIID posted on September 8, 2022**, is now a fact regarding the location of the soccer stadium.

Other useful pieces from the **most recent Crain’s Grand Rapids post** about the soccer stadium:

- The Soccer Stadium project is also applying for grants from EGLE for utilities on site. EGLE is a state-run program, which means Grand Action 2.0 will be applying to use public funds for utilities for the soccer stadium.
- The Crain’s article talks about community engagement, which **I addressed in a recent post**, pointing out that those with all the power don’t really host community engagement sessions, they host meetings where they hold all the power and dictate the agenda.
- Ever since Grand Action 2.0 went public with this proposal, they have consistently stated that the soccer stadium would be 8,500 seats. In the new announcement, they are now saying that the design would allow them to “expand to a total of 11,000 seats in the future.”
- The soccer stadium would allow for a “Tier II professional team,” but fails to mention who would own it. Based on their track record of sports team ownership in Grand Rapids, **it is likely that Dan DeVos would own it**. Dan DeVos also happens to be the person who bought the Big Boy property, then donated it to the DDA.
- The article mentions that events like ArtPrize could be hosted at the soccer stadium. Anything to bring in tourists who will spend money at the DeVos hotels.
- Once the project is finalized, it would be owned by the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA). The CAA Chairman, Richaed Winn, is the President of AHC Hospitality, which is the name of a hotel chain owned by the DeVos family.
- The Crain’s piece states, that the soccer stadium will employ 260 people. However, the number doesn’t say permanent jobs – between construction and staff to run the stadium – nor does it say these jobs will be full time or if they will pay a living wage or not.

- There is also part of the article that addresses how people will get to the stadium, but doesn't address serious parking issues or the traffic congestion that the soccer stadium is likely to create.

What this issue essentially comes down to is people with economic and political power making decisions that the public has little to no say in. However, these same members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure will work the system to make sure that their pet projects receive as much public funding as possible, while they reap the largest in economic benefits. After all, how do you think rich people got rich – if they didn't inherit their wealth, they exploited workers, manipulated the system in their favor, or they did both.

West Michigan Far Right Watch: Acton Institute trashes Aaron Bushnell, GR Chamber says they care about immigrants, and Doug DeVos interviews Teresa Weatherall Neal https://griid.org/2024/03/12/west-michigan-far-right-watch-acton-institute-trashes-aaron-bushnell-gr-chamber-says-they-care-about-immigrants-and-doug-devos-interviews-teresa-weatherall-neal/

The GRPS Superintendent that was mentored by Betsy DeVos

In the final piece of far right thinking, I want to look at the Doug DeVos podcast, where former Grand Rapids Public School Superintendent, **Teresa Weatherall Neal, was DeVos' guest**.

Neal talks about her history in the GRPS and how she made it a point to promote School Choice, despite being the Superintendent of the GRPS. None of this should be surprising to those who follow GRIID, since **Teresa Weatherall Neal went to Washington, DC for the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education**.

In the GRIID article on Neal going to DC, we also document how Neal adopted many of the DeVos family priorities for education, which was charter schools, privatization of education and allowing religion to be inserted more aggressively in the Grand Rapids Public School system.

At one point in the interview, Neal was talking about getting additional funding for the Grand Rapids Public Schools, specifically through the Student Advancement Foundation, an entity that is really driven by the DeVos family and other members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure. Neal confirmed this when she said to Doug DeVos, "***We came through you guys, the Student Advancement Foundation.***"

In the later part of the interview DeVos and Neal talk about her leadership, which she bragged about, with little or no humility. At one point Neal said, "no one loves the children in Grand Rapids more than I do."

Lastly, Teresa Weatherall Neal briefly talks about her work now with the group **Thrive & Prosper**, which has no information on it other than sending a message to the group. I submitted a message, so I will be curious to see if I get anything back.

Grand Action 2.0 is now pitching apartment high rises to be adjacent to the Amphitheater and Soccer Stadium, with lots of tax incentives for struggling developers https://griid.org/2024/03/26/grand-action-2-0-is-now-pitching-apartment-high-rises-to-be-adjacent-to-the-amphitheater-and-soccer-stadium-with-lots-of-tax-incentives-for-struggling-developers/

On Tuesday, both MLive and Crain's Grand Rapids posted stories about the additional development projects associated with the downtown Amphitheater and the Soccer Stadium.

Grand Action 2.0, the development entity that is run by and serves the interests of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, will be pitching their new development projects at the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority meeting on Wednesday, March 27. I want to look at the Agenda Packet for that meeting, but first I want to look at how both MLive and Crain's Grand Rapids reported on the Grand Action 2.0 announcement.

The MLive article is headlined, **High-rise towers would bring 735 apartments to amphitheater, soccer stadium sites**. The article begins by stating:

Two residential and commercial towers, containing 735 apartments, retail and parking, would be built next to Acrisure Amphitheater and the proposed Grand Rapids soccer stadium under plans being crafted by Grand Action 2.0 and the Downtown Development Authority.

The only people sited in the MLive piece is someone from the City of Grand Rapids and the head of Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. The article is upbeat in terms of the prospects of both apartment complexes and how they can continue to promote "economic development." However, the article never talks to residents in the area about the impact it may have during the construction time and the having 735 new apartments in that area.

The Crain's Grand Rapids story's headline is, **Skyline-changing mixed-use projects envisioned with Grand Rapids amphitheater, soccer stadium**. Their article is shorter than the MLive piece, partly because no one is cited in the article. The Crain's piece is also framed as positive news, with no concerns reflected in the story.

MLive kept referring to a new city memo about these new development projects, but they never source where the memo can be found. I suspect that the "memo" the article refers to is simply part of the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority meeting for March 27, **linked here**, beginning on **page 47**.

Grand Action 2.0 submitted information about these new development projects to the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, simply because they are hoping to benefit from the Transformational Brownfield Program, which will increase the amount of tax that can be recaptured and reimbursed to developers. Remember, the developers are connected

to the Grand Rapids Power Structure and will benefit financially from the tax reimbursements.

Then there is the issue of what the cost of these 735 apartments will be. The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority Agenda Packet does mention that a certain percentage of the apartments will be set aside as more “affordable”, even though Grand Action 2.0 never really defines affordable, nor does it list what these proposed apartments will actually cost. It is important to remember that the term affordable is purposely vague and it is dictated by those who are part of the Capitalist Class, not the masses of people who make up the working class.

It is important to note that this is the first time that people who live in Grand Rapids, specifically people who live near the Soccer Stadium – the near westside residents, and the people who live just south of the Amphitheater – those in the Grandville Avenue corridor and the Black Hills neighborhood – are just now hearing about these new development projects.

Those with economic and political power will always inform people only after they have spent months, even years developing a plan before they go public. This means the public only gets to give input at certain city meetings, which are ultimately irrelevant, since those with economic and political power have already met with and discussed their plans with Grand Rapids City officials. This process is called the Capitalist Class two step, where they don’t inform the public, but they use public money for privately owned projects, thus increasing their wealth and conning us into believing they do this so we have more entertainment options. In ancient Rome they simply called this, Bread and Circuses.

The Grand Rapids City Commission votes unanimously to provide a $318 million subsidy for the unaffordable Grand Action 2.0 proposed apartment buildings

https://griid.org/2024/05/28/the-grand-rapids-city-commission-votes-unanimously-to-provide-a-318-million-subsidy-for-the-unaffordable-grand-action-2-0-proposed-apartment-buildings/

On Sunday MLive posted an article with the following headline, $318M incentive plan for high-rise towers, downtown venues OK’d by Grand Rapids board.

The “board” that the MLive reporter refers to is the Grand Rapids City Commissioners. The Grand Rapids Mayor and the six City Commissioners voted unanimously to provide $318 million of incentives, through what is known as the Transformational Brownfield plan, which was the exact amount requested by Grand Action 2.0.

The Grand Rapids City Commission voted unanimously to approve a $318 Million incentive – which is code for subsidy – to an organization that is **comprised of the economically and politically most powerful people/families** in West Michigan, along with people who have relationships with those with power and often do their bidding. You can watch the very brief discussion they had at **this link**. The discussion about approving the $318 million subsidy to Grand Action 2.0 begins at 14:40 in and ends at 15:50.

Of the 735 units, only 146 would be affordable, and the notion that those 146 apartments are affordable is questionable at best, but for this writer Grand Action 2.0's notion of affordable is insulting. Included here above is a graphic provided to the City Commissioners in the agenda packet listing the so-called affordable apartments that will be built next to the Amphitheater and the soccer stadium. How are these number actually affordable for most people who are struggling to survive? Clearly, as **I noted in a post two weeks ago** when MLive first reported on the $318 million subsidy, Grand Action 2.0 doesn't want low income people to live in these apartments.

Now that the Grand Rapids City Commission has unanimously signed off on the incentive plan, the Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF) must do the same. The MSF is the public funding arm of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. As you can see, the **board members of the Michigan Strategic Fund** are primarily from the private financial sector, along with a few members of the Michigan government. Notice that Randy Thelen, the president and CEO of The Right Place, Inc., also sits on this board. Thelen will surely voted yes to use more public money to subsidize unaffordable housing that Grand Action 2.0 has proposed, especially since 10 of the **board members of The Right Place Inc**. also sit on **the board of Grand Action 2.0.** The centers of power in this city are so god damn incestuous, or what is known as interlocking systems of power.

But Wait, there's more!

It is important to note that the Grand Action 2.0 Amphitheater and Soccer Stadium apartment projects are not only relying on the $318 Million Transformational Brownfield plan, they also listed in the agenda packet for last week's Committee of the Whole meeting likely additional subsidies.

Economic Development staff have been working with Grand Action to submit a grant application requesting up to $1 million from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) to support demolition and environmental cleanup costs associated with the amphitheater development. Pending review by EGLE, a request to approve the grant submission would be presented to the board at its next meeting.

The residential components of the project both meet the requirements for the Neighborhood Enterprise Zone exemption, which may be considered by the City as the projects develop further. Based on projections, the NEZ could provide up to $24 million of tax savings for the amphitheater apartments, and $6.8 million of tax savings for the stadium district tower, each over a period of 15 years.

If these other tax incentives and grants are approved, then Grand Action 2.0 will get an additional $31.8 million, **bringing the total cost to the public $349.8 million**. Don't you just love it when the public pays for projects that are crafted by the Capitalist Class, projects they could easily afford themselves?

Betsy DeVos was in Grand Rapids to promote anti-trans hate and the local news media didn't really question it

https://griid.org/2024/06/18/betsy-devos-was-in-grand-rapids-to-promote-anti-trans-hate-and-the-local-news-media-didnt-really-question-it/

Former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos showed her face in Grand Rapids to talk about Title IX and the anti-trans movement that exists within women's sports.

It is interesting that Betsy DeVos is now critical of Title IX policies during the Biden administration, when she **provided cover for men who were accused of sexual assault on US campuses** by defending "their rights."

Betsy DeVos was in Grand Rapids as part of the **Our Bodies, Our Sports** advocacy tour. Several of the local news agencies reported on DeVos speaking in front of the Ford Museum, along with several female athletes that condemned trans women for being allowed to compete in NCAA and high school sporting events that are for women and girls.

MLive had the most detailed coverage compared to how **WOODTV8** and **WZZM 13** covered this story. However, only WZZM 13 sought out a critical perspective on what DeVos was saying. Channel 13 got a written response from the Grand Rapids Pride Center, which stated in part:

Title IX was enacted to ensure that no person, on the basis of sex, is excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Using Title IX to exclude transgender athletes contradicts the very essence of this law, which is about providing equal opportunities for all students, regardless of gender identity. Excluding transgender athletes from sports harms not only the individuals affected but also the broader community. Transgender youth who are denied the opportunity to participate in sports experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Sports can be a crucial avenue for developing self-esteem, teamwork skills, and a sense of belonging, all of which are vital for the healthy development of young people.

However, the more egregious aspect of the local commercial news coverage was their failure to explore which groups are participating in the **Our Bodies, Our Sports tour**.

Above is the list of organizations that make up the coalition involved in the Our Bodies, Our Sports tour. There are some groups listed here, specifically the Women's Liberation Front, the Women's Sports Policy Working Group, the International Consortium on Female Sports, and the Women's Declaration International, all of which are Radical Feminist groups. Radical Feminists groups are also known as **TERFs, trans-exclusionary radical feminist,** which are working with conservatives to push their **anti–trans** agenda.

However, the rest of the organizations in the coalition are far right entities that are not only anti-trans, they are anti-Critical Race Theory, they are anti-Abortion, anti-Public Education, and unconditional support for Israel. The groups that embrace a more far right platform in the Our Bodies, Our Sports coalition are the Independent Women's Forum, the Independent Women's Network, Champion Women, Concerned Women for America, Young Women for America, the Independent Women's Law Center and the Independent Women's Voice.

Interestingly enough, one of the advisors & partners with the group Champion Women is Richard Lapchick. Lapchick is the Chair of **DeVos Sport Business Management Program**, which is located in Florida.

By not reporting on the coalition involved in the Our Bodies, Our Sports coalition, news consumers in West Michigan were denied a full account of who is behind this movement, along with their far right ideology. Once again, Betsy DeVos gets a free pass from the local commercial news media.

Updated Grand Rapids power analysis: Understanding the GR Power Structure – Part II: The DeVos family

https://griid.org/2024/06/18/updated-grand-rapids-power-analysis-understanding-the-gr-power-structure-part-ii-the-devos-family/

Last week I **began an updated version of a Grand Rapids Power Analysis**, which lays out the ground work for what the Grand Rapids Power Structure looks like and what it means for this community.

When I use the phrase, the Grand Rapids Power Structure and who has power, it is important to note that I mean power over. A local power analysis is designed to investigate who has power over – who oppresses, exploits and engages in policy that benefits them to the exclusion of everyone else – the majority of people living in Grand Rapids.

As I noted in the previous post, I believe that private power – individuals and organizations – have the most power over people in this community, based on the

hierarchy of power chart. Private power primarily relies on economic and political power and the family that has the most of that kind of power is the DeVos family. Now, the Meijer family might have more wealth (although the DeVos family does a better job of keeping their collective wealth more hidden), but the DeVos family is more involved in local politics, the local economy, as well as social and cultural dynamics.

One thing that is different about what I wrote in 2018 about the DeVos family is the fact that both Richard DeVos Sr. and his wife have died, which changes some of the dynamic, but only on the margins of how the DeVos family continues to wield tremendous power in this city.

DeVos family wealth

It is safe to say that most of what the DeVos family does and the influence they have in this community and beyond begins with their wealth. The graphic above provides some of the major assets and businesses and investment firms that the DeVos family controls. However, the graphic is limited in that it doesn't provide all of the names of the subsidiaries they own, nor the vast amount of investments they have at any given time. For example, the public got a glimpse of the investments that Betsy DeVos has when she was going through her nomination process for Secretary of Education in 2017. She was required to reveal a list of investments, which was published for a brief time, so I saved the document of investments, which you can see **here**, which is 108 pages of investment information.

For the DeVos family, owning the Amway Corporation, the RDV Corporation, Fox Motors, the Windquest Group, Ottawa Private Capital LLC, CWD, CDV Properties, DP Fox, Boxed Water, Wakestream Ventures and a whole host of other entities is never enough for this family. Since 2018, I have continued to track their business investments and expanded assets, which include the **two restaurants and hotel that will open this summer in Ada**, the acquisition of **Muskegon's convention center along with six hotels and restaurants** in the city (which will be under AHC Hospitality, the **acquisition of Peacock Limited** power sports, their investment into a **Michigan boat dealership**, becoming a **near monopoly in the auto dealership business in Grand Rapids** and the **CDV5 Properties getting involved in the housing market**.

Having a seat at the table

A second way that the DeVos family exercises power over others is by having their people sit on the boards of numerous entities in this city, all of which have tremendous influence on the political, economic, social and cultural dynamics of Grand Rapids. This list below, along with the graphic here, are just some of the organizations/entities that the DeVos family has a seat at in order to influence outcomes on all levels. This is what I like to refer to as interlocking systems of power. These interlocking systems of power dictate a great deal of local government policy, economic policy and social and cultural aspects of Grand Rapids. Again, these are just some of the organizations/entities the DeVos family has influence with.

DeVos family intersecting systems of power:

- West Michigan Policy Forum – Dick and Doug DeVos
- Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce – Michael Nelson, Chief Operating Officer at Amway
- Economic Club of Grand Rapids – Tim Gortsema President Grand Rapids Griffins, Michael Nelson, Chief Operating Officer at Amway
- The Right Place Inc. – Michael Nelson, Chief Operating Officer at Amway
- Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority – Richard A. Winn AHC Hospitality
- Experience GR – Jenifer Cutter AHC Hospitality, Ross Bartlett Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Richard Winn AHC Hospitality
- Downtown Development Authority – Greg McNeilly Windquest Group, Richard Winn AHC Hospitality
- Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. – Richard Winn AHC Hospitality
- Grand Action 2.0 – Dick DeVos, Rick DeVos, Doug DeVos, Richard Winn AHC Hospitality
- Talent First – **Brian Kraus** Chief Supply Chain Officer at Amway
  Corewell Health – Doug DeVos
- GVSU Board of Trustees – Randall Damstra Ottawa Avenue Private Capital, LLC, a division of RDV Corporation
- Grand Rapids Symphony Board of Directors – Pamella DeVos
- Grand Rapids Art Museum Foundation – Pamella DeVos

Election campaign contribution and public policy influence

A third area of influence that the DeVos family has is their longstanding interest to influence who gets elected to public office and what kinds of public policy gets adopted.

It is well known that the DeVos family has contributed over $100 million for political campaigns in Michigan since 1990, based on data from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network. The DeVos family is the single largest political contributor in Michigan, which demonstrates how much influence they have.

If we look at how much of their wealth they have spent just since the 2022 election, even that amount is pretty staggering. In the **2022 election GRIID documented that the DeVos family contributed $12,304,750.00** to candidates running for office and for ballot initiatives.

When it comes to **Kent County election campaign contributions in 2022, the DeVos family spent $60,900.00**, which was also the largest amount from any one group in Kent County. In addition, for the Grand Rapids City Commission races, the DeVos family contributed **$9450.00 to one candidate in the 1st Ward** and **$9450.00 to one candidate in the 3rd Ward**.

So far in the 2024 election, the DeVos family has contributed **$264,000** for just **4 Kent County candidates**, which include the County Clerk, County Treasurer, County Prosecutor and the Kent County Sheriff, all of which are running as Republicans. Now, the amount of campaign contributions that the DeVos family will give for the rest of the

2024 election cycle will grow exponentially. In addition, it is always important to keep in mind that the public policies adopted at the state and federal level will also impact people in this community, along with policies implemented in Kent County and this Grand Rapids, all of which GRIID will be documenting throughout the year.

Recent public policies that have been adopted in Grand Rapids and Kent County, where the DeVos family has had a role in are, the ordinances adopted last year by Grand Rapids to criminalize the unhoused, and the various development projects that Grand Rapids and Kent County have collaborated on such as the Amphitheater and the Soccer Stadium.

The ordinances adopted by Grand Rapids last July, were influenced by the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, which put forth their own proposal that **was endorsed by 120 people**, which included **3 DeVos family members and 13 other people who run one of the entities that the DeVos directly controls**. The Amphitheater and the Soccer stadium project were both proposed by Grand Action 2.0, which the DeVos family helped to create several decades ago. Dick DeVos is one of the current co-chairs of Grand Action 2.0, along with Doug DeVos who is on the advisory committee. The DeVos family has been involved in all of the Grand Action 2.0 projects, since they will benefit tremendously since they own most of the hotels in downtown Grand Rapids and several GR sports teams.

DeVos family foundations

A fourth major way that the DeVos family influences what happens in Grand Rapids is through their numerous foundations. GRIID has been monitoring those foundations for years, which is linked **here**.

There are at least five DeVos foundations, all of which provide massive tax havens, since foundations are a way for the super rich to hide their money from being taxed. Each of the five DeVos foundations have millions in assets and only give out a small percentage on an annual basis.

In addition to be tax havens, the DeVos foundations also contributed to entities which allow them to influence policies. For example, Grand Valley State University received lots of money from the DeVos foundation, plus they have someone on the board of trustees, both of which provide them with leverage to influence university policy.

The DeVos family foundations also make contributions to far right entities like the Acton Institute, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy or the American Enterprise Institute, all of which influence public policy and public debate. The DeVos family foundations do the same with conservative christian groups, which also promote far right ideologies.

Lastly, the DeVos family foundations make contributions to local social service agencies that provide some form of charity to individuals and families that are housing insecure or food insecure. Of course, the non-profits that the DeVos family foundations contribute to do not address structural or root causes of social problems. In fact, the social charity that these non-profits provide to people are often the direct result of public policies that

the DeVos family has paid for in campaign contributions, which forces people to then rely on social services that the DeVos family contributes to. In turn, the same non-profits will not question or challenge the influence that the DeVos family has, since they don't want to risk losing the foundation money. It is what I like to call hush money.

You can see all of they ways that the DeVos family is influencing political, economic, social and cultural realities in Grand Rapids, which is why they are the most powerful family.

Project 2025 is the result of the rightward shift in all electoral politics, plus the DeVos family is involved with many of the organizations behind the project

https://griid.org/2024/07/11/project-2025-is-the-result-of-the-rightward-shift-in-all-electoral-politics-plus-the-devos-family-is-involved-with-many-of-the-organizations-behind-the-project/

There is a tremendous amount of social media chatter about Project 2025, a project that was hatched by the longtime conservative groups know as the **Heritage Foundation**.

Most of the social media posts about Project 2025 uses the all too often fear tactic, painting a picture that democracy will end. Granted, a great deal of what Project 2025 is advocating would be horrible, but we need to look at Project 2025 through a historical lens.

The Heritage Foundation was founded in 1973, with a large injection of funding coming from beer magnate Joseph Coors. Coors and other Capitalists who embraced far right thinking were getting better organized in the 1970s, which included the Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel. (See Russ Bellant's book, ***The Coors Connection: How Coors Family Philanthropy Undermines Democratic Pluralism***.)

In 1980, when Ronald Reagan was seeking to defeat sitting President Jimmy Carter, the Heritage Foundation had crafted a similar platform for Reagan, known as the Mandate for Leadership. The 1980 version of the Mandate for Leadership was 1,100 pages long and "**was described by United Press International back then as "a blueprint for grabbing the government by its frayed New Deal lapels and shaking out 48 years of liberal policy**."

The Reagan Administration not only pushed national politics to the right, it forced the Democrats to do the same. Under the leadership of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), the Democrats also began to abandon traditional New Deal policies and embrace Reagan era policies, such as the Clinton Administration adopting the end of welfare known as **The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act**. Around the same time, The Clinton Administration adopted the

Crime Bill, which was crafted by then Senator Joe Biden, known as the **Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994**, along with the **1996 Telecommunications Act**, which ended Federal Communications Commissions regulations and resulted in media consolidation so complete that only six corporations control most of what we watch and hear. The point being that all politics shifted to the right with the Reagan Administration and that brings us to the present with what is referred to as Project 2025. These policies that were adopted under Clinton were part of the Reagan era Mandate for Change policies that the Heritage Foundation wanted to see implemented.

The Trump Administration utilized the Mandate for Leadership platform crafted by the Heritage Foundation during his Administration, which is what Project 2025 is also known as. Therefore, it is important that we understand that Project 2025 is the natural outcome of a policy platform that has shifted to the right for the past 40 plus years, just as all electoral politics has shifted to the right. As **Black Agenda Report** editor Margaret Kimberley has said, "*Project 2025 is just the latest in a series of conservative think pieces which outlines how republicans should wield presidential power. The outrage surrounding it ignores democrats' collusion with republican policies when they are in office and is a cynical effort to scare especially Black voters into continuing support for the Biden/Harris ticket."*

The DeVos connection to the Heritage Foundation and the Project 2025 Advisory Board

Another major omission in the fear-driven cries for people to look at Project 2025 is the lack of any conversation about the long standing relationship between the DeVos family and the Heritage Foundation. One would think that this would draw the ire of liberals and Democrats, but I have yet to see any discussion about the relationships between the Heritage Foundation and the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family.

The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation were major contributors to the Heritage Foundation for decades, providing millions to the far right think tank. When Rich DeVos died in 2018, the **Heritage Foundation wrote a tribute to the the far right/Christian Right billionaire**.

However, Rich DeVos was not the only contributor to the Heritage Foundation, since many of his sons would also provide money and ideological support for the think tank. **In 2002, Dick DeVos gave a speech** to the conservative think tank, the **Heritage Foundation**. In that speech DeVos lays out a strategy for attacking and undermining public education. Here is a video of that speech:

Ten years later Dick DeVos was being interviewed by the Heritage Foundation after Michigan became a Right to Work state, **where the Mackinac Center for Public Policy led the charge, with substantial funding from the DeVos family**. Here is that interview:

Then there is the issue of the more than 100 Advisory Board organizations listed as supporting Project 2025, which you can **find here**. What is instructive about this list are the dozens of groups that the DeVos family has had a direct connection to, whether it has been funding, sitting on their board of directors, policy work or collaborating with them. Here are just a few examples of the direct connection of the DeVos family to the organizations that endorse Project 2025

Alliance Defending Freedom – Funding, policy work and collaboration

American Center for Law and Justice – Funding

American Family Association – Policy Work

American Legislative Exchange Council – Policy Work and collaboration

Center for Immigration Studies – Policy Work

Claremont Institute – Funding

Coalition for a Prosperous America – Policy Work

Eagle Forum – Policy Work and collaboration

Family Policy Alliance – Policy Work

Family Research Council – Funding, Policy Work and Board of Directors

The Heartland Institute – Funding and Policy Work

Hillsdale College – Policy Work and collaboration

Independent Women's Forum – Policy Work and collaboration

Dr. James Dobson Family Institute – Policy Work and collaboration

Mackinac Center for Public Policy – Board of Directors, Funding, Policy Work and collaboration

Texas Public Policy Foundation – Policy Work

Turning Point USA – Policy Work and collaboration

Young Americans Foundation – Funding, Policy Work and collaboration

In this moment in history it is vitally important that we take a long view of the Heritage Foundation and Project 2025. The proliferation of memes and other sound bite reactions to Project 2025 does do anything other than to promote fear-based reactions. If we are to defeat such policy platforms, then we need to develop movements and structures that promote collective liberation and the dismantling of systems of power and oppression. Simply voting Blue won't do that, since all electoral politics has shifted to the right.

Billionaire families announce new development project in GR, wants $544 million in public funding

https://griid.org/2024/09/22/billionaire-families-announce-new-development-project-in-gr-wants-544-million-in-public-funding/

MASSIVE news for GR! Check out this article highlighting a historic development project that will transform our skyline and enhance our community.

The above comment is what the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce posted on their Facebook page over the weekend, a comment that was attached to a post from MLive about the new DeVos/Van Andel development plan.

Such a comment is no surprise coming from the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, especially considering ht close relationship that that organization has had with the DeVos and Van Andel families over the years. The GR Chamber has endorsed every DeVos and Van Andel development project ever since the DeVos family decided to purchase the Pantlind Hotel in downtown Grand Rapids and re-named it the Amway Grand Plaza.

This symbiotic relationship with the GR Chamber at the co-founding Amway families has also been seen in the Chamber's unconditional support in the history of Grand Action 2.0 (which began with using millions in public dollars to build the Van Andel Arena) and every project since then, leading up to the 12,000 seat outdoor Amphitheater and the Soccer Stadium. The DeVos/Van Andel relationship has also been central to the creation of the **West Michigan Policy Forum**, which was an outgrowth of the GR Chamber of Commerce in 2008, and has been pushing neoliberal capitalist policies ever since.

Local News coverage of DeVos/Van Andel development announcement

It is also not surprising how the local news had reported on the announcement about the new development venture involving the Amway co-founding families. In fact, the coverage once again demonstrates the subservience of both MLive and WOODTV8 to the DeVos and Van Andel families. To be frank, I believe that the local news agencies are essentially lapdogs to power, especially when it comes to the DeVos and Van Andel families.

The MLive headline read, ***DeVos, Van Andel families plan massive 'skyline defining' project in Grand Rapids*****,** while the channel 8 online headline stated, ***Plan for old Charley's Crab site would be 'skyline-defining,' firm says***.

The idea that such a project will be "skyline defining" is based solely on the words of the firm that has been hired by the DeVos/Van Andel families, specifically Progressive Companies, known by most as Progressive AE. The CEO and President of Progressive Companies was quoted in both news sources, which confirms the subservience of the local news to these two families.

According to MLive, the DeVos/Van Andel project is being handled by:

The Fulmar Property Holdings, a company comprised of members of the DeVos and Van Andel families. The families own the 500-space parking lot at the corner of Fulton Street and Market Avenue, just north of Acrisure Amphitheater, where the project would be built.

The same article states that the project will include, "mixed-use development with three high-rise towers containing up to 671 high-end apartments and condos, a hotel, office tower and retail."

Besides Progressive Companies and **Fulmar Property Holdings**, the project includes **Michigan Growth Advisors**, which will be taking the lead on efforts to secure federal, state and municipal financial incentives – tax breaks, subsidies – which means the millions in public funding will likely go to a project that is being championed by two multi-billionaire families.

The MLive article states that the **project's price tag is an estimated $738 million**, but the "developers are eyeing a big public subsidy — **a $544 million Transformational Brownfield plan**." Thus, the two billionaire families are seeking to use public incentives to cover the cost of three quarters of the total development project costs.

What makes this all the more absurd and infuriating is that the development will include 76 condos – which will no doubt only be affordable to those with deep pockets and a 130-room hotel, with rates that start at $400 a night. But wait, it gets even more disgusting. There will be 595 market-rate apartments that will cost the following:

For a studio apartment, that would be $2,643 per month, $2,833 for a one-bedroom, and $3,401 for a two-bedroom.

Much of the remaining portion of the MLive article is dedicated to how this DeVos/Van Andel project will utilize public funding to create an even larger playground area for the business class and their friends in downtown Grand Rapids. The MLive article also states that the project deal will be sweetened because, "*Fulmar Property Holdings is proposing to access the bigger subsidy by providing an $8.5 million payment to the Grand Rapids Affordable Housing Fund over a 20-year period*."

Ok, so just to be clear, the DeVos/Van Andel project will provide $8.5 million over a 20 year period to the Grand Rapids Affordable Housing Fund, and in return, the two

billionaire families hope to get $544 million Transformational Brownfield plan (Public Money). Welcome to the world of **NeoLiberal Capitalism**, where the billionaire class will receive $544 million to develop a project that will make them countless millions over the years and we are supposed to be excited that some of the wealthiest families in the area will contribute $425,000 a year for 20 years to the City's Affordable Housing Fund. $425,000 a year for the DeVos and Van Andel families is like most working class people contributing $50 a year. It's chump change for these rich families.

To add insult to injury, MLive ran a second article on Saturday with the headline, ***5 things to know about the massive, skyline changing Grand Rapids riverfront project***. This second article was essentially a summary of the initial post from Friday.

Again, the subservience of MLive to the DeVos/Van Andel families is demonstrated. Instead of providing even more Press Release journalism, MLive might want to actually ask people who have been dealing with gentrification, displacement and housing insecurity in recent years. There are groups in this city that would certainly have something to say about billionaires using $544 million in public incentives to expand their wealth and create a downtown district that will be their playground, but the local news doesn't care what the public thinks about how public funding is used.

5 anti-Capitalist things to know about the new DeVos/Van Andel downtown development project

https://griid.org/2024/09/23/5-anti-capitalist-things-to-know-about-the-new-devos-van-andel-downtown-development-project/

As a follow up to my last post, headlined, ***Billionaire families announce new development project in GR, wants $544 million in public funding***, I thought it would be useful to do the same thing that MLive did.

MLive did a follow up to the announcement about the new DeVos/Van Andel development project in downtown Grand Rapids, even though the follow up article didn't really provide any new information than their initial post. I want to provide five points that we all need to be talking about, especially if we want to take away some of the power that the co-founding families of Amway have in this city.

First, even though it may not be the sexist thing to talk about, Grand Rapids has a serious issue around parking. I have already seen people on various social media platforms respond to the news about the new DeVos/Van Andel project on the corner of Fulton and Market regarding parking. People, especially those that live on the near

westside of Grand Rapids are very concerned about the lack of parking in downtown Grand Rapids and their fear of having to pay for street parking in front of their own homes. Now, it is true that the initial MLive article about the new DeVos/Van Andel project did mention that it would include up to 2,500 parking spaces. However, there was no clarification if these spaces would be public or private, especially considering that there will be 130 hotel bedrooms, 76 condos and 595 market-rate (expensive) apartments.

Add the lack of parking to the fact that Grand Rapids and Kent County officials are hell bent on attracting as much tourism to downtown as possible. Tourism will bring even more cars to an area where parking is difficult to find, with the added dynamic that Grand Rapids just **upped the cost of parking, which also included extending the hours for parking and increasing rates for events**.

Second, the cost of housing with the DeVos/Van Andel project is all market driven, which means it excludes the majority of people already living in Grand Rapids. This project will include a 130 unit hotel, with rooms starting at $400 a night. There will also be 76 condos, but we don't know the prices for those as of yet. However, after doing a search for the average price of a condo in downtown Grand Rapids I found $389,950.00 as the average.

Then there is the cost of the 3 types of 595 apartments that will be part of the DeVos/Van Andel project. The cost of these apartments are: for a studio apartment, that would be $2,643 per month, $2,833 for a one-bedroom, and $3,401 for a two-bedroom. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the average cost of rent for a 2 bedroom apartment in Michigan, based on the Fair Market Rate, is $1,204. However, the cost is higher in Grand Rapids, and according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, for someone to afford the average cost of a 2 bedroom apartment in Grand Rapids, they would have to make $26.33 an hour. Most people I know do not make that kind of a wage.

Third, we all have to stop buying into the narrative that these projects are transformational, or to more accurately put it, such projects are transformational for those who already control most of the land and other assets in downtown Grand Rapids, such as the DeVos and Van Andel families. As I stated in yesterday's post, the DeVos/Van Andel project is requesting $544 million in financial incentives, for a $738 million project cost. This means that the DeVos/Van Andel project people are asking for roughly 75% of the cost of this project to be picked up by the public sector.

Beyond this, imagine how much money the DeVos/Van Andel people will make off of the 130 unit hotel, the 76 condos and the 595 apartments. These families will be making millions on a regular basis, not the people who will clean and maintain those properties or provide security for those buildings. It is likely that those workers would not be able to even afford to stay in the hotel rooms, plus they certainly will not be able to afford the cost of any of the 76 condos, nor the 595 apartments. These spaced are reserved for the business class and those that make 6 figure salaries and up.

Fourth, it is not likely that we will see any local politician – city, county or state elected official question or challenge the new DeVos/Van Andel project. These issues are not part of the candidate platforms for those running for Mayor of Grand Rapids in November, for Grand Rapids City and Kent County Commission seats, or those that represent Grand Rapids in the State Legislature.

Politicians and candidates will not speak out against the use of public funding/financial incentives for the DeVos/Van Andel project or any other major downtown development project because they will not publicly challenge the members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure. When was the last time you heard a local politician publicly challenge the power of families like the DeVos and Van Andel families? These politicians and candidates do not have the guts to do so, plus most of them actually believe that the DeVos/Van Andel project and those like it are transformational.

For example, the legislation that allowed for the increased in the hotel tax in Kent County that was voted on in August, was based on **House Bill 5048 of 2023**, which was sponsored by House Democrat John Fitzgerald (District 83). The Democrats in the State House and Senate unanimously voted for it, with some Republicans joining them. Here is what that legislation said about how the hotel tax could only be used:

Generally, a county must use the revenue from the imposed excise tax to pay for specified items, including the administration and enforcement of the tax ordinance, the financing of convention and entertainment facilities, and the promotion of tourist and convention business in the county. Under the bill, these requirements would apply to revenue from a local unit of government's imposed excise tax.

Based on this recent example, the question is, why aren't politicians, and especially Democrats, creating policies that re-directs the kind of funds generated by the hotel tax in Kent County ($24 million annually) going to fund housing and other basic needs of the people whom they claim to represent? Because they are cowards and because they embrace business as usual politics.

Lastly, since we can't rely on local politicians to represent the interests of of the major of Grand Rapids and Kent County, it will be necessary to build a movement that not only demands that the public has a say in how public funds are used, but to make demands on using the disgustingly larger amount of wealth from the small number of billionaires and millionaires in Kent County for real community needs – housing, food, transportation, health care, renewable energy, etc. Imagine how many lives would be improved if the public had control over public funding. Imagine if there was a movement to demand that the wealthiest members of this community should give that money to the people who made their wealth through their labor – **a point I made about the Meijer family wealth increasing during the pandemic**. Who wants to be part of such a movement?

More than 4 things to know about the DeVos and Van Andel development project, since MLive is too cowardly to question the co-founding Amway families

https://griid.org/2024/10/08/more-than-4-things-to-know-about-the-devos-and-van-andel-development-project-since-mlive-is-too-cowardly-to-question-the-co-founding-amway-families/

Do you ever feel like you are stuck in some strange commercial news time-loop, where the local news media just repeats itself as a tactic to avoid having to question those who run Grand Rapids? It would appear that those who manage MLive are doing just that.

For the past few weeks, MLive has been running a story on the new DeVos/Van Andel proposed downtown development project. The story was first reported on September 21st, so **GRIID provided a robust critique** of the MLive coverage. A day later, MLive decided to sidestep doing real journalism and simply published a piece entitled, **5 things to know about the massive, skyline changing Grand Rapids riverfront project**. I also provided **a response to MLive's recycled reporting**.

Hoping that their readership has short term memory loss, MLive further milked this story, with their latest pulitzer prize reporting and catchy headline, **4 things to know as Grand Rapids weighs $544M incentive for massive skyline defining project**.

True to its headline, this most recent mLive piece provides 4 subheadings – 1) What's proposed?, 2) How does the Transformational Brownfield subsidy work? 3) Residents want a bigger affordable housing commitment, and 4) What's next? In turn, I will provide some responses to each of the 4 MLive things to know.

What's proposed? – MLive's answer provides a summary version of their initial article from September 21st. There is a brief mention of the acreage involved in the DeVos/Van Andel development project, that there will be 2500 parking space – just enough for the apartment/condo dwellers and the businesses that will occupy the space – plus a repeat of the rental costs of the proposed apartments, which will be "priced at 150% of Kent County's Area Median Income." In other words, let's make these apartments expensive. Well, not DeVos/Van Andel expensive, but high enough so that only people making six figure salaries and up can afford them. This might actually move Grand Rapids up the list of most **competitive rental costs in the country, where they currently sit at #11**. This also fits into the narrative that the GRPD have crafted, where the new downtown entertainment venues will result in adding more cops. I mean, we can't allow unhoused people to ruin the activities and sense of entitlement of the bourgeois that will frequent

the amphitheater and the soccer stadium, at least those that will being living right by these venues.

How does the Transformational Brownfield subsidy work? – Here, MLive does a reasonable job in explaining how the Transformational Brownfield subsidy actually works. Unfortunately, MLive then avoids questioning he claims of the DeVos/Van Andel proposal by failing to verify their claims. Here is what the article states:

Project officials say the project isn't feasible without the subsidy because high-rise towers are very expensive to build, and the amount a developer can charge for rent isn't high enough to cover the cost of constructing the building. The site itself is also challenging and pricy to build on because of its proximity to the river and the condition of the soil, officials say.

Well, shit, if project officials say this is the case, then it must be true. I mean, the God-fearing DeVos and Van Andel families would not deceive the public to by using public subsidies now would they?

Residents want a bigger affordable housing commitment – This talking point from MLive is just ridiculous. MLive only cites one person from the group Together West Michigan, which hardly represents "residents." The lone-person cited from Together West Michigan thinks that the DeVos/Van Andel development project could do more to support affordable housing. Unfortunately, they offer no suggestions to either expand the $8.5 million the DeVos/Van Andel project would contribute over a 20 year period to the City's Affordable Housing Fund. $8.5 million over a 20 year period is $425,000 annual, which is chump change for these two billionaire families.

As a counter proposal, I would say that it seems more than fair to suggest that the DeVos and Van Andel families could give $10 million each per year towards the City's Affordable Housing Fund. This would result in **$20 million a year over the next 20 years** and the DeVos and Van Andel families could pay that amount through their tax-free havens they call foundations. In addition, the City could require that the DeVos/Van Andel development project **make half of the one bedroom and two bedroom apartments truly affordable, charging $500 a month for a one bedroom and $800 for a two bedroom**. This would be more than fair, considering there are currently thousands of renters that don't make a living wage and many of them have to work two jobs or have two incomes just to survive.

What's next? – Here, the MLive reporter just says that the city's Brownfield Redevelopment Authority will discuss the proposed project on October 16th. Unfortunately, MLive fails to inform its readers that the **Brownfield Redevelopment Authority meets at 8:30am**, making it near impossible for working people/families to attend. I also noticed, that as of this posting, the **City's Meeting portal** has yet to provide any information about that meeting on October 16 and will likely wait until a few days before to post anything.

The City will then make the final decision on whether or not to approve the DeVos/Van Andel project, which in all honesty seems like a done deal. I mean, when was the last

time that the City of Grand Rapids ever denied any proposal coming from the co-founding Amway families?

Shocking News: DeVos controlled Grand Rapids DDA approves DeVos/Van Andel development plan

https://griid.org/2024/10/11/shocking-news-devos-controlled-grand-rapids-dda-approves-devos-van-andel-development-plan/

Recently, the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority (DDA) approved a proposal from the DeVos/Van Andel. This should not come as a surprise to anyone who bothers to follow the DDA and who controls it. (**See October 9 DDA Agenda**)

The Grand Rapids DDA is made up of a 9 member board and two of those members – **Greg McNeilly** and **Richard Winn** are both DeVos employees. Richard Winn is the President of AHC Hospitality, which is a DeVos-owned company that manages 14 Hotels/Inns, most of which are in West Michigan. In addition to sitting on the DDA Board, Richard Winn is also on the boards of the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority, Experience GR, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. and Grand Action 2.0. All of these entities work in collaboration to make sure that the DeVos and Van Andel families get what they want.

The other DeVos operative is Greg McNeilly. McNeilly was the campaign manager for the failed gubernatorial campaign of Dick DeVos in 2006. McNeilly is currently the Chief Operating Officer of the DeVos run Windquest Group, an entity that is owned by Dick & Betsy DeVos. McNeilly has also been the former President of the Michigan Freedom Fund, a far right political group that was also created by the DeVos family. **McNeilly ran the campaign to oppose the Voters Not Politicians ballot initiative**. In 2021, **McNeilly defended the Enbridge Corporation** and their plans to build a tunnel underneath the Great Lakes for the Line 5 oil pipeline.

Most of the recent of the DDA Board has some connection to the DeVos family as well, whether it is business dealings or receiving campaign funding, so there is no real opposing voices on the DDA when it comes to the most powerful families in this city.

Once you understand how the **Grand Rapids Power Structure** functions in this city, you will then be able to understand the decisions and the policies that are adopted by elected officials and groups like the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority.

Grand Rapids Board unanimously approves a $565 million subsidy for a development project proposed by two billionaire families

https://griid.org/2024/10/17/grand-rapids-board-unanimously-approves-a-565-million-subsidy-for-a-development-project-proposed-by-two-billionaire-families/

On Wednesday, the Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority unanimously approved the subsidy, known as a Transformational Brownfield Plan, for the DeVos/Van Andel development project in downtown Grand Rapids.

MLive reported that the Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority agreed to provide a $565 million subsidy for the project.

One thing that I immediately noticed about the subsidy amount, **was that it was $21 million larger than the original amount cited by MLive back in late September, which was $544 million**.

The announcement of the unanimous approval by the Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority to approve a $565 million subsidy to the two billionaire families wanting to build a massive development project in downtown Grand Rapids is not surprising at all. The MLive coverage of the announcement is also consistent with their previous coverage on this matter, which has been to simply provide a platform for the developing company to say whatever they want, without question.

The primary source in the MLive story was Joe Agostinelli, the founder of Michigan Growth Advisors, a firm that's working with the company that is jointly owned by DeVos and Van Andel. The MLive article also cites Sarah Rainero, who is the Economic Development Director for the City of Grand Rapids. Rainero talked about how the $565

million subsidy is primarily from the state. While that may be true, it is still public money, which means that the billionaire families of DeVos and Van Andel will receive more than two-thirds of the cost of this development project from public funding.

The only other source cited in the MLive article was Grand Rapids Mayor Bliss, who said that she was "**really glad**" that this project was moving forward, plus she referred to it as "**transformational**." Seems like we know where Bliss stands on this matter when it comes before the City Commission for a vote. Unfortunately, the MLive article said nothing about when that vote might be. It seems that MLive also doesn't really care what the public thinks about another massive development project by two billionaire families, using a $565 million subsidy.

Major MLive Omission

Besides leaving out public voices on the massive subsidy for the billionaires development project, the MLive article doesn't cite anyone from the government body – the Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority – in this story. Shouldn't the public know who these people are and what interests they represent? Well, why don't I just tell you.

You can find the list of the 11 members board that makes up the Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority by going to **this link**. Besides including their name, I am including who these people work for, which should tell you something about why they unanimously approved the project and the $565 million subsidy.

- J**eff Edwards, *Chair*** – Principal, Reveille Development Company, used to work for Rockford Construction
- **Lynn Rabaut, *Vice-Chair*** – former GR City Commissioner, retired as the Executive Director at GR Griffins Youth Foundation
- **Kristine Bersche, *Secretary*** – Environmental Business Advisor with **Bridge House Advisors**.
- **Troy Butler, *Treasurer*** – Managing Parter at **Squeegee Squad Grand Rapids**
- **Guillermo Cisneros** – President & CEO – West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, a board member of Grand Action 2.0 and the Economic Club of Grand Rapids
- **Kaylee Dillard** – Project Manager at Wolverine Building Group
- **Brooke Oosterman** Executive Director of Housing Next, which was created by the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce
- **Martin Uchendu** – Realtor at Five Star Real Estate
- **John Van Fossen** – Vice President Government Affairs at Meijer
- **Lynee Wells** – Founder + CEO Aligned Planning
- **Milinda Ysasi, *Commissioner*** – CEO at Grow, and as a GR City Commissioner has enthusiastically supported downtown development projects, all of which have used massive public subsidies.

As you can see, the people who make up the board for the Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority represent interests that benefit developers and those in the

professional and Capitalist class. Unfortunately, these people do not represent the interests of most BIPOC communities, working class people, and people who are living paycheck to paycheck, which are the majority of people living in this city.

2 Ways to oppose the $565 million subsidy for the DeVos/Van Andel development project in downtown Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2024/11/10/2-ways-to-oppose-the-565-million-subsidy-for-the-devos-van-andel-development-project-in-downtown-grand-rapids/

There will be numerous housing related matters discussed and presented during this Tuesday's Grand Rapids City Commission meeting.

Several of the housing issues that will be presented have to do with funding, along with a public hearing that is specific to the DeVos/Van Andel development project on Fulton and Market.

As **I reported nearly three weeks ago**, the Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority unanimously approved a **$565 million subsidy to the DeVos/Van Andel development project**. This $565 million subsidy to the two billionaire family development project needs to be opposed, and here are two things you can do:

First, you can sign and share the **Action Alert** created by the Grand Rapids Area Tenant Union, an **Action Alert** that will go directly to the Mayor, the Grand Rapids City Commissioners and the Grand Rapids City Manager.

Second, you can attend the Grand Rapids City Commission meeting at 2pm (**do you think the city deliberately scheduled this public hearing for 2pm, since they knew there would be opposition???**). The Public Hearing for the $565 million subsidy for the DeVos/Van Andel development project will be towards the end of the City Commission meeting. Anyone who opposes the $565 million subsidy will have a chance to speak during the Public Hearing portion of the City Commission meeting.

The Grand Rapids Area Tenant Union (GRATU) has provided several important talking points that people can use while addressing the Grand Rapids City Commission, such as:

- No subsidies for billionaire families. Make them pay for it!
- The rental rates of the 595 apartments this DeVos/Van Andel project proposes to build are unaffordable for a majority of the population. Studio apartments in the new development will go for $2,643 per month, $2,833 for a one-bedroom, $3,401 for a two-bedroom. GRATU is proposing that the DeVos/Van Andel development project charge $400 for a studio apartment, $500 for a one-bedroom and $800 for a two-bedroom apartment, prices that align with 30% of the median income in Grand Rapids.
-
- The New York Times recently reported that Grand Rapids is one of the worst cities in the U.S. for renters.
- Rents have increased up to 27% since 2020, while wages have not kept up with inflation.
- The median monthly rent for an apartment in Grand Rapids was $1,100 in 2020 and is now $1,400, an increase of $300 each month.
- People are paying an average of $3600 more rent per year than they did in 2020, while the minimum wage increase during those 4 years only provides an additional $1400 per year for the 40-hour-a-week worker.
- The DeVos/Van Andel company is proposing to offer $425,000 annually over a 20 year period, a total of $8.5 million, to go towards the City's Affordable Housing Fund. Yet the DeVos and Van Andel Foundations together generate assets of roughly $500 million on an annual basis. GRATU is proposing that the DeVos and Van Andel Foundations provide $5 million a year over the next 20 years, $100 million total, to the Affordable Housing Fund.

Public funds for public housing, not for billionaires! People over profits!

We were talked down to: How the developers and City Officials treated the overwhelming opposition to the DeVos/Van Andel development project

https://griid.org/2024/11/13/we-were-talked-down-to-how-the-developers-and-city-officials-treated-the-overwhelming-opposition-to-the-devos-van-andel-development-project/

Yesterday, there were so many people who showed up to oppose the DeVos/Van Andel development project, that many had to wait in the hall way or downstairs before they could even speaking during the public hearing that was held during the Grand Rapids City Commission meeting at 2pm.

However, before the Public Hearing began, the City's economic development director presented the scope of the project, with numerous slides, which began around 21:35 in **the video linked here**. The economic development director didn't just provide an overview, in reality she made a pitch on why this development project would be a good thing for the city. You can see in the image below, which is from the slide presentation, that there is a timeline, including a an estimate fall 2025 date for when construction would begin for this project. This information was presented as if it was a done deal.

The City's economic development director was followed by Brad from Progressive Companies, who spoke for about 3 minutes. He was followed by Joe from **Michigan Growth Advisors**, which which has been taking the lead on efforts to secure federal, state and municipal financial incentives – tax breaks, subsidies, etc. Joe keep repeating this phrase – "This project simply won't work without the incentives." He later insults the crowd by saying we don't understand how the contributions to the Affordable Housing Fund works. All total, the three people who were championing the development project put forth by the billionaire families DeVos and Van Andel, spoke for about 30 minutes.

Unfortunately, the public still had to wait several more minutes, since a few City Commissioners had comments, comments that were initiated by Jon O'Connor. O'Conner, in is standard contempt of the public, also spoke down to people, suggesting that we did not understand how the tax incentives worked. The back and forth with City Commissioners and the developer lasted an additional 13 minutes, which means that before the public got to speak, **we had to sit through 44 minutes of people talking about how great this project would be for the city and how the rest of us are just stupid**.

When it finally became time for the public comment portion, the number of those that spoke in opposition to this project was 32, while only 5 spoke in favor. Those who opposed this development project spoke about issues like – not giving $565 million in tax incentives to the two billionaire families behind the project, the ridiculously high rent costs of the 595 "market rate" apartments, the City's failure to address the real housing crisis, the further criminalization of the unhoused, the massive parking problems in the downtown that impact residents on the westside, how the City always supports funding for these kinds of projects that primarily benefit those with deep pockets, but not projects that would be transformational for working class families and BIPOC communities, along with general moral outrage that people expressed.

It is also important to point out who the 5 people were that supported this project, since they certainly did not represent the general population. There was an employee of Rockford Construction, someone with Downtown GR Inc., someone from the Right

Place Inc., the General Manager of the Convention Center, and the head of governmental affairs with the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce.

It is also important to point out that most of the other people in the room were there in opposition, because at one point, those speaking from Together West Michigan, asked people who were with that group to stand up. There was almost half of the room that stood up. There were also people who were downstairs or who had to leave early that never got a chance to speak out against the project.

Now, according to the timeline listed above, the Grand Rapids City Commission will vote on whether or not to approve the $565 million tax incentives to the DeVos/Van Andel development project on December 3rd. This does provide people with time to send the **Action Alert** created by the Grand Rapids Area Tenant Union, which emphatically opposes this $565 million give away. As of this writing there are close to 800 letters that have been sent to Grand Rapids City officials. We can make it over 1,000 by signing it and sharing it on social media.

The new downtown GR Soccer Stadium will be named the Amway Stadium, which should surprise no one who has been paying attention

https://griid.org/2024/11/18/the-new-downtown-gr-soccer-stadium-will-be-named-the-amway-stadium-which-should-surprise-no-one-who-has-been-paying-attention/

MLive posted just minutes ago that the soccer stadium that will be located just west of US 131 by Pearl St. will be named the Amway Stadium, after the company pledged $33 million for the stadium.

Not surprising, the MLive story is celebratory and uncritical of the soccer stadium, as they have been all along with other major downtown development projects that have used hundreds of millions of public dollars to subsidize these so-called transformational projects.

The MLive article omits the fact that Amway is owned by the DeVos and Van Andel billionaire families, but they also omitted several other realities regarding the Soccer Stadium:

- They omitted the fact that Grand Action 2.0 is essentially run by the DeVos family
- They omitted the fact that the DDA – which approved using lots of public tax money for the project, has a DeVos family operative on that unelected board.
- They omitted the fact that the Kent County and Grand Rapids City Commissions are in the pocket of the DeVos family. Both of these governing bodies approved $100 million in public subsidies for the Soccer Stadium.
- They omitted the fact that the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA) is chaired by a DeVos employee – Richard A. Winn AHC Hospitality .

MLive also does not include a statement from the CEO of Amway, Michael Nelson, which reads:

"We are a people business, and sports bring people together. It's often a source of community and connection—offering shared experiences and points of pride. Those ideas are part of Amway and the thousands of communities around the world that Amway Business Owners create."

These flowery words should not be confused with what real community looks like, especially when you consider the fact that the DeVos family owns the Grand Rapids Griffins, the Orlando Magic NBA team, the now defunct Grand Rapids Rampage, the Grand Rapids Rise (women's volleyball team) and the Orlando Squeeze, a Major League **Pickleball** franchise owned by Ryan DeVos. The DeVos family doesn't care about community, they care about expanding their wealth, and owning sports teams will do just that.

Lastly, it is ironic, that a $33 million pledge by the Amway corporation, which is a multi-billion dollar global corporation, is only one third of the amount that taxpayers are contributing, even though the public had no say in the use of the $100 million that Kent County and Grand Rapids approved.

Dissecting the Amway talking points used for buying the naming rights to the Grand Rapids soccer stadium

https://griid.org/2024/12/01/dissecting-the-amway-talking-points-used-for-buying-the-naming-rights-to-the-grand-rapids-soccer-stadium/

As GRIID **reported on November 18th**, it should have been no surprise to anyone that the yet to be constructed soccer stadium would be named the Amway Stadium.

Earlier this year, **GRIID also wrote** that people should have known that the DeVos family would want to see one of their corporation's names on the new stadium, right after Dan DeVos purchased the property on Pearl Street, where the Big Boy restaurant sits, that the location of the new stadium would end up there.

In today's post, I want to dissection a **recent interview done by the online platform known as GR&Riverfront**, which is essentially a collaboration between various members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, to promote projects, businesses and tourist attractions along the Grand River.

GR&Riverfront recently interviewed the CEO of Amway, Michael Nelson, on the DeVos company's decision to buy the naming rights to the new soccer stadium. I am posting the entire interview, which will include my own responses to the Amway CEO's comments, which will begin with GRIID and the commentary in italics.

GR& Riverfront: What inspired Amway to make this significant commitment to the new downtown soccer stadium and to visibly connect the company to this venue?

Michael Nelson: Though our business spans the world, our home is West Michigan. It has been since Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel founded the company in 1959 – and always will be. This community is special to Amway and the 2,500+ employees that work in our Headquarters location in Ada.

That's why we're committed to ongoing investments in this community – its people and its success. We're proud to support the vision of Grand Action 2.0 and to continue Amway's legacy of community partnership. It's an honor to have our name associated with such an exciting new landmark in Grand Rapids. **GRIID –** *Amway, like all corporations, has as its primarily commitment to increase their profits. The legacy of Amway's investment in Grand Rapids can be summed up in its relationship to Grand Action 2.0, which was co-founded by the DeVos and Van Andel families. Every project that Grand Action 2.0 has imposed on the City of Grand Rapids using massive amounts of public money without public input – the Van Andel Arena, the upgrade of the Civic Theater, the Convention Center, the Downtown Market, the Amphitheater and the Soccer Stadium, all came about primarily because of public funding, plus all of these venues have greatly expanded the profits of all of the hotels that the DeVos family owns in downtown GR.* ***Public investment equals massive private profits for the Amway owners.*** *This is their legacy.*

GR&: Grand Rapids as a city, and Amway as a company, have great histories in sports. What is it about sports that brings people together – both in a region and via a company? What about that excites you with regards to this new stadium?

Michael: We are a people business, and sports bring people together. It's often a source of community and connection – offering shared experiences and points of pride.

Those ideas are part of Amway and the thousands of communities around the world that Amway Business Owners create.

While this will be the home of a new soccer club, the Amway Stadium will also provide much more – a hub for community interaction and healthy activity. Just like the team it houses, it will be something this community can feel proud of, because it will make Grand Rapids a destination for people to visit across Michigan and beyond. **GRIID –** *The DeVos family does love sports, which is why they own the Grand Rapids Griffins, the Orlando Magic NBA team, the now defunct Grand Rapids Rampage, the Grand Rapids Rise (women's volleyball team) and the Orlando Squeeze, a Major League* ***Pickleball*** *franchise owned by Ryan DeVos. As for the soccer team that will play in the new Amway Stadium, I would bet money that it will also be owned by the DeVos family.* ***The DeVos family doesn't care about community, they care about expanding their wealth, and owning sports teams is one way to do just that.***

GR&: Many of Amway's efforts in the region are focused on activities that promote a healthy lifestyle and togetherness, including the Amway River Bank Run. Why is this a focus and how does the soccer stadium connect to it?

Michael: Amway's purpose is to help people live better, healthier lives. This is our promise to every community we serve – from Asia, to Europe, to South America, to our home in West Michigan. And Amway solutions are focused on supporting people's health and wellbeing journey. Therefore, this soccer stadium is a natural fit!

Our Founders, Jay Van Andel and Rich DeVos, believed that all of us are responsible for using our talents to make the world a better place. Supporting our community and working together have been key parts of Amway since 1959. Rich and Jay knew that a strong partnership, using our unique skills and talents toward a shared purpose, allows us to go far. West Michigan demonstrates this uniquely through the many public-private partnerships that occur, including the soccer stadium. **GRIID –** *The purpose of Amway is to make profits for the DeVos and Van Andel families. Read the book, "****Amway : The Cult of Free Enterprise,"*** *by Stephen Butterfield, which provides investigative insight into the pyramid scheme that Amway was built on. Tens of thousands of people have lost everything and gone into bankruptcy while attempting to sell Amway products, which dismantles the notion that Amway wants to "help people live better." In addition, the DeVos and Van Andel families have provide over $100 million in campaign contributions to political candidates, candidates that embrace Neo-Liberal economic policies, which have harmed countless lives, often subjecting them to poverty.* ***Amway doesn't care about the health of most people who live in West Michigan, they care about expanding their wealth and maintaining an ideological position that believes that their wealth is because of their commitment to God.***

GR&: Thousands of Amway employees are based in western Michigan and many Amway Independent Business Owners visit regularly. What will this stadium mean for them?

Michael: For 65 years, Amway has been part of the West Michigan community. It's where our Founders were born, started a business, and raised their own families. The

Grand Rapids landscape was shaped through that support and regional commitment. We're proud to have our name on a new regional landmark and to keep Rich and Jay's commitment alive. We hope that our employees, Business Owners, and broader community see this not only as a commitment to our region, but also an investment in our health and wellbeing focus. **GRIID –** *If the DeVos and Van Andel families were so committed to the health and well being of those living in Grand Rapids, then* ***why did they sign on to supporting the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce ordinance proposal to criminalize the unhoused****, then backed* ***the City's two ordinances that has clearly criminalized the unhoused in Grand Rapids?***

GR&: Soccer is a global game that has grown greatly in popularity in the United States in recent decades. Does the global nature of the game and the global nature of the Amway business go hand-in-hand?

Michael: Amway operates in more than 100 countries and territories – with millions of passionate Amway Business Owners building health and wellbeing communities. We're the #1 direct selling company in the world. And soccer is the #1 sport in the world – inspiring a unique comradery and community spirit. Supporting this soccer stadium is a great example of building community based on our unique values.

We know that we're all stronger, and better, when communities come together and rally for a shared purpose. We're excited to see what the future of West Michigan soccer holds. For our community, and for global fans of this great sport! **GRIID –** *Of course Amway is the #1 global direct sales company. It's because their get rich quick scheme has been able to con millions of poor people around the world that they too can make lots of money selling Amway products. The reality however, is that few people get rich from selling Amway products. The goal is really not to sell Amway products, but the idea of Amway and recruit as many people as possible to sell Amway products. Every person you convince to sell Amway products has to give you part of the sales, resulting in a small number getting super rich without having to do much work, while the majority of those who are actually selling Amway products will put their lives in financial jeopardy.* ***This is the cold hard reality of Amway's pyramid scheme, a scheme that is based on exploitation.***

MLive omits the most substantial organized effort to oppose the DeVos/Van Andel development project, which received $565 million in tax breaks from GR City officials

https://griid.org/2024/12/05/mlive-omits-the-most-substantial-organized-effort-to-oppose-the-devos-van-andel-development-project-which-received-565-million-in-tax-breaks-from-gr-city-officials/

On Tuesday morning, MLive posted an article by journalist Brian McVicar, entitled, **With billions in assets, should DeVos and Van Andel families qualify for big tax incentive?**

The article was deeply problematic from the get go, providing lots of space to GR City Officials and the development spokesperson hired to manage the DeVos/Van Andel development project, which will build 3 towers on the Fulton & Market lot on the south end of downtown Grand Rapids.

The article does provide some local oppositional voices, like Kent County Commissioner Ivan Diaz and the group Together West Michigan. Diaz was questioning then logic in providing the DeVos/Vandel project with such a large amount of tax breaks, while Together West Michigan wanted to see the billionaire families give more money to the City's Affordable Housing Fund.

When the article first appeared on MLive at 8:31am on Tuesday, December 3rd, the journalist had failed to mention the most substantial opposition effort, which was led by the Grand Rapids Area Tenant Union (GRATU). I sent Brian McVicar a message that said, "Brian, regarding your 12/3 article, you did not include the Grand Rapids Area Tenent Union opposition to this project, which has been the primary group involved. GRATU has generated over 1000 letters to GR City officials opposing the $565 million in tax incentives and other issues related to the project, which you can **find here.**"

The link I included was a GRATU Action Alert, which had sent over 1,000 letters to Grand Rapids City officials, with the following three demands:

- **No to the $565 million in tax breaks to two billionaire families.**
- **Truly affordable rental fees for the nearly 600 apartments there were part of the 3 tower plan.**
- **Instead of the DeVos/Van Andel families providing a mere $425,000 annually to the GR Affordable Housing Fund over a 20 year period, should give $5 million a year for the next 20 years.**

The MLive journalist Brian McVicar wrote back in the morning saying, "*Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Jeff. My apologies for failing to include this. I will update the story and let readers know that the Grand Rapids Area Tenant Union has also opposed the project's subsidy request*."

Apparently, McVicar didn't read the GRATU Action Alert, since it didn't just mention the "subsidy request."

I checked the MLive piece several times and at 3:17pm on Tuesday, I send another message to McVicar saying, "Brian, I just checked the article and did not see any

updates referencing the GRATU opposition letters. Am I missing something?" McVicar's responded back at 4:38pm by saying, "*Nope, you're definitely not missing anything. I'm tied up right now with the story on today's commission meeting but will update my story as soon as I'm able*."

McVicars did finally update the article at 5:37pm, but only included this sentence: "***The Grand Rapids Area Tenant Union had also spoken out against the projec***t." This weak update, just 90 minutes before the City voted to approve the massive tax breaks and other aspects of the project, was not only unacceptable, it was insulting.

Imagine if local news agencies had reported on the three GRATU demands that were included in their Action Alert. Imagine if they reported that over 1,000 letters were sent to GR City officials from community members expressing their opposition. It is my belief that if they larger public knew there was a more organized effort that addressed several facets of the DeVos/Van Andel development project, even more people would have decided to oppose the project.

This example is reason #83 for why we need independent media in this city and why we need to develop Movement Media (media that comes out of the movements for systemic change) in Grand Rapids. Clearly, we cannot rely on the commercial news agencies in this city, as they simply parrot the dominant narratives from those in power.

Doug DeVos exposes his class privilege in video talking about "How to Help Everyone Thrive and Prosper"

https://griid.org/2024/12/10/doug-devos-exposes-his-class-privilege-in-video-talking-about-how-to-help-everyone-thrive-and-prosper/

In August, **I wrote about the group called Thrive and Prosper**, where I said the group is a concrete manifestation of West Michigan Nice. I went on to say:

Therefore, the label of West Michigan Nice could aptly be given to the recently created group known as Thrive and Prosper. Yes, Thrive and Prosper. Sounds like a get rich quick scheme or a cult or just simply the logical outcome of how Grand Rapids deals with everything.

More recently, in a conversation I was having with a local religious leader, they were saying that Thrive and Prosper was essentially a DeVos front group. This sentiment was confirmed when I had looked at **Doug DeVos' podcast page called I Believe**. On the page it was promoting a mini-series of videos from the, "**Believe in Our City**" event that was organized by Thrive and Prosper in the summer.

There are a total of 7 episodes, with numerous speakers, but the 3rd episode features Doug DeVos speaking about, "How to Help Everyone Thrive and Prosper."

The video with Doug DeVos is about 22 minutes long, which you can **watch here**, but I will provide you with some highlights so you don't have to sift through the bullshit.

One theme that DeVos spoke about was what he called the Abundance mentality. For DeVos, abundance mentality means that we don't have to stop something from happening when looking at what else is happening that is problematic.He said that just because there are problems in some parts of the city, doesn't mean that we shouldn't build up other parts of the city.

Of course this is hypocritical, since the DeVos family has primarily been about building up the downtown area of Grand Rapids, while other parts of the city are neglected. Doug DeVos has spent millions in the Boston Square neighborhood and then set up the AmplifyGR project to impose the DeVos family values on an entire neighborhood, **which GRIID has written about since AmplifyGR went public in 2017**.

DeVos then went on to talk about how as a city we are often unsettled. The Amway CEO explained what he meant by be unsettled, stating, "*We saw that in our own community, about 4 years ago. We saw that here, very unsettled. We started experiencing some of the mob, some of the rioting and some of the lawlessness that don't really comport with a civil society."*

These comments from DeVos clearly demonstrate his class privilege, since what happened with the uprising in 2020 was rooted not only in how the police murder and repress Black communities, but how there is deep seated structural injustice and exploitation that people like DeVos are removed from and responsible for. The DeVos family is the best example of the growing wealth gap in Grand Rapids, where a small number of people are benefiting from the labor and suffering of the majority of the population.

Doug DeVos further demonstrated his class privilege by saying of the 2020 uprising in Grand Rapids, "***Certainly protests are fine, but peaceful***." It is instructive how those with political and economic power are always preaching that our outrage and our frustration with systemic oppression is only legitimate when it is peaceful. The irony of this is that when those with private power or the state use force against those protesting, it is always necessary and reasonable. Violence that flows down from the top is legitimate, but when violence flows from the bottom of society it is always condemned.

The billionaire DeVos continued to reflect on how you deal with being unsettled, by sharing a story from the 1990s. DeVos talked about the Plaza Towers, which were not constructed well and was deeply problematic. He said there were two options, tear it down or rebuild. Jay Van Andel was at a meeting where the fate of the Plaza Towers were being discussed where he said, “we don’t blow things up, we build things up.” DeVos was using this story to say when there is a problem, you don’t blow up the institution or throw it away, you reform it and work from within. Sage advice from billionaires.

Another theme that DeVos wanted to stress was the need to come up with a vision. In this case, the Amway executive talked about downtown Grand Rapids, turning it around took vision, a vision that was nurtured by Grand Action. Of course Doug DeVos would say this, since his family has been the primary beneficiaries of the downtown development projects.

There were also references to the Amway business model, but through a top down view, nothing remotely honest aboSuch sentiment is of course code for – how can you build wealth and then expand your wealth over a lifetime? Once you have begun to build wealth, use some of that money to buy politicians who will push public policies that benefit the Capitalist Class while hurting everyone else. The next step is to start a foundation and give a small amount of your wealth to promote individual responsibility and assist people who are struggling because of the economic and political policies that you benefit from. Your charity wins you PR points and shields you from being scrutinized for helping to create the social and economic problems to begin with.

This is just one of the videos from the Thrive and Prosper gathering in the summer of 2024. GRIID will deconstruct others in the coming weeks.

ut the Amway business model being a pyramid scheme.

Amway business model, independent business owners – pyramid scheme, it’s your vision.

There were other fluffy statement and glittering generalities, but Doug DeVos then wrapped up his comments by asking, “*What are you going to do? That is your homework? What are you going to make it better in this city?*”

What the DeVos/Van Andel ownership of the soccer team means for Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2024/12/17/what-the-devos-van-andel-ownership-of-the-soccer-team-means-for-grand-rapids/

Earlier today, it was announced that the Amway families of Van Andel and DeVos will be the owners of the new soccer team that will play in the soon to be constructed soccer stadium.

MLive reported that the Van Andel and DeVos families will own the MLS NEXT Pro soccer team. The brief article features comments from Dan DeVos and David Van Andel, with some content that is recycled from previous posts.

The **Crain's Grand Rapids** article was much more substantial, although it also had quotes from the billionaire Amway families. The content that was included in the Crain's article provided more detail on the ownership structure, stating:

David Van Andel *and his family will hold primary ownership of the club, with roles planned for his four sons: Jesse, Aaron, Kyle, and Christian Van Andel.* ***Dan DeVos*** *and his family will hold a minority stake, with his son, Cole DeVos, playing a key leadership role.*

What is significantly different about the Crain's piece and the MLive article was that Crain's provided some context on the amount of sports teams the Amway families own.

The new soccer team will join the Grand Rapids Rise women's volleyball team, which DeVos' DP Fox Ventures launched in December 2022 and played its first season this year, as the region's most recent professional sports team addition.

DeVos also serves as chairman of RDV Sports, which owns the NBA's Orlando Magic, the NBA G League's Lakeland Magic and the Orlando Solar Bears minor league hockey team.

DP Fox will assist with the process of forming the team, but the club will eventually need its own group to manage its operations in the future, according to the founders.

The rest of the coverage is fairly standard, with GR Mayor Bliss expressing their excitement about the new soccer team, along with more quotes from the Amway billionaire families.

What this means for Grand Rapids

First, as GRIID has been stating all along, especially when it was announced that Dan DeVos had purchased the Big Boy restaurant property in 2022, **we all should have known that that the Amway families would own the soccer team**.

Second, it means that when the billionaire families of DeVos and Van Andel want something done in Grand Rapids, they pretty much get to do whatever they

want. **Grand Action 2.0 was founded by the DeVos and Van Andel families**, with the specific goal of getting the City, County and State governments to spend over a billion dollars of public money to build the Van Andel Arena, the Convention Center, the Downtown Market, the Amphitheater and now the Soccer Stadium. This also includes **the apartment complexes that will be adjacent to the Amphitheater and the Soccer stadium with hundreds of millions in public funding** and the new **"3 towers project" on Fulton and Market, with at least $565 million in tax incentives**.

Third, of course the ultimate goal of the DeVos and Van Andel families is to expand their wealth. By owning another sports team, they will get to hold the City and County hostage in the future, when the time comes to expand the soccer stadium or use more land for parking, etc. The DeVos family owns most of the hotels in downtown GR, so when people come to watch a game and don't want to drive home, or because they are from out of town, the chances are high that they will stay in a DeVos-owned hotel.

Fourth, In Dave Zirin's book, ***Bad Sports: How Owners Are Ruining the Games We Love***, he discusses how wealthy sports team owners are constantly manipulating municipal governments and city residents to get them to provide massive subsidies for the construction of sports venues, like arena's and stadiums. Zirin mentions how the DeVos family squeezed taxpayers in Orlando, when they wanted a new arena for their Orlando Magic basketball team. Zirin writes: "*And he's (DeVos) is getting $1 billion in taxpayers' money to build the arena. That sends a bad message. Indeed. At its core, the DeVos model could be characterized as theft of public funds that turns teams and arenas into slush funds for radical right politics*."

Fifth, with the Amphitheater and the Soccer Stadium construction projects will come a parking nightmare for those who live on the near westside of Grand Rapids. In addition, all of this construction between Fulton on the south and Bridge St. on the north, will likely result in an ongoing gentrification of the near westside. Low income and working class families will not be tolerated, since they have little to offer to the billionaire families and their network of other members of the Capitalist Class.

Sixth, all of this new development, which is primarily predicated on the expansion of wealth for the DeVos, Van Andel and other members of the Capitalist Class will also result in further justification of expanding the GRPD. People with deep pockets will always use cops to protect their wealth, which is what the GR Chamber was arguing with their push to get the city to deal with the "unhoused problem" in downtown GR in 2022. In addition, the GRPD also recognizes that more development where people are coming in large numbers to spend money will result in the "need" for more cops. **GRIID reported on a WOODTV8 story** where a GRPD Captain stated: "*We want to expand our numbers in the next couple years quite a bit. So I would say in the next couple of years — without speaking for the city commission, they'd have to approve it — but we would like to be in that 330 or 340 range. There's a lot going on downtown with the amphitheater coming in, the soccer stadium. There's excitement with the river transformation. There is a lot of great restaurants and nightlife down here*."

A great deal more could be said about the announcement that the Van Andel and DeVos families will own the professional soccer team, but the six reasons I provided are plenty to chew upon for now. What the DeVos and Van Andel families are doing with owning sports teams is also comparable to the bread & circuses environment that was crafted during the Roman Empire. Distract the public with entertainment long enough and they will forget about how they are being constantly robbed by those who run this city. Just another example of West Michigan Nice!

Why are we not more pissed off with the DeVos family regarding the shit show that is the Trump Administration?

https://griid.org/2025/02/05/why-are-we-not-more-pissed-off-with-the-devos-family-regarding-the-shit-show-that-is-the-trump-administration/

For anyone who is really paying attention to what the Trump Administration has been doing over the past two weeks, it is likely to elicit feelings of anger, depression, frustration and a lack of hope.

While I have been experiencing some of the same feelings, I also have been trying to make distinctions between rhetoric and reality. Trump is a master at rhetoric, but often his rhetoric is not real or even factual. I believe his rhetoric is both ideological, which is meant to speak to his base, but it is also a means to elicit responses from those who have not completely been propagandized……those who haven't yet drank the KoolAid.

As someone who tries to pay attention to history and learn from it, I am reminded that this is not the first time that members of the Capitalist Class, even those who are billionaires, have inserted themselves into electoral politics. In fact, as Howard Zinn and other radical historians have pointed out, the US political class has been dominated by the Capitalist Class from the very founding of this country, both in terms of campaign financing and running as political candidates.

The group Americans for Tax Fairness published **a report** late last year, where they documented the 150 families who spent the most during the 2024 Election cycle, with

three quarter of the money going to the Republican Party, candidates and Political Action Committees. This same group also published a **useful spreadsheet on these 150 families**, which you can find here.

If you look down the last, you will see the DeVos family listed at number 49. The combined about of money that the DeVos family members contributed to the GOP in the 2024 Election cycle was **$7,038,500.00**. The spreadsheet lists 9 different DeVos names, but Betsy and Elizabeth are the same person, as is Cheryl and Suzanne. This is because they both make campaign contributions using different names they go by.

What follows are detailed campaign contributions from the DeVos family members cited in the Americans for Tax Fairness report. The data comes from Open Secrets.

Richard DeVos Jr.

Betsy DeVos

Doug DeVos

Maria DeVos

Daniel DeVos

Pamela DeVos

Cheryl DeVos

Suzanne DeVos

So why are we not confronting the DeVos family?

Considering the fact that the DeVos family is number 49 of the 150 families from the Capitalist Class in the US that contributed over $7 million to the GOP in the 2024 election cycle, it would be safe to say that they are the member of the Billionaire Class in Grand Rapids that is most responsible for the new Trump Administration locally.

If we acknowledge this fact, then why are there no protests and no rage being directed at the DeVos family? Why are we not organizing a campaign to expose them and to undermine their comfort? What is it going to take before we take action action the people who have imposed upon us this nightmare reality we find ourselves in?

Taxing the rich is a nice sentiment, but that is really low hanging fruit. We need to make members of the Billionaire Class, like the DeVos family, feel uncomfortable and let them know that we will not tolerate their efforts to expand their wealth while so many in this community are just trying to survive. The DeVos family directly contributed to making sure that Donald Trump became President again. Why are we not more pissed off about this family?

MLive reports on land sale for new soccer stadium, but omits the concerns of residents and ignores the DeVos connection in all of it

https://griid.org/2025/02/25/mlive-reports-on-land-sale-for-new-soccer-stadium-but-omits-the-concerns-of-residents-and-ignores-the-devos-connection-in-all-of-it/

Two weeks ago, MLive ran an article entitled, Grand Rapids board signs off on $8M land sale for Amway Stadium.

The MLive story was based on a February 10 Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority (DDA) meeting, where it was decided that Grand Action 2.0 would be purchasing the land on which the new soccer stadium would be built. The article states:

The 8.5 acres Grand Action is purchasing includes 4.4 acres of surface parking lots near the corner of Pearl Street NW and Mt. Vernon Avenue NW owned by the DDA. It also includes the YMCA's parking lot, public rights of way and the former Big Boy property.

The only people cited in the MLive article were DDA chairperson Rick Winn, Grand Action 2.0 executive director Kara Wood and Tim Kelly, president and CEO of DGRI. There were no neighbors cited, nor were any community groups that have publicly opposed this project.

The DDA unanimously approved the land sale, but the MLive article failed to mention that two of the members of the DDA are DeVos family operatives, Rick Winn and Greg McNeilly.

Richard Winn is the President of AHC Hospitality, which is a DeVos-owned company that manages 14 Hotels/Inns, most of which are in West Michigan. In addition to sitting on the DDA Board, Richard Winn is also on the boards of the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority, Experience GR, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. and Grand Action 2.0. All of these entities work in collaboration to make sure that the DeVos and Van Andel families get what they want.

Greg McNeilly was the campaign manager for the failed gubernatorial campaign of Dick DeVos in 2006. McNeilly is currently the Chief Operating Officer of the DeVos run Windquest Group, an entity that is owned by Dick & Betsy DeVos. McNeilly has also been the former President of the Michigan Freedom Fund, a far right political group that was also created by the DeVos family. **McNeilly ran the campaign to oppose the Voters Not Politicians ballot initiative** in 2018. In 2021, **McNeilly defended the**

Enbridge Corporation and their plans to build a tunnel underneath the Great Lakes for the Line 5 oil pipeline.

The MLive article also leaves out some of the important details that were decided upon at the February 10 DDA meeting. Here are additional details, based on the **DDA minutes**:

Of the approximately 8.5-acre site, the DDA currently owns 4.4 acres, which includes the northern portion of the YMCA parking lot and the portion of the Area 7 parking lot south of Blumrich Street. It also includes the former Big Boy property which was given to the DDA in December 2023 for no cost. The rest of the site is made up of the southern portion of the YMCA parking lot and public rights of way. The attached exhibit provides an overview of DDA owned property on the site.

To initiate construction of the stadium, Grand Action 2.0 has developed agreements for the land owned by the YMCA and the DDA. Under the proposed arrangement,GA 2.0 will acquire the YMCA property and assign the deed to the DDA. For the DDA owned property, GA 2.0 has agreed to pay the fair market value of $53.43 per square foot that was established in the 2024 appraisal. Excluding the former Big Boy property, the total site area is 150,481.21 square feet, bringing the final amount of the sale to $8,040,211.05.

To allow construction to begin in spring 2025 while the project funding is finalized, GA 2.0 has proposed entering into two Agreements with the DDA. The first is a Temporary Access Agreement that would remain in effect for the entire construction period, currently expected to last two years. The Access Agreement will provide GA 2.0 and its contractors full access to the site to construct the Stadium. During construction, GA 2.0 has agreed to carry the required insurance and to indemnify the DDA and the City of Grand Rapids from any and all claims that may arise during their use of the site. Additionally, to make up for lost parking revenue during construction, GA 2.0 will pay the DDA a fixed amount of $27,000 per month in the first year and $28,350 per month in the second year. Those payments will be applied to the final purchase price.

The second agreement is a Purchase and Sale Agreement (PSA) that finalizes the terms and the purchase price to be paid to the DDA. Like the Agreements for the Acrisure Amphitheater, GA 2.0 will pay off the full amount due for the property (minus the monthly parking payments) over a term not to exceed 10 years. As the ultimate owner and operator of the stadium, the PSA is expected to be assigned to the CAA at the conclusion of construction.

The MLive article also **omits the larger context of the relationship between Amway, Grand Action 2.0, the DDA and DGRI, all of which have embedded DeVos family operatives**.

The other major omission centers on the fact that the soccer stadium will be built where there is existing downtown parking, thus reducing the amount of available parking in the downtown area and the near westside. Westside residents are **already pissed off about the possibility that they might have to pay for permits to park on the**

street. Apparently, these concerns are not relevant to MLive, nor is it a concern of Grand Action 2.0 and their masters, the DeVos family.

Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce video is filled with misinformation, crafted moments and self-serving commentary by Dick DeVos https://griid.org/2025/04/29/grand-rapids-chamber-of-commerce-video-is-filled-with-misinformation-crafted-moments-and-self-serving-commentary-by-dick-devos/

The recent 43 second video that celebrates the ground breaking for the new soccer stadium in Grand Rapids was produced by the GR Chamber of Commerce. You can watch the **43 second video here**, but what follows is a deconstruction of the video, both what it presented and what it didn't present.

The voiceover for this video is from Dick DeVos, whom you can see in the first few seconds of the video, with his name included and the words Grand Action 2.0 below his name. However, Dick DeVos isn't just with Grand Action 2.0 in this capacity, his family and the Van Andel family **purchased the naming rights to the soccer stadium**, which will now be called the Amway Soccer Stadium. In addition, the **DeVos and Van Andel families will own the professional soccer team** that will play in the Amway Soccer Stadium.

The narrative for the video begins by saying:

Another new chapter opens today, as we break ground for the Amway Stadium. Another chapter opens for the westside of Grand Rapids that has been defining and redefining itself and is now adding a new definition to the westside of Grand Rapids as the home of West Michigan soccer.

The GR Chamber of Commerce video fails to mention several things in the first part of the video, which is the fact that Grand Action 2.0 got the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County to provide millions in public funds for this project, which means the video omitted the public's role in this development project. The video also omits the fact that the GR Chamber, Grand Action 2.0 and their friends **spent about $500,000 to push the hotel tax increase ballot initiative in August of 2024**.

The video shows a group of white kids (*these kids were probably brought in from Ada*) playing soccer on a parking lot that will be torn up for the soccer stadium. This means there will be less parking around the soccer stadium, which west-siders are up in arms about. There is already a shortage of parking in that area, plus Grand Rapids and Kent County officials are hell bent on attracting as much tourism to downtown as possible. Tourism will bring even more cars to an area where parking is difficult to find, with the added dynamic that Grand Rapids just **upped the cost of parking, which also included extending the hours for parking and increasing rates for events**.

The GR Chamber of Commerce video ends with these words:

You're going to have a world class facility, that is going to be able to host world class events, in the middle of a world class city.

World Class?

- Grand Rapids was just named the **27th worst city in the US for Air Quality/Air Pollution**, according to the American Lung Association.
- Grand Rapids' **Black homeownership rate is worst among 50 largest U.S. metros**.
- According to the ALICE data, **47% of Grand Rapids residents are living paycheck to paycheck**.

While Dick DeVos and the GR Chamber of Commerce make a video about the soccer stadium, which will make them millions, the trial for the cop that murdered Patrick Lyoya is happening, and the GRPD continues to brutalize and over-police in Black and Brown neighborhoods. Do you think that is what Dick DeVos meant by when he said Grand Rapids was a world class city?

"We had to destroy the art community in Grand Rapids, now we want to control it", is what I take from the DeVos Institute's strategy https://griid.org/2025/05/18/we-had-to-destroy-the-art-community-in-grand-rapids-now-we-want-to-control-it-is-what-i-take-from-the-devos-institutes-strategy/

On May 11th, MLive posted an article entitled, **DeVos Institute program helps 14 Grand Rapids nonprofits build capacity**.

The MLive article uncritically centers the work of the DeVos Institute of Arts and Non-Profit Management. The article goes on to say:

Fourteen Grand Rapids area nonprofits are participating in the DeVos institute's two-year program, Capacity Building: Grand Rapids. It provides participants with personalized consultations, group training sessions, and help with strategic planning and building effective boards, according to a release.

The DeVos Institute **website** provides us with a framework for what they will be doing with the fourteen Grand Rapids nonprofits that they will be working with:

Our approach is grounded in The Cycle, a practical management framework designed to optimize organizational performance in five essential areas: market position, programming, marketing, governance, and revenue development.

I don't know about you, but based on what the DeVos Institute says it does, it seems to me that they focus on money, maximizing wealth and expanding wealth. The fourteen

groups in Grand Rapids that will be working with the DeVos Institute are non-profit groups and arts-centered organizations. The MLive article lists the following groups:

- Artists Creating Together
- ArtPrize
- Broadway Grand Rapids
- Children's Healing Center
- Festival of the Arts
- Girls Choral Academy Grand Rapids Art Museum
- Grand Rapids Ballet
- Grand Rapids Children's Museum
- Grand Rapids Civic Theatre
- Grand Rapids Symphony
- Lowell Arts
- Opera Grand Rapids
- West Michigan Trails
- West Michigan Youth Ballet

Ways in which the DeVos family has undermined local art in Grand Rapids

Being an artist in a Capitalist world is difficult and deeply problematic. When art is seen as a commodity, it loses meaning and it takes from us our ability to see beauty, to imagine, and it diminishes our ability for critical reflection.

When ArtPrize was created by the DeVos family, their goal was never about elevating art, **it was about selling the City of Grand Rapids and expanding their wealth**. This view of ArtPrize was affirmed by Sam Cummings, CEO of CWD Real Estate Investment, when he said, ***"Our long-term goal is really to import capital – intellectual capital, and ultimately real capital. And this (ArtPrize) is certainly an extraordinary tool."***

A major outcome of ArtPrize is that it undermined local art and local artists. ArtPrize didn't pay artists to submit their work for the 2-week spectacle, in fact, they made them pay to submit their work. Many local artists and art venues were negatively impacted, not just during ArtPrize, but for weeks and months leading up to it, since so much capital and so much PR was centered on the spectacle of ArtPrize that artists had to adjust to that world. In addition, local arts councils disbanded and funding sources for art dried up. Hell, even Festival of the Arts was thrown on the scrap heap of the art as a commodity, since it no longer fit the tourist-driven destination that the Grand Rapids Power Structure wants to see.

A second major way that the DeVos family has undermined local art is through their involvement in shaping public policy to promote business interests over the public good. What we have been seeing in Grand Rapids and the US as a whole over the past 40 – 50 years is a push to have local and state governments adopt **neoliberal economic austerity policies**, which include the following:

- THE RULE OF THE MARKET

- CUTTING PUBLIC EXPENDITURE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES
- DEREGULATION
- PRIVATIZATION
- ELIMINATING THE CONCEPT OF “THE PUBLIC GOOD”

The DeVos family has been part of promoting these kinds of economic austerity measures in three main ways. **First**, they have provided millions of dollars to political candidates who embrace economic austerity policies. **Second**, the DeVos family gives millions of dollars to organizations which promote economic austerity, like the American Enterprise Institute, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, the Acton Institute, and the Heritage Foundation. The DeVos family funds these organizations through their foundations, thus allowing them to use non-taxed funds to promote economic austerity policies. The **third** way the DeVos family promotes economic austerity policies is by being part of groups like the West Michigan Policy Forum, Grand Action 2.0, The Right Place Inc. and the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, all of which embrace the same economic policies of wealth expansion for the few and economic despair for everyone else.

The irony of all of this is that while the DeVos family has spent decades undermining local artists and the arts community, they are now swooping in to offer their services to assist art groups in order to make them more marketable and profitable. Just one more example of how sinister the DeVos family is and how they want to control so much of what happens in West Michigan.

Billionaires like the DeVos family will also benefit from the Big Beautiful Bill just for owning private jets https://griid.org/2025/07/14/billionaires-like-the-devos-family-will-also-benefit-from-the-big-beautiful-bill-just-for-owning-private-jets/

The Big Beautiful Bill, which is only beautiful for the Capitalist Class and government entities like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), will deeply hurt millions of people in the US, especially those who rely on Medicaid.

There is another aspect of the Big Beautiful Bill (BBB) that hasn’t received much attention, one which will benefit billionaire families like the DeVos family.

According to **inequality.org**, the BBB:

*“Includes a massive tax subsidy for private jet buyers. Instead of corporations deducting the purchase of their jets over several years of their useful life, the BBB includes 100 percent “**bonus depreciation**” in the year of purchase.*

For example, a corporation purchasing a $50 million private jet could potentially deduct the entire $50 million from their taxes in the year of the purchase, rather than spreading the deduction over many years. This amounts to a massive taxpayer subsidy, as ordinary taxpayers pick up the tab for the private jet industry and billionaire high flyers.

*From our **IPS research** on private jets, we know that regular taxpayers and commercial air travelers subsidize the high-flying excess of private jet owners. In the U.S. private jets use seven percent of the airspace but **only contribute 0.6 percent** of the cost of using it.*

As wealth has concentrated into the vaults of the ultra-wealthy, the demand for private jets is surging. Every billionaire appears to need one or two. As a result, private jets are one of the largest and fastest growing sources of air and climate pollution. In 2023, private jets emitted 19.5 million tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, a 25 percent increase over 2013 levels."

The DeVos Family and their fleet of jets

It is always difficult to find out details about the wealth of the DeVos family, primarily because they don't believe in full transparency and because they have diversified their wealth and assets in such a way as to make it difficult to track.

There was an interesting **article from Business Insider in 2018**, with a headline that read, Education secretary Betsy DeVos owns a fleet of 12 private jets and 4 helicopters. In that article it states:

***According to Forbes**, the DeVos family owns a fleet of 12 private jets — 1 Boeing Business Jet, 5 Gulfstream G550's, 1 Gulfstream G450, 2 Bombardier Challenger 350's, 3 Cessna Citation CJ4's — and four helicopters.*

We also know that while she was the Secretary of Education, **Betsy DeVos used her own private jets to travel as Education Secretary**, rather than using commercial planes.

Then there is the fact that the global corporation that Rich DeVos founded with Jay Van Andel, the Amway Corporation, also has a fleet of private jets and other planes, with **their own hangar** at the Kent County Airport.

The Amway corporate jets get even more use than the private jets owned by the DeVos family, primarily because the Amway jets are used by more people, particularly the people who are near the top of earners in their notorious pyramid scheme. In addition, the Amway Corporation has partnered with other commercial airline companies to offer exclusive trips to Amway distributors for Amway conventions. One example was the **partnership with the Emirates, the world's largest international airline**, which transported over 6,500 distributors and company representatives to Dubai.

Then there is the Charter School scheme that Dick DeVos runs, the West Michigan Aviation Academy. The West Michigan Aviation Academy, located at the Kent County Airport, is a school designed to create more pilots, but it also encourages more private

jet/plane ownership and use. In the past, **Dick DeVos has complained about his Charter School not getting enough public funding**.

Therefore, on top of the fact that the DeVos family:

- Makes massive political contributions to GOP candidates/politicians, which adopt policies that do tremendous harm to working class families, immigrants, the LGBTQ community and BIPOC people in general;
- Uses their foundations to funnel millions to far right groups like Focus on the Family or think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute or the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

The DeVos family and the Amway Corporation – just on the matter of air travel – emit at least 10 times more pollutants than anyone else who books a flight from the Kent County Airport. Lastly, besides travel for pleasure, the DeVos family uses their private jets to travel to places to meet with other disgustingly rich people to figure out new ways to expand their wealth and to exploit and oppress more of the world's population, while creating more pollution and perpetuating Climate Change. Reason #31 for why we should have nothing but contempt for the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family.

DeVos family always looking to expand their wealth, this time with high end bourbon and whiskey https://griid.org/2025/08/04/devos-family-always-looking-to-expand-their-wealth-this-time-with-high-end-bourbon-and-whiskey/

In his most recent Facebook post, Dick DeVos wrote (yes, I monitor these people):

"CONGRATULATIONS to West Michigan-based CraftCo. and its JOSEPH MAGNUS, FOX & ODEN, and COPPERCRAFT brands for taking home top honors as some of the best bourbons and rye whiskeys in the world!

Joseph Magnus took home Best of Class, multiple Double Golds, and Gold Medals for favorites like its Cigar Blend Bourbon and Murray Hill Club. Fox & Oden was recognized with Platinum, Double Gold, and Silver Medals for its Double Oaked Bourbon and Straight Rye Whiskey. And Coppercraft 9-Year Straight Bourbon earned a silver medal.

These awards are a testament to the exceptional craftsmanship of the CraftCo team. Congratulations to them and their customers!"

This is the latest example of how the DeVos family has continued to not only diversify what they own, but more importantly it demonstrates their ongoing commitment to

expand their wealth. The most recent documentation shows that the DeVos family's wealth stands at **$5.4 billion**, **according to Americans for Tax Fairness**.

Now the DeVos family is making money off of high end bourbon and rye whiskey, which at first glance range in price from $72 a bottle to $250 a bottle. Not surprising, the DeVos family is not catering to working class people. In the Facebook post where Dick DeVos is talking about his family's brands, John Truscott, a longtime Republican operative (he was John Engler's right hand man) and **CEO of Trustcott Rossman**, Truscott said, "Joseph Magnus is my go to."

CraftCo., which is located in Holland, was purchased by the Windquest Group, one of the many DeVos owned corporations. Dick and Betsy DeVos are the primary owners of the **Windquest Group**, which is made up of the following industries – spirits, hospitality, Sports Performance, Manufacturing and Wellness.

It completely makes sense that Dick DeVos would use his Facebook page to brag about the awards that his alcohol company recently won. Anything to further the ideological and Capitalist agendas is exactly what the DeVos family does. Expanding their wealth means they get to make massive contributions to local, state and elected officials during every election cycle, as I have been documenting for the past 3 decades. Here is an **example from 2024**.

In addition to exposing the DeVos family's ongoing efforts to undermine and influence public policy, one tactic that we can all engage in is to not assist them in expanding their wealth. We can and must boycott any and all DeVos connected products, which are vast.

An interesting response to my recent post about the DeVos-owned bourbon label: Liberals acting as apologists for the DeVos family

https://griid.org/2025/08/20/an-interesting-response-to-my-recent-post-about-the-devos-owned-bourbon-label-liberals-acting-as-apologists-for-the-devos-family/

In early August, I posted an article entitled, **DeVos family always looking to expand their wealth, this time with high end bourbon and whiskey**.

The article looked at the West Michigan-based CraftCo. and its JOSEPH MAGNUS, FOX & ODEN, and COPPERCRAFT brands of bourbon and whiskey that Dick and Betsy DeVos recently purchased, but it primarily talked about the DeVos family's expansion of investments and companies that will allow them to grow them their wealth. I also talked about how they use their wealth in the political arena to buy candidates and policies that benefit their interests, which are the interests of the Capitalist Class.

Here is one response I saw to that article, a response that I found very instructive:

"Good, while you are at it don't go to DeVos Hall, GR public museum, the symphony, the opera, the ballet, or any of dozens of institutions they have funded for fifty years. Boycotts do nothing. I'm a dyed in the wool democrat but I appreciate everything the DeVos family has done for the city and I am not naive enough to believe boycotting their commercial enterprises will do one thing to stop their political contributions. Which they have the same right to do as do we. Develop community and quit vilifying."

I think some deconstruction of this response is in order.

First, when the person says that people should boycott the institutions that the DeVos family has funded for 50 years, that is a statement that I do not disagree with. This is why billionaires get away with so much, since there are never enough organized campaigns to challenge their economic and political power.

Second, saying that boycotts do nothing is just historically wrong. The **Montgomery Bus Boycott** was very effective in the early years of the Civil Rights Movement. Then there was the South African Anti-Apartheid campaign that began in 1959, which included boycotting as a tactic, along with divestment and sanctions. The South African Anti-Apartheid campaign was also successful, even though it took longer than the Montgomery Bus Boycott to get the results that South Africans wanted. Boycotts are an effective tactic against systems of power and oppression, but the most effective boycotts are those that are initiated by people that are most impacted, like the **boycotts that the Palestinians are calling for right now**.

Third, the person who made the response said that they are, "**a dyed in the wool democrat**." To me this makes sense, since there are too many people who identify as Democrats that limit their political understanding to voting and not on larger strategies and tactics that will actually make way more change than voting does.

Fourth, this Democrat then says that they "appreciate everything the DeVos family has done for the city." And what would that be exactly? In every instance where they have purchased property in downtown Grand Rapids, especially the places that have their names on it, the public has contributed more in any of those endeavors than the DeVos family has. This means that the public, primarily through tax dollars, have done a great deal for the city, despite the fact that the public has had virtually no say in how that money is spent. The person who made this statement fails to understand that the DeVos family, like all billionaires are strategic. The DeVos family gave money to the arena, the downtown market, the Civic Theater, to the Amphitheater, the Soccer Stadium, just to name a few. Why? Because they will be one of the very entities that will profit from such ventures, since it means that people will stay at the hotels they own and eat in their restaurants. **This is why the DeVos family has their people strategically placed on boards that make decisions about the downtown**, because it mostly benefits their interests, not that of the majority of the people who live in Grand Rapids.

Fifth, this person again fails to understand how pressuring billionaires, both economically and politically, can be effective as strategies and tactics. This person also says that the DeVos family has the right to make political contributions, just like we do.

Holy fucking shit! Does this person not understand that they give a crap load more money to political candidates, because they are billionaires? Does this person think that the **DeVos family campaign contributions to 5 Kent County positions in the 2024 election, contributions that were $330,000** – the bulk of these Kent County candidates – is equal to what the rest of us can do?

The DeVos family is not just making political contributions to candidates, they are buying access and they are influencing public policy in ways that most of us never could. I have been tracking this shit for decades, which you can read in my 800 page document called, **We're Rich and We Do What We Want: A DeVos Family Reader**. **Chapter 3** is the chapter that looks at campaign financing.

Lastly, this person says develop community and stop vilifying. This is just plain ignorant. Does this person think that billionaires become billionaires purely on hard work. Fuck no! Billionaires become billionaires because they exploit people and resources, along with using a political and economic system that is designed to benefit a small percentage of the population. Sure, the DeVos family has foundations, but if you look at that stuff closely, most of their foundation contributions also go to institutions that promote and benefit from power and oppression. Besides, billionaires create foundations primarily as a way to hide some of their wealth so it will not be taxed.

Statements like the one that prompted this article make it clear there are too many people who are willing to give billionaires a free pass. Not only that, but there are people who are unknowingly doing the bidding of billionaires, like the DeVos family, by defending them and acting as apologists for their desire to dominate the economic, political, social and cultural dynamics of Grand Rapids. I for one will continue to vilify the DeVos family as long as I draw breathe.

Believe in Our City: Just another iteration of the same old business as usual brand in Grand Rapids https://griid.org/2025/09/10/believe-in-our-city-just-another-iteration-of-the-same-old-business-as-usual-brand-in-grand-rapids/

Have you all heard of the group Believe in Our City Grand Rapids? It started this past April with 150 leaders from across Grand Rapids came together to officially launch the city's A250 initiative.

The A250 initiative is the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, which is doing the same program across the county, using the same fundamental talking points and messages.

The **A250 Steering Committee for Grand Rapids** are the following people:

- Dale Robertson – Grand Rapids Public Museum

- Mayor David LaGrand
- Doug DeVos – Continuum Ventures, the investment management company for Doug and Maria DeVos **https://www.continuumv.com/about**
- Gleaves Whitney – Gerald R. Ford Foundation
- JD Loeks – Studio C Celebration Cinema
- Joe Jones – Hekiman Group
- John Tuttle – Acrisure
- Juan Olivarez – Community Leader
- LaSandra Gaddy – Grand Rapids Community Foundation
- Mark Washington – Grand Rapids City Manager
- Peter Meijer – Meijer
- Philly Mantella – President of GVSU
- Ron Gorman – Kent ISD
- Tina Freese Decker – Corewell Health
- Senator Winnie Brinks – Michigan 29th Senate District

Looking at this list of people I see several who are part of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, along with government collaborators and other community partners that are interested in maintaining business as usual politics in Grand Rapids.

The April event launch featured several speakers and some video that featured Rich DeVos talking about the city when he opened the Amway Grand Plaza in downtown. (Video **link is here**, with Rich DeVos comments beginning at 8:04 into the video.)

The MC for the video is Joe Jones, who was followed by Doug DeVos, which you can watch here. DeVos talks about how his partner in this A250 endeavor is Mayor LaGrand, which tells us more about LaGrand than it does about DeVos. Doug DeVos does his usual bullshit talk about how great we are and how we can do better. As a billionaire who has made his money off of the labor of others, and as someone who buys politicians on a regular basis, his words are hollow, even hypocritical.

DeVos was followed by Mayor LaGrand. LaGrand praises Doug DeVos in his comments and says that Doug's commitment to community is what we need. LaGrand also uses lofty language like equality, democracy and loyalty, but after months as Mayor of Grand Rapids I don't see where this rhetoric matches up with his actions.

There are also community partners that are involved in Believe in Our City, such as:

- The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation
- The City of Grand Rapids
- Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation
- Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce
- America250MI

Seems like the usual suspects, which not only promote business as usual, they promote their own interests, especially when it comes to the DeVos family and the GR Chamber of Commerce.

It seems to me that the Believe in Our City project is just another version of **Thrive and Prosper**. Grand Rapids is synonymous with the phrase West Michigan Nice. West Michigan Nice is an ironic reference to the fact that while people and institutions might appear to be polite, in reality they look down on people with contempt or paternalism, especially those people made vulnerable by systems of power and oppression. Therefore, the label of West Michigan Nice could aptly be given to the recently created group known as Thrive and Prosper. Yes, Thrive and Prosper. Sounds like a get rich quick scheme or a cult or just simply the logical outcome of how Grand Rapids deals with everything.

Doug DeVos embraces this same ideology and has been at the forefront of the Thrive & Prosper groups as well. **I wrote about a Doug DeVos video** he did with Thrive & Prosper, which clearly exposes his class privilege.

Lastly, it is important to note that the A250 project is connected to the 175th anniversary of the founding of Grand Rapids, which I also wrote about with the headline, **What are we really celebrating on the 175th Anniversary of Grand Rapids?**

Besides my critique, which is based on what the group has made available online, here is an additional critique by Peter TeWinkle who has attended Believe in Our City project events.

I went into the 2025 session of Believe In Our City with a good bit of skepticism. The theme was entrepreneurship. It's one of those initiatives that flows naturally out of an individualistic, market-driven worldview. Still, I went for two reasons. First, because all the people who pull the levers of power would be there and I think it's important to know what they're talking about. Second, because I was hopeful to hear about some initiatives that would help people start or find support to sustain their businesses.

Unfortunately, "entrepreneurship" was meant in a much broader sense in this case; a sense captured in our city motto, "strength in activity." We were highlighting go-getters, over-comers, and problem-solvers who embodied something like an "entrepreneurial spirit." Doug Devos began the conference by wanting us to recognize that we were not alone in our desire to make change; that we needed to put our ideas into action; and that we needed to challenge one another to think differently. He said that we'll continue to get the same results if we keep making the same decisions.

Upfront and behind the scenes were organizations like the American Enterprise Institute, Acton Institute, Koch Industries, and the Stand Together Foundation. I recognize that some of my impression is the result of a difference of opinion. For example, while more than one speaker called out racialized narratives of inferiority imposed on people of color. The culprit for these narratives was not white supremacy, as I see it, but those who poison young minds with their obsession on oppression. A lot of what was presented felt condescending and some of it was downright deceiving (i.e. disparities in infant mortality rates are NOT resolved by marriage). The reality is there was only one perspective being promoted. The message is quite clear. The call is not for a collective exchange of ideas. The call is for all of us to embrace conservative ideals.

The implication is that it's the people who disagree with the individualistic, market-driven world view who are the ones who need to have their thinking challenged. They need to stop complaining and start believing. The obvious irony here is that it's the DeVos's who are the ones who make the decisions in Grand Rapids. They are the ones who have been putting their ideas into grand action for decades. If the city is not yet a flourishing place for all people, then whose decisions are we to point to if not the people who hold all the wealth and influence city staff? Whose thinking is it that needs to be challenged if not the thinking of those who have been reshaping this city to the neglect of so many? If systems change when, as one speaker suggested, behaviors in the system change, then whose behavior needs to change if not those who designed the system?

There were certainly good people doing good work represented on the stage. There are good employers in our city who genuinely want to create easier pathways to higher wages for their employees. I was grateful for voices such as Christina Keller, from Cascade, and Shana Washington, from Trinity Health, who acknowledged the benefits cliff as well as barriers to higher-paying employment (e.g. high costs of transportation, housing, childcare, and job training). They saw the limitations of our current system and they have some interesting ideas that they are putting into action. But, at the end of the day, it's hard for me to "believe" that the thrive + prosper brand has any plan to address these systemic barriers. All the while, the number of people who are constrained by their income grows and Grand Rapids remains the worst metro area for African-Americans. But, we don't have to talk about those things. We just believe.

Why is Rep. Scholten celebrating a DeVos created charter school?

https://griid.org/2025/09/25/why-is-rep-scholten-celebrating-a-devos-created-charter-school/

Recently, Rep. Hillary Scholten posted a picture of herself in front of the West Michigan Aviation Academy, which is located next to the Gerald R. Ford Airport.

The photo of Scholten in front of the DeVos created school is accompanied by these words:

"At a time when aviation professionals are needed more than ever, the West Michigan Aviation Academy is a huge asset to our community and our nation. It's a launching pad for high schoolers interested in the aviation field, allowing them to SOAR to new heights. Always great to pay a visit to the students and instructors there!"

Some people might say that since Scholten is on the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure she should meet with institutions that are connected to transportation. This would be nothing more than a weak apologetic argument that doesn't reflect the real context in this case.

Dick DeVos created the West Michigan Aviation Academy in 2010. Dick and Betsy DeVos have been at the forefront of the anti-public education movement for more than four decades. They both embraced the Heritage Foundation's effort to undermine the public school system, which began during the Reagan years.

In 2000, Betsy DeVos led a campaign to put the issue of school vouchers on the ballot in Michigan. That ballot initiative failed, but DeVos did not give up. Betsy made the decision to diversify the kind of tactics that the so-called School Choice movement would use in the years to come. These tactics included financially backing candidates at the state and federal level, candidates who would push for an anti-public education platform, creating new anti-public education front groups like the Great Lakes Education Project and attacking teacher unions across the country.

This is why it is so egregious for Rep. Scholten to engage in a photo op in front of the West Michigan Aviation Academy. Scholten knows exactly who runs and funds this school, which is the same family that has helped get Donald Trump and other Republicans like him elected to office locally, across Michigan and at the federal level.

Lastly, where was Rep. Scholten in recent weeks when the teachers from the Grand Rapids Public Schools were showing up in big numbers to demand better pay? Rep. Scholten didn't show up for public school teachers in Grand Rapids, she chose to engage in a photo op at a charter school created by the DeVos family.

The billionaire families of DeVos & Van Andel have hired a Chicago-based Real Estate developer for the 3 tower project in Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2025/10/01/the-billionaires-families-of-devos-van-andel-have-hired-a-chicago-based-real-estate-developer-for-the-3-tower-project-in-grand-rapids/

There has been some news coverage of the decision by the DeVos and Van Andel families to hire the **Magellan Development Group** to work on the three towers project at Fulton and Market streets in downtown Grand Rapids.

This comes as no surprise considering the **kinds of high-end project**s that the **Magellan Development Group** features on their website. I mean, let's be clear, the DeVos and Van Andel three towers project is about making money and attracting

members of the Capitalist and Professional classes to live in the condos and apartments that will be part of the project.

The three towers project will include 76 condos, a 130-room hotel – with rates that start at $400 a night, plus there will be 595 market-rate apartments that will cost $2,643 per month for a studio apartment, $2,833 for a one-bedroom, and $3,401 for a two-bedroom. Most people who live in Grand Rapids can't afford these prices, which is why I say the housing options will be for the Capitalist and Professional classes.

This is not just my opinion, since LinkedIn released its new list of cities on the rise, which **highlights emerging U.S. cities** that offer both "vibrant job markets and **growing professional communities**." In fact, LinkedIn named Grand Rapids, Michigan, area the No. 1 spot in the country.

Then there is the little matter of what the President of Magellan Development Group said about the DeVos and Van Andel families:

"*The DeVos and Van Andel families' long-term stewardship of Grand Rapids makes this opportunity so special — and their vision aligns perfectly with our commitment to build something that truly belongs here and serves the city for generations."*

What this statement clearly signifies is that the President of the Magellan Development Group embraces the same worldview and ideological framework that the DeVos and Van Andel families do. If this guy thinks that they are stewards of Grand Rapids, then the DeVos and Van Andel families made the right choice to hire the Magellan Development Group.

An **article on the GR& Riverfront site** also clarifies why the billionaires families chose the Chicago-basrd real estate developer. They write:

"*For Magellan, Grand Rapids stood out as a city ready for this scale of investment.*

- ***Civic alignment:*** *With community, business, and elected leaders rallying behind the Acrisure Amphitheater, Amway Stadium, and riverfront redevelopment, Grand Rapids signaled it is in growth mode.*
- ***Market demand:*** *The city is primed for new levels of residential and hospitality offerings, with unmet demand for high-quality urban living spaces.*
- ***Stewardship:*** *The ownership families' stewardship and commitment to the community were decisive factors.*

For Ryan Schell, Magellan's Vice President of Development, the decision was also personal. A Michigan native, Schell has spent time in Grand Rapids throughout his life and returns often with his family. "I've seen this city grow and evolve," Schell said. "To now help shape this site — steps from the ***amphitheater*** *and riverfront development — is incredibly exciting. The opportunity is here, and it's exactly the kind of project that aligns with our expertise."*

For those of us who actually live in Grand Rapids and have not bought into the DeVos and Van Andel model of entrepreneurship, we see them as occupiers, looters and exploiters. Remember, the Three Towers project, which is estimated to cost $738 million, was gifted $565 million in tax breaks. DeVos and Van Andel are just the opposite of stewards.

Being a steward means carefully and responsibly managing something that has been entrusted to your care, but does not belong to you. The opposite of being a steward would then be someone who carelessly and irresponsibly disrupts or destroys something that does not belong to them. This defines who the DeVos and Van Andel families really are.

GRIID articles on the billionaires families of DeVos & Van Andel and their three towers project:

https://griid.org/2024/09/22/billionaire-families-announce-new-development-project-in-gr-wants-544-million-in-public-funding/

https://griid.org/2024/10/08/more-than-4-things-to-know-about-the-devos-and-van-andel-development-project-since-mlive-is-too-cowardly-to-question-the-co-founding-amway-families/

https://griid.org/2024/10/17/grand-rapids-board-unanimously-approves-a-565-million-subsidy-for-a-development-project-proposed-by-two-billionaire-families/

https://griid.org/2024/11/10/2-ways-to-oppose-the-565-million-subsidy-for-the-devos-van-andel-development-project-in-downtown-grand-rapids/

https://griid.org/2024/12/02/it-would-appear-that-the-city-of-grand-rapids-will-provide-565-million-in-tax-incentives-to-the-2-billionaire-families-despite-significant-public-opposition/

5. DeVos Family Foundations

West Michigan Philanthropy is simply generosity, according to the GR Press

https://griid.org/2011/12/12/west-michigan-philanthropy-is-simply-generosity-according-to-the-gr-press/

The fifth principle of journalism, according to the **Committee of Concerned Journalists**, says, "***Journalism has an unusual capacity to serve as a watchdog over those whose power and position most affect citizens***."

There is nothing in the basic principles of journalism, which suggests that journalist should give those in power a free pass or act as their lapdogs. However, once again, this is exactly what the Grand Rapids Press did with its **feature story** on Sunday, December 11. The article offers nothing but praise for the wealthiest families, no critical voices and no critical perspective on the function and role of philanthropy in a capitalist-driven society.

Praise for Hometown Wealth

The article's headline reads, "**Grandchildren of prominent West Michigan donors are shaping the future of local philanthropy**." As is implied in the headline, the article presents what three generations of the wealthiest families in West Michigan have done with their money as fundamentally a benefit to the community as a whole.

The end of the first section of the Press article states, "*The generosity of families like Meijer, Loeks, DeVos and Van Andel is a major reason the Grand Rapids-Muskegon-Holland metro area was ranked second most generous in the nation, behind Salt Lake City, by the Chronicle of Philanthropy.*"

Another statement by the Press, which demonstrates their unquestioning function of wealthy families in West Michigan, was the text that accompanied a graph, which tracked 2 families and two generations of "giving." The text reads, "*Generosity instilled in children and grandchildren of business giants could result in the West Michigan community reaping rewards long into the future*."

Such comments reflect the Press writer' acceptance that philanthropy, and in this case the philanthropy of a few wealthy families, is a huge benefit for West Michigan residents as a whole. The families cited are DeVos, Van Andel, Meijer, Frey, Wege and Loeks. Funny thing is, the Press writer never really demonstrates how the community is reaping rewards from these families.

The only sources cited in the article are a Grand Rapids Community Foundation spokesperson, David Van Andel (Van Andel Foundation), philanthropy "expert" with the Dorothy Johnson Center for Philanthropy, the CEO of the Wege Foundation and Ellie Frey (Frey Foundation).

Each of these sources sites of few non-profits that have received funding from one or more of the family foundations cited in the area, non-profits such as UICA, Mel Trotter Ministries and Gilda's Club to name a few.

The main source cited in the article, Michael Moody, is referred to as a philanthropy expert. Moody is employed by the **Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy**, which is funded by one of the family foundations in the article – The Frey Foundation. Moody speaks highly of Amway, the DeVos family and Rick DeVos' venture known as ArtPrize. The philanthropy expert also makes comments about generational family philanthropy and what the current generation is likely to do in West Michigan.

Normalizing Systemic Inequity

There is been a great deal of writing and research that takes a very critical and systemic view of the function of foundations and philanthropy in the US. Researchers such as Michael Barker, Adrienne Pine, Joan Roelofs, Daniel Faber and the women of color collective known as **INCITE!**

Each of these writers has provided us with important analysis on the historical function of foundations, particularly those of the wealthiest families in the country and in each community.

Michael Barker's **2008 research** on how the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations funding influenced the major environmental organizations to abandon grassroots advocacy to become beltway players is a crucial investigation for anyone looking at what has happen to environmental politics in the past 30 years. Barker has also done important work to track the real outcome of the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**, particularly their foundation's impact on a global scale. Barker observes that much of what the large foundations do is fund social engineering.

Foundation funding as social engineering is not generally part of the public discourse on philanthropic giving, but within a critical analysis of neoliberal capitalism one can see how the vast amounts of money given by wealthy families is not merely an act of charity.

There are several reasons why wealthy families and individuals create foundations. **First**, foundations provide a means to protect some of their money from being taxed. This has a double effect, in that foundation money is in itself sort of a tax shelter and the money these foundations give to non-profit sectors is an additional tax write-off.

Second, foundations created by the wealthy have always served as both a public relations tool and a buffer from social movements that have sought to create systemic change. Philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie gave a small portion of their wealth to create libraries in some communities. This effort by Carnegie both won him praise for funding public access to information, but more importantly it diverted public attention away from the tremendously exploitative wealth he generated off of the backs of steel workers.

The **third** reason for philanthropic giving, particularly through foundations, is to engage in the social engineering that Barker identifies. This has been the case for the past 100 years in the US, but the biggest growth of foundation funding has developed since the explosion of social movements in the 1960s and 70s. Large foundations realized that the social movements of the 1960s and 70s were a genuine threat to the established order of US society and that using only force was not the best approach to undermining the impact of such movements.

Instead, foundations approached many social movements and offered to fund their work. This funding has resulted in two major outcomes. *First*, foundation funding has required that the grassroots movements professionalize leadership. People who organically were seen as leaders in social movements were there because of their lived experience of oppression, which gave them insight and passion to organize for change. *Secondly*, what foundations did was to get movements to create more formal organizations and hire people with specialized educational degrees that would direct the efforts of such groups to call for reformist approaches to change rather than systemic.

Here Dylan Rodriguez notes:

"*The structural and political limitation of current grassroots and progressive organizing in the US has become stunningly evident in light of the veritable explosion of private foundations as primary institutions through which to harness and restrict the potentials of US-based progressive activism."*

Stifling political dissent locally

To bring it back to West Michigan, one need only look at how dependent local non-profits are on foundation money in order to survive. It's not just the social service oriented groups like Mel Trotter Mission that relies on the philanthropy of the areas wealthy families, many of the progressive organizations locally also are dependent on funds from the same families that often have agendas that are contrary to the mission of those non-profits.

In the case of Mel Trotter Mission, it makes complete sense that the Frey family would donate to a homeless shelter, since that organizations doesn't question any systemic reasons why people are homeless. The same is the case with organization Kids Food Basket, which provides free meals to children in the Grand Rapids area and has received a fair amount of **funding from Amway**. Not surprising, the director of Kids Food Basket **recently said** she was not interested in the causes of hunger, just feeding kids.

But local wealthy families are not just funding the obvious entities that in no way will disrupt business as usual politics in West Michigan. Some of the families mentioned in the Grand Rapids Press article even fund groups like Local First. Ellie Frey is listed as donating to Local First, an organization, which encourages people to buy from businesses based in West Michigan. While it might be preferable to drink coffee at a locally owned café instead of a Starbucks, Local First still accepts the basic principles of a free market capitalist system. They don't question the fundamental principle within free market capitalism of perpetual growth, which is not only unsustainable it undermines localism abroad when Grand Rapids companies sell their products out of state or around the world.

Another entity that seems quite progressive is the Community Media Center (CMC), an entity that got its start as part of the public access TV movement in the 1970s. The original goal of that movement, which was an outgrowth of the social movements of the 1970s, was to provide people whose voices were absent or marginalized in corporate media an opportunity to share their stories and perspectives. The CMC became involved in citizen journalism a few years ago to address some of these media inequities. However, in June of this year the Community Media Center accepted $28,000 from the Amway Corporation to underwrite a segment on their citizen journalism site known as Marketplace. Marketplace features local entrepreneurs, which is the kind of reporting that Amway can support, since it does not address any wealth disparities in West Michigan or question the role of philanthropists like the DeVos family.

The larger benefits for local wealthy families to donate to progressive groups is that it takes attention away from how they acquired their wealth and why we have such inequalities in our society that necessitate philanthropy in the first place. In addition, by funding progressive and charitable causes it makes it hard for people, especially in those organizations, to question the kinds of policies that families like DeVos support.

If your organization is the beneficiary of money from the families listed in the Press article it will be difficult for you to question their funding on anti-LGBT campaigns, anti-Choice campaigns, anti-union campaigns and anti-democracy efforts like the **One Kent Coalition and the West Michigan Policy Forum**.

Lastly, it makes it difficult for the public as a whole to have a critical discussion about the function of local foundations and philanthropists if the only daily newspaper in town acts as a public relations agent for the wealthy families who use their money to solidify the status quo in Grand Rapids.

Foundation Profile: The Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2013/02/18/foundation-profile-the-richard-helen-devos-foundation/

*This posting is part of our investigation into the **Grand Rapids Non-Profit Industrial Complex**. We are beginning with a look at Grand Rapids-based foundations.*

This is the first in a series of postings that look at foundations based in Grand Rapids. It seems obvious to us, to begin with the most powerful family in the area, the DeVos Family, specifically the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation. The following information is based on the foundation's 990s, which you can access **here**.

We looked at the 990s for this foundation from 2009 through 2011, which provides us with which organizations they gave money to and what amount.

It should be noted that, the money donated through the foundation is different than the money donated in direct political contributions, even though foundation funding can have direct political consequences.

There were over 100 different entities which received funding support from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation in each of the three years (2009 – 2011) we looked at. There seems to be three broad categories that this foundation gives large sums of money; education, religious and political.

There are many social service agencies that also are recipients of this foundation, but those numbers pale in comparison to the large recipients of the oldest DeVos family foundation. Most of the non-profit groups receiving money are also overtly Christian.

Looking at the area of education, the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation has provided substantial financial support to Christian Schools. For instance, the Grand Rapids Christian School Association has received roughly $5.6 million from this foundation from 2009 – 2011. Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary combined have received roughly $8.5 million.

However, Christian schools are not the only recipients of funds from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation. Grand Valley State University has received $5 million from 2009 – 2011 and Norwood University has received $6 million. Norwood is a leading business school in the US, which states that its mission, "*is to develop the future leaders of a global, free-enterprise society.*"

When it comes to **funding religious groups**, the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation give to conservative, evangelical Christian groups. For instance, the Alliance for

Children Everywhere, which does Christian charity work, has received roughly $1.2 million from the foundation in recent years.

Another Christian organization that has received a significant amount from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation is Prison Fellowship Ministries, founded by former Watergate criminal Chuck Colson. While Prison Fellowship Ministries deals primarily with prison ministry, **Colson has not shied away from taking strong public stands against the LGBTQ community** and other conservative causes.

Then there are groups like the Haggai Institute and the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association, both of which promote far right politics and develop future conservative leadership. The Haggai Institute has received $1 million and the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association has received $6 million.

The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation has also given Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church over $1 million and Focus on the Family has received an estimated $1.3 million between 2009 – 2011. **Focus on the Family** has a long history of supporting repressive roles for women and has taken strong stances against women's reproductive rights and LGBTQ equality. Their founder, **James Dobson** has been a leader in the religious right and even promotes a form of Christian Theocracy.

One last Christian group that has received funding from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation is the Grand Rapids-based **Acton Institute**. The Acton Institute, founded in 1990, believes there is a natural relationship between Christianity and Capitalism. The Acton Institute is anti-union and has even been the recipient of funding for climate denial.

Funding groups like Acton with a strong free market capitalist mission is no surprise, since this is something that Richard DeVos has been promoting for most of his life and is supported by the some of the groups his foundation has financially supported.

The Heritage Foundation has received millions of dollars from the DeVos family and the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation gave $6 million from 2009 – 2011. The **Heritage Foundation** was one of the leaders in the "new right movement," and is credited with crafting the initial policy positions for the Reagan Administration.

Other think tanks that have received large sums from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation are the **American Enterprise Institute**, Americans for Prosperity, the Freedom Works Foundation and the Young America's Foundation.

Some of these groups have had tremendous impact on public policy, such as ALEC funded policies, which have been disastrous for working class people and the environment. **Americans for Prosperity**is a front group for the Koch Brothers and played a large role in passing a Right to Work law in Michigan. **Freedom Works** also promotes public austerity measures, which transfers more public finds to private power and is closely connected to the Tea Party.

Young America's Foundation is lesser known, but is equally dangerous in terms of the ideology it promotes, such as the free market and personal freedom. Young America's Foundation was started to counter the left/activist influence of students on campuses in the US in the 1960s and 1970s.

It seems pretty clear that the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation supports ultra-conservative policies and the supremacy of the free market for solving social problems. Many of the groups they have funded have promoted various forms of discrimination and hate, along with merging of Capitalism with Christianity.

At the same time, there are many local social service agencies in West Michigan, which have also received funding from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, although to a much lesser degree. Providing funds to groups like ICCF, the Literacy Center of West Michigan and Home Repair Services. Such funding, it could be argued, is put to good use for people with specific needs.

However, what this funding also can do is not only redirect public attention away from the far right groups they fund and even cause justice minded people to become apologists for the DeVos family and its foundations. This is certainly a theme we will explore when doing interviews with local non-profits.

The next foundation we will profile is the Dick & Betsy DeVos Family Foundation.

Foundation Profile: Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2013/02/20/foundation-profile-dick-betsy-devos-foundation/

This is the second posting in our investigation into the **Non-Profit Industrial Complex in Grand Rapids**. A few days ago, we looked at the **Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation** and today we look at the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation.

There are already some noticeable differences between the first generation of Amway owners to the second generation. Dick DeVos ran for political office in 2006 and the marriage between Dick DeVos and Betsy Prince strengthened ties between two of the most conservative families in Michigan.

While they have carved out their own niche, Dick & Betsy DeVos have also continued the commitment to conservative Christianity and Capitalism that Richard & Helen have served.

Again, we looked at the 990s for the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation from the online source Guidestar.** The most recent years available for this foundation were 2008 through 2010.

There were certainly some similarities between whom the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation provided funds to and whom the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation provided funds to.

Both foundations have donated large sums to groups like the ultra conservative Christian organizations, the Haggai Institute ($2,250,000) and the Acton Institute ($110,000). The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation have also generously donated to places like Norwood University ($200,000), which promotes global capitalism as an overt mission of the school.

However, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has also directed funds to groups that Dick's parents have not. Some of these groups further the family commitment to conservative Christianity and free market capitalism, such as the mega-church, **Willow Creek** ($1.5 million). Willow Creek also is involved in sponsoring a major global leadership conference each year, which has features speakers such as former Bush Cabinet member Condoleeza Rice, school privatization icon Michele Rhee and CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz.

Another recipient of major funding from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation that promotes free market capitalism is the Thunderbird School of Global Management ($1.2 million). Dick DeVos sits on the **school's Board of Fellows**, along with many other corporate leaders.

Other free market-focused organizations that have received large sums of funding from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation are the **Institute for Economic Empowerment of Women** ($425,000) and the local group Grand Action ($235,000). Dick DeVos is one of the **chairs of Grand Action** and using his foundation money to fund Grand Action projects has financially benefited his family's downtown businesses, as we have noted in a **previous posting**.

One of the political arenas that Dick & Betsy DeVos have distinguished themselves in is their interest in promoting private schools, charter schools and school voucher policies.

Schools and non-public school campaigns have received sizeable amounts of funding from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation between 2008 and 2010. Groups such as the **Alliance for School Choice** ($50,000), the Educational Freedom Fund ($305,000) and the Florida School Choice Fund are just some of the anti-public school groups to receive money from the couple's foundation.

Researcher Rachel Tabachnick identifies Betsy DeVos as the Four Star General of the School Privatization Movement, in an **article** she wrote for the Political Research Associates. The article states:

Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State described Betsy DeVos as the "four-star general" of the school privatization movement shortly after DeVos announced the formation of the "new" American Federation for Children (AFC) in

March 2010. As Boston noted, the American Federation for Children was not new, but a rebranding of an organization called Advocates for School Choice.

The American Federation for Children is now the umbrella organization for two nonprofits that have been at the center of the pro-privatization movement for over a decade. In addition to the renamed Advocates for School Choice, it includes the Alliance for School Choice, formerly known as the Education Reform Council. Both entities received extensive funding from the late John Walton, one of the Wal-Mart heirs. The boards of the two related entities included movement leaders Betsy DeVos–scion of a Christian Right family who married into the Amway home goods fortune–William Oberndorf, Clint Bolick, John Kirtley, Steve Friess (son of Foster Friess), James Leininger, John Walton, and Cory Booker.

These two nonprofits–Alliance for School Choice, a 501(c)(3) and Advocates for School Choice a.k.a. American Federation for Children, a 501(c)(4)– ***provided over $17 million in grants*** *to 35 other national and state-level pro-privatization nonprofits from 2006 to 2010. These grants represented a significant portion of the total budgets for many of the state organizations. Today Betsy DeVos and John Kirtley are the chair and vice chair of both boards.*

Dick DeVos has his own history with pushing for privatization of public schools, a subject we looked at in **an article written after DeVos commented that the Grand Rapids Public Schools might need some attention**.

The other distinctly different area of funding that Dick & Betsy DeVos have provided funds to, which is different than the first generation of Amway, is the area of arts and culture.

The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has provided a significant amount of funds between 2008 and 2010 to groups such as the JFK Center for the Performing of Arts ($581,755), the Grand Rapids Art Museum ($82,500) and the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts ($1,143,000). Dick & Betsy's son Rick DeVos sits on the board of both UICA and the Grand Rapids Art Museum, both of which have been major partners in the other major Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation funded effort, ArtPrize.

ArtPrize is run by their son Rick and has been bankrolled primarily through their foundation. The financing of their son's project, ArtPrize, has also been financially beneficial to the DeVos family with all of its downtown businesses. However, even more important is to look at why the couple has decided to fund arts and culture.

Richard Kooyman, in a **2010 article**, explores the motives behind the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation's funding of art and culture. In that article Kooyman notes that we should all be concerned about what impact their funding has in this area, since they have been forward about wanting to inject the values of morality and free market capitalism into art and culture.

Much more could be said about the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation, but it is clear that they have continued the family's commitment to conservative Christianity and capitalism that began with their parents Richard & Helen DeVos and **Edgar & Elsa Prince**.

Foundation Profile: Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2013/02/25/foundation-profile-doug-maria-devos-foundation/

*This is our third foundation profile for our **Grand Rapids Non-Profit Industrial Complex Project.** So far we have looked at the **Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation** and the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation**.*

Doug DeVos is the current President of Amway, the company that his father founded, along with Jay Van Andel.

The foundation that Doug and his wife Maria run is not as large as the elder DeVos or his brother Dick, but sizeable nonetheless.

We were able to access the 990 documents for this foundation for **2009 through 2011, from the online source Guidestar.**

Like the other DeVos family foundations we have looked at, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation has contributed significantly to conservative Christian organizations and organizations that promote the supremacy of free market capitalism.

Some of the groups that the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation have contributed to between 2009 and 2011 are the Willow Creek Association ($100,000), the Acton Institute ($159,350), the Mackinac Center for Public Policy ($65,000), Grand Action ($200,000) and the Heritage Foundation ($50,000).

This DeVos Family Foundation has also contributed significantly to the Grand Rapids Christian School Association ($7,106,000), the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital Foundation ($4,545,000) and the National Constitution Center ($3,175,000).

Doug DeVos is the **Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Constitution Center**, which includes a whole host of conservative members, including Richard DeVos Sr. Despite the rather benign sounding name, the National Constitution

Center promotes a rather narrow notion of civic engagement, with its current Chairman being Jeb Bush.

Another large recipient of funding from the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation is the **American Enterprise Institute** – AEI ($1,750,000). The American Enterprise Institute has a along history of lobbying the federal government on issues ranging from Iraq, tobacco regulation and water policies. The American Enterprise Institute has had a strong relationship with the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which has been at the forefront of much scrutiny for its lobbying practices. It also should be noted that the American Enterprise Institute is part of the network of organizations that deny climate change and has even offered money to scientists to publicly state their opposition to global warming.

One last group that has been the recipient of Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation money is the National Organization for Marriage (NOM). NOM has received $500,000 from the foundation, which has resulted in a **national boycott against Amway.**

The National Organization for Marriage aggressively opposed marriage equality and is a leading group that both lobbies and funnels money to state campaigns where marriage equality is on the ballot.

The California-based group Rights Equal Rights Cause initiated the boycott campaign last summer and is targeting Amway, since Doug DeVos is the current President of the family company.

Foundation Profile: Dan & Pamella DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2013/02/26/foundation-profile-dan-pamella-devos-foundation/

*This is our fourth foundation profile for our **Grand Rapids Non-Profit Industrial Complex Project.** So far we have looked at the **Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation**, the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation** and the **Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation.***

The Dan & Pamella DeVos Foundation is the last of the local DeVos family foundations that we are profiling.

Dan & Pamella also contribute to some of the same entities that other DeVos family foundation contribute to. During the years between 2009 – 2011 the Dan & Pamela

DeVos Foundation has contributed to the group that brother Dick is involved in, Grand Action ($204,280).

Dan & Pamella have also contributed to the local hospital named after their mom, the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital Foundation (over $7 million), Grand Rapids Christian School Association ($850,000) and the Young Life Grand Rapids ($50,000).

Like his brother Dick and his wife Betsy, Dan and Pamella have contributed substantially to the art world. During the three years of 990s we looked at, the couple has donated to the Grand Rapids Art Museum ($514,835), John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts ($20,000), ArtPrize ($50,000), UICA ($50,000) and the Whitney Museum of American Art ($2,793,250).

It is worth noting that the couple's nephew Rick sits on the board of both the UICA and the Grand Rapids Art Museum. Also, **Pamella DeVos is the Secretary** of the Whitney Museum of American Art, which might explain the large donations from the couple.

Dan & Pamella DeVos have also contributed to some of the same free market capitalism groups such as The Heritage Foundation ($25,000) and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy ($75,000).

The Dan & Pamella DeVos Foundation have also contributed significantly to the global free market school, Norwood University. Over a three year period they contributed $2,627,500.

While the Dan & Pamella DeVos Foundation has not been as overtly political in their contributions as other members of the DeVos family, they continue the tradition of funding conservative Christian organizations and pro-capitalist entities.

Foundation Profile: Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation

https://griid.org/2013/03/24/foundation-profile-edgar-elsa-prince-foundation/

*This foundation profile is part of a series, which is part of our **Grand Rapids Non-Profit Industrial Complex Project.***

The **Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation have a long history** of support for right and religious right causes, in Michigan, across the country and even around the world.

The foundation is primarily run by the children of Edgar & Elsa Prince, which includes Emily Wierda, Betsy DeVos and Erik Prince. The following information is based on the data we found from the foundation's 990s for 2009 – 2011.

Some of the larger recipients of the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation money in the three most recent years of data are the Family Research Council ($1,753,850), Focus on the Family ($1,347,000) and the Haggai Institute ($1,400,000).

Focus on the Family has a long history of supporting repressive roles for women and has taken strong stances against women's reproductive rights and LGBTQ equality. Their founder, **James Dobson** has been a leader in the religious right and even promotes a form of Christian Theocracy.

The **Family Research Council has taken strong anti-LGBT stances** over the years, along with advocating a male-dominated nuclear family model. The **Southern Poverty Law Center has even identified as a hate group**, particularly because of its anti-LGBT positions.

Other religious right groups that have been the recipients of contributions from the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation are the American Family Association ($20,000), the Dove Foundation ($20,000), Prison Fellowship Ministries ($170,000) the **Promise Keepers** ($25,000), the **Rutherford Institute**($35,000) and the American Alliance of Jews and Christians ($10,000).

A few lesser known Christian Right groups to have received money from the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation are the Wycliff Bible Translators ($5,000) and the Bible League ($20,000). These two groups have a history together, since the Bible League provides translations of the Christian bible, which Wycliff translates and distributes globally. The Wycliff Bible Translators, also known as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, has a long history of going into indigenous communities to evangelize, collaborating with dictatorships and multinational corporations, **which have at time led to cultural and physical genocide.**

Some of the religious groups that the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation have funded are also anti-abortion facilities, such as the Pregnancy Resource Center ($65,000) and the Alternative Pregnancy Care Center ($30,000).

Like many of the DeVos Familyb Foudations, the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation has also funded organizations with strong free market capitalism missions. Pro-Capitalist groups that have been recipients are the **Acton Institute** ($105,000), **Competitive Enterprise Institute** ($15,000) the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** ($50,000) and the National Right to Work Legal Defense Fund ($40,000). These organizations have fought to protect business and corporate interests, along with efforts to undermine workers rights and the power of labor unions.

A few last notable groups that have received funding from the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation are the Center for Military Readiness ($45,000) and the Council for National Policy (CNP) ($45,000). The Center for Military Readiness has worked on campaigns to limited LGBT citizens and women from being soldiers in the US military and the CNP, **which seeks to promote Christian Theocracy in American public life.**

It's not Philanthropy, It's Ideological and Class Warfare: How the DeVos Family Foundation contributions complement their political donations

https://griid.org/2016/10/27/its-not-philanthropy-its-ideological-warfare-how-the-devos-family-foundation-contributions-compliment-their-political-donations/

In the early part of 2013, we set out to look at the **role of foundations in West Michigan**, particularly those that are connected to the wealthiest families in the area.

During that investigation we relied on the 2009 – 2011 990 reports that all foundations and non-profits must submit, which provides information for the public. These public disclosures are meant to provide a certain amount of transparency, although there is still plenty that is hidden from plain sight.

We know a fair amount about the funding patterns of the wealthiest people in West Michigan as it relates to campaign financing, particularly that of the DeVos Family, which continues to be the largest contributor to political campaigns in Michigan and out of state. Last year we **wrote a piece** about how much money the DeVos Family had contributed in the 2013-2014 election cycle. Based on a **report** from the non-partisan group, the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, the DeVos Family outspent every other individual, family or entity on elections during that two year period in Michigan. In fact, Rich Robinson, then the director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network said, ***"The DeVos family doesn't have a peer among individual donors, or as far as interest groups go."***

More recently, we wrote two articles about the DeVos Family contributions in the current election cycle. On August 1, **we wrote about their influencing of State races** during a 56-day period this past summer. The DeVos Family was contributing **$26,785 a day** to influence the electoral outcome in November. The **second article** looked at the DeVos Family contributions to the 2nd and 3rd Congressional races.

However, it is rare that the news media ever talks about the relationship between the DeVos Family's buying of elections and their private funding through their foundations. More importantly, there is never really any investigation into how this one/two punch of monied influence serves essentially the same purpose.

In looking at the more recent 990 filing for the DeVos Family Foundations, we found that some of the largest recipients of their contributions complemented their political giving. For instance, in 2012, the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation gave $100,000 to the Tampa Bay Host Committee, which was the organization behind the 2012 Republican Convention in Florida.

Other significant donations from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation were to pro-capitalist groups like the **American Enterprise Institute** ($500,000 for 2012/13) the **Acton Institute** and the **Heritage Foundation** ($1 million).

Another significant political donation made through the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation was $2,000,000 to Donors Trust Inc. "DonorsTrust is a not-for-profit company that distributes millions of dollars in grants each year to groups, organizations and projects that are "dedicated to the ideals of limited government, personal responsibility, and free enterprise," according to an excellent **article on Desmogblog**.

In fact, the largest contributor between 2013 and 2014 was the DeVos Family, through their DeVos Leadership Initiative. (pictured here on the right)

The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation has also been contributing significant amounts of money to most of the colleges and universities in West Michigan, like Calvin, Hope, GRCC, GVSU and MSU. These contributions, ranging from $1 million to $3 million a year clear are meant to influence school policy and curriculum.

However, the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation has also provided large sums of money to universities outside of Michigan, particularly to private, faith-based schools like Kings College. In a two year period (2012-2013), the foundation gave King's College $10.5 million dollars. The mission of, "King's College seeks to transform society by preparing students for careers in which they help to shape and eventually to lead strategic public and private institutions." Richard and Helen DeVos are also on the **Board of Trustees for the College.**

One last way in which the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation compliments their direct political giving is the money they donate to the Young America's Foundation. Their mission reads:

Young America's Foundation is committed to ensuring that increasing numbers of young Americans understand and are inspired by the ideas of individual freedom, a strong national defense, free enterprise, and traditional values.

As the principal outreach organization of the Conservative Movement, the Foundation introduces thousands of American youth to these principles. We accomplish our mission by providing essential conferences, seminars, educational materials, internships, and speakers to young people across the country.

YAF has a long history of countering progressive and radical organizing on campuses across the country and often brings anti-Islam and other proponents of White Supremacy speakers to campus.The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation gave Young America's Foundation $2 million in 2012.

These are just some of the organizations and entities that are recipients of the DeVos Family money, organizations and entities that have a long history of opposing LGBTQ liberation, unions, racial justice and an economic system based on cooperation and equity.

In the coming weeks, we will look at other DeVos Family Foundations and how their political contributions coincide with their ideological spending as well.

It's Not Philanthropy, It's Ideological and Class Warfare: How the DeVos Family Foundation contributions complement their political donations – Part II

https://griid.org/2016/11/01/its-not-philanthropy-its-ideological-and-class-warfare-how-the-devos-family-foundation-contributions-complement-their-political-donations-part-ii/

Last week we looked at how the DeVos Family uses their vast financial resources to influence elections and purchase policy, particularly at the local and state level. We also began the process of investigating how their political funding is complemented by their philanthropic contributions.

We presented recent examples of the DeVos Family's efforts to influence the 2016 elections and compared that specifically with the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation contributions. It seems rather clear that in addition to the DeVos Family's commitment to a patriarchal/heterosexist brand of christianity, their philanthropic giving also supports projects which furthers their deep commitment to Neoliberal Capitalism.

Since last week, it has been **reported by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network** that nine members of the DeVos Family have been the largest contributors to the House Republican Campaign Committee (HRCC) in the most recent election cycle. Each of the nine members of the DeVos Family have contributed $40,000 to the HRCC, for a combined $360,000. The $360,000 that the DeVos Family has contributed to the HRCC was **just** for the period of July 21 through October 20.

What we will look at in Part II is the remaining DeVos Family foundations and where they have directed their funding to demonstrate how it fits within their ideological and class warfare framework.

Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation

The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation also contributes larger sums of money to the organizations that fit within their ideological and class warfare framework. One such entity is the **Acton Institute**. The Grand Rapids-based think tank, which believes that Capitalism and Christianity make good bed fellows, has received $505,000 from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation according to the 990 reports for 2012 and 2013.

Another Capitalist entity that they have contributed to is Endeavor, which likes to refer to itself as a non-profit for entrepreneurs. The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributed $162,000 in 2013, according to their 990s, but they also play a significant role in having a **staff person from their foundation sit on the regional board of Endeavor in Detroit, Nate Lowery**.

However, the major area of philanthropy for Dick and Betsy DeVos is in the area of an attack on public education. They do this through several organizations with their funding. First, there is the DC-based entity called the **Alliance for School Choice**. In 2013, they contributed $250,000 to this group, which promotes the privatization of public education.

Another anti-public education source for DeVos philanthropy is the Foundation for Excellence in Education ($100,000 in 2013). Betsy DeVos sits on the **board of directors**, along with Condoleezza Rice and the board president, Jeb Bush.

Lastly, there is the Great Lakes Education Foundation, which has also received substantial funding from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation. ($200,000 alone in 2013) The Great Lakes Education Foundation is a source of funding that supports the **Great Lakes Education Project**, of which Betsy DeVos is also a board member, along with the DeVos political operative, Greg McNeilly.

Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation

The Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation is not nearly as big as the other DeVos foundations, but they contribute in similar ways, thus supporting the link between philanthropy and the family's more overt political contributions.

Dan & Pamela also give to the usual suspects of pro-capitalism, such as the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** ($90,000) and the Acton Institute ($50,000). They also contribute significantly to pro-business universities, such as Northwood ($1.3 million). Lastly, the Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation also throws its money behind education efforts that promotes privatization, through the Michigan Education Excellence Foundation. ($150,000) This entity has as its **partners major corporations and private donors** that reads like a who's who of those who are benefiting most from neoliberal capitalism.

Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation

Like the Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation is smaller than other family members, but they too use philanthropic dollars to fund ideological and class warfare endeavors.

Doug & Maria has contributed large sums to the Acton Institute ($435,000), the **American Enterprise Institute** ($2 million) and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy ($100,000). This DeVos foundation has also supported anti-LGBT projects, like the National Organization for Marriage (NOM), with a contribution of $250,000.

It should also be noted that the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation gave $100,000 to the Clinton Global Initiative in recent years. The **Clinton Global Initiative has come under increasing scrutiny because of it role in profiting off of misery and its role in shaping US foreign policy**.



While it is true that the DeVos Family Foundations give money to all sorts of local non-profits, those contributions are overshadowed by the larger donations that truly promote their ideological and class warfare. It also plays an important role in censoring the organizations who are recipients at local level.

Johnson Center report on philanthropy fails to challenge the dominant narrative about wealth

https://griid.org/2017/08/01/johnson-center-report-on-philanthropy-fails-to-challenge-the-dominant-narrative-about-wealth/

The Johnson Center at GVSU, recently came out with a report on philanthropic giving in two communities. The report,**Understanding Philanthropic Character of Communities**, looks at philanthropic giving in Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids.

The report is rather academic and vague. More importantly, the report reflects the dominant narrative about foundations and philanthropy, which is to say they celebrate philanthropic giving without any critical analysis of what foundations represent.

My take on the role and functions of philanthropy are informed in part by several books which challenge the dominant narrative: *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex, by INCITE; Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism, by Joan Roelofs;* and *Under the Mask of Philanthropy, by Michael Barker.* In addition, my own experience working within the non-profit industrial complex has informed me on how foundation funding impacts whats happens and what doesn't happen in this community.

Philanthropy in GR: What Does Happen

According to the report by the Johnson Center, the bulk of the philanthropy in Kent County (for 2012) came from private foundations, not community foundations, as in seen in the graphic below.

The private foundations cited in the report are listed here on the right.

Most of these foundations, dominated by the DeVos family, are also part of the West MI Power structure. These families, besides having foundations, have tremendous economic and political power in the area and are known to influence local and state policy through their political contributions. Their political contributions are not factored into the Johnson Center report, which makes the report incomplete, since you cannot ignore the political contributions.

First, in the case of the DeVos family, **their political contributions are much larger than the philanthropic dollars they give out on an annual basis**.

Second, a great deal of money contributed by the DeVos family, and to a lesser degree other foundations on the list, provide significant amounts of funding to groups that promote policy that dismantles various forms of social welfare, such as public funding for schools, pensions and services which the state previously provided. Therefore, when foundations give money to non-profits, this money then seeks to fill a gap that they created through their influence in the policy arena. For instance, since public education spending has been reduced in Michigan for more than two decades or diverted to charter schools, the DeVos family can contribute significantly to private education programs like Potter's House or Believe 2 Become, which is a way to introduce faith-based/entrepreneurial education into the Grand Rapids Public Schools. The result is that foundations, like the various DeVos foundations are often seen as very generous with the money, when in fact they use their wealth to create a social crisis and then fill the void with funding that they can control the outcomes with.

At the end of the Johnson Center report there are three areas of investigation on philanthropic giving: art, downtown development and education. We have already addressed the educational component to some degree, so lets look at arts and downtown development.

In regards to Kent County, the only philanthropy discussed in the Johnson Center Report is ArtPrize. The report states:

For all the controversy ArtPrize has engendered — whether over the quality of art selected through public voting, the "popularity contest" aspect of the public awards, the political activities of the DeVos family, or the rejection of specific works of art — ArtPrize is an undeniable success.

Calling it a success is not a very objective term, since the report never provides any clarity on how ArtPrize as been an undeniable success. Do they mean for the public, for the downtown businesses or the artists?

The other area the report looks at is on downtown development. You can see from this graphic here, how much foundation money and how much public money was put into various projects. It is important to note that these are projects initiated by Grand Action, which was created by Dick DeVos and other members of the local power structure, as a means to generate more revenue for their downtown assets – hotels, bars, restaurants and private parking lots.

Challenging the dominant narrative about foundations and philanthropic contributions

As was mentioned earlier, a critical view of foundations and philanthropic contributions is important, especially if we want to challenge the dominant narratives of class privilege.

There are five major critiques to this dominant narrative:

. Foundations are a way of creating tax havens for those with high levels of wealth and only a small percentage of the money in foundations actually is spent.
. Foundations are great PR for the capitalist class. Foundation giving distracts the public by getting us to praise those with wealth for their generosity, instead of critically examining how those who have foundations "made" their wealth.
. Foundations also engage in forms of population management. Charitable contributions are often a way to put the attention on those who are experiencing poverty, instead of those who created poverty and social inequality. Plus there is the added benefit of making people feel ashamed of being the recipient of charity, instead of realizing their collective potential to organize as a social movement.

- Foundations have directly influenced the culture of non-profits in three important ways. First, there are always conditions, limitations and pre-determined outcomes for foundation giving. Second, foundation giving almost always makes it so that you cannot participate in work that seeks to transform society or to get at the root of systemic problems. Third, non-profits most often follow a corporate model that is both hierarchical and with boards of directors, which are often times made up of people who are in positions of power.
- Lastly, foundation giving limits our ability to be imaginative about how to collectively work for change.

Grassroots Responses to Big Philanthropy: Grand Rapids Activism in the Shadow of Amway, ArtPrize and DeVos

https://griid.org/2017/11/22/grassroots-responses-to-big-philanthropy-grand-rapids-activism-in-the-shadow-of-amway-artprize-and-devos/

Last week, I was asked to be part of a panel discussion for a conference being held in downtown Grand Rapids and organized by the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA).

The organization itself doesn't seem to be focused on systems of oppression and collective liberation, but the panel I was asked to participate in was headed in the right direction.

The title of the panel session was, Grassroots Responses to Big Philanthropy: Grand Rapids Activism in the Shadow of Amway, ArtPrize and DeVos. The title was reflective of something that I have spent a great deal of energy on, both monitoring the DeVos family, providing analysis of their type of philanthropy and how we need to counteract the insidious nature of the millions this family distributes in order to serve their own interests.

As I write this, it is Giving Tuesday, which seems appropriate, considering the fact that so many non-profit organizations are hoping to cash in on funding from philanthropic organizations that often contribute to the harm they are responding to.

The Problem of Philanthropy for Social Movements

Based on the research of the group INCITE!, which produced the book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded,* it is important to provide a framework for thinking about the nature of philanthropy and foundations.

According to INCITE, "*The non-profit industrial complex is a system of relationships between:*

the State (local and federal governments)
the owning classes
foundations
and non-profit/NGO social service & social justice organizations

With these kinds of relationships, it often results in the surveillance, control, derailment, and everyday management of political movements. The state uses non-profits to:

Monitor and control social justice movements;
Divert public monies into private hands through foundations;
Manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism;
Redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society;
Allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through "philanthropic" work;
Encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them

Now that we have a framework around thinking about the function of philanthropy and foundations, I can talk about what was discussed on the panel. I will keep the comments and observations to what I shared, since I do not have consent from the other panelists.

There were a few questions posed to those of us on the panel. The first question was, ***What does activism and community organizing mean to you and your organization***? While doing introductions I said that I was only representing GRIID and the Grand Rapids People's History Project. However, I did say that I was currently involved in doing some food justice organizing, working with the GR Rapid Response to ICE project and Movimiento Cosecha GR.

My response to the first question was that it was deeply critical for us to think about the work we do in terms of building dynamic social justice movements and that our organizing needed to be strategic and reclaim radical imagination. I stated that these movements must be led by those most impacted – communities of color, immigrants, queer communities, those with disabilities, etc. I also stated that those of us in these movements, who bring a great deal of privilege, need to make sure that our involvement needs to make sure that the voices of those most marginalized need to be elevated and that whatever actions we take should center around the voices/input of those most impacted from systems of oppression.

I also said that we need to create, when possible, independent, autonomous groups that seeks to get to the root of whatever issue(s) we are organizing around, through the use of Direct Action and horizontal organizing models.

The second question posed to those of us on the panel was, ***From your perspective, how does activism and community organizing function within Grand Rapids***?

My response began with a comment from a friend of mine who in not originally from West Michigan. She stated that "Grand Rapids does charity real well, but it doesn't do

justice for shit." I followed up that comment by saying that this fits into what people often called West Michigan nice. West Michigan nice is in many ways a dominate ethos in this community, which essentially means don't rock the boat, don't challenge structural injustice and don't bite the hand that feeds the non-profit industrial complex.

An example I gave had to do with the issue of hunger in this community. Two of the largest organizations responding to hunger are Feeding American West Michigan and Kids Food Basket. In both cases, these organizations do a great job of providing food charity, but they are in no way interested in doing food justice. All one has to do is look at their funding sources and who sits on their boards. I interviewed the director of Feeding America a few years ago and he bragged about the fact that they were increasing the amount of food that their organization was distributing on a yearly basis. When I said that this just means that more people are food insecure and that the goal should ultimately be to end hunger, this non-profit director said that this was not the focus of their organization.

The third question deal more directly with the function of systems of power. The question was, ***How do you and/or your organization navigate government power structures and big philanthropy***?

This question got to the heart of the title of the panel as it was presented to those attending the conference. Using the DeVos Family as the lens at which to respond to this question, I began by saying that I think it is important to recognize that the DeVos Family not only is the most powerful family in West Michigan, but that their religious values and ideological framework is what informs and determines their wealth and power.

I then stated that the **DeVos Family contributes more to influence government policy in Michigan more than any other family in the state**, based on documentation from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network. The kinds of policies they have been promoting, both through their family campaign finances and groups like the West Michigan Policy Forum have resulted in making Michigan a Right to Work state, attacking teacher and other public sector pensions, denying same sex parents from adopting from the largest adoption agencies in the state, changing the tax system to benefit the wealthiest and changing state law to allow larger campaign contributions.

All of these policies have caused a tremendous amount of harm and negatively impacts the most marginalized communities in the area. The DeVos Family then provides substantial grant funding through their numerous family foundations, funding that is often used by non-profits to respond to the harm the DeVos Family has caused. The difference is that the funds used within the non-profit sector are based on conditions, which allows the DeVos Family to engage in a form of social engineering and population management.

In addition, the non-profits that are receiving funds from the DeVos Family Foundations are then put in a position so as to never criticize the family's political funding. This

means that in addition to engaging in population management, non-profit/social service organizations are also managed for fear of losing their funding. Therefore, the DeVos Family philanthropy plays a significant role in the two pronged strategy of ideological warfare they engage in through their wealth. (See **Part I** and **Part II** of an article that further explores this dynamic.)

One recent example is the **DeVos creation of the group AmplifyGR**. In this case, through their partnership with Rockford Construction, they have purchased a great deal of land in the Boston Square and Cottage Grove areas in southeast Grand Rapids. The DeVos Family then created their own non-profit, AmplifyGR, which then seeks to impose a development/gentrification plan on these neighborhoods. The DeVos Family makes it more probable that they will be able to achieve their goals, **since there are many non-profits in the target area that have been major recipients of DeVos foundation money**.

What the DeVos Family did not expect is for the community to push back against their plans to re-develop the area. AmplifyGR has recently canceled the previously schedule "community engagement" meetings to re-assess their plans. However, the public should not take this as a victory, but rather a temporary setback. No doubt the family will use its vast influence and resources to rethink how best to achieve their goals. One thing is clear though, the resistance to AmplifyGR's plans has come because of grassroots and autonomous organizing outside of the shadow of big philanthropy.

100 Ideas, White Supremacy, Entrepreneurs and Income Inequality

https://griid.org/2018/01/09/100-ideas-white-supremacy-entrepreneurs-and-income-inequality/

Try to imagine if you can, what Grand Rapids might look like if no one lived in poverty. Imagine if just those who were African American, disproportionately did not live in poverty. Can you even imagine that?

Some will say that African Americans have had every opportunity to get out of poverty and that there is no reason why a high number of blacks in this city should live in poverty.

Those who are quick to say this fail to acknowledge the history of White Supremacy in the US. They fail to acknowledge that slavery meant that black people earned no money and were not allowed to acquire assets, while white people profited significantly off of slavery.

Those who fail to acknowledge the history of White Supremacy fail to take into account the theft of black owned land, the constant terrorism of armed white people, whether it is

the KKK or the local police department. Failure to acknowledge the history of White Supremacy means failure to talk about the history of lynching, segregation, financial red lining, that black people have disproportionately made lower wages than white people, mass incarceration, white flight, gentrification, urban renewal and the defunding of the public sector, which has disproportionate impacted the black community more than any other.

People could read about how the economic system of capitalism doesn't serve most people, but has particularly impacted the black community, as the great historian Manning Marable documents in his book, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America.*

Along comes **Start Garden**, which says it wants to give away $1,000 to 100 people for new business ideas in the coming weeks. In July, Start Garden judges (whoever they might be) will have complete say in determining what lucky 10 people will then each get $20,000 to start a new business initiative.

The funds for this new project are coming from the banks and other financial institutions listed below, with the intent of creating,"*10 new sustainable ideas in our Grand Rapids business district*," says, Jorge Gonzalez of Start Garden. Gonzalez went on to say, based on an MLive article, "*That means wealth creation."*

Gonzalez's co-worker in this project, Darrel Ross explained the thinking behind the initiative, when he said, "*The solution to poverty is income, and the best way to generate income is through entrepreneurship*." Such a statement not only fails to acknowledge the history of White Supremacy, it fails to take into account how the system of capitalism works.

Capitalism, particularly Neo-Liberal Capitalism, functions best when there are a small percentage of the population keeping most of the wealth, while the masses are living in poverty or just a pay check away from falling into poverty. In fact, the founder of Start Garden, Rick DeVos, and the entire DeVos Family, has been deeply committed to the accumulation of wealth for themselves and influencing public policy to do things like – defund the public sector, eliminate unions, provide tax breaks and major subsidies to corporations, undermine public education and give the super rich unlimited ability to buy elections at the federal and state level.

Yet, somehow those who currently run Start Garden want people to believe that creating more entrepreneurs is the best way to generate income. Now, this might help a few people get out of poverty, but it is not sustainable and it again fails to acknowledge history and the complex nature of systems of oppression that make it extremely difficult for black and brown communities to experience economic justice.

Real economic justice looks more like what the Movement for Black Lives (MBL) is proposing.

First, the MBL is calling for massive **Reparations** for the wealth extracted from our communities through environmental racism, slavery, food apartheid, housing

discrimination and racialized capitalism in the form of **corporate and government reparations** focused on healing ongoing physical and mental trauma, and ensuring our access and control of food sources, housing and land.

Second, MBL is calling for an **Invest-Divest strategy**, which says, We demand **investments in the education, health and safety of Black people**, instead of investments in the criminalizing, caging, and harming of Black people. We want investments in Black communities, determined by Black communities, and **divestment from exploitative forces** including prisons, fossil fuels, police, surveillance and exploitative corporations.

Third, they are calling for **Economic Justice**, where they say, We demand **economic justice for all** and a reconstruction of the economy to ensure Black communities have collective ownership, not merely access.

Each of these strategies and demands comes with lots of details on how the black community can get out of poverty, all of which can be found at this link **https://policy.m4bl.org/**.

The local news reported that there was a large audience for the kick-off of the 100 Ideas Start Garden Project. This is no surprise, given that 100 people will likely get $1,000 for just pitching a one-minute idea. However, such entrepreneurial ventures will only end up benefitting a small number of people, which will ignore thousands in poverty and perpetuate individualism, rather than promote how we can collectively fight poverty, income inequality and imagine other community-based forms of collective liberation.



What is Amplify GR up to these days?

https://griid.org/2018/02/07/what-is-amplify-gr-up-to-these-days/

Is has been 4 months since AmplifyGR made the announcement that they canceled all of the previously scheduled meetings with the community on their development plans for the Boston Square and Cottage Grove neighborhoods.

AmplifyGR staff person Willie Patterson, made a video announcement that was posted on October 12. In that message, AmplifyGR acknowledges that the community has raised several concerns about the process AmplifyGR was engaged in, which led to the cancelation of the meetings. Of the three community Forums that AmplifyGR did host, there was **significant pushback from the community and those in attendance**.

However, AmplifyGR is merely adjusting their plans for the re-development of parts of southeast Grand Rapids. In an **AmplifyGR blog post from August 22**, they state, "***Still, those of us on the front lines agree: If going slower is the price of getting this right… of NOT repeating the mistakes of the past… it's worth it. You're worth it. Our community is worth it. And our commitment and passion to achieving the above priorities has never been greater."***

The above statement is a clear indication that AmplifyGR plans to move forward with their development projects, they just want to get more feedback from the community. In fact, it seems as though, based on some of their Facebook posts, that the DeVos-created entity is meeting with people, just in a less public fashion. In other words, AmplifyGR is moving forward with their development plans for southeast Grand Rapids, outside of the public arena, where they have been challenged on their lack of transparency and intent from the very start. AmplifyGR wants to avoid the kind of pushback they have been experiencing, especially when the community has a chance to speak their mind in a public forum and even interrupt the organization's plans, as we saw during the **last public meeting AmplifyGR held in September**.

I have also looked at the Southtown Corridor Improvement District minutes over the past six months and there is no new evidence that AmplifyGR has been either attending or having input on those meetings. I looked at those minutes, because it was at **minutes from January of 2017** that I first learned of the AmplifyGR plans to re-develop parts of southeast Grand Rapids.

In addition, I have looked through the GR Planning Commission documents and meeting minutes and have found no evidence of AmplifyGR activities there.

So, what has the DeVos-created entity, AmplifyGR, been up to is recent months? The last blog post on their website is from August of 2017. However, their Facebook page has been posting information since the announcement of the public meeting cancellations.

AmplifyGR hosted a Coffee with the Cops function, has promoted community turkey give away during the holidays, job fairs and they have posted several announcements about other DeVos Family funded projects, such as Spring GR and the DeVos created entity Start Garden. In fact, Start Garden's 100 Ideas entrepreneurial project is the now the cover page for AmplifyGR. DeVos money looking out for DeVos money.



DeVos money looking out for DeVos money.

Does Doug DeVos and the West Michigan Policy Forum really want to change the prison system in Michigan?

https://griid.org/2018/03/14/does-doug-devos-and-the-west-michigan-policy-forum-really-want-to-change-the-prison-system-in-michigan/

We have been monitoring the West Michigan Policy Reform (WMPF) group, ever since it came into being in 2008.

This **group is made up of the West Michigan power structure**, like the DeVos family, Peter Seechia, John Kennedy, Michael Jandernoa and other CEOs and politicians that have been supporting and lobbying on state policies since they were founded in 2008.

The West Michigan Policy Reform has already been instrumental in pushing through state policy that benefits businesses on taxes, they were a force in making Michigan a Right to Work state, pushing for education policies that expand Charter Schools and last year got legislation passed to eliminate traditional public sector employees and public teacher pensions.

Now the group is taking on what they refer to as Criminal Justice Reform.

Over the past several weeks, the West Michigan Policy Forum has been posting pieces on **their Facebook page,** pushing what they name as criminal justice reform, with posts about recidivism in Michigan's prison population, juvenile justice and a letter from Doug DeVos on behalf of the of the WMPF.

DeVos wrote his letter that was published in the **Grand Rapids Grand Rapids Business Journal on March 9**. DeVos begins his "letter" by stating:

More than a decade ago, law enforcement leaders supported smart criminal justice reform because they recognized that over-incarceration would not make Michigan safer. Despite these improvements, Michigan still incarcerates more people, keeps inmates longer and spends significantly more money on corrections than our neighboring Midwest states. One out of every five taxpayer dollars goes toward corrections — a proportion of Michigan's general fund budget nearly twice that of the next highest spending state.

So, does this mean that Doug DeVos and the West Michigan Policy Forum are now interesting in dismantling mass incarceration? Hardly.

What DeVos goes on to say in his letter, is to promote specific legislation by Republican Representatives **Klint Kesto** and **Hank Vaupel**. DeVos never identifies this legislation, which is **House Bill 5234**. This legislation does provide county sheriff's with the ability to provide medical treatment to inmates who are elderly or struggling with mental health issues.

This sounds like a humane thing to do, but why would the West Michigan Policy Forum being championing it? Again, Doug DeVos states:

While there has been discussion of business support of reform to fill jobs, the need for reform is much bigger than any economic impact. To ensure safety, we must keep those who need to be restrained in prison. However, more than 80 percent of Michigan inmates, or more than 32,000 of the current prison population, will be released and re-enter our local communities. For those who have broken the law and have faced appropriate accountability, we have a moral responsibility to create real opportunity for them. We should help them find confidence, meaningful work to support themselves and their families, rebuild lives and contribute to the well-being of our community.

Again, this sounds like a very humane approach, but something seems missing. I believe that this is really about the West Michigan Policy Forum wanting to have access to laborers, as DeVos admits in the above statement. In addition, the message of criminal justice reform also plays well with liberal and progressives.

However, this seemingly liberal legislative push by the West Michigan Policy Forum is a reform that will benefit business interests, plus it is simply a reform. In other words, there is no indication that the WMPF is now going to take on the issue of mass incarceration by dismantling it.

The West Michigan Policy Forum is NOT going to be advocating for the end of police surveillance of the black and latinx communities, they are NOT going to be calling for an end to bail money, they are NOT going to be calling for the end of the privatization of prisons and prison services, they are NOT going to be calling for the end of criminal history to determine eligibility for housing, education, licenses, voting, loans, employment, and other services and needs, they are NOT going to be calling for an end to ICE raids, they are NOT calling for changes in the condition of jails, prisons, juvenile

detention facilities or immigration detention and they are NOT going to be calling for the end of capital punishment.

These ARE the kind of actions that groups like the **Movement for Black Lives are calling for** across the country, along with other black organizations and immigrant-led movements. This is the kind of platform we need to support and to embrace, NOT the weak, reformist legislation that the West Michigan Policy Forum is pushing.

Will Capitalism Save communities of color? Start Garden and the deception of wealth creation

https://griid.org/2019/02/21/will-capitalism-save-communities-of-color-start-garden-and-the-deception-of-wealth-creation/

"A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand, we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."

Martin Luther King Jr. – from his Beyond Vietnam speech – April 4, 1967

Capitalism, and its current form of Neoliberal Capitalism, is very seductive. It offers promises of personal wealth and freedom from poverty, yet too often it has failed people miserably, especially in communities of color. However, despite this well documented history, such as in Manning Marable's important scholarly work, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America,* members of the capitalist class continue to promote "economic opportunities" for communities of color.

Take the example of Start Garden, their recent comments in the business press and the beginning of their second straight year of the 100 Ideas project. In a **recent article from MiBiz**, Co-Director of Start Garden, Paul Moore said:

"***What the data is pointing to is we're going to need to do a better job at creating on-ramps for women and minorities, and if we're not doing that with any intentionality, there's no reason we should expect to see anything change***."

What Moore and Start Garden believes is that if you can just offer more women and people from communities of color business opportunities, then they will have the same opportunities that men and white people have had. But this is a lie and has been so, since capitalism is by its very nature predatory and benefits only a small sector of the population. Charlene Caruthers, in her book Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements, makes this observation:

Capitalism with Black in front of it won't liberate our people. Capitalism is by definition tied to the subjugation of African-descended people. Our collective liberation will not come from models that rely on individual or small group wealth building.

However, this is exactly what Start Garden is doing – attempting to convince some people from communities of color that they can make it individually or create small pockets of wealth. And in many ways it makes sense. To criticize people of color for wanting to build wealth through capitalist means is just another way to practice white supremacy. What I am interested in doing is to challenge entities like Start Garden, which are funded by members of the billionaire class (the DeVos family), and the larger community about the very nature of these types of neoliberal capitalist projects.

Start Garden's 100 Ideas project is a great example of how we can all be fooled into thinking about wealth and economics. They invite people to submit ideas and for that they will pay you just to submit an idea. However, if there are ideas that they really like, they will reward you with more money. However, as always with venture capitalists, the get to keep some of the profits you make, especially if your new business project does well.

But here is the thing. Start Garden was made possible by DeVos money, which as we know was built on the Amway pyramid scheme. The DeVos family became billionaires by convincing people that they could get rich by selling their products. It works, for a small percentage of people. There are a few who have benefited from this pyramid scheme, but most people are unable to live well, because that is the nature of capitalism…….the few benefit at the expense of the majority.

On top of the fact that DeVos wealth was created through a pyramid scheme, they have also spent decades and millions of dollars to support the Republican agenda of attacking workers, undermining unions, making Michigan a Right to Work state and pushing policies that transfers public money into the private sector.

This is all context. Then, Start Garden steps in and says, we want to help you potentially funding your ideas. The problem with the is that the DeVos family has spent decades promoting policies that have negatively impacted communities of color and now they want to offer "opportunities." On top of all of that, Start Garden takes no risk, while presenting themselves as providing opportunities, whereby they can profit off of the creative imagination and labor of other people.

One additional fallacy about the lie of Start Garden's entrepreneurial project and its attempt to create opportunities for people of color is that no where in their vision or philosophy do they acknowledge the history of how white supremacy and structural racism have devastated communities of color, nor do they advocate this the system of white supremacy should be dismantled.

If we look at the Black Radical tradition, we can see that there is a fundamentally different approach to how to work for collective liberation. Zoe Samudzi and William

Anderson, in the powerful book, As Black As Resistance: Finding the Conditions for Liberation, make this observation:

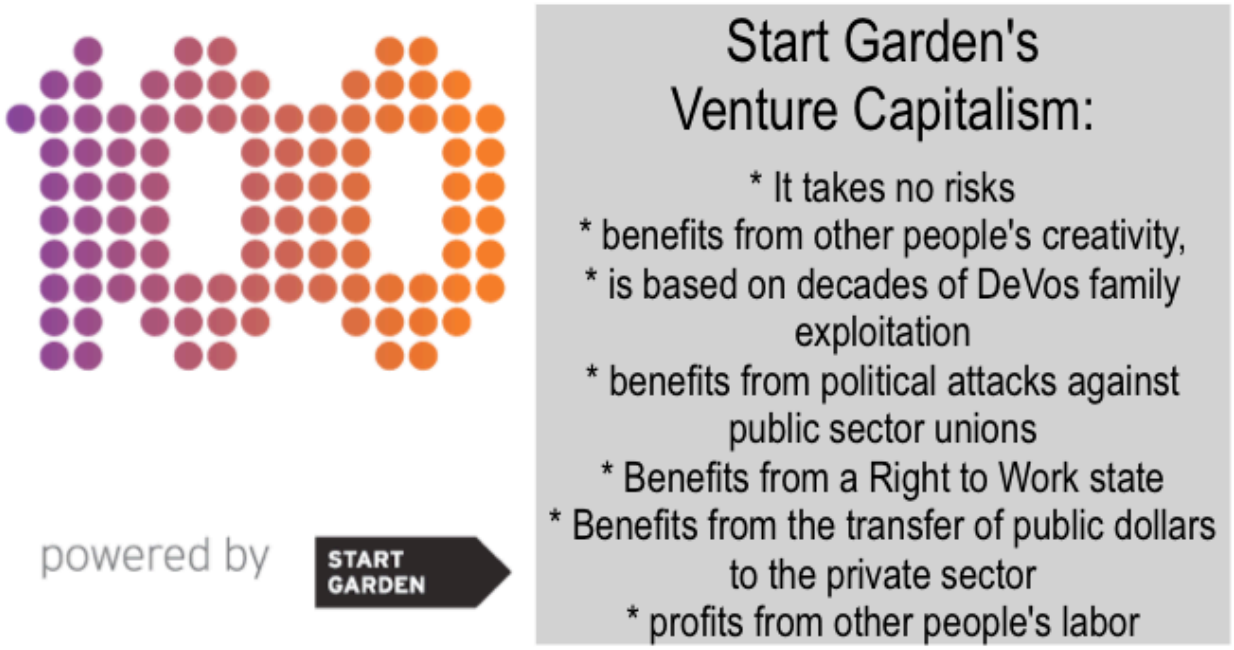
Our movements and our work need to avoid neoliberal enticements to corporatize or commoditize or otherwise become caught in the gears of capitalist accommodationism.

Towards the end of his life, Malcolm X also understood that capitalism could never be a solution to the liberation of his people. Malcolm said, "*Most of the countries that were colonial powers were capitalist countries and the last bulwark of capitalism today is America and it's impossible for a white person today to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism. You can't have capitalism without racism*."

Malcolm X inspired black people to form the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. The Black Panther's, in their creation of the **10 Point Program** identified capitalism as one of the problems. In point #3 they state:

WE WANT AN END TO THE ROBBERY BY THE CAPITALISTS OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES. *We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of our fifty million Black people. Therefore, we feel this is a modest demand that we make.*

There is a certain insidiousness about what Start Garden is promoting and their deliberate targeting of communities of color. Whatever people from those communities chose to do with what the Start Garden's of the world are offering is their choice, but for those of us who are white and claim to be progressive or in favor of dismantling the system of white supremacy, we should not be seduced by what the DeVos-funded Start Garden project is offering.



Grand Rapids Foundation contributions for 2017: The Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2019/03/11/grand-rapids-foundation-contributions-for-2017-the-richard-helen-devos-foundation/

Foundations have to submit 990 statements annually, in order to avoid scrutiny from the federal government. Because of the paperwork that is involved and the documentation that recipients of foundation money must submit, the government provides two years for foundation 990 reporting. This means that foundations are only now submitting their 990 forms from 2017.

Over the next several weeks, as foundations make their 2017 990s available, I will be providing a summary and analysis of foundation giving for 2017 from members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure. We begin with the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation.

As we have **documented in the past**, the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation is one of the largest in the area. According to Guidestar.org, the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation reported Gross Receipts at $48,711,749 and Assets at $14,017,852. To see the full 990 file for 2017, go to this link **https://griid.files.wordpress.com/2019/03/richard-helen-devos-foundation-2017.pdf**.

990 documents have payments to entities that occur during the year and a separate section for future payments. We will include the total from both as it applies.

The largest recipients of contributions from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation tend to fall into the category of educational institutions.

Aquinas College $3,000,000
Calvin College $1,020,000
Davenport University $1,525,000
Grand Rapids Christian Schools $500,000
Grand Valley State University $5,040,000
King's College $8,400,000
Kuyper College $2,000,000
Lee University $1,900,000
Michigan State University $2,600,000
Potter's House $325,000
Rehoboth Christian School Association $1,000,000
South Christian High School $1,500,000
Western Theological Seminary $1,450,000
Zuni Christian School Mission $1,050,000

This level of contributions to schools serves two purposes. First, it underscores the value that the DeVos Family puts on private religious education, specifically religious education that embraces a similar worldview of the DeVos Family. Second, in the instances where they contribute to public schools, here the seek to have influence on the policies of those schools, such as GVSU, which we have documented. **https://griid.org/2018/09/13/gvsu-canonizes-rich-devos-but-some-students-push-back/**

The next large category that the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation contributed were churches or organizations that identify as Christian. We only include those which are $50,000 or more for 2017.

Alliance for Children Everywhere $450,000
Back to God Ministries International $50,000
Bethany Christian Services $500,000
Central Presbyterian Church $500,000
Christian Leaders NFP $300,000
Christian Reformed Church in North America $300,000
Christian Schools International $50,000
David's House Ministries $500,000
DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative $100,000
Evangelism Explosion III International Inc. $250,000
First Christian Reformed Church $50,000
Focus on the Family $50,000
Guiding Light Ministries $75,000
Holland Home $60,000
Holland Senior Citizen Center Inc. $500,000
Hope Network $100,000
ICCF $75,000
International AID Inc. $95,000

Keystone Community Church $300,000
LaGrave Avenue CRC $1,100,000
Luis Palau Association $670,000
Madison Square CRC $430,000
Mel Trotter Ministries $50,000
Nueva Esperanza $50,000
Partners Worldwide $1,500,000
Pillar Church $1,100,000
Pine Rest $1,875,000
Pregnancy Resource Center $50,000
Prison Fellowship Ministries $600,000
Right to Life of Michigan $150,000
The General Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in America $100,000
Words of Hope Inc. $50,000
World Renew $625,000
Youth for Christ USA Inc. $50,000

Funding to these faith-based entities clearly fits into the DeVos agenda, since they are also Christians, particularly Christians that do not threaten systems of power and fall on the conservative side of Christianity.

A third category that the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation has contributed to would be the Think Tank/political advocacy sector. Again, we only include those who received $50,000 of more.

Acton Institute $125,000
Alliance Defending Freedom $50,000
American Enterprise Institute $150,000
Heritage Foundation $250,000
Mackinac Center $115,000
National Constitution Center $2,050,000
National Review Institute $75,000

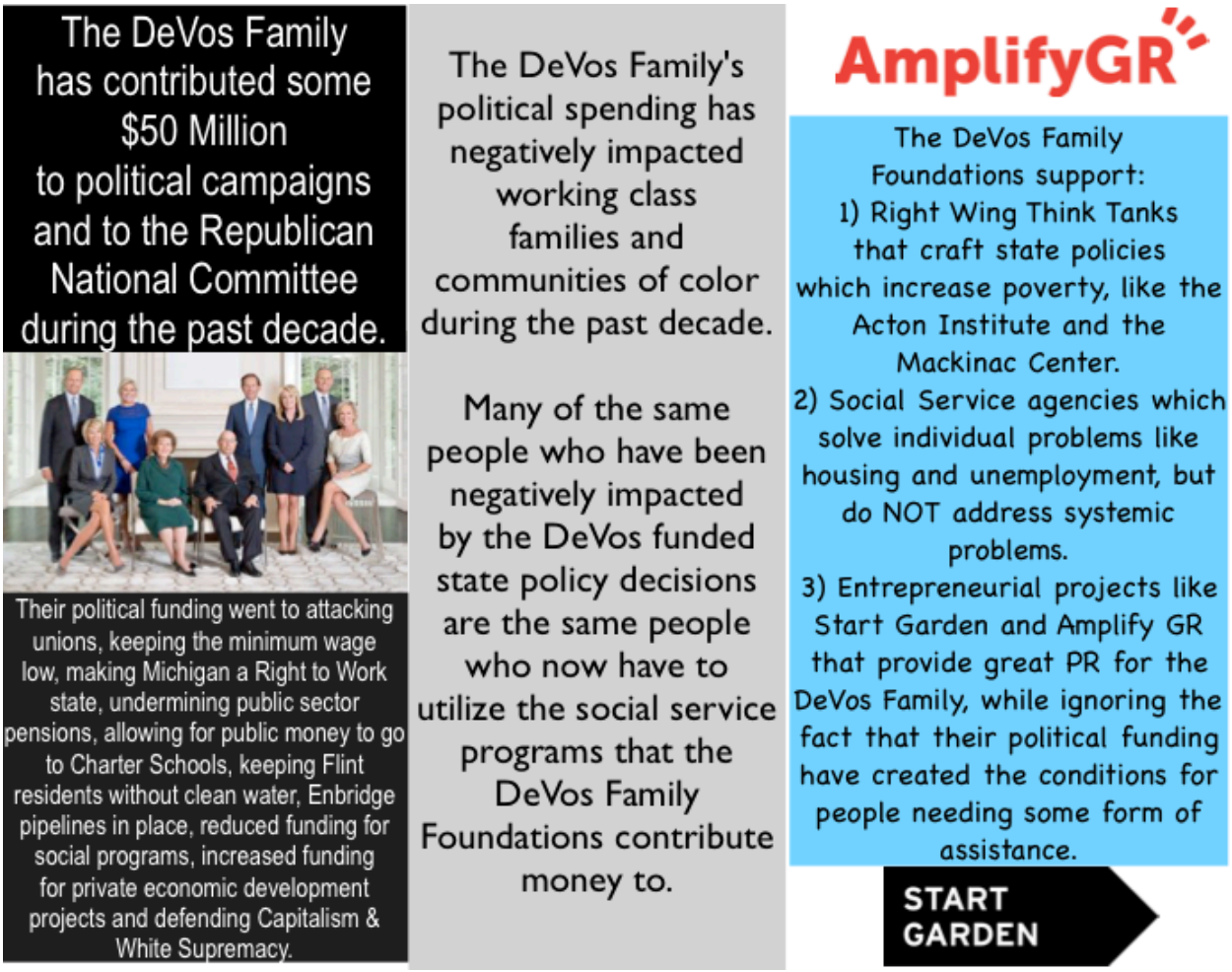
These Think Tanks and advocacy groups play a vital role in promoting the Right Wing political agenda that the DeVos family has been promoting for the past 5 decades. These groups collectively support a neo-liberal economic agenda, privatization of public services, the privatization of education, an attack on unions and worker benefits/ pensions, the subsidization of the business class and US interventionist and imperialist policies.

In addition, the Think Tank/Advocacy groups work compliments the direct political funding that the DeVos family gives to state and federal candidates, **such as the $11.3 million they gave in the last election cycle**. In fact, the Think Tank/Advocacy groups often write the policy positions that the politicians will introduce, such as the Right to Work policy that the Mackinac Center crafted, which was pushed by DeVos funded state policy makers.

A fourth group that the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation made contributions to were social service agencies, mostly in West Michigan. The benefit of providing groups like the Baxter Community Center with funding is that it ends up making social problems the fault of individuals and not structural injustice. Indeed, these social service agencies do not advocate for policy change or structural transformation, rather they provide assistance to individuals and families who are “in need.”

A fifth and final category of groups receiving funding from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation are cultural groups like the Grand Rapids Art Museum, the St. Cecilia Music Society and ArtPrize. Contributing to to these groups provides great PR value, thus suppressing or re-directing any criticism of the overtly far right policy objectives of the DeVos Family.

We feel that is is vital to scrutinize the contributions from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation and to see them as a form of strategic funding for the short and long-time objectives the family has been promoting for decades.



The Jerry & Marcia Tubergen Foundation: The DeVos Family operative you may not have heard about
https://griid.org/2019/04/24/the-jerry-marcia-tubergen-foundation-the-devos-family-operative-you-may-not-have-heard-about/

The Jerry & Marcia Tubergen Foundation is not a very large foundation, with just under $3 million in contributions since the foundation began.

Jerry and his wife Marcia primarily contribute funds to christian organizations and private christian schools. Some of the organizations they contribute to are: the Acton Institute, Chico Daniels Ministries, Mel Trotter Ministries, the Pregnancy Resource Center and Right to Life Michigan.

The private christian schools that receive money from the Jerry & Marcia Tubergen Foundation are: Calvin College, Church Planter's Training International, Cornerstone University, Northpointe Christian Schools and Potters House.

Almost all of these groups are based in West Michigan, but there are a few entities that are not based in the area that receive the largest sums from this foundation. For the most recent 990 documents between 2014 – 2016, the Jerry & Marcia Tubergen Foundation gave Cure International over $1 million per year. Not surprising, **Jerry Tubergen sits on the board of Cure International**, which is a christian ministry that provides health services for people living in countries in the Global South. The other non-local entity that receives a larger sum of funds from the Tubergen Foundation is the **Museum of the Bible Inc**, which receives about $100,000 annually.

There is nothing terribly unusual for the Jerry & Marcia Tubergen Foundation's contribution to mostly christian entities. After all, Jerry Tubergen is the CEO of one of the largest components of the DeVos empire, the RDV Corporation.

In addition to being the CEO of RDV Corporation, Jerry Tubergen is listed as a trustee for every DeVos family foundation, according to the 990 reports. Thus Jerry Tubergen is a trustee of the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, the Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation and the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation.

There isn't a great deal of information about Jerry Tubergen online, but it is interesting that he is a trustee for every DeVos family foundation, along with being the CEO of RDV Corporation. In addition, all of the DeVos family foundations and RDV Corporation have the same address, which is 126 Ottawa Ave. NW, in downtown Grand Rapids.

In 2015, the DeVos Family created their own investment firm, which is called Ottawa Private Capital LLC, also run by Jerry Tubergen and is located at 126 Ottawa Avenue NW, in downtown Grand Rapids.

In early 2017, after Betsy DeVos was in the process of becoming the US Secretary of Education, she had to disclose documents of every group she was involved with and a listing of all the businesses she had investments in. This was a rare look into the details

of the investments that the DeVos family has and it are these investments that Jerry Tubergen manages on behalf of the DeVos family in his role as head of Ottawa Private Capital LLC. You can read the **pages and pages of investments the DeVos family has**, based on the documents that Betsy DeVos was forced to submit before becoming the US Secretary of Education.

Jerry Tubergen is a name we rarely see, yet he is one of the most trusted confidants of the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. It's time we start to pay more attention to this man and what role he plays in the Grand Rapids Power Structure.



Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation: funding conservative think tanks, the religious right, neoliberal capitalist groups and the pro-Charter School movement
https://griid.org/2019/05/13/dick-betsy-devos-foundation-funding-conservative-think-tanks-the-religious-right-neoliberal-capitalist-groups-and-the-pro-charter-school-movement/

Nearly three weeks ago, we posted an **article about the Jerry & Marcia Tubergen Foundation**. Jerry Tubergen is the CEO of RDV Corp, sits on the board of directors of

every DeVos family foundation and essentially manages all of the family investments through Ottawa Private Capital LLC.

Today we want to look at the last three years of the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation, with the three most recent 990 documents the foundation has submitted being 2015, 2016 & 2017. We also want to see if there has been any major changes, since Betsy DeVos became the Secretary of Education in early 2017.

While there are dozens of entities that received funding from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation between 2015 – 2017, there are a few causes that received larger sums of money. The major groupings to receive substantial funds from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation were conservative think tanks, pro-Charter School/private education groups, christian entities and pro-capitalist/entrepreneurial groups. These four sectors demonstrate Dick & Betsy DeVos' commitment to radically altering the education landscape in the US, plus their deep ideological commitment to the religious right and neoliberal capitalism.

Think Tanks push a far right neoliberal agenda

The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has always supported conservative think tanks, since these organizations develop neoliberal platforms and then push neoliberal policy at the state and federal level.

At the federal level, the think tank that has consistently received the most money from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation is the **American Enterprise Institute** (AEI). In 2015, AEI received $1,750,000 from Dick & Betsy, $750,000 in 2016 and $1,000,000 in 2017.

At the State level, there are two main think tanks that have received support from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation. First, is the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**. This neoliberal think tank received $75,000 in 2015 and $900,000 in 2017. Then there is the **Acton Institute**, based in Grand Rapids. The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributed $305,000 in 2016 to the Acton Institute and $150,000 in 2017.

Pro-Charter School/Education Privatization groups

A second major area the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has contributed to is an area that they have been deeply committed to since the Reagan years. One group is the **Alliance for School Choice**, which received $100,000 in 2015, $290,000 in 2016 and $1,000,000 in 2017.

Another group fighting for Charter Schools and the privatization of education is the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), which Betsy DeVos founded. Dick & Betsy gave GLEP $56,000 in 2015, $200,000 in 2016 and $100,000 in 2017.

A third group in this sector is a group called Partnership for Education Justice. The Partnership is essentially an organization dedicated to providing legal defense and legal support to families and groups within the public school system that wants to bring

religion into school or push Charter School-like agendas within public schools. The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributed $400,000 to this group in 2015.

Conservative Christian organizations

The DeVos family has a long history of financially backing the religious right, specifically the Christian Right. In Grand Rapids, some of the main groups they have contributed to are Potters House School, where the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation gave $200,000 in 2015, $1,200,000 in 2016 and $200,250 in 2017.

The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation also contributed money to the Grand Rapids Christian Schools, giving $300,000 in 2015, $350,000 in 2016 and $300,000 in 2017. Another conservative Christian entity the DeVos family loves is the Willow Creek Association. In 2015, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributed $600,000, in 2016 another $600,000 and in 2017, just $500. The reason for the major drop in funding was the news about Willow Creek founder being caught in a sex scandal.

Giving Money to Make Money

The last major sector that the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has contributed to is the neoliberal capitalist entrepreneurial groups. These are organizations that invest money into start up companies or projects that not only get them great PR, but allows for them to profit off of these new start ups.

In 2015, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributed $1,875,000 into the **Xprize Foundation**, along with an additional $3,750,000 in 2016. Then there is the Grand Action Foundation, which received $50,000 in 2016 and $2,550,500 in 2017. Lastly, there is the group E-merge (which is now part of Start Garden – founded by Dick & Betsy's son Rick), which received $200,000 in 2016 and another $150,000 in 2017.

Like the other DeVos family foundation, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation gives a great deal of money to organization that promote right wing and neoliberal capitalist policies that hurt working class families and communities of color. Many of the same people who are negatively impacted by these negative policies often seek out the charity services of organizations that the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributes to (although in smaller contributions), without being aware of the fact that the DeVos Foundation funding was part of the root cause of their suffering.

Herein lies the beauty of foundations. The rich members of the capitalist class get to place millions of dollars into tax-free entities called foundations and then they are allowed to contribute to organizations which promotes class warfare to benefit themselves.

The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation: directing the future of southeast Grand Rapids and infiltrating the Grand Rapids Public Schools

https://griid.org/2019/06/23/the-doug-maria-devos-foundation-directing-the-future-of-southeast-grand-rapids-and-infiltrating-the-grand-rapids-public-schools/

Over the past few months we have been posting articles about the various DeVos Family Foundations, including the **Richard & Helen DeVos**, **Dick & Betsy DeVos** and the foundation run by the main financial advisor to the DeVos family, **Jerry Tubergen**.

Today, we want to examine the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, since we recently obtained their 2017 foundation 990 financials. We will specifically be looking at 2015 – 2017, what is similar to the other DeVos foundations and what is different or unique about the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation.

Capitalism, Conservative Politics and Christianity

Based on the 2015 – 2017 990 documents for the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, there are clear and consistent funding choices that are aligned with other DeVos family foundations.

The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation has provided significant funding to several entities that promote a neoliberal brand of capitalism, such as the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**, which received $1 million during the three years we looked at. However, the Mackinac Center doesn't just promote neoliberal capitalism, they also craft public policy that is used by lawmakers and wealthy political donors like Doug & Maria DeVos, that push their ideological interests.

At the national level, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation contributed $4.5 million to the **American Enterprise Institute** (AEI), which does what the Mackinac Center does in Michigan, only AEI crafts and influences public policy in Washington, DC.

Other entities that the Doug & Maria Foundation substantially support at the national level are the National Constitution Center ($6 million), Wake Forest University ($13 million) and the Purdue Research Foundation ($10 million).

The National Constitution Center promotes and celebrates a more conservative view of US history, which is why **Doug DeVos is Chairman of the Executive Committee for the Board of Trustees**.

Wake Forest University embraces and promotes conservative politics, particularly with education policy. The Wake Forest Review wrote a story in early 2017, which ardently defending the Trump administration's choice for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. The article was headlined, ***Betsy DeVos is a Hope for School Choice***. The article cites several neoliberal education organizations and claims that Betsy DeVos is committed to making sure that low-income students have access to quality education. Such a claim is erroneous and is not supported with actual data.

The Purdue Research Foundation (PRF) receives so much money from the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation because one of the areas of concentration of the PRF is competition and entrepreneurship. According to the PRF site, *Near the University's main campus is PRF's flagship incubator,* ***Purdue Research Park*** *(PRP), which is the largest university-affiliated business incubation complex in the country.* **https://prf.org/about/areas-concentration.html** This is exactly the kind of projects that the DeVos family loves to support, since they believe that everyone should be an entrepreneur.

Different & Unique

What makes the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation somewhat different and unique from the other DeVos foundations, are their creation/funding of the group Amplify GR and the role that the foundation plays in the Grand Rapids Public Schools.

We have written numerous stories about Amplify GR, but what makes this DeVos-funded project so unique is that it seeks to fulfill what LINC could not for the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation.

Someone from LINC told me in 2017, that the substantial funding they were receiving from the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation was not fulfilling the goals of the DeVos agenda fast enough. Creating Amplify GR was a way to directly influence an area of the city that combined the core goals of the DeVos family, such as creating more businesses, promoting entrepreneurism and pushing a neoliberal educational model. Now, Amplify GR does provide some basic services that are beneficial to residents in southeast part of Grand Rapids, but they do it in such a way as to avoid having to deal with the history of systemic racism or exploitation that has plagued the area for decades. In addition, the **Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation fund other social services in the southeast part of GR**, which helps to downplay the role that the DeVos Family political funding has played in creating poverty and undermining civil rights.

In addition, the DeVos family and Amplify GR has partnered with ICCF by funding the purchase of 177 homes throughout the city, homes that were previously gobbled up by investment companies during the economic crash of 2007 – 2008. **We wrote about that purchase of 177 homes in late 2017** and asked how much money the DeVos family gave ICCF for those purchases. ICCF never responded to our request, but now that we have the 990s of several of the DeVos family foundations, we know that at least four of the family foundations each contributed $1,250,000 to ICCF, totaling $5 million. Providing $5 million to the largest affordable housing organization in Grand Rapids raises all kinds of questions, but it also means that it buys a great deal of silence, since ICCF would never dare to question or publicly oppose the racist and oppressive political machinations of the DeVos family, **like the campaign contributions to an outwardly racist Senator from Mississippi**.

A second unique endeavor of the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation has been the direct and indirect funding they have provided to the Grand Rapids Public Schools. People would expect the DeVos family to fund Christian Schools, which they do, at both the K-12 and college levels, but funding public education might seem contrary to the casual observer. However, their funding of public schools is very strategic and calculating.

According to their 990s between 2015 – 2017, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation provided **$1,328,513** directly to the Grand Rapids Public Schools. However, there are several other major contributions to education-related entities within Grand Rapids, that are either directly connected to the GRPS or collaborates with the GRPS. These organizations are (followed by the contribution amount from the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation):

Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation $1,122,800

Believe 2 Become $3,534,050

First Steps Kent $410,000

K-Connect $600,000

Kent Services Network $107,000

Leading Educators Inc. $2,145,000

Now, not only has the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation contributed nearly $10 million to the GRPS and programs that work with the GRPS, the DeVos family also has direct involvement in the decision making of the entities listed above.

> Maria DeVos sit on the **Board of Directors of the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation**.
> Believe 2 Become was created by the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation.
> Doug DeVos sits on the **Commission of First Steps Kent**.
> The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation is part of the **pre-natal to 3rd grade working group and the Equity & Inclusion working group of K-Connect**. In addition, a member of the DeVos Family Foundation is on the Board of Trustees.
> Along with several other major conservative foundations, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation was able to get the group Leading Educators Inc. to make Grand Rapids one of their regions of influence. In fact, this is what **Leading Educators Inc. says about Grand Rapids**:

*Thanks to a generous grant from the **Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation**, Leading Educators expanded to Greater Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the first cohort of principals and teacher leaders began training in the summer of 2017. Our approach is the backbone of an ambitious strategy to significantly increase academic achievement among economically-disadvantaged young people who attend the nearly 120 district, charter, and religious schools in the Greater Grand Rapids urban area.*

For anyone concerned about the future of public education in the Grand Rapids area, they need to pay attention to the deeply entrenched role that the Doug & Maria Foundation and the DeVos family in general, plays in promoting a neoliberal education model, which ultimately undermines the traditional values of public education.

Foundation Watch: Cheri DeVos and the CDV5 Foundation

https://griid.org/2019/08/30/foundation-watch-cheri-devos-and-the-cdv5-foundation/

The Cheri DeVos Foundation, also known as the CVD5 Foundation, is probably the least known of the DeVos family foundations. This is not surprising, as Cheri DeVos is not in the news like her other siblings, Dick, Doug and Dan. However, the lack of media attention, doesn't mean that Cheri DeVos doesn't have the same ideological commitments as the rest of the family.

Besides being born into the DeVos family wealth, Cheri DeVos owns numerous brands throughout the area. She owns CDV5 Property Management, that new restaurant on the corner of Wealthy & Fuller – Hancock, MSA Fieldhouse, MSA Sport Spot, MSA Woodland, Ottawa Beach General Store and Ada Village General Store. For more details on the various brands owned by Cheri DeVos, click **here**.

On the **CDV5 Foundation website**, it says, "*We partner with select causes and organizations that are closely aligned with our passions*." So lets see what the foundation's passions are that they contribute large sums of money to and what that means.

We looked at the three most recent years (2015 – 2017) of 990 documents for the CDV Foundation, as provided by the site Guidestar. According to Guidestar, this foundation has $61.5 million in assets. Some of the larger contributions from the CDV5 Foundation went to similar areas or entities as the other DeVos foundation supported.

(Public Education)

Wake Forest $7,000,000
Michigan State University $1,550,000
Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation $770,000

(Private Education)

Hope College $4,650,000
Grand Rapids Christian School Association $2,875,000
Ada Christian School Society $1,260,000
Rehoboth Christian School Association $650,000
Potters House $650,000

ICCF $1,515,000 (all in 2017)
Grand Rapids Whitewater Inc. $1,275,000
Kids Food Basket $1,150,000
Bethany Christian Services $685,000
Mackinac Center for Public Policy $300,000

AmplifyGR $160,417

Most of these contributions from the CDV5 Foundation are consistent with contributions from the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation**, the **Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation** and the **Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation**.

Like the other DeVos foundations, the CDV5 Foundation made significant contributions to private Christian schools, which certainly fits within the family's ideological framework. What may not seem so predictable is the funding that the CDV5 Foundation has provides in recent years to the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation ($770,000), which is a funding arm of the Grand Rapids Public Schools.

Providing funding to the Grand Rapids Public Schools may seem to fall outside of the ideological commitments of the DeVos family, but that is because much of the public has been unaware of the DeVos families efforts to transform the GRPS. As we noted in our **recent post on the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation**, that foundation contributed $1,122,800 to the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation, along with the fact that Maria DeVos sits on the board of that foundation.

Another significant common recipient of DeVos foundation money has been the Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF). Above we noted that the CDV5 Foundation contributed $1,515,000 to ICCF in 2017, **which is the same year that other DeVos foundations contributed over $1 million each**, along with other families in the Grand Rapids Power Structure. These contributions to ICCF coincided with the their announced partnership with AmplifyGR.

Other notable contributions from the CDV5 Foundation, as listed above, shows that Cheri DeVos also has support right wing think tanks like the Mackinac Center and has contributed to charity groups like Kids Food Basket, which do not have a commitment to ending the causes of hunger or poverty. Like the other DeVos family foundations, the CDV5 Foundation contributes to numerous charity-based entities because it is great PR for the family and because they know that these charity-based groups will not challenge or question the role that the DeVos families plays in creating poverty and increasing the wealth gap in Michigan.

FOIA document shows that the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation paid $243,000 for the GRPS to get services from businesses that are part of the war on Public Education in 2017

https://griid.org/2019/11/13/foia-document-shows-that-the-doug-maria-devos-foundation-paid-243000-for-the-grps-to-get-services-from-businesses-that-are-part-of-the-war-on-public-education-in-2017/

Recently, the group Grand Rapids for Education Justice, submitted a Freedom of Information Act request with the Grand Rapids Public Schools to get information on several issues.

One issue that the GREJ was interested in was funding, specifically funding that comes from either the business community or area foundations. You can see the entire document at **this link**.

However, there was one example that stood out in this FOIA'd document. The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation contributed $243,000 to pay for the services of three separate entities that do "research." The three organization, with the amount they received are: Cambridge Education $80,000, Basis Policy Research $90,000 and Tripod Surveys $72,150. In addition, the remaining $850 could be used by the GRPS at their discretion.

Cambridge Education

According to a **2011 MLive article**, "Cambridge is affiliated with **Mott MacDonald**, an employee-owned management, engineering and development consultancy serving the public and private sector around the world based in the United Kingdom."

This is not the first time that the DeVos family has paid for Cambridge Education to come to Grand Rapids and influence what happens at the GRPS. In an **article from Jack Prince**, posted on this site inJune of 2018, Prince writes:

Cambridge was sent to GRPS as a gift from the DeVos' in April of 2012. As a result of a private paid business led audit of GRPS, Cambridge Education revealed that the district needed to restructure. In August 2012, the audit done by Cambridge Education revealed the district needed to restructure to deliver a better education to students reflecting current student population and to save money. That December the school board approved superintendent Neal's district restructure known as the transformation plan. It should be noted that the origin of this so called restructure plan was a private for-profit company and not the result of some personal educational philosophy and awareness of superintendent Neal. Somehow this plan became her plan when the name was changed to the transformation plan. Almost immediately the newly named plan garnered the support of local conservative politicians. "State Rep. Lisa Posthumus Lyons R Alto and Sen Dave Hildenbrand R-Lowell Twp. have written letters supporting the Grand Rapids superintendent and school board's planned major overhaul of the district to improve achievement and finances."

The FOIA document doesn't indicate what exactly Cambridge Education was hired to do in 2017, but based on the previous work they did, they played a major role in restructuring the GRPS and creating what the GREJ has identified as a two-tiered school system.

Basis Policy Research

We have a better idea of what Basis Policy Research did with the $90,000 they received from the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation to provide a service for the Grand Rapids Public Schools. According the **Basis Policy Research website**, it states:

Adults without a high school diploma are more likely to face limited employment opportunities and a lifetime of poverty. Educators are looking for ways to identify

students who are at risk of dropping out and match them with interventions that can get them back on track. Grand Rapids Public Schools recently partnered with Basis to develop a customized, student-level early warning system that uses dropout risk factors to predict the likelihood that a student will fail to graduate: the Opportunity Index.

*Our partnership with Grand Rapids Public Schools resulted in the **Opportunity Index**, which tracks both a student's progress towards graduating on time as well as their likelihood of being ready for success after high school (often called "college and career readiness"). It focuses on early warning indicators of a student's progress towards these dual goals using scorecards that pinpoint each student's progress from kindergarten through high school. Educators and parents are using this tool to identify students for support and to be able to target resources so that more students graduate on time and prepared for success. In an extension of this work, we also partnered with the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation to facilitate conversations around these scorecards among educators, parents, and students.*

When you go to click on the Opportunity Index link, it takes you to the DeVos-funded group **Believe 2 Become**. However, that link says, WE COULDN'T FIND THAT PAGE.

In addition, Basis Policy Research has three offices around the country and one of them is in Grand Rapids, specifically at 1059 Wealthy SE, Grand Rapids. I have called their Grand Rapids office on several occasions in the past week and the phone just rings, without going to voicemail. What kind of a business doesn't provide people with an opportunity to leave a message? I also sent them an e-mail more than 2 weeks ago and still have not received a response.

One of the main researchers with Basis Policy Research is David Stuit, who is originally from Grand Rapids. Besides working for Basis Policy Research, Stuit seems to be rather connected to the Charter School industry. **Stuit has a page on the website of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**, an organization which has received millions from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation, both of which have made it a priority to fund Charter Schools and private schools.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools has also spent a great deal of **money lobbying Congress** on education policy that would benefit the Charter School Industry.

Tripod Surveys

Tripod crafts surveys for students in order to evaluate their teachers. Some of the staff with Tripod used to work for Cambridge Education and it appears they operate from the same ideological framework.

One **teacher evaluation site** we came across says:

*In a study recently released in the esteemed American Educational Research Journal (AERJ), and titled "**What Can Student Perception Surveys Tell Us About Teaching? Empirically Testing the Underlying Structure of the Tripod Student Perception Survey**," researchers found that the Tripod's factor structure did not "hold up." That is,*

*Tripod's 7Cs (i.e., even constructs including: Care, Confer, Captivate, Clarify, Consolidate, Challenge, Classroom Management; see more information about the 7Cs **here**) and the 36 items that are positioned within each of the 7Cs did not fit the 7C framework as theorized by instrument developer(s).*

While this is just a snapshot of the three companies that were paid for by the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, it demonstrates that they prefer to use their money to fund entities that are antithetical to public schools and public education. The big question is, ***why does the Grand Rapids Public Schools agree to utilize the paid for resources from the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation and what does this mean for the future of the GRPS?***

It's not Philanthropy, It's Ideological and Class Warfare: How the DeVos Family Foundation contributions complement their political donations – Part I

https://griid.org/2020/08/09/its-not-philanthropy-its-ideological-and-class-warfare-how-the-devos-family-foundation-contributions-complement-their-political-donations-part-i/

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However, before we get to the data from the 2018 990 documents from the various DeVos family foundations, it is important to note that this family spends more money to directly influence public policy, based on the funding they provide to candidates and various Republican Party entities, as documented by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN). Between 1999 and 2018, the DeVos family provided at least $93 million in contributions to political candidates and Republican PACs. However, this amount of money does not include Dark Money, such as the group known as Donor's

Trust. According to **one source**, the DeVos family has contributed $6.5 million to Donor's Trust, which funds a variety of right wing entities throughout the country.

We argue, that the money the DeVos family foundations contribute ultimately compliments the direct political contributions they make. In Part I of this series, we look at the contributions the DeVos family foundations made for 2018 to educational entities and what that means.

The DeVos family is not shy about their Christian values, which is reflected in the amount of funding they provide to Christian Schools from their 2018 contributions:

King's College $33.500,000
Rehoboth Christian School $2,836,000
Potter's House Christian School $2,175,000
Western Theological Seminary $1,950,000
Lee University $1,250,000
Grand Rapids Christian Schools $1,220,000
Cornerstone University $1,160,000
Aquinas College $1,097,500
Trinity Christian College Association $1,000,000
Calvin Theological Seminary $443,000
Zuni Christian Mission School $300,000
Calvin College $125,000

It's instructive to note that King's College is a Catholic College, which also has a major business school component. Potter's House has been a pet project of Dick & Betsy DeVos for many years and Rehoboth and Zuni are both mission schools specifically for indigenous people to educate them in the "one true God" – which is one form of White Saviorism and Cultural Genocide.

The DeVos family foundations also contribute significantly to public schools, such as:

GVSU $4,983,000
Northwood University $3,320,000
MSU $2,700,000
Grand Rapids Community College Foundation $2,623,000
Ferris State $537,500
Grand Rapids Students Advance Foundation $477,500
Grand Rapids Public Schools $211,200

In the case of GVSU, Northwood and GRCC, there are buildings named after DeVos family members. The GR Student Advancement Foundation is the foundation for the GRPS, so the combined total is close to $700,000 for 2018 alone. The DeVos family foundations have been the largest contributor to the GRPS for several years, **as we reported on in 2019**. The DeVos family has been instrumental is getting more business-oriented curriculum into the GRPS system and they have been the main

force **behind Christian-centered programs like Believe to Become and the DeVos Urban Leadership Institute**.

It is no surprise that GVSU is first on the list of contributions to secular schools from the DeVos family. The DeVos family has been very influential in the school's history, with several members of the family serving on the Board of Trustees. It is also well known that the DeVos family influenced the school's shift from being a more liberal-arts oriented school, with William James and Thomas Jefferson Colleges, to a more business-centered school. It is also well documented that the DeVos family blocked GVSU's push to have domestic partner benefits for faculty and staff. In 1994, when faculty and staff at GVSU were meeting with then President Lubbers over the university's willingness to offer domestic partner benefits, word got out that this was going to happen. At the time GVSU was raising money for a proposed health education building on Michigan St and Peter Cook and Rich DeVos had pledged millions. Once DeVos and Cook found out about the proposal by GVSU to offer domestic partner benefits, they threatened to withdraw their financial support if the university would support a domestic partner benefits policy. GVSU acquiesced to the wish of DeVos and Cook. For further reading on Rich DeVos and GVSU check out **What's in a Name: A Popular Guide to Wealth & Influence at GVSU**.

These DeVos foundation contributions to schools and colleges are strategic, both to promote conservative Christian values within faith-based schools and to influence public schools to take a more pro-capitalist position, as well as to infiltrate these institutions with conservative Christian beliefs. These two principles – conservative Christian and Capitalist Class values – are also what drives the DeVos family contributions to political candidates for local and federal offices. This is essentially the two-pronged strategy of the DeVos family, both in the political and philanthropic arenas.

It's not Philanthropy, It's Ideological and Class Warfare: How the DeVos Family Foundation contributions complement their political donations – Part II – Funding the Christian Right

https://griid.org/2020/08/12/its-not-philanthropy-its-ideological-and-class-warfare-how-the-devos-family-foundation-contributions-complement-their-political-donations-part-ii-funding-the-christian-rig/

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We argue, that the money the DeVos family foundations contribute ultimately compliments the direct political contributions they make. In Part II of this series, we look at the contributions the DeVos family foundations made for 2018 to Christian groups that would easily be considered part of the Christian Right – anti-LGBTQ, racist, practices White Saviorism, pull-yourself up by the bootstrap followers of Jesus.

Christian Leadership Institute – $837,000 – this group has as some of its content partners **Focus on the Family** and **Foundation for Economic Education**.

International Aid – $100,000 – Has a history of collaborating with dictatorships around the world, particularly those working with the US government. Oliver North wrote in his autobiography about his relationship to International Aid.

Luis Palau Association – $900,000 – Luis Palau and his activities have been reported in dozens of article in Christianity Today during the past 40 years. During that time Palau was in Somoza's Nicaragua, where, unlike the community of Solentiname, a Nicaraguan Christian based community under persecution, he was welcome with open arms. In 1977, Palau was greeted and accompanied on his crusade by Colombian president Alfonso Michelsen, not particularly known for being a human rights advocate. Also in the 70's Palau visited Bolivia with the help of an organization known as Food For the Hungry (FFH). According to Sara Diamond's book Spiritual Warfare, FFH "argues that poverty is rooted in individuals' belief systems and by extension, in cultures supposedly conducive to underdevelopment and poverty." (Diamond pg 226) The founder of FFH, Larry Ward, was also with Palau on that trip. Ward, a former overseas director of World Vision "was known to have a close relationship with South Vietnamese and US military leaders." In 1982, Palau brought his crusade to Paraguay, under the brutal dictatorship of Alfredo Stoessner. According to recently released documents there was massive execution of civilians during Stoessner's reign. (see Covert Action Quarterly, Fall 1994). Stroessner's government gave Palau his approval to distribute

100,000 bibles and study courses to children nationwide. Luis Palau was also a close friend and supporter of the Guatemalan dictator Rios Montt, who engaged in genocidal policies during his 18 months as President.

Partners Worldwide – $1,975,000 – this group believes that the only way to fight poverty is to make everyone an entrepreneur. **Partners Worldwide** embraces Capitalism to fight the affect of Capitalism, specifically poverty.

Campus Crusade for Christ – $10,000 – founded by Bill Bright, CCC was a campus-based Christian group that during the 1960s and 70s, was opposed to the anti-war, Civil Rights, LGBTQ and Feminist students groups that flourished around the country. The Southern Poverty Law Center refers to CCC as a Hate group.

Evangelism Explosion – $215,000 – founded by Dr. James Kennedy, former pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and a longtime supporter of anti-LGBTQ campaigns. Over the years, Kennedy emphasized **anti-gay rhetoric**, particularly in his TV ministry. He recommended as "essential" the virulent work of R.J. Rushdoony, who believed practicing gays should be executed.

Prison Fellowship Ministries – $1,550,000 – founded by former Nixon staffer Chuck Colsen, who went to prison for Watergate. PFM is **biased towards only working with those in prison who identify as Christian**, plus they do nothing to challenge the Prison Industrial Complex.

Willow Creek Association – $1,000,000 – Is a Christian Ministry that has lost some credibility in recent years, because of the sex scandal that their leadership has been accused of. More importantly, Willow Creek hosts annual conferences that feature politically conservative and far right speakers from around the world.

Life International Inc. – $50,000 – an anti-Choice Christian group that works outside of the US.

One could also add to this list the millions that the DeVos family has contributed to the Christian Reformed Church in America, which has its own history of promoting Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, anti-feminist, anti-union and anti-LGBTQ messages.

In Part III, we will look at the Think Tanks and related groups that received funding from the DeVos family foundations in 2018.

It's not Philanthropy, It's Ideological and Class Warfare: How the DeVos Family Foundation contributions complement their political donations – Part III – Funding Far Right Think Tanks

https://griid.org/2020/08/17/its-not-philanthropy-its-ideological-and-class-warfare-how-the-devos-family-foundation-contributions-complement-their-political-donations-part-iii-funding-far-right-think/

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In **Part I** of this series, we looked at how the DeVos family foundation funded and influenced educational institutions in West Michigan and across the US. In **Part II**, we looked at how the DeVos family foundations funded far right Christian organizations, and in today's post we want to take a look at how these same foundation have funded Think Tanks and other groups that influence public policy, along with organizations that practice far right and Neoliberal policies.

American Enterprise Institute – $1,500,000 – AEI is one of the most influential Think Tanks in Washington, DC. The **American Enterprise Institute** has a long history of opposing an increase in the minimum wage, business regulation, being critical of Climate Change, supported the US invasion/occupation of Iraq, with strong ties to the Koch Brothers and Donor's Trust.

Mackinac Center for Public Policy – $1,000,000 – The Mackinac Center is the most influential Think Tank in Michigan and has been working with the DeVos family for decades. The Mackinac Center was instrumental in getting **Right to Work passed in Michigan**, along with pushing privatization policies, anti-union policies and a whole host of prop-business policies. The Mackinac Center has also been aggressively **pushing disaster capitalism policies during the COVID 19 pandemic**.

George W. Bush Foundation – $2,000,000 – The DeVos family has always had close ties with the Bush family. The George W. Bush Foundation funds pro-capitalist projects across the US and around the world. The foundation's foreign policy projects compliments US imperialism, particularly the economic aspects of US imperialism, such as supporting CAFTA in Central American and other Neoliberal economic practices in countries that the US has militarily occupied in recent decades.

Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty – $228,500 – The DeVos family has long supporter the **Acton Institute**, with funding and with family members serving on the Board of Directors. The Acton Institute promotes the idea that Capitalism and

Christianity are good bedfellows, but they also take a strong stance against the LGBTQ community, have supported attacks on unions, promotes xenophobia and has been very critical of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Alliance for School Choice – $700,000 – The **Alliance for School Choice** has long received support from the DeVos family, since they advocate for the privatization of education and promote policies that undermine public education.

Talent 2025 Inc – $716,000 – Talent 2025 is a Grand Rapids-based entity that works with the business class to find inroads within the education system to recruit and promote the idea that education is fundamentally about developing talent for the business world. **https://griid.org/tag/talent-2025/**

National Review Institute – $150,000 – The NRI was founded by William F. Buckley to promote the benefits of Capitalism, particularly the way that the United States brand of capitalism.

Pregnancy Resource Center – $300,000 – The Pregnancy Resource Center is an anti-Choice organization that is based in Grand Rapids and provides "alternatives" to abortion.

Right to Life Michigan Educational Foundation – $125,000 – The RTL foundation is also an anti-choice organization that attempts to influence public opinion on reproductive rights and they lobby Michigan legislators to take an anti-Choice position.

Collectively, in just 2018, the DeVos family contributed roughly $6.5 million to these think tanks and public policy influencing entities to push and promote their brand of class warfare and ideologically far right policies. In Part IV of this series, we will look at the DeVos family created non-profits and what role they play in furthering the family's legacy.

It's not Philanthropy, It's Ideological and Class Warfare: How the DeVos Family Foundation contributions complement their political donations – Part IV – Funding DeVos-created projects

https://griid.org/2020/08/24/its-not-philanthropy-its-ideological-and-class-warfare-how-the-devos-family-foundation-contributions-complement-their-political-donations-part-iv-funding-devos-created-pro/

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AmplifyGR – $62,994 – The DeVos-created AmplifyGR was born in secrecy, with millions being spent to purchase land in the Boston Square area of Grand Rapids, before the organization revealed its plans to the public. **GRIID has posted nearly two dozens articles about AmplifyGR** and what is so problematic about what their longterm plans are for the mostly Black neighborhood.

ArtPrize – $900,000 – We have also written extensively about ArtPrize, from multiple angles, but one thing is clear that **ArtPrize has financially benefited the DeVos family and their closest allies in the Grand Rapids area**.

Believe 2 Become – $688,529 – One non-profit director told us that AmplifyGR was created by the DeVos family, since the Believe 2 Become project had not brought them the results fast enough. Even so, Believe 2 Become has been a tremendous vehicle for the DeVos family, providing an opportunity in insert Christianity into the GRPS and to promote **business class values and "talent development."**

Christian Leadership Institute – $837,000 – **Richard DeVos Sr. mentored the founder of the Christian Leadership Institute**, which develops Christian leaders in the same ideological framework that drives the DeVos family.

Gatherings of Hope – $888,471 – Gatherings of Hope (GOH) was created specifically through the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, to develop local Christian leadership, to document what social services that churches were providing and how best to connect those services to people. **GOH does nothing to dismantled the systems of power and oppression, which cause individuals and families to seek out the services that these churches offer**.

Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders – $100,000 – The GRIL is an outgrowth of the **DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative**, which says that their goal is to, "make a positive impact on the lives of disadvantaged, urban youth by investing in their leaders." Essentially, this project is designed to get urban youth interested in Christianity and capitalism, without questions the larger systems of power and oppression that created their "disadvantage."

edNet – $330,527 – edNet was created as a way to infiltrate public schools and to pull teachers away from participating in unions. **Read our assessment** of what is problematic about this DeVos-create entity.

Start Garden Foundation – $230,000 – Start Garden, was created by Rick DeVos as a venture capitalist project that the son of Dick & Betsy could run. The project has shifted in recent years by attempting to win over Black and latinx residents to the joys of entrepreneurism. **Here is just one of the critiques we have written about Start Garden**.

West Michigan Aviation Academy – $832,000 – This school is a pet project of Dick DeVos, in part because of his interest in flying, but more importantly his commitment to privatized education. **In 2019**, Dick got mad because Gov. Whitmer was against an increase in funding of charter schools, with public money.

In the end, besides the millions of dollars that the DeVos family foundations have contributed to organizations that embrace their ideological and capitalist class values, they have made it a goal of theirs to create their own organizations that can promote the ideological and class warfare they are waging against us, without all the messiness that comes with organizations that the DeVos family can't always control.

In Part V of this series, we will look at which non-profits in Grand Rapids received funding from the DeVos foundations and how that prevents them from challenging power and oppression.

It's not Philanthropy, It's Ideological and Class Warfare: How the DeVos Family Foundation contributions complement their political donations: Part V – Buying Non-Profit silence

https://griid.org/2020/09/03/ts-not-philanthropy-its-ideological-and-class-warfare-how-the-devos-family-foundation-contributions-complement-their-political-donations-part-v-buying-non-profit-silence/

We were recently able to access the 2018 990 documents from the various DeVos family foundations, through GuideStar.org. These foundations include, the Richard &

Helen DeVos Foundation, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, the Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation and the CDV5 Foundation.

We have been tracking the DeVos family foundations for years, since it provides useful information on how the family strategically uses their money to influence the world around us. It is important to recognize that when people generally think of philanthropy, they think of money going from those with tremendous wealth to non-profits who provide needed services in the community. While there is some truth to this, what we will demonstrate in this series of articles, is that the DeVos family uses their foundation money to primarily wage ideological and class warfare.

In **Part I** of this series, we looked at how the DeVos family foundation funded and influenced educational institutions in West Michigan and across the US. In **Part II**, we looked at how the DeVos family foundations funded far right Christian organizations, and in today's post we want to take a look at how these same foundation have funded Think Tanks and other groups that influence public policy, along with organizations that practice far right and Neoliberal policies. In **Part III**, we looked how the DeVos foundations are funding far right think tanks and other public policy influencing organizations. In **Part IV**, we looked at how much the DeVos foundations have contributed to organizations which they have created themselves during the 2018 fiscal year alone.

In today's post, we will look at which non-profits in Grand Rapids received funding from the DeVos foundations in 2018, and how that prevents them from challenging power and oppression in this community.

It is important to point out that the following non-profits provide services to individuals and families that have been marginalized in this community. A great deal of the marginalization is rooted in poverty, where families struggle to feed, house and provided the basic necessities required to have a full life.

What is interesting about this dynamic with non-profits who provides basic social services, is that the DeVos family has spent millions of dollars over several decades to fund think tanks that create policies that do serious harm to families, and fund candidates who pass legislation that enacts the harmful policies that the think tanks created. Therefore, the DeVos family funds public policy that harms families and then contributes to non-profits who provide social services to families who have been harmed by the very policies the DeVos family has financed. The main difference in this process is that the non-profits that the DeVos family funds generally do not challenge the public policies that the DeVos money has financed in the first place. In other words, there is no systemic analysis or efforts on the part of these non-profits to dismantle the root causes of the issues they are dealing with – housing, refugees, disabilities and hunger.

To be clear, these organization provide charity work, but little justice work. More often than not, these organization are a buffer between people who are marginalized and the systems of power and oppression that caused the very marginalization people are facing.

Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF) – $1,757,500 – ICCF using language in the **mission statement**, such as Housing Justice, and they do build homes for families who are experiencing poverty. However, there is no real commitment to ending poverty or commitment to a living wages or to challenging the systems of capitalism and White Supremacy, which are at the root of housing injustice, displacement and gentrification. ICCF is also working with AmplifyGR, the DeVos-created entity, which bought up millions of dollars of property to develop before even telling residents what they were up to. In a neighborhood where I lived for 27 years, **ICCF also bought up land and displaced families, despite previously committing to not displacing families in the Wealthy/Jefferson area of Grand Rapids**.

Hope Network – $857,500 – **Hope Network claims to be advocates** for those who have serious injuries and need long-term therapy or permanent assistance from accidents that have caused significant disabilities. Hope Network does practice some form of disability rights, but they do not promote disability justice, plus they do not pay most of their staff a living wage.

Bethany Christian Services – $815,000 – **Bethany Christian Services** serves vulnerable kids in the US, refugees, immigrants and they do international adoption. However, Bethany does not challenge systemic or structural racism, they do not question the economic system of capitalism and they do not question US foreign policy, which contributes significantly to the creation of refugees and immigrants around the world.

Kids Food Basket – $607,500 – Kids Food Basket provides food to school age children in West Michigan. However, despite **KFB's claim that they want to end hunger**, no where in their mission or work do they have a plan to dismantle poverty or to challenge the system of capitalism, **particularly in the food system**.

Next Step of West Michigan – $365,000 – **Next Step of West Michigan** does construction and property maintenance work, hiring men and women coming out of rehab or prison. This non-profit does not question or challenge capitalism or the Prison Industrial Complex.

Guiding Light Mission Inc. – $241,000 – The **Guiding Light Mission** provides temporary , emergency housing for people who are experiencing homelessness. They do not challenge the market-driven housing system or advocate for housing justice or an end to the root causes of homelessness.

Mel Trotter Ministries – $126,000 – **Mel Trotter Ministries**, like Guiding Light Mission, provides temporary/emergency housing for people who are experiencing homelessness, but they do not challenge the market-driven housing system or advocate for housing justice or an end to the root causes of homelessness.

The DeVos family foundations contribute to each of these local non-profits, and many more, precisely because these non-profits do not challenge systems of power and oppression. Whether or not there is any clear mandate from the DeVos family foundations about not challenging systems of power and oppression, the fact remains

that these groups do not challenge systems of power and oppression, thus the DeVos family foundation money is ultimately hush money.

West Michigan Foundation Watch: Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation still funding the Christian Right https://griid.org/2021/06/28/west-michigan-foundation-watch-richard-and-helen-devos-foundation-still-funding-the-christian-right/

In this edition of West Michigan Foundation Watch, we look at the 990 document for the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation for 2019.

The 2019 990 document is significant, especially since this is the first year after the death of Richard DeVos, who died in 2018. It is significant, in that the numbers are down for the 2019 contributions from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, which could be an indication that the foundation might be phasing out.

The only trustee listed on the 990 document for 2019, is the longtime DeVos family financial advisor, Jerry Tubergen. Tubergen is the CEO of RDV Corporation, and he is the CEO of Ottawa Private Capital LLC.

However, even though the 2019 contributions from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation are down from previous years, they still contributed just over $31 million.

The largest contributions, ones that are a million dollars or more are as follows:

Aquinas College $1,000,000

Central Presbyterian Church of New York $1,000,000

George W Bush Foundation $2,000,000

Grand Rapids Community College $1,000,000

Grand Valley State University $2,010,000

Kings College $5,000,000

Michigan State University Office of University Development $2,500,000

Spectrum Health Foundation $3,350,000

West Michigan Horticultural Society $1,035,000

These contributions alone come to just shy of $20 million of the $31 million contributed in 2019. The contributions to local Colleges and Universities has been consistent for decades for the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, primarily as a mechanism of

influencing school policies, with GVSU as one example. **https://griid.org/2018/09/13/gvsu-canonizes-rich-devos-but-some-students-push-back/**

The entities to receive a million or more outside of West Michigan are due to the politics of those entities, such as Kings College, a Catholic school with a heavy emphasis on business; Central Presbyterian Church of New York, because of their conservative politics; and the George W Bush Foundation, since the DeVos family helped to elected George W Bush, with massive campaign contributions.

However, there is a longer list of entities that received foundation contributions from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, entities that would fall under the category of Religious Right.

In the **anti-Choice category**, you have the Right to Life of Michigan Educational Fund receiving $50,000, and the Pregnancy Resource Center receiving the same $50,000 amount.

Then there are Christian groups that engage in **White Saviorism**, listed here, with the amount of money they received from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation:

World Renew $150,000

Partners Worldwide $500,000

Mel Trotter Ministries $50,000

Luis Palau Association $200,000

International Aid Inc. $48,200

Guiding Light Mission $75,000

Music Mission Keiv Inc. $50,000

Evangelism Explosion III International Inc. $165,000

Christian Leaders NPF $150,000

Cardus Inc. $300,000

Back to God Ministries International $50,000

Zuni Christian Mission School $100,000

Rehoboth Christian School Association $350,000

The Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation also funds **private schools** and **organizations which work to undermine public education**:

Potters House $525,000

Mackinac Center $100,000

Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders $20,000

Alliance for Children Everywhere $200,000

There are also non-profits in Grand Rapids that do important work, but taking money from DeVos foundations also buys their silence, thus preventing them from speaking out on the harm that the DeVos family engages in, with their financial interests and their political funding.

Even after both Richard & Helen DeVos pave passed away, their legacy of funding the political and religious right continues.

West Michigan Foundation Watch: Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation – the art of influence https://griid.org/2021/07/18/west-michigan-foundation-watch-doug-maria-devos-foundation-the-art-of-influence/

The 990 documents for local foundations are starting to be posted on GuideStar and we will be posting at least one a week for the next month or so.

The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, like all of the DeVos family foundations is important to scrutinize, since they are the largest foundations in the area and have tremendous influence in supporting conservative religious groups, groups that practice a form of White Saviorism and public policy through think tanks and other groups that have an ideological framework that lines up with the DeVos family.

The Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation contributed $14.5 million in 2019, even though the foundation itself had $80 million in assets that same year.

The first list of contributions are for Private Charter and Public School Education entities. Many of these education entities are part of the national and local network of entities that have been part of network of organizations that Betsy DeVos is connected to, such as the Alliance for Children Everywhere, Leading Educators Inc., the New York Leadership Academy, Potters House and Hope Academy of West Michigan. Note that they contribute both to the Grand Rapids Public Schools and the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation, which is the foundation for GRPS. This is because the GRPS has for the past several decades adopted more business-friendly education practices and even has specialty schools/academies that have pro-business influence and even business curriculum.

EDNET $258,540

Alliance for Children Everywhere $260,000

Calvin University $500,000

First Steps Kent $150,000

Hope Academy of West Michigan $294,000

K-Connect $500,000

Kent School Services Network $150,000

Leading Educators Inc. $697,250 and $862,750

Talent 2025 $205,000

Wake Forest University $1,280,000

West Michigan Aviation Academy $315,000

Cornerstone University $114,500

Grand Rapids Christian Schools $163,000

Grand Rapids Public Schools $129,850

Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation $215,000

Grand Rapids Youth Commonwealth Inc. $100,000

GVSU $175,000

New York City Leadership Academy $356,000

Potters House $100,000

Rehoboth Christian School Association $65,000

The group listed below here, are primarily are Conservative Christian groups, that have a history of practicing a form of White Savorism. Note, Bethany Christian Services recently changed their long-standing policy of allowing same sex couples to adopt, so we won't know if the DeVos family contributions will continue or be as substantial until we have access to the 990 documents for 2021.

Gatherings of Hope $762975

Believe 2 Become $590,144

Bethany Christian Services $750,000

Christian Leadership Institute $100,000

Luis Palau Association $330,000

Tall Turf Ministries $200,000

Wedgewood Christian Services $685,000

Keystone Community Church $720,000

Then next group list below here are organizations that share a similar ideological that the DeVos family does, particularly a Neo-liberal brand of Capitalism, which involves significant State intervention and harmful austerity measures.

National Constitution Center $3,025,000

Rende Progress Capital $275,000

Acton Institute $75,000

George W Bush Foundation $500,000

Mackinac Center $300,000

Lastly, there is one Grand Rapids development project that the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation is championing, since it also promotes development in the downtown area, which widely benefits the profits of the DeVos family, with the numerous hotels they own and other investments in that part of the city.

Grand Rapids Whitewater Inc. $750,000

One other important aspect of the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, is the fact that this foundation has started several initiatives, they also have a representative sitting on the Boards of numerous groups that the foundation makes contributions to, along with those entities that list the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation as Partners. This level of control and influence is substantial, and it reflects the interlocking systems of power that the DeVos family is involved in Grand Rapids and beyond.

Here are the projects that the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation has initiated

Believe 2 Become

https://believe2become.org/who-we-are/

Education Network of Greater Grand Rapids

https://www.ednetggr.org/EdNet-Home

AmplifyGR

This list is of groups that lists the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation as Partners

Alliance for Children Everywhere

https://www.childreneverywhere.org/our-people

Grand Rapids White Water

Leading Educators Inc.

New York Leadership Academy

https://www.leadershipacademy.org/our-partners/

This final list has DeVos family members who sit not the Board of Directors or are Trustees of these organizations.

Christian Leadership Institute

National Constitute Center

https://constitutioncenter.org/about/board-of-trustees

Talent 2025

http://www.talent2025.org/about/ceo-council-members

AmplifyGR

We monitor foundations like the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, because they wield tremendous influence that impacts policy and practices within various sectors of society. To ignore this or frame their foundation contributions has benign or even beneficial is to not only ignore the strategic function of their foundation contributions, it minimizes the far right political contributions they also make.

West Michigan Foundation Watch: Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation – funding the far right and the anti-Public Education movement https://griid.org/2021/08/04/west-michigan-foundation-watch-dick-betsy-devos-foundation-funding-the-far-right-and-the-anti-public-education-movement/

To date, we have looked at the 990 documents for local foundations in 2021 for the **Prince Family**, the **Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation** and the **Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation**. Today, we provide some insight into the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation.

The Dick & Betsy DeVos has over $53 million in assets, money that is hidden from taxation, which is one of the primary benefits of having a foundation. As in previous years, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has contributed to numerous conservative Christian entities, Think Tanks and Policy organizations, organizations that are committed to the privatization of education, higher education, and entities that are run by or founded by other members of the DeVos family.

Conservative Christian groups

Mars Hill Bible Church $380,000

Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders $20,000

Museum of the Bible $160,000

Partners Worldwide $25,000

Rehoboth Christian School Association $10,000

Willow Creek Association $800,000

Global Leadership Network $710,000

Think Tanks and Policy Organizations – These groups all have a documented history of promoting Capitalism, opposing labor unions, undermining public education, and create policy positions that are often adopted by state and federal lawmakers.

Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty $170,000

American Enterprise Institute $550,000

Mackinac Center for Public Policy $350,000

Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy $40,000

Education groups committed to undermining Public Schools – These groups work to attack public education, teacher unions and/or promote the privatization of education or attempt to insert religion into public schools.

Kids Hope USA $300,000

Potters House $1,200,000

Alliance for School Choice Inc. $1,000,000

Foundation for Individual Rights in Education Inc. $10,000

Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation $5,000

Holland Christian Education Society $100,000

Journey Grand Rapids $10,000

Higher Education – Many of these universities or colleges have buildings or business schools named after the DeVos family.

Northwood University $1,000,000

Ferris State University $10,000

Grand Rapids Community College Foundation $50,000

GVSU $175,000

MSU $200,000

University of Maryland College Park Foundation Inc. $750,000

Organizations that were founded by a member of the DeVos family – This is a perfect way for the DeVos family members to channel un-taxed funds to pet projects that one of the family members have started.

ArtPrize $385,000

Orlando Magic Youth Foundation $270,000

Start Garden Foundation $600,000

West Michigan Aviation Academy $173,000

Like most of the other DeVos family foundations, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributes to the religious and far right organizations throughout the country and in West Michigan. The only major difference is the sizable amount of funding to organizations that are committed to undermining public eduction, which has been a passion of both Dick & Betsy DeVos for the past 40 years.

Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation: Funding family-run entities and organizations where they are trustees https://griid.org/2021/08/13/dan-pamela-devos-foundation-funding-family-run-entities-and-organizations-where-they-are-trustees/

To date, we have looked at the 990 documents for local foundations in 2021 for the **Prince Family**, the **Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation**, the **Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation** and the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation**. Today we want to examine the Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation.

In the graphic above, you can see some of the major entities that Dan and Pamela DeVos own, which is where their Foundation money comes from. Like all wealthy people, foundations are a great way to channel one's wealth, without having it taxed. In looking at their 990 document for 2019, which is the most recent available, the Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation contributed just over $12 million to various entities. Here is a breakdown of some of the categories and the larger contributions in each category.

Conservative Christian groups

Keystone Community Church $300,000

Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders $15,000

Young Life $35.000

70×7 Life Recovery $90,000

Think Tanks and Policy Organizations – These groups all have a documented history of promoting Capitalism, opposing labor unions, undermining public education, and create policy positions that are often adopted by state and federal lawmakers.

Mackinac Center for Public Policy $150,000

Higher Education – Many of these universities or colleges have buildings or business schools named after the DeVos family.

Davenport University $58,500

Ferris State University $51,000

Grand Rapids Community College Foundation $100,000

Grand Valley State University $2,213,000

Northwood University $1,382,500

Organizations that Dan or Pamela DeVos are on the Board of Directors

Whitney Museum of American Art $2,600,000

Northwood University $1,382,500

Great Lakes Center for the Arts $150,000

Grand Rapids Symphony Society $575,000

Hope Network $55,000

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts $650,000

Orlando Magic Youth Foundation Inc. $275,000

The Joffrey Ballet $325,000

Organizations that are run by DeVos Family members

Orlando Magic Youth Foundation Inc. $275,000

West Michigan Aviation Academy $330,000

ArtPrize $50,000

Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders $15,000

The Dan & Pamela DeVos Foundation doesn't have as many overt contributions to entities that are far right and their foundation is smaller than most of the other family members. However, Dan and Pamela DeVos are as committed to the same larger political, religious and ideological goals as the rest of the family, as is evidenced by the political contributions. In the **2020 Election, Dan and Pamela contributed** nearly $2 million to candidates at the federal level, $350,000 at the state level and $14,000 at the Kent County level.

West Michigan Foundation Watch: CDV5 Foundation – Just another DeVos Foundation funding the Religious Right and charity projects that don't threaten Capitalism https://griid.org/2021/08/23/west-michigan-foundation-watch-cdv5-foundation-just-another-devos-foundation-funding-the-religious-right-and-charity-projects-that-dont-threaten-capitalism/

To date, we have looked at the 990 documents for local foundations in 2021 for the **Prince Family**, the **Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation**, the **Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation**, the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation** and the **Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation**. Today, we want to examine the most recent 990 documents for the Cheri DeVos Foundation, also known as the CDV5 Foundation.

Of all of the DeVos family foundations, CDV5 is the one that people are least likely to know about. Named after Cheri DeVos **VanderWeide**. She is also a sibling of Dick, Dan and Doug DeVos, yet she has managed to not have the same kind of name recognition that the other children of Richard & Helen DeVos. Despite Cheri's anonymity, the CDV5 Foundation has assets of $62 million dollars, according to GuideStar. Cheri DeVos has been involved in Amway, RDV Corp and other DeVos-owned entities. She attended 4 years at Hope College and like her siblings, makes significant contributions to the Republican Party every election cycle.

The CDV5 Foundation contributes to many of the same sectors that the other DeVos family foundations do, with a bit more emphasis on contributions that stay in West Michigan. Here is a breakdown of the CDV5 Foundation contributions for 2019, which is the most recent 990 document available to the public.

Conservative Christian groups

Hope Academy of West Michigan $292,885

Base Camp Urban Outreach $40,000

Bridge Street House of Prayer $115,000

Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders $22,000

Keystone Community Church $400,000

Potters House $75,000

Rehoboth Christian School Association $100,000

Young Life $75,000

Think Tanks and Policy Organizations – These groups all have a documented history of promoting Capitalism, opposing labor unions, undermining public education, and create policy positions that are often adopted by state and federal lawmakers.

Mackinac Center for Public Policy $100,000

Higher Education – Many of these universities or colleges have buildings or business schools named after the DeVos family.

Grand Rapids Community College Foundation $750,000

Grand Valley State University $500,000

Hope College $150,000

Organizations that are run by DeVos Family members

West Michigan Aviation Academy $365,000

ArtPrize $50,000

Orlando Magic Youth Foundation $270,000

The three largest donations from the CDV5 Foundation are Kids Food Basket – $600,000, Grand Rapids White Water Inc. – $525,000, and the George W. Bush Foundation – $500,000. All three of these entities fit within the framework of DeVos foundation contributions, with Kids Food Basket being a charity that does not deal with root causes of hunger; Grand Rapids White Water Inc., which will promote business development/gentrification along the Grand River, particularly in the downtown corridor; and the George W. Bush Foundation, which props up the legacy of a President that embraced Corporate Capitalism and US Militarism.

A critical look at the DeVos Family Foundation $1 Million contribution for hurricane relief: What the MLive story doesn't tell you

https://griid.org/2022/10/03/a-critical-look-at-the-devos-family-foundation-1-million-contribution-for-hurricane-relief-what-the-mlive-story-doesnt-tell-you/

On Friday, MLive posted a story with the headline, **DeVos Family Foundation donates $1 million to Florida hurricane relief**.

The article is based solely on a Press Release from the **DeVos Family Foundation**, with talking points about the amount of money being donated and how it will be spent. According to the MLive article/DeVos Family Foundation Press Release, $500,00 will be donated to the **United Way Hurricane Relief Fund**, another $250,000 will go to the statewide **Florida Disaster Fund touted by Casey DeSantis, wife of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis**, and the remaining $250,000 will be reserved for future rebuilding efforts as needs come to light.

It is rather unfortunate, although completely expected, that MLive (and most commercial media sources) do not provide additional information, sources or a critical examination when the most powerful family in West Michigan makes a charitable contribution. There are several angels to this story, beyond acting as a stenographer for the DeVos family, where any serious journalist might take this story. First, there could have been a more serious look at the Florida connection for the DeVos family. Second, MLive, or any other news source that relied on the DeVos Family Foundation Press Release, could have provided a link to the entire Press Release, then look at how other news sources used the talking points provided in the Press Release. Third, there could have been a more critical look at how the $1 million contribution was being spent. Lastly, why are journalists not asking the question, why is this even a news story?

The DeVos/Florida connection

The DeVos family doesn't make philanthropic contributions for no good reason. The most powerful family in West Michigan always uses their money in very calculated ways, even strategic. It is no surprise that the family would contribute $1 million to the Florida for post-hurricane needs. The DeVos family owns numerous homes in Florida and spends a great deal of time there. They fly to Florida on a regular basis in their private planes when staying at their Florida homes. In addition, the DeVos family has owned the Orlando Magic for several decades now, which means they also have a major financial interest in Florida, particularly in Orlando. Then there is the issue of influencing political outcomes in Florida. For example, the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation donated $100,000 to the Florida4Marriage campaign in 2008, to defeat a campaign to get marriage equality in Florida. A more recent example has to do with the fact that the **DeVos family has collectively contributed nearly a half a million to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, beginning in the 2018 campaign and in the current election cycle**.

DeVos Family Foundation Press Release talking points

There are no online links to the Press Release that the DeVos family sent out to generate the hoped for positive news coverage they expected, but in looking at other news sources, we can find additional talking points.

The online site for the National Basketball Association, nba.com, **also posted a story** about the DeVos Family Foundation's $1 million contribution. Some of the same

talking points are used in their story as compared to the MLive article. However, there were some additional talking points worth including here from the NBA's website:

The DeVos family has a long history of helping out in times of need in Central Florida.

- *In 2004, following the devastation caused by Hurricane Charley, Richard and Helen DeVos donated $1 million to relief efforts in Orange, Seminole, Osceola, Volusia and Polk Counties.*
- *In 2020, they backed a $2 million compensation fund for hourly employees of the Magic, Amway Center, Lakeland Magic and Solar Bears while their seasons were suspended due to the COVID-19 outbreak, assisting approximately 1,800 part-time employees.*
- *In 2016, they contributed $400,000 to the One Orlando Fund following the tragedy at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando.*

Naturally, the DeVos family wants to demonstrate their generosity with such Press Releases, as is evidenced in the information included in the NBA.com article. Again, there is no critical assessment of these charitable contributions. For instance, there is another way of looking at the $400,000 contribution in the aftermath of the 2016 Pulse Night Club shooting. **GRIID wrote a piece after that anti-LGBTQ shooting took place**, making the point that the **DeVos family had fostered an anti-LGBTQ climate in Florida for decades**, working with groups like Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and Dr. James Kennedy.

How the $1 million DeVos donation will be spent?

A third direction the reporting could have gone, would have been to look more critically at where the $1 million from the DeVos Family Foundation was being used. As was already mentioned, $500,000 was going to the United Way, but the other funds are less clear. $250,000 will go to the Florida Disaster Fund touted by Casey DeSantis, wife of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. It is less clear how that $250,000 will be spent, plus it should be noted that the **organizational chart for this fund** is under the control of Governor DeSantis.

The other $250,000 will be reserved for future rebuilding efforts as needs come to light. Also, a rather vague statement. However, it is possible to think about how those funds might be used, based on the actions of various DeVos family members have used disaster relief funds over the years, in what Naomi Klein refers to as **Disaster Capitalism**.

Disaster Capitalism is a way for members of the Capitalist Class to use disasters to re-direct funding, often public funding, to support projects that ultimately benefit the bottom line of families like the DeVos family. In a **2017 article** for The Guardian Naomi Klein wrote about Disaster Capitalism and Hurricane Katrina:

What I saw during the flooding shocked me. But what I saw in the aftermath of Katrina shocked me even more. With the city reeling, and with its residents dispersed across the country and unable to protect their own interests, a plan emerged to ram through a pro-corporate wishlist with maximum velocity. The famed free-market economist Milton

Friedman, then 93 years old, wrote an article for the Wall Street Journal stating, "Most New Orleans schools are in ruins, as are the homes of the children who have attended them. The children are now scattered all over the country. This is a tragedy. It is also an opportunity to radically reform the educational system."

We know that the DeVos family, particularly Betsy DeVos, has made it a mission to undermine the Public Education system in the US. Using disasters is an effective way to push this agenda. Betsy DeVos did the same thing while she was Secretary of Education, during the 2017 Hurricane that devastated Puerto Rico. **GRIID wrote about** the role that Betsy DeVos played in that catastrophe and how she used it to **push her privatized education agenda**.

Why is the DeVos Family Foundation contribution even news?

We know that there are lots of people who have donated to the Florida hurricane relief, even some from West Michigan who have traveled there to assist those most impacted. So, why does $1 million from the DeVos Family Foundation merit news coverage? $1 million is no small amount, at least to most of us, but it is a drop in the bucket for the DeVos family. The DeVos family is collectively worth billions, so making a $1 million dollar donation is like most people contributing $20, especially when we consider what percent $20 is to the total income of say someone who makes $40,000 a year. In addition, while a $20 contribution is also tax deductible, it is different than the $1 million contribution from the DeVos Family Foundation. Wealthy people who have created foundations, create them in order to avoid paying taxes on large sums of money that are put into the foundation's coffers.

Lastly, it is news precisely because the DeVos Family Foundation and all of their other foundations are a well oiled public relations machine, which makes it a point to tell the rest of the world how "generous" they are. As we mentioned earlier, these donations or contributions from the DeVos family are strategic and calculated, specifically to make them look good, but also because if they control the narrative through their Press Releases, then they can avoid or minimize public scrutiny.

The Political function of Philanthropy: DeVos Family Foundations – Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation https://griid.org/2023/06/07/the-political-function-of-philanthropy-devos-family-foundations-richard-and-helen-devos-foundation/

"*In any case, the hidden hand of of foundations can control the course of social change and deflect anger to targets other than elite power."*

– Joan Roelofs, Foundations and Public Policy

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Power Structure have created. Our monitoring of local foundations has been part of our larger critique of the **Non-Profit Industrial Complex in Grand Rapids**.

Over the next several weeks, GRIID will provide some information and analysis of the most recent 990 documents that foundations are legally required to submit. These 990 documents must be submitted within a three-year period, which is why the 990s that we will be examining are from 2020, since most foundations prefer to submit their 990 documents at the last minute, thus minimizing possible scrutiny.

Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. The oldest of these family foundations is the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation. GRIID relies on **GuideStar.org** to access the 990s of each of their foundations and it appears that 2020 will be the last year that the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation will exist. According to GuideStar, in 2020, the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation contributed **$19,170,000**, leaving them with only **$31,037** of funds left in the foundation. To see the 990 document for 2020 from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, go **here**.

The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2020, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Think Tanks, Education-centered groups, and social service entities, to name a few. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount and a brief analysis.

We also include groups that are DeVos owned or created, along with liberal non-profits. With the liberal non-profits, we believe that funding from foundations like the DeVos family foundations is a form of hush money. When we say hush money, we mean that these entities will not publicly challenge the system of Capitalism, the wealth gap, structural racism and other systems of oppression, which the DeVos family benefits from and perpetuates through their own political funding.

Religious Right

- Alliance for Children Everywhere – $150,000
- Back to God Ministries – $25,000
- Christian Leaders NFP – $150,000
- Christian Reformed Church in North America – $635,000
- David House Ministries – $35,000
- Evangelism Explosion III – $100,000
- Front Porch Ministries – $50,000
- Luis Palau Association – $150,000
- Madison Square Christian Reformed Church – $300,000
- Partners Worldwide – $250,000
- Right to Life of Michigan – $20,000
- Words of Hope Inc – $25,000

- World Renew – $150,000
- Youth for Christ USA Inc – $50,000

These religious groups practice varying degrees of conservative politics, which fit into the ideological framework that the DeVos family is committed to. For instance, the Luis Palau Association is a Latin American based group that was founded by Luis Palau, an evangelist who had a long history of supporting far right and military dictators throughout Latin American, which we have **documented in a previous GRIID post**.

Education-centered groups

- Calvin Theological Seminary – $150,000
- Grand Rapids Community College Foundation – $1,000,000
- Grand Valley State University – $1,000,000
- InterCollegiate Studies Institute Inc – $100,000
- King's College – $5,500,000
- Rehoboth Christian School Association – $300,000
- Western Theological Seminary – $200,000
- Zuni Christian Mission School – $50,000

Richard and Helen DeVos have been using the massive wealth to influence education systems in West Michigan and abroad, with an emphasis on Christian Schools, such as Calvin College, Western Theological Seminary and the White Savior schools that are part of the longstanding practice of imposing christianity on Native communities. Contributions to GRCC and GVSU also is a long standing practice, primarily to influence the curriculum in those colleges. **Rich DeVos used to be a trustee at Grand Valley State Colleges back in the 1970s** and was instrumental in getting ride of the William James and Thomas Jefferson Colleges at GVSC, plus the played a role in getting GVSU to build a campus in downtown GR, along with the creation of the Seidman College of Business.

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- Christian Leaders NFP – $150,000
- Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders – $10,000
- Spectrum Health Foundation – $3,350,000

Groups receiving Hush $

- Bethany Christian Services – $150,000
- Guiding Light Mission – $50,000
- Hope Network – $180,000
- Mel Trotter Ministries – $25,000
- Safe Haven Ministries – $25,000

These groups all provide some sort of social service – people fleeing domestic violence, those who are housing insecure, people with disabilities, adoption and immigration. There are root causes to all of these issues, but these groups are not likely to address root causes and larger systems of oppression. When the DeVos family foundations make contributions, this will increase the likelihood that systems of oppression will not be addressed by these groups.

Foundations rarely make contributions without strings attached. The Richard and Helen DeVos has a long history of funding far right and religious right groups, which **GRIID documented 10 years ago** when we started this project. In addition, investigative journalist and author Russ Bellant, documented the same sort of dynamics in several of his books on the far right/religious right, specifically with his book, ***The Religious Right in Michigan Politics***, published in 1996.

The Political function of Philanthropy: DeVos Family Foundations – Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation https://griid.org/2023/06/14/the-political-function-of-philanthropy-devos-family-foundations-dick-and-betsy-devos-foundation/

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Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation has been one of the largest in West Michigan, which was founded in 1989, the same time that Dick DeVos was the CEO of Amway. According to GuideStar, in 2020, the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation contributed **$12,994,900**, leaving them with $50,056,750 of funds left in their foundation. To see the 990 document for 2020 from the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation, go **here**.

The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2020, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Think Tanks, Education-centered groups, and social service entities, to name a few. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount and a brief analysis.

We also include groups that are DeVos owned or created, along with liberal non-profits. With the liberal non-profits, we believe that funding from foundations like the DeVos family foundations is a form of hush money. When we say hush money, we mean that

these entities will not publicly challenge the system of Capitalism, the wealth gap, structural racism and other systems of oppression, which the DeVos family benefits from and perpetuates through their own political funding.

Religious Right

- Family Legacy Missions International – $10,000
- Haggai Institute International – $10,000
- Museum of the Bible Inc. – $50,000
- Partners Worldwide – $25,000
- Right to Life of Michigan – $25,000
- School of Missionary Aviation Technology – $120,000
- Teachers Who Pray Inc – $100,000
- Willow Creek Association – $860,000

These religious groups practice varying degrees of conservative politics, which fit into the ideological framework that the DeVos family is committed to. For instance, **Right to Life Michigan spent $9,343,500 to defeat Prop 3**, which allows people to legally chose to have an abortion.

Far Right Think Tanks

- Acton Institute – $70,000
- American Enterprise Institute – $350,000
- Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy – $640,000
- Mackinac Center for Public Policy – $50,000
- National Review Institute – $150,000
- Prager University Foundation – $70,000

These Think Tanks influence public policy in individual states, like the **Acton Institute** and the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** does in Michigan. The **American Enterprise Institute** does the same think at the federal level, which is why they are based in DC.

Education-centered groups

- Alliance for School Choice – $1,000,000
- Ferris State University – $10,000
- Foundation for Excellence in Education – $10,000
- Grand Rapids Community College Foundation – $150,000
- Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation – $25,000
- Grand Valley State University – $150,000
- Holland Christian Education Society – $100,000
- Michigan State University – $212,500
- Northwood University – $253,000
- Potter's House – $400,000
- University of Maryland Park College Foundation – $750,000

Some of these education centers are local, where the DeVos family has spent decades cultivating relationships and influencing campus policies. Then there are groups

like **Alliance for School Choice**, which promotes education privatization, an organization that has worked closely with Dick and Betsy DeVos for several decades.

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- ArtPrize Grand Rapids – $250,000
- Grand Action Foundation 2.0 – $100,000
- Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders – $10,000
- Orlando Magic Youth Foundation – $90,000
- Start Garden Foundation – $200,000
- West Michigan Aviation Academy – $390,000

Of course all these entities that were created by DeVos family members, also promote their ideological religious and capitalist values. On top of that, it also means that DeVos family members are funding their own entities and using their foundation to fund their own pet projects, like Start Garden – which promotes entrepreneurial capitalism – or the West Michigan Aviation Academy – because it promotes the privatization of education.

Groups receiving Hush $

- Dégagé Ministries – $105,000
- Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids – $200,000
- Family Promise of Grand Rapids – $100,000
- Inner City Christian Federation – $25,000
- Kids Food Basket – $5000
- Mel Trotter Ministries – $5000
- Wedgewood Christian Services – $255,000

These groups all provide some sort of social service – people fleeing domestic violence, those who are housing insecure, people with disabilities, adoption and immigration. There are root causes to all of these issues, but these groups are not likely to address root causes and larger systems of oppression. When the DeVos family foundations make contributions, this will increase the likelihood that systems of oppression will not be addressed by these groups.

Foundations rarely make contributions without strings attached. The Dick and Betsy DeVos has a long history of funding far right and religious right groups, which **GRIID documented 10 years ago** when we started this project. Lastly, it is worth noting that the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation, like all of the DeVos family foundations, compliments the campaign contributions they make to further impact public policy and promote their religious and capitalist ideologies.

The Political function of Philanthropy: DeVos Family Foundations – Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation https://griid.org/2023/06/20/the-political-function-of-philanthropy-devos-family-foundations-doug-and-maria-devos-foundation/

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Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. The Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation has been one of the largest in West Michigan, which was founded in 1992. According to GuideStar, in 2020, the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation contributed **$16,590,424**, leaving them with **$79,921,409** of funds left in their foundation. To see the 990 document for 2020 from the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, go **here.**

The Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2020, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Think Tanks, Education-centered groups, and social service entities, to name a few. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount and a brief analysis.

We also include groups that are DeVos owned or created, along with liberal non-profits. With the liberal non-profits, we believe that funding from foundations like the DeVos family foundations is a form of hush money. When we say hush money, we mean that these entities will not publicly challenge the system of Capitalism, the wealth gap, structural racism and other systems of oppression, which the DeVos family benefits from and perpetuates through their own political funding.

Religious Right

- Alliance for Children Everywhere – $100,000
- Base Camp Urban Outreach – $20,000
- Bridge St. House of Prayer – $50,000
- Christian Leader NFP – $50,000
- Covenant House Michigan – $25,000
- Keystone Community Church – $120,000
- Life International Inc – $100,000
- Luis Palau Association – $150,000

- Partners Worldwide – $40,000
- Pregnancy Resource Center – $30,000
- Young Life – $50,000

Far Right Think Tanks

- Acton Institute – $75,000
- American Enterprise Institute – $500,000
- Mackinac Center – $50,000
- National Constitution Center – $2,000,000
- The Seminar Network Inc. – $500,000

Education-centered groups

- Calvin University – $100,000
- Cornerstone University – $30,000
- Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative – $265,000
- Godwin Heights Public Schools – $48,000
- Grand Rapids Christian Schools – $161,000
- Grand Rapids Community College Foundation – $631,000
- Grand Rapids Public Schools – $93,500
- Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation – $720,000
- Grand Valley State University – $195,000
- Hope Academy of West Michigan – $78,500
- K-Connect – $125,000
- Leading Educators Inc – $1,855,250
- Ottawa Area ISD – $87,000
- Potter's House – $125,000
- Purdue Research Foundation – $5,175,000
- Rehoboth Christian School – $200,000
- The NYC Leadership Academy Inc – $345,000
- Wake Forest University – $250,000

The Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation has a long history of contributing to the Grand Rapids Public Schools, particularly through the GRPS foundation, known as the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation, which we **documented in 2019**.

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- ArtPrize – $50,000
- Grand Action Foundation 2.0 – $50,000
- Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders – $30,500
- Orlando Magic Youth Foundation – $90,000
- West MI Aviation Academy Foundation – $315,000

Groups receiving Hush $

- Access of West Michigan – $30,000
- Baxter Community Center – $50,000
- Bethany Christian Services – $475,000
- Degage Ministries – $165,000

- Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids – $200,000
- Family Promise of Grand Rapids – $135,000
- First Steps Kent – $75,000
- Heart of West Michigan United Way – $525,000
- ICCF – $30,000
- Kent County Habitat for Humanity – $125,000
- Kids Food Basket – $27,500
- Lifequest – $20,000
- Oakdale Neighbors – $37,120
- Safe Haven Ministries – $120,000
- The Other Way Ministries – $60,000

These groups all provide some sort of social service – people fleeing domestic violence, those who are housing insecure, people with disabilities, adoption and immigration. There are root causes to all of these issues, but these groups are not likely to address root causes and larger systems of oppression. When the DeVos family foundations make contributions, this will increase the likelihood that systems of oppression will not be addressed by these groups. One thing that is unique about the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation is the amount of money they give to non-profits that are in the 3rd Ward of Grand Rapids, where AmplifyGR is location, which is an entity they created.

Foundations rarely make contributions without strings attached. The Doug and Maria DeVos has a long history of funding far right and religious right groups, which **GRIID documented 10 years ago** when we started this project. Lastly, it is worth noting that the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, like all of the DeVos family foundation, compliments the campaign contributions they make to further impact public policy and promote their religious and capitalist ideologies.

The Political function of Philanthropy: DeVos Family Foundations – Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation https://griid.org/2023/06/28/the-political-function-of-philanthropy-devos-family-foundations-dan-and-pamela-devos-foundation/

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documents at the last minute, thus minimizing possible scrutiny. So far we have posted article about the **Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation**, the **Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation**, and the **Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation**.

Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. The Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation has been one of the largest in West Michigan, which was founded in 1992. According to GuideStar, in 2020, the Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation contributed **$8,735,200**, leaving them with **$11,167,253** of funds left in their foundation. To see the 990 document for 2020 from the Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation, go **here**.

The Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2020, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Think Tanks, Education-centered groups, and social service entities, to name a few. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount and a brief analysis.

We also include groups that are DeVos owned or created, along with liberal non-profits. With the liberal non-profits, we believe that funding from foundations like the DeVos family foundations is a form of hush money. When we say hush money, we mean that these entities will not publicly challenge the system of Capitalism, the wealth gap, structural racism and other systems of oppression, which the DeVos family benefits from and perpetuates through their own political funding.

Religious Right

- Alliance for Children Everywhere – $100,000
- Base Camp Urban Outreach – $20,000
- Bridge St. House of Prayer – $50,000
- Christian Leaders NFP – $50,000
- Keystone Community Church – $120,000
- Life International – $100,000
- Luis Palau Association – $150,000
- Partners Worldwide – $40,000
- Pregnancy Resource Center – $30,000
- Ron Ball Evangelistic Association – $90,000
- Tall Turf Ministries – $100,000
- US Conference of Catholic Bishops – $30,000
- West Michigan Christian Foundation – $450,000
- Young Life – $50,000

Life the other DeVos Family Foundations, contributing money to religious right groups is important for Dan and Pamela DeVos. For example, they contributed $450,000 to the West Michigan Christian Foundation, which according to their **2022 Impact Report**, donated **$5.7 Million to anti-abortion groups**. Another example is the Ron Ball Evangelistic Association, which received $90,000 from the foundation. Ron Ball does

large revival-like gatherings and **partners with the Heritage Foundation** to promote American Capitalism.

Far Right Think Tanks and Free Market groups

- Acton Institute – $75,000
- American Enterprise Institute – $500,000
- FII National – $1,225,000
- Greater Grand Rapids Chamber Foundation – $160,000
- Junior Achievement of the Michigan Great Lakes – $265,000
- Mackinac Center – $50,000
- National Constitution Center – $2,000,000
- Purdue Research Foundation – $5,175,000
- The Seminar Network Inc – $500,000

The DeVos family has always been deeply committed to free market Capitalism. They contributed $1,225,000 to **FII National, also known as UpTogether**, which believes that **poverty is a choice** and that people can chose to get out of poverty by starting their own business. Another interesting group is **The Seminar Network Inc**. (also known as Stand Together), which is an entity that promotes social entrepreneurs, was founded by the Koch Brothers and creates education material that **denies Climate Change**.

Education-centered groups

- Calvin University – $100,000
- Cornerstone University – $30,000
- Early Neighborhood Learning Collaborative – $265,500
- Godwin Heights Public Schools – $48,000
- Grand Rapids Christian Schools – $161,000
- Grand Rapids Community College Foundation – $631,000
- Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation – $545,000
- Grand Rapids Public Schools – $93,500
- Grand Valley State University – $195,000
- Hope Academy of West Michigan – $78,500
- K-Connect – $125,000
- Kent School Services Network – $50,000
- Leading Educators Inc. – $1,855,250
- Ottawa Area ISD – $87,000
- Potters House – $125,000
- Rehoboth Christian School – $200,000
- NYC Leadership Academy Inc – $345,000
- Wake Forest University – $250,000

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- ArtPrize – $50,000
- Grand Action Foundation – $50,000
- Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders – $30,5000

- Orlando Magic Youth Foundation – $90,000
- Spectrum Health Foundation – $492,500
- West Michigan Aviation Academy – $315,000

Groups receiving Hush $

- Baxter Community Center – $50,000
- Bethany Christian Services – $475,000
- Children's Assessment Center – $40,000
- Dégagé Ministries – $165,000
- Dwelling Place – $200,000
- Family Promise – $135,000
- First Steps Kent – $75,000
- Guiding Light Mission – $20,000
- Heart of West MI United Way – $525,000
- ICCF – $30,000
- Kent Habitat for Humanity – $125,000
- Kids Food Basket – $27,500
- Lifequest – $20,000
- Safe Haven Ministries – $120,000
- The Other Way Ministries – $60,000
- Wedgewood Christian Services – $250,000

Foundations rarely make contributions without strings attached. The Dan and Pamela DeVos has a long history of funding far right and religious right groups, which **GRIID documented 10 years ago when we started this project**. Lastly, it is worth noting that the Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation, like all of the DeVos family foundation, compliments the campaign contributions they make to further impact public policy and promote their religious and capitalist ideologies.

The Political function of Philanthropy: DeVos Family Foundations – CDV5 Foundation, the Cheri DeVos Foundation https://griid.org/2023/07/10/the-political-function-of-philanthropy-devos-family-foundations-cdv5-foundation-the-cheri-devos-foundation/

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GRIID has been providing information and analysis on the various DeVos Family Foundations, using the most recent 990 documents that foundations are legally required

to submit. These 990 documents must be submitted within a three-year period, which is why the 990s that we will be examining are from 2020, since most foundations prefer to submit their 990 documents at the last minute, thus minimizing public scrutiny. So far we have posted articles about the **Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation**, the **Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation**, the **Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation** and the **Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation**.

CDV5 – Cheri DeVos Foundation

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. The Cheri DeVos Foundation has been one of the larger foundations in West Michigan, and was also founded in 1992. According to GuideStar, in 2020, the Cheri DeVos Foundation contributed **$8,308,020**, leaving them with **$62,463,632** of funds left in their foundation. To see the 990 document for 2020 from the Cheri DeVos Foundation, go **here**.

The Cheri DeVos Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2020, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Think Tanks, Education-centered groups, and social service entities, to name a few. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount and a brief analysis.

We also include groups that are DeVos owned or created, along with liberal non-profits. With the liberal non-profits, we believe that funding from foundations like the DeVos family foundations is a form of hush money. When we say hush money, we mean that these entities will not publicly challenge the system of Capitalism, the wealth gap, structural racism and other systems of oppression, which the DeVos family benefits from and perpetuates through their own political funding.

Religious Right

- Base Camp Urban Outreach – $30,000
- Bridge St. House of Prayer – $70,000
- Christian Leaders NFP – $50,000
- Mel Trotter Ministries – $25,000
- Partners Worldwide – $30,000
- Young Life – $50,000
- Zuni Christian Mission School – $30,000

Life the other DeVos Family Foundations, contributing money to religious right groups is important for Cheri DeVos. Groups like the Bridge St. House of Prayer and Mel Trotter Ministries prey on those who are financially struggling or unhoused in order to evangelize them, while perpetuating the harm that Capitalism creates that actually is the root cause of economic hardship for thousands in Grand Rapids.

Far Right Think Tanks and Free Market groups

- FII National – $1,225,000
- Greater Grand Rapids Chamber Foundation – $130,000

The DeVos family has always been deeply committed to free market Capitalism. They contributed $1,225,000 to FII National, also known as **UpTogether**, which believes that poverty is a choice and that people can chose to get out of poverty by starting their own business. Another interesting group is the Greater Grand Rapids Chamber Foundation, which is **currently focused on supporting the Housing Next program**, which was created by the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and believes that market-based solutions will solve the housing crisis.

Education-centered groups

- Grand Rapids Christian Schools – $160,000
- Grand Rapids Community College Foundation – $250,000
- Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation – $720,000
- Grand Valley State University – $200,000
- Hope Academy of West Michigan – $78,500
- Hope College – $50,000
- Potters House – $90,000
- Rehoboth Christian School – $120,000
- Wake Forest University – $25,000

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- ArtPrize – $50,000
- Grand Action Foundation – $50,000
- Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders – $20,500
- Orlando Magic Youth Foundation – $90,000
- Spectrum Health Foundation – $385,000
- West Michigan Aviation Academy – $365,000

Like the other DeVos Family Foundations, the Cheri DeVos Foundation makes it a point to fund other DeVos created projects, which means that DeVos family members are just shuffling money to each other and calling it a charitable contribution.

Groups receiving Hush $

- Baxter Community Center – $40,000
- Bethany Christian Services – $260,000
- Children's Assessment Center – $40,000
- Dégagé Ministries – $60,000
- Family Promise – $155,000
- Feeding America West MI – $50,000
- Heart of West MI United Way – $345,000
- ICCF – $25,000
- Kent Habitat for Humanity – $300,000
- Kids Food Basket – $150,000
- Safe Haven Ministries – $90,000
- Wedgewood Christian Services – $215,000

Foundations rarely make contributions without strings attached. The Cheri DeVos has a long history of funding far right and religious right groups, which **GRIID documented 10**

years ago when we started this project. Lastly, it is worth noting that the Cheri DeVos Foundation, like all of the DeVos family foundation, compliments the **campaign contributions they make to further impact public policy and promote their religious and capitalist ideologies**.

The Political function of Philanthropy: DeVos Family Foundations – The Jerry & Marcia Tubergen Foundation https://griid.org/2023/07/18/the-political-function-of-philanthropy-devos-family-foundations-the-jerry-marcia-tubergen-foundation/

"*In any case, the hidden hand of of foundations can control the course of social change and deflect anger to targets other than elite power."*

– Joan Roelofs, Foundations and Public Policy

For the past 10 years, GRIID has been monitoring foundations in West Michigan, particularly the large family foundations that those who are part of the Grand Rapids Power Structure have created. Our monitoring of local foundations has been part of our larger critique of the **Non-Profit Industrial complex in Grand Rapids**.

GRIID has been providing information and analysis on the various DeVos Family Foundations, using the most recent 990 documents that foundations are legally required to submit. These 990 documents must be submitted within a three-year period, which is why the 990s that we will be examining are from 2020, since most foundations prefer to submit their 990 documents at the last minute, thus minimizing public scrutiny. So far we have posted articles about the **Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation**, the **Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation**, the **Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation**, the **Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation** and the **Cheri DeVos Foundation**.

The Jerry & Marcia Tubergen Foundation

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. Now, Jerry and Marcia Tubergen are not directly DeVos Family members, but they have a long and deep connection to the most powerful family in. West Michigan. The Jerry and Marcia Tubergen was founded in 1998. According to GuideStar, in 2020, the Jerry and Marcia Tubergen Foundation contributed **$3,418,635**, leaving them with **$14,695,875** of funds left in their foundation. To see the 990 document for 2020 from the Jerry and Marcia Tubergen Foundation, go **here**.

The long standing connection that Jerry and Marica Tubergen have with the DeVos family are as follows. Jerry Tubergen is the CEO of one of the largest components of the DeVos empire, the RDV Corporation. Jerry is also runs the DeVos investment firm, called Ottawa Private Capital LLC. It is also important to point out that Jerry Tubergen is listed as a trustee for every DeVos family foundation, according to the 990 reports.

The Jerry and Marcia Tubergen Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2020, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Education-centered groups and DeVos created/connected entities. The Jerry and Marcia Tubergen Foundation has a smaller foundation compared to the DeVos family members, but there is some similarities in the groups they fund. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount and a brief analysis.

We also include groups that are DeVos owned or created, along with liberal non-profits. With the liberal non-profits, we believe that funding from foundations like the DeVos family foundations is a form of hush money. When we say hush money, we mean that these entities will not publicly challenge the system of Capitalism, the wealth gap, structural racism and other systems of oppression, which the DeVos family benefits from and perpetuates through their own political funding.

Religious Right

- Center for Faith Sexuality and Gender – $50,000
- Cure International – $1,250,000
- Mel Trotter Ministries – $525,000
- Museum of the Bible – $100,000
- The Colson Center for Christian Worldview. – $25,000
- Young Life – $20,000

Jerry Tubergen sits on the board of Cure International, which is a christian ministry that provides health services for people living in countries in the Global South. Cure International does not challenge or question the political or economic conditions in the Global South and should be viewed a an organization that engages in a form of Saviorism. Mel Trotter Ministries also practices a brand of Saviorism, plus are **not interested in solving the root causes of homelessness**.

Education-centered groups

- Cornerstone University $205,000
- NorthPointe Christian Schools – $30,000
- Potters House – $30,000

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- ArtPrize – $5000
- West Michigan Aviation Academy – $5,000

Groups receiving Hush $

- Heart of West MI United Way – $30,000
- Kids Food Basket – $27,500
- Wedgewood Christian Services – $150,000

West Michigan Foundation Watch: The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2024/08/14/west-michigan-foundation-watch-the-dick-and-betsy-devos-foundation/

It is that time of the year again, when GRIID posts about the various West Michigan Foundations from families that make up the Grand Rapids Power Structure. I start with the DeVos family, which has just 5 different foundations, since the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation was recently fazed out, which **I wrote about in a 2 Part series**.

The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation has been one of the largest in West Michigan, which was founded in 1989, the same time that Dick DeVos was the CEO of Amway. According to GuideStar, in 2022, the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation contributed **$8,657,300.00** leaving them with **$57,782,067.00** of funds left in their foundation account.

The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2022, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Think Tanks, Education-centered groups, and social service entities, to name a few. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount and a brief analysis.

We also include groups that are DeVos owned or created, along with liberal non-profits. With the liberal non-profits, we believe that funding from foundations like the DeVos family foundations is a form of hush money. When we say hush money, we mean that these entities will not publicly challenge the system of Capitalism, the wealth gap, structural racism and other systems of oppression, which the DeVos family benefits from and perpetuates through their own political funding.

Religious Right

- Alpha USA – $100,000
- Global Leadership Network – $400,000
- Help Pregnancy Crisis AID Inc. – $75,000
- Mars Hill Bible Church – $246,000
- Museum of the Bible – $50,000
- Partners Worldwide – $25,000
- Pregnancy Resource Center – $20,000
- Right to Life of Michigan – $25,000
- Embracing the Journey Inc. – $200,000

These religious groups practice varying degrees of conservative politics, which fit into the ideological framework that the DeVos family is committed to. For instance, **Right to**

Life Michigan spent $9,343,500 to defeat Prop 3, which allows people to legally chose to have an abortion.

Far Right Think Tanks

- Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty – $252,500
- American Enterprise Institute – $375,000
- Defense of Freedom Institute for Policy Studies – $650,000
- Foundation for Individual Rights in Education – $25,000
- Great Lakes Education Foundation – $100,000
- Institute for Cultural Evolution – $34,000
- Mackinac Center for Public Policy – $625,000
- Philanthropy Roundtable – $50,000
- The Claremont Institute – $260,000
- Young America's Foundation – $25,000

These Think Tanks influence public policy in individual states, like the **Acton Institute** and the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** does in Michigan. The **American Enterprise Institute** and the **Philanthropy Roundtable** do the same thing, but at the federal level, which is why they are based in DC.

Education-centered groups

- Dr. Howard Fuller Collegiate Academy Inc. – $1,000,000
- Grand Rapids Community College Foundation – $50,000
- Holland Christian Schools. – $51,000
- Northwood University – $250,000
- Potters House – $200,000
- Prager University Foundation – $25,000
- Student Freedom Initiative – $500,000
- University of Maryland – $1,450,000

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- ArtPrize – $200,000 (this was the last year it was being run the Rick DeVos)
- Chicago Cubs Charities – $10,000
- Corewell Health Foundation – $330,000
- Grand Action Foundation 2.0 – $50,000
- West Michigan Aviation Academy Foundation – $450,000

Of course all these entities that were created by DeVos family members, also promote their ideological religious and capitalist values. On top of that, it also means that DeVos family members are funding their own entities and using their foundation to fund their own pet projects, like Grand Action Foundation 2,0 – which promotes development projects in Grand Rapids that use public funds and expands their wealth – or the West Michigan Aviation Academy – because it promotes the privatization of education.

Groups receiving Hush $

- Baxter Community Center – $5,000
- Exalta Health – $10,000

- Degage Ministries – $5,000
- ICCF Community Homes – $25,000
- Kent County Habitat for Humanity – $5,000
- Kids Food Basket – $5,000
- Safe Haven Ministries – $10,000
- Women's Resource Center – $10,000

These groups all provide some sort of social service – people fleeing domestic violence, those who are housing insecure, people with disabilities, adoption and immigration. There are root causes to all of these issues, but these groups are not likely to address root causes and larger systems of oppression. When the DeVos family foundations make contributions, this will increase the likelihood that systems of oppression will not be addressed by these groups.

Foundations rarely make contributions without strings attached. The Dick and Betsy DeVos has a long history of funding far right and religious right groups, which **GRIID documented 10 years ago** when we started this project. Lastly, it is worth noting that the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation, like all of the DeVos family foundations, compliments the campaign contributions they make to further impact public policy and promote their religious and capitalist ideologies.

West Michigan Foundation Watch: The Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2024/08/21/west-michigan-foundation-watch-the-doug-and-maria-devos-foundation/

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. Last week I looked at the **Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation**, but today we'll take a look at the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation.

I am using the data from the foundation's 990 document for 2022, which is the most recent year that is available. The Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation has **$86,526,683.00 of assets** in the foundation's account, which is just another way that members of the Capitalist Class to be able to hide their money from taxation.

Before I dive into how the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation distributed to of their funds, I wanted to point out that they spent over $1 million on "professional services", some of which were just a way of giving money back to themselves. For instance, their foundation paid RDV Corporation (DeVos owned) $617,137.00 for a "management fee." The foundation also spent another $294,728.00 for a "management fee" to Ottawa

Avenue Private Capital, which is also owned by the DeVos family. Other expenses for the Doug and Maria Foundation went to:

- Basis Policy Research, which has an office on Wealthy St, and does consulting and research on education policy and practices, with an emphasis on private and Charter School education systems, received $141,661.00.
- Seyferth PR received $71,846.00 as a communications consultant.
- Tiffany McCurley Bierlein Designs LLC received $51,075.00 for consultation services.

I guess when you have over $86 million in assets in your foundation, you can afford to spend over $1 million on services, especially when most of that goes back to entities you already own.

The Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2022, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Think Tanks, Education-centered groups, and social service entities, to name a few. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount.

Religious Right

- Covenant House Michigan – $25,000
- Keystone Community Church – $370,000
- Life International Inc. – $30,000
- Luis Palau Association – $150,000
- National Christian Foundation – $366,000
- Partners Worldwide – $15,000
- Pregnancy Resource Center – $30,000
- Young Life – $55,000

Far Right Think Tanks/Pro-Capitalist groups

- Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty – $80,000
- American Enterprise Institute – $350,000
- Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce – $59,500
- Mackinac Center – $125,000
- National Constitution Center – $6,522,500
- Philanthropy Roundtable – $25,000
- Stand Together Foundation – $1,000,000

Education-centered groups

- Calvin University – $100,000
- Grand Rapids Christian Schools – $450,000
- Grand Rapids Public Schools Foundation – $145,000
- GVSU – $15,000
- K Connect. – $125,000
- Leading Educators Inc. – $900,000
- Living Stones Academy – $90,000
- Potters House – $225,000
- Rehoboth Christian School Association – $100,000

- Talent 2025 Inc. – $25,000
- Wake Forest University – $265,000

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- ArtPrize – $25,000 (this was the last year it was being run by Rick DeVos)
- Corewell Health Foundation – $362,000
- Grand Action Foundation 2.0 – $50,000
- West Michigan Aviation Academy Foundation – $60,000

Groups receiving Hush $

- Baxter Community Center – $40,000
- Bethany Christian Services – $116,000
- DA Blodgett/St. Johns – $150,000
- Degage Ministries – $25,000
- Exalta Health – $30,000
- ICCF Community Homes – $30,000
- Kids Food Basket – $7,500
- Safe Haven Ministries – $70,500
- The Other Way Ministries – $30,000

These groups all provide some sort of social service – people fleeing domestic violence, those who are housing insecure, people with disabilities, adoption and immigration. There are root causes to all of these issues, but these groups are not likely to address root causes and larger systems of oppression. When the DeVos family foundations make contributions, this will increase the likelihood that systems of oppression will not be addressed by these groups.

West Michigan Foundation Watch: The Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2024/08/28/west-michigan-foundation-watch-the-dan-and-pamela-devos-foundation/

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. GRIID has already looked at the **Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation**, along with the **Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation**. Today, I want to look at the Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation.

I am using the data from the foundation's 990 document for 2022, which is the most recent year that is available. The Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation

has **$6,114,272 of assets** in the foundation's account, which is just another way that members of the Capitalist Class to be able to hide their money from taxation.

Before I dive into how the Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation distributed their funds, I wanted to point out that Dan and Pamela own the following components of the DeVos family empire – DP Fox, Fox Motors, the Pamela Roland Collection, the Grand Rapids Griffins, and are a partner in CWD Real Estate Investments, as we noted in **Part II in the series on the Grand Rapids Power Structure**.

The Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2022, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Think Tanks, Education-centered groups, and social service entities, to name a few. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount.

Religious Right

Keystone Community Church – $75,000

Far Right Think Tanks/Pro-Capitalist groups

Mackinac Center – $375,000

Education-centered groups

- Davenport University – $252,500
- GVSU – $425,000
- * Northwood University – $20,090,000 (Dan DeVos is on the **Board of Trustees**)

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- ArtPrize – $25,000 (this was the last year it was being run by Rick DeVos)
- Chicago Cubs Charities – $30,000
- Corewell Health Foundation – $225,000
- Grand Action Foundation 2.0 – $50,000
- * Grand Rapids Art Museum – $250,000 (Pamela DeVos is an **honorary Trustee**)
- Grand Rapids Griffins Youth Foundation – $52,560
- * Grand Rapids Symphony Society – $450,000 (Pamela Roland is a **Board member**)
- * Hope Network Foundation – $425,000 (Dan DeVos is a **Board member**)
- * John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts – $200,000 (Pamela DeVos is a **Trustee)**
- West Michigan Aviation Academy Foundation – $65,000
- * Whitney Museum of American Art – $550,000 (Pamela DeVos is on the **Board of Trustees)**

Groups receiving Hush $

- Baxter Community Center – $10,000
- Bethany Christian Services – $50,000
- Family Promise of Grand Rapids – $50,000

These groups all provide some sort of social service – people fleeing domestic violence, those who are housing insecure, people with disabilities, adoption and immigration. There are root causes to all of these issues, but these groups are not likely to address root causes and larger systems of oppression. When the DeVos family foundations make contributions, this will increase the likelihood that systems of oppression will not be addressed by these groups.

The Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation gives less money to religious groups and right wing think tanks, compared to other DeVos Family Foundations. However, where they do stand out is in contributions to entities that either Dan or Pamela DeVos are board members. (***Wherever you see an ****) These groups receive millions or hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Dan and Pamela Foundation, which means they not only have a significant say in how their contributions are used, they get to influence policies in the organizations that they are board members of. In these cases they are doubling up on the kind of influence they have.

West Michigan Foundation Watch: The CDV5 Foundation – also known as the Cheri DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2024/09/05/west-michigan-foundation-watch-the-cdv5-foundation-also-known-as-the-cheri-devos-foundation/

GRIID has always begun our Foundation Watch work by looking at the foundations associated with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family. GRIID has already looked at the **Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation**, the **Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation** and the **Dan and Pamela DeVos Foundation**.

I am using the data from the foundation's 990 document for 2022, which is the most recent year that is available. The CDV5 Foundation has **$74,339,327 of assets** in the foundation's account, which is just another way that members of the Capitalist Class to be able to hide their money from taxation.

Before I dive into how the CDV5 Foundation distributed their funds, I wanted to point out that Cheri DeVos is the primary DeVos family member who runs this foundation, along with CDV5 Properties,, which does property management for retail, office and residential buildings, **like the one I wrote about in 2022**.

In addition, it is important to point out that the CDV5 Foundation has provided funds to other DeVos family economic assets, specifically **Ottawa Avenue Private Capital $212,047.00 and the RDV Corporation $151,581.00**.

The CDV5 Foundation made contributions to dozens of entities in 2022, but there are some clear categories of groups they contributed to, such as the Religious Right, Think Tanks, Education-centered groups, and social service entities, to name a few. Below is a listing of each from these categories, with a dollar amount.

Religious Right

- Basecamp Urban Outreach – $20,000
- Fellowship of Christian Athletes – $30,000
- Keystone Community Church – $250,000
- Partners Worldwide – $30,000

Education-centered groups

- Grand Rapids Christian Schools – $810,000
- Hope College – $25,000
- Potters House – $75,000
- Rehoboth Christian School Association – $100,000

DeVos-owned, created or connected groups

- ArtPrize – $25,000 (this was the last year it was being run by Rick DeVos)
- Chicago Cubs Charities – $10,000
- Corewell Health Foundation – $200,000
- Grand Action Foundation 2.0 – $50,000
- Grand Rapids Symphony Society – $450,000
- Helen DeVos Children's Foundation – $35,000
- West Michigan Aviation Academy Foundation – $105,000

Groups receiving Hush $

- Baxter Community Center – $30,000
- Bethany Christian Services – $40,000
- DA Blodgett/St. Johns – $100,000
- Family Promise of Grand Rapids – $20,000
- Housing Kent – $300,000
- Kids Food Basket – $100,000
- Safe Haven Ministries – $50,000
- Women's Resource Center – $300,000

These groups all provide some sort of social service – people fleeing domestic violence, those who are housing insecure, etc. There are root causes to all of these issues, but these groups are not likely to address root causes and larger systems of oppression. When the DeVos family foundations make contributions, this will increase the likelihood that systems of oppression will not be addressed by these groups.

For example, the CDV5 Foundation gave $300,000 to the group Housing Kent. Housing Kent claims to work towards housing for everyone who lives in Kent County. However,

Housing Kent never discusses how the cost of housing, either owning a home or renting, is too expensive for thousands of individuals and families living in Kent County.

Housing Kent thinks that if more “affordable housing” is built, there can be options for everyone. This is a false solution, since they do not promote social housing policies or funding for social housing, plus they never talk about the need for people to earn a livable income to be able to afford to buy a home or cover the cost of rent in Kent County. You see why they think this, based on **those who sit on the board of directors**, which os made up of mostly developers, politicians, DeVos personnel and the government affairs person from the GR Chamber of Commerce, Josh Lunger. Lunger was the person from the GR Chamber to prosed the ordinance to criminalize the unhoused and then championed the version of the City ordinance that Grand Rapids adopted.

Then there are the “**strategic partners**” involved with Housing Kent, which consists of lots of the usual suspects – banks, foundations that are part of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, government entities, numerous businesses and pro-business groups, along with several non-profit groups that are notorious for not challenging systems of power or addressing roots causes of social problems. These are the exact kinds of groups that the DeVos family foundation love to direct money towards, because they will not threaten the ideological economic and political interests of the most powerful family in West Michigan.

6. West Michigan Media Coverage & the DeVos Family

Press reporter acts as stenographer for 3 generations of the DeVos family

https://griid.org/2010/09/09/press-reporter-acts-as-stenographer-for-3-generations-of-the-devos-family/

Today on front-page of the Region section of the *Grand Rapids Press,* reporter **Myron Kukla wrote a short article** about members of the DeVos family speaking at an event in Holland that is part of the **Edgar Prince** "Lessons in Leadership Series."

The article shares comments from Helen DeVos, Richard DeVos and Dick DeVos Jr., who shared the stage with Betsy DeVos, Rick DeVos and his wife. The Press reporter shared comments from each of the family members that were presented in such a way that made you feel like we were all just sitting in some typical family living room and drinking tea.

The article does mention the Amway business, the creation of Windquest Group, their ownership of the Orlando Magic basketball team, Kids Hope USA and Rick DeVos' involvement with ArtPrize.

There was no historical context and no discussion about how the family has used their wealth over the years. Even if those aspects were not discussed at last nights event it would not be unreasonable for a journalist to explore those angles, especially considering the DeVos family arguably has more economic and political influence on West Michigan than any other family.

People need to know about the **Richard DeVos Sr.'s long time funding of far-right causes**around the world. In fact, **Helen**, **Dick**, and **Betsy** DeVos have also contributed to far-right causes such as using public tax money for private education, English only campaigns, anti-gay legislation, pro-corporate policies and counter-insurgency campaigns around the world.

For a reporter to not ask questions or raise questions about such influence is unacceptable. The public deserves more from journalists, especially if they want people to participate at any level of the democratic process. Maybe the Press reporter knows that if you challenge or even question the power that the DeVos family wields there will be consequences, such as what happen to sports journalist **Dave Zirin who exposed Richard DeVos' support of far-right activities in a recent book**.

The Press reporter did mention who the moderator of the event was, Rev. Robert Sirico, who was referred to as a "family friend." Sirico is the founder and president of the far-right think tank **The Acton Institute** based in Grand Rapids that weds capitalism and Christianity and has a history of supporting anti-environmental and other reactionary policies. Sirico is also a "family friend" and spiritual advisor to Erik Prince, the war profiteer who has fled the country in order to avoid any consequences for the growing scandal surrounding the activities of Blackwater.

Any competent journalist would have a least frame the event with the DeVos clan with some acknowledgement that there are serious criticisms of their influence, but not much can be expected from the **Grand Rapids Press, which the day before made the new home of Dick and Betsy DeVos their front-page story**. Instead, the Press reporter merely acted as a stenographer of power.

Six words to describe Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2011/07/06/six-words-to-describe-grand-rapids/

It was announced during the 4th of July celebration that the Amway corporation, along with MLive and the Grand Rapids Press have teamed up to offer yet another contest.

The contest is called **My GR 6** and is designed to get people to submit a 6-word phrase that best describes the City of Grand Rapids. The winner of this contest will be showered with $10,000 worth of local prizes that have been donated by some of the larger local businesses and entertainment venues.

Already there has been a significant media buzz around the issue and lots of people submitting their 6 word statements. **First**, I want to state upfront that there are a lot of things happening in this community that are beneficial, creative and truly support what the famous educator/activist **Scott Nearing** called "the good life." What Nearing meant by the good life was social justice, ecological integrity and economic simplicity.

Second, while this project may get people to reflect fondly on the positive attributes of this city, it will not likely get much critical reflection. Some obvious criticisms are that this new "contest," which was hatched by some marketing personnel with the Amway Corporation, should raise red flags for anyone who hasn't completely bought into the PR generated history of the Ada-based company, its founders and their families.

The Amway Corporation and the DeVos & Van Andel families have a long history of influencing Grand Rapids both economically and politically. Using the wealth these families made off the backs of workers and those who bought into the pyramid-scheme sales structure, the Amway families have purchased property in the downtown part of Grand Rapids and played a major role in the re-construction of that part of the city.

These assets that Amway family members have acquired has provided them significant leverage in determining what kind of development was to occur, such as hotels, the arena, convention center and medical mile.

In addition to the property assets they possess, they have also leveraged what happens in the city through the political process, whether that has been through major contributions to the Republican Party or area candidates running for office at all levels. They have also influence downtown development through support and participation in such groups as the DDA and Grand Action.

More recent participation in cultural institutions such as the Art Museum, the Public Museum, UICA and the now popular ArtPrize have also provided tremendous clout to the Amway families who have become much better at using the wealth they made from other people to create a much friendlier buffer between unbridled greed and a growing class of people living in poverty.

“Grand people, great faith, generous giving.” Richard and Helen DeVos MyGR6 phrase

The **Third** and last point to raise here is that while it is certainly important to point out the positive elements of what makes up Grand Rapids, it too often means that we do not look at the negative and even destructive forces in this city. Not directing our gaze or our creativity toward these very real elements of this city is exactly what the Amway families want us to give our attention to.

So, in keeping with the spirit of the MyGR6 contest, I would like to offer up 6 words to get us to think about the not so pleasant realities that permeate our city.

Poverty – Last week we **reported** on the new unemployment statistics for Kent County, which currently has 8.8% of unemployment. What the statistics don’t reveal is that there are thousands of people living in poverty in Grand Rapids, both the unemployed and underemployed. This means that thousands of people are faced with the possibility of being evicted, not being able to pay utility bills, forced to rely on food pantries and purchase cheap foods, which is often unhealthy food. Living in poverty often leads to people living under significant stress and coping with depression.

In the neighborhood that I have lived in for 26 years, this kind of poverty also has led to abusive landlords who take advantage of those in poverty by taking their monthly rent but not investing is a safe and healthy environment. *This is part of My Grand Rapids!*

Racism – It is not a secret that Grand Rapids in one of the most racially segregated cities in the country. In addition to the segregation, communities of color are still disproportionately treated as second-class citizens. The poverty rates are higher for Black and Latino/a communities and there is a disproportionately higher rate of incarceration for these two communities of color.

I also know numerous people in the Arab American community who continue to receive threats and verbal assaults on a daily basis. The same is true for all communities of color and those that are also part of recent immigrant communities, who constantly live in fear of harassment from both individuals and cops. Grand Rapids is home to thousands of migrant workers who make poverty wages and endure harsh working conditions even though they provide the labor that brings us most of our food. *This is part of My Grand Rapids!*

Sexism – According to the Kent County Sexual Assault Prevention Action Team, there are significant numbers of women and children who are sexually assaulted on a monthly basis in Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids is no different from the rest of the country in that roughly 30% of the women who live in this community will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. This is not a marginal number, but the number does not convey the realities of the ongoing trauma that those who are victims of sexual assault experience throughout their entire lives, which includes some of my closest friends and those I work with. *This is My Grand Rapids!*

Homophobia – While it is true that the City of Grand Rapids passed an anti-discrimination ordinance in the mid – 1990s, there is still significant discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community. This discrimination is faced in the areas of **housing**, employment, health services and within religious institutions. After months of research and interviews with people in the LGBTQ community for the People's History Project, it is clear that Grand Rapids has a long way to go to not only respect people in the gay community, but to provide social, cultural and public space for them to feel safe and welcomed. *This is My Grand Rapids!*

Pollution – For some, Grand Rapids is known as a "green" city. However, despite some progress being made around environmental issues, Grand Rapids is still a community with an unsustainable amount of pollution. Air pollution is problematic for everyone, but particularly for people with asthma and other respiratory issues. Communities of color and working class neighborhoods are disproportionately closer to the highways that run through this city and are exposed to more air pollution caused from vehicle exhaust.

Grand Rapids doesn't have adequate green space and needs to improve the urban canopy of trees significantly. Water pollution has improved in some areas but we need to drastically reduce both the amount of contaminants going into water and the amount of water consumed in this city. Grand Rapids does not as of yet have a plan for dealing with composted matter, does not allow people to raise chickens and is still far off from being a city where bicycle and mass transit are the dominant forms of transportation.

Exploitation – The economy of Grand Rapids operates within a Capitalist model and is even celebrated as a place of famous entrepreneurs – ie., the Amway families. This means that we have significant concentrations of wealth in the hands of a few, while working people are exploited on a daily basis.

The "captains of industry" have mechanisms they have created to dictate what happens in Grand Rapids, such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Right Place Program, the DDA and other business programs that exist to push forth a corporate agenda. We can see this — what **Michael Barker calls soft power** — with the power of business schools at local universities as well as the clout that wealthy families exert through their numerous foundations.

In fact, writers like Barker would argue that Amway's creation and participation in the MyGR6 contest is a form of soft power because it ultimately supports a system which only benefits a certain sector of the population. If we truly want Grand Rapids to be a grand city, then we need to have critical dialogue followed by the kind of systemic change that would not allow so few to have power over so many.

Holy Shit! Amway is a Pyramid Scheme?

https://griid.org/2010/11/04/holy-shit-amway-is-a-pyramid-scheme/

Yesterday, it was **reported on MLive** that Amway has agreed to pay out $56 million to plaintiffs in a "***class-action suit alleging the company and some of its top-level distributors operate an illegal pyramid scheme.***"

The article goes on to say that the **lawsuit,** "*alleged the company used unfair and illegal business practices that mislead distributors about their ability to make money and how much it would cost to be part of the business.*"

However, despite the claims made in the lawsuit, Amway President Doug DeVos still does not want to admit to the allegations in the lawsuit. In an interesting display of journalism, the Grand Rapids Press included a letter that the Amway executives sent to the "Amway Community."

The letter states that while the company has agreed to pay out $56 million and "*the company and its IBO leaders take responsibility for all past issues,"* it still denies any real wrong doing.

While one could argue that it shows that the Press is not afraid of exposing the wrong doings of the most powerful company in West Michigan, the way the Press presents the story suggests otherwise.

First, this story is archived in the Business section of MLive and not in general news where other crime stories are found. Make no mistake this is a crime story. It might be a "white collar" crime, but it is definitely crime. And to be realistic, which is worse, the guy who steals a few hundred bucks from the local party store or business practices which steal millions?

Second, the Press does not bother to seek out other sources for this story, but relies on Amway executives to tell us what we should believe. MLive did run a **follow up article today**, which cited two of the lawyers representing the plaintiffs, but they still don't go far enough to seek out local or national sources that could speak to the allegations in the lawsuit.

Lastly, the Press fails to question the very nature of Amway's business practices. So while this lawsuit identifies specific claims from specific plaintiffs about pyramid scheme practices, the Press misses the opportunity to ask the question, "**Isn't Amway fundamentally based on a pyramid scheme system?**"

This is exactly what numerous former Independent Business Operators (IBOs) of Amway have been claiming for years. One of those former IMOs is **Steve Butterfield** who wrote the book ***Amway: The Cult of Free Enterprise***. That the Press chose not to include voices like Steve Butterfield's and not question how Amway has operated from the very beginning is a clear indicator that the Press is unwilling to challenge the power of the Ada-based company.

Grand Rapids Fortunate Grandson continues tradition of profit making for the few

https://griid.org/2011/07/27/grand-rapids-fortunate-grandson-continues-tradition-of-profit-making-for-the-few/

I have heard numerous people over the past 2 years make the argument that Rick DeVos is blazing his own path and shouldn't be judged by the previous DeVos generations' political philosophy. A **recent article in MiBiz** would suggest otherwise, especially for those who are not under the spell of Capitalism's promise of riches.

The MiBiz article mostly focuses on Rick DeVos' more recent project known as **5×5**, a competition of sorts, which requires those seeking funds for start up business projects must present their idea to a panel of judges. This is really old news for those who follow GR politics since the 5×5 venture has been happening since January of this year.

5×5 is not an entirely original idea for Grand Rapids, since another project called **Sunday Soup** follows a similar model. Well, not really. There are fundamental differences between the two projects, Sunday Soup is grassroots, takes place at the DAAC and allows anyone who attends to be part of the collective decision on which art-based proposal will get funding. 5×5 is not grassroots, gives out money for business-focused projects and uses judges that are primarily culled from business circles.

Cut from the same cloth

The MiBiz article is instructive in that not only provides DeVos an unchallenged forum to promote his ideas, it tells us something about what he really values.

The article provides a little information on DeVos' history of for-profit projects. He mentions Sprout as his first venture and says that it didn't do as well as planned. Soon after he started ArtPrize, which as we all know has been widely successful. Rick DeVos then goes on to say:

"Perseverance is the key, as is not treating failure as something that marks someone for life. (Failure) is inevitable if you're trying. If you're not failing, you aren't trying hard enough."

Interesting, although not surprising, that the MiBiz writer does not challenge DeVos on this notion of perseverance. Here is a guy who comes from a multi-billion dollar family, with business and political connections that have a global reach, and he wants us to believe that he became successful because he persevered?

In addition, Rick DeVos has become quite good at using cutting edge language like "decentralized models" and "a dynamic ecosystem of entrepreneurs." DeVos wants us all to think that he embraces a communal/collectivist approach to life, but despite his use of language we need to ask the basic question…….who benefits from these kinds of projects?

The MiBiz article makes it clear that the local elite business community fully endorses his projects, as well as the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority (DDA). There is no mention of working class people, racial minorities or those who live anywhere other than the downtown business districts. So it seems clear who the beneficiaries are.

The MiBiz article also mentions a third project by Rick DeVos, called Momentum. Momentum is a business "boot camp" where applicants are vetted and are then eligible for much larger capital investment funds. The project provides **mentors** (all White business people) and a group of **business sponsors** that also attempt to present themselves as "community minded."

The MiBiz article ends with one more comment from Rick DeVos that is also instructive. *"I love ideas, and I love the connection between ideas. I love innovation and trying things in that spirit of rebelliousness you have to start from when you're trying to do something new. … Anything we can do to support that is a good thing."*

First, there is nothing rebellious about anyone who was born into wealth and continues to promote well accumulation for a chosen few. Second, there is nothing terribly innovative about any of the projects that Rick DeVos has created to far. The 5×5 and Momentum projects are both designed to do what organizations as old as the **National Manufactures Association** – generate more wealth for a select few and then make the claims that this new wealth will trickle down to benefit everyone.

The trickle down notion is even what drives ArtPrize if one considers who the primary beneficiaries are of that project. The downtown businesses – hotels, restaurants, clubs and private parking lots – are the big winners. Sure some working class people might make extra tips, but the whole idea is based on the fact that hundreds of artists will invest their unpaid labor with only a handful of artists getting paid.

ArtPrize is also "successful" in that it has received an uncanny amount of **local news coverage** (which is essentially free advertising), so much so that in 2010 ArtPrize coverage trumped election coverage despite the fact that there was a Governor's race. Add to this the recent announcement that ArtPrize is receiving **$100,000 of federal money**, which essentially means that working people are partially subsidizing a project that will disproportionately benefit the business class.

For all the claims that Rick DeVos is a rebellious guy who is stepping out from the shadows of his father and grandfather, we think it would be more accurate to say that he is continuing the family tradition of transferring wealth to a chosen few while most of the community struggles to meet its basic needs.

Meijer and DeVos got richer while West Michigan poverty increased

https://griid.org/2011/09/22/meijer-and-devos-got-richer-while-west-michigan-poverty-increases/

Today, **MLive reported** that Fred Meijer and Richard DeVos are tied for 60th place on the **Forbes 400 richest people** in the US.

Besides listing other rich people on the list from Michigan, MLive reporter Chris Knape echoes the message from both Meijer and DeVos about how they made their wealth. Meijer, because he practices "*higher standards, lower prices*," and DeVos because of his "*international multi-level marketing business in his basement."*

The article did have useful data, since it reported that DeVos' wealth had increase by 43% since 2007 and Meijer' wealth went up 150% during the same period of time. Both, according to Forbes are worth $5 Billion.

These substantial increases in their wealth raise numerous questions, which the Press writer doesn't pursue. One question might be how has the federal and state tax structures benefited these obscenely rich men? **Citizens for Tax Justice** note in a recent fact sheet that corporations pay well below the amount of taxes they should be paying because of the current federal tax structure. We all know what kind of **tax cuts for businesses have taken place in Michigan in 2011**, with the elimination of the business tax legislation.

Another question, which could be asked by journalists, would be how both DeVos and Meijer were able to increase their wealth at 43 and 150 percent respectively during a major global economic crisis? Some Meijer employees are unionized, but that union has made significant concessions in recent years on wages and benefits. Amway isn't unionized and isn't likely to unionize since the DeVos family has been rabidly anti-union from the beginning of their pyramid scheme business.

Maybe the most important question to ask about the $5 billion dollars that DeVos and Meijer are worth is how one can reconcile this increase in wealth during a period when more people in Michigan are living in poverty?

According to a 2010 **report** by the Brookings Institute, poverty in the Grand Rapids area increased 8.9% between 2000 – 2008. The same report shows that the percentage of the population living in poverty in the Grand Rapids area went from 15.7 in 2000, to 22.7 in 2007 and 24.7 in 2008. This would mean that one quarter of the people living in this area are living in poverty.

This increase in poverty is just as bad for children. According to the **Michigan League for Human Services** children living in poverty increased 19.4 in 2008 to 22.1 in 2009.

Considering that one quarter of the population in the Grand Rapids area are living in poverty and having to rely on some form of assistance, the announcement that Meijer and DeVos are both now worth $5 Billion dollars should cause us to question how that is possible.

My own experience in Latin America is that the poor to not celebrate and idolize the rich. In fact, they see the rich oligarchies as the source of their misery. Here in West Michigan, Fred Meijer and Richard DeVos are labeled as generous philanthropists that everyone should be grateful for. This is a stunning achievement of class warfare being conducted by the wealthy elite, when working class people think fondly of the local robber barons. However, as long as MLive and the other local commercial news media continue to celebrate such individuals, the possibility of developing a class-consciousness amongst working people will be a difficult task.

Stenographers for Power: MLive and the DeVos Family

https://griid.org/2012/06/07/stenographers-for-power-mlive-and-the-devos-family/

Yesterday, MLive once again demonstrated how they acts as stenographers for the local power structure, by using the occasion of a corporate awards ceremony to let members of the DeVos family have an uncontested opportunity to present their own narrative on the history of Amway.

The MLive story focuses on Dick and Doug DeVos, both of whom were inducted into the Direct Selling Association Hall of Fame at an event held in Dallas, Texas. However, Rich DeVos, who was also at the event, was sought ought by the MLive reporter for additional comments about the family business.

There was some mention in the article about how when Rich DeVos was inducted into the same **Hall of Fame in 1979**, it "*came on the heels of an investigation by the Federal Trade Commission into the company's practices and compensation structure that concluded Amway was not a pyramid scheme."* Beyond this bit of information there in no deviation from the DeVos family and Amway narrative.

The MLive article allows the DeVos family to spin their own Horatio Alger myth about the family's humble beginnings in their home to a global company that generates billions in annual sales. The DeVos/Amway narrative is best reflected in the headline, which reads, "From clearing plates to leading a company: How the DeVos brothers grew up to change Amway."

To further demonstrate the stenographic role that MLive played with the DeVos brothers, the article includes a link to 6 video excerpts with Doug and Dick DeVos talking about the business, their dad and ArtPrize. It is impossible to know how the questions were framed, but each of the video responses are very short with no challenging questions from the reporter. In one of the videos, Dick DeVos says that his dad is a person who is quick to offer encouragement and affirmation to people, but does that mean all people or just those he agrees with. I mean, Rich DeVos has demonstrated over the years that he has no problem funding campaigns to suppress opposing views by attacking unions, the LGBT community and supporting domestic and foreign policy that is repressive.

The most recent example is Rich DeVos' $250,000 contribution to Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker for his successful bid to win re-election in a recall effort. **MLive did report** on the donation by DeVos, but they don't include any investigation into why the elder DeVos would give such a large sum to Walker, nor do they ask this kind of question when they have his two sons on camera.

The MLive reporter also decided not to pursue any discussion with either Dick or Doug DeVos around the economic and political power they wield in West Michigan. Not that we expect that MLive would do that, but this would be at least be a more honest function of journalism, to actually challenge power.

It would be useful information for the general public for the local news media to make the links between the DeVos involvement in entities like the West Michigan Policy Forum, One Kent Coalition, Grand Action, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, the Econ Club of Grand Rapids, the Acton Institute and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

It would also be useful for the general public to know more details on what entities the DeVos family has funded over the years, particularly the groups that suppress rights or promote far right values such as the American Family Association or **their funding of efforts to privatize public education.** Hell, even regular updates on **how much money they donate to candidates** would be useful information for the public, but this is not what stenographers do. Stenographers don't ask questions, and when it comes to the DeVos family, MLive might as well by called the Stenographers of Power.

Suckling at the power Teat: MLive and stenography for the DeVos Family

https://griid.org/2012/10/08/suckling-at-the-power-teat-mlive-and-stenography-for-the-devos-family/

This morning, MLive once again demonstrated their inability to report on the DeVos Family in a critical manner.

The article, **posted online today**, is headlined, *ArtPrize founder Rick DeVos shares qualities with his grandfather, Amway co-founder Rich DeVos.* The article does as is suggested in the headline, makes the argument that Rick DeVos is following in the footsteps of Amway co-founder Richard DeVos Sr.

The glowing review of the third generation DeVos states in part:

*The entrepreneurial spirit of Rich DeVos, which has had a stamp on West Michigan for decades, seems to be renewed with his **grandson Rick DeVos**, who launched the international art competition and the innovative seed fund.*

While his grandfather revitalized downtown Grand Rapids by investing in buildings, Rick is doing it with people.

To provide further evidence of Rick DeVos' leadership and entrepreneurial spirit, the MLive reporter uses Doug and Dick DeVos as sourced. And what do you think that Rick's uncle and father had to say about what the ArtPrize guru is doing for Grand Rapids? Of course it was glowing and affirming.

In addition, the MLive reporter addressed Rick DeVos' other project, Start Garden. Not surprising, this project that Rick DeVos kicked off earlier this year was also presented as nothing but a major benefit to the community.

How is it that the most widely read daily news source in West Michigan acts as a **stenographer to power**? What kinds of conversations do reporters have with editors about how to present such a story? Now, I don't think for a second that MLive editors had to say to the reporter of this article that they need to paint Rick DeVos as a local hero. It is our observation over the years of monitoring media in this market that local news agencies have internalized the same values as the corporate world, not just because they are thinking about ad sales, but because MLive is a corporation.

This internalizing of the values of the system means that the reporting on powerful families like the DeVos family is positive, but there are no balancing or dissident voices. The fact that there were no critical voices about either ArtPrize or Start Garden is a clear indicator that MLive is either unwilling to be critical of local power or is blind to the negative and even destructive aspects of what the DeVos family has done.

The recent **GQ article on ArtPrize** was able to both look at the cultural aspect of Artprize, but provide some contextual critique of the annual event. The author of that article was also able to find critical voices of the art extravaganza, even though that author is not from this community.

There is no mention of the fact that Rick's uncle **Doug DeVos recently gave $500,000 to the National Organization of Marriage (NOM),** which is the largest anti-Gay marriage group in the US. The MLive article also does not mention the kind of negative

impacts that other DeVos family funding has caused all around the world. Lastly, there is nothing in the MLive story that looks at the **political economy of ArtPrize**, which would expose the real financial winners of ArtPrize.

MLive should not call these kinds of articles news reporting. Stories that coddle power are nothing more than stenography and free publicity for companies like Amway and families like the DeVoses.

Greed loves Greed: Amway names Bank of America as the 2012 Partner of the Year

https://griid.org/2012/10/25/greed-loves-greed-amway-names-bank-of-america-as-the-2012-partner-of-the-year/

The pro-business newsletter Michigan Loves Manufacturing, ran a **Press Release from Amway**earlier today, which announced that the Ada-based company has named Bank of America as their 2012 Partner of the Year.

The Press Release talks about the value that Bank of America brings to Amway distributors, also known as Independent Business Owners (IBOs), such as providing each distributor with a VISA card.

Such news is unsurprising, since a company built on direct sales that uses people in a pyramid scheme would give an award to one of the more notorious banks in the US.

The list of reasons why Bank of America is one of the most hated businesses in the country are numerous. Among the criticism are:

> Bank of America is one of the biggest banks that has been gobbling up community and regional banks for years, which gives them the power to dictate and increase fees with few options for the public.
> Bank of America is currently foreclosing on more homes in the US than any other lending institution.
> Bank of America has spent millions lobby the US Congress to pass laws to their benefit or to deregulate the industry. For example they spent millions to oppose bills like the Credit Cardholders Bill of Rights and the Foreclosure Prevention Act, Helping Families Save their Homes Act, Mortgage Reform and Anti-Predatory Lending Act, all of which would have directly benefited consumers.
> Bank of America has contributed over $22 million to both Republican and Democratic candidates since 1990, **according to Open Secrets**.
> Bank of America is one of three major financial institutions **facing charges of money laundering**.

> Bank of America has received public bailouts and loan guarantees totaling $199.2 billion plus an undisclosed amount from the Federal Reserve's $8 trillion in emergency programs. This includes $45 Billion in TARP funds.
> Last May, Bank of America paid $22 million to settle charges of improperly foreclosing on active-duty troops. The firm spun these foreclosures as being Countrywide's fault for having started them before becoming part of Bank of America.

Considering Amway's history of financial scamming, buying politicians and funding campaigns that hurt some of the more vulnerable populations in the country, their award to Bank of America.

MLive and the DeVos role in paying to make Michigan a Right to Work state

https://griid.org/2012/12/17/mlive-and-the-devos-role-in-paying-to-make-michigan-a-right-to-work-state/

Earlier today, **MLive posted a story** that mildly summarizes a ***New York Times article*** about the GOP and the DeVos family's role in getting Right to Work (RTW) legislation rammed through the State and signed into law by Gov. Snyder last week.

The Mlive story doesn't provide much information from the *New York Times* piece, but does give DeVos hatchet man Greg McNeilly space to defend his boss Dick DeVos.

The MIlve story is less than 200 words and certainly paints DeVos as a savvy political player instead of the shrewd people of the 1% that uses his family's wealth to impose repressive policies on the people of Michigan and around the country.

We **reported the DeVos family's role in getting RTW legislation passed** in a posting earlier this month, which provided information that MLive rarely does. We pointed out that the DeVos family has been a major financial donor to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, which was the real architect for the RTW legislation that was pushed by the Republican members of the State and then signed into law by Snyder.

We also pointed out that the West Michigan Policy Forum, which several members of the DeVos family are involved with, has also been pushing for RTW laws in Michigan since their founding in 2008. The **2012 conference held by the West Michigan Policy Forum held in September featured a whole session on RTW**, a session led by someone from the Mackinac Center.

The *New York Times* article doesn't have a great deal of new information, but it is an affirmation of what some of us have been saying about the prominent role that the DeVos family has played in pushing through this repressive legislation.

The Times piece does state, "***A union-backed ballot measure to enshrine collective bargaining rights in the State Constitution was defeated, thanks to an aggressive campaign against it that was financed in part by $2 million of DeVos family money.***" Interesting that the MLive story did not include that information.

There was one comment in the MLive story that is relevant in terms of the current "discourse" from those supporting RTW, which claim that this was "retribution" for Prop 2. DeVos spokesperson Greg McNeilly is quoted as say, "*It had nothing to do with retribution (for Proposal 2), but (that union-backed ballot proposal) did serve a timeliness factor because it made the issue fresh. It put the issue on the agenda.*"

It's unfortunately, but not surprising that readers of MLive have to find other sources that expose the DeVos family for their tactics of subverting democracy with money.

For readers of this blog, the tepid treatment of the DeVos family role in the RTW fiasco is all the more reason why we need an independent media and why **we need to make the DeVos family the target of our collective anger.**

MLive continues its love affair with anyone named DeVos with today's article

https://griid.org/2013/03/29/mlive-continues-its-love-affair-with-anyone-named-devos-with-todays-article/

Earlier today, **MLive ran a story** announcing that Rick DeVos was named by GOOD Magazine as one of the, "100 People Pushing the World Forward."

The MLive article cites the CEO of GOOD, who states of the 100 people selected:

"They are each doing amazing work, and we believe that amplifying their voices will help move the needle on some of the world's greatest challenges."

First of all, Rick DeVos does not need his voice amplified, since the news and entertainment media have made sure that he and his projects are widely known. In fact, one would be hard pressed to go a week in West Michigan without hearing about ArtPrize or Start Garden.

Second, there is no real exploration of what GOOD Magazine is all about and what criterion they used to determine who the 100 People Pushing the World Forward are.

In looking at GOOD online, it seems to be another mechanism where people with tremendous amounts of privilege are identified as those "who give a damn." However, what they give a damn about is never really clarified, but based on the case studies they present, one could certainly draw some conclusions.

These case studies are listed in the **GOOD Corps section** of the site, which states:

GOOD/CORPS partners with brands and organizations to help them do the same by transforming the values at the core of their identity into actionable solutions that improve both their business and the world.

Essentially, GOOD is a mechanism for people to do things to feel good about themselves, engage in small acts of charity or investment, while never having to critique or challenge the current economic system that perpetuates massive global inequity.

For instance, some of the GOOD Corps case studies are those that work in collaboration with Pepsi and Starbucks. Both companies are based on maximizing profits at all costs, whether those are social or environmental. Pepsi has contributed massively to poor public health by pushing their sugar water on children and communities around the globe, using up valuable water resources in communities that struggle to have access to fresh/potable water, as is well documented in Maude Barlow's book, *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water.*

The Starbucks GOOD Corp project was identified as essentially a program created that allowed Starbucks customers to donate to local charities. Sounds very nice, unless you know something about Starbucks treatment of workers and their role in global politics.

The IWW union has been involved in a nasty battle for years with Starbucks, which has consistently tried to undermine efforts to form a union amongst the baristas. Starbucks has even fired people who talked about unionizing or attempting to do so while working as an employee.

Starbucks is also the target of the international Boycott, Sanctions & Divestment Campaign, since Starbucks not only does business with the State of Israel, but the CEO of Starbucks, Howard Shultz, has been a major support of the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

These are issues that could have been easily explored by the MLive writer, instead of just cheerleading once again for Rick DeVos.

MLive's Managed Reporting on DeVos Family "Giving"

https://griid.org/2016/01/05/mlives-managed-reporting-on-devos-family-giving/

Yesterday, MLive published a series of articles that claimed to illuminate the philanthropic donations made by the DeVos Family.

There were a total of three articles from January 4 and a slide show with highlights of recipients of DeVos Family donations. One article focused on how much money the **DeVos Family has contributed to GVSU**, a second article provided a brief overview of **how MLive conducted their research**, with the third article entitled **How and why Amway's DeVos family gives away billions.**

The articles are pretty straight forward and mostly data driven, yet the headline (**How and why Amway's DeVos family gives away billions)** of the featured article suggests that there is some big reveal.

The featured story does what has come to be expected from commercial media. The story reads as a form of stenography, where the reporter reprints what people in power have to say without verifying or questioning said comments. Several sources are cited in the article:

> DeVos Family spokesperson John Truscott
> R.J. Shook, founder of the Philanthropic Research Institute
> Communications Director for Grand Rapids Public Schools, John Helmholdt
> Doug DeVos
> Marge Palmerlee, Degage's Executive Director
> Dennis VanKampen, CEO of Mel Trotter Ministries
> Michael Kaiser, former Kennedy Center President
> Mike Guswiler, President, West Michigan Sports Commission
> Kyle Caldwell, Executive Director of GVSU's Johnson Center for Philanthropy
> Tom Haas, GVSU President
> Jim Brooks, philanthropist and founder of the now-defunct West Michigan Strategic Alliance
> Steve Ford, son of the late President Gerald R. Ford

All of the sources speak glowingly of the DeVos family, which should raise red flags for any discerning reader. How is it that an article can be written about the most powerful family in West Michigan and not include some critical commentary or analysis?

Giving strategies

The "big reveal" from the MLive article is as follows:

The family has in the past instructed philanthropic organizations not to discuss the gifts. That restriction was lifted for this series, and three hallmarks emerged for the DeVos family foundations' giving strategies:

> ***leveraging additional donations through peer pressure or organized giving among the family foundations.***
> ***providing strategic advice to institutions receiving money.***
> ***extending influence through board service and other connections.***

The three strategies are interesting, but hardly a big reveal. People who have followed the DeVos Family over the years would have been aware of these "three hallmarks" for giving. However, even though the rest of the MLive article is an elaboration on the three strategies, there is really no new information provided about the real effects of the DeVos Family contributions. Sure, there is some commentary about how it has impacted various local and national organizations, but the commentary is superficial and highly managed.

For instance, GVSU President Tom Haas is quoted as saying, "*We wouldn't be the university we are today without his and the family's support.*" While such a statement is true, it fails to convey how DeVos money has impacted Grand Valley State University. One example is based upon our own research with the **Grand Rapids LGBT People's History Project**, where the DeVos Family made it clear to GVSU in the mid 90s that, if the university were to allow domestic partner benefits, they would withhold funding for the new health sciences building on Michigan Avenue in Grand Rapids.

This kind of influence is exactly what the DeVos Family means by strategy number two – **providing strategic advice to institutions receiving money.** This is probably the most important strategy, since this is often the primary reason that wealthy families contribute to institutions and organizations…….to influence what those entities do.

This influence can take on various forms. First, the influence can be straight forward, where the funding is to simply affirm the ideological mission of the institution receiving the money. For instance, one of the entities mentioned in the MLive article is the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, which is referred to in the article as a conservative think tank. However, to not explore how DeVos money assists groups like the Mackinac Center is another way of not serving the public interest. For instance, in 2012 we wrote about **how DeVos money supported the efforts of the Mackinac Center to get Right to Work Legislation passed in Michigan**.

It is this kind of journalism that is needed, where reporters take the information provided about those in power and then flesh out the details of how this impacts the public. This could have been done with any number of the organizations and institutions that

received DeVos Family money that appear in the **donation recipient slideshow on MLive**. One of the recipients listed in the slideshow is the Grand Rapids Public School system, which has received a total of $2.6 million from the DeVos Family. The featured story also mentions that GRPS has been a recipient of DeVos money, where "funding paid for leadership development, teacher evaluation and teacher training," along with funding for the Believe 2 Become project. The Believe 2 Become project is really a **wedding of faith-based entities with the public schools system**, something that again the DeVos Family ideologically supports.

The DeVos Family funding of the Grand Rapids Public Schools should also raise interesting questions for competent journalists. Why would a family that has been **a national leader in private education, faith based education and the school voucher movement** be contributing to public education? Unfortunately, these are not the kinds of questions or angles that are pursued in the MLive story.

A second major reason that families like the DeVos's contribute money to institutions and organizations is to redirect or manage populations that have the potential to be involved in revolutionary and insurgent politics. For instance, as the MLive recipient slide show reveals, one of the local organizations that benefits from DeVos Family money is LINC Community Revitalization. The slide show information says the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation contributed $905,000 to LINC in 2013. DeVos money does not mean that LINC doesn't do good work in the community, rather the point is that instead of organizing people to engage in radical grassroots organizing for systemic change, LINC puts most of its energy into directing people into participating in acceptable political tactics that do not question systems of power, along with an emphasis on developing entrepreneurs.

A third reason for foundation and philanthropic contributions, in addition to ideological support of social management, is to buy silence and complicity. This consequence of funding from the wealthiest sectors of society is the least evident, but it is as equally impactful as the other reasons. The DeVos Family knows that if they give money to an organization or an institution that those groups receiving the money will not take a public stance that is either critical of the DeVos Family practices or critical of issues that the DeVos Family is attempting to influence.

For instance, in the summer of 2015, **DeVos Family political contributions helped the Michigan legislature pass HB 4052**, which allows organizations to discriminate against families wanting to adopt on religious grounds. This connection is made clear when one considers that the largest adoption agency in the state, Bethany Christian Services, is also a major recipient of DeVos Family money. This is not to suggest that Bethany would challenge DeVos's political influence, but it does have a silencing effect on staff who may not agree with such discriminatory policies.

The last major issue that the MLive articles on the DeVos Family giving fail to address is what connections their major political contributions have with their philanthropic giving? This seems like an important question that journalism that serves the public interest would want to explore. We already raised the question about the DeVos Family funding of the Grand Rapids Public Schools, **while at the same time being involved in funding and politically leading national groups that promote redirecting public funds away from public schools and into the hands of private and charter schools**.

A larger and maybe more obvious question is how does their political funding for economic policies that benefit the rich then connect to their charitable funding for urban-based social services agencies? For instance, the state policies that the **DeVos-influenced West Michigan Policy Forum** have worked on in recent years – ending state business taxes, Right to Work and other anti-union/anti-worker policies – such policies contribute to creating poverty and widening the gap between the rich and the working class poor. So, the DeVos Family funds public policy that makes them and their friends richer by stealing public money, then they turn around and fund projects that provide some assistance to those experiencing poverty, but such programs redirect working class anger into pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps practices. Sounds like a wonderful way to get richer while simultaneously convincing the public you are generous beyond compare. Seems to work.

MLive, experts and Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary

https://griid.org/2016/12/21/mlive-experts-and-betsy-devos-as-education-secretary/

On Monday, MLive ran another piece looking at President-elect Donald Trump's choice for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos.

The article on MLive follows a very binary pattern with conservative/liberal voices identified as experts. The story also sets up an overly simplistic framework for the article that does little to flesh out what Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary could actually accomplish.

However, before we look at the experts cited in the article it is important to note that the MLive writer uses words to describe Betsy DeVos that she would use herself in the opening sentence. It reads:

*When president-elect Donald Trump **nominated renowned philanthropist and school-choice advocate Betsy DeVos** for U.S. Secretary of Education, waves of hope and anger swept through education circles nationwide.*

The MLive reporter uses the terms "renowned philanthropist" and "school-choice advocate." These are terms right out of the DeVos family playbook on how to present themselves to the public and demonstrates that more often than not, news media outlets play along with these terms.

People who make billions off the labor of others, rich people, don't just give their money to organization or causes. Those who are super rich are strategic about who they give money to and that contribution serves very specific purposes. As we **noted in an article about the DeVos Family philanthropy**, their larger contributions go to institutions that they are politically aligned with. In the case of the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation we looked at the most recent 990 filings that foundations are required to submit and this is what we found:

*The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation also contributes larger sums of money to the organizations that fit within their ideological and class warfare framework. One such entity is the **Acton Institute**. The Grand Rapids-based think tank, which believes that Capitalism and Christianity make good bed fellows, has received $505,000 from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation according to the 990 reports for 2012 and 2013.*

*Another Capitalist entity that they have contributed to is Endeavor, which likes to refer to itself as a non-profit for entrepreneurs. The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributed $162,000 in 2013, according to their 990s, but they also play a significant role in having a **staff person from their foundation sit on the regional board of Endeavor in Detroit, Nate Lowery**.*

*However, the major area of philanthropy for Dick and Betsy DeVos is in the area of an attack on public education. They do this through several organizations with their funding. First, there is the DC-based entity called the **Alliance for School Choice**. In 2013, they contributed $250,000 to this group, which promotes the privatization of public education.*

*Another anti-public education source for DeVos philanthropy is the Foundation for Excellence in Education ($100,000 in 2013). Betsy DeVos sits on the **board of directors**, along with Condoleezza Rice and the board president, Jeb Bush.*

*Lastly, there is the Great Lakes Education Foundation, which has also received substantial funding from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation. ($200,000 alone in 2013) The Great Lakes Education Foundation is a source of funding that supports the **Great Lakes Education Project**, of which Betsy DeVos is also a board member, along with the DeVos political operative, Greg McNeilly.*

The other major effect that foundation giving can often have is to buy silence. The Dick & Betsy DeVos foundation knowns that if they give say $25,000 to a local non-profit, that organization will never say anything critical of the DeVos family. This outcome is equally problematic as contributions that go to groups they are ideologically aligned with, since the overall projects that the DeVos family are committed to – increasing their wealth by supporting neoliberal capitalism, attacking unions & LGBT rights – often are counter to the very efforts that non-profits are trying to counter.

Then there is there is the second label that the MLive article uses to describe Betsy DeVos…….”school-choice advocate.” More than many labels that have been used in recent decades, this one is Orwellian to the core. “School-Choice advocates” are not about choice, they are about promoting their own ideological agenda. This agenda includes taking public money away from public schools, attacking teacher unions, promoting racist and classist education policies and the desire to have religion back in the class room. This is anything but school choice.

Education Experts

The bulk of the MLive article was devoted to getting the opinions of four education policy “experts.” Two of the four experts were overtly in favor of charter schools and school privatization. The first was Michael Petrilli, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Fordham’s partners are a who’s who of school privatization groups, such as the **American Enterprise Institute**, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the Foundation for Excellence in Education, the Hoover Institution, the **American Federation for Children** and the **American Legislative Exchange Council** (ALEC).

The second overtly pro-charter/private schools expert is Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. DeVos political operative Greg McNeilly, is on the board of directors of this group.

A third expert is Elizabeth Mann, a fellow at the nonpartisan Washington D.C.-based Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution. Often viewed as a centrist think tank, the Brookings Institute embraces neoliberal economic policies and the Brown Center on Education Policy has as one of its main experts, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. For those thinking Duncan was a staunch defender of the public school system, please see the following links for clarification.

http://www.counterpunch.org/2008/12/18/arne-duncan-s-privatization-agenda/

http://www.counterpunch.org/2009/08/24/obama-and-duncan-s-education-policy-like-bush-s-only-worse/

http://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2015/10/privatization-charters-high-stakes-tests-arne-duncans-education-legacy.html

http://blackagendareport.com/content/obamas-public-education-policy-privatization-charters-mass-firings-neighborhood-destabilizat

https://dianeravitch.net/2016/10/28/arne-duncan-supports-privatization-measure-in-massachusetts/

The fourth expert the MLive article cites is Michigan Education Association spokesman Doug Pratt. Pratt is clearly not a support of DeVos as Education Secretary, but he is the only one who frames the qualifications of Betsy DeVos in a more honest way.

Lastly, it should be noted that the MLive article, while seeming to be neutral, actually just promotes the school-choice framework with the imbalance of experts that lean towards DeVos. The other major omission is that this article, like most commercial media sources, are missing the much larger view of why Betsy DeVos is an awful choice for Education Secretary, as noted in **our longer article written just after she was named as Trump's choice**.

Stenographers to Power: MLive and the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation

https://griid.org/2017/01/09/stenographers-to-power-mlive-and-the-dick-betsy-devos-foundation/

Yesterday, **MLive ran an interesting piece about the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation**. I say interesting, because the MLive reporter frames the issue this way:

There's no question Dick and Betsy DeVos garner lots of attention — and criticism — for their outsized political donations. But those are pocket change compared to their charitable contributions, which add up to nearly $139 million over their lifetimes.

What the MLive reporter has done is to somehow separate the direct political campaign contributions from Dick and Betsy DeVos from the foundation giving, suggesting that their foundation giving is merely charitable and not political. In addition, the MLive

reporter then makes the claim that couple gives way more money that is charity-based, unlike the political contributions, which the writer refers to as “pocket change.”

Ultimately, the reporter from MLive, has either failed to understand the nature and function of foundations or they are compromised into protecting power, or maybe both.

As we have noted in **previous postings**, foundations run by the capitalist class have clear agendas that are often ideologically and politically motivated. We have also written about the **nature and function of foundations and their relationship to the Non-Profit Industrial Complex**, which is so well articled in the book by the radical women of color organization, ***The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond The Non-Profit Industrial Complex.***

Limited Transparency

Part of the impetus for the MLive article was the recent posting of a **report** on the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation website. This reported is carefully crafted to convey a message that the Dick & Betsy want to convey, which has little to do with transparency. The “report” does not provide a detailed account of the recipients of their $11.6 million in contributions, just an overview that provides extremely limited information.

The report from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation is only 6 pages long and 2 of those pages are the front and back cover. The report provides some numbers and general categories, like what can be learned from the graphic they use shown above.

The MLive article follows the information provided in the report and then choses to focus on the amount of money the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation have directed at education.

In addition, the article sites the power couple, a DeVos spokesperson John Truscott and one of their critics. In fact, the only critic, is Mark Brewer, the former chair of the Democratic Party in Michigan. Brewer falls into the same trap as the MLive reporter and refers to the foundation giving as a “smokescreen” to divert attention away from their electoral contributions, instead of seeing the foundation contributions as equally political.

Looking at Their Track Record

In order to make a more honest assessment of the so-called charitable contributions that the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has made over the years, one can at least look at database provide by Guidestar.

The most recent year available on Guidestar for the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation in 2013. In that year here are some of the “charitable” organizations they contributed to:

Acton Institute $250,000

Alliance for School Choice $250,000

Bethany Christian Services $25,000

Endeavor Global Inc $162,500

Foundation for Excellence in Education $100,000

Great Lakes education Foundation $200,000

Mackinac Center for Public Policy $50,000

Northwood University $200,000

Pregnancy Resource Center $20,000

Right to Life Michigan $25,000

Willow Creek Association $1,000,000

Each of these organizations have highly ideological and political agendas, since they attack unions, attack reproductive rights, seek to inject religion into public policy and attempt to undermine public education. Willow Creek Association, which has been the largest recipient in recent years, hosts an annual Global Leadership Summit that weds christianity with global capitalism. Check out the main speakers from the **2016 Summit**.

Buying Silence and Obedience

Lastly, it is important to note that there are plenty of entities that are also recipients of the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation money. Whether this money ends up in the hands of entities like GVSU, ArtPrize, Bethany Christian Services or the Inner City Christian Federation, it is money that is given strategically and always with strings attached.

In the case of Bethany Christian Services, the function they play in relation to DeVos funding was demonstrated in 2015, when **legislation was passed at the state level to make it so that only heterosexual couples could adopt**. Bethany is one of the largest adoption agencies in Michigan and they comply with the anti-LGBT funding coming from the DeVos family foundations.

Other entities, even if they “do good” in the community, play the role of being silent on the political and ideological agenda of the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation. Many of these organization may even be opposed in principal to the anti-worker, anti-LGBT, anti-reproductive rights and anti-public education agenda, but they chose to say nothing because they do NOT want to jeopardize future funding.

Therefore, the MLive story not only perpetuates a myth about DeVos foundation giving as charity, they fail to understand the more complex function of foundations that are both highly political, often acting as a way to engage in population management. Once again, MLive demonstrates that they are indeed stenographers to power.

Stenographers to Power: MLive and the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation Part II

https://griid.org/2017/01/11/stenographers-to-power-mlive-and-the-dick-betsy-devos-foundation-part-ii/

On Monday, **we posted a critique of an MLive story** focusing on the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation. The story on Monday from MLive created the narrative that the couple's election/candidate contributions is "purse change" compared to their Charitable contributions.

We argued that the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation's contributions were also primarily motivated by a political agenda, considering who the recipients on those dollars are. The MLive reporter also claimed that the couple had "lifted the veil" on the foundation's spending, even though the information they release was minimal and did not reveal much.

Earlier today, MLive ran another article focusing on Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributions, specifically on one recipient of the foundation's funding, Potter's House. The headline reads for the MLive article reads, *Betsy DeVos' support of urban school goes beyond writing checks.*

First, the headline is a bit misleading. **Potter's House** presents itself as not only an urban school, but a Christ-centered school. More specifically, the mission statement reads:

The Potter's House provides a Christ-centered education to children of all ethnic heritages and income levels, equipping them to serve God and society to their fullest potential.

There is a big difference in calling yourself an urban school, as opposed to a Christ-centered school. Plus, one of the main objections from educators across the country to Betsy DeVos being chosen as Donald Trump's Secretary of Education, is that she and the DeVos family are primarily interested in promoting religious education, along with blurring the lines between church an state with DeVos funded programs like Believe to

Become in the Grand Rapids Public Schools. A source who worked closely on that campaign told me recently that the DeVos family was the primary funder of the Believe to Become project, which was connected to the Grand Rapids Public Schools.

Secondly, the only sources in the article are the Dick & Betsy DeVos and the superintendent of Potter's House School, John Booy. There are no critical voices in the article and nowhere does the reporter contest or really verify the claims made by those interviewed.

At one point superintendent Booy makes the statement, *"They do their research on an organization and when they fund, it's with no strings attached."*

Third, of course there are strings attached, even if they are not overt and in writing. As we stated in Monday's critique in **Part I** those who are recipients of the foundation's money would never dream of saying anything critical of their politics, even if it had nothing to do with the work of the organization receiving funds from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation. Money, particularly in the amount the the Dicl & Betsy DeVos Foundation gives to Potter's, always buys silence and complicity.

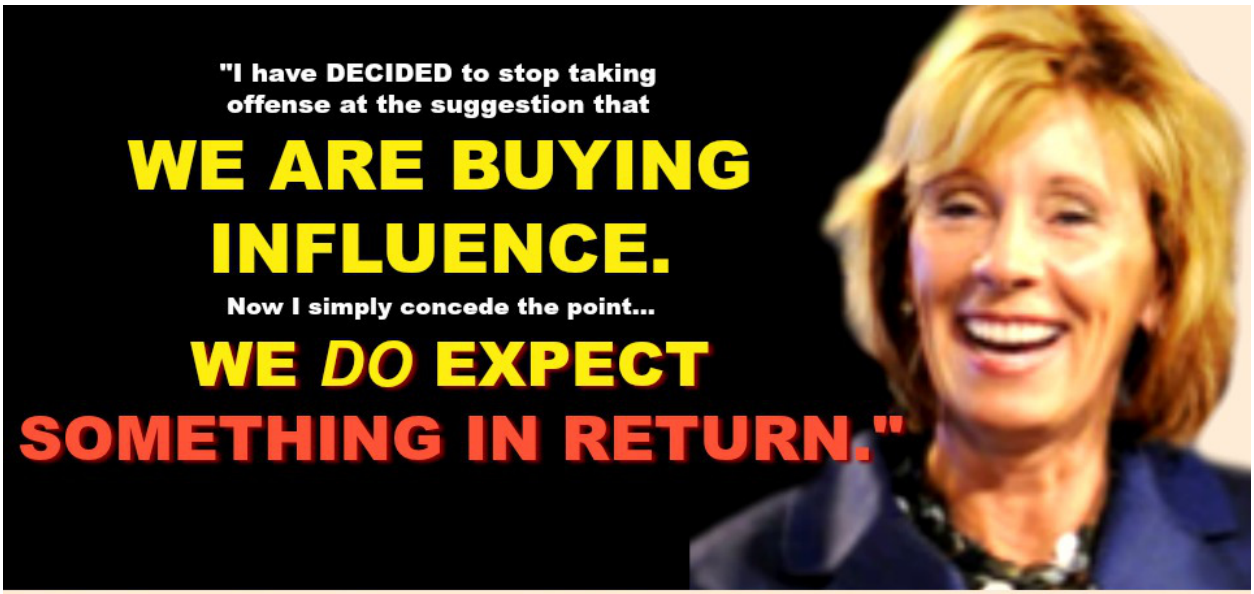
One other interesting point from the MLive article was this revelation:

For years, Dick DeVos took seniors on an annual insider's tour of Grand Rapids, explaining the role planning and philanthropy played in revitalizing the city's downtown.

Who wouldn't love to sit in on that tour. I can imagine that there would be a great deal to talk about from Dick's perspective. especially as it relates to the Grand Action projects he has been involved in with the rest of the GR elite, like the arena, the convention center, the civic theater and the downtown market. He also would no doubt talk about the number of hotels he and the rest of his family own downtown, along with all the other kinds of developments that they have a stake in.

However, it is not likely that these students would learn how much public money was funneled into such projects, either outright funding or tax breaks provided, equaling millions of dollars in the downtown alone.

So, once again, MLive has demonstrated that they don't ask hard questions of those in power, don't verify claims that are made and don't offer critical perspectives. They truly are stenographers to power.



Billionaire Betsy DeVos Wants Taxpayers to Subsidize Private Religious Schools

MLive: Reporting on and Taking Money from Betsy DeVos

https://griid.org/2017/02/07/mlive-reporting-on-and-taking-money-from-betsy-devos/

It would be a bit misleading to promote the notion that journalism in the US was once a noble profession and only in recent decades has it lost credibility.

Media scholars like Bob McChesney have made it clear that there was never a heyday of journalism in the US and that news agencies have always been compromised because of the relationships they have with centers of power, because of the increasing consolidation of ownership and because news agencies are also businesses.

The reliance on advertising for most news agencies inherently compromises their ability to practice journalism without financial consequences. I was on a panel years ago with local news managers in the greater Grand Rapids area and one TV executive said,

"***My job it to make sure that the shareholders with this company are happy. The only way to keep them happy is to get good ratings and good ratings means more advertising dollars. Anyone who tells you our primary job is to inform the community, doesn't understand how this all works***."

When news agencies rely on the money from an industry they are also reporting on, do you think it is possible for them to honestly report the truth?

Today, on MLive, it was ironic that there were several articles about the upcoming vote in the Senate on whether or not to confirm Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, and right next to those articles appeared ads from the Reserve and Neurocore.

Both Neurocore and the Reserve are part of the **Windquest Group**, which is owned and managed by Dick and Betsy DeVos.

So how is it that so many people still think that MLive has any integrity when it comes to challenging power in this community? This is not to say that they never do good reporting. However, we have demonstrated for years how the Grand Rapids Press/ MLive has never really challenged the power of the DeVos family. There have only been marginally decent articles in the last few months, because MLive has been forced to have to report on the nomination of Betsy DeVos by President Trump.

Now that DeVos has been confirmed as the Secretary of Education we should be extremely skeptical that MLive or any other local corporate news agencies will report honestly and with integrity on the role Betsy DeVos plays as Secretary of Education and the larger role that the DeVos family plays when it comes to influencing policy at the federal, state and local level.

MLive and West Michigan Billionaires: On the need to redefine wealth

https://griid.org/2017/03/22/mlive-and-west-michigan-billionaires-on-the-need-to-redefine-wealth/

It's another year and the richest people in Michigan are getting even richer.

Yesterday, **MLive posted a story** based on the annual **Forbes listing** of the wealthiest people on the planet.

The MLive story focuses mostly on the wealthiest people in West Michigan, noting that Doug & Hank Meijer have the most combined wealth at $7.2 billion, followed by Rich DeVos, with estimated wealth at $5.6 billion. Other Michigan billionaires mentioned in the article call Detroit home, Marian Ilitch and Dan Gilbert, worth $6 billion and $5.8 billion respectively.

Towards the end of the article it states:

"The number of billionaires globally climbed 13 percent to a record 2,043 from 1,810 last year, according to Forbes. Their total net worth jumped by 18 percent to $7.67 trillion, another record."

The number of billionaires and their total net worth are staggering. However, what the MLive article fails to discuss are how the wealthiest people increased their wealth and why there is such a significant wealth gap.

Just telling us that the rich got richer doesn't really inform us. In fact, regurgitating the Forbes list doesn't benefit the public at all. What the MLive article actually does is to continue to protect the wealthiest people by implying that these people are wealthy simply because they earned it.

There are plenty of reasons why there is such a huge gap between the wealthiest people in the US and the rest of us. T**he Urban Institute has 9 charts** about Wealth Inequality in America, that are informative and instructive.

One chart, which is interactive, shows how wealth is concentrated at the top.

The Institute for Policy Studies also has some important visuals to help us understand the wealth gap in the US.

Part of the wealth gap in the US is rooted in White Supremacy, which as a system of oppression, has benefited white people over communities of color. The graphic below illustrates the wealth disparity along racial lines, where the top 400 wealthiest people have more wealth than 16 million Black households or 15 million Latino households.

However, even these charts fail to fully communicate the reasons why there are so few wealthy people, who are increasing their wealth, and so many people experiencing poverty.

United for a Fair Economy publishes an annual report on both economic and racial disparities in the US. The report uses Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s notion of The Dream, but quite often is comes across as a nightmare, considering the growing racialized wealth gap in the country.

What is really important in this year's report, is the deep historical factors that have determined the wealth gap in America. In the graphic below, you can see from the pre-colonial period up to the beginning of the 20th century, ways in which the policy gave a **boost** to some people, yet **blocked** so many others.

These historical factors led the report's authors to conclude in the Strategies Moving Forward section, that reparations for Blacks and indigenous communities as the number one priority. Reparations would indeed be an important first step, but it would only go so far as long as the existing economic and political systems were allowed to remain in the hands of the wealthiest people.

Redefining what is means to be wealthy

Maybe one of our problems is how we talk about and name wealth. Most rich people, like the Meijer and DeVos patriarchs, often refer to themselves as self-made men. The fact is that these men completed relied on the labor of others in order to obtain their wealth. And not only did they rely on the labor of others, they counted on those laborers as being compliant and not rising up to demand the wealth they helped create.

In addition, we might think about referring to those we call wealthy as criminals, especially when considering how many people in Grand Rapids alone are suffering from poverty. Thousands of households in this community are suffering from malnutrition, high stress, fatigue, poor living conditions and limited access to education and health care. The very fact that one in four children live in poverty in Grand Rapids is a crime, while so few have so much.

The so-called balance of commercial journalism: The MLive story on the DeVos-created group AmplifyGR and its development plans in Southtown

https://griid.org/2017/06/14/the-so-called-balance-of-commercial-journalism-the-mlive-story-on-the-devos-created-group-amplifygr-and-its-development-plans-in-southtown/

Over the past 25 years that I have been monitoring the news media in West Michigan, rarely have I come across a reporter who has been willing to challenge local power. This has most definitely been the case with the most powerful family in West Michigan, the DeVos family.

On **Tuesday, MLive ran a story** about the DeVos-created group AmplifyGR and its partnership with Rockford Construction to develop part of what is referred to as Southtown.

The MLive article is instructive on many levels and I want to provide a bit of deconstruction.

First, the article is framed as presenting a balance of perspectives, which is even the focus of the headline. However, there is no real balance in this story. The reporter provides all kinds of commentary about Doug, Maria and Cheri Devos, saying they have "*been involved in several school and community redevelopment programs around the U.S. and in West Michigan*." There is no follow up on these other efforts or any investigation, rather it is just stated as fact.

There is also some elaboration on what AmplifyGR is, but the source that MLive uses is taken from the RDV Corporation's (DeVos owned) posting about the job description for the AmplifyGR job. In other words, there is no independent source.

Secondly, those cited in the article, also reflect a significant imbalance. The AmplifyGR Executive Director, Jon Ippel is cited, as is a representative from Rockford Construction. In addition, Third Ward GR City Commissioner Dave Allen speaks positively about the project. Only one neighborhood resident who opposes the plan is cited. There is reference to others opposing the plan, but no one is sourced and you can tell how many other people expressed opposition.

Third, about halfway through the article it states, "*Though Amplify GR was scheduled to send a delegate to the Homes for All group, they canceled, saying DeVos and VanGessel preferred to share their vision with neighbors at the meeting on June 29."* This is simply not true. AmplifyGR cancelled coming to the GR Homes for All forum because they said that the facebook event and **my article** on the project had created a, "hostile environment."

What is also interesting about the above quote from the MLive article is that Doug DeVos and Rockford CEO Mike VanGessel will be sharing "their vision with neighbors" on June 29. The **facebook event page** for the AmplifyGR event says there will also be a presentation. This seems to contradict a later comment in the MLive story, which says, "***Rockford Construction's community development director, said details of their plans with Amplify GR have yet to be developed."***

Ok, so if there are no plans as of yet, then what is the presentation all about? Also, AmplifyGR and Rockford Construction have somewhat developed plans, since they have been presenting information at the Southtown Corridor Improvement District meetings over the past 6 months. You can see all kinds of plans in our **original article about the DeVos-created AmplifyGR**. Do the following two slides suggest anything other than the fact that they have some concrete ideas of what they plan to do in the Southtown area?

Fourth, in the very first paragraph of the article it states that the AmplifyGR project will embark, "***on an ambitious campaign to redevelop a tired and underdeveloped neighborhood on the southeast side of Grand Rapids***." Using terms like tired and underdeveloped to describe the neighborhood AmplifyGR seeks to develop provides no

historical context for the area. The area was once a thriving neighborhood, but the MLive story provides no investigation as to what changed and why there are abandoned factories.

Fifth, the article states that, "*Rockford Construction has acquired more than a dozen properties in the target area."* Actually, according to Grand Rapids City records, the total number of properties that Rockford Construction has purchase in the area is **28**, as we noted in our **Part II** story about the DeVos/Rockford plan.

Lastly, the MLive article concludes with the following:

*Ippel said their approach is based on other successful initiatives, such as, **Purpose Built Communities,** an 8-year-old group that successfully redeveloped the East Lake community near Atlanta, and is working with 15 other communities.*

It is worth noting that the Purpose Built Communities seems to be driven by people other than those who live in the neighborhood that is being targeted. The staff and boards members of the organization are made up of former politicians, corporate executives and people who have worked at foundations.

It seems that up to this point, the same can be said for the AmplifyGR project, which is relying on politicians, foundations and corporate developers. The June 29 meeting will be the first time that most residents will know about the project and have a say in the future of their neighborhood. However, as we have noted in pervious postings on this issue, those who have are funding the project and those who have purchased a great deal of land are operating from a position of power. Residents should indeed be suspicious of what those with power and money and those who don't live in the neighborhood, are really intending to do.

In Praise of Grand Action and its founders: The Pandering of MLive

https://griid.org/2017/09/18/in-praise-of-grand-action-and-its-founders-the-pandering-of-mlive/

On Friday, an entity created by some of the members of the West MI Power Structure, Grand Action, announced that the three founding members – David Frey, John Canepa and Dick DeVos – were leaving the group.

On Saturday, **MLive reported** on this announcement and then spent the rest of the article praising the three men and their work with Grand Action.

Here is an excerpt from the MLive article:

Grand Action was the catalyst for Grand Rapids major civic projects, beginning with the Van Andel Arena, followed by DeVos Place, Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, MSU College of Human Medicine Secchia Center and the Downtown Market.

More than a quarter of the $420 million price tag for the large scale projects was donated from the private sector. Deep-pocketed philanthropists such as Rich DeVos, Jay Van Andel, Fred Meijer and Peter Secchia picked up the bulk of those private contributions, helping to raise a total of $130 million.

The rest of the article is basically pictures and a few sentences on each of the "civic projects" that Grand Action has had a hand in, along with pictures of the three men, their involvement with Grand Action and a few quotes from each.

It is as if, the MLive writer was simply using a Media Release from Grand Action. There is not one single critical perspective provided and the praise of Frey, DeVos and Canepa is nothing short of pandering.

This pandering is also reflected in the excerpted comment above, when one considers that the emphasis is on how much **private money was raised** and not **how much public money was used.** Based on the numbers provided in the article, the **public contributed $290 million** and the **private sector contributed $130 million**.

Apart from the obvious difference in the amount given from private vs public, the other significant difference is that the public had NO say in these projects. These civic projects were not part of a millage or something that taxpayers could have a say in. These were decisions made by members of the West MI Power Structure at Grand Action, then vetted through meetings at the Downtown Development Authority, **where promises were made on how much public money would be provided, without public input.**

The MLive article is also pandering to those with power in this town, because there are no critical perspectives provided about any of the projects, about the use of public money with no public input and the fact that many of those who make up the committee on Grand Action, most clearly Dick DeVos, would financially benefit from these downtown projects. The DeVos family empire, with all the hotels they own downtown, would certainly profit from these Grand Action initiated projects, including the **Grand Rapids Destination Asset Study**, which Grand Action commissioned last December.



How Media Reports on the death of Billionaires: Helen DeVos

https://griid.org/2017/10/20/how-media-reports-on-the-death-of-billionaires-helen-devos/

One can learn a great deal by paying attention to how the commercial news media reports on those who are part of the power structure, whether they are national or local.

In 2011, we **wrote a critique of the news media's coverage of the death of Fred Meijer**, saying essentially that the news media in West Michigan had canonized the billionaire. We also pointed out that from 2007, when the world was in an economic free fall, through 2010, Fred Meijer had increased his wealth by 150%, totally $5 billion by 2010.

Despite Fred Meijer's otherworldly wealth, the West Michigan news media chose to focus on his philanthropic activities. This tells us that the local news media do not question:

How people acquire their wealth.
The role and function of foundations or philanthropy.
What impact philanthropy has on systemic change.

> And they generally ignore or keep separate the influence that philanthropists have on public policy.

On Wednesday, Helen DeVos, the wife of Amway co-founder Rich DeVos, passed away. On Thursday, the West Michigan news media began to eulogize Helen DeVos, much in the same manner as they did Fred Meijer of Jay Van Andel in recent years. **One MLive article** provided a platform for those who are part of the power structure to voice their thoughts on the death of Helen DeVos, including Gov. Snyder, Rep. Justin Amash, some local CEOs, grandson Rick DeVos and Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalyn Bliss. This article also included a tribute video to Helen DeVos created by MLive staffers.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

Wood TV 8, **WZZM 13** and **WXMI 17** all had variations on the same kind of reporting, with nothing but glowing remarks about her generosity.

In the **primary article from MLive**, the reporter provides an overview of the life of Helen DeVos, with a list of awards she won, her relationship to her family and the charitable causes she was involved in. One comment from her youngest son, Doug DeVos, is particularly telling.

"She saw the money as a tool to support causes close to her heart. The DeVos family has given away more than $1.2 billion over the years, a majority of the donations coming from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation."

Doug DeVos' comment is instructive for two main reasons. **First**, he tries to minimize the vast amount of wealth that Rich and Helen had amassed over the years and get us to believe that it did really have any impact on her. **Second**, Doug points on the amount of money his mom and dad's foundation has contributed over the years. Let's take a look at that for a moment.

While most of the eulogizing focuses on the funding that Helen DeVos gave to the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital, it ignores so many other entities that were the recipients of funding from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation.

The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation has contributed money to organizations that are blatantly anti-LGBTQ, such as the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and Focus on the Family. While doing research for the Grand Rapids LGBTQ People's History Project, we discovered that their foundation threatened to withhold funding if the University was going to move forward with providing domestic partner benefits to faculty and staff. GVSU decided to take the money and then wait another 13 years before they agreed to provide domestic partner benefits.

The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation has also provided millions of dollars to organizations that are deeply committed to waging class war and standing on the side of those who are already wealthy. The couple's foundation has given millions to each of the following politically right think tanks:

Heritage Foundation

American Enterprise Institute

Mackinac Center for Public Policy

Acton Institute

However, their foundation funding pales in comparison to the political contributions that Richard and Helen DeVos have made over the years. The Michigan Campaign Finance Network reported earlier this year that the **DeVos Family has contributed $82 million since 1999**. A great deal of that has come from Rich and Helen, which have been making large donations to candidates and the GOP for over 40 years.

If you spend time searching the database at the Center for Responsive Politics, you can see the vast amounts of money Helen and Rich DeVos have spent to buy political influence. **Search the 49503 zip code and you see that most of the names that come up are Rich and Helen DeVos.** The image below is just a sampling from the 2016 Election Cycle.

At the state level, you can look at a **previous posting we did**, which looked at how the DeVos Family had contributed to candidates who introduce policies that have become law. For instance, in 2015, DeVos money helped to pass **HB 4052**, a law that takes away local control. Why is this relevant, because powerful entities like the DeVos family do not want local communities adopting policies like a living wage, regulations against wage theft or adopting anti-discrimination ordinances that would include or add anti-discrimination protections for the LGBT community.

A second example signed into law in 2015 was **HB 4188**. This legislation, often framed as a religious freedom bill, would allow adoption agencies in Michigan the ability to deny LGBT couples/partners/families from adopting.

All of this is to say that Helen DeVos, like all the other members of the family, do significant harm through their wealth, both in the form of foundation given and political contributions. In more honest days, people did not mourn the deaths of local oligarchies or the robber barons in their community, they celebrated their deaths.

Writing whatever they say: MLive and Amway

https://griid.org/2018/02/14/writing-whatever-they-say-mlive-and-amway/

On Monday, MLive ran what I hesitate to call a piece of journalism. The posting on February 12, was entitled, ***Amway's 2017 revenues show sales on 'right track,' say leaders***.

The posting is based on an "interview" that MLive reporter Shandra Martinez did with the Amway co-CEOs Steve Van Andel and Doug DeVos.

A second posting was also done on February 12, entitled, ***How Amway is appealing to a younger generation***.

This second MLive posting, was rather brief and included a 1minute and 31 second interview with the heads of Amway, Steve Van Andel and Doug DeVos, which you can watch below. In fact, the posting essentially regurgitates what Van Andel and DeVos had to say in what MLive refers to as an "interview."

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

MLive repeated this process in a posting from February 13, entitled, ***50 percent of Amway's revenues now come from e-commerce***.

In fact, MLive will no doubt post 2 additional pieces based on the same "interview" that MLive reporter Shandra Martinez conducted with the second generation Amway CEOs, based on these other videos from the same "interview."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9pHYcjbluc

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SjvyuGqX0A

After watching the four videos, it is painfully clear that MLive fundamentally is acting solely as a stenographer, simply writing what the Amway executives have to say. There is only once instance, where the MLive reporter can be heard asking a question, which is a softball question, about what Van Andel and DeVos thought about the new corporate tax breaks.

Imagine what a serious journalist would have asked? Imagine what information or insight would have been gained from a serious, investigative article? Imagine what impact that might have on the public's view of the the Amway corporation and the DeVos and Van Andel families that are plastered on every other building in downtown Grand Rapids? Well, you will have to keep imagining, since the MLive reporter failed to practice anything that remotely resembled journalism, which we will elaborate on here.

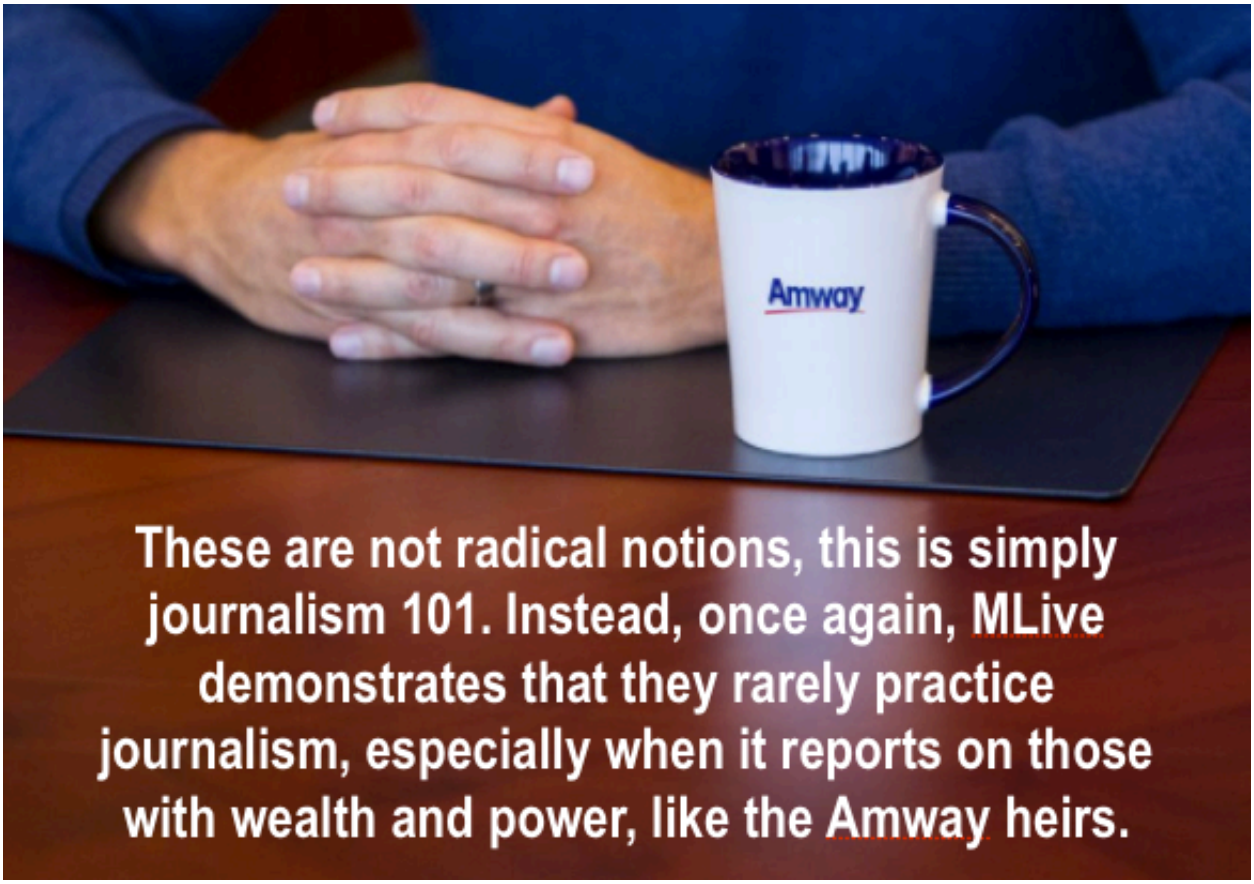
First, it is important to ask ourselves how MLive can claim these postings are anything that resembles journalism. It's as if the MLive reporter just sat down with the Amway CEOs and said, "***what would you like to tell our readers?***"

Second, if you are serious about practicing journalism, you don't interview some of the wealthiest people in West Michigan (who also happen to make it their business to finance political candidates to make sure policies are passed that support their ideological worldview and expand their financial interests), without asking hard, probing questions. The former editor of the GR Press, Mike Lloyd once told me that is was the duty of the Press to, "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." This in not practiced at MLive.

Third, based on the commentary from **the original article posted early Monday morning**, the MLive reporter could have asked some important questions, about why Amway sales have increased in countries like China, South Korea, Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, India, Russia, Malaysia and Hong Kong. More importantly, the MLive reporter could have asked those same question to people who didn't have the wealth and power that Van Andel and DeVos hold or the reporter could have conducted their own investigation as to why Amway is experiencing these trends.

Fourth, in the video where DeVos and Van Andel talk about the new tax benefits for corporations that the Trump administration passed, any competent reporter would have asked follow up questions, sought out addition sources and even conducted their own analysis of what the recent tax policy of the Trump administration means for the US, who it benefits and who it impacts negatively.

These are not radical notions, this is simply journalism 101. Instead, once again, MLive demonstrates that they rarely practice journalism, especially when it reports on those with wealth and power, like the Amway heirs.



The Canonization of Rich DeVos: Even in death the news media acts as stenographers to power
https://griid.org/2018/09/07/the-canonization-of-rich-devos-even-in-death-the-news-media-acts-as-stenographers-to-power/

It has begun. With Thursday morning's announcement of Richard DeVos Sr.'s death, the news media has already begun to canonize the billionaire co-founder of Amway.

This treatment of DeVos was expected, since for years the news media, particularly the West Michigan news media, has acted as stenographers to the most powerful family in the area.

The narrative that the news media has crafted around Rich DeVos and his family has been decades in the making, as we have documented over the years. The narrative that has been created is similar to what Sarah Schulman calls the “gentrification of the mind” or what the great revolutionary thinker Franz Fanon referred to as the “colonization of the mind.”

This colonizing of our minds, in the case of the Rich DeVos, has much to do with how we are taught about the capitalist myth of the self-made man. We are taught very early that people like Rich DeVos made their money without anyone’s help. In addition, the news media in West Michigan has been telling us since the 1970s that Grand Rapids would not be what it is if it weren’t for Rich DeVos. This cumulative impact of a specific narrative is important for our understanding of how so many people have embraced this belief and why it is so important to think about the narrative that the news media has created about Rich DeVos.

Stenographers to Power

There have been numerous stories in the national news media, including the **New York Times** and the **Washington Post**.

However, it is more relevant to focus on the West Michigan media, since they have had a more intimate relationship with the DeVos family and have been reporting on the family for decades.

One thing that I found instructive, was just how quickly the Grand Rapids-based news media had constructed a narrative about Rich DeVos. The MLive story was posted at 11:00am on Thursday, just a few hours after it was announced that DeVos died. Not only was it instructive to see how quickly the local news media crafted these stories, it was also instructive about how much media has been crafted in such a short time. This not only includes a written narrative, but dozens of photos and video. Now, it is certainly possible that the local news media already had something created in anticipation of his death and some might say that is just journalism being prepared. However, it doesn’t take into account the consistency in the narrative about Rich DeVos. It’s as if the news media talked to each other and agreed that they were all going to do nothing but celebrate the Amway co-founder in whatever stories they produced.

All of the local news outlets have put forth a similar narrative about Rich DeVos, whether we are talking about **MLive**, **WOOD TV 8**, **WZZM 13** or **WXMI 17**. Here is a list of themes constructed by the news media about Rich DeVos

He was a successful businessman.
He made his own wealth.
He and his family are generous contributors to charity.
Rich DeVos revitalized downtown Grand Rapids.
He was a major contributor to the Republican Party and other conservative causes.
Rich DeVos helped GVSU move from a college to a university.

He became a sports owner in the 90s by purchasing the Orlando Magic basketball team.

He was a motivational speaker.

Now, there were a few references in the local news coverage that made it seems as if the coverage was balanced. Amway business practices were discussed in terms of the claims of the Canadian government that the company engaged in fraud, but this was settled and Amway agreed to pay a fine. However, those who have challenged the narrative about Amway have not limited their criticism to just the Canadian incident, they have looked at the business structure and the corporate culture as well. For a further investigation of this, please see the book *Amway: the cult of free enterprise,* by Stephen Butterfield.

There was also some reference to DeVos being on President Reagan's AIDS Task Force in the 1987. However, this reference on MLive just mentioned that activists protested this appointment and then quoted DeVos saying, *"That was probably one of the most difficult years of my life. It was the first time I began to not sleep at night. It wasn't so much the criticism. It was the enormity of the problem and the people who were suffering with it. I think it raised my sensitivity. I became far less critical."*

Apart from these few mild criticisms, the rest has all been media pundits and other influential people gushing about what a great man Rich DeVos was. **WOOD TV 8 political reporter Rick Albin** kept talking about how DeVos remade the city of Grand Rapids and they kept showing a clip of DeVos saying that this was his town……without any irony on their part.

Then there was **Catherine Behrendt with WZZM 13**, who also spoke about DeVos. Behrendt spoke of him as if he was a saint and then did a walk down memory lane with some video footage of her and Rich in his home showing her pictures and allowing her to be there while he was exercising on the treadmill.

However, maybe the most disgusting display of stenography by the local news media was not only their reading of the DeVos family statement, but the inclusion of several tweets from grandson and founder of ArtPrize, Rick DeVos. And it is important to note that the TV stations in particular did not just read these tweets at one point in their coverage, they kept going back to tweets from Rick DeVos throughout their coverage.

One other demonstration of the news media's complicity in canonizing Rich DeVos, is the fact that WOOD TV 8, at the bottom of their main story on DeVos, included a **link to an RDV Corp website**that tells the story of Rich DeVos.

On Monday, we will provide a counter-narrative to the life of Rich DeVos in an article we are tentatively calling, An Honest Obituary for Rich DeVos. In the meantime, check out our DeVos Family Reader entitled, ***We're Rich and We Do What We Want*** if you want information that is not filtered by the commercial media.

A more honest obituary for Richard DeVos Sr.

https://griid.org/2018/09/10/an-more-honest-obituary-for-richard-devos-sr/

A few days have passed since the death of Richard DeVos Sr., yet the accolades continue to flow, especially from members of the capitalist class and organizations which he supported with his money.

One example of an organization that has made a public **statement after the death of DeVos is the Acton Institute**. The Acton founder, Rev. Robert Sirico stated, "*Rich DeVos never shrank from the conviction that the roots of liberty and the morally-charged life are to be found in the eternal truths of the Judeo-Christian tradition*."

Now, I'm not really interested in making any kind of determination about what the "eternal truths" of the Judeo-Christian tradition are, since that same tradition has been used to justify, slavery, genocide, the subjugation of women, the theft of land, homophobia, white supremacy and the unbridled accumulation of wealth. These justifications have not been made by some marginal group of people, but by the leadership in most of the mainstream Christian denominations for most of its history.

What I am interested in discerning is a response to the claims made by the media, particularly the West Michigan media, about the life of Richard DeVos, especially after he and Jay Van Andel founded Amway. What follows is a look at how Rich DeVos used his wealth, power and privilege to expand his own personal wealth, the impose his own ideological worldview on the public and to go to great lengths to support organizations which shared his ideological worldview, especially those organizations which sought to dismantle anything that is part of the public sector, attack organized labor, undermine public education and cause harm to the most vulnerable members of society – communities of color and the LGBTQ community.

When Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel founded the Amway corporation, they did so by embracing some of the most deeply entrenched lies about this country. Rich DeVos has written numerous books that promote his values. In his book *Believe,* DeVos, in talking about freedom, states, *"that call of freedom went forth from a rugged wilderness, and Europe and Asia and Africa sent their sons of adventure to hew out a new society in a land of forests and savages*."

An **early critique of Amway** and their ideological stance came from a student at Calvin College in 1971, who wrote:

The most important issue in maintaining a wealthy economy is maintaining the control of the raw materials needed by American industries to keep producing the finished products. The United States simply does not have the raw materials to maintain its wealthy economy. Almost every significant raw industrial resource that American industries use is imported from poverty-stricken Third World countries in African, South America and Asia. Thus, the American Way has a vested interest in maintaining control

over the countries from which the resources come. The continuation might be maintained by sheer economic brute force, by political manipulation or rewarding governments which are friendly to us, by CIA-inspired coups who are not cooperative with us or by wars to "maintain freedom" and to "prevent the spread of communism."

Another early public challenge of the power and influence of Rich DeVos came from **a Grand Valley State College student in 1977**, when DeVos was a member of the Board of Control (similar to a Board of Trustees). The student called into questions DeVos and his unwillingness to allow students to have a say in school policy.

This example from GVSC continued right up until his death, since DeVos has contributed millions of dollars to the school, often with strings attached. Many people who attended William James and Thomas Jefferson Colleges before the school became GVSU, has stated that Rich DeVos lobbied heavily for the school to shed its counter-cultural history and adopt a more market-based school with an emphasis on business.

In 1994, when faculty and staff at GVSU were meeting with then President Lubbers over the university's willingness to offer domestic partner benefits, word got out that this was going to happen. At the time GVSU was raising money for a proposed health education building on Michigan St and Peter Cook and Rich DeVos had pledged millions. Once DeVos and Cook found out about the proposal by GVSU to offer domestic partner benefits, they threatened to withdraw their financial support if the university would support a domestic partner benefits policy. GVSU acquiesced to the wish of DeVos and Cook. For further reading on Rich DeVos and GVSU check out **What's in a Name: A Popular Guide to Wealth & Influence at GVSU** and our film **A People's History of the LGBTQ Community in Grand Rapids**.

Anti-LGBT Legacy of Rich DeVos

The example from GVSU of DeVos threatening to withhold money from the university if they provided domestic partner benefits is just one example of Rich DeVos' legacy of supporting anti-LGBT campaigns and organizations.

For decades, through his foundation, Rich DeVos funded anti-LGBT groups and Christian organizations that had adopted a homophobic and transphobic position, like the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and the National Organization for Marriage. These organizations identified themselves as pro-family, but what they really were promoting was a hetero-normative, patriarchal family structure, which was never tolerant of people who identified as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender or queer. Rich DeVos contributed millions to these entities, in part, because they were anti-LGBT.

Other more specific examples of DeVos and his anti-LGBT stance came in the late 1980s when he was appointed to President Reagan's AIDS Commission. HIV/AIDS had been devastating the LGBT community for years before the federal government created this and the LGBT community was demanding that the federal government take action.

With the appointment of this commission, Reagan was able to appease those who demanded a more sustained federal response to AIDS. He also answered the concerns of the New Right by appointing an AIDS commission that included few scientists who had participated in AIDS research and few physicians who had actually treated people with AIDS. In addition, the commission included outspoken opponents of AIDS education, such as New York Cardinal John O'Connor. O'Connor was not only opposed to AIDS education, he was openly hostile to the Gay community.

Another openly hostile opponent of the LGBT community was Rich DeVos, who was also on Reagan's AIDS Commission. In an interview with MLive a few years ago, DeVos made some pretty revealing comments about his attitudes towards the Gay community while sitting on the AIDS Commission.

When HIV first came out, President Reagan formed a commission and I was honored to be on that commission. I listened to 300 witnesses tell us that it was every body else's fault but their own. Nothing to do with their conduct, just that the government didn't fix this disease. At the end of that I put in the document, it was the conclusion document from the commission, that actions have consequences and you are responsible for yours. AIDS is a disease people gain because of their actions. It wasn't like cancer. We all made the exceptions for how you got it, by accident, that was all solved a long time ago. That's when they started hanging me in effigy because I wasn't sympathetic to all their requests for special treatment. Because at that time it was always someone else's fault. I said, you are responsible for your actions too, you know. Conduct yourself properly, which is a pretty solid Christian principle.

Not only does DeVos show his homophobic bias, his comments demonstrate his ignorance of the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS.

On the issue of same sex marriage, DeVos was also an active opponent, providing at least $20,000 to fight the ballot initiative in Michigan in 2004 and another $100,000 for the ballot initiative in Florida in 2008.

Some people have claimed that in his later years, Rich DeVos had a change of heart, as was demonstrated by his family's donation to the families of the victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Florida. While it is true that the family made such a donation, there was no acknowledgement that DeVos had funded the anti-LGBT marriage proposal in 2008 and that he had given millions of dollars to John Kennedy's Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church for decades, a church that is based in Florida and preached on the evils of "homosexuality" for decades, thus cultivating a climate of hate directed at the LGBT community.

Funding Right Wing Organizations that do harm

Beyond identity politics, Rich DeVos was also a champion of funding what are often referred to as conservative groups. However, such a label is not adequate, since many of the groups that DeVos funded were ideologically motivated and embraced far-right policy positions and above all a neo-liberal capitalist framework.

I wrote about the funding of these organizations in 1998, in an article entitled, **Giving til it hurts others**. Rich DeVos continued to give to some of these same entities right up until his death, groups like the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Free Congress Foundation, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, the Acton Institute and a whole range of groups that sought to undermine social welfare policies, re-direct public funds to the private sector, an attack on labor unions, the privatization of education and the re-regulation of environmental laws and the financial sector.

The Heritage Foundation, for example, was a major architect of the Reagan administration's policies to downsize government and to attempt to undermine social welfare policies.

Closer to home, DeVos has supported the Acton Institute, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and the West Michigan Policy Forum, all of which support the same neo-liberal capitalist platform we mentioned above. What is important to note about these groups and the funding they have received from Rich DeVos, is that all of these groups are working towards a radical reconstruction of government and society, one that is based on market principles. These groups all are involved in provided research and documentation that supports their ideological positions, that are them used to influence policy makers at the local, state and federal level.

Rich DeVos bought a lot of political influence

In addition to funding organizations that fit in the ideological framework of DeVos, he made it a point to buy as much political influence as possible. Depending on the source, some claim that Rich DeVos contributed roughly $200 million to candidates or incumbents since the early 1970s. According to opensecrets.org, **DeVos had already contributed more than $1 million in the current election cycle**.

Rich DeVos has contributed to the Republican Party at the federal and state level, plus he has contributed to specific candidates running for federal, state and local office from Michigan and in other states. DeVos has also contributed to support or oppose ballot initiatives in Michigan and throughout the country as well.

The amount of money that Rich DeVos has contributed to buy political influence is staggering, but it is also important to note that his contributions directly influence policy. Lets look at a few examples from recent years.

In June of 2014, Governor Snyder signed into law **HB 4052**, a law that takes away local control. Why is this relevant, because powerful entities like the DeVos family do not want local communities adopting policies like a living wage, regulations against wage theft or adopting anti-discrimination ordinances that would include or add anti-discrimination protections for the LGBT community.

HB 4052 was introduced by Rep. Earl Poleski (R) and then went to the Committee on Commerce & Trade, which is chaired by Joseph Graves (R). Graves received $9,000 from the DeVos family for his re-election bid in 2014, along with several other members of the Committee on Commerce and Trade. This committee recommended that HB

4052 be adopted and then it was put before the Michigan Senate. The Michigan Senate sent the bill to the Competitiveness Committee chaired by Mike Shirkey (R). Rep. Shirkey received $4,500 from the DeVos family for his re-election bid in 2014, as did several other members of this committee.

A second example would be a bill that was also signed into law the summer of 2014, **HB 4188**. This legislation, often framed as a religious freedom bill, would allow adoption agencies in Michigan the ability to deny LGBT couples/partners/families from adopting.

HB 4188 was introduced by Rep. Andrea LaFontaine (R). Rep. LaFontaine received $8,100 in campaign contribution in 2014 from the DeVos family. Many of the cosponsors of this bill were also recipients of DeVos family funding.

A third example would be legislation that was passed in September of 2017, legislation that is sort of a Citizens United for Michigan, allowing for greater amounts of money to be contributed during elections. **We documented that in the Michigan Senate, most of those who voted for the legislation had received money from DeVos**.

The "benevolence" of Rich DeVos

One additional major claim that has been made in recent days is how benevolent Rich DeVos has been and how much money his foundation has contributed to charitable causes.

First, it is important to note that no matter what year one looks at the 990s from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, most of the larger donations are going to entities like the megachurch Willow Creek Community Church, the Haggai Institute, the American Enterprise Institute or Americans for Prosperity. Giving millions to groups like these is not charity, it is the funding of ideologically-driven groups that try to influence public policy or are engaged in work that does actual harm to people.

Second, the money that Rich DeVos has contributed to more traditional charity groups or service organizations, goes specifically to those organizations because they do not address root causes of problems or take a systemic approach to dealing with social ills. The non-profits that DeVos has contributed money to provide services to individuals who are looking for assistance in some way, but Rich DeVos never gave money to groups that were focused on challenging systems of oppression or those who encourage direct action to fight injustice. Contributions to non-profits helps to create a buffer between those in the capitalist class and those who could potentially be organized to challenge the wealth of the capitalist class, as we documented in our recent series on the **Grand Rapids Power Structure**. Obviously, a great deal more could be said about Rich DeVos and his wealth, power and influence. However, this article should provide you with ample evidence to counter **the narrative from the commercial media since his death last week**.

GVSU Canonizes Rich DeVos, but some students push back

https://griid.org/2018/09/13/gvsu-canonizes-rich-devos-but-some-students-push-back/

The Rich DeVos love-fest continues in Grand Rapids, particularly in the news media, where there are daily posting on the "legacy" of the co-founder of Amway.

My favorite headline so far has been, **For Rich DeVos, giving away his millions was a full-time job**. This headline is not only misleading, it is inaccurate in terms what the organizations who were the recipients of his contributions actually do that is harmful. For an counter-narrative, see **A more honest obituary for Richard DeVos Sr**.

The canonization of DeVos has also extended to areas outside of the news media. GVSU has already erected a monument of sorts to DeVos and placed it on the Allendale campus at GVSU. (seen here on the right)

The commemorate piece states:

This Laker Light shines in memory of one of Grand Valley State University's greatest leaders and most loyal friends, Richard M DeVos Sr. Mr DeVos' vision for Grand Valley, including the building of the downtown campus, will benefit students and our community for generations to come.

Such a statement is fundamentally based on the amount of money that Rich DeVos contributed over the years to the campus, especially since the school transitioned from Grand Valley State Colleges to Grand Valley State University. This transit was in many ways influenced by DeVos in that it went from a place that was called the "Berkeley of midwest" to a campus that has a significant business emphasis and has become increasingly more conservative.

Some students are not being quiet about this new monument to DeVos, as they have begun putting up around campus a poster (seen here) that attempts to provide a counter-narrative to benevolence of DeVos. We are grateful that the student who created the flyer added a nod to GRIID, by including a link to our DeVos Family Reader, entitled, **We're Rich and We Do What We Want**.

When it comes to Rich DeVos and GVSU, we'd also like to share a few other resources that are important if we are to understand the history and how GVSU has evolved.

First, there is a **GR People's History Project post** based on a student newspaper from the late 1970s called The Insider, where students confronted DeVos while he was on the Board of Control. If you go to page 26 of **The Insider issues we have posted**, you can read the student criticisms of Rich DeVos in 1977.

Another important resource that was created specifically for students and faculty, is **What's in a Name: A Popular Guide to Wealth and Influence at GVSU**, which provides a visual depiction and maps to show where there are names of wealthy donors

on buildings and what harm they have caused with their money, with DeVos being the primary perpetrator.

Lastly, when we produced A People's History of the LGBTQ Community in Grand Rapids film, we devoted a whole chapter to GVSU, which talks about how DeVos was a major impediment to LGBTQ justice. You can view the entire film at **this link**. The section on GVSU begins at 1:06:10.



DeVos front group AmplifyGR, shifts tactical approach to influence outcomes in southeast part of Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2019/05/30/devos-front-group-amplifygr-shifts-tactical-approach-to-influence-outcomes-in-southeast-part-of-grand-rapids/

On **May 25, MLive ran an article** on a new partnership between Home Repair Services and the DeVos-backed entity AmplifyGR.

This new effort between the two groups, called the Neighborhood Strong program, has been funded through the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, the CDV5 Foundation, as well as banks and utilities, according to AmplifyGR director Jon Ippel. It is safe to say that the bulk of the $325,000 provided is coming from the DeVos family, since they have already invested over $10 million on property in that part of Grand Rapids.

The project does provide funding for homeowners in the southeast part of Grand Rapids to make repairs on their homes, which is a positive thing. A few of the homeowners are cited in the MLive article, along with representatives from AmplifyGR and Home Repair Services.

At one point, the MLive story states, "*Amplify was **initially greeted with suspicion** from some neighbors who expressed concerns about gentrification, but it has since been working to build relationships with residents and community groups."*

This statement is instructive and it speaks to the tactical changes that AmplifyGR has taken since it **first became public back in the Spring of 2017.** AmplifyGR was greeted with more than suspicion in the summer of 2017, when neighbors and other members of the public **called the DeVos-created entity out during several public forums.**

After AmplifyGR's the 3rd community forum and continued push back, they decided to cancel any future forums. AmplifyGR then made this statement:

"If going slower is the price of getting this right… of NOT repeating the mistakes of the past… it's worth it. You're worth it. Our community is worth it. And our commitment and passion to achieving the above priorities has never been greater."

AmplifyGR has shifted their tactical approach to meeting with small groups of people and individuals in the southeast area, thus eliminating community accountability. When organizations like AmplifyGR, which has the back of the wealthiest family in West Michigan, chose to operate with limited transparency, you can be sure that they still are committed to their original agenda, an agenda reflected in the graphic below.

In addition to the Neighborhood Strong program, AmplifyGR has partnered with another DeVos entity, Start Garden, to push an entrepreneurial approach to community development, held turkey give aways, provided personal finance counseling opportunities to residents and other mini grant options.

What AmplifyGR has NOT done is to develop the three dozen properties they invested in with their development partner Rockford Construction. Again, this speaks to the transparency issue, since their is no clear plan on what their longterm agenda is, specifically with the $10 million worth of property that they own. And this is exactly why the community had major concerns about gentrification. When the wealthiest family buys that much land in any neighborhood, they aren't doing it for altruistic reasons.

None of us should be fooled by the piecemeal services and bandaid approach to neighborhood stabilization projects that AmplifyGR has been engaged in in the past 18 months. People should demand full transparency from AmplifyGR and an articulation of their longterm plans for this part of southeast Grand Rapids where they have engaged in a land grab.

Senator Tom Barrett, drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants and the DeVos Family

https://griid.org/2019/08/18/senator-tom-barrett-drivers-licenses-for-undocumented-immigrants-and-the-devos-family/

On Friday, in an **article published by MLive**, it was announced that there will be legislative support for Movimiento Cosecha's Drivers Licenses for All campaign.

State Senator Stephanie Chang will be introducing legislation in the upcoming weeks that will allow undocumented immigrants the opportunity obtain a drivers license in Michigan. Michigan used to grant undocumented immigrants the right to obtain a drivers license, but that change in 2007, when Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox made a ruling to prevent undocumented immigrants from obtaining a Michigan Drivers License.

The MLive article includes video taken by Movimiento Cosecha that shows a member of Movimiento Cosecha asking Gov. Whitmer if she supports undocumented immigrants and their desire to have a drivers license in Michigan. Whitmer said she would support the granting drivers licenses to undocumented immigrants.

It is important to recognize that the only real reason that some Michigan politicians are willing to support drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants is because of all the organizing that Movimiento Cosecha and other immigrant rights groups have done to make drivers licenses an issue.

However, there are some Michigan legislators, specifically Republican lawmakers, who do not support allowing undocumented immigrants to have a Michigan drivers license. One such politician is Sen. Tom Barrett, a Republican from Charlotte. Barrett was quoted in the MLive article as saying that allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain a drivers license is a,"*slippery slope towards granting amnesty or giving them voting rights*." He also stated:

"We have to respect the laws of our country, not encourage or reward people for being here illegally."

So, lets unpack what Sen. Barrett had to say.

First, on the matter of respecting the laws of the country. Since the founding of the US, most laws have benefitted white people, particularly white people with property. The laws of the US have primarily punished the poor, black, brown and indigenous people. It was legal to own slaves for nearly 100 years in the US. It was legal to disenfranchise communities of color for most of US history and still the system has found ways to prevent people of color from voting. It has been legal in the US to actively discriminate against black, brown and immigrant people. It was legal to deport Chinese immigrants after the Chinese Exclusion Act. It was legal to round up Japanese Americans during WWII and forcibly put them in internment camps. It was legal for white people to take indigenous land.

Second, undocumented immigrants who come to the US are primarily coming out of desperation, fleeing violence, persecution, poverty and climate injustice. Undocumented immigrants risk their very lives to come to the US so they can have a better life.

Third, providing undocumented immigrants the opportunity to obtain a drivers license is not a reward. When undocumented immigrants are allowed to obtain drivers licenses in Michigan, it means they will be able to support their families, contribute to their communities and contribute to broader community safety.

Fourth, does Senator Barrett realize how ridiculous he sounds when he says, giving undocumented immigrants a drivers license is a *slippery slope towards granting amnesty or giving them voting rights*. How is granting people asylum a slippery slope? As was already stated, people are risking their lives to flee dangerous circumstances and should be able to apply for asylum with the fullest support of the legal system.

Fifth, we all know that only those who have citizenship can vote, so either Senator Barrett doesn't know the law or he is merely using rhetoric which speaks to his constituents, rhetoric which is rooted in xenophobia, nationalism and white supremacy.

Sixth, Senator Barrett has been a politician only since 2014 and he has won the past few elections primarily because of the amount of money he has raised since becoming a State Representative and State Senator in Michigan. **According to the Michigan Campaign Finance Network**, the number one family to contribute to Tom Barrett since he first ran for office in 2014, is the DeVos Family. The top two entities to finance Tom Barrett since he first ran for office, have been the **House Republican Campaign Committee** and the **Senate Republican Campaign Committee**. The number one contributor to both of those GOP entities has been the DeVos Family.

Therefore, since the DeVos Family has been the primary economic contributor to Senator Tom Barrett, we can certainly put some of the blame on them when Barrett says dumb ass shit like, ***"We have to respect the laws of our country, not encourage or reward people for being here illegally."***

Tell us what to write: Once again, MLive acts as a stenographer for the Amway Corporation

https://griid.org/2019/09/13/tell-us-what-to-write-once-again-mlive-acts-as-a-stenographer-for-the-amway-corporation/

On Tuesday, **MLive posted a story** about the 60th anniversary of the Ada-based global corporation known as Amway. Amway, is short for The American Way, according to founders Jay Van Andel and Rich DeVos.

Actually, it isn't terribly accurate to say that MLive posted a story, rather was more like, "tell us what you want us to write." Now, I'm not suggesting that Amway actually told MLive what to print, but it doesn't matter, because the story that MLive published essentially reads like they wrote just what the Amway leaders wanted them to say.

The text of the article has no real new information about the pyramid scheme corporation and the two videos posted by MLive are also consistent with a style of journalism known as stenography.

The two videos posted by MLive are here below. This first video focuses on what the new CEO of Amway, Milind Pant, is saying, while the second video only has Amway co-Chairman Doug DeVos speaking. In both cases we don't know what the MLive reporter asked them, as the questions are not included.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

This news story about Amway is indicative of the kind of journalism that has been practiced more and more over the past 20 – 30 years, especially with the consolidation of news media ownerships has taken place.

There is nothing investigative about the story, there is no evidence that any serious questions were asked, and no where do we see other perspectives included. The story that MLive posted could have included a comment from the Chinese government, since that was one topic raised in the article.

Other questions that could be asked are:

> How does Amway impact local communities around the world, specifically how does it undermine local economies?
> How do the **millions of dollars that Amway contributes to candidates** influence public policy that would be beneficial to the Amway Corporation?
> How does the even larger sums of money that the **DeVos** and Van Andel families contribute to the Republican Party benefit the Amway Corporation?

So, how is it that the only daily newspaper in Grand Rapids, would fail to practice good journalism when it comes to the most powerful corporation in West Michigan, a corporation that is still run by two of the most powerful families in West Michigan, the DeVos and Van Andel families?

Billionaire Dick DeVos complains that more public money isn't funding his charter school

https://griid.org/2019/11/04/billionaire-dick-devos-complains-that-more-public-money-isnt-funding-his-charter-school/

When you are a billionaire in this society, 99% of the time you get what you want. This has been the case for the DeVos family members, like Dick DeVos.

Last week, MLive provided a platform for Dick DeVos to have a public temper tantrum, since the he finds it unacceptable that more public money isn't channeled to him and his friends and their precious charter schools.

The headline of the MLive article read, ***Dick DeVos calls governor's veto of charter school funding increase 'unacceptable'***.

Dick DeVos, who owns and operates the West Michigan Aviation Academy, crafted a press release calling Governor Whitmer's decision to not include increased funding for Charter Schools in the education budget. DeVos was quoted in the MLive article are saying, ***"Our students deserve better and should not be used as political pawns."*** Such a statement would have any honest reporter burst out in laughter, considering how Dick & Betsy DeVos have devoted the past three decades in Michigan into making students political pawns for their own gains.

Dick DeVos, Betsy DeVos and the rest of the DeVos family members have been working on changing education policy in the state of Michigan for nearly 30 years. Here are just some of the ways they have been undermining public education in Michigan:

> According to the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, the DeVos family has contributed $25 million in the past two election cycles alone, and most of those candidates have supported charter schools and the re-directing of public money to charter schools.
> Dick & Betsy DeVos led a ballot effort that would allow for school vouchers in 2000. That effort lost on a vote of 2,767, 320 (NO) to 1,235,533 (YES), meaning the **public voted more than 2 to 1 to reject such a plan**.
> Dick & Betsy DeVos created the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP) shortly after the defeat of the 2000 Pro-School Voucher ballot initiative. GLEP is essentially a pro-charter school front group that lobbies the Michigan legislature on education policy and has been crafting education policy for nearly 2 decades, policy that promotes a Neo-Liberal Education framework.

Great Lakes Education Project also supported a 2011 law that lifted Michigan's cap on charter schools. Under the law, the number of authorized charter schools was raised to 300 through 2012 and 500 through 2014, after which the cap was lifted.

Despite two decades of charter-school growth, the state's overall academic progress has failed to keep pace with other states: Michigan ranks near the bottom for fourth- and eighth-grade math and fourth-grade reading on a nationally representative test, nicknamed the "Nation's Report Card." Notably, the state's charter schools scored worse on that test than their traditional public-school counterparts, according to an analysis of federal data. (**According to an article from Politico**, just before Betsy DeVos became the Secretary of education.)

The DeVos Family, through the Great Lakes Education Project, has been one of the **main political contributors in the fight over Detroit Public Schools**.

It should be acknowledged that Dick DeVos was not the only voice, opposing Governor Whitmer's decision on education funding. Other voices that were quoted in the MLive article were Dan Quisenberry – president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies, Leah Nixon – director of communications for National Heritage Academies, and Rob Kimball – associate vice president for charter schools for Grand Valley State University.

Curiously, there was not one single voice defending the Governor's decision, no one from the Governor's office, no one from Michigan Public Schools and no one from the Michigan Education Association.

MLive just can't help but act as a stenographer for the DeVos family

https://griid.org/2019/11/27/mlive-just-cant-help-but-act-as-a-stenographer-for-the-devos-family/

On Monday, MLive posted a story with the following headline, ***DeVos family earns spot on Forbes' list for donating $112 million***.

The article, like so many we have documented over the years, provides an unquestioning forum for the DeVos family and allows them, once again, to be seen as generous people.

The MLive article is based on a **Forbes magazine list of the top 50 people** who donate in the US. The DeVos family ranks 26th on the list, along with other members of the capitalist class, including Bill & Melinda Gates, the Walton family, Jeff Bezoz, Mark Zuckerberg, Michael Bloomberg, Warren Buffet, George Soros and Charles Koch.

The problem with such innocuous lists is that they never question:

How these people became so wealthy

These lists don't make comparisons to how much money these people contribute to candidates or political parties
And they never question what role rich people's philanthropy plays within a larger political, economic and social framework.

Members of the Capitalist class become disgustingly rich because they exploit other people's labor. Sure, some of these people were born into wealth, but that hasn't stopped them from buying politicians that provide massive subsidies for their companies and to get politicians they have bought to pass policies that create tax structures that benefit those with the most wealth.

The only two entities that received funds from the DeVos family foundations, mentioned in the MLive article, were Spectrum Hospital Foundation and Grand Valley State University in 2018. There is no exploration into why the various DeVos foundations contributed the amount of money they did and there is no questioning of what strategic role this money plays for the DeVos family.

If we go back and look at the examples of the Rockefeller family or Andrew Carnegie, when were some of the first foundations were created, we know from that history that their wealth was much more scrutinized, even when it was used for philanthropic purposes. (see *Foundations and Public Policy* (Joan Roelofs) and *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (edited by INCITE!)

Those who create foundations are not giving money away to be generous, their philanthropy is strategic. Those with wealth use philanthropy to either distract people from asking questions about why those with wealth are so wealthy or to fund projects that fit within their ideological framework. For instance, the DeVos foundation contribute to conservative christian groups that embrace their worldview, to social service agencies that focus on individual solutions to issues like poverty, and to organizations that do public policy work that serves the interests of the DeVos family, like the Acton Institute, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the American Enterprise Institute.

Therefore, to report on the DeVos family philanthropy without exploring the deeper implications of why the contribute does a disservice to the public and demonstrates how MLive will not challenge the DeVos family influence in West Michigan.

How the local news media is framing the DeVos-created AmplifyGR development proposal in the Boston Square area of Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2020/01/08/how-the-local-news-media-is-framing-the-devos-created-amplifygr-development-proposal-in-the-boston-square-area-of-grand-rapids/

Ever since the MiBiz article from Sunday, December 29, there have been at least four additional local news stories about the DeVos-created AmplifyGR 9-acre development proposal for the Boston Square neighborhood in the southeast part of Grand Rapids.

It is always important deconstruct how news organization cover critical topics and how they frame the issues that they are reporting on. News framing is not just how journalists/reporters talk about the subject they are covering, but what internalized values they may bring to a particular story. For instance, the dominant narrative in the US is that whenever development is proposed, it is seen as a positive, even a necessary outcome. There might be concerns raised about development projects, but in general development projects are seen as a community benefit. This is the dominant narrative in the US and therefore it is a narrative that commercial news agencies adopt.

The first article to appear, was from **MiBiz, on Sunday, December 29**. MiBiz is a business-focused news agency, that includes real estate/development as a primary news category. Their article from December 29 reads like it was based on a press release that came directly from the DeVos-created entity known as AmplifyGR. The story provides a basic narrative about what the proposal includes, a listing of organizations that AmplifyGR has partner with, along with a list of development partners, including companies hired to design and build aspects of the project. There is only one person cited in the story, Jon Ippel, who is the executive director for AmplifyGR. Lastly, the article does mention that there is Grand Rapids Planning Commission meeting on January 9th, which will discuss the project, but MiBiz doesn't tell readers that there is a public hearing about the project on January 9. In addition, the only image included was one that AmplifyGR provided, which is a rendering of the geographical area of the project.

The next news story about the DeVos-created AmplifyGR project was done by posted on **Michigan Radio on January 5**. The Michigan Radio story is based upon a public meeting that was held on Saturday, January 4, at the Boston Square Neighborhood Association. The neighborhood group had posted on Facebook that they were hosting the event, so community members came to learn about the project. Someone this writer had spoken to, who attended this meeting, said that AmplifyGR came and also did a formal presentation at the community meeting.

There were two people cited in the story, with the first being the president of the neighborhood association who said he was **skeptical** about the project and was concerned about the possibility of **gentrification**. The other source cited in the story was a staff person from AmplifyGR, someone who assured those in attendance that this project would not **displace** people. The story also mentioned that there was a GR Planning Commission meeting on January 9, but no mention that there was a public hearing about the proposal from AmplifyGR. The only image used in the story was taken by Michigan Radio, which showed the AmplifyGR staff person and a map of the project area.

MLive ran a story that was posted on Monday, January 6, with a headlined that read, DeVos-backed nonprofit aims to transform Grand Rapids neighborhood. The

MLive article was based upon their reporter going to the Boston Square Neighborhood to interview people and to take pictures of the area. The MLive story does provide a basic narrative about the project and some background on what has happened since 2015, when the project began with the purchasing on nearly two dozen properties at the cost of $10 million.

The MLive article cites the executive director of AmplifyGR, someone who serves on AmplifyGR's neighborhood advisory committee, the executive director of Oakdale Neighbors and a rental property owner who has an office in the Boston Square neighborhood. It should be mentioned that the **Oakdale Neighbors received $273,500 from the DeVos family in recent years.** The only critical voice of the four cited was the rental property owner and his comments were about the demographic of people in the area and what they could afford in regards to rent.

The MLive article provides a significant amount of space to AmplifyGR to talk about all the positive things the organization has done in the past two years in the neighborhood, but it also lists **who sits on the AmplifyGR board**, which includes Cheri & Maria DeVos. There are 17 pictures that accompany the article and a **link to the what AmplifyGR will be presenting**. There is mention that AmplifyGR will be presenting at a GR Planning Commission meeting, but there is no mention of the date for that meeting or that there is a public hearing on January 9.

On Monday night, the DeVos-created AmplifyGR decided to host another meeting for people who wanted to see their development proposal. This event resulted in two more local news stories, one from WOOD TV8 and WZZM 13.

The **channel 8 story** provides a basic narrative of the proposed project. The two sources cited in the story are the executive director of Oakdale Neighbors and a staff member of AmplifyGR. The channel 8 reporter then says that there are concerns about gentrification, based on what has happened in other areas of the city like wealthy street, but both people cited in the story say that won't or doesn't have to happen in this case. The story does mention that the DeVos-created AmplifyGR will be presenting to the GR Planning Commission on Thursday, but there was no mention that there was a public hearing.

The **WZZM 13 story** also reported from the open house that AmplifyGR was hosting and did address concerns about gentrification, but the only person who viewers heard from talking about gentrification was an AmplifyGR staff person and they believed that would not be an issue with this project. The channel 13 web-based article does use AmplifyGR-provided images for the proposal. There was also mention that AmplifyGR would present to the GR City Planning Commission on Thursday at 1pm, but again there was no mention that this was a public hearing.

Local News omissions

There were some obvious omissions in the local news coverage of the DeVos-created AmplifyGR development proposal. The most obvious was the fact that none of the stories mentioned that the GR Planning Commission was hosting a Public Hearing on

January 9 at 1pm. This is a significant omission, since all of the 5 stories failed to let the public know that they could weigh in on this proposal.

Another significant omission with the local news coverage were voices of those who were not part of AmplifyGR or the organizations collaborating with them. While there were numerous mentions about gentrification, there was only one person cited in all five stories who expressed concern about the possibility of gentrification in this project. None of the news agencies sought out other voices in the community, instead they relied on AmplifyGR staff or those directly connected to the project. Such a limited scope of perspectives not only excludes different perspectives, it sends the message (by omission) that there are no dissenting voices.

A third significant omission is the lack of context and the failure of reporters to ask more probing questions. The MLive article did provide some background information, but did not follow that information up with more poignant questions. None of the news agencies talked about how structural racism has played into the disinvestment in the Boston Square neighborhood and non of the news agencies raised issues around the fact that the DeVos/Rockford Construction tandem had begun buying land in the Boston Square area in 2015, but didn't tell residents until mid-2017. There were some news agencies that identified this project as a DeVos-back project, yet there was no exploration of what that could mean. In other words, none of the local news agencies asked a question like, ***why did the most powerful family in West Michigan create this non-profit and should people be concerned about their short term and long term intentions***? This question is an important one and it is exactly why **GRIID has been reporting on the DeVos-created AmplifyGR work since May of 2017**.

Neo-Liberal Capitalist project Grand Action makes a comeback

https://griid.org/2020/03/18/neo-liberal-capitalist-project-grand-action-makes-a-comeback/

While we are all faced with an uncertain future with Covid – 19, we also have to pay attention to what systems of power are up to. Scholar/activist Naomi Klein calls these moments **Disaster Capitalism**, where governments use a disaster to push further austerity measures.

GRIID hopes to spend time looking at how local systems of power might also try to take advantage of the current crisis to further their own agendas.

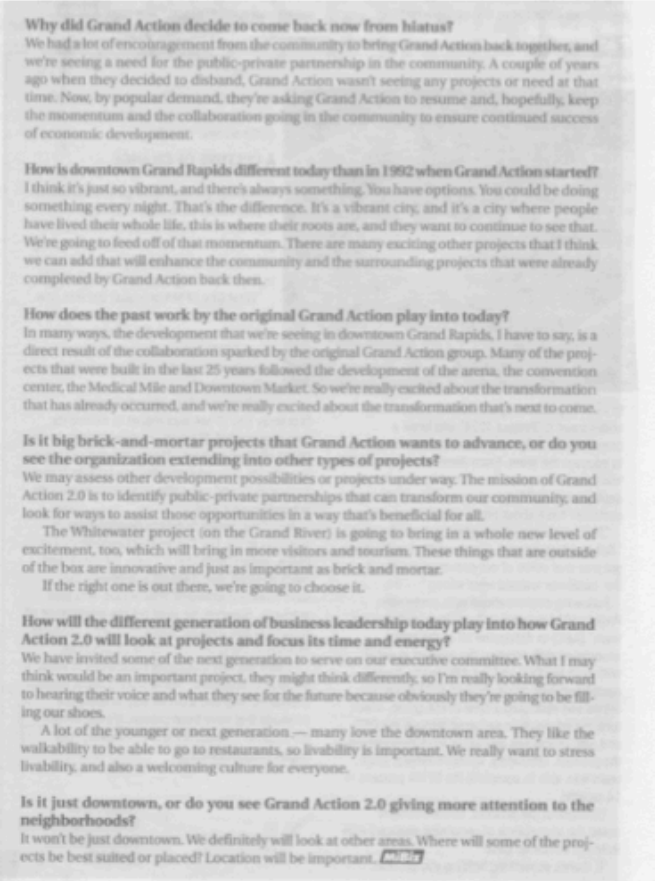
Grand Action 2.0

Despite their **announcement a few years ago to shut down**, Grand Action recently announced that they are coming back.

The business press reported on this announcement, with the headline, ***Grand Action reboots to tackle new transformational projects in GR.*** I'm not sure how "transformational" the work of Grand Action can be, unless by transformational they mean it will transform more public money to fund private projects.

The previous version of Grand Action was led by David Frey, John Canepa and and Dick DeVos. DeVos is the only holdover with Grand Action, but he will be joined by Carol Van Andel and Tom Welch. Carol is the wife of David Van Andel, the current CEO of the Van Andel Institute. Tom Welch is the regional president of Fifth Third Bank.

The reporter from MiBiz, which ran a short article on Grand Action's return, only ran a brief intro and then asked several questions, which we deconstruct below.



Why did Grand Action decide to come back now from hiatus?
We had a lot of encouragement from the community to bring Grand Action back together, and we're seeing a need for the public-private partnership in the community. A couple of years ago when they decided to disband, Grand Action wasn't seeing any projects or need at that time. Now, by popular demand, they're asking Grand Action to resume and, hopefully, keep the momentum and the collaboration going in the community to ensure continued success of economic development.

How is downtown Grand Rapids different today than in 1992 when Grand Action started?
I think it's just so vibrant, and there's always something. You have options. You could be doing something every night. That's the difference. It's a vibrant city, and it's a city where people have lived their whole life, this is where their roots are, and they want to continue to see that. We're going to feed off of that momentum. There are many exciting other projects that I think we can add that will enhance the community and the surrounding projects that were already completed by Grand Action back then.

How does the past work by the original Grand Action play into today?
In many ways, the development that we're seeing in downtown Grand Rapids, I have to say, is a direct result of the collaboration sparked by the original Grand Action group. Many of the projects that were built in the last 25 years followed the development of the arena, the convention center, the Medical Mile and Downtown Market. So we're really excited about the transformation that has already occurred, and we're really excited about the transformation that's next to come.

Is it big brick-and-mortar projects that Grand Action wants to advance, or do you see the organization extending into other types of projects?
We may assess other development possibilities or projects under way. The mission of Grand Action 2.0 is to identify public-private partnerships that can transform our community, and look for ways to assist those opportunities in a way that's beneficial for all.

The Whitewater project (on the Grand River) is going to bring in a whole new level of excitement, too, which will bring in more visitors and tourism. These things that are outside of the box are innovative and just as important as brick and mortar.

If the right one is out there, we're going to choose it.

How will the different generation of business leadership today play into how Grand Action 2.0 will look at projects and focus its time and energy?
We have invited some of the next generation to serve on our executive committee. What I may think would be an important project, they might think differently, so I'm really looking forward to hearing their voice and what they see for the future because obviously they're going to be filling our shoes.

A lot of the younger or next generation — many love the downtown area. They like the walkability to be able to go to restaurants, so livability is important. We really want to stress livability, and also a welcoming culture for everyone.

Is it just downtown, or do you see Grand Action 2.0 giving more attention to the neighborhoods?
It won't be just downtown. We definitely will look at other areas. Where will some of the projects be best suited or placed? Location will be important.

When Grand Action (GA) says that the community was asking that they come back, the question is which community? How many of the developers and city planners were calling for Grand Action to come back and how many people are asking for this who are not part of the local power structure?

Question #2 asks what is different about the downtown now and the GA people says the city is now vibrant with lots of things to do. Again, the question should be asked who is the downtown vibrant for and who can easily access downtown resources - housing, entertainment, etc.?

Questions #3 asks how their previous work plays into future projects. Their answer center's around the importance of public-private partnerships, which is a few people in the public sector deciding to use public money that will primarily benefit the private sector.

Questions #4 asks if the future work will be bricks & mortar projects. GA uses the example of the Whitewater project, which they claim will benefit all. It will primarily benefit developers and those who can profit from this project, even though it will use lots of public money. https://griid.org/2019/02/20/people-profits-and-the-grand-rapids-whitewater-project/

Question #5 centers around involving younger business people. Here the GA says they have invited younger business people and really want to promote "livability" in the downtown area. How livable is it for people making minimum wage, for people of color, for undocumented immigrants or those who are gender non-conforming?

Question #6 asks whether GA 2.0 will just be downtown or in other parts of the city. GA says they will consider other areas of the city, which should put us all on alert. What will there public-private projects do to "transform" neighborhoods? Gentrification is the word that comes to mind.

MLive reporter fails to see or explore the serious conflicts of interest when reporting on the proposed soccer stadium, public money and the DeVos family

https://griid.org/2022/09/19/mlive-reporter-fails-to-see-or-explore-the-serious-conflicts-of-interest-when-reporting-on-the-proposed-soccer-stadium-public-money-and-the-devos-family/

Last week, we **wrote about the proposed Soccer stadium** that is deeply entrenched within the control of the DeVos family.

In that article, we discussed the recent land purchase by Dan DeVos, under the name of DF Fox Ventures LLC. The land in question is where the current Big Boy restaurant currently sits, which would be the southern end of the potential stadium property.

We also discussed how the DeVos family has so many other connections to those who will make the decisions and have a say in the financing of this project – Grand Action 2.0, the Downtown Development Authority, the Right Place Inc., etc.

Since then there have been two additional news stories on MLive that are worthy discussing, particularly as it relates to the possible Soccer Stadium being located in downtown Grand Rapids.

The first article, from the past Friday, was **an MLive article** focused mainly on all of the submissions for how to spend the $127.6 million in COVID-19 stimulus funding that Kent County received from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). In that article, the reporter spends several paragraphs discussing the fact that the, "Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority made the request for assistance for the proposed $125 million stadium."

Now, the ARPA funds can only being used to cover costs incurred by existing businesses or projects, not one that is only on paper at this point. The fact that the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority, which **also has a DeVos employee and two politicians who have received DeVos campaign contributions**, should tell you something about how shameless these people are. Everyone who submitted a proposal to access ARPA funds being administered through the county knew exactly who was eligible for those funds. The fact that the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority submitted a request to use ARPA funds for the soccer stadium simply demonstrates that they were hoping that their submission would be considered, **since those making the decisions are always influenced by money**.

The second MLive article, which was from yesterday, is more directly about the proposed downtown Grand Rapids soccer stadium, with the headline, ***As group eyes Grand Rapids soccer stadium, questions swirl over housing, neighborhood impact***. Housing concerns are high on the list for many people in this community, so MLive was right to look at this issue as it relates to the proposed soccer stadium. Unfortunately, the MLive reporter did not explore the housing consequences very far.

For instance, there were two westside neighborhood association representatives cited in the story, but only one of them addresses housing. The spokesperson from the West Grand Neighborhood Organization did make the comment, "*We desperately need housing, so I'm not sure how a soccer stadium's going to accomplish that goal*." However, the MLive reporter does not explore the implications of the desperate need for more housing, particularly affordable housing. There was also no discussion about building the proposed soccer stadium in the area behind the YMCA, which is primarily parking. If the soccer stadium goes there, it will displace most, if not all, of those surface

parking spots, which means they will need room for more parking. This gets more complicated, since GVSU owns most of the other parking spaces in that area and is not likely to give up those spaces. In addition, building a soccer stadium might raise the cost of property taxes in the area, which could negatively impact home owners and cause an increase in rental costs as well.

Unfortunately, none of these issues are explored. Instead, the MLive reporter gives lots of print space to comments from Grand Action 2,0 and to Richard Winn, who is chair of the board of directors for the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The MLive reporter did mention that Richard Winn is the president of AHC Hospitality, which is owned by the DeVos family, but they did not mention that Winn and another DDA member, Greg McNeilly, have been longtime political operatives for the DeVos family. Even more egregious is the fact that the MLive article did not mention that Richard Winn sits on the board of the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority, which just submitted a proposal to use COVID relief money, public money, for the proposed soccer stadium. This all screams of conflict of interest!

Once again, we see how local news reporting, which is critical in this instance around the current housing crisis and the tremendous influence of the DeVos family, fails the public by not exploring the connections and the numerous conflicts of interest. Instead, the MLive reporter finds too many people who happily regurgitate messages about how wonderful a new soccer stadium would be for downtown Grand Rapids. As is generally the case with the local commercial news media, they fail to ask who will really benefit from a new soccer stadium. Or maybe they want us to just forget about all of this non-sense and enjoy ArtPrize.

The end of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation – Part I: The news media's subservience https://griid.org/2024/05/06/the-end-of-the-richard-helen-devos-foundation-part-i-the-news-medias-subservience/

Last week, if you consumed any of the daily local commercial news media, it would have been near impossible for anyone to not come across the announcement from the DeVos family. The announcement was centered around the closing of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, which has now ended after 54 years.

I counted 10 stories collectively from local commercial news media outlets about the sunsetting of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation. Last Tuesday hundreds of people – family members, friends, community leaders and non-profit groups – gathered at the Amway Grand Plaza to "pay tribute to the couple's philanthropic legacy," **according to MLive**.

In many ways, the MLive article encompassed the general tone of the all the local news media stories about the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation's history. Of course there were DeVos family members who were cited in the local commercial news coverage, along with people like former GVSU President's Arend Lubbers and Mark Murray. Not

surprising was the fact that both men had nothing but glowing words for the now deceased couple.

However, the public record is not so kind, or at least it is a bit more honest about what the legacy of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation. For example, while producing a documentary about the history of the LGBTQ community in Grand Rapids, I discovered in 1994, when faculty and staff at GVSU were meeting with then President Lubbers over the university's willingness to offer domestic partner benefits, word got out that this was going to happen. At the time GVSU was raising money for a proposed health education building on Michigan St and Peter Cook and Rich DeVos had pledged millions. Once DeVos and Cook found out about the proposal by GVSU to offer domestic partner benefits, they threatened to withdraw their financial support if the university would support a domestic partner benefits policy. GVSU acquiesced to the wish of DeVos and Cook. Arend Lubbers sided with DeVos on this matter, not GVSU faculty and staff.

Another attempt to win domestic partner benefits was made in 2003, but then **President Mark Murray blocked the attempt**. Murray stated at the time, "*As a University that has benefited from very generous support from the private philanthropic community, we must recognize the prevailing views of those who provide such support*." Translated, Murray was saying that he didn't care about LGBTQ faculty and staff, he just wanted to make sure that members of the Capitalist Class in West Michigan – like Richard and Helen DeVos – would continue to give the university money.

Another example of how the local commercial news media treated the closing of the Ricard & Helen DeVos Foundation as some sacred entity, was a piece that WOODTV8 did, where two of the channel 8's media personalities sat in the studio with Dick DeVos for 4 minutes. What is astounding was all of the superlatives the channel 8 people used when talking about Richard and Helen DeVos, but also how they did not question the narrative coming from Dick DeVos. Watch that WOODTV8 piece and you'll see how subservient they are to the most powerful family in West Michigan.

In the end, the local commercial news media failed to not only include different perspectives on the legacy of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, they failed to provide people in this community with a more robust understanding of the function of foundations. It's difficult to know why the news coverage was so subservient to the DeVos family, although I suspect that a great deal of it has to do with not wanting to piss off the most powerful family in the area. In addition, after methodically monitoring the local commercial Neds media for the past 30 years, I would say that the simplistic coverage of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation coming to an end has to do with the fact that the local commercial news media – both editors and journalists – both have internalized the values of the rich and powerful, thus deferring to reporting on them as celebrities and saints.

In Part II of this series, I will explore the function of foundations, plus a more robust analysis of the 1,000 non-profits that the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation contributed to over the passed 54 years.

The end of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation – Part II: Manipulating social and economic outcomes in West Michigan and beyond https://griid.org/2024/05/07/the-end-of-the-richard-helen-devos-foundation-part-ii-manipulating-social-and-economic-outcomes-in-west-michigan-and-beyond/

In **Part I** of this two part series, I looked at how the local commercial news media reported on the sunsetting of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation. I concluded that the local news was rather subservient to the DeVos family and miserably failed the public by not providing a more honest and transparent view of the foundation.

I (and others) have been monitoring the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation since the late 1980s. When I was involved in the Indy Media project known as **Media Mouse**, we regularly monitored and wrote about their foundation. Prior to that, the independent journalist Russ Bellant was writing about the DeVos family for a variety of publications, but then published a book in 1996 entitled, *The Religious Right In Michigan Politics*.

Beginning in 2013, GRIID began to more methodically report on the most powerful foundations in West Michigan, which **included the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation**. I have continued to do so on an annual basis to not only report on how much money they were providing in grants, but to what entities and how that impacted the public. However, before we get to an analysis of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, I want to talk briefly about the function of foundations in general.

The function of foundations and the non-profit industrial complex

Foundations are primarily created by the rich and the powerful to fulfill several functions:

- Foundations are a way for members of the Capitalist Class to hide their wealth and not have it taxed.
- Foundations provide a public relations role for members of the Capitalist Class as a way to demonstrate their “generosity” and to shift the public’s attention away from how they made and expanded their wealth.
- Foundations provide the Capitalist Class with an opportunity to fund far right organizations and think tanks, which not only defend Capitalism, they craft public policy positions that benefit those with tremendous wealth.
- Foundations get to influence what Non-Profits do, since the grant money foundations provide always comes with strings attached that are at best reformist in nature and social service driven.
- By providing grants to Non-Profits, foundations also are able to condition Non-Profits into not criticizing what foundations do or the Capitalists that create them.
- Lastly, foundations provide funding to social service entities that assist individuals who are hurting, as a way to manage inequality, thus preventing working class people from rising up against the Capitalist Class. The agencies that provide social services act as a buffer for those with power.

In their groundbreaking book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond The Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, the group INCITE! identified the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

as a relationship between the State, the owning classes, foundations and the non-profit/NGO, social service and sometimes social justice organizations. **These relationships often result in the surveillance, control, derailment, and everyday management of political movements.** For the women of INCITE! the state and private power uses non-profits to:

- Monitor and control social justice movements;
- Divert public monies into private hands through foundations;
- Manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism;
- Redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society;
- Allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through "philanthropic" work;
- Encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them.

All of this is to say that foundations, like the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, don't operate in a vacuum. In fact, the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation has always been a very strategic part of how the DeVos family uses their wealth, which we will now explore.

Funding hate, harm and far right Think Tanks

If you look at the 990 record of the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation over the decades, you see certain entities that have received millions of dollars. These groups often are faith-based groups, groups that defend Capitalism or Think Tanks that influence public policy.

Some of the faith-based groups that have received funding from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation are:

- Focus on the Family
- Family Research Council
- Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church
- Haggai Institute
- Luis Palau Evangelistic Association
- Right to Life
- Prison Fellowship Ministries

Some common themes from all of these faith-based groups, and many more that have received funding from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation, are that they embrace an anti-LGBTQ politics, oppose reproductive freedom, preach a very heteronormative family structure, believe that people should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, and have close relationships with conservative and repressive governments.

Groups that defend Capitalism and are often Think Tanks that have received tens of millions in funding from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation are groups like:

- The Heritage Foundation
- The American Enterprise Institute

- Americans for Prosperity
- Freedom Works
- The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty
- The Mackinac Center for Public Policy

You can investigate what each of these groups promote by using the invaluable online site **SourceWatch.org**

All of the groups that I have listed so far that have received funding from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation have been the recipient of much larger amounts of money than most of the groups in West Michigan. I say this, since I think it is important that we understand that these groups don't do charity work, they influence public policy and promote a religious right perspective that does real harm in this world.

Business Education, Religious Schools and the undermining of Public Education

A third major group that has received funding from the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation are systems of education or groups that promote the privatization of education.

Regarding Universities and Colleges the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation has consistently contributed to Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, GVSU, GRCC, Davenport University in this area, and to King's College and Northwood University. In some of these cases the funding was purely to support religious education, while places like GVSU has more to do with influencing campus policy and/or to promote Business Departments.

The Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation has also supported the promotion of charter schools or the privatization of education, which are also the function of many of the Think Tanks mentioned above.

A fourth Major area of funding for the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation has been organizations that provide social services to individuals or families. Many of these groups are also faith based, but none of them advocate systemic change, only individual achievement. These groups also won't question or speak out against how the DeVos family spends money in the political arena, which often goes to candidates that do not support an increase in the minimum wage, who don't support labor unions or which don't promote higher taxes for the super rich. When the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation provides grants to these groups, I call it hush money, which just guarantees that the entities receiving the funds won't question how the DeVos family increases their wealth or how they influence political outcomes. Some of these group that are local are:

- Guiding Light Mission
- Hope Network
- Mel Trotter Ministries
- Safe Haven Ministries
- ICCF
- Bethany Christian Services

One last arena that the Richard & Helen DeVos Foundation provide funding to are projects which were started by their children. This provides an opportunity to just shuffle funding around in house, since it ultimately goes to a project that was created by another DeVos. Some examples are:

- ArtPrize
- Start Garden
- Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders
- Christian Leaders NFP
- West Michigan Aviation Academy

Anyone can see that the analysis that I have provided is way different than what the local news reported. While this is what the local news media should be doing, they have demonstrated over the past few decades that I have done news monitoring, that they are nothing more than stenographers for those with power. More importantly, we need people of conscience to understand and social movements to expose the blatant hypocrisy of the DeVos Family Foundations and not be fooled by their so-called philanthropy.

Stenographers to power: When an Amway Press Release is used as “news”

https://griid.org/2024/10/01/stenographers-to-power-when-an-amway-press-release-is-used-as-news/

As someone who has been monitoring the Grand Rapids area news media over the past 4 decades, I have certainly seen how sectors of power get a different type of treatment by local news agencies.

This preferential treatment was on full display in a WOODTV8 story from Monday, September 30th, with a digital headline that read, “**Amway hires new president and CEO**.”

Considering the power that the Amway Corporation and the founding families – DeVos and Van Andel – have in this community, what channel 8 posted was no surprise. However, I believe it is still worth showing people just how WOODTV8 acquiesced to the company, which is often referred to as a pyramid scheme.

The Amway Corporation sent out a **Press Release** on Monday morning, which I am including here below in its entirety. The parts that are bolded in the Amway Press Release are what WOODTV8 posted as a "news" story.

Amway, the world's largest direct selling company, today announced that its Board of Directors has appointed Michael Nelson as President & Chief Executive Officer, effective immediately. Nelson succeeds Milind Pant, who had served as CEO since January 2019.

"Amway is looking to the future with energy and confidence," said Board Co-Chair Steve Van Andel. "We're ready to build on the momentum of recent years, grow from our strengths and answer market needs of today in a way that only we can. ***The Board is thrilled to welcome Michael to this crucial position, and we're certain that he brings exactly what Amway needs to continue leading, growing and thriving in the industry – now and well into the future."***

Nelson brings more than three decades of Amway experience to the office, having held critical leadership roles in Strategy, Supply Chain, Human Resources, and Technology, among many other disciplines across the organization. ***His expertise spans business strategy, people management and development, and global operations, making him uniquely suited to the CEO position.*** *His tenure with Amway also gives him a deep understanding of the company's legacy, its strengths in developing science-based health and wellbeing solutions, and its vital partnership with Amway Business Owners around the world.*

"This business is special, and no one understands that better than Michael," said Board Co-Chair Doug DeVos. "He knows who we are, where we can go and how we can get there. Today, that's especially valuable as Amway pursues a bold and innovative agenda toward growth. We believe Michael is a leader who will honor all that's special about Amway, and help us grow because of it."

As President and CEO, Nelson will lead nearly 14,000 employees supporting one million Amway Business Owners across the globe. The Amway business, started by Jay Van Andel and Rich DeVos more than 60 years ago, will continue to be a private, family-owned company with a family-led board of directors.

*"****I'm honored*** *and grateful to Doug, Steve and the rest of the Board for* ***the opportunity to help guide this remarkable organization in our shared purpose****," said Nelson.* ***"It's a mission that's been close to my heart for more than 30 years, and I look forward to partnering with the Board, my colleagues and Amway Business Owners to build on the legacy and success of the last 65 years. There's tremendous potential and an even brighter future ahead."***

Nelson is a well-known leader in the West Michigan community, serving as a board member for the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, Economic Club of Grand Rapids, The Right Place and the West Michigan Regional Air Alliance. His dedication and deep roots will continue to strengthen Amway's longstanding commitment to contribute meaningfully to the West Michigan community.

As former CEO Milind Pant departs, the Amway Board of Directors wishes him the best in his future endeavors.

"The Board thanks Milind for his service and leadership over the last six years," said Van Andel. "He steered us through global challenges and sharpened our business strategy. Today, we're well positioned to continue leading and growing in the health and wellbeing industry."

Besides channel 8's re-printing of the majority of the Amway Press Release, they made no effort to talk about what this change means, how it might impact West Michigan, nor the implications of having a new CEO that has been strategically embedded in other institutions in the Grand Rapids Area…..which GRIID noted in **Part II** in my series on the Grand Rapids Power Structure.

In **Part VI** of the Grand Rapids Power Structure series, where I talked about the function of the local news media, I stated – "*While there are nuances within various news media outlets, the main function of most news media is to serve and normalize power*." This example from WOODTV8 merely affirms the normalization of power in this city.

MLive articles on the DeVos family continues the tradition of acting as stenographers to power

https://griid.org/2024/10/16/mlive-articles-on-the-devos-family-continues-the-tradition-of-acting-as-stenographers-to-power/

On October 14, MLive posted two articles about the DeVos family, primarily around their funding of political candidates and other political funding in general over the last decade.

As someone who has devoted a great deal of energy over the past several decades to monitoring the DeVos family, these two MLive articles only cover the tip of the iceberg when it comes to how the DeVos family uses their money to influence politics, particularly in Michigan.

Let's start with the primary article, headlined, **Billionaire DeVos family has poured nearly $12 million into 2024 election**.

This article begins with some superficial commentary about the total amount the DeVos family has contributed over the years, but then the story shifts a bit to say:

The prominent Michigan family hasn't kept the wealth to itself. Seven DeVos family foundations have given nearly $839 million to hundreds of nonprofits over the past decade. They've helped finance major developments in downtown Grand Rapids.

This sounds like apologetics to me, where the MLive writer seeks to paint the DeVos family has doing "good" through their foundations and with the money they have pumped into the downtown development projects in Grand Rapids. This overly simplistic defense of the DeVos family not only exposes the bias of the MLive writer, it is completely false. The DeVos family foundations have contributed a lot of money to non-profits over the last decade, but the bulk of these contributions have gone to higher education (to influence campus policies/departments), far right think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute or to religious groups that seek to impose religion on the public arena. I have been monitoring their foundations over the past decade, on an annual basis, just go to **this link**.

On the matter of financing major developments in downtown Grand Rapids, the MLive writer omits the fact that in almost every instance, public funding of development projects has outweighed what the DeVos family has contributed. Just look at the most recent example, **where the DeVos and Van Andel proposed development project**, with the total cost is likely to be $738 million, these families want $544 million in public subsidies.

There are other major omissions in the main MLive article, such as the section on the Michigan Freedom Network. The Michigan Freedom Network is the political action committee of the Michigan Freedom Fund, which was created by the DeVos family, something that was conveniently left out of the article. In fact, the person who ran the Michigan Freedom Fund a few years ago was Greg McNeilly, **a longtime DeVos political operative, who now runs the Windquest Group, which is part of Dick and Betsy's empire**.

The article also mentions the Great Lakes Education Project, which the DeVos family has contributed to, but **fails to acknowledge that the the Great Lakes Education Project was created by the DeVos family** after Michigan defeated a school vouchers ballot initiative in 2000.

The remainder of the MLive article looks at campaign finances from the DeVos family around campaigns in Michigan for federal offices and State races. Unfortunately, the MLive article omits the amount of money that the DeVos family has contributed to Kent County and Grand Rapids City politics in recent years.

If we look at how much of their wealth they have spent just since the 2022 election, even that amount is pretty staggering. In the **2022 election GRIID documented that**

the DeVos family contributed $12,304,750.00 to candidates running for office and for ballot initiatives.

When it comes to **Kent County election campaign contributions in 2022, the DeVos family spent $60,900.00**, which was also the largest amount from any one group in Kent County. In addition, for the Grand Rapids City Commission races, the DeVos family contributed **$9450.00 to one candidate in the 1st Ward** and **$9450.00 to one candidate in the 3rd Ward**.

So far in the 2024 election, the DeVos family has contributed **$264,000** for just **4 Kent County candidates**, which include the County Clerk, County Treasurer, County Prosecutor and the Kent County Sheriff, all of which are running as Republicans.

The second MLive article, which is headlined, **Dick and Betsy DeVos fund controversial, pro-Trump sheriffs program,** is a bit misleading, since the article covers more than the pro-Trump sheriff's program.

The major omission in the first part of the second MLive article on the DeVos family, is their failure to look at the larger context of the recent public scrutiny of policing in this country. The Black Lives Matter movement made policing an issue, primarily since the police shot and killed Michael Brown over a decade ago. Ever since then, there has been a push the billionaire class to fund policing, since the cops are a necessary component to protect the interests of the billionaires like the DeVos family.

There is also a section about the legacy of funding conservative causes. MLive relies on former Michigan Governor John Engler to defend the DeVos family, so much so that they don't challenge his assertions. The article sates: *But the other foundations funded by the second generation of the DeVos family don't evince the same level of enthusiasm for building conservative political institutions.*

This is simply not true and I would challenge anyone to actually look at all of the articles I have written about how the DeVos family foundations have contributed to conservative causes over the past decade, which you can read in the section on DeVos foundations in my ever-growing document, the **DeVos Family Reader**.

Now, I'm sure that the MLive writer thinks that they are shinning the light on the most powerful family in West Michigan. The reality is, these two article continue to frame the DeVos family in a positive light, with only mild partisan influences, but fails to discuss the ideology that has driven the DeVos family to impose their worldview on the rest of us and the harm it has done over the decades.

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7. ArtPrize

The Subversion of Art

https://griid.org/2009/05/31/the-subversion-of-art/

"The people who make art their business are mostly imposters." Pablo Picasso

Ok, so it has been more than a month since Rick DeVos made his big surprise announcement about the world's largest art competition, known as ArtPrize. Thus announcement resulted in lots of response that ranged from exuberance to outrage. The blog-o-sphere was hopping with commentary and lots of conversations were had

throughout the community. What follows are seven points I'd like to make about ArtPrize and its significance in this community.

First, did you notice all the hype and near reverence from the local news media about this announcement? For days we were all teased by stories about the "big surprise" and once the announcement was made it was as if the Pope was coming to Grand Rapids. Imagine, any hard working person who has a great idea getting that kind of press coverage. I can see it now, "local activists take a stand against global warming." Oh, wait…..that's not news. How about, "Amway is a green business." Yep, now that is news!

Second, the ArtPrize announcement came with the statement that this project would revitalize the art community in West Michigan. Anyone who knows artists in this community should be outraged at such a statement. It is my observation that in the past 10-15 years there has been a tremendous amount of artwork done in this community by people who are committed to improving the community. Think about the work done in the past decade to use empty, forgotten spaces for art by the Free Radical efforts. How many young people in this community have been turned on to art and self-expression from the projects organized by Art Works? The bold new work by Latino/a artists and the quiet dedication of artists like George Bayard. Numerous artists have volunteered their work and talent to making Grand Rapids a better place. To claim that ArtPrize would revitalize art in this community is an insult to the hard work of countless artists who have given so much.

Third, are we all supposed to jump at the chance to win money? I have spoken with several artists who say they will participate in ArtPrize because they could use the money. Fair enough, but winning the $250,000 is not really a solution. It's sort of like winning the lottery, it's all about chance. Why can't we use this opportunity to talk about why most artists are not valued in this society and this economy? Giving away cash prizes does not help artists, it just perpetuates the idea that "great" art is worth lots of money and to be enjoyed by people who can afford to buy it.

Fourth, by telling artists that you can win $250,000 or any of the other smaller cash prices, you are telling artists to make something that is motivated by money. I always thought art was a form of self-expression, a medium for people to articulate feelings, ideas and opinions about beauty, tragedy, liberation and oppression. How does setting out to make art with the goal of winning a large cash prize inspire honest art?

Fifth, that the money is coming from a member of the DeVos family should be reason enough for us to reconsider our participation in such an event. Now, I don't know Rick DeVos, and frankly, I don't care to know him. No matter what his intentions are, the DeVos family has made its money by taking advantage of working people for decades. Amway is based upon a pyramid scheme and anyone wanted to explore what this has meant should read Stephen Butterfield's book ***Amway: The Cult of Free Enterprise***.

Sixth, we should all recognize that the DeVos family has used its money and political power over the years to support lots of repressive policies. They have been some of the largest donors to the Republican Party, have financed anti-choice campaigns, the

privatization of public education, anti-gay campaigns, anti-union campaigns, and provided funds to brutal military groups in Nicaragua and Mozambique. (See Russ Bellant's books ***Old Nazis, the New Right, and the Republican Party*** and ***The Religious Right in Michigan Politics***) Locally, the DeVos family has also used their power and wealthy to buy lots of downtown property, determine the outcome of local city planning, and influence policy by being involved in the Downtown Development Authority and Grand Action.

Having someone from the DeVos family dynasty head up ArtPrize for me is in part a PR stunt, but mostly it's just good for business. Any effort to "develop" the downtown area or bring people to that part of town benefits the DeVos family by generating revenue and potentially increasing their property value. In many ways I see ArtPrize as a logical extension of the gentrification of downtown Grand Rapids that primarily benefits a small sector of this community.

Lastly, I wanted to say that I think that ArtPrize does provide us with an opportunity to have serious conversations about the role of art in public life. We should use this event to talk about city politics, economic inequality and share the stories about what local artists have done to breathe life into neighborhoods and inspire change.

ArtPrize tells us that this event is very democratic because anyone can vote. But when you have a rigged system or in this case an event in which the community has had no say in its development, then how can that be democratic? Instead of giving cash prizes to a handful of artists, why not figure out ways to support and nurture art that is transformative, art that is self-expressive, art and artists that are not for sale.

More Thoughts on Art Prize

https://griid.org/2009/08/24/more-thoughts-on-art-prize/

t has been almost two months since I originally **wrote a critique** of the DeVos initiated Grand Rapids Art Prize. I have received lots of feedback on my critique, both verbal and written responses. All the feedback has been interesting and has contributed to a larger dialogue that people are having as the art contest event grows near.

The most **recent response I received via this web page** was such that I felt the need to provide additional comments on why I still feel that Art Prize is problematic. The writer made two basic arguments; any art that comes to this community is "good" and the further development of downtown Grand Rapids (what I called gentrification) is beneficial to this community.

I also felt it was important to post my response to these recent comments since the local media continues to provide only glowing coverage of the evolving Art Prize event. What follows is my response.

“Cynthia, thanks for your thoughts on this matter. I completely agree that there can be a great deal of “good” that can be gained from people being exposed to more art, particularly when it inspires and gives us a sense of awe. I have no doubt that there will be some positive benefits to Grand Rapids with more art being created and displayed.

My initial article and critique was not designed to dwell on the negative, instead it was meant to challenge us all to think about the art contest within a larger social context. Doing so is not a negative, rather an opportunity to push us to think about these issues and the long-term implications they have on this community.

Art and other forms of creative expression can always have the power to give us a sense of peace and wonderment. My mother was in a movie about women in Nazi concentration camps, which had the opportunity to prolong their lives if they possessed the ability to play a musical instrument. The music that was played for the Nazi camp officials and their guests no doubt gave men who were in charge of mass extermination a sense of joy or an appreciation of the beauty that comes from classical music. However, looking at the larger context reminds us that this beautiful music was for genocidal murderers. Now, in no way am I comparing the DeVos family to the Nazis. The example was merely to illustrate a point about the importance of looking at the social, political and economic context in which art and creativity is often expressed.

Anyone can look at the churches and other buildings that are part of Rome or the Vatican and many other European cities and be amazed at the beauty, the detail and the craft of the artists who were commissioned to create those works of art. Again, the larger context forces me to come to terms with the fact that much of the gold and silver used in churches throughout Europe was imported from Latin America and mined by indigenous populations for several hundred years after the European conquest of the Americas.

Gandhi once said there was no beauty in the finest linens made in Europe if they caused poverty in India. One of the points I was making in the original article was the economic impact that the art contest could have on the downtown of Grand Rapids. Gentrification may “improve the quality of life for those involved and those around them,” as you say, which was exactly my point. Those who will benefit from this gentrification are those who already are economically privileged and whatever gentrification will come out of it will mostly fatten the wallets of those who live better than most of us. Ask people in Heartside if their being displaced or brutalize by the police, so that gentrification may occur without any resistance, feeling that this art contest is of benefit to them.

The last point I want to make on this matter is that the more we ignore the larger context in which wealthy and privileged sectors of society operate, especially when they engage in philanthropic acts, the more difficult it will be to challenge them when they blatantly exploit and abuse working class sectors of society. A great resource that explores this

issue is a book published by the group **INCITE!** entitled, “The Revolution Will Not Be Funded.”

The consequence of not shining the light on Art Prize, which is the brainchild of one of the DeVos family members, is that it may make it more difficult for people to question the policies and influence that such families and other power structures have on our community in the future. They may withhold funding because they disagree with something that people without power are proposing in the city or they might use their political and economic influence to subvert the democratic process. We would all be naïve if we did not acknowledge that candidates are bought by people like the DeVos family and political and economic policy which impacts as all is all too often dictated by their influence.

What Will the Media Report on After ArtPrize?

https://griid.org/2009/10/01/what-will-the-media-report-on-after-artprize/

The first voting phase of ArtPrize has just been completed and before we know it the finally tallies will be in and ArtPrize will be over. Based on the type of and amount of local news coverage this event has generated, we thought it might be useful to place ArtPrize coverage next to other issues of importance to the community.

Before making any comparisons, it is worth looking at the ongoing coverage of ArtPrize in recent weeks. We have already looked at the ArtPrize media phenomenon is a **previous posting** from September 19, but here are some observations since then.

The local TV stations continue to provide daily coverage of ArtPrize with specific ArtPrize sections on their web sites like this one at **WOODTV8**. Most of the local news outlets tended to mimic each other’s coverage, like the story about how downtown restaurants were overwhelmed by the weekend traffic generated by ArtPrize. **The FOX 17 story** was typical, with lots of language about this being the most amazing event Grand Rapids has ever experienced, but with emphasis on how restaurant owners made out like bandits.

WZZM 13 had a few other elements that were tapping into the ArtPrize buzz. First, the added to the web site banner in big letters “**The Place to See ArtPrize**.” They also included on their main page a banner and link to their own photo contest under the heading “**What is Art?**” The contest is also based on voting, with the winner receiving $1,300. WZZM 13 partnered with local furniture company Haworth to promote their own contest.

The Grand Rapids Press has in many ways been the most zealous of ArtPrize supporters in local media. Beyond what we have already documented, the very first day they altered the design of the front page so that it looked like an ArtPrize magazine cover. They continue to provide daily front-page coverage and several other pages full of stories and photos.

The most egregious example to date was the Monday, September 28 coverage, driven mostly by the reporting on the Rob Bliss paper airplane spectacle. The Press did several stories about this ArtPrize entry days before it happened, but the coverage afterwards was pretty astounding. The **main story on 9/28** gushed with praise of the event created by what the Press reported has dubbed "urban event organizer Rob Bliss."

There has been plenty of online discussion about whether or not the paper airplane drop was art or not, but **as we have said all along** the real beneficiaries of the ArtPrize phenomenon has been the downtown business and property owners. The financial incentive is tremendous, which is exactly why the local media has created so much content around ArtPrize, because this is what they believe will bring people to their web sites and thus, bring visitors to see the multitude of ads that inhabit those electronic destinations. As in the print version of the Press and the broadcast channels of the tv stations, advertising is king, because advertising is where they make their money. These news entities would not even entertain hosting a website if it was not driven by the advertising that pays for the sites.

Imagine ArtPrize-like coverage for other issues

Since it is painfully clear that local media coverage of ArtPrize has been all ArtPrize all the time, lets turn our attention to what this might look like with other issues of import to the local community.

A month from now there will be elections for local political office and several ballot proposals. According to the **Kent County Clerk's office**, there are 45 candidates running for local office in Grand Rapids and other communities in Kent County. Imagine how what it would look like over the next few weeks if the local news media paid as much attention to the candidates, people who will make decisions that impact our lives everyday, as they have to ArtPrize.

There could be lead stories on the TV stations everyday with details about the candidates and particularly about the incumbents and what their voting records have meant for the people thus far. The GR Press could run front-page stories that featured in-depth analysis of the candidates and the issues they face with current budget problems, unemployment and sustainability efforts. Would this type of coverage translate into more people showing up at the polls on November 3? We will probably never know, since the coverage of local elections that **we have documented over the past 10 years** has been abysmal.

Imagine if the local news media was reporting on the lives of people, **which number in the thousands in Kent County**, who have lost jobs or are about to lose their unemployment benefits. How would we all perceive what is going on in our community if we were made aware of in detail the hardships that these people face?

The same could be said about the thousands of Kent County residents that currently have no health care insurance. Imagine if these thousands of people who are at greater risk of disease and suffering because they can't afford health care got the same attention as the thousands of paper airplanes that kind of floated down to the streets of Grand Rapids. How would this type of coverage how we view our community?

Reporting on and Promoting ArtPrize

https://griid.org/2009/09/19/reporting-on-and-promoting-artprize/

We are just days away from the official opening of the voting for ArtPrize, but to any reasonable observer it is clear that the local media coverage has already drawn a conclusion on the success or failure of the endeavor initiated by Rick DeVos.

While there have been a few stories that look into some of the challenges of ArtPrize, both logistical and the difficulties in voting process, the coverage has been overwhelmingly positive. Both **WOOD TV 8**and **WXMI 17** have online sections devoted to ArtPrize. **WOOD radio** provides a "how to guide" for those interested in ArtPrize, but the absolute winner in terms of adver-news for ArtPrize goes to the Grand Rapids Press. Not only do they have a **major online section** for the contest, they have been running a front-page feature on the days leading up to the opening.

Not to be outdone, the local blog-o-sphere has also been providing substantial coverage of this downtown art event. **Rapid Growth Media** is even providing space for Rick DeVos to blog this week so we can all learn more about his brainchild and even the new "citizen journalism" site, **The Rapidian**, seems to be flush with stories on ArtPrize.

However, some of the most honest reporting we have seen so far on ArtPrize , has been done by the *Grand Rapids Business Journal*. In a front-page story in their September 17 – 23 edition they discuss the economic promise of ArtPrize.

Reporter Mark Sanchez spoke with downtown business leaders to get their take on what the long term impact ArtPrize could have on Grand Rapids. The president of the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention Center & Visitor's Bureau was quoted as saying, "***The positive buzz and the energy that is being created around ArtPrize is going to do things that traditional advertising could never do for me….I'm appreciative of the short-term economic push, because we all could dearly use it.***

I'm more excited about the viral effect and what it could do for our destination appeal."

Jeff Ott with the law firm of Warner, Norcross & Judd talked about ArtPrize being a tool to recruit potential lawyers to this community, lawyers his law firm is seeking. "***For us to attract these people, it is very important for us to sell our firm, but we also have to sell the cities where these people are going to live and work. ArtPrize is part of the total package. It helps us sell the city."***

Maybe the most revealing comment is from local property owner and managing partner of CWD Real Estate Sam Cummings. Cummings said, "***Our long-term goal is really to import capital – intellectual capital, and ultimately real capital. And this (ArtPrize) is certainly an extraordinary tool."***

This is exactly the point I was making in **my initial critique of ArtPrize**, that it makes perfect business sense since it will bring more people downtown to spend money and to possibly invest in the ongoing gentrification that will benefit a small sector of the community.

An evolving internal monologue, now published: Brett's addition to the ArtPrize "Conversation"

https://griid.org/2009/10/05/an-evolving-internal-monologue-now-published-brett%E2%80%99s-addition-to-the-artprize-%E2%80%9Cconversation%E2%80%9D/

(This article is submitted by Brett Colley, an Associate Professor of Art & Design at Grand Valley State University, and an exhibiting participant in ArtPrize.)

In its efforts to "reboot the public conversation between artists and audiences", ArtPrize has raised into stark relief the tensions between two broad groups: Those with no formal art education who produce and/or patronize art, and those with credentials and/or careers connected to its preservation, theory, and production. Of course, members of each group are equally entitled to their opinions and practices.

I know from my experiences as an educator that mutual animosity between such factions is *not intrinsic*to a dialogue regarding contemporary art or its cultural value. However, the lack of organized forums (relative to other ArtPrize programming) for substantive public discourse concerning the art currently on display in downtown Grand Rapids has drawn out the suspicion and misgivings of each group.

In the past week, I have witnessed emotionally charged exchanges at both Kendall's Lunchbox discussion with the ArtPrize team, and at the Battle for the Top 10 Critical Discourse, hosted by the UICA on Friday evening.

From the “General Voting Public”, there has been contempt projected toward the “Art Experts” who question the quality or legitimacy of some popular entries.

From the Expert crowd, there has been obvious disdain directed at the Voting Public for making what they perceive as poor choices. The model of a popular vote to determine the outcome has purposefully stripped those with years of education and experience of any exceptional role in assessing the contestants, and increases the likelihood that winners will not be representative of the high critical standards of the field. In an era that has seen the conflation of “High” and “Low” art/culture, does this really matter? Later in this essay, I’ll argue that it *does*.

Given the *source* of the idea (ArtPrize) and conditions that deliberately humble them, it is hardly surprising that area Art Experts (academics, professionals, et.al.) would brace with trepidation as their discipline was deemed the subject of a grand “social experiment” funded by one of the region’s wealthiest, most infamously conservative families.

It is equally unsurprising that the General Public has grown at best *suspicious*, and at worst *resentful* of Art Experts, and now feels exceedingly grateful to Rick Devos and company for restoring the validity/power of their own tastes (at least that’s a popular perception.)

After decades of assorted media-hyped “art controversies” (Robert Mapplethorpe, Andre Serrano’s *Piss Christ*, the *Sensation* show at the Brooklyn Museum), being fed vacuous rhetoric (“beauty is in the eye of the beholder”, or “I know what I like”) as if it were philosophical comfort food, and then being told what is “good” or worth lots of money (but seldom, if ever *why*) who can blame the G.P. for feeling indignant?

So much of the conflict is simply built into the subject at hand, or ”conversation”. (Which makes the structure for negotiating it all the more critical.) As my colleague Paul Wittenbraker recently and succinctly observed:

> “*Art is many things to many people simultaneously. This is one of the great powers of art, but also grounds for confusion and stress…The presumption that we can bring diverse art worlds together under the pretense of a unified outcome is problematic*.”

Re*solution*s to the conflict are not simple, and the onus is on both groups – as well as the ArtPrize team itself – to enact them. I will go on to suggest some of the actions I believe necessary for resolution, but first it is important to cite some of the conditions that have brought this conflict to the forefront of the ArtPrize conversation:

By assigning value to the arts primarily through their ability to drive our economy, and incentivizing artists with prize money and wide-scale exposure, the organizers of ArtPrize have skewed both the event and the ensuing conversation toward creative works that are easily accessed (physically and conceptually) and commodified, and have marginalized many credentialed artists and critics with divergent ideas and practices.

The local news outlets (press and television) have focused overwhelmingly on the event's positive impact for businesses in downtown GR, and treated the actual competition and entries as if discussions of quality were irrelevant. Their biased coverage quickly established the tenor of the conversation and has further rendered the event almost unassailable by critics. Those who don't support ArtPrize unconditionally are tagged with the dreaded "e-word" (*elitist*) and regarded with suspicion.

I cannot delve into all the complexities of ArtPrize at once, as compelled as I am to do so. Thus, I won't attempt to untangle the thorny "elitist/expert" knot in this essay. Suffice it to say: We live in an increasingly specialized world. The next time we need brain surgery or a general to orchestrate our troops in wartime, we will surely call upon a specialist with education and experience relevant to the task at hand.

I suspect that one reason the General Public perceives those of us who've expressed reservations about ArtPrize (or its potentially negative impact on area art) as "elitist" is because they believe we are merely trying to preserve our own authority and power within the culture of Art.

While I cannot deny that any "authority" I may have in this field has been hard-won (through 8 years of post-secondary education and 15 years of professional experience) and does indeed have value to me, it has not been my motivation in critiquing either ArtPrize or the quality of the contestants.

The undermining of my authority *does* have consequences, in that it potentially compromises my ability as an educator to convince students to grow beyond clichés, refine their craft, and reflect critically upon their impulses as young artists. I can certainly imagine future situations in which the "popular" winners of past ArtPrizes will render that task more difficult.

However, I do not aspire to assert opinions about art that will prevail over all others, nor do I expect to persuade 35,000 other voters to adopt my tastes.

My critiques (of the current ArtPrize model) stem from my sincere desire (evidenced by more than a decade of similar efforts in the classroom) to inspire and preserve high-quality visual culture. Again, I am not seeking to defend my own platform of authority, but I do wish to protect our visual environment from the repercussions of rewarding ill-considered or badly constructed work, and celebrating simplistic spectacle over subtlety and sophistication. Such repercussions would be felt by children, adults, amateurs and professionals alike, for it is evident that poor-quality creative culture degrades the experience and discourse of public life.

An intellectually lazy citizenry is the foundation of a weakened democracy.

In other words, all citizens have something at stake in this, knowingly or not.

On the evening news, I have watched Jeff Meeuwsen implore ArtPrize voters to carefully consider their decisions, and help shape an outcome they can be proud of. I believe that Jeff and I share an understanding with respect to the significance of what is

judged as “good”. We each recognize the potential consequences of this social experiment for our immediate and long-term environment.

Rather than tuck my head in for fear of being labeled the “e-word”, I am *offering* my expertise to facilitate such “good” judgment.

Having made that offer, it is imperative that I and other Art Experts (academics, professionals) who share this aspiration find useful terms with which to engage the General Public. Recognizing that I am writing primarily to an audience of my peers, I will suggest that we engage those who lack formal training with language that is honest, reflects our shared humanity, shows respect, and which openly communicates our desire to produce and preserve a quality culture for the benefit of *all*. We each need to formulate ways of expressing the true value of the arts, in order to promote appreciation for both our convictions and our specialized work.

In short, we needn’t apologize, nor should we patronize.

I believe that every artist, art educator, or student of the arts should be capable of mounting an immediate, uncomplicated argument for the cultural value of what they do – an argument that does *not* lean on economic viability, marketable skills, or the intrinsic value of self-expression. (As an aside, I contend that there is nothing inherently beneficial to self-expression. For example, does anyone value Mahmoud Amademajad’s expressions of disbelief concerning the Holocaust?)

Historically, the arts have been inextricably linked to technological and conceptual innovation. Artists think through and with materials and contribute to the language and scholarship of other disciplines. We have looked to the arts in order to expand our capacity for communicating difficult concepts, or to share ideas we cannot otherwise express. Art can serve to catalyze public discourse regarding complex issues (in this instance, “Art” itself!) Art reminds us that problems can have more than one solution, that small changes can make big differences, that words and numbers are incapable of expressing all that we know, and that the world is comprised of multiple, diverse perspectives.

(These are values – lessons the arts teach – that have been clearly articulated by Stanford Professsor Emeritus of Art and Art Education, Elliot Eisner. If you don’t know him, look him up.)

Blunt, creative spectacles that captivate by virtue of bright colors, moving parts, and sheer scale often lack these more redeeming characteristics of art. One does not attend (or erect) a theme park with the intention of personal or societal growth, but for *entertainment*. Many of the 2009 ArtPrize entries operate on this level – they are rooted firmly in the familiar and presume our desire for nothing more than action movies and amusement parks. Art and entertainment are often, easily, and sometimes effectively conflated. But is presenting art as entertainment the mission of ArtPrize?

Several artists responsible for the “entertainment” in this year’s competition have readily admitted to employing spectacle as a strategy to capture the public attention and vote,

working big and adopting popular, unchallenging subject matter. After all, one was overheard to say at Friday night's "Battle for the Top 10", "This is a popular vote, so we wanted to make something big and fun."

If one pauses to fully consider that sentiment, one may begin to see why and how a capitalist model for art can so effectively break down the quality of art/culture and the discourse surrounding it. It is valuable, even imperative, that art production flourish outside the arena of capitalism in order to contribute freely to the intellectual and spiritual growth of our citizenry. Competitions structured as the 2009 ArtPrize has been structured serve (unintentionally) to further disenfranchise those artists working outside the sphere of populist appeal and the marketplace.

As long as the arts are viewed and applied as fuel in the economic engine, their value will be assessed thusly*. Art ideally teaches *qualitative* assessment skills, and yet so many of the measures for assessing the success of ArtPrize have been quantifiable: The number of voters, votes, gallery patrons, contest participants, restaurant profits, etc.

*(This is the unfortunate blowback of Richard Florida's research. If you don't know him, look him up.)

As an artist, educator, and citizen of Grand Rapids, I support all initiatives to reboot the conversation between artists and audiences, and ask simply that we continue to question this particular mechanism.

As future iterations of ArtPrize transpire, I hope that a structure is realized that places less emphasis on the competition/prize and successfully incorporates more opportunities for (adult) art education and moderated public critiques of the exhibited work. In Kendall's Lunchbox Series – an aspect of ArtPrize that respectfully showcases the expertise and scholarship of the field – both content and discussion have veered toward the social experiment, rather than the actual exhibitors. I believe the real teaching/learning opportunities reside within the art itself.

The education day for area students, K-12, the audio guides, and the tutorial on contemporary art included in the preview party at the Old Federal Building have all been exemplary programming. But the UICA staff cannot – should not – do it all.

With respect to the conversation that happens inside this structure, arts professionals need to clearly understand the (non-monetary) value of what they do, develop an effective vocabulary with which to address "fans" and detractors alike, and (learn to) lead in efforts to inform our democracy, through reasonable, respectful discourse. The first language of artists and non-artists alike should be empathy. Embrace it or not, ArtPrize is now here, and has left us little room to hide behind our cynicism and doubts.

Counting the Vote Coverage: ArtPrize vs Local Elections

https://griid.org/2009/11/08/counting-the-vote-coverage-artprize-vs-local-elections/

Since 1998 GRIID has been monitoring election coverage in West Michigan. Most of **our studies** in the past have been entitled ***An Informed Vote***, as we were attempting to determine whether or not voters who relied on Grand Rapids-based news media could make an informed decision when voting.

We just finished another monitoring project of the local news media as it related to the November 3 elections. According to the **Kent County Clerk's office**, there were 43 candidates running for office in Kent County alone and three ballot proposals.

In this monitoring project we only looked at the *Grand Rapids Press*from October 2, 2009 through November 3, 2009. We documented all stories related to elections in Kent County, but also tracked stories that were about ArtPrize. Considering the **amount of news coverage that ArtPrize generated in the local media**, we decided to make a comparison of the voting for ArtPrize and voting in local political elections.

We chose to begin the monitoring project on October 2, a full month before the local elections, but also because it was the day that the Top 10 Finalists in the ArtPrize competition were announced. Statistically what we found is that there were a total of **10 Election stories** over the 30-day period and **35 ArtPrize stories.**

We also looked at placement of stories and found that local elections only made the **front page once** (November 1st), whereas ArtPrize was on the **front page a total of 6 times** during this 30-day period.

As we suggested in a **previous posting**, it appears that an art contest organized by the richest family in the area garnered more media attention than local elections. And remember, these statistics on the number of election stories vs ArtPrize are almost exclusively after the ArtPrize vote. Imagine how many more ArtPrize stories there would be to local election coverage if we looked at 30 days prior to the art contest vote.

Some Election Analysis

In the 10 election stories, the first story did not appear until October 24 (Campaign Finances). On October 26, there were two short stories on ballot proposals in Rockford and Overisel Township. Grand Rapids City Commission races got coverage on October 27, 28 and November 1st. There was also a full story on a Kentwood City Commission race on October 30. Some local races were mentioned at the end of other stories, but the only elections that received any substance were the First & Third Wards in Grand Rapids and the City Commission race in Kentwood.

In the Grand Rapids City Commission candidate coverage the *Press* used a set of questions that they submitted to all four candidates running in the First & Third Ward. The questions were primarily focused around city budget issues – cutting departments,

taxes, pensions, road repairs and the creation of bike lanes. While these were relevant questions to ask of the candidates, there certainly could have been more that the *Press* could have asked these candidates.

In addition, in both of the City Commission races there were incumbents running. However, the *Press* never bothered to report on the voting record of either candidate. Providing voters with a record of how candidates have voted in the past would be useful information on where they might stand on issues in the future.

Lastly, considering the lack of coverage by the only daily newspaper in the Grand Rapids area is it a surprise that only **10% of the registered voters in Grand Rapids** even bothered to participate in the election process?

The "Benefits" of ArtPrize

https://griid.org/2010/09/13/the-benefits-of-artprize/

"***Our long-term goal is really to import capital – intellectual capital, and ultimately real capital. And this (ArtPrize) is certainly an extraordinary tool."*** Sam Cummings – downtown GR business/property owner

We are a little over a week away from ArtPrize 2010 and there has been plenty of buzz around the 2nd year of Rick DeVos' creation. Like **last year**, GRIID will be tracking local media coverage of this event and making some comparisons to how the upcoming elections will be covered.

Last year ArtPrize was overwhelmingly reported on when comparing it to elections in Kent County. There were a total of **10 articles on elections** in the *Grand Rapids Press* 30 days prior to the election compared to **35 on ArtPrize** and that was just the last week of ArtPrize and it still merited more coverage than elections.

Our decision to focus on ArtPrize coverage is to provide some analysis that is outside of the artistic aspect of the event. We recognize that there may be benefits to individual artists and the art community as a whole, but we also believe that much of what motivates Rick DeVos and the other core members of ArtPrize is how the event benefits the elite sectors of Grand Rapids, particularly the downtown business and developers.

It was **reported a few months back** that last year ArtPrize was the force behind bringing in an additional **$5 – $.7.6 million dollars** to Kent County, based on a study done by GVSU students. This economic impact is not lost on downtown businesses, some of which have made the 2nd annual event part of the business plan.

According to a September 7 edition of the Grand Rapids Business Journal, "***The 16-day art competition that begins on Sept. 22 also is a major event for downtown businesses***." Greg Gilmore, owner of the BOB and other area restaurants said he has already had 8 meetings with his staff about ArtPrize in order to be better prepared to take advantage of the business opportunities during the 16-day event.

The question to ask is not so much does ArtPrize benefit Grand Rapids, rather who does it benefit in Grand Rapids.

ArtPrize, criticism and the Press

https://griid.org/2010/09/30/artprize-criticism-and-the-press/

As we have mentioned in a previous posting, GRIID has been tracking the Grand Rapids Press coverage of ArtPrize since the day after Labor Day.

To date we have seen **76 total stories**, with **21 of them being on the front page**. The articles have dealt with everything from artist profiles, to venues, to how to make your ArtPrize experience more meaningful.

What we haven't seen much of are stories that have offer up any real critical perspective of ArtPrize, apart from some of the stories that have pointed out the electronic voting flaws due to not getting all the broadband companies on board from the get go.

The lack of any critical stories changed as of Wednesday, when the Press ran four articles that could fall under the broad tent of criticism.

The first of the four articles appeared on page A15, **written by art critic Ed Riojas**. Riojas calls himself an "art curmudgeon" in the opinion piece since he has issues with people submitted works of art made from what he called recycled or found material. Riojas raises some interesting points about how one defines what art is and the potential dangers of allowing people to submit virtually anything.

The other three articles (all appearing on page A17) were stories that originally appeared on the Grand Rapids-based citizen journalism site **The Rapidian**. One article by George Wietor, entitled "Essays and Critique," was more of an explanation of what The Rapidian does and how ArtPrize coverage has been one of the main sources of stories generated in recent weeks. The other two stories dealt with the **role of social media in ArtPrize** and the other dealt with the **role of the public vote in ArtPrize**.

In some ways it was very refreshing to see these pieces included after two weeks of nothing but glowing accounts of ArtPrize or stories that were nothing more than shameless promotional pieces for downtown businesses. It is extremely important for sources of journalism such as the Grand Rapids Press to provide either criticism of the role of art in society or at least a forum for that dialogue to take place.

However, each of these criticism pieces all focused on very narrow aspects of the social implications of art. There was and has been little about how ArtPrize is perceived by racial and cultural minorities in this community, how ArtPrize impacts the economically & socially marginalized populations that make up part of the Heartside community, the use of public space and how ArtPrize impacts local artists and local art year round. One other aspect that has not been explored in the Press coverage are the economic impact that the event has on the community as a whole and who are the primary beneficiaries of the money being spent/invested in downtown Grand Rapids because of ArtPrize.

These are all important and valid questions that news agencies should be exploring but have yet to do so in any serious way. The four pieces in Wednesday's paper were a positive contribution to the beginnings of that questioning, but three of those stories were from non-staff.

Using the stories from The Rapidian raises questions about why the Press has not paid its own staff to write these kinds of stories. Did they choose to run somewhat critical pieces from non-Press staff as a way of avoiding any backlash from ArtPrize supporters? Certainly it makes it easier for the Press to deflect any criticism, since they can always say that such criticism is from a source independent of the Press.

In addition, the Press' decision to run stories from The Rapidian also raises questions about what relationship the monopoly daily newspaper has with this recent citizen journalism experiment. Will we see more of this kind of collaboration? If so, then what is the ultimate function of citizen journalism? Will it just supplement the kind of news that the Press should be doing without having to pay anyone to do this kind of work or will it provide the Press with a greater pool of free lance writers, thus making it easier to downsize its fulltime staff?

These are not minor questions, since it leads us back to the obligation of journalism in this community, particularly journalism that will fulfill the fundamental tenets of that profession. Some of the most **important aspects of journalism** are to be an independent source to monitor power, all kinds of power – political, economic, etc.

Another important function of journalism is its obligation to the truth and its loyalty to the public. If journalism is true to these principles, it means that it will not shy from making critical observations or investigating the implications of anything that will impact the community. The Grand Rapids Press and any other entity that claims to practice journalism has an obligation to practice these principles, otherwise they should not deserve our trust or respect.

What is ArtPrize?

https://griid.org/2010/10/26/what-is-artprize/

(This article is by **Richard Kooyman** and re-posted from **Facebook**.)

The second annual **ArtPrize**, the world's largest art competition decided by popular vote just wrapped up in **Grand Rapids, Michigan**. 192 private and public venues juried 1713 artists and placed them in a three square mile section of the core downtown where 38501 registered voters then casted 465538 votes and picked the first place winner out of the top ten. The ten finalists divided a purse of $450,000 with the first prize receiving $250,000.

Since it's inception there have been questions as to where does ArtPrize fit in the art world big picture. Questions like how does the competition design effect artists and the public and what does the foundation behind ArtPrize think about art and its place in society? And who are the people behind ArtPrize?

ArtPrize is the brain child of **Rick DeVos**, son of **Dick and Betsy DeVos** and heirs to the **Alticor/Amway** fortune. The **Dick and Betsy Devos Foundation**funds the prize money for ArtPrize and have been vocal supporters of the event. ArtPrize describes itself as a "radically open art competition" and "part social experiment" where the goal is to "reboot the conversation" between the public and artists about art.

As an artist I believe it is important to ask what is the ArtPrize social experiment and which conversations about art does it feel need to be "rebooted?"

To help answer those questions the first thing to do is to look at the Artprize website. It's mission statement, now called a 'Design Brief' is filled with hip sounding catch phrases that suggest a blurring of the role between artist, viewer and community, blending fact and promotion into new, yet often vacuous descriptions. Pronouncements like "You = Creator" and " Art is the focus of the competition but the Community is the event" hint at values designed to suggest a new reinterpretation of the arts. The ArtPrize message infers that the old way of thinking and talking about art should be replaced by a new dialog and presentation, a new agenda that pairs art with community and entrepreneurship.

Ask anyone who has attended ArtPrize what they think about it and you will get mostly positive impressions about how the event is good for the economy of Grand Rapids, good for children's art exposure and a fun event filled with amazing sights. All these elements are true but seem ancillary to why ArtPrize was designed as a art competition decided by popular vote. Why did the **Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation**, a Christian

Evangelical Foundation, decided to provide the money for ArtPrize? And why was it designed to be solely a public vote? Was it simply a good idea to bring business to the area restaurants and hotels or was it a statement, even a referendum against the established ideas of art in society today?

Here is one answer to these questions. ArtPrize is an ultra conservative families new venture into the cultural art's management business. Let me explain.

ArtPrize's Definition of Art

While ArtPrize claims to be "radically" open to any artist who applies one still needs to be juried into a venue to show your work. A hand few of the 192 venues are juried by art professionals but the most are not and no information is given to the applicants about who is jurying their work and what their qualifications may be. ArtPrize never uses the words 'jury' or 'juried'. Rather ArtPrize sells their event as a coming together of artists and venues, a "matching" as they say. The main reason for a public vote is explained on the AP web site as being fun – "Who doesn't love learning through play?"

ArtPrize says that if art is fun people will want to learn more about it. Before you teach anyone about art you need to define what art is, or what your definition of art is. What is the ArtPrize definition of Art?

The **Acton institute**, located also in Grand Rapids, calls itself a "ecumenical think-tank dedicated to the study of free- market economics informed by religious faith and moral absolutes" and is financially support by The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation. Betsy DeVos has been an Acton board member for over 10 years. In a recent **Acton** blog podcast titled, **The Stewardship of the Arts**, art was defined as a combination of 1) a mastery of skill and 2) the glorification of God.

The photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's work was sited as an example of being bad art because while it contained the skill requirement of art it was morally depraved and therefore does not fulfill the second requirement of their definition. In an essay written for the Acton Institute **Journal of Markets and Morality** Trinity College Assistant Professor **Nathan Jacobs** suggests that to be a good Christian Steward of the Arts "may require withdrawing from the secular art world in favor of something wholly different." A "rebooting" of the definition of art perhaps?

ArtPrize's Role in the Privatization of Art

ArtPrize pride's itself in providing a unique type of art competition. A competition, where the public decides who and what type of art is worthy of the top prize of $250,000. In the initial press release for ArtPrize Betsy DeVos said, "*Dick and I share our son's vision for encouraging everyone to explore the arts in a truly democratic way*."

The debate about the art professional's role in art exploration was completely side stepped the first year of ArtPrize. Possibly feeling the art world's skeptical look, in it's second year they added 4 professional juried awards, sponsored by local corporations,

to follow behind the public vote. While the first prize voted by the public is awarded $250,000 the 1st prize in professionally juried awards is only $5000, 50 times less in value as the public vote.

In a 1996 study by the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**, the largest state based free market think tank in the country, called for the complete privatization of the arts. The **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** is located in Midland Michigan and is supported by The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation. In the **study**they declared government support for the arts as being not only a bad idea, but an unfair one.

"Art is highly personal and subjective. Forcing one person to subsidize another person's art is inherently unfair. Talented Michigan artists, like other professionals, should look to the private sector for income, not to government, for their sustenance," and that the solution for the sustainability for artists is in benevolent patrons. "Every year, private philanthropists donate nearly $10 billion to further artists' visions of American culture. Artists whose work pleases their audiences will soon find voluntary support from such benevolent patrons."

In recent years conservative think- tanks have been asserting effort to redefine art into pluralistic values of art and community and connecting everything to the free market. The ArtPrize website shows three equally sized circular graphics comprising the main elements of the competition: Venues, Artists, Public. Speaking about ArtPrize, Dick and Betsy DeVos repeatedly pluralized creativity with entrepreneurship. In a recent **Grand Rapids Press interview** Dick DeVos said that their main interest in funding ArtPrize is to support "innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship."

Redefining art on pluralistic values of creativity, morality, community and business trivializes the striving for excellence or professionalism in art, as if art alone isn't enough. Modeling art solely to serve free enterprise devalues art. The very strength of contemporary art today, what makes it truly valuable to society, is the fact that it no longer has to serve religion, politics or business.

The DeVos's type of entrepreneurial attitude about art values the free market over both government support of the arts and professional knowledge of the arts. The **CATO Institute**, a free market and individual liberty think tank begun by billionaire **David Koch**, is also supported by the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation. The CATO Institute's **Handbook for Congress** calls for the complete privatization of the **National Endowment for the Arts** and the **National Endowment of the Humanities** and the total defunding of the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting**. The handbook states " Government subsidies to the arts and humanities have an insidious, corrupting effect on artists and scholars."

ArtPrize uses art and artists to stimulate the local economy of Grand Rapids. They say so clearly on their website, "Art is the focus of this competition, but community is the main event." In 2009 it was estimated, in a **Grand Valley University** study that $7 million dollars was generated by local businesses off the backs of the artists who

exhibited. Artists themselves have for years been applauding the fact that art is good for regional and national economies. But the danger is not the effect of art on business. The issue is how does business use the arts. Are private subsidies any less “insidious” than governmental support? Business, while being a guiding principle of the ArtPrize founders doesn’t completely explain the reason why the DeVos’s designed and administer an art competition such as ArtPrize. They seem to do it for a bigger reason. They do it to control how society will look at and enjoy the arts.

ArtPrize is a example of the social conservative’s new idea of Art’s Management

Dick DeVos in a recent television interview said “This isn’t just an art contest. It’s about changing the dynamics and conversation about creativity.”

It’s clear that there is a difference between how secular society and Christian society define art. If the secular/Christian debate about what is art cannot be won then at least arts organizations, the current gatekeepers and managers to what is shown or preformed can be controlled.

And how does someone go about controlling how art is managed? One way is to form the **DeVos Institute of Art’s Management at the Kennedy Center**. In May of 2010 Dick and Betsy DeVos gave $22.5 million dollars, the largest gift ever for art’s management in the United States or aboard, according to **Michael Kaiser**, President of the **Kennedy Center for Performing Arts** who said, “*It has been abundantly clear to me that we spend a disproportionate share of professional arts training on performers and creators. In fact, billions of dollars are spent educating dancers, singers, pianists and actors. We spend a pittance on training the people who will employ them, who will find resources to support their work and will attract their audiences.*”

The **DeVos Institute of Arts Management** will provided training and technical support for arts organizations including seminars in strategic planning, fundraising, program marketing and most importantly, board development. Boards make organizational strategy and hire artistic directors and staff to implement those strategies.

What do artists need and want from local, regional and national art’s organizations and what it will mean to move from a society where government and art professional institutions fund the arts to a society where arts funding may be completely privatized? And what effect will the DeVos’s social, political and religious beliefs have on the training of future art organizations?

It was recently announced that 35 West Michigan art’s organizations have signed up for a free two year training program, part of a national “ capacity-building” program presented by the **DeVos Institute of Art’s Management**. In a Grand Rapids Press interview Betsy DeVos said, “We just viewed this as a really powerful way to leverage creative talents for the benefit and enjoyment of all of us.” Do we as artists want a future where we are looked at as primarily entrepreneurs? A world where creativity becomes something more valuable when it is thought of as good business? Do we want local art’s organizations, locally funded, providing programming selected ultimately by local boards trained to look at the arts as a commodity to be “leveraged”?

Who ever controls the context by which art is shown or talked about can control the content of art and how we will talk about it. This is what ArtPrize does. This is something we all should be concerned about.

ArtPrize trumps democracy: What the Press coverage tells us about the Press

https://griid.org/2010/11/04/artprize-trumps-democracy-what-the-press-coverage-tells-us-about-the-press/

Yesterday, we posted the findings of our **56-day study** that looked at the Grand Rapids Press election coverage from the day after Labor Day through November 1st.

In that study we also did a comparison to see how much coverage the Press was giving to ArtPrize, since it was taking place in relatively the same time frame as the 2010 Election.

We found that there were almost twice as many ArtPrize articles in the print version of the Grand Rapids Press as there were of election articles, 153 to 87. We also found that comparatively there were 35 ArtPrize stories on the front page of the Press and only 18 election stories.

Big deal. So what's the point? The point is that this should tell us something about the Grand Rapids Press and news coverage in an age of hyper-capitalism.

First, the most obvious thing about the newspaper's decision to run more stories about ArtPrize than they did about electoral politics is that it makes clear what their priorities are. And the number one priority of the Grand Rapids Press is not to inform the public, it is to sell newspapers.

Of course this is their number one priority, since they are owned by a for profit company – **Advance Publications**. But it should be stated that the selling of newspapers is not just about news but about advertising. Indeed, the bulk of the revenue made by the Press is from advertising, not subscriptions and ArtPrize articles, particularly on the front page, helps to create a more positive consumer climate.

As media scholars like Erik Barnouw, Robert McChesney and Lesley Savan have demonstrated in numerous books over the years – newspapers, TV and radio stations always think about the content of their news and its relationship to the advertising. This

means that for profit news agencies have to be careful not to provide news that makes us either feel too bad or makes us think in great detail about substantive issues. To do so could limit the public's ability to be consumers.

Second, despite the fact that news agencies are driven by profits does not necessarily mean they can't do good journalism. Often journalists and editors will say that they are just giving people what they want. And while it may be true that the public is demanding all ArtPrize all the time, that justification is not part of the widely accepted **Principles of Journalism**.

Lastly, the data begs the question that if the Press treated election coverage the same way they did ArtPrize coverage would that have an impact of the number and sophistication of voters on November 2nd?

For instance, if there were as many articles about candidate races as there were about ArtPrize, would that make a difference? If there were equally as many front-page stories about the election as there was about ArtPrize would there be more participation in elections? If the Press invited the public to design a front-page cover for the elections like they did for ArtPrize would that have made a difference? If the Press engaged the public in their election coverage the same way it engaged the public who came out to see ArtPrize entries would that encourage people to participate in the electoral process even more?

We may never know the answers to these questions, but it would be worth posing these questions to the Press editor Paul Keep. Send him an E-mail (***pkeep@grpress.com***) and ask him about the difference in the amount and quality of ArtPrize coverage versus Election coverage. If you get a response let us know and we could add your comments to this posting.

Nothing but praise for ArtPrize at GVSU event

https://griid.org/2011/09/24/nothing-but-praise-for-artprize-at-gvsu-event/

Last night, a packed audience at Grand Valley's Loosemore Auditorium, came to hear perspectives from a panel of artists on what they thought about ArtPrize.

The event was billed as "***Perspectives on ArtPrize***" and was part of the 2011 DeVos Art Lecture Series at GVSU. The panel consisted of 6 artists and ArtPrize founder Rick DeVos.

From the very beginning, it was clear that the event was framed in such a way that didn't really welcome any criticism of the local art competition. Marcia Haas, wife of GVSU President Thomas Haas, said in her welcoming comments, "*Isn't it wonderful that*

our city is alive with art? This is an experience like no other, for people to have a chance to explore our community."

The panel was then introduced and moderated by GVSU Director of Galleries and Collections Henry Matthews. The first words out of his mouth were, "*can you feel the excitement*?"

Matthews asked Rick DeVos to begin the conversation by saying that the overall structure of ArtPrize is pretty much the same as previous years, with voting and no categories. He also said there were awards being judged and an exhibition center at St. Cecilia Society, which included music and other performance art.

The first question asked by the moderator was, "For those who participated last year, how are things different or better?" Jason Quigno, a Native American artist from Michigan said it was hectic, but he likes seeing the excitement on the street. Cyril Lixenberg, an artist from Amsterdam, said he also thinks it is exciting and knows many other people who have told him they were excited. Cynthia McKean, an artist from Saugatuck, said there is confusion, but that this is part of the fun.

There were two Argentine artists on the panel, both from Buenos Aires. Juan Batalla said it was an interesting experience. "*It allows art to be talked about, since there is no one who determines who gets to exhibit and who doesn't. The real joy begins when people begin to talk about the art*." Danny Barreto said he was impressed by the size of the event, the beauty of the city and the variety of art. "*It is not only for enlightened people, but for families and regular people who have a chance to look at art in a different way*."

Hubert Massey, an artist from Detroit, said he was impressed by the size and the interaction of the people with the art. "*It has a real large impact on the community. Art changes lives and people's behavior. This should be happening all across the country.*"

This was the consensus all night, with panelists falling over themselves in praise of ArtPrize. Questions and comments from the audience were not much different in that people wanted to thank Rick DeVos and asked questions like, "Could this be replicated in other cities and what are the lessons learned from this event?" DeVos responded to the lessons learned by saying he thinks that we need to "*just get out of the way and allow people determine what happens. He thinks that the collaborative relationships that develop are critical and more of that needs to be developed. The artists and the venue people are putting lots of energy into the whole experience*."

Another audience question asked how many people have been employed by this event? It spoke to the general belief that ArtPrize is good for the local economy, but upon further investigation it seems that a narrow sector of Grand Rapids really benefits – hotel, restaurant, parking lot and club owners are the big winners. DeVos' response to this question was that the real goal of ArtPrize "is building a deeper and richer culture of experimentation of expression."

When the artists on the panel were asked about how they felt about their work being voted on, they all responded favorably. DeVos said, “it wasn’t about the Prize, it was the participation of the people.” Really, I wonder how many artists, especially the first year, would have participated if there were no prize money. It seems like a pretty big carrot in motivating artist participation.

The only critical question asked all night was by a young Latino man. He wanted to how this art competition affected the poor people in the community? Cyril Lixenberg responded by saying “get the kids involved.” DeVos agreed and said that he talked to students who got excited about what they were seeing. “It opens up the possibilities for people. ArtPrize is like a treasure hunt, since they get to explore parts of the city they haven’t seen, especially people of lesser means.” No one really answered the young man’s questions and no one could use the word poor, just terms like “disadvantaged” and “lesser means.”

Matthews wrapped up the panel discussion by asking DeVos what was next for ArtPrize? DeVos said he had no “world conquering” plans.

After sitting through the brief panel discussion (only 1 hour), I was left feeling frustrated that: 1) there was no one on the panel who had a critical, different or dissenting opinion; 2) the only question with social implications was skillfully diverted and dismissed, and 3) the event was really an opportunity for Rick DeVos to promote himself and his art competition.

The Media Spectacle that is ArtPrize

https://griid.org/2011/09/23/the-media-spectacle-that-is-artprize/

It is now day three of the official beginning of ArtPrize 2011. However, it is strikingly clear that coverage of this year’s ArtPrize began way before the event kick-off on Wednesday.

For the third year in a row there is no way that one could not know about the downtown art competition. The local news media have been falling over themselves trying to “report” on everything from artist profiles, the marketing techniques, venue locations and public reactions.

The Grand Rapids Press ran their own competition, by inviting people to design a front-page cover that would be used for the opening day. The winning design also now adorns Press boxes throughout downtown GR, enticing readers to get a copy of the only daily paper in town’s take on the art competition.

The local TV stations have also been busy making ArtPrize their main focus. **Channel 8 and channel 13 both broadcast live all day at the Grand Rapids Art Museum**. **WOOD TV 8 has an ArtPrize banner**to go along with weather and sports. The local NBC affiliate included the art competition logo onto the station's web design and their meteorologists will be providing "live ArtPrize forecasts every day from the street side studio."

WXMI 17 also has an Artprize section, but the ABC affiliate WZZM 13 has what they have called the "**conversation couch**." WZZM 13 has partnered with the Grand Rapids Art Museum, by setting up a couch with word bubbles behind it. People can sit down and use other word bubbles to talk about what art and the art competition means to them. Corporate sponsors all graciously provided the couch, TV and signage for WZZM 13's art competition coverage.

Local radio isn't doing quite as much as TV, but **WOOD radio** does have a listing of ArtPrize events.

We also can't ignore what independent media is doing. The Rapidian has their own **ArtPrize section**, which has been consistent the three years the event has happened in downtown Grand Rapids.

So what is the big deal, there is lots of local media coverage of ArtPrize. This writer doesn't really have a big issue with the amount of coverage that the art competition is receiving, rather it is the lack of critical coverage and the frustration from not seeing the same intensity of coverage for other issues.

Imagine if elections got the same amount of coverage, with all day live broadcasts and a couch for people to sit in and talk about the meaning of democracy for them. Imagine the Grand Rapids Press invited people to design a front-page for their paper with the theme of environmental justice or sustainability. What if the local TV stations had a banner for racial justice or fighting poverty? Are these issues of less importance than ArtPrize? Do they not deserve the same kinds of journalistic enthusiasm and creativity?

The Political Economy of ArtPrize – Part I

https://griid.org/2011/10/04/the-political-economy-of-artprize-part-i/

There have been numerous articles written in recent weeks critiquing the quality of the art in this year's ArtPrize. Some of what has been said is important and needs to continue.

However, there is an aspect of ArtPrize that hasn't been addressed and that is the economic impact that the art competition has on Grand Rapids. This is what I hope to look at in two separate articles.

First, there have been previous estimates and a **current study is being done on the economic impact**, but little discussion has been placed on whom are the primary beneficiaries of the money being spent during Artprize. **Secondly**, there has been virtually no investigation into the Rick DeVos created entity's own finances, sponsors and the political significance of that funding.

Part I – Who Benefits

About a month ago I was reading an excellent book by Gergory Sholette entitled, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*. It is a wonderful critique of this shift to art creation as a mechanism of economic development.

I tend to take books no matter where I go, so I have been out at numerous places and people will ask what is that book about. I respond and say I am reading it before ArtPrize starts for new insight into understanding the annual event. People often say they have some issues with the event as well, but "***at least it is good for the economy***."

But what do people mean, "it's good for the economy?" The economy is not an entity or some benevolent institution, it is a financial system that is designed to primarily benefit the capitalist class. Therefore, **the question that should be asked is, who benefits financially from Artprize**? So lets look at how people are spending money and who that money disproportionately goes to.

First, based on the insane amount of car traffic in recent weeks, it is safe to conclude that lots of people are driving to come downtown. This means that the oil companies and parking lot owners are making big money. In downtown Grand Rapids, the two primary beneficiaries of paid parking are the City itself and **Ellis Parking**, which has substantial control over urban parking in Grand Rapids, Lansing and Flint.

Second, people are eating and drinking at restaurants and clubs in downtown Grand Rapids. According to the **Experience Grand Rapids site**, there are 80 restaurants in the downtown area. The primary beneficiaries of money being spent at these places are the owners, owners like John & Greg Gilmore. Sure wait staff might make extra tips, but do you think that those who cook, wash dishes and clean these establishments are getting a raise during Artprize? Another thing generally overlooked about people going to restaurants during ArtPrize is that is more people are coming downtown that means that less people are eating in neighborhoods like Alger Heights or Grandville Avenue.

A **third** way people are spending money in downtown Grand Rapids is on hotel rooms. There are not many downtown hotels, but it is worth noting that the majority of those hotels are owned by the DeVos family. Again, the owners of those hotels are the primary beneficiaries of the money being spent on hotel rooms. Sure there are people employed in those hotels, but do you think the men and women who clean the rooms and change the linen are making a livable wage or get extra pay during ArtPrize?

A **fourth** economic beneficiary of ArtPrize are venues that are not restaurants, bars or hotels. Places like the various museums downtown, the convention center and other non-service industry venues are making money. Again, the question should be asked who are the primary economic beneficiaries of these venues? One could argue with the museums that it helps keep their doors open and provides financial resources for them to bring new exhibits to town.

A **fifth** group that benefits are businesses that sell art supplies or commodities used in ArtPrize installations, such as hardware stores, big box stores and any place that carries paint, construction material, etc. Since there are a limited number of stores that carry these items, most of the materials are being purchased from big box stores like Meijer, Home Depot, Wal-Mart or Lowes. Of course there are people who are using recycled material in their art, but the primary beneficiaries of these art material purchases are the owners of those stores.

A **sixth** economic beneficiary are the people employed temporarily by artists to haul or help install pieces. There are a few companies, some local, that are making money off of transporting pieces, especially the larger ones.

Some people might also want to include in the group of economic beneficiaries being artists. A few artists will win monetary prizes, some will sell art because of ArtPrize and some might say that greater exposure is to their benefit. However, lets be clear that the over 1,000 artists who submitted works of art this year are fundamentally contributing **free labor**.

There might be people we overlooked who economically benefit from the annual art competition, but the primary beneficiaries are the owning class, which has not been reflected in past studies done on the economic impact of ArtPrize. The study done last year by GVSU estimated that $7 – 7.5 million in economic activity was generated because of ArtPrize, but that study did not acknowledge that most of that money went to the people who own the hotels, restaurants, clubs and parking lots.

The group hired to do the study on the 2011 economic impact of ArtPrize is the **Anderson Economic Group** (AEG) based out of Lansing. However, looking at that business's profile it is clear that they operate in the service of the financial sector, which is why the Economic Club of Grand Rapids hosted AEG's founder In September and spoke on Michigan's economy. Considering who the Anderson Economic Group serves, do we really think they will be looking at how ArtPrize benefits working class families?

The answer of course is no. ArtPrize economically benefits the owning class and the so-called creative class, which is ultimately about promoting enterprise culture. This sentiment was best described by local business elite Sam Cummings in 2009. "***Our long-term goal is really to import capital – intellectual capital, and ultimately real capital. And this (ArtPrize) is certainly an extraordinary tool."***

There may be some trickle down economic benefits to working people by ArtPrize, but it is primarily an engine for wealth that gushes up.

(Part II of this article will focus on the finances of ArtPrize as an entity, their sponsors and its political/economic significance.)

The Political Economy of ArtPrize – Part II

https://griid.org/2011/10/07/the-political-economy-of-artprize-%E2%80%93-part-ii/

Earlier this week in **Part I**, I talked about who the primary economic beneficiaries are of ArtPrize, particularly the owners of the downtown businesses. In Part II I want to talk about the financials of ArtPrize, where their money is coming from and what that means for civil society in the Greater Grand Rapids area.

Several weeks ago I registered on the ArtPrize site and asked the following question: "Can I see your organization's financial records, what your budget is, how much money you get from sponsors and a breakdown of that amount." The response I got back was, "*GVSU is doing an economic impact study, I would suggest contacting the university."*

First off, the response in no way answered my question, since an economic impact study is not likely to include the budget for ArtPrize, with a breakdown of sponsorship contributions. Second, since ArtPrize is now a non-profit they are required by law to make this information public. I wrote back to the person who directed me to GVSU and I asked the same question as before. I went to the ArtPrize office downtown and asked the same question to which I was directed to their PR guy, Brian Burch. I e-mailed Brian and have as of this writing received no response.

Getting access to non-profit financial statement, also known as 990s, is easier said than done. I was able to access the 2009 financials online, but it provides a limited sense of what kind of money has come and who has funded the annual art competition. However, there is enough information to make some observations and analysis about the amount of money funneled to ArtPrize and who is giving it.

According to the 2009 financial statement for ArtPrize, there was a total of $2,173,163.00 in expenses. The document also shows that Dick and Betsy DeVos gave son Rick **$1,700,000.00** for his art competition. Some of the expenses included **$605,660.00 for web design that was paid to Pomegranate Studios, which is another DeVos venture; $221,000.00 to People Design Inc. for advertising and $256,000.00 for PR provided by Seyferth & Associates.** So it seems that mom & dad fronted this little capital venture for son Rick.

We have not as of this writing received the 990s for 2010 or 2011, but we were able to locate some information on finances for 2010. According to an **article in Philanthropy Roundtable**:

The Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation makes ArtPrize possible. "The foundation provided the venture capital," says Rick. Last year, the contest cost $2.8 million, with the cash awards making up only a fraction of this price. The organization had to underwrite everything from its own staff time to developing a web infrastructure that can handle public voting. The physical event also carried substantial costs, such as providing shuttle buses, printing maps and guidebooks, and producing colorful silicone gel wristbands. In keeping with DeVos' original conception, ArtPrize spent no money on advertising. The DeVos Foundation put up the prize money and made up the difference between the event's receipts and expenses with a loan. ***Community sponsors also chipped in, providing $500,000 in 2009 and $1 million in 2010****.*

Well, we know that the amount of people ArtPrize has hired has increased over the past 2 years, so we can speculate that the budget is bigger now than in 2009. Then there is the matter of sponsors, which are numerous. Some of them are just the run of the mill downtown businesses, but there is **a listing for the major sponsors**, such as the Presenting Sponsor – The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation.

Other major sponsors are: Amway, Bissell, Comcast, Grand Rapids DDA, The David & Carol Van Andel Foundation, Haworth, Frey Foundation, Herman Miller, Meijer, Steelcase, Kendall College, PNC Bank, Wolverine Worldwide, West Side Beer, Daniel and Pamella DeVos Foundation, Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, Rick and Melissa DeVos, VanderWeide Family Foundation, Amway Hotel, Deloitte, Atomic Object, Fox Motors, Huntington Bank, ITC Holdings, Pomegranate Studios, Rockford Construction, Square One Design, Universal Forest Products, Gilmore Collection, Varnum, ITC Holding, On Stage Services, Terryberry Company, Consumers Energy and The Edgar and Elsa Prince Foundation.

After major sponsors there are the group listed as benefactors. This list includes Crown Motors of Holland, Edward Jones, Experience Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Community Foundation, J.C. Huizenga, Porsche, RCM Technologies, Scott Christopher Homes and Spectrum Health.

The corporations, foundations and other entities listed here make up a good portion of the local power structure, whether we are talking about the DeVos, Van Andel and Prince families, Peter Seechia, David Frey, John Huntington and Fred Meijer or just the corporate entities which wield significant power over political and economic policy in West Michigan.

This kind of sponsorship certainly plays a key role in the political culture of West Michigan. It is very doubtful that thousands of dollars are donated to ArtPrize just for fun. In fact, I would submit that these entities contribute to events like ArtPrize as a means of creating an illusion, a diversion or a buffer for public outrage.

The **illusion** from the money donated by the list of sponsors is that the public is to see them as what they call themselves, philanthropists. We are to believe that these great patrons donate money out of the goodness of their hearts. The financial contributions of the sponsors could also been seen as a **diversion**, so that people look at all the art downtown and forget about the thousands of people who are living in poverty, are unemployed and struggling to meet their basic needs. Lastly, these contributions can act as a **buffer**, by getting people who enjoy and praise ArtPrize to the extent that they will silence or marginalize people who want to challenge or question the power that the families and corporate entities in West Michigan wield.

If you look at who makes up the **Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce**, the **Econ Club of Grand Rapids**, the **Downtown Development Authority**, **Grand Action**, the **West Michigan Policy Forum** and the **One Kent Coalition** you see many of the same names involved in sponsoring ArtPrize. The Chamber of Commerce and the Econ Club have been supporters of the economic policies implemented by Governor Snyder, which have resulted in the elimination of a business tax, weakening public sector unions and taking away local power through the Emergency Financial Manager system.

The **West Michigan Policy Forum wants Michigan to be a Right to Work state** and the One Kent Coalition wants to radically alter local government by merging the City of Grand Rapids with the Kent County that will be led by a CEO, according to their own **proposed legislation**.

Another example would be the dominance of the DeVos, Prince and Van Andel families in their sponsorship of ArtPrize. According to research done by investigative reporter Russ Bellant (*The Religious Right in Michigan Politics*), we know that the DeVos and Prince families have donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to organizations and campaigns to defeat efforts for greater equality by the LGBTQ community, both in Michigan and around the country.

Some of this funding has gone to support efforts to defeat marriage equality and domestic partner benefits or to religious groups, which preach that, “homosexuality is a sin.” Despite this kind of homophobic policy funding, I have seen nothing in writing or heard anyone discussing these issues while ArtPrize has been going on. Look at it this way, what if neo-Nazi groups or the KKK were sponsors of ArtPrize? Do you think there would be some discussion of this, maybe even rage? Do you think that the African American community and its allies would be avoiding or even calling for a boycott of ArtPrize? Sure seems likely. So why is it that when institutions that make it a priority to deny people who identify as LGBTQ their basic rights, why are people not outraged? Just because the foundations that fund anti-gay policies don’t wear white hoods, doesn’t mean they don’t do harm to vulnerable population.

It could be that this information is just not known. However, it is my contention that this information is known at some level, but there are too many people who are willing to just ignore these facts so they can stroll about downtown for a few weeks of the year and give up their power to a small sector of West Michigan, that not only has deep pockets,

but undermines basic rights and the democratic process. Some might say that this kind of analysis is just conspiracy theories, but I say this is how power functions.

***Postscript**: Just a little side note – Brian Burch, the PR guy for ArtPrize, is also one of the Holland City Council members who voted no on including sexual orientation in the City's anti-discrimination ordinance the past summer.*

List of sources on local funding for anti-gay initiatives:

http://www.disaboomlive.com/forums/t/40396.aspx

http://thinkprogress.org/lgbt/2011/08/10/292447/the-big-donors-who-fund-noms-educational-hate-speech/

http://www.mediamouse.org/tag/betsy-devos

http://www.mediamouse.org/resources/right/foundations/richard-and-helen-devos-foundation

http://www.mediamouse.org/resources/right/foundations/edgar-and-elsa-prince-foundation

When elites give money to each other: ArtPrize financials for 2010

https://griid.org/2011/11/16/when-elites-give-money-to-each-other-artprize-financials-for-2010/

We wrote last month a series of articles on ArtPrize, with an emphasis on the political economy of this downtown Grand Rapids spectacle.

In **one article** we shared information on the operating budget for the first year of ArtPrize, in 2009. In that first year of operation, the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation gave $1,700,000 to Rick DeVos' desire to see "crazy stuff happen all over Grand Rapids." We obtained this information by looking at the 990 documents that ArtPrize now has to file since it is a non-profit entity.

Just days ago we were able to obtain the 990 documents for 2010, which reveals even more about who is funding ArtPrize.

Here is a list of financial donors in 2010 that gave $10,000 or more:

Richard & Helen DeVos	**$100,000**
PNC	**$100,000**
Meijer Inc.	**$50,000**
Doug & Maria DeVos	**$50,000**
Dan & Pam DeVos	**$50,000**
Bob & Cheri Vanderweide	**$50,000**
Steelcase	**$50,000**
Amway Corporation	**$50,000**
Haworth	**$35,000**
Dave & Carol Van Andel Foundation	**$35,000**
Huntington National Bank	**$30,000**
Frederick Meijer Gardens	**$30,000**
Rockford Construction Company	**$25,000**
People Design	**$25,000**
KatePew Wolters	**$25,000**
West Side Beer Distributing	**$25,000**
Edgar & Elsa Prince	**$25,000**
Kendall College of Art & Design	**$20,000**
Comcast	**$20,000**
Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority	**$15,000**
Wolverine Worldwide	**$15,000**
Herman Miller	**$15,000**
Universal Forest Products	**$15,000**
Cascade Engineering	**$15,000**
JCT Foundation	**$15,000**
Amway Hotel Corporation	**$10,000**

McGarry Bair	**$10,000**
Pearl St Investment MGMT of Oppenheimer & Co.	**$10,000**
Modern Day Floral	**$10,000**
Fifth Third Bank	**$10,000**
Applause Catering	**$10,000**
Warner, Norcross & Judd LLP	**$10,000**
Spectrum Health Hospital	**$10,000**
J.C. Huizenga Group	**$10,000**
Eastern Floral	**$10,000**

In addition, there were numerous other entities that gave between $5,000 and $7,500 dollars to ArtPrize 2010.

Looking at this list of financial contributors one can easily see that those who were major donors are the political and economic power in this community. It should come as no surprise that they were major donors to ArtPrize, since they are also entities that will benefit financially and politically from the annual downtown art event.

As we have stated before, if you look at who makes up the **Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce**, the **Econ Club of Grand Rapids**, the **Downtown Development Authority**, **Grand Action**, the **West Michigan Policy Forum** and the **One Kent Coalition** you see many of the same names involved in sponsoring ArtPrize. The Chamber of Commerce and the Econ Club have been supporters of the economic policies implemented by Governor Snyder, which have resulted in the elimination of a business tax, weakening public sector unions and taking away local power through the Emergency Financial Manager system.

The **West Michigan Policy Forum wants Michigan to be a Right to Work state** and the One Kent Coalition wants to radically alter local government by merging the City of Grand Rapids with the Kent County that will be led by a CEO, according to their own **proposed legislation**.

In addition to these policy benefits, these entities will make lots of money during ArtPrize, since many of them own or have investments in downtown hotels, bars, restaurants, parking facilities and other services. These entities also benefit, in that all of the donations are tax right offs, since ArtPrize is now a 501c3 non-profit entity.

More importantly, ArtPrize acts as a mechanism to distract us from the political and economic power that the DeVos' and their friends have in West Michigan or worse, it acts as a form of cultural imperialism by making the public give thanks to the local robber barons for entertaining us for a few weeks every fall. Either way, the public loses while the Grand Rapids version of the 1% laughs all the way to the bank.

In May of 2012, we can get access to the 990s for the 2011 ArtPrize and we promise to give you a breakdown of their finances for the third year of operation.

New Economic report underscores the money making function of ArtPrize

https://griid.org/2011/12/21/new-economic-report-underscores-the-money-making-function-of-artprize/

Yesterday, **MLive reported** on a new study that looked at the economic impact of ArtPrize this past fall.

The report was prepared by the **Anderson Economic Group**, which was contracted by the local group Experience Grand Rapids. The **37-page report** provides an overview of the findings, attendance, attendance experience, economic impact analysis, quality of life benefits, cultural and long-term benefits.

The MLive article provides a brief summary of the findings and cites only three sources, a consultant with the Anderson Economic Group, the VP of marketing for Experience GR and the executive director of ArtPrize.

The MLive article doesn't question the findings of the report or ask any independent questions of the sources cited. Instead, the story essentially communicates the message that downtown art event was an economically beneficial to Grand Rapids.

The commissioned report defines economic impact as *the new economic activity directly or indirectly caused by ArtPrize. This excludes any activity associated with Art-Prize that merely replaces or displaces other economic activity in the region. The net benefits provide a true measure of the economic activity that would not have occurred without ArtPrize.*

Some of the data shows that about 73% of those who attended traveled from outside of Grand Rapids and 31% traveled from outside of Kent & Ottawa County. The report also states that $15.4 million was generated directly because of ArtPrize and $4.6 million in new earnings for local households.

The data provided by the Anderson Economic Group certainly supports the normal arguments for the benefits of ArtPrize, which is that it is a great economic stimulator for Grand Rapids. However, the report and most news reporting on the local art extravaganza does not ask fundamental questions about which entities & individuals were the beneficiaries of the money spent by attendees and the ArtPrize organization.

As we have **reported before**, the primary beneficiaries of money spent by attendees were hotel owners, parking lot owners, downtown restaurants, bars and other retails shops. While one could add that wait staff may have made more money in tips during this time, the bulk of the money made from attendee spending went to a small group of business owners in downtown Grand Rapids.

When looking at the money spent by ArtPrize as an organization, the Anderson report states the bulk of this money was spent on local resources. This is a true statement, but incomplete. It's incomplete in that a great deal of the money that ArtPrize spent went to a small circle of businesses, many of which are either owned by the DeVos family or closely connected to the DeVos family as we pointed out in **another recent article** based on 2010 filings. This is one area in which the Anderson report falls short, in that it does not qualify who the economic beneficiaries are. They do report that $4.6 million in new earnings for local households, but provide no analysis of who made up these local households.

The other main conclusion from the report in that ArtPrize provides long-term cultural benefits. The report identifies these benefits as ARTcation – where schools are bringing children on field trips to downtown Grand Rapids; University participation and the educational speaker series that was held during ArtPrize.

Providing children an opportunity to experience art is a valuable cultural experience, but ArtPrize is not the only cultural event in Grand Rapids that would be beneficial for children to be exposed to. In terms of local university participation the report concludes it was beneficial to students and the local campuses indentified. In contrast, there are local students and faculty that this writer has talked with that have a critical perspective of ArtPrize, which are not acknowledged in this report.

Lastly, the speaker series identified in the Anderson report consisted of eight separate events where a speaker or a panel spoke on issues related to ArtPrize. The report does not provide any details on the speaker series, but if the event we **wrote about at GVSU** was any indication of the quality of the speaker series then that conclusion should also be questioned.

The report concludes by stating that ArtPrize is beneficial to Grand Rapids because it makes it a stronger tourist destination "*highlights the city's ability to foster creativity and entrepreneurship*." This concluding comment in many ways sums up the real purpose of ArtPrize, which is to make money, particularly money for those who are disproportionately in a higher income bracket.

The "humility" of Rick DeVos

https://griid.org/2012/04/11/the-humility-of-rick-devos/

Earlier today, the Hauenstein Center of GVSU hosted the last of their Wheelhouse Talks, which took place and the Salvation Army Kroc Center in Grand Rapids.

The guest speaker today was Rick DeVos, founder of ArtPrize and other "entrepreneurial" endeavors. DeVos, who read from a script, talked less than 15 minutes before he opened it up for questions.

DeVos began his talk by saying that "leadership" was a loaded word for him. He said he has a hard time with being considered a leader and that he tries to take a humble approach when asked to come speak about the issue of leadership. DeVos even said he prefers being in a quiet room reading a book and not around a lot of people.

DeVos played the humility card quite a bit in fact, but as someone who is born into wealth and has taken advantage of the privileges of using that wealth to start other business ventures, it just seemed like false humility.

DeVos said the main things he wanted to communicate about how he has been successful were three things: having good ideas, clear goals and courage. In fact, the talk he gave earlier today was quite similar to his comments in a recent article in the **Fast Company Magazine**.

The son of Dick & Betsy DeVos said that we in Michigan plan too much and don't allow for creativity and that this is a hold over from the manufacturing days. DeVos said he had no proof that people would be interested in ArtPrize, 5×5 or water in a box, but people did. True, there has been interest in those things, but people also like American Idol and Tim Tebow. Just because people like something doesn't necessarily mean it is a benefit to the community.

DeVos then talked about courage and bravery, which for him is in part coming to terms with the fact that you will fail at times. Again, this seems like such a strange notion from someone who got $2 million from his parents to start ArtPrize. When most people fail in the real world, they don't have rich parents to back them up.

The third generation DeVos then talked about how there are trolls in the world that will criticize you. Some of those "trolls" are other business people who want to bring you down instead of supporting you and the other type of trolls are those who are "Internet loons with conspiracy theories." DeVos didn't identify any of the loons, but dismissing critics as loons who promote conspiracy theories is just a convenient way to dismiss anyone who honestly wants to challenge those who have power.

As someone who has written a great deal about ArtPrize from a critical point of view, I don't see such criticism as conspiratorial, but an understanding of how power functions. When we posted a **piece last November** that looked at the second year financials of ArtPrize, where the was clearly monetary benefits being shared by a small sector of local businesses, that isn't a conspiracy, it is business as usual.

As I already mentioned the talk was brief, so DeVos allowed plenty of time for Q&A. Most of the comments from those in the audience of about 200 were affirming of ArtPrize and the questions ranged from “will you write a book,” to “how did ArtPrize get started” and “what does it take to be an effective team builder.”

One woman did cite an author about how God is calling us to a place of purpose. She asked DeVos where God was calling him, particularly around issues like poverty and justice. Not surprising, those topics were avoided and DeVos instead said he was interested in creating systems where people could invest in each other and themselves.

Some would argue that such investment does address poverty, but the history of struggle for justice, from the 19th century labor movements to the current global uprisings against private economic power, would suggest that justice is about equity, human rights and the redistribution of wealth and power.

GQ’s take on ArtPrize and the DeVos Family

https://griid.org/2012/08/18/gqs-take-on-artprize-and-the-devos-family/

Within the past 24 hours, I have had friends message me to see if I had seen the recent GQ article on ArtPrize and Rick DeVos.

Comments have been exchanged and conversation have ensued which led me to believe that a response was relevant considering Grand Rapids is about to embark on year four of ArtPrize.

My first reaction to the Matthew Power piece in GQ, which was written based on his visit last year, was that it was nice to see such a mainstream publication willing to talk about the political dynamics of ArtPrize.

Early on in the article, Power lets his readers know that he wants to know the motives behind ArtPrize, a question many of us have been asking **since it was first announced**.

It was also refreshing to see the article include information on the politics of the DeVos family. The GQ article does not give enough details on their political and economic influence, but that the writer even dared to go down that path is important since none of the commercial media in Grand Rapids has been willing to utter a sound about the influence of the DeVos family and ArtPrize. In fact, the local media as we have noted on numerous occasions has been nothing short of **a PR engine for the event**. We have also noted that **local news outlets have demonstrated that reporting on ArtPrize is more important than reporting on electoral politics.**

It was equally refreshing to see Matthew Power include critical comments from two local artists, Paul Amenta and Michael Pfleghaar. Amenta and Pfleghaar both do not mince words when talking about what they find objectionable about ArtPrize, which is important considering that the event itself has not been very interested in providing a forum for critical discourse. Last year this writer attended a panel discussion on AtPrize at GVSU where not one of the panel members was willing to provide any critical comments about the annual event; and, when one audience member did, the panelists danced around his question.

Pfleghaar should also be saluted for saying that the "DeVoses were oligarchs who treated Grand Rapids like a playtown, and he also suspected ArtPrize was somehow part of their shadowy conservative cultural agenda." Pfelghaar also stated, "Rick's money is their money to me. He was born into this fortune."

This last comment cuts to the core of the issue in many ways, despite Rick DeVos' attempts to distance himself from his family's political legacy. According to the 990s we have looked at for ArtPrize, Dick and Betsy DeVos gave their son $1.7 million in 2009 to help him make his dream become a reality. His parents have continued this trend, along with other DeVos family members and the Prince family, providing hundreds of thousands each year to underwrite some of the larger venues.

Rick DeVos' desire to distance himself from the family politics was reflected in this comment in the GQ story where he says, "***I don't even want to weigh in on any of the political stuff. I just prefer to stay away from that***." Sorry Rick, but you do not get to stay away from that since the political stuff is woven into the very fabric of ArtPrize as we have noted in a previous posting entitled **The Political Economy of ArtPrize**.

Does Rick really believe that he can separate his activities, such as ArtPrize or Start Garden, when they can only happen because of the family money? He can no more distance himself from his family's politics than any other child of a billionaire family unless they reject the wealth, which ultimately means rejecting how that wealth was acquired and what kind of influence and power that wealth buys. Rick cannot distance himself from the anti-LGBT, anti-Union, anti-public education and pro-privatization policies that the DeVos family has financed and lent their name to for decades.

This influence was reflected in the GQ story when the writer pointed out that some people he spoke with said that many artists are hesitant to submit critical pieces or voice criticism of ArtPrize. Powers states that this form of "self-censorship" was due to "all the funding the DeVoses provide for cultural institutions." Indeed, it is extremely difficult for the cash-strapped nonprofit world to slap one of the biggest hands that feeds them.

Lastly, the GQ article was instructive in its observations about Rick DeVos and his family, with references to a bodyguard-protected family car waiting for them in the alley to the bodyguard hovering near Rick during the ArtPrize awards ceremony last year at the convention center. If Rick is afraid of being assaulted or kidnapped for ransom, he might consider that animosity towards his family is not just because of their politics, but

because there are millions of people living in utter poverty while his family owns their own island and Grandpa is consistently one of the top 100 wealthiest people on the planet.

MLive article misses the point of the GQ article on ArtPrize

https://griid.org/2012/08/23/mlive-article-misses-the-point-of-the-gq-article-on-artprize/

Nearly a week after the GQ story on ArtPrize has been circulating in Grand Rapids, MLive finally decided to join the conversation.

The **MLive article**, by entertainment writer Jeffrey Karczmarcxyk, frames the narrative around the GQ story on ArtPrize (So you think you can paint) as a glass half-full/half-empty story. Karczmarcxyk presents the argument that the Matthew Powers article in GQ pointed out the very best and the very worst of the annual art event in Grand Rapids.

While the **GQ article** did do what the MLive writer stated, the GQ article was much more than that. Matthew Power seemed to be asking both critical questions about ArtPrize the event, but equally important was its relationship to the political and economic power of the DeVos family.

The only real reference that the MLive writer made to the politics of the DeVos family was this line, "*Power's observations on the "ultra conservative" DeVos family and its support of "hot-button, conservative issues" is searing."* While I think that Powers made important statements about the DeVos family, in terms of their involvement in issues like anti-gay marriage, I would hardly call what he wrote as "searing."

However, maybe to Karczmarcxyk, the GQ article was a searing indictment of the DeVos family, which might explain why he did not honestly deal with that aspect of the GQ article.

The MLive story does mention Paul Armenta and SITE: LAB, but fails to acknowledge the critical comments from Armenta or GR artist Michael Pfleghaar that were prominent in the GQ article. In fact, the only source that Karczmarcxyk uses in the MLive article, other than Power, was the PR guy for ArtPrize, Brian Burch. Burch applies his trade and puts his own spin on the GQ article with this innocuous comment, "*The piece offers a number of interesting perspectives that add to the conversation and showcases how much complexity can come out of something so simple."*

The MLive story was in no way a surprise, it just demonstrated once again its unwillingness to provide a larger critique of ArtPrize, the DeVos family and their politics, which is what the **GQ article was a least willing to do**.

Photo bomb challenges the politics of ArtPrize , with online campaign

https://griid.org/2012/09/23/photo-bomb-challenges-the-politics-of-artprize-with-online-campaign/

Last year we posted a two-part piece on the political economy of ArtPrize. In **part II**, we identified ArtPrize sponsors, based on the 990 records they submitted to the federal government, which lists the ArtPrize budget, expenses and sponsors and how much they gave.

The article from last year talked about some of the sponsors and the hateful campaigns they have funded, particularly anti-LGBT campaigns.

Some of this funding has gone to support efforts to defeat marriage equality and domestic partner benefits or to religious groups, which preach that, "homosexuality is a sin." Despite this kind of homophobic policy funding, I have seen nothing in writing or heard anyone discussing these issues while ArtPrize has been going on. Look at it this way, what if neo-Nazi groups or the KKK were sponsors of ArtPrize? Do you think there would be some discussion of this, maybe even rage? Do you think that the African American community and its allies would be avoiding or even calling for a boycott of ArtPrize? Sure seems likely. So why is it that when institutions that make it a priority to deny people who identify as LGBTQ their basic rights, why are people not outraged? Just because the foundations that fund anti-gay policies don't wear white hoods, doesn't mean they don't do harm to vulnerable population.

Starting today, a group of local activists are now trying to shed light on the anti-LGBT funding from some of the ArtPrize sponsors. Using public information, the activists have found a few examples of anti-LGBT funding and are posting photos and information at a **Facebook page called ArtLies**.

For example, the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation gave $75,000 to the 2004 Anti-Gay Marriage Amendment in Michigan. Edgar and Elsa Prince are the parents of Erik Prince and Betsy DeVos. The Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation gave **$450,000 to California's Prop 8 to ban Gay Marriage, in 2008**.

The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation donated **$100,000 to the Florida4Marriage campaign in 2008**, to defeat a campaign to get marriage equality in Florida.

More recently, the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation donated $500,000 to the National Organization on Marriage for its efforts across the country to defeat Marriage Equality. This large amount of money to defeat Marriage Equality across the country has led to a campaign to **Boycott Amway**, since Doug DeVos is the current President.

In addition, the local activists pointed out with some signs in their visual campaign other funding issues with some of the ArtPrize sponsors. For example, **Richard DeVos contributed $250,000 to Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker** to defeat the recall campaign earlier this year, since Walked has been attacking working people and labor policies in that state.

Another issue one of the signs points to is the funding that the Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation and the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation have given the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. The **Mackinac Center is a far right think tank** that supports Right to Work laws, privatizing public services, privatizing public education and deregulation of any restrictions put on the private sector by the state. **The Dick & Betsy DeVos has given $80,000 between 2002 – 2009 to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the Edgar & Elsa Prince has provided $195,000** during the same time period.

Lastly, the activists point out in one sign that the Dick and Betsy DeVos foundation has contributed millions of dollars to promote the privatization of education, which undermines public education funding across the country. One researcher even refers to **Betsy DeVos as the 4 – star general of the pro-school privatization movement.**

In their photo bomb action today, some of the activists even stood next to one of the WOOD TV 8 signs by the Grand Rapids Art Museum, where the channel 8 station has been broadcasting live since ArtPrize began this year. They stood their with these illuminating signs about ArtPrize sponsors to make the point that commercial media in this community has ignored the politics of the ArtPrize sponsors.

Year Seven of the Monied Spectacle: An Indy Media Guide to ArtPrize

https://griid.org/2015/09/21/year-seven-of-the-monied-spectacle-an-indy-media-guide-to-artprize/

Year seven is upon us. Whether you like it or not, for the next month or so, the spectacle that is ArtPrize, is pretty much all you will hear about. Forget about Donald Trump, Iran

or climate change, thousands of people invading downtown Grand Rapids is all that matters.

This is year seven and for seven years we have been writing about ArtPrize. Therefore, it seems fit that for year seven, we provide you with an Indy Media Guide to ArtPrize. However, before we begin, it is worth noting that our ongoing critique of this monied spectacle does acknowledge that there is pleasure, entertainment and benefits to ArtPrize. We do not see the world in some overly simplified binary world of good and bad, but we do want to see a world where those with obscene wealth and power are challenged or at the very least made to feel a bit exposed.

> Back in the summer of 2009, as ArtPrize was first being announced, we were one of the first media sources to raise questions about the intent of this so-called art extravaganza. The main issue we raised was around the larger PR function such an event would provide for the DeVos family. We asked, what impact will such an event have on any insurgent movement to challenge organized money? Like most billionaire families, the DeVos family cares deeply about its public image and ArtPrize seemed like the perfect opportunity to bring more converts to the, "where would Grand Rapids be without them," crowd.
> By year two, it became clear that the local news media had become unpaid cheerleaders for ArtPrize. Even during the inaugural year, ArtPrize had already garnered the allegiance of local media, as we noted in our story entitled, **Reporting on and Promoting ArtPrize**. In that article, we quoted local property owner and managing partner of CWD Real Estate Sam Cummings. Cummings said, "***Our long-term goal is really to import capital – intellectual capital, and ultimately real capital. And this (ArtPrize) is certainly an extraordinary tool***." Such a comment confirmed for us the overriding role that the annual event would play in Grand Rapids. Later that year we published the finds of a news study to make the point about how ArtPrize had become the media darling. **ArtPrize trumps democracy: What the Press coverage tells us about the Press** reveals that even during a gubernatorial election year, ArtPrize had nearly twice as many stories in the Grand Rapids Press as all election related stories, **153 ArtPrize articles to 87 election articles.**
>
> In year two, we were also fortunate to have artist Richard Kooyman allow us to re-post his thoughtful piece on the danger that DeVos money and ArtPrize would pose to art and culture in general, in his piece **What is ArtPrize?**
> In year three, we began to look more closely at the financial aspects of ArtPrize. The mainstream news media has always run stories about how much money is "brought in by ArtPrize," but they have never really explored who are the big financial winners, as we did we our story, **When elites give money to each other: ArtPrize financials for 2010**. We have also made it clear, based upon

990 documents, that Rick DeVos has been bankrolled by his parents, Dick & Betsy, to put on the annual monied spectacle. It became clear from the 990 documents that a great deal of the money was simply being passed around from one DeVos entity to another, although this was never a theme of any media reporting.

In 2012, a GQ article about the DeVos family and ArtPrize generated some interesting conversation, but not by local news media, as we pointed out in **MLive article misses the point of the GQ article on ArtPrize**. The **GQ article** was one of the first outside media sources to discuss the political dynamics of ArtPrize, something that Rick DeVos constantly wants to distance himself from. Rick DeVos' desire to distance himself from the family politics was reflected in this comment in the GQ story where he says, "***I don't even want to weigh in on any of the political stuff. I just prefer to stay away from that***."

In 2012, we continued to explore the money and politics of ArtPrize, we our 2 part piece entitled, The Political Economy of ArtPrize. In **Part I**, we explored the more general impact that such an event has on art and culture and in **Part II** we explore in more detail the relationship between those who finance ArtPrize to what else the monied elites finance at the local, state and federal level.

2012 was also the year that local activists engaged in a **photo bomb campaign** (called ArtLies) to visually make a point about the money and politics of ArtPrize donors, sponsors and the DeVos family.

In 2014, artist Steve Lambert generated lots of attention and discussion around the politics of ArtPrize, with both his installation piece and his **announcement that if he won the prize money from ArtPrize he would donate it to a local LGBT effort**, since the DeVos family has historically funded anti-gay campaigns. What Lambert was able to do was to force both ArtPrize and the larger community to ask more fundamental questions about the political economy of this annual monied spectacle.

Ultimately, we believe that you cannot separate the funding sources of events like ArtPrize, from the political desires of the capitalist class. The DeVos funding of ArtPrize is a way to distract us and make us feel good for a few weeks out of the year, while the politics they fund bludgeon us all year round.

More evidence that ArtPrize & Rick DeVos are connected to Far Right Politics

https://griid.org/2015/10/01/more-evidence-that-artprize-rick-devos-are-connected-to-far-right-politics/

For years now, we have been making the point that since ArtPrize is bankrolled annually by the parents of Rick DeVos – Dick & Betsy – and the major players from the capitalist class in West Michigan, that ArtPrize serves as both a great PR tool for the DeVos family and a mechanism to generate even greater**political and economic clout for the major sponsors**.

ArtPrize founder Rick DeVos has gone to great lengths to deny that the annual event is in any way politically motivated. In fact, in an article that was critical of ArtPrize and the DeVos family politics that appeared in **GQ Magazine** in 2012, Rick DeVos was quoted as saying, "***I don't even want to weigh in on any of the political stuff. I just prefer to stay away from that***."

Artist Steve Lambert, who entered ArtPrize last year with the piece Capitalism Works for Me, also **challenged DeVos** around the political nature of the event, specifically the funding coming from people who have historically funded anti-LGBT campaigns.

Now there is new evidence that Rick DeVos does walk in the same political circles as his parents and grandparents. **I wrote yesterday about how I was denied entry to a Right Wing Think Tank Conference** being held in Grand Rapids and provided some information on the **State Policy Network** and its affiliate groups, like the Acton Institute and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

While looking at the **agenda for the SPN conference**, I was intrigued by a session that was being offered to. The title of the session is **ArtPrize: Unorthodox, Highly Disruptive, and Undeniably Intriguing**, presented by Rick DeVos and sponsored by the **National Review Institute**. (The National Review Institute is a political advocacy group committed to the legacy of William F. Buckley, who was an apologist for Capitalism and US Imperialism.)

So, here is Rick DeVos, who claims to stay away from politics, speaking at a conference that is dedicated to strategizing around political issues. Here is a rundown of the political agenda being discussed at the conference that DeVos is part of:

> Get States to pass Right to Work Legislation
> Get States to adopt austerity measures that will hurt workers, the public sector and public services
> Attack Public Education by redirecting more public funds to Charter Schools and other "Schools of Choice."
> Privatize Higher Education

Promote more Ag-Gag laws, which attack community based efforts around food production and silences animal rights groups challenging the industrial animal industry.
Attacks on Green Energy Legislation

This is not simply some guilt by association argument, rather it further demonstrated that Rick DeVos is welcomed by and part of a larger movement that his family has been invested in that promotes reactionary politics that are specifically harmful to workers, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, women and those who identify as secular.

Rick DeVos and his supporters can say that giving a talk on ArtPrize at the State Policy Network Conference doesn't mean he endorses their politics. However, such a claim would be disingenuous. Do you think that an artist or non-profit that presented at a conference around women's reproductive rights, for example, could claim that their presence in no way endorsed the politics of the conference? I think not.

Rick DeVos can come up with catchy titles for his presentation on ArtPrize that uses terms like unorthodox and disruptive, but the truth is that his event, his funders and his family are only interested in disrupting the lives of people that stand in their way to greater wealth accumulation.



Moral Pronouncements aren't enough: Artprize, the DeVos Family and Trump's Executive Orders

https://griid.org/2017/02/10/moral-pronouncements-arent-enough-artprize-the-devos-family-and-trumps-executive-orders/

Yesterday, Artprize made an announcement on their website that appears to be a response to some of the recent Executive Orders coming from the Trump administration, particularly the anti-immigrant, anti-refugee and anti-Muslim policies.

Here is part of what the **ArtPrize announcement**stated:

*ArtPrize operates according to a **Mission and a set of Guiding Principles**. Recently the ground shifted, and so far the policies and statements of the current administration have made what were once broadly agreeable sentiments into urgent calls to action.The*

ArtPrize team is committed to these principles so we're compelled to speak out. ArtPrize opposes any efforts to:

> *Discriminate against anyone based on religion, race, gender, sexual identity, physical ability or economic status.*
> *Detain or persecute refugees and immigrants.*
> *Limit or undermine a free press or freedom of speech.*
> *Prevent any child in the United States from accessing a quality education that includes the arts and humanities.*

While such a pronouncement is nice and all, it effectively does nothing to address the reality that is faced by immigrants, refugees and Muslims, based on the recent Executive Orders.

No doubt this pronouncement is also influenced by the recent confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, who is the mother of ArtPrize founder Rick DeVos. This seems evident based on the fourth point in the ArtPrize announcement, which says ; *Prevent any child in the United States from accessing a quality education that includes the arts and humanities.*

Show us the money!

Here are some reasons why the pronouncement is essentially meaningless.

. The US government's negative treatment towards immigrants, refugees and Muslims is nothing new. ArtPrize first came on the scene in 2009, after the Obama administration took office. During his administration **more undocumented people have been detained and deported than any previous administration.** This included an escalation in the **detention of families**. So why now?

2. This announcement is fundamentally a PR stunt aimed to head off any potential or additional anger that might be directed at ArtPrize because of the growing animosity towards the Betsy DeVos confirmation and the **increased exposure to the DeVos family history** as a result of the nomination and eventual confirmation.

3. ArtPrize was founded by Rick DeVos, receives a tremendous amount from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation on an annual basis, gets money from other DeVos family members and the circle of friends that they associate with, like the Seechia, Jandernoa, John Kennedy, etc. These people are all **part of the West Michigan power structure** that continues to support reactionary policies around labor issues, LGBTQ issues, as well as, promoting a Neoliberal Capitalist model. These people also a major contributors to the Republican Party at the state and federal level. In other words, their funding helped bring about the election of Donald trump. Therefore, unless ArtPrize is

willing to stop receiving funds from these major contributors to the GOP, the announcement is essentially meaningless.

4. Lastly, the only real action that ArtPrize could take would be to work to fund the immigrant justice, pro-refugee, in Solidarity with the Muslim community and Sanctuary movements that are currently organizing in Grand Rapids. In other words, raise millions of dollars for these movements, money which we know they are capable of raising for an art competition, so that these movements can reduce the harm being done to immigrants, refugees and Muslims throughout West Michigan.

Failure to act on these four points means that the ArtPrize pronouncement is essentially meaningless.

The funding scheme of ArtPrize

https://griid.org/2017/05/28/the-funding-scheme-of-artprize/

Yesterday, MLive reported that the City of Grand Rapids has a new event policy, which changes the payment structure for events held in Grand Rapids.

The MLive article states:

The change will impact ArtPrize the most, which will now be paying at least $9,000 in new fees to the city this year, said Tom Almonte, managing director of public services.

The change was a part of a large new fee structure the commission passed in order to make it easier for smaller community events to afford permit applications. However, the change doesn't fully account for the lowered cost as $75,000 from the city's general fund will be used to cover the difference.

The MLive article frames the issue as if entities like ArtPrize are being penalized for having an event with large crowds, when the reality is just the opposite. Like most coverage of ArtPrize, there is no critical inquiry and no context for actual costs.

First, the City of Grand Rapids is saying that they are contributing $75,000 of taxpayers money. Does this use of money from the general fund also include the cost of having members of the GRPD police the event?

Second, the additional $9,000 it will cost ArtPrize might seem like a lot of money to the public, but to the DeVos family, this is simply a drop in the bucket.

According to the most recent (2015) 990s for the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation, it states:

In addition to this loan, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation contributes money to their son Rick's annual event. Again, according to the 2015 990 document for the foundation, his parents gifted $750,000 and an additional $400,000 in two separate line items.

The Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has assets listed at $55 million and change. Foundation money is a way for rich people to hide their wealth from being taxed. However, if the Dick & Betsy Foundation want to pay the $9,000 fee the City of Grand Rapids is now asking, that is essentially like asking the rest of us to pay 90 cents.

In addition to the large sums of money that the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation provides, several other family foundations make sizable donations to ArtPrize, along with dozens of other sponsors.

Then there is the fact that each individual artist must pay $50 to register the art they have created for ArtPrize. In 2015, there were 1,742 artists who entered ArtPrize, which at $50 a pop comes to $87,100.

To top it off, while a few artists win cash prizes, all of them give their labor for free. Imagine having several thousand artists create all kinds of art pieces, in various mediums, and not get compensated one penny.

It seems that the DeVos family has figured out another way to redirect public funds to cover some of the cost of ArtPrize, use non-taxed foundation money to underwrite the event, have sponsors pony up thousands more and get 2,000 artists to give free labor and pay money to enter this damn contest. Isn't capitalism wonderful!

ArtPrize, art and the aesthetic experience: An interview with Richard Kooyman

https://griid.org/2017/08/07/artprize-art-and-the-aesthetic-experience-an-interview-with-richard-kooyman/

We recently conducted an interview with artist Richard Kooyman, someone who has been critical of ArtPrize from the very beginning. Richard and his partner began a campaign to boycott ArtPrize, a campaign which you can find at this link https://www.facebook.com/groups/600028213541598/.

What made you decide to want to organize such a campaign?

ArtPrize/DeVos Resistance was organized by myself and Melanie Parke after the election of Donald Trump. We began the group when Betsy DeVos, one of ArtPrize's founders choose to work for Trump, but our objection to the ArtPrize model began the very first year after it was announced.
As artists we felt boycotting an art event involving Betsy DeVos is an important political statement and it's something artist's could easily do. We started a Facebook page and a Twitter account. Both of these were blocked right away by ArtPrize.

We are calling for a boycott of ArtPrize by artist and viewers. We feel that if more people know about the connection of the DeVos's to ArtPrize they wouldn't want to attend an event that ultimately benefits the pocket book and cultural cache of Betsy DeVos and her family. Boycotting is a direct action that can have an important effect and it doesn't cost you time or money. In fact, boycotting ArtPrize will save you time and money!

As an artist, what do you find objectionable about ArtPrize?

There are two heads to this snake called ArtPrize. One is the politics of the people behind ArtPrize and their view of Art, and the other is the event model itself. The two are intimately ensnarled.
The history of Dick and Betsy DeVos's political activism is both religious and capitalist. There has been a lot written about them online. Janet Reitman wrote a great piece for Rolling Stone where she unpacks this really well.

There is this thread of privatization running through all of their political agenda. They have this belief that anything will be better off if it can be taken out of the governmental realm and privatized. The DeVos's see the privatization of everything from schools to culture as an economic opportunity but also a way to control these things and to profit from them in the process. From the start ArtPrize was promoted as a return to "democracy" in the arts. They even called it "part social experiment". The Grand Rapids Press quotes Betsy Devos as saying, "Dick and I share our son's vision for encouraging everyone to explore the arts in a truly democratic way."

From the onset that just smelled wrong to me. There is no inherent democratic quality to art. Art just is. You don't "democratically" experience art. You experience it. It's important to note that people like the DeVos's aren't advocating for "democracy" in banking or real estate or even when it comes to voting, so it beg's the question why are they so concerned with "democracy" in the Arts? I can only guess that to the DeVos's there is an element of controlling culture in the ArtPrize model which they liked. Culture like political opinion can be controlled if you have enough money and power and dictate the terms of engagement. And I think they didn't want Institutions like the NEA, which they have

wanted to eliminate for years, setting the narrative for culture. They want to set the narrative and they want to make money in the process.

The other head of the snake is the event model itself. It's unsustainable for artists. It's a pay -to -play model that takes advantage of artists as free content to capitalize off of. Let's be honest, the real purpose behind ArtPrize isn't Art, it's the economic development of Grand Rapids businesses, many of which are owned by the DeVos family. I don't think the DeVos's really are interested in Art. They want to use artists to make money. Rick DeVos said as much. He once said that initially he wanted to have a film festival but realized it would be too expensive to put on so he decided to do an art competition. After ArtPrize8 the ArtPrize team televised a wrap up of the event and the first thing they started talking about was that ArtPrize made a record $28 million dollars. It seems it's the most important selling pitch to them. ArtPrize has charts and diagrams that can tell you how many people came, and how far they walked, and how many hamburgers they ate, but they never tell you how much it costs the average artist to do ArtPrize.

ArtPrize makes $28 million dollars and yet they have the audacity to charge artist an application fee. ArtPrize will brag how they give out almost $200,000 in grants to artists but just do the math. $28 million vs. $200,000. The NY artist John Powers once called ArtPrize a "scrum for a prize", which it is. It dangles this big carrot in front of artists, who have a hard enough time surviving in the world. It's a model that uses us for their own financial gain and it's not right.

Some people argue that since it is so successful, the majority of people really must love it. How do you respond to this?

It doesn't really matter if a lot of people like it. In Spain lot's of people like bullfighting, but that doesn't make it right. Lot's of people voted for Trump. That doesn't mean they made the right choice.

ArtPrize is an example of the success of today's neoliberal politics. ArtPrize is bright and shiny. You can buy swag. It has large crowds. It feels like something big is going on. It's got that perfect aesthetic balance of cutting edge along with soft puppy dogs. But like most neoliberalism the harsher realities behind the scene aren't always visible. Most people walking around don't realize that these artists paid to apply, paid to make the work, ship their work, paid to be in GR for 19 days, and then had to ship it all home again, all while area businesses made $28 million dollars. People don't see that aspect of ArtPrize.
There is this long standing myth that visual artists should be willing to show there work for free because it's good exposure. That is changing. Organizations like Working Artist and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.) are arguing that visual artists need to be paid for what they provide society. Doctors, realtors, even politicians don't work for free so why should artists. The people that attend ArtPrize for the most part are not an art buying

crowd so ArtPrize should be more sensitive to the fact that they are getting all this content for free.

The other thing I hear over and over is how great ArtPrize is for children's art education. How ironic, that the DeVos's, who are the main driving force behind the destruction of our children's public education, which includes art education, now proudly boast how great it is that a school class gets to spend one day looking at art downtown as a class trip. It's sick. It's an example of them controlling culture for their personal gain.

What are some of the important things that you think people should know about the DeVos Family?

A lot of artists and people who go to ArtPrize just don't know about the political activism of the DeVos family and terrible things they have done to our society. More and more people are becoming aware now that Betsy DeVos is Secretary of Education but many don't realize the millions of dollars these people have poured into political campaigns and PAC's that want to eliminate a women's right to choose, or their long term attack on public education, unions, and environmental regulations. The poisoning of the Flint water system happened because Rick Synder became governor put there by the DeVos's. Betsy DeVos's parents were the driving money behind California's Prop 8. Her brother is the corporate mercenary Eric Prince, founder of BlackWater.

And the majority of people have no idea that Dick and Betsy DeVos gave a bunch of money to start the DeVos Institute of Arts Management which is now at the University of Maryland. Why does a extremely evangelical couple who made billions of dollars selling soap want to start an institute on the east coast that trains people in the administration and management of our arts institutions? I contend it's about controlling culture.

Also the death of the NEA can be traced back to the DeVos family. For years they backed Peter Hoekstra as congressional representative in their district. They also backed Rep. Dick Armey from Texas. Both of these men were the driving force behind the campaign to eliminate the NEA back in 1996. And they have succeeded. We have basically no meaningful public support of the arts today because of the political influence of the DeVos family.

One claim that ArtPrize makes is that they make art more democratic with their voting system and that they have brought art to the masses. What is your take on this point?

Well the funny thing about ArtPrize's initial "social experiment" is that it didn't take them long to realize it wasn't working too well for them and they were forced to change it. I think ArtPrize saw this populist idea of a public vote as a way of snubbing their noses at the his/herstorians, art writers, artists, and curators who spend their lives studying and working in the field of art. You don't just wake up one day as an artist or an art historian

or art writer. It takes a life time of knowledge building. ArtPrize wanted people to believe that Joe the plumber's opinion on art was just as valid as all of the knowledge that experts have. The DeVos's political activism doesn't like experts. They don't like expert scientists or expert historians. It's too hard to push your own religious and economic agenda through if you have to deal with someone who is an expert. It's too difficult to tear down environmental regulations aimed at corporate pollution if you have scientific experts to deal with. It make it more complicated to push your belief that a viable life begins at the moment of conception if you have those pesky scientific experts telling you it doesn't.

The problem in ArtPrize's "social experiment" came when a 13ft mosaic of Jesus with buffed up abdominal muscles won the grand prize. In the larger art world ArtPrize was seen as a bit of a joke because the public picked a horrendously schmaltzy piece as the grand prize. ArtPrize realized that if they really wanted to build a internationally recognized art event that maybe this public vote thing wasn't the best idea after all. So

the next year they came up with this whole new narrative about exploring the "tension" between the public and a new juried vote. I'm thinking it pained the DeVos's to have to do that. It went against everything ArtPrize was sent up to be about in the beginning. I remember it being a pretty funny night on social media when Jesus won the grand prize.

Now ArtPrize seems to want it both ways. On one hand they create this narrative that your opinion is the most important thing and all you need to do is come to downtown and vote your feelings. And yet they also have been adding these educational aspects to the event to help people become better educated and to be able to think and converse better about art. This public vote thing is just a great big marketing pitch to get people to show up by creating this false affect of empowerment.

Why do you think so many artists chose to buy into an event like ArtPrize?

I don't think that many artist do buy into it. I'm hoping the number who don't will increase as more and more learn about the embedded interdependence between ArtPrize and The DeVos's. I think this year the number of applicants is down to around 1400. That's really not that many considering all the artists around the country.

Those that do attend may just not be aware of the political marriage between the DeVos's and ArtPrize. I still get local artists who insist that the DeVos's politics and ArtPrize are completely separate. That's just not true. ArtPrize is listed as the primary project of the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation. Betsy listed it as her project on her personal foundation before she went to work for Trump and she served as a Director on the AP board until she went to Washington. The DeVos family still gives a lot of money to ArtPrize.

I believe in artists. I believe in their good hearts and I think that if most artists really knew about the DeVos's and the facts, they wouldn't apply.

What role(s) do you see art play in society and how does ArtPrize undermine these roles?

This is an important question to me. It's the driving force behind why I have devoted so much time and attention watchdogging ArtPrize.
Art provides society with new ideas and it asks both new and age old questions. It is

the purest human action we create. When you come to a work of art, whether that is a painting or a dance performance, it's not about you. It's really about surrendering yourself, if only for a moment, to what the artist has done. T.S Eliot said art isn't about self expression, it's about the extinction of the self. You are getting the self and all your baggage out of the way, to be able to have this profound aesthetic experience.

ArtPrize could have decided to put on a purely aesthetic experience for people. And they could have decided they would pay artists to do this. Dick and Betsy could have afforded to do this without any outside help. If that was the case I would have less of a problem with the event.

But they don't do that. Not only do they use artists for their financial gain but they intentionally scheme an aesthetics that resembles and extols corporate culture. They are saying don't surrender yourself by learning from the artist. They are saying your personal opinion, is more important than what the artist wants you to think. From the beginning ArtPrize wasn't about the pleasure of experiencing art, it was about saying everyone is going to be the judge of art. They are advocating not to surrender yourself to art, but to assert your personal opinion over art. Rick DeVos intentionally made a for profit contest, a commercial game, a circus, out of the aesthetic experience. That's a shameful and ignorant handling of something that is very important and special to me.

Grand Rapids, ArtPrize and Whiteness

https://griid.org/2017/09/28/grand-rapids-artprize-and-whiteness/

Recently, I was driving back into Michigan on highway 94 and saw a billboard just after re-entering the state that read, Cool City – Hot Art. The billboard was created by Experience GR and also included the words food, beer and music.

This billboard, in many ways, is reflective of the economic, political and cultural climate that exists in Grand Rapids. If we were to more honestly depict in words what the reality is for Grand Rapids, this is what the billboard would actually look like.

Grand Rapids is such an overtly White City. The whiteness permeates everything about the city, from the hyper-religious reality to the heavy handed entrepreneur/free market/ philanthropy crap that is constantly shoved down our throats. This is also the case with the litany of non-profits that exist, with their emphasis on practicing white savior politics. Then there is the cultural climate in Grand Rapids, where every organization claims to celebrate diversity, but more often than not engages in cultural appropriation or is patronizing to the populations they "serve." Most organizations, whether it is city government, the Chamber of Commerce or culture-focused say they love black and brown people, but only if they remain loyal to whiteness. If people of color dare to challenge the whiteness that permeates Grand Rapids, they will be further marginalized and punished.

When I say whiteness, I am not just talking about white people, I am talking about a way of being in the world that centers and privileges white reality and white values. Now ask yourself who has economic and political power in this city? Who has power to impose their will on other people or whole communities? What entities spend a great deal of time celebrating Grand Rapids and all of the lists that the city has been included in over the past 5 years? Who in this city makes it a point to say that Grand Rapids is a great place to raise a family? The answer is always white people. Whether we are talking about the DeVos family, the Meijer family, Secchia, Jandernoa, Rockford Construction, the Right Place Inc., the Art Museum, the Christian Reformed Church, the commercial news media, Experience GR, Mel Trotter Ministries or ArtPrize.

Notice in the altered billboard above that the words, beer, art and music are crossed off and replaced by poverty, racism and gentrification. While the dominant culture in Grand Rapids likes to think of beer, art and music, a disproportionate amount of those in communities of color experience, racism, poverty and gentrification. Whiteness says we need to celebrate the good things in our city, and that is because they "good" things disproportionately happen to white people.

For communities of color, the reality is quite different. Think about this. Why are there a disproportionate amount of black and brown folks living in poverty in Grand Rapids? Why are there a disproportionate amount of Black and brown folks in the Kent County Jail or facing probation in this city? Why are the public schools predominantly made up of black and brown students? Why are the neighborhoods that are experiencing gentrification disproportionately made up of black and brown folk? Why are black and brown neighborhoods disproportionate targeted by the GRPD? If Grand Rapids is so welcoming, why the hell are so many people in the immigrant and undocumented community living in constant fear? I mean, if Grand Rapids is such a cool city and the best place to raise a family, then why the hell are so many people from communities of color struggling to survive or wanting to get the hell out?

ArtPrize and Whiteness

We are in year nine of ArtPrize and that means that for a few weeks thousands of people will descend upon Grand Rapids, look at art, stay in hotels, eat in downtown restaurants and park their cars in every possible space imaginable. In addition, the city always tries to keep all these visitors from having to deal with those on the street asking for money or sleeping in storefront entryways.

Then there is the experience of many artists of color who are either outright being censored for their work or are marginalized by the lack of exposure or the intentional omission of art venues that feature works by artists of color (Cultura Collective). This is in part because ArtPrize is primarily about downtown Grand Rapids and that it has to offer whiteness. There are hotels, restaurants, bars and music venues because those with power in this community has made sure that the downtown has been heavily invested in. When you think of the Grand Rapids Brewing Company, the BOB, the Amway Grand Plaza, the DeVos Convention Center, the Art Museum or the UICA, what kind of spaces do you think they represent? These are white spaces, plain and simple.

Then there is the very nature of ArtPrize, which is often billed as a free wheeling art exhibit where anything goes. However, apart from the fact that is is an event that is bankrolled and run by members of the DeVos family, the event is really just another way to promote and celebrate the the free market. Artprize awards a select few with cash prizes, some of which are chosen by handpicked jurors and the rest are voted on by the public. Those artists that with through the public vote shows just how democratic the event truly is, according to the ArtPrize founder Rick DeVos. So rich people funding an event that financially benefits them and their friends, while the public gets to vote is called democracy? Sound familiar. This is exactly what the DeVos Fanily does in the political arena, **where they contribute millions of dollars to candidates to make sure that the legislation that gets passed protects and expands their wealth and the other values they want to impose on the rest of us**.

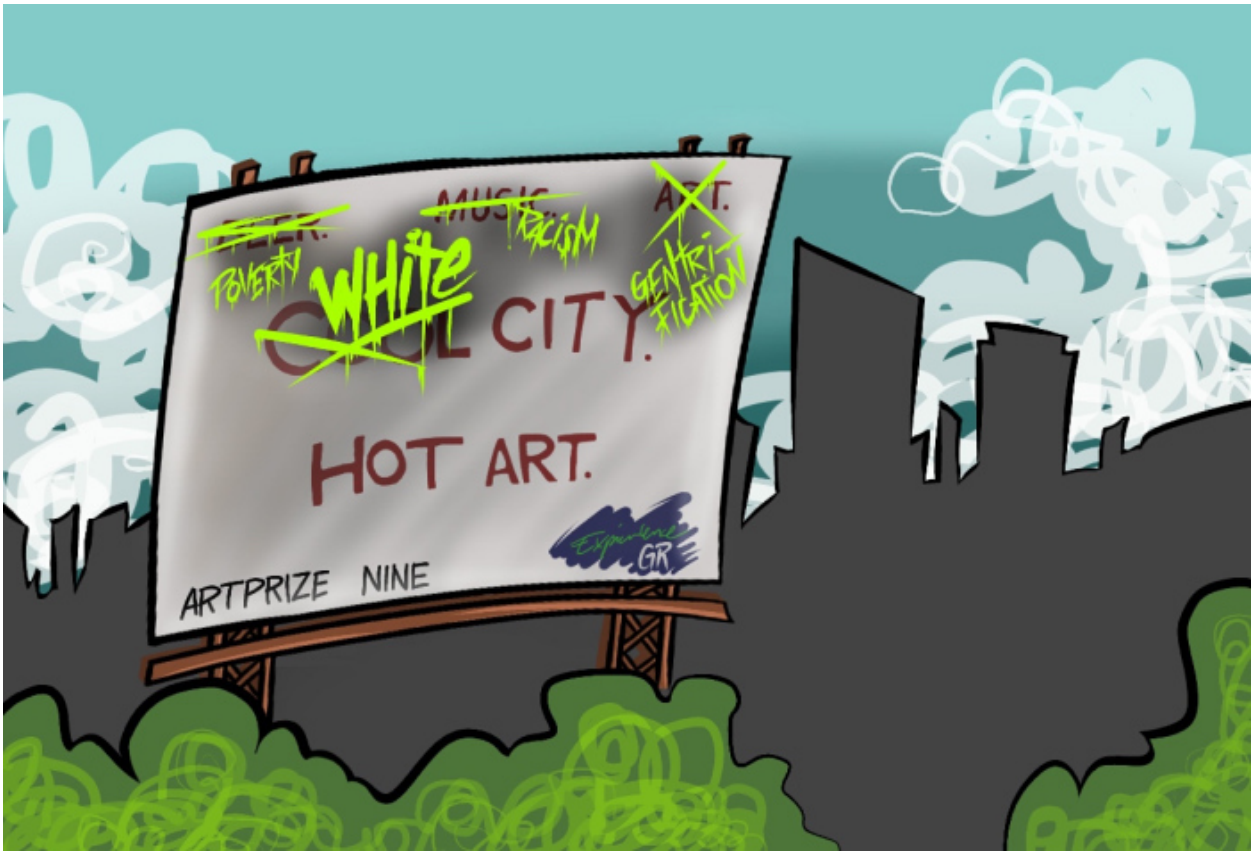
There was a recent article in the New York Times about Artprize entitled, **How a Quirky Art Prize tied to the DeVos Family Went Political**. Like most stories about ArtPrize, the NYTs piece completely misses the point. ArtPrize doesn't have to be heavy handed about the content of the art submitted. In fact, they could care less about the content. What Rick DeVos and his family care about are: the PR benefits of the event that gets people to say, "they've done so much for this city"; the amount of money they make from the annual event; and the hope that people will be less inclined to examine the power and influence their family has in West Michigan.

But there is also another aspect to the spectacle that is ArtPrize, which brings us back to the notion that Grand Rapids is a White City. The racism/white supremacy, poverty and gentrification that plagues thousands of people in this city will still plague people in this city after ArtPrize is over. Those who have political, economic and cultural power in this city, will still have that power after ArtPrize. ArtPrize does not and will not change the realities of racism/white supremacy, poverty and gentrification. ArtPrize does

maintain the status quo and business as usual, despite its appearance. In a word, ArtPrize maintains whiteness in Grand Rapids.

So, to those of us who are descendants of Europeans and Euro-Americans, we have to come to terms with the reality that Grand Rapids is a White City. What some people call West Michigan Nice, is essentially whiteness. West Michigan nice is not wanting to upset anyone, it's avoiding conflict and it is not wanting to confront the ugly reality of our history or the present.

At this point, maybe readers will expect some sort of plan or suggestion on how Grand Rapids can stop being a White City. However, as I have learned over the years from those in communities of color, we all need to figure this shit out and stop wanting people to provide us with a fucking blueprint on how to stop participating in white supremacy. We (us white folk) need to do the hard work, get over our fragility and start working on dismantling white supremacy in all its manifestations.



10 years of ArtPrize critique and resistance
https://griid.org/2018/09/16/10-years-of-artprize-critique-and-resistance/

It has been 10 years since Rick DeVos announced that he and his family's money (Dick & Betsy DeVos have bankrolled ArtPrize) would be hosting an annual event in downtown Grand Rapids, known as ArtPrize.

We have written about this event from the beginning, offering a critique of the monied spectacle, which uses artist labor and public resources that primarily benefit private wealth.

Early on it became clear that the local news media would not offer any sort of scrutiny of the annual event, instead they became cheerleaders and collaborators. Some years we even tracked election coverage and compared it to ArtPrize coverage. ArtPrize garnered more coverage than representative democracy.

We have also documented to benefits from the annual monied spectacle and we have posted artist responses to ArtPrize.

As the annual event gets ready to kick-off, we simply wanted to provide our readers with several of the articles we have written over the years, to provide some context for why it is important to critique and resist this monied spectacle.

ArtPrize trumps democracy: What the Press coverage tells us about the Press

What is ArtPrize?

When elites give money to each other: ArtPrize financials for 2010

MLive article misses the point of the GQ article on ArtPrize

Photo bomb challenges the politics of ArtPrize , with online campaign

The Political Economy of ArtPrize – Part I

The Political Economy of ArtPrize – Part II

NO THANKS ARTPRIZE

Moral Pronouncements aren't enough: Artprize, the DeVos Family and Trump's Executive Orders

The funding scheme of ArtPrize

ArtPrize, art and the aesthetic experience: An interview with Richard Kooyman

Grand Rapids, ArtPrize and Whiteness



ArtPrize is Back and I still Hate it
https://griid.org/2021/09/15/artprize-is-back-and-i-still-hate-it/

So, ArtPrize is back, and I still despise what it is and who primarily benefits from it.

Here at GRIID, I have been writing about the monied art spectacle that is run by the son of Dick & Betsy DeVos for the past 12 years. With that, here is a list of why I still hate ArtPrize.

- They exploits artists. ArtPrize gets artists to create art to be displayed in order to attract people to come and spend los of money on food, beer, parking and hotels. However, artists are not compensated in anyway. This year, ArtPrize has made some grant funding available to certain artists, but that still means the bulk of submissions will not be compensated for their time nor the supplies needed to create their art.

- **ArtPrize gets public money from the City of Grand Rapids to promote the event.** Why should any public money be given to an event that is run by a billionaire family, especially since the City already provides lots of other in kind services that costs taxpayers money, like the use of police during the monied spectacle.
- The local news media spends entirely too much time and energy on ArtPrize, essentially becoming a PR agent for an event that is run by a billionaire family. I mean, WOODTV8 even has a special studio inside the Grand Rapids Art Museum, created just to broadcast live about ArtPrize. In 2010, GRIID conducted a 56-day study of the Grand Rapids Press, to compare how much coverage there was on ArtPrize and elections in Michigan. The 2010 election include a Governor's, Congressional races, State races, County races, candidates for the Michigan Supreme Court, and several statewide ballot initiatives. **During the 56-day study period, we found there were 87 election articles, but 153 ArtPrize articles**. For the full findings go to **this link**.
- Most of the **sponsors of ArtPrize are either other members of the DeVos family or members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure**. This group of people fund Republican candidates from the local level all the way up to the likes of Donald Trump. This would provide a perfect opportunity to boycott or disrupt the monied spectacle, yet liberals and progressives would rather attend ArtPrize that challenge their funding sources and the politics behind it.
- Early on in the ArtPrize experiment, one of the members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, Sam Cummings, provided us with an honest reason why ArtPrize exists, when he said "***Our long-term goal is really to import capital – intellectual capital, and ultimately real capital. And this (ArtPrize) is certainly an extraordinary tool***." ArtPrize has always been about bringing money to the downtown elites. We wrote **The Political Economy of ArtPrize – Part I** and **The Political Economy of ArtPrize – Part II** a few years back to make the point about who the primary beneficiaries of the money being spent during ArtPrize.
- ArtPrize is primarily about Whiteness. Sure, there are Black, Indigenous and other people of color that come to ArtPrize or submit their art. However, there are so many BIOPC people who have shared with me that they don't feel safe during ArtPrize, nor do they feel like it is an event that centers their lived experience. We wrote about this dynamic is an article entitled, **Grand Rapids, ArtPrize and Whiteness**.
- In 2015, the **State Policy Network** (a far right policy network) was being hosted at the Amway Grand Plaza at the very same time that ArtPrize was being held. The founder of ArtPrize, Rick DeVos, presented at the far right conference, with a session entitled, ArtPrize: Unorthodox, Highly Disruptive, and Undeniably Intriguing. Here is a list of other session being offered at the same conference, which should tell you something about how Rick DeVos views ArtPrize:
- Get States to pass Right to Work Legislation
- Get States to adopt austerity measures that will hurt workers, the public sector and public services.

- Attack Public Education by redirecting more public funds to Charter Schools and other “Schools of Choice.”
- Privatize Higher Education.
- Promote more Ag-Gag laws, which attack community based efforts around food production and silences animal rights groups challenging the industrial animal industry.
- Attacks on Green Energy Legislation.

Lastly, one of the things that I hate most about monied spectacles like ArtPrize, is that they deceive us into a certain narrative about our lives, which is to say a Capitalist narrative. I want to live in a world where artists don’t have to worry about having their basic needs met and can create art that they don’t have to worry about people being offended by or censored. I want to live in a world where art is not a commodity. I want to live in a world where we all have plenty of leisure time to make art, to play, to learn another language or do whatever brings us joy. I don’t want to live in a world where the same people who exploit and oppress us are the same people that host art events that kill our souls, while they try to convince us it’s a fun.

How do we justify ArtPrize with all the horrible shit the DeVos family does?

https://griid.org/2022/08/16/how-do-we-justify-artprize-with-all-the-horrible-shit-the-devos-family-does/

So, we are approaching the beginning of the fall season and that will mean that ArtPrize will be back in full swing in downtown Grand Rapids.

ArtPrize will mean that thousands of people from all over the world will descend upon Grand Rapids from September 15th through October 2nd. Businesses will be hoping, the hotels will be full and parking lots will be over capacity. People will be voting on artwork that artists have submitted…..for a fee, and the GRPD will be out in force making sure that tourists are safe from unhoused people or dissidents challenging the fetishized event, all at taxpayer expense.

I have been writing about and critiquing ArtPrize since it began. Last year I posted an article entitled, **Artprize is back and I still hate it**. In that post I listed 7 main posts why I object to ArtPrize. It was interesting to see the reaction from people and how they justified why they would attended ArtPrize and why it should be supported. I will get to those justifications in a bit, along with a list of the harmful shit that the DeVos family does, but first I think it is worth talking about how the City of Grand Rapids uses public money to support ArtPrize, without out consent.

In the **August 9th Grand Rapids Fiscal Committee Agenda**, there are two separate resolutions in support of ArtPrize. The first resolution begins on page 21, which provides

$50,000 from the City's General Fund sponsorship. The City of Grand Rapids justifies the $50,000 contribution from the general fund, by stating:

A significant portion of these public art activations occur in City parks, facilities and public spaces, encouraging visitors and residents to explore the city and creating much needed foot traffic for adjacent and nearby businesses.

On top of that, the $50,000 from the City's General Fund, is actually money the federal government provided for the American Rescue Plan Act (page 22). I think an important and reasonable question to ask is, **why isn't this public money, which was given to the City to provide COVID relief for people, not going directly to people who are still struggling to survive because of COVID?**

The second resolution begins on page 23, where the City of Grand Rapids will be providing an additional $50,000 in support of ArtPrize through Mobile GR, plus $50,000 more from in kind services. This resolution justifies the $100,000 in support of ArtPrize by stating (page 25):

ArtPrize has partnered with the City of Grand Rapids Mobile GR Department as an Official Parking and Mobility Sponsor since 2012 and has agreed to feature the City's facilities and services as a preferred parking and mobility provider in its event publications.

Therefore, the City of Grand Rapids will be providing $150,000 in public money to support ArtPrize. Add to that the amount of GRPD officers who will be assigned to patrol ArtPrize, plus the overtime, which will be thousands more from the City Budget, which the public has no real say in. **Thus, the City of Grand Rapids will be spending an estimated $200,000 of public money for an event put on by a family that is worth billions.**

There was also some additional resolutions from the **August 9th Community Development Committee Agenda**, which are rather instructive. On pages 11 – 12, there are several items listed that the Grand Rapids City Manager must approve as it relates to ArtPrize. Some of these include pre-approved vendors in the designated ArtPrize boundaries, the use of parking during ArtPrize, signage, *plus no sounds amplification systems can be used unless they are approved by ArtPrize and in consultation with the City Manager.* ***If anyone decides to use a bullhorn to amplify messages that are not in compliance with the DeVos-run event, you will like be arrested.***

I mention these resolutions for the reasons that are already stated, but also because it is important to note that the Grand Rapids City Manager, Mark Washington, not only gets to make decisions about the use of public money during Artprize, **Mark Washington also sits on the Board of Directors of ArtPrize**. **Seems like a clear conflict of interest, doesn't it?**

Justifying ArtPrize

Over the years, there have been several common justifications that people use to defend the spectacle that is ArtPrize. Here are a few of the most common, with my response.

ArtPrize brings people to downtown Grand Rapids, which is good for the City. It is true that ArtPrize brings people downtown for a few weeks and it does result in significant revenues for the private sector – hotels, restaurants, bars, parking facilities, retail shops. The amount of money that is spent during ArtPrize does benefit businesses, but how much of those profits translate into increased wages for those who do the dirty work? People who wait on customers, those who bus tables, wash dishes, cook, clean hotel rooms, park cars, sit in the parking booths, etc, do you think they are making a livable wage? No. The revenue generated from ArtPrize end up in the pockets of businesses that are disproportionately owned by those who are also members of the Capitalist Class. As Sam Cummings, one of the partners with CWD Real Estate Development said early on about ArtPrize, **"*Our long-term goal is really to import capital – intellectual capital, and ultimately real capital. And this (ArtPrize) is certainly an extraordinary tool*."**

ArtPrize provides an opportunity for LGBTQ, the disability community and those who are part of the BIPOC community to showcase their art. Again, like the point about bringing people to downtown, this is a true statement. However, to me, this is a strange way to look at the work of artists that are queer, disabled and/or BIPOC. How about we question the homophobic, transphobic, ablest and White Supremacist society that we live in, which are the primary obstacles for queer, disabled and BIPOC artists getting the exposure they deserve. In addition, the DeVos family is ideologically, politically and financially committed to undermining a great deal of what the queer, trans, and BIPOC communities are demanding and are generally only supportive of them if they embrace a Christian, nationalist and Entrepreneurial ethos that the ArtPrize-created/funded family is all about.

ArtPrize provides an opportunity for people to win a lot a money, which could change the future for the artist who gets the most votes*.* Again, I get the sentiment here, but for me, the most honest question to ask would be, "*What does it say about our society where people have to play the lottery, have to hope to win ArtPrize or get selected for funding from Start Garden (another DeVos creation) in order to feel financially secure?*" Or to put it another way, why do we live in a meritocracy where only some people are financially rewarded and huge sections of the population are forced to live in poverty? If the basic needs of everyone were met and we lived in a society that valued real equity, then artists would not have to perform for people to be valued.

The DeVos family has done so much for Grand Rapids, and ArtPrize is just one example of how much they care about this community. This one always puzzles me, since it is an oversimplification for how the DeVos family influences what happens in Grand Rapids. The DeVos family does own a great deal of property in downtown, with a near monopoly of the hotels, a bar and they have all of their foundations and investment firms located at 200 Monroe – in that newly developed complex on the corner of Monroe and Lyon. All of their properties have primarily benefited their family,

not the community as a whole. Then there are the entities that they have either created or sit on the board of directors of. Grand Action was a creation with a tremendous amount of DeVos influence and they have not only proposed projects – the arena, the downtown market, the soon to be amphitheater – they financially benefit from those projects. The DeVos family also is involved with the West Michigan Policy Forum, the Acton Institute, the Right Place Inc, the GR Chamber of Commerce, the Econ Club and so many other entities that are primarily driven by financial interests that primarily benefit those who are already part of the Capitalist Class. The DeVos family does not do anything that does not support their financial, political or ideological interests.

The harm done by the DeVos family

I could tell you to just read the document GRIID has created, **We Do What We Want: A DeVos Family Reader**, but here are a few of the ways they use their wealth and influence to do tremendous harm.

First, the DeVos Family Foundations, which are numerous, are a mechanism (as are all foundations) to hide their wealth from taxation. In addition, the DeVos Family Foundations have give millions to Religious Right groups, which zealously oppose gay marriage and trans rights, along with opposing people's right to have an abortion. Their foundations also fund think tanks like the Mackinac Center, the Acton Institute, the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute. These groups zealously defend the economic system of Capitalism and fight against those who challenge it, such as worker unions and those fighting for a living wage. The DeVos Family Foundations have also inserted themselves in local education systems, which has also resulted in those schools adopting a more pro-Capitalism framework, along with injecting religious beliefs into the public sphere.

Second, the DeVos Family has contributed more campaign money to the Republican Party than any other family in Michigan. Since the early 1990s, the wealthiest family in West Michigan has contributed over $100 Million to the GOP, specifically for the purpose of adopting public policies that harm worker wages, the right to unionize, to undermine public education, to attack LGBTQ rights, the limit Civil Rights for BIPOC communities, to limit the taxation of corporations, to use public money to fund private businesses (subsidies) and to promote economic policies that continue to destroy eco-systems and promote Climate Catastrophe. The DeVos Family has contributed more than any other entity to get Kent County Prosecutor Chris Becker elected. Chris Becker has made it clear to the public that he will honor a 1931 law that prohibits abortion in Michigan. The DeVos Family collectively has been the largest donor (so far) to the campaign of GOP Gubernatorial Candidate Tudor Dixon, who not only embraces the same ideologically-drive far right policies that the DeVos Family support, Dixon also believes that the 2020 Election was not legitimate. In 2020, the DeVos Family was a significant donor to the re-election campaign of Donald Trump. This means that after all of the heinous shit that Donald Trump did during his presidency, the DeVos Family decided to funded the neo-fascist president in 2020.

A whole lot more could be said about the real harm that the DeVos Family has done ever since the Amway Corporation put them on the map, but to me it boggles the mind that people can somehow engage in some sort of mental jujitsu to justify the existence of ArtPrize. How can people separate the oppressive policies that the DeVos family has funded and then walk around downtown GR and think that ArtPrize is just an art competition? **For me, there is no fundamental different between people participating in ArtPrize – knowing what we know about the DeVos Family – or attending a county fair hosted and funded by the KKK.**

8. Betsy DeVos Watch

Grand Rapids Right Wing Think Tank President Praises Betsy DeVos after Confirmation as Secretary of Education

https://griid.org/2017/02/16/grand-rapids-right-wing-think-tank-president-praises-betsy-devos-after-confirmation-as-secretary-of-education/

The Acton Institute President Robert Sirico said last week on a **blog post**, that Betsy DeVos was the best choice for Secretary of Education.

The blog post does acknowledge early on that the Betsy and other members of the DeVos Family have played an intricate role in supporting the work of the Acton Institute over the years.

Betsy DeVos is a former board member of the Acton Institute. She and her family also have been loyal philanthropists for the Grand Rapids, Mich., area of which Acton faithfully belongs. That written, it must be added that Acton's relationship with the DeVos family and Betsy specifically and personally shows the passion and intellect that she brings to bear on those issues upon which she has been focused for decades. Among those issues is school choice so direly needed for students forced to suffer the failures rampant in our public schools.

However, Fr. Sirico fails to mention the vast amounts of money (over a million dollars) the DeVos family has contributed to the right wing think tanks since its founding, nor

does he mention that other members of the DeVos family have served on the Acton Board or that Betsy's mother, Elsa Prince Broekhuizen, currently serves on the Acton Board.

The founder of the Acton Institute then goes on to say:

The hue and cry from Betsy DeVos' detractors has been, frankly, disingenuous. She has shown time and again her mastery of intricate details of the many problems facing our country, and now has an opportunity to reverse the unfortunate circumstances facing many of our nation's public schools.

I'm not sure of her mastery of intricate details, but I do agree with Fr. Sirico that Betsy DeVos intends to reverse the circumstances of the nation's public schools.

For a significantly different take on what Betsy DeVos' confirmation as Secretary of Education means check out this **interview by Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting** that was posted last week.

Protecting Betsy DeVos: On the Nature and Function of Power

https://griid.org/2017/02/20/protecting-betsy-devos-on-the-nature-and-function-of-power/

It has been reported in many **news sources** that the new Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, now is receiving protection from the US Marshal Service.

This news comes just days after Betsy DeVos was confronted by protestors who preventer her from entering a public school in Washington, DC, as can be seen in this video.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

The decision to provide US Marshals to accompany Betsy DeVos, should come as no surprise to those who are familiar with the nature and function of power in US politics.

Those who have power over others, those with political and economic power, will always be the beneficiaries of protection from state agents, like the US Marshal Service. The nature and function of power in the US is such that those who have power will be protected at all costs and anyone who threatens that power will suffer the consequences.

Whether you are protestors trying to non-violently prevent a government official from entering a public school, water protectors trying to stop an oil pipeline from entering the land you care for or fast food workers fighting for a living wage, you are threatening power. When power is threatened, it will engage in various forms of repression to suppress those engaged in whatever form of resistance they chose to employ.

> When was the last time you saw cops defend people from corporate greed?
> When was the last time you saw ICE officials defend immigrants who are fleeing political or economic repression?
> When was the last time you saw an FBI agent defend those fighting against Islamophobia and hate crimes?
> When was the last time you saw a member of the Grand Rapids Police Department defend a black person from other law enforcement agents who wanted to do them harm?

The fact that Betsy DeVos is now receiving protection from federal law enforcement agents, is based upon how power functions in this society. She represents power and any threat to that power will not be tolerated.

Here we can turn to the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who has some very astute things to say about power, from an **1857 speech**:

"This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. In the light of these ideas, Negroes will be hunted at the North and held and flogged at the South so long as they submit to those devilish outrages and make no resistance, either moral or physical. Men may not get all they pay for in this world, but they must certainly pay for all they get. If we ever get free from the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others."

The Business Press coddles Betsy and the rest of the DeVos Family

https://griid.org/2017/03/07/the-business-press-coddles-betsy-and-the-rest-of-the-devos-family/

On Sunday, one of the two major business publications in West Michigan, ran a front page article headline, ***As Betsy DeVos takes Cabinet post, family to continue community engagement***.

The MiBiz article presents Betsy DeVos and the rest of the DeVos Family as, ***"inextricably woven into the community."*** This is not an inaccurate statement, rather a statement from a certain perspective. Those of us who write about local politics might call it a process of population management or social control.

We use those kinds of terms, especially since the DeVos Family through the organizations they are apart of (West Michigan Policy Forum, GR Chamber of Commerce, Great Lakes Education Project, Grand Action, etc) and their foundations as a way to influence local, regional and state politics that reflects the values they embrace – anti-working class, homophobic, neo-liberal capitalist, hyper-conservative christian and white supremacist values. These are evidenced by the organizations they are part of. The foundations also perpetuate these values, but also provide major funding sources for the non-profit sector in West Michigan as a means of censoring these groups from even thinking about challenging those values.

The MiBiz article spends a fair amount of time talking about the ways in which Betsy DeVos has had to divest from certain areas, particularly areas related to education. There is a link in the article to the **108-page document from the US Office of Government Ethics**.

Related to Betsy DeVos having to remove herself from being part of some of the family holdings, MiBis cited Remos Lenio, partner at investment banking firm **Tillerman & Co.** in Grand Rapids. **Lenio, has a person connection to the DeVos family and is said to share the DeVos Family's desire to make Grand Rapids into a "Christian Wall Street."**

None of the DeVos Family members are cited in the MiBiz article, instead we hear from two of the DeVos Family operatives, Greg McNeilly and John Truscott. McNeilly, who ran Dick DeVos' failed campaign for the Governor of Michigan in 2006, continues to work as a DeVos operative, when he became the Windquest Group's Chief Operating Officer in 2012. McNeilly also runs one of the DeVos state policy front groups, the **Michigan Freedom Fund**, which lobbies for policies that represent the DeVos Family's conservative christian values and neo-liberal capitalist interests.

John Truscott used to work for former Governor John Engler as his Press Secretary. In addition to being a spokesperson for the DeVos Family, Truscott is a founding partner of **Truscott Rossman**, a public relations agency based in Michigan, which has clients such as the Van Andel Institute, CWD (Cummings, Weirda & DeVos), Experience Grand Rapids and the City of Grand Rapids.

Towards the end of the article is states which boards that Betsy DeVos has had to step down from, but the MiBiz piece suggests that there are no major changes to what the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation does in the community.

However, the MiBiz article does not provide any analysis of what the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation has provided money to since it's inception. They simply quote John Truscott who says, ***"No major changes are expected from Dick and Betsy's foundation. While she does not have a role in the foundation while serving as Secretary, the family will continue to help people and make a significant philanthropic impact."***

I guess what Truscott means by helping people is to fund all kinds of groups that attack public sector workers, working class families, the LGBT community, women's reproductive rights and to support Religious Right groups in Michigan and across the nation.

According to the most recent year available on Guidestar for the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation (2013), here are some of the "charitable" organizations they contributed to**:

Acton Institute $250,000
Alliance for School Choice $250,000
Bethany Christian Services $25,000
Endeavor Global Inc $162,500
Foundation for Excellence in Education $100,000
Great Lakes education Foundation $200,000
Mackinac Center for Public Policy $50,000
Northwood University $200,000
Pregnancy Resource Center $20,000
Right to Life Michigan $25,000
Willow Creek Association $1,000,000

In the end, the MiBiz piece not only fails to scrutinize the DeVos Family, it only cites DeVos Family operatives as it relates to what their businesses and foundation are involved in. Considering this article appeared in the business press, it is no surprise then that MiBiz ends up coddling the most powerful family in West Michigan.

The Misleading and Unverified claims of Betsy DeVos

https://griid.org/2017/03/20/the-misleading-and-unverified-claims-of-betsy-devos/

Last Thursday, it was reported that Education Secretary Betsy DeVos was claiming that the administration's education budget, "places power in the hands of parents and families."

MLive reported on this story last week, with the announcement that the Trump administration's budget cuts would take out $9 Billion from the Department of Education.

In a statement released by Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education said:

*"The budget places power in the hands of parents and families to choose schools that are best for their children by investing an additional $1.4 billion in school choice programs. It continues support for the nation's most vulnerable populations, such as students with disabilities, while streamlining and simplifying funding for college and continuing to help make college education more affordabl*e."

The MLive article also includes some additional breakdown of the proposed budget, but beyond that there is no verification of the claims made by Betsy DeVos, nor are there any other voices or perspectives represented in the article.

The lack of verification of claims is pretty standard for stories appearing on Mlive. However, what is even more problematic about the headline and the statement that DeVos made in this story is that it normalizes the position of those who have been pushing for the privatization of public education, expanding the number of charter schools and school vouchers. This is essentially what Betsy DeVos means when she says that the proposed education budget, which increases funding for "school choice," will do since school choice is code word for privatization, charter schools and school vouchers.

The celebration of increased funding for so-called "school choice," was celebrated by **Education Week**, which posted a headline entitled, ***School Choice a Big Winner in President Trump's Budget.*** Education Week also endorses the further privatization of education and a school choice emphasis.

The same can be said for the Michigan-based organization that Betsy DeVos helped to create, the Great Lakes Education Project. **GLEP also celebrates the budget** and the fact that President Trump, in his first address to Congress, spoke about "school choice."

A counter to the so-called School Choice narrative can be seen in a recent posting on PRWatch, entitled ***Trump and DeVos Push ALEC Privatization Scheme as Studies Document Voucher Failures.***

The PRWatch article is important for several reasons. First, they point out that the Trump administration education proposals are modeled on the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) bills,which have been adopted in at least 17 states.

The PRWatch article also points out the push to use taxpayer money to fund the expansion of religious schools, along with the fact that when the public can vote on it, School Voucher Ballot initiatives have failed.

Such a counter narrative is important if people are to have a more complete understanding of education policy and how it continues to shift in the direction that Betsy DeVos and the organizations that she and her husband have been funding for years, such as the **American Federation for Children** and the **Alliance for School Choice.**

A great example of a counter narrative, was the recent article in Rolling Stone Magazine entitled, **Betsy DeVos' Holy War.**

Betsy DeVos compares School Choice to Uber or Lyft

https://griid.org/2017/03/31/betsy-devos-compares-school-choice-to-uber-or-lyft/

Now that Betsy DeVos has bought a seat in the new administration, we thought it might be a good time to begin doing a regular column entitled, Betsy DeVos Watch. These columns will be an opportunity to provide regular analysis of the statements and policies put forth by the Secretary of Education.

On Wednesday, **Betsy DeVos delivered a speech at the Brookings Institute**. DeVos continued to promote her commitment to the so-called "School of Choice" policy, which is essentially a policy that undermines public education.

It makes complete sense that DeVos would speak at the Brookings Institute on this topic, especially since the organization publishes an annual **Education Choice and Competition Index** (ECCI). "*The intent of the ECCI is to create public awareness of the differences among districts in their support of school choice, provide a framework for efforts to examine the impact of choice and competition, and document changes over time in the policies and practices of school choice."*

There is one major point we want to emphasize from DeVos' comments delivered at the Brookings Institute. DeVos made the comparison between school choice and

transportation. Betsy stated, "*Nobody mandates that you take an Uber over a taxi, nor should they. But if you think ridesharing is the best option for you, the government shouldn't get in your way.*"

This comparison is instructive in many ways. The comparison by DeVos essentially seeks to frame education through a market lens, which is no surprise considering that this lens, along with a religious lens, are how she sees the world. As someone who comes from the capitalist class and then married into an even more staunch proponent of the capitalist class, Betsy DeVos whole heartedly believes that the neoliberal market should dictate what we do.

Seeing the world through a market lens is problematic in so many ways. DeVos sees transportation options as choices, but that is because she ignores the history and context of how transportation options have been imposed on us. The very fact that most of us are limited to car transportation is due to the history of the influence of the automobile industry, as is well documented in the documentary film, **Taken for a Ride**. However, if our transportation system in the US had been designed with the public interest and ecological concerns in mind, we would have a very efficient mass transit system that would benefit everyone. Therefore, the so-called choice model for either transportation or schools is really an illusion. The education system has been determined by those in power who have never had the interest of the masses in mind.

Lastly, it should be stated that Betsy DeVos' comparison between transportation of choice and school choice is also disingenuous, especially when one realizes that she comes from a family that has used private chauffeurs, owns a $40 million yacht, has had **helicopter pads at their homes** and utilizes their own private airplanes for their transportation "needs."

Betsy DeVos Watch: When Role Models Visit a School for Girls

https://griid.org/2017/04/07/betsy-devos-watch-when-role-models-visit-a-school-for-girls/

Last week, we kicked off the first installment in our series of articles under the **heading of Betsy DeVos Watch.**

In this week's article we take a look at a visit from the Secretary of Education to a charter school in the nation's capitol. **DeVos was visiting** Excel Academy in Washington, DC and began her brief comments by stating, "*As we bring our education*

system into the 21st century, it is important we highlight the many types of different schools serving the varied and unique needs of individual students."

Of course, there is nothing surprising about these comments or which school DeVos visited, since she has been saying for years that she thinks that charter and private schools would be better for the country.

However, what was more interesting than the fact that Betsy DeVos visited Excel Academy, was who she brought with her. Accompanying the Secretary of Education was the President's wife Melania Trump and Queen Rania Al-Abdullah from Jordan. Excel Academy is an all girls school, which is why DeVos chose two women to be her guests for the school visit on Wednesday.

DeVos ended her comments at Excel Academy by stating, *"I'm honored to have joined First Lady Melania Trump and Queen Rania Al-Abdullah in visiting this exemplary school. I thank Excel Academy for shaping these young women's lives in a positive and meaningful way."*

Let us take a moment to unpack what kind of message DeVos and her guests could have sent to the all-female students who attend Excel Academy and what kind of role models each of the them represent in the real world.

First, Betsy DeVos grew up in a family that was extremely wealthy and one that had very reactionary beliefs about women and families. Betsy then married into an even wealthier family, which also has a long history of supporting religious values that often demean women and promote patriarchal values. Both the DeVos and Prince families have spent millions of dollars supporting groups like Focus on the Family, The Family Research Council and Promise Keepers (just to name a few), all of which promote patriarchal values with very narrowly defined gender roles. The young girls attending Excel Academy could also learn the idea that wealth gives you power, buys you access and allows you the ability to impose your will on the rest of society.

Then there is the President's wife Melania Trump. There have been lots of demeaning things written about Melania and we in no way want to contribute to gossip and petty views about the President's wife. However, we will say that it is no doubt quite probable that these girls that attend Excel Academy are aware of the history of how Trump has viewed women, **along with the sexist comments he has made** and doesn't apologize for. What sort of message does that send to these girls at Excel Academy.

Lastly, there is Queen Rania Al-Abdullah from Jordan. While some might think that being royalty is rather cool, the fact is that Jordanians live under a monarchy, do **not have terribly progressive policies regarding women and girls** and on top of that are a **major recipient of US military aid**.

So when Betsy DeVos says she wants to see young women's lives be shaped in a positive and meaningful way, we would say don't use the Secretary of Education and her guests as role models.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Listening to CEOs, Workforce Development and Student Loans

https://griid.org/2017/04/13/betsy-devos-watch-listening-to-ceos-workforce-development-and-student-loans/

On Tuesday, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos joined President Trump and several other cabinet members for a Strategy and Policy Forum listening session with 17 CEOs from major corporations.

Corporations like Walmart, IBM, General Motors, PepsiCo and Boeing were present to offer their suggestions on how to further privatize the country. Each of the cabinet members met with specific CEOs and Betsy DeVos spent her time with Ginni Rometty of IBM; Jack Welch, formerly of GE and Toby Cosgrove of the Cleveland Clinic.

According to a **statement released by DeVos**, she stated:

"Today's event was a great opportunity to listen and learn from some of America's best innovators and job-creators. I look forward to collaborating with them on how we can maintain our nation's global competitiveness."

Speaking as a member of the Capitalist Class, DeVos was in her element during the "listening session," feeling right at home with public-private partnership dynamics. In her statement from April 11, DeVos also said:

"*By encouraging public-private partnerships, we can help connect students with prospective employers and provide those students with the necessary skills to find a good-paying job in their communities."*

For members of the Capitalist Class, education is primarily about talent creation and making sure that schools are producing new workers and managers for the business community. Education is not seen as a form of liberation, development of critical thinking skills or as a mechanism to further explore our humanity. The Strategy and Policy Forum listening session with the 17 CEOs is just one illustration of the importance of education as a form of workforce development.

Further Punishment for those with Student Loans

On Tuesday, Betsy DeVos reversed some Obama administration policies on student debt and student loans, policies that were not all that beneficial those those with student loans.

DeVos stated, "*We must create a student loan servicing environment that provides the highest quality customer service and increases accountability and transparency for all borrowers, while also limiting the cost to taxpayers."*

Such a statement further demonstrates Education Secretary DeVos' belief that the market should be the driving factor when it comes to education.

Resistance Report noted that, "*The new rule will affect approximately **4 million students and graduates** whose loans are in default, collectively owing more than $67 billion. The affected students make up about 11 percent of the estimated 44 million Americans who have student debt, according to data from the Federal Reserve. And unlike credit card debt, student debt **can't be discharged through bankruptcy**, thanks to laws passed in the 1970s.*"

These changes to the student loan policy will most likely result in more students defaulting on their loans, but it will certainly result in more and more people being deeply limited in what they can be involved in, since having 10 – 30 year student loan payments provides little incentive for people to be involved in challenging systems of power that have imposed these loans on them in the first place.

Betsy DeVos Watch: On promoting a Culture of Safety in US Education Systems

https://griid.org/2017/04/17/betsy-devos-watch-on-promoting-a-culture-of-safety-in-us-education-systems/

Last Thursday, **Education Secretary Betsy DeVos made the following statement**:

"Every student deserves to learn in an environment where they are safe, and this Administration is committed to promoting a culture of safety on our nation's campuses."

DeVos made this statement while meeting with Michigan's First Lady Sue Snyder, who is attempting to work on the issue of sexual assault on US campuses. There were several news agencies seeking to get more information on the meeting between DeVos and Snyder, **but so far no one knows what the two women spoke about.**

Sexual Assault on campuses across the US is a major issue. *Twenty-three percent of female undergraduate students have experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact, according to **reports**.* Not only can this leave the student struggling with physical and emotional damage caused by the assault, survivors continue to be stigmatized. Some colleges also choose to sweep reports of these assaults under the rug.

So how seriously will Education Secretary Betsy DeVos take the issue of sexual assault on US campuses? It remains to be seen how serious she will take the issue, but we have some indication of where she stands on this matter, based on statements she made during her confirmation hearing.

The Obama administration cranked up the issue in 2011 when it sent a "Dear Colleague" letter out to universities telling them they had to respond promptly to claims of sexual assault and sexual harassment on their campuses. It also said they had to use the standard of "preponderance of the evidence" when determining whether an assault occurred. That standard — common in civil law — is lower than the "beyond a reasonable doubt" standard required for conviction in criminal cases.

During her confirmation hearing, DeVos would not commit to continue what the last administration had begun in 2011. The US Department of Education has confirmed that Candice E. Jackson will become the deputy assistant secretary in the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). Jackson, a lawyer, received national recognition during the presidential campaign in 2016, since she wrote a book about how the Clintons have a history of disrespecting women. The appointment of Jackson seems to be a highly partisan move that will not translate into actual justice for victims of sexual assault on US campuses. DeVos has also stated that she plans on restoring due process for those accused of sexual assault on US campuses, which seems to suggest that she will not be taking an aggressive stance against sexual assault at the university level.

Promoting a Culture of Safety on US Campuses?

It is worth noting that Betsy DeVos, her husband Dick DeVos, the DeVos family and the Prince family have a long history of funding organizations that promote patriarchal values and hetero-normativity. From Focus on the Family to the Family Research Council, the DeVos and Prince families have given millions to dozens of organizations that do not make it a priority, even downplaying the urgency of, sexual assault in the US.

Expanding on the notion of what Betsy DeVos said last Thursday about promoting a culture of safety on US campuses, we must also apply that to students who identify as being from communities of color, immigrant communities, the LGBTQ community and those who practice Islam.

These students, in the current political climate, also would not feel safe on campuses across the nation. Just after the election in November of 2016, **campuses were reporting an increase in hostile acts against minorities**. However, it should be noted that this is not a new thing for minorities to feel unsafe on US campuses. The efforts to try to integrate schools, beginning in the 1960s, was met with tremendous resistance and **a report from the Southern Poverty Law Center in the summer of 2000** documented that "***hate on campuses has become commonplace***."

The new Secretary of Education has publicly stated that *every student deserves to learn in an environment where they are safe,* but we are not hopeful that this is what will actually happen. Safety in education will only happen when communities make it a priority and put it into practice across the country. Safety in education will only happen when white supremacy, classism and heterosexism are eliminated in every school.

Students, alumni and community groups fight to prevent Betsy DeVos from giving a commencement address next week at an historically black university

https://griid.org/2017/05/04/students-alumni-and-community-groups-fight-to-prevent-betsy-devos-from-giving-a-commencement-address-next-week-at-an-historically-black-university/

Betsy DeVos is slated to deliver the spring commencement address next Wednesday (May 10) at a private historically black university in Daytona Beach, Bethune-Cookman University.

This announcement has received a tremendous amount of push back, especially after the Secretary of Education stated in February that historically black colleges and universities were "***the real pioneers when it comes to school choice***" and "***living proof that when more options are provided to students, they are afforded greater access and greater quality***."

"Colleges of choice. I mean, we had no other choice but to create HBCUs," Cynthia Slater, president of the Daytona Beach NAACP Branch, said.

The **NAACP, students and residents marched for about a mile on Wednesday** from New Mt. Zion Church in Daytona Beach, showing their disapproval of DeVos as BCU's commencement speaker.

According to the Tampa Bay Times, the Florida chapter of the NAACP called the scheduled speech a "slap in the face to minorities, women and all communities of color."

Students and Alumni have created a petition to demand that the university dis-invite the Secretary of Education. The **petition**, in part, reads:

Betsy DeVos doesn't understand that HBCUs were created because African Americans were excluded from mainstream institutions. Secretary DeVos has no understanding of the importance, contributions, and significance of HBCUs.

Having DeVos speak at the commencement ceremony is an insult to the BCU graduating class, students, alumni, family, friends, and Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune's legacy.We, the proud alumni of Bethune-Cookman University, do not want Betsy DeVos to have a seat at our table. Please rescind her invitation to speak at the graduation ceremony.

For years the school privatization movement, which has included Betsy DeVos as one of its champions, has attempted to win over the black community and push for "school choice" or school privatization. In a recent article on **Black Agenda Report**, Glen Ford made the following point:

"Never in history have Black Americans marched, rallied or petitioned for private school vouchers."

Evelyn Bethune, granddaughter of school founder Mary McLeod Bethune, said a commencement is the wrong forum for DeVos because it should be a "very sacred ceremony."

"Graduation is a really big deal for our kids and for their families," said Bethune, who graduated from Bethune-Cookman in 1979 and whose grandson will graduate with a master's degree next week. "That spotlight should be on them and not on the controversy of the speaker that has been invited."

Still, Evelyn Bethune takes exception to school administrators comparing the work of her grandmother to what DeVos stands for today. She said her grandmother was a strong proponent of education while being able to relate to common people.

"I don't see any of that in Ms. DeVos," said Bethune, who still lives in Daytona Beach and heads up an educational foundation and education consulting firm. "I've looked at her history, I've looked at the things that she has been connected to and I don't see any resemblance to anything related to my grandmother."

A speech disrupted and deconstructed: On the arrogance of Betsy DeVos giving a commencement speech at Bethune-Cookman University

https://griid.org/2017/05/12/a-speech-disrupted-and-deconstructed-on-the-arrogance-of-betsy-devos-giving-a-commencement-speech-at-bethune-cookman-university/

On Wednesday, US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos gave the commencement speech at one of the nation's historically black universities, Bethune-Cookman University, located in Florida.

Current students and alumni had opposed having DeVos be the commencement speaker, because of **racist and insensitive comments she made about black colleges and universities being "schools of choice."** The opposition was public, with marches, formal statements and a petition campaign that had generated some 50,000 signatures prior to May 10.

When DeVos was introduced students began booing and yelling to attempt to drown out the Secretary of Education. Many of the graduating students also stood and turned their backs on DeVos and the administration that invited her, all of which can be seen in this video.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

While much of the news coverage focused on the student opposition, little was shared about what Betsy DeVos said and attempted to say. **A story on Buzzfeed** included these comments from DeVos:

"One of the hallmarks of higher education, and of democracy, is the ability to converse with and learn from those with whom we disagree," she said. "I have respect for all those who attended, including those who demonstrated their disagreement with me. While we may share differing points of view, my visit and dialogue with students leaves me encouraged and committed to supporting HBCUs."

Like much of her speech, reasonable people would take issue with what she had to say. In all the years of monitoring the activities of the DeVos Family and Betsy DeVos in particular, there is little indication that she is interested in conversations with those with whom she disagrees. In fact, what Betsy DeVos has demonstrated over the years is that she has used her family's deep pockets to fight against people she disagrees with, particularly those who support public education, LGBTQ rights, public sector unions, pro-choice advocates, working class people in general and anyone who wants to keep religion out of the public sphere.

Betsy DeVos attempted to say many other things during the commencement speech, much of which was difficult to hear based on the videos and often ignored. However, it is worth deconstructing some of the comments from her speech, which can be found in its entirety **here**.

DeVos's speech is entitled ***A Calling to Service, Courage and Grace.*** One question we might all ask ourselves is how does someone who was born into and married into the billionaire class practice service. It is well known that Dick and Betsy DeVos have numerous people working in their home ion Holland in varying capacities, but primarily as domestic servants.

Early on in her speech DeVos said, "*I am at the table fighting on your behalf, and on behalf of all students across this great nation."* This has not been historically true, since Betsy has fought against public education for several decades, both by creating entities such as the Great Lakes Education Project and by **funding anti-public education and school privatization campaigns across the country.**

What was most disconcerting about the Education Secretary's speech was her misuse of comments from the university's founder Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune. DeVos said there were three main themes she found in reading Dr. Bethune, one of which was that we should, "*take responsibility for your families and your communities and never tolerate inequality or injustice."*

So how does Betsy DeVos reconcile her being part of the billionaire class when so many millions of families live in poverty? How does her class privilege relate to not tolerating inequality or injustice? Simply put, it doesn't. Betsy DeVos, along with the rest of the capitalist class, made their wealth through injustice and inequality.

Lastly, towards the end of her comments, Betsy DeVos stated, "*And when some pursue dissention, you can engage in debate with grace and poise, just as Dr. Bethune did."* While it is true that Dr. Bethune may have displayed a tremendous amount of poise and grace in her lifetime, the reality is that it was precisely because of her dissention, and the dissention of countless other black educators, that HBCUs were started throughout the country. Like any struggle for justice, black colleges and universities were build on dissention against institutionalized racism and white supremacy., something Betsy DeVos would know little about.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Education Budget Cuts will hurt communities of color, working class families and promote the privatization of schools

https://griid.org/2017/05/22/betsy-devos-watch-education-budget-cuts-will-hurt-communities-of-color-working-class-families-and-promote-the-privatization-of-schools/

The Trump administration is supposed to release their proposed Education Department Budget cuts this Tuesday, followed by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos going before the House Appropriations Committee on Wednesday.

However, there have been several news outlets that have gained access to the proposed education cuts through leaked documents. The proposed education budget cuts would total of $10.6 billion will be cut from existing programs, with a share of those "savings" invested in school choice.

Here is a breakdown of the proposed education budget cuts:

As was predicted with the nomination of Betsy DeVos, this focus of the new administration would be to accelerate the further privatization of public education, a process that has been happening over the past several decades.

According to a recent article by Jeff Bryant, *A glaring example of this pivot to the private sector is the plan's cuts to programs that make public schools attractive options for parents, especially in low-income communities, while boosting federal support for "school choice" that incentivizes parents to turn to charter schools and private schools instead.*

The proposed education budget cuts would most negatively impact communities of color. Two examples of how these budget cuts will impact communities of color, are the cuts to Alaska Native Education ($32.4 million) and Native Hawaiian Education ($33.3 million) programs.

The Washington Post, which also obtained the leaked documents, provides a useful breakdown of the administration's rationale for each of the proposed education budget cuts. For the Alaskan Native Education program it states:

This program supports supplemental education services for a very high-need student population facing unique challenges in obtaining a high-quality education. The Alaska Native Education program largely duplicates services that may be funded through the $260 million in other Federal elementary and secondary programs that support Alaska as well as State, local, and private funds.

A similar rationale is provided for the cuts to the Native Hawaiian Education program.

What is equally devastating are the cuts to support arts education, international studies and foreign languages. A $400 million fund to pay for an array of school-enriching

services and academics — such as mental-health support, anti-bullying programs and advanced courses — gets zero. Even money for Special Olympics education programs would be gone.

In addition, these proposed budget cuts provide greater opportunities for the super rich and corporations to channel money into private education programs, programs that the super rich and corporations can write off as major tax deductions.

A new report from the School Superintendents Association and the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, confirms this analysis on how school privatization and voucher programs will benefit the capitalist class.

Public Loss, Private Gain: How School Voucher Tax Shelters Undermine Public Education exposes how state and federal tax policy promotes the privatization of education funding while simultaneously draining public coffers to enable savvy taxpayers to turn a profit.

The report notes that, "***Seventeen states divert a total of over $1 billion per year toward private schools via school voucher tax credits. When combined with a federal tax loophole, nine of these states' credits are so lucrative that they allow some upper income taxpayers to turn a profit (at federal taxpayer expense) on contributions they make to fund private school vouchers, all while leaving less resources available for federal investments in education. Simply put, wealthy taxpayers are benefiting from a federally sanctioned voucher tax shelter***."

The graphic on the right provides an example of how the school privatization/voucher system will benefit the capitalist class.

The report also notes the following:

The Educational Opportunities Act *(HR 895 /S 148) would put two new types of voucher tax shelters within reach for many more Americans, and for profitable corporations. It would allow individual taxpayers and businesses in any state to receive federal tax credits for donations to school voucher nonprofits, up to $4,500 per year for individuals or $100,000 per year for corporations. Donors in states with state voucher tax credit programs would also be eligible for a state credit. By stacking federal credits and state credits together on a single donation, some individuals and corporations would be able to double their money by claiming a dollar in state credit and a dollar in federal credit for each dollar donated. The result would be a risk-free, 100% profit of up to $4,500 per year for individuals or up to $100,000 for corporations. Wealth managers and tax accountants would be foolish to not advise their clients to take advantage of this handout from their federal and state governments.*

Just one more example of how policy benefits the capitalist class and harms working class and communities of color.

A closer examination of what Betsy DeVos said about the Education Budget cuts yesterday

https://griid.org/2017/05/25/a-closer-examination-of-what-betsy-devos-said-about-the-education-budget-cuts-yesterday/

On Monday, **we posted a critique of the proposed budget cuts** that Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has proposed. These budget cuts amount to roughly $10.6 billion and would negatively impact students of color, working class children, public schools and children with disabilities.

Yesterday, DeVos spoke before Congress about these proposed budget cuts. Here is a **link** to her opening statements made before the House Appropriations Committee.

One thing about DeVos's comments is that she uses rhetoric that most politicians use, claiming that, the ***"budget lays out a series of proposals and priorities that work toward ensuring every student has an equal opportunity to receive a great education."***

Such platitudes are repeated over and over again, yet there is no evidence that this is currently the case or has ever been the case when it comes to guaranteeing that *every student receives a great education*.

In her comments, DeVos then lists 5 principles that are guiding the education budget proposal.

First, our request would devote significant resources toward giving every student an equal opportunity for a great education. It emphasizes giving parents more power and students more opportunities. **Again, platitudes, with no evidence to substantiate the claims.**

Second, the Administration's request recognizes the importance of maintaining strong support for public schools through longstanding State formula grant programs focused on meeting the educational needs of the nation's most vulnerable students, including poor and minority students and students with disabilities. **Just the opposite is the case, since vulnerable students will suffer under the proposed cuts and there is plenty of evidence that States are redirecting funds to charter and other privatized education systems and away from public education.**

Third, our request maintains funding for key competitive grant programs that support innovation and build evidence of what works in education. This also means strong support for the research and data collection activities of the Department. **Education funding should not be based on competition, but providing equitable funding for all students, particularly those most vulnerable.**

Fourth, our request reduces the complexity of funding for college while prioritizing efforts to help make a college education accessible for low-income students. As Congress prepares to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, I look forward to working with you to address student debt and higher education costs while accelerating and improving student completion rates through such efforts as Year-Round Pell, and reducing the complexity of student financial aid. **DeVos contends that the budget "makes a historic investment in America's students," while at the same time eliminating or significantly changing many of the programs meant to assist future or current students in realizing their dreams of a higher education.**

And fifth, consistent with our commitment to improve the efficiency of the Federal government, our request would eliminate or phase-out 22 programs that are duplicative, ineffective, or are better supported through State, local or philanthropic efforts. Six additional programs were already eliminated in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. All told, taxpayers will save $5.8 billion. **This last point is particularly offensive, since it claims that the states will fulfill some of the programs that are being cut, like Native students in Alaska and Hawaii, plus eliminating Special Olympics Educational programing. The other aspect of the fifth principle is the fact that DeVos included philanthropic efforts, along with State and local. Philanthropic efforts should scare the shit out of all of us, considering the ideological agenda that her family's philanthropy has support as it relates to education.**

The fifth principle also seems like a particularly cruel joke, considering how her family's foundations, along with the various anti-public education groups she has funded or co-founded, have been about the business of transferring public money into private education systems. This point is made less diplomatically in a recent article by Jeff Bryant entitled, **What Betsy DeVos Calls Education Transformation Is Actually Public Theft.**

Bryant points out in his article:

*A recent op-ed in the **New York Times** cites a study which found Indiana students using the state's voucher program to transfer from public schools to private schools voucher students "experienced significant losses in achievement" in mathematics and "saw no improvement in reading."*

*But one thing Indiana's voucher program certainly accomplished is to provide a huge cash infusion to religious schools. As **Mother Jones** recently reported, of the **more than 300 schools** receiving voucher money in the Hoosier state, only four aren't "overtly religious." The remaining four are for special needs students.*

Diane Ravitch, a highly respected education historian and author of numerous books on education, including *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools,* points out in a **recent blog post** that Betsy DeVos recently posed for an advertisement (see below) for a Christian school that does not accept students with disabilities.

This point about private schools that discriminate against certain students came up during the her education budget discussion in front of the House Appropriations Committee yesterday. DeVos was asked if she would withhold federal funding for private schools that engaged in discrimination against students, and the **Education Secretary refused to say she would withhold funding from private schools that discriminate.**

Speaking of Diane Ravitch, her most recent article in the New Republic, an article that appeared on Tuesday, provided important analysis that some people are unwilling to hear.

The article is entitled, **Don't Like Betsy DeVos? Blame the Democrats**. Ravitch's main argument is that the ***Democratic Party paved the way for the education secretary's efforts to privatize our public schools.***

Here are a few important excerpts from that article:

*Thirty years ago, there was a sharp difference between Republicans and Democrats on education. Republicans wanted choice, testing, and accountability. Democrats wanted equitable funding for needy districts, and highly trained teachers. But in 1989, with Democrats reeling from three straight presidential losses, the lines began to blur. That year, when President George H.W. Bush convened **an education summit of the nation's governors**, it was a little-known Arkansas Democrat named Bill Clinton who drafted a bipartisan set of national goals for the year 2000 ("first in the world" in mathematics, for starters). The ambitious benchmarks would be realized by creating, for the first time, national achievement standards and tests. Clinton ran on the issue, defeated Bush, and passed **Goals 2000**, which provided grants to states that implemented their own achievement metrics.*

Later on Ravitch states:

*When Barack Obama took office in 2009, educators hoped he would return the party to its public school roots. By then, even Bill Clinton was calling No Child Left Behind a "**train wreck**." Instead, Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan doubled down on testing, accountability, and choice. Their **Race to the Top** program was, in essence, No Child Left Behind II: It invited states to compete for $5 billion in funds by holding teachers accountable for test scores, adopting national standards, opening more charter schools, and closing low-scoring public schools.*

The Obama years saw an epidemic of new charters, testing, school closings, and teacher firings. In Chicago, Mayor Rahm Emanuel closed 50 public schools in one day. Democratic charter advocates—whose ranks include the outraged Booker and Bennet—have increasingly imported "school choice" into the party's rhetoric. Booker likes to equate "choice" with "freedom"—even though the entire idea of "choice" was created by white Southerners who were scrambling to defend segregated schools after Brown v. Board of Education.

These are important points that Ravitch makes and ones we must come to terms with if we are truly fight for quality education for all students. Partisan politics have systematically destroyed public education and if we are to salvage what is left then we can not rely on either political party to do the right thing, based on their track record. It is too easy to blame Trump and DeVos, when the record shows that the attacks on public education have been a bipartisan affair.

Betsy DeVos Watch: On Charter Schools and possible new Student Loan Chief

https://griid.org/2017/06/22/betsy-devos-watch-on-charter-schools-and-possible-new-student-loan-chief/

Last week, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos spoke to a gathering of people at the **National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is an organization committed to the growth of Charter Schools and lobbies at both the state and national level on education policy. You can see from the graphic below, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools has spent several million dollars over the years to influence federal education policy, according to the **Center for Responsive Politics**.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools relies on some of the **richest family foundations**, like the Walton and Gates Foundations and they boast **being in partnership** with some of the most anti-Public School groups in the country. A few of the groups they partner with have strong ties to Dick & Betsy DeVos, such as the **Alliance for School Choice** and the **American Federal for Children**.

What **Betsy DeVos had to say to those gathered at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools event** was not terribly revealing, but there were some comments that are worth pointing out.

First, she likes to talk about her and her husband, Dick DeVos.

Defenders of the status quo like to paint me as a "voucher-only proponent", but the truth is I've long-supported public charter schools as a quality option for students. I worked with many others to get Michigan's first charter legislation passed in 1993—the third state to do so. And my husband founded a charter high school in Michigan that focuses on aviation, educates kids in the STEM fields and prepares them to contribute in significant ways to our 21st century economy.

Midway through her comments at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, DeVos mentions several school programs that she has high regard for, one of which is the Christian Academy for Reaching Excellence (CARE). Jeff Bryant, a national writer, who advocates for public education **has the following comments about Betsy DeVos and CARE**.

DeVos's belief in using education as a way to "advance God's Kingdom" is well documented.

*As Kristina Rizga reports for **Mother Jones**, the lengthy philanthropic record DeVos and her husband have amassed over many years shows "the couple's clearest preference is for Christian private schools."*

***CARE elementary** certainly fits that profile. Students at CARE, according to the school's **handbook**, "Attend weekly chapel, they are taught Christian principles with love and respect, and they are exposed to the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Prayer is part of the CARE experience."*

*On its **website**, CARE says the school admits students of "any race, color, national, and ethnic origin" and "does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national, and ethnic origin." Discriminating based on religion is notably absent.*

*Since the school's opening in the fall of 2015, it has gotten significant praise from school choice advocates in South Florida, including the **Foundation for Excellence in Education**, which **endorsed DeVos's nomination**.*

*The Foundation for Excellence in Education was founded by former Florida Governor **Jeb Bush** and has received **generous support** from DeVos and her foundation. DeVos has also **served on its board of directors**.*

The Secretary of Education wraps up her comments to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools by making the following comments near the end of her speech. This comment is simply an affirmation on her commitment to fund education systems that are anything but public education.

Today we have a great opportunity. While some of you have criticized the President's budget—which you have every right to do—it's important to remember that our budget proposal supports the greatest expansion of public school choice in the history of the United States. It significantly increases support for the Charter School Program, and adds an additional $1 billion for public school choice for states that choose to adopt it.

Possible Student Loan Officer should scare the shit out of students

The other news about Betsy DeVos that is worth mentioning is her **announcement about who she intends to appoint as the Chief Operating Officer of Federal Student Aid**.

The Education Secretary wants to bring in , whom the Education Department press release says has, "*more than 30 years of experience in the financial services industry*."

Johnson has been the **CEO of numerous financial institutions** and has spent more than 30 years working to make money for those same institutions. Having him as the Chief Operating Officer of Federal Student Aid should make any student with federal loans scared and angry.

A **recent article on Buzzfeed** does point out the predatory nature of Dr. Johnson being Betsy DeVos's choice to head up this position.

The Education Department's statement described A. Wayne Johnson as the "Founder, Chairman and former CEO" of a payments technology company called First Performance Corporation. It noted his PhD in education leadership, and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, citing his dissertation, said he "actually wrote the book on student loan debt."

But what wasn't noted was Johnson is currently the CEO of Reunion Student Loan Services, a detail confirmed by a company representative reached by phone on Tuesday afternoon. Reunion originates and services private student loans, and offers refinancing and consolidation for existing loans.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Religion, Education and Advancing God's Kingdom

https://griid.org/2017/07/07/betsy-devos-watch-religion-education-and-advancing-gods-kingdom/

Late last month, the **US Supreme Court decided on the case of** Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer.

The ruling was in support of Trinity Lutheran Church, which basically means that the State of Missouri mustgive taxpayer funding to a house of worship.

On the same day as this ruling, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, **released the following brief statement**:

"This decision marks a great day for the Constitution and sends a clear message that religious discrimination in any form cannot be tolerated in a society that values the First Amendment. We should all celebrate the fact that programs designed to help students will no longer be discriminated against by the government based solely on religious affiliation."

So why would the Secretary of Education weigh in on a decision from the US Supreme court, particularly since it is a separation of church and state matter?

The answer, for those who are familiar with Betsy DeVos' background, has to do with the religious ideology that the DeVos and Prince families embrace and have attempted to impose on the rest of society for several decades now.

The Family Research Council, which the DeVos family has funded for several decades, released a statement in support of the courts' decision, which reads in part:

"At the heart of the First Amendment is the idea that Americans should be able to not just hold beliefs but follow those beliefs as they live their lives. The Free Exercise of religion, explicitly protected by the First Amendment, protects varied and robust religious expression in the public square. Certainly the Framers never meant to exclude churches from public life in the way the state of Missouri and lower courts have here."

The Cato Institute, which has a long history of pushing for privatization of public education and an advocate for religious education, **stated**:

"Today's Trinity Lutheran ruling strikes a blow against patently unequal treatment of religious Americans under state laws, an inequality felt no more acutely than in education. But it does not yet get us to where we need to be.

The huge impact of today's ruling is that it says religious institutions cannot be barred from participating in government programs simply because they are religious. The Trinity Lutheran Church could not be ruled ineligible to participate in a grant program to improve playgrounds simply because it is a religious entity. This should have been a simple decision: It is clearly unequal treatment of religious Americans under the law to say "the reason you are ineligible for this benefit for which anyone else is eligible is that you are religious."

Both of these statements are reflective of the ideological framework within which Betsy DeVos views the world. For a more detailed analysis of the religious views that DeVos embraces so fervently, **see Janet Reitman's article in Rolling Stone**, which was published earlier this year.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State had a much different ***take on the courts' decision, saying:***

"Taxpayer-funded religion is bad for churches, communities and citizens. Americans United will continue to fight to buttress the church-state wall because that's the only thing that can ensure true religious freedom for everyone. This ruling threatens to open the door to more taxpayer support for religion, which is at odds with our history, traditions and common sense."

The ACLU also came out against the court ruling, with the **following statement**:

"Abandoning a longstanding constitutional protection for the separation of church and state, the Supreme Court ruled earlier this week that a church must be allowed to participate in a state program that provides direct taxpayer grants to improve school playground surfaces. The decision was very troubling. As we argued in our friend-of-the-court brief in the case, Trinity Lutheran v. Comer, the government should not be funneling public funds directly to churches or other houses of worship, for any reason. Period."

The statement from Betsy DeVos, in support of the US Supreme Court ruling that says the State of Missouri must use public money to fund a religious school, should not surprise us, but it should make us all worry about the commitment she has to **furthering "God's Kingdom."** This has been the commitment of both the DeVos and Prince families for decades, but now that Betsy is the Secretary of Education, she has an even greater platform in which to impose religious beliefs on the rest of US society. The question is, will we allow this to happen or fight against it?

Betsy DeVos Watch: Title IX listening sessions give voice to anti-feminist groups that minimize sexual assault and rape on campus

https://griid.org/2017/07/18/betsy-devos-watch-title-ix-listening-sessions-give-voice-to-anti-feminist-groups-that-minimize-sexual-assault-and-rape-on-campus/

Last Thursday, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos hosted what she called a "**Title IX Listening session**."

The media release for the event stated that, "*DeVos announced she will convene a diverse group of stakeholders at the Department of Education Thursday, July 13 to discuss the impact of the Department's Title IX sexual assault guidance on students, families and institutions."*

Sounds like it was a good thing to do. However, upon closer examination, some of the "stakeholders" that DeVos had invited were made up mostly of mens groups that are anti-feminist and are making the claim that too often women on campus are wrongfully accusing men of committing sexual assault.

Some of the organizations invite by Betsy DeVos are groups like **National Coalition for Men Carolinas**, which is a chapter of a national organization. This organization's website states the following:

Men are easy targets, often staying silent while being publicly attacked by radical feminists and the media. But that is changing. Men are uniting and standing their ground against anti-male hatred and directed discrimination.

Besides their anti-feminist propaganda, one thing that the National Coalition for Men does is publish photos, names, and biographical details of women who have accused men—falsely, the National Coalition for Men insists—of rape. Its members **routinely bring lawsuits** against women-only networking groups and social events, crying discrimination.

Another group invited by Secretary DeVos to the Title IX listening session was Stop Abusive and Violent Environments (Save). SAVE is another anti-feminist organization that believes that campuses are experiencing "rape culture hysteria."

According to a recent article on **Slate.com**, "*The Southern Poverty Law Center has identified SAVE, which opposes rules that prevent defense attorneys from entering evidence of a survivor's sexual history in a rape trial, as a planet in the "**manosphere**" of misogynist online forums. SAVE lobbies against domestic violence protections, claims*

that the "leading reason" for abuse is "female initiation of partner violence," and calls falsely accused perpetrators the "true victims of abuse."

One addition group invited to the Title IX listening sessions was Families Advocating for Campus Equality (FACE). The FACE website is full of videos, commentary and links that make the claim that too many men on college campuses across the US are being falsely accused of sexual assault and rape.

Sexual Assault and rape at US campuses across the country are a serious matter, but the new administration, through the efforts of Betsy DeVos, are making it clear that they want to overturn the gains made by women's groups who have fought against violence for decades.

The Michigan Student Power group has been circulating a **petition** in response to Betsy DeVos's Title IX listening sessions, which provides some useful analysis of last week's meeting.

Betsy DeVos Watch: One DeVos delivers speech at ALEC conference, while other DeVos family members make ALEC endorsed policies a reality in Michigan

https://griid.org/2017/07/23/betsy-devos-watch-one-devos-delivers-speech-at-alec-conference-while-other-devos-family-members-make-alec-endorsed-policies-a-reality-in-michigan/

Last Thursday, US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos spoke at American Legislative Exchange Council's (ALEC) annual meeting in Denver. MLive, like many other media sources chose to focus on how DeVos responded to those who were protesting the ALEC conference, with the MLive headline reading as, ***DeVos calls out protesters as 'defenders of status quo' at conservative political conference***.

The MLive article primarily cites DeVos, but does give a few sentences to State Superintendent from Michigan. There is no one who was part of the protests who were quoted in the article, despite the fact that they were the subject of the headline.

You can watch the entire speech to the American Legislative Exchange Council, a video that was taken by a TV station in Denver.

The MLive reporter did not verify any of the claims made by Secretary DeVos or provide any information about the mission and work of the American Legislative Exchange Council.

ALEC is one of the largest corporate lobbying forces in the US, **representing the interests of hundreds of companies**, many of which are Fortune 500 companies. ALEC lobbies at the federal and state level to push for policies that will be beneficial to its members.

ALEC also consists of numerous **think tank and non-profit organizations**, like the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

The group that has done more to **expose ALEC** in recent years is the Center for Media & Democracy (CMD), a group which hosts the important resource known as **SourceWatch**. The CMD's data-base on ALEC is extensive and is updated on a regular basis.

One of more intriguing things that DeVos said in her speech, was to give praise to ALEC for the work they do, particularly at the state level.

"You have led the way in helping states across the nation craft innovative solutions to today's problems: in healthcare, taxes, regulations, entitlements, and importantly, education."

This statement by DeVos is true, but the MLive reporter doesn't bother to verify it or provide examples of what the Secretary of Education means by help states craft solutions, which is code for crafting policy.

A recent example in Michigan where ALEC-connected organization collaborated to get policy adopted into law, was the attack on teacher pensions. This would be easy to verify, since ALEC has branches in all 50 states and separate websites for those states, such as the Michigan site, **which has as its most recent posting a piece praising the attack on teacher pensions.**

Another important aspect of the Michigan attack on teacher pensions, was the fact that one of the major groups lobbying for the new law on teacher pensions is the West Michigan Policy Forum. The West Michigan Policy Forum, which includes several members of the DeVos Family, is made up of members from the West MI power structure **that also has provided substantial political contributions to the Michigan legislators that pushed the new teacher pension laws**.

A recent Facebook post by the West Michigan Policy Forum underscores the excitement they feel over getting the policy they paid for.

*The West Michigan Policy Forum (WMPF) sent out a statewide letter today applauding **Governor Rick Snyder** and lawmakers for their success in making critical changes needed to address the drastically underfunded teacher pension fund. The letter followed the Governor's signing SB 401 into law today.*

The law will:

–Place all new school staff hired after Feb. 1, 2018, into a 401 (k)-style retirement savings account – empowering new teachers by giving portability to their benefits and ensuring their retirement is pre-funded;
–Offer a newly designed hybrid plan for teachers who prefer this alternative;
–Help stabilize $29 billion in previously unfunded retirement promises, which has been draining money away from classroom funding;
–Limit risk and increases stability for school districts and kids in the future.

"The state's lawmakers collaborated on addressing Michigan's unfunded liabilities in a way that reduces tax payers' risks well into the future," says John Kennedy, chairman, West Michigan Policy Forum. "This allows school districts to keep recruiting great teachers and ensure that the state keeps its promises to current teachers and retirees."

The WMPF letter says the innovative leadership that the team of elected officials displayed shows a true commitment to a long-term vision for our state.

In the letter sent to more than 1,500 business and community leaders throughout Michigan, the WMPF specifically called out the leadership of Senator Phil Pavlov R- St. Clair; Representative Thomas Albert, R-Lowell, Senate Majority Leader Arlan Meekhof, R-West Olive, and Speaker of the House Tom Leonard, R-DeWitt.

Reforming Michigan's unfunded liabilities will continue to be a top priority for WMPF as other public pensions and retiree healthcare benefits will be addressed. During the 2016 WMPF bi-annual conference, a report and full review of the dangers of unfunded retirement promises and the looming problems in MI's local governments were presented.

Kennedy says WMPF members believe Michigan will be a model for the nation as it continues the hard work of addressing these crucial issues. He says, "By enacting these changes into law, Michigan legislators have offered more certainty today that Michigan will remain a good place to create jobs and raise their families."

The MLive article completed missed the boat on being able to connect the Betsy DeVos speech at the ALEC conference in Denver last week, to how ALEC works at the state level, to how other members of the DeVos Family play a role in helping to craft state policy.

Protestors confront Betsy DeVos during her visit to GRCC

https://griid.org/2017/08/02/protestors-confront-betsy-devos-during-her-visit-to-grcc/

Yesterday, about 40 people showed up to the Grand Rapids Community College to confront Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos as she toured a few buildings on campus.

The DeVos family has contributed significantly to GRCC over the years, which resulted in the former Davenport College on Fulton St. being named the DeVos Campus.

MLive had reported less than 24 hours ago that DeVos would be making a stop in Grand Rapids, thus making it difficult for people to turn out on short notice.

DeVos was in Grand Rapids earlier that morning and visited with students at the **Van Andel Education Institute**, which is not a public education facility. It was a strategic move on the part of the Education Secretary to not announce her visit to the Van Andel Education Institute.

People involved in organizing today's action began meeting near the GRCC campus at 12:30 and were under surveillance by the GRCC campus security and the GRPD, which had officers in cars all over the campus.

Once it was determined which building Betsy DeVos would be entering, those protesting lined up along Ransom Street in front of the GRCC campus. You can see people in the pictures that were there to confront DeVos and you can see law enforcement people waiting inside the parking ramp.

DeVos showed up in a white SUV with tinted windows, followed by another vehicle, also with tinted windows, before anyone realized it was her.

However, those who organized the protest were undeterred and went up to the campus and inside the building hoping to confront the Secretary of Education while touring the building. People were met by campus security who told them they would be arrested if they moved beyond a certain point, as you can see in the video here.

People with the group Socialist Alternative, then decided to go to the Godfrey St. campus of GRCC, since DeVos was headed there next. The group held the same large banner and was told by the GRPD that they could be on the property before DeVos' vehicle showed up.

However, when the vehicle transporting Betsy DeVos showed up, people tried to block the entrance to the campus. The cops threatened to arrest them and those protesting

did move, but not fast enough for the cops, since one of the people attempted to block the entrance was pushed and shoved.

Alex Kelley contributed to this article.

Media Questions directed at Betsy DeVos demonstrates that commercial news agencies really are stenographers to power

https://griid.org/2017/08/03/media-questions-directed-at-betsy-devos-demonstrates-that-commercial-news-agencies-really-are-stenographers-to-power/

It is well known that politicians, and often those deeply involved in partisan politics, are trained to deal with the news media. Quite often public relations firms or consultants will provide training and offer ongoing advise on how to deal with controversial matters, how to respond to questions from the public or how not to respond to questions from the public, at least how not to respond to questions directly.

Politicians are often the masters of double speak, at least those that are well trained and know how to maintain control in circumstances that could be potentially disastrous.

Betsy DeVos has been around politics for most of her life. She was the chair of the Michigan Republican Party for many years, has been involved in numerous political campaigns and has sat on numerous boards for organizations that have state and national affiliation. She knows how to deal with the news media and has perfected the art of political double speak.

Yesterday, MLive posted an article with the headline, ***Watch Betsy DeVos weigh in on LGBTQ rights, budget cuts and protesters***.

The post was based upon a “media session,” where Betsy DeVos answered questions from several Grand Rapids news agencies during her visit to Grand Rapids on Tuesday. The questions primarily had to do with current issues her office is dealing with and one that was completely independent of education issues. There are two questions/ responses that I wanted to address, since they are both rather instructive in terms of how politicians respond to reporters.

The first response I want to look at has to do with the education budget and how or if DeVos would intervene if LGBTQ students were discriminated against.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

As you can see, Betsy DeVos responded by saying that the education budget would "support the most the most vulnerable students." The essentially repeats that the budget will focus on supporting students with the greater need, but never clarifies or provides examples of what that would look like. She then emphasizes the states role in making decisions on how best to use the dollars provided by the federal government.

It is hard to know whether or not the reporter who asked this question asked a follow up question or contested the Education Secretary's response, since the MLive videos are cut off right after her responses. However, it is fairly common for commercial news reporters to not ask challenging questions and to often act as stenographers for those in power.

We do know that the **education budget would negatively impact many vulnerable students, particularly Native Hawaiian, Alaskan students and some Special Education programs, which are to be eliminated**. If the reporter knew this fact and if they practiced sound journalism, they would have challenged the Education Secretary on her response. A competent reporter would also know that the **Every Student Succeeds Act was essentially crafted by the American Legislative Exchange Council** (ALEC).

The last thing about this response from Betsy DeVos is that she makes sure NOT to respond to the question asked about whether or not she will intervene if states discriminate against LGBTQ students. This is particularly where the PR/double speak training comes in. Don't respond to questions you don't want to answer, particularly questions that could lead to providing a mechanism for the public to hold politicians accountable.

This second video is really an example of a reporter internalizing the values of systems of power. The reporter does what real journalists should never do, which, in this case is to praise the DeVos Family for all they have done for Grand Rapids and West MI. The reporter also asks her about how it makes her feel when there are people in the streets protesting her. Wow! Talk about showing your bias.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

The response that Betsy DeVos gives is also a great example of double speak. She frames the public protest of her policies as "people resisting change" and that what she is doing is to remain focused on doing what is best for all students. This response deserves an Orwellian award, since she not only refuses to acknowledge that there is significant public opposition to what she is doing as Secretary of Education, she took a potentially volatile question and stuck to her mantra of claiming to fight for all students.

In the end, both of these video responses provide us with invaluable examples of political double speak and they demonstrate that commercial news media is in no way interested actually practicing sound journalism.

MLive, Betsy DeVos and White Savior Politics

https://griid.org/2017/09/11/mlive-betsy-devos-and-white-savior-politics/

Last Wednesday, **MLive ran an article** that was based on a segment in a recent **NPR edition of This American Life, entitled Vouching Toward Bethlehem**.

The headline of the MLive article reads: ***Betsy DeVos' history volunteering in Grand Rapids school featured on This American Life.*** One question to ask ourselves is, why did the MLive reporter use this particular headline? There were numerous themes within the 30 minute NPR piece. Producer Susan Burton talks a bit about the history of Betsy DeVos and school policies around Charter Schools and School Vouchers. The NPR segment also discussed the function and role that Kids Hope USA played in Betsy DeVos deciding to become a volunteer within the Grand Rapids Public Schools.

Kids Hope USA was created to provide an opportunity for Christians to "live out their faith. The mission statement of the group says, "KHUSA offers churches and schools a proven, award-winning model to meet the emotional, social and academic needs of children."

This dynamic that Kids Hope USA engages in, is part of the NPR segment, with a representative with Kids Hope USA talking about how they area white group of people who were looking to have real life experiences in urban schools. The NPR segment even stated that someone from Kids Hope USA was even driving around in urban neighborhoods looking for a school that would provide mentors with a great opportunity.

The school that was picked was Burton Elementary School. Burton Elementary is a school that is made up of mostly Spanish speaking students, with parents from countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and the Dominican Republic.

The NPR segment focuses on what impact Betsy DeVos had on the lives of 2 particular families that had students attending Burton Elementary School.

In one case, Betsy DeVos bought the family a car and donated presents a Christmas time. In the other case, the current Secretary of Education hired the student's mother to come work for the family cleaning their house in Holland. In both cases, Betsy DeVos

and her husband Dick, took these students out of the public school system and paid for their tuition at private religious schools.

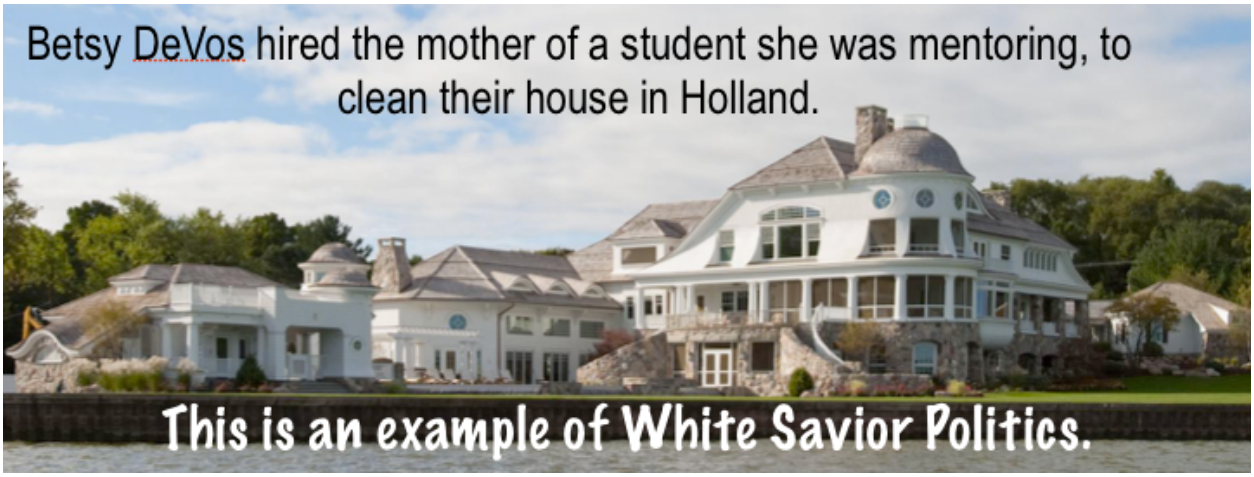
The NPR segment producer discusses this dynamic to some degree and even has an excerpt from a speech that DeVos gave at a recent ALEC conference. The NPR segment chose to focus on the private vs public school angle, but in many ways it seems that they were missing a major component of what was also happening. The very fact that Betsy and Dick DeVos took these students out of the public schools, paid for their tuition and then hired one of the mothers to clean their house in Holland, is nothing short of what is means to practice White Savior politics.

In a **recent piece on Everyday Feminism**, white savior politics is described this way:

In the simplest terms, it's when a white character or person rescues people of color from their oppression. The White Savior is portrayed as the good one, the one that we're meant to identify with as we watch or read these narratives. They usually learn lessons about themselves along the way. There are many problems with this kind of narrative, some of which I'll go over.

For instance, it racializes morality by making us consistently identify with the good white person saving the non-white people who are given much less of an identity in these plot lines. It also frames people of color as being unable to solve their own problems. It implies that they always need saving, and that white people are the only ones competent enough to save them. This is very obviously untrue, and it's a harmful message to relay.

In many ways this is the deeper message of what Betsy DeVos did with these 2 students and their families, while mentoring through Kids Hope USA. It is bad enough that MLive chose to make Betsy look like she really cares about students (as if there aren't hundreds of volunteers who give their time to mentor kids in the Grand Rapids Public School), but the larger problem with the MLive piece is that it selects a conservative vs liberal narrative that plays well with the public. By creating this left/right dichotomy, the MLive piece conveniently misses the larger White Savior narrative that is the real story highlighted in the NPR segment.



Betsy DeVos is the featured guest at the annual Acton Institute Dinner on October 18

https://griid.org/2017/09/14/betsy-devos-is-the-featured-guest-at-the-annual-acton-institute-dinner-on-october-18/

Current Secretary of Education and former board member of the Acton Institute, Betsy DeVos will be the featured speaker at the 27th Annual Acton Institute Dinner on Wednesday, October 18 in Grand Rapids.

DeVos, who served on the Acton Institute Board from 1995 – 2005, will be speaking at the event, which will be held at the DeVos Hall in downtown Grand Rapids. The event is a mere $175 a plate per person or for the more ambitious members of the capitalist class, you can spend $7,500 for a table of 10 people, recognition in the program and an invitation to receptions before and after dinner.

The **text** that accompanies the invitation states:

*A Grand Rapids native, **Betsy DeVos** is a proven leader, an innovator, a disruptor and an advocate. In education, in business and in politics, Betsy has been a pioneer in fighting to remove barriers, to enact change and to create environments where people have the opportunity to thrive.*

No surprise that the Acton Institute describes a fellow member of the capitalist class and the religious right this way. Betsy DeVos has indeed been a pioneer in the fight to remove barriers, barriers to amassing more wealth for her family and other members of the West Michigan elite. Betsy DeVos is also a disruptor, a disruptor of the lives of the

working poor, communities of color, the LGBT community, organized labor and public education.

She will share the stage at the Acton Institute Annual Dinner, by Acton founder Rev. Robert Sirico. Sirico is one of the most committed apologists of capitalism and believes that Christianity is completely compatible with the so-called free market. Rev. Sirico also acts as a sort of spiritual counselor to the brother of Betsy DeVos, Erik Prince.

The visit to Grand Rapids by DeVos for the Acton Institute's Annual Dinner provides a perfect opportunity for people to engage in active resistance. For those interested in organizing some kind of action, send me a message jsmith@griid.org.

Betsy DeVos selectively eulogizes Rev. Dwight Montgomery

https://griid.org/2017/09/19/betsy-devos-selectively-eulogizes-rev-dwight-montgomery/

Last Thursday, the Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, released **this brief statement**:

"Rev. Montgomery was a steadfast advocate for equality and opportunity for all, especially for students and parents. He knew neither income nor address should determine the quality of education a child receives. Through his work in Memphis and with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, many students and families benefitted from opportunities, both educational and spiritual, they would otherwise have been denied.

We in the education community mourn the loss of his leadership, but most who knew him mourn the loss of their pastor. My prayers are with the faithful of Annesdale Cherokee Baptist Church as they will be the legacy of their shepherd."

Such a statement begs the question, "why does the Secretary of Education eulogize a Black minister who is part of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)?

According to a **statement released** by the President of the SCLC, Dr. Charles Steele Jr.:

Montgomery always believed in having a wide variety of educational alternatives available, Dr. Steele said, "because no single, educational approach works for every child." "He was a charter school advocate, and was passionate about both public schools and alternative education," he said. "Traditional schools shouldn't just be a one-way street."

The statement by the current SCLC president provides a window into why Betsy DeVos might eulogize the recently deceased Rev. Montgomery, but it still only provides a small window.

However, an **article** by Laura Faith Kebede on Chalkbeat, provides us with more details on why Secretary DeVos felt compelled to release a statement about Rev. Montgomery.

Kebede writes, *Montgomery backed efforts that would support local Christian schools — including tuition vouchers, which set aside public money for children to attend private schools. Voucher legislation has failed to pass in Tennessee for at least a dozen years.*

The writer of the Chalkbeat article goes on to say:

In Tennessee and Florida, chapters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference have frequently partnered with the American Federation for Children, an organization that DeVos once chaired, to push vouchers as a civil rights issue. In 2015, Montgomery led a group of pastors affiliated with SCLC to the state Capitol to present a petition of 25,000 signatures supporting vouchers.

This statement underscores why Betsy DeVos would eulogize Rev. Montgomery last week. In demonstrates that the Secretary of Education will sing the praises of people who support school voucher programs and those that enter into an alliance with the **American Federation for Children**.

Not surprising, Betsy DeVos did **not** praise Rev. Montgomery for his **recent efforts** to remove a statue of Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest from a Memphis park, shortly after the White Supremacist violence in Charlottesville.

More importantly, DeVos failed to acknowledge Rev. Montgomery's work with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the national Poor People's Campaign. The Poor People's Campaign was really about radical redistribution of America's wealth to the poor, particularly communities of color. Dr. King stated in an SCLC retreat in 1967, his vision for what the **Poor People's Campaign**meant for the movement:

I think it is necessary for us to realize that we have moved from the era of civil rights to the era of human rights…[W]hen we see that there must be a radical redistribution of economic and political power, then we see that for the last twelve years we have been in a reform movement…That after Selma and the Voting Rights Bill, we moved into a new era, which must be an era of revolution…In short, we have moved into an era where we are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society.

Somehow, Betsy DeVos chose not to acknowledge Rev. Montgomery's work against White Supremacy and Capitalism.

Those attending the MSU ribbon-cutting ceremony were greeted by anti-Betsy DeVos protestors in Grand Rapids

https://griid.org/2017/09/20/those-attending-the-msu-ribbon-cutting-ceremony-were-greeted-by-anti-betsy-devos-protestors-in-grand-rapids/

Earlier today, MSU students organized a demonstration at the new MSU medical building on the corner of Monroe and Michigan in downtown Grand Rapids.

The reason for the protest, was due to the fact that MSU administrators had invited Betsy DeVos to speak at the grand opening of the new university facility.

An estimated 60 people showed up to protest DeVos, a protest that was organized by MSU students and faculty.

The MSU student-led protest included a **petition** to stop DeVos from speaking, which included these bullet points:

As Education Secretary, Secretary DeVos:

> Recommends a $9 billion cut in federal education funding, including cuts to higher education, training and after-school programs.
> Supports cutting financial aid to low-income college students making it easier for private loan servicer's to prey on Michigan families. The MSU College of Human Medicine already has some of the highest per student debt in the nation.
> Rolled back regulations on for-profit colleges and has made it easier for low performing for-profit colleges to defraud students.
> Refuses to limit federal education funding for schools who actively discriminate against LGBTQ students.

As expected there were police everywhere, in cars, on bike and on foot, to make sure that the MSU ribbon cutting affair would go smoothly. The police put up tape and barricades to deter people opposed to Betsy DeVos from entering the north side of the property (see below), where the university had set up a large tent where DeVos spoke and attendees could schmooze and have refreshments.

Those who were protesting Betsy DeVos, brought signs and engaged in various chants with bullhorns. The signs covered a variety of messages that spoke to who Betsy DeVos is and what some of her positions as Secretary of Education have been so far.

One of the most consistent messages had to do with what the Secretary of Education is **proposing to change about Title IX**. I did a short interview with one of the protestors who talked about the Title IX issue and why it is so problematic.

Interview at Betsy DeVos Protest on 9/20/2017 while at MSU in Grand Rapids

Jeff Smith

In the early part of the demonstration there were numerous people who clearly were headed to the event with Betsy DeVos. They had to walk through the gauntlet of protestors as they made their way to the north side of the building, where the outdoor tent was. Some notable people who went to hear Betsy DeVos, were President of the Right Place Inc., Birgit Klohs and Grand Rapids City Commission Dave Shaffer. Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss also showed up and since there were members of the Grand Rapids Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), they let Bliss know that she was not welcome. In addition, the CEO of The Rapid, Peter Varga, also came to the event. He was also confronted by protestors, particularly ATU members, who unleashed a barrage of comments at Varga, who just received yet another raise, while bus drivers don't have a contract. Varga had an exchange with one ATU member, then walked back to the corner of Monroe and Michigan and asked a cop to escort him (pictured on the right) down to the north side of the building.

The anti-DeVos demonstration lasted about two hours and certainly made it clear to those who attended the event and those driving by, that Betsy DeVos was not welcomed.

Lastly, there were about 15 pro-Trump/pro-DeVos people who also showed up, but they didn't seem to be there for any other reason than to harass those in the anti-DeVos camp. They were not successful.



The significance of Betsy DeVos appointing John Engler to the National Assessment Board

https://griid.org/2017/10/04/the-significance-of-betsy-devos-appointing-john-engler-to-the-national-assessment-board/

Last week it was reported by MLive, that Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos had appointed several new people to the National Assessment Board, including former Michigan Governor John Engler.

The National Assessment Board's mission is to:

*The National Assessment Governing Board was **created by Congress** in 1988 as an independent, nonpartisan board to set policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as The Nation's Report Card.*

MLive includes a brief comment from DeVos about the appointment of Engler, where the Secretary of Education says, "***He is a tireless advocate for all our nation's students, and his strong leadership will be a substantial asset to the board***."

The MLive article also mentioned that Engler has been a supporter of Charter schools and, "*as governor helped launch the sector in 1993 with an effort to overhaul school funding and the eventual passage of the Michigan Charter School Act of 1994."*

The MLive article didn't say much more than what is cited above and the same was the case for the announcement in the **Detroit Free Press** and the **Detroit News**.

Shortly after John Engler became Governor of Michigan, the issue of public education funding became an issue. Engler had proposed in the summer of 1993 to cuts property taxes by 20%. At the time, as a State Senator, Debbie Stabenow proposed a 100% cut to property taxes.

According to a story on Michigan Radio,

At the time, Stabenow's move was widely interpreted as an attempt on her part to show how silly it was to cut taxes without specifying new revenues for the schools. If that was its purpose, it backfired. The Senate passed the amended bill the same day, the House followed a day later, and the governor immediately announced that he would sign the bill. With little debate the state had eliminated $6.5 billion in school taxes for the 1994-1995 school year. Absent further action, there would be no way to finance the public schools.

This decision to gut financing for public schools, eventually paved the way for charter schools to be introduced into Michigan.

I remember when this was all happening. Governor Engler came to Grand Rapids in the fall of 1993 to visit what was then called Henry School (now MLK School). There were parents and other activists waiting for the Governor's motorcade. One parent held a sign that said, "Hey Engler, Remember what happened to Custer." Engler's motorcade did not stopped and parents were prevented from speaking with him while he visited the school.

The Michigan Radio piece then goes on to say, "*Both Republicans and Democrats worked together to create school choice in Michigan – that issue was not put to voters. The question to voters was how to pay for it. Proposal A increased the state sales tax and tobacco tax to help pay for schools. It also put a cap on how much money local governments could raise to spend on schools."*

Since then the **record on the performance of Charter Schools is not good**, according to a recent story by The Bridge. And John Engler is certainly a part of that same legacy, a fact that seems to be missed by MLive and the other major dailies in Michigan.

For a listing of those who will join John Engler on the National Assessment Board, **see the information that the Secretary of Education posted on each of the new appointees**.

A Eulogy for Public Education: Demonstrators march in Grand Rapids and denounce the policies of Betsy DeVos

https://griid.org/2017/10/09/a-eulogy-for-public-education-demonstrators-march-in-grand-rapids-and-denounce-the-policies-of-betsy-devos/

About 60 people gathered in downtown Grand Rapids yesterday, to hold a mock funeral for public education.

Organized by the Michigan Student Power Network, people met at Monument Park, most dressed in black, to eulogize Public Education in the US. Those who organized the action handed out a small document, something you might find at a funeral, which read in part:

It is with great sadness that we announce the impending death of the great institution of Public Education. After years of living on life support, Public Education is now in the terminal stages of its long battle with underfunding, privatization, segregation, and rich political donors, it would seem that the end is drawing near for this vital institution.

Shortly after 2pm, one of the organizers read the entire statement, a statement that was offered up as a eulogy in this video.

Eulogy for the Death of Public Education action in Grand Rapids 10/8/2017

Jeff Smith

After the eulogy, the march/procession began with people carrying signs, banners, flags and coffins, each speaking to the death of public education. The group of 60 marched west on Fulton Street, then around the arena district, to end up back on Fulton Street. Here is a short video of the march/procession.

Death of Public Education protest in Grand Rapids 10/8/2017

Jeff Smith

Along the route, the march/procession made stops at the downtown GVSU campus, the GRCC campus and back to Monument Park. At each stop there were speakers addressing a variety of issues such as the **assault on Title IX policies**, which will decrease the efforts to support those who have been sexually assaulted on school campuses across the country.

Another speaker addressed the issue of **budget cuts for education**, especially to programs that are offered to students with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

Another speaker addressed how the Secretary of Education and her policies have and will impact the Grand Rapids Public Schools. This speaker also addressed the **relationship between Betsy DeVos and the Superintendent of the GRPS**.

Along the march/procession route, there were a few detractors, but most people responded positively to what the action was drawing attention to. As expected, the police got involved early on in the march/procession (see photo above) and even threatened people at one point with arrest if they didn't get out of the street.

You can follow the Michigan Student Power Network on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/michiganstudentpower/?ref=br_rs.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Protests continue to follow the Secretary of Education across the country

https://griid.org/2017/10/16/betsy-devos-watch-protests-continue-to-follow-the-secretary-of-education-across-the-country/

On Friday, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos spoke in Seattle, Washington at a forum hosted by the Washington Policy Center.

Her speech was not unlike many of the other speeches she has given since becoming Secretary of Education, especially at forums hosted by organizations that have similar a ideological framework as DeVos.

There were a couple of things during her speech that are worth noting. **First**, DeVos once again used the mantra of states rights to push her education agenda, commenting that states, "*are best equipped to solve the unique problems they face*." **Second**, DeVos argues that public money is really the taxpayers money and therefore, shouldn't parents be able to spend that money how they want in terms of education? I wonder if Betsy feels the same way about tax dollars that subsidize large corporations, like Amway. Does she think the public should be able to decide if Amway or any other corporations should receive public money? How about the public tax dollars that go to the US military? Should the public be allowed to have a say in how that money gets used and whether or not they want it to go to the largest military in the world? Betsy DeVos, like

all neoliberal capitalist only believe in government intervention when it serves their interest.

Third, DeVos makes a comparison between food and education choice. She states:

Near the Department of Education, there aren't many restaurants. But you know what? Food trucks started lining the streets to provide options. Some are better than others; and some are even local restaurants that have added trucks to their businesses to better meet customer's needs.

Now, if you visit one of those food trucks instead of a restaurant, do you hate restaurants? Or are you trying to put grocery stores out of business?

No. You are simply making the right choice for you based on your individual needs at that time.

This argument is essentially a free market argument, where she believes that education, like food or anything else, is nothing more than a commodity.

Fourth, early on in her speech, DeVos says:

State-based centers like yours are important in shaping policy because you have great ideas and you fight for them. Your fellow member in the State Policy Network, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, has advanced major initiatives in my home state of Michigan.

It is important to understand that the **Washington Policy Center**, just like the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** and the **Acton Institute** are all think tanks that are members of the State Policy Network.

According to Source Watch:

*The **State Policy Network** (SPN) is a web of right-wing "think tanks" and tax-exempt organizations in 49 states, Puerto Rico, Washington, D.C., Canada, and the United Kingdom. As of July 2017, SPN's membership totals 153. Today's SPN is the tip of the spear of far-right, nationally funded policy agenda in the states that undergirds extremists in the Republican Party.*

The Center for Media & Democracy published an excellent report entitled, **Exposed: The State Policy Network**, which we highly recommend. Here is just one of the section from the report that provides a snapshot of what the State Policy Network advocates all across the country.

Protests Follow Betsy DeVos wherever she goes

Lastly, it is important to point out that during the 8 months that Betsy DeVos has been the Secretary of Education, protests occur no matter where she travels to. **While she was in Seattle last Friday**, she was greeted by over 1,000 people, possibly the largest demonstration she has been confronted by since taking office.

This video gives you a sense of how large the protest was.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

People in Grand Rapids have certainly protested Betsy DeVos while she has visited Grand Rapids, both on in early August while she was at **GRCC** and more recently while speaking at the opening of the **new MSU building in downtown Grand Rapids**.

In the Seattle Times story last Friday, they provide an interactive map of where the Secretary of Education has visited and how many times she was met by protestors. Go to this link and scroll down halfway through the article until you see this map.

This Wednesday, we have a chance to add to the number of protests against Betsy DeVos since she became Secretary of Education. The Acton Institute is holding its annual meeting at the DeVos Convention Center and Betsy DeVos is the keynote speaker. For details on the protest, **go here**.

Gauntlet of Shame greeted Acton Institute event attendees and Betsy DeVos supporters in Grand Rapids last night

https://griid.org/2017/10/19/gauntlet-of-shame-greeted-acton-institute-event-attendees-and-betsy-devos-supporters-in-grand-rapids-last-night/

As we **reported on last month**, Betsy DeVos was the keynote speaker at the Acton Institute's 27th annual gala event, held at the DeVos Convention last night.

The protest outside was designed to make it uncomfortable for those attending the event, which were largely members of the capitalist class. The Acton Institute set up valet parking right along Monroe St. in front of the Convention Center, but some people chose to park in the ramp across the street under the city/county building. Either way, people who were attending the Acton Institute event had to pass through a gauntlet of protestors who greeted them with whistles, signs and chants of "Shame" as they entered the building.

Rich people attending Acton event

Jeff Smith

Betsy DeVos Protest at Acton Institute Event

Jeff Smith

The idea behind the Gauntlet of Shame was to communicate clearly to the Capitalist Class that what they do and what they support causes actual harm to people, especially to those most marginalized. We know that what the Acton Institute stands for, which is primarily about the neoliberal capitalism – profits over people, the privatization of public services, attacks against public education, dismantling unions – that these policies cause tremendous harm to working class people and especially to communities of color.

Betsy DeVos Protest at Acton Institute Event

Jeff Smith

Another aspect about last night's protest was that people were not there to engage in a dialogue. The Capitalist Class isn't going to change, because they benefit from the systems that are in place. We were there to make people feel uncomfortable, because of all the harm they cause in the world. Here is the text of a handout that someone made, which sums up well the reasons why people were confronting those attending the Acton Institute Gala event.

Cops and War Criminals

The police presence was minimal when the demonstration began last night, with some cops in cars and others on bikes to keep an eye on those protesting. However, once it became clear that the protest was not the usual sign holding affair and that people were being made to feel uncomfortable, the police numbers grew.

The protest was concentrated at the main convention center entrance off of Monroe, so the police presence was heavy there, with 6 cops standing in front of the doors (along with

convention center security) and then several other cops around the perimeter of that entrance, since people were coming from the north and south side of Monroe to enter the building. The police were even escorting members of the Capitalist Class from the valet area to the building.

At one point, just before he entered the building, people recognized the brother of Betsy DeVos, Erik Prince, who was attending the Acton Institute event. Immediately, people began shouting War Criminal at Prince and walking towards him. The police stood in front of those attempting to get closer to Prince, and just before he entered the building he blew a kiss to those protesting. This gesture was nothing more than a big "Fuck You" to everyone outside. Erik Prince can arrogantly make these gestures because he knows

that the current political and economic system will protect people like him, despite the fact that the mercenary corporation he used to own, Blackwater, was responsible for the **murder of innocent Iraqi civilians**. Prince himself **lived in the United Arab Emirates** for several years to avoid extradition for his role in those murders. The Capitalist Class gets to live in this world, causing tremendous harm, and then they do not have to suffer the consequences of their actions.

The protest against the Acton Institute and Betsy DeVos began at 5:30pm and ended just after 7pm, since the dinner/keynote address was scheduled for 7pm. People left feeling energized, especially since this was an action that was focused on directly confronting those who attended the Acton Institute and those who support the current Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos.

Betsy DeVos Protest at Acton Institute Event

Jeff Smith



Betsy DeVos Watch: The Shock Doctrine, Puerto Rico and Public Education

https://griid.org/2017/11/30/betsy-devos-watch-the-shock-doctrine-puerto-rico-and-public-education/

It has been over 2 months now since Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. The devastation left thousands homeless, many without power and thousands more which have sought refuge in various parts of the US.

While this is considered old news in the hyper-up to the minute US news cycle, it is important that we all not forget about Puerto Rico, especially since the island is at risk of ongoing efforts to privatize everything from electric power to education.

On November 8, US Secretary of Education visited Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. **DeVos stated**, "*The dedication shown by educators, administrators and local leaders to getting students back in the classroom, and their lives back to normal, was evident at each stop. The U.S. Department of Education will continue to assist them in every way we can."*

This is an interesting statement from Secretary DeVos, especially since there is no evidence that she met with teachers during her brief visit. In fact, **teachers were protesting her visit** for fears that Betsy DeVos would implement a kind of shock doctrine as it relates to public education on the island.

According to one source, *Members of the **Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico** rallied at the headquarters of the Department of Education in San Juan to demand a meeting with (Puerto Rican Secretary of Education) Keleher. The FMPR union has charged Keleher with deliberately keeping many of the island's schools closed, even after teachers and other volunteers have cleared them of debris and cleaned them, because she intends to permanently shutter them.*

Last week, independent journalist **Vijay Prashad wrote** of the ongoing crisis in Puerto Rico:

"Of Puerto Rico's 1,113 schools, only 119 have reopened. The teachers' union, Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico, has suggested that the government has slowed down rebuilding of schools in order to push for their privatisation. They say that the plans for the rebuilding of Puerto Rico are similar to what was done in New Orleans after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when schools fired teachers and created a network of private charter schools. The Federación worries that much the same will happen in Puerto Rico. The failure to reopen schools is one sign of such a plan."

The concerns raised by the teacher's union in Puerto Rico, and many others, about the potential privatization of public education on the island are real. Author of the Shock Doctrine, Naomi Klein, believes that all we need to do is look at the recent example of Hurricane Katrina and how that catastrophe provided an opportunity to privatize the public education system in New Orleans.

Bill Quigley, who has been writing about and monitoring the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans, has written a great deal about how the Shock Doctrine was applied to public schools. In a very thorough and thoughtful **article from 2007**, Quigley writes:

Before Katrina, the process of creating a charter school was legally required to first have the approval of parents and teachers. Supporters of this experiment, many if not most of who do not have children in public schools, repeatedly argue that this

experiment creates "choice" for at least half the parents and students. The irony is that few parents had any choice at all in creating the experiment involving their children.

The very first public school converted to a charter was done on September 15, 2005, while almost all the city remained closed to residents. The school board did not even hold the meeting in New Orleans.

While President Bush may have been slow to react in other areas after the storm, he made a bold push right after Katrina to help convert public schools to charters.

On September 30, 2005, the U.S. Department of Education pledged $20.9 million to Louisiana for post-Katrina charter schools. The federal government offered no comparable funding to reestablish traditional neighborhood or district schools.

In early October 2005, Governor Blanco issued an executive order which waived state laws which required faculty and parent approval to convert a regular public school to a charter school. The Orleans School Board then used this waiver to convert all 13 schools in the less-flooded Algiers community of New Orleans to charter schools without parent or teacher approval.

Then all four thousand public school teachers in New Orleans, members of the largest union in Louisiana, were fired – along with support staff.

US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos had made it clear that these types of changes to public education are exactly what she would like to see continued and expanded while she holds her post within the Trump Administration. This is a story that we need to continue to follow and monitor that could be devastating for the students, teachers and parents in Puerto Rico.

Betsy DeVos Watch: The Education Secretary once again speaks to an organization that the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation gives money to

https://griid.org/2017/12/12/betsy-devos-watch-the-education-secretary-once-again-speaks-to-an-organization-that-the-dick-betsy-devos-foundation-gives-money-to/

One pattern, which has emerged in the first year that Betsy DeVos has served as Secretary of Education, is that she has a tendency to speak at events hosted by organizations that she and her family foundations have provided substantial funding to.

In July, DeVos spoke at the American Legislative Exchange Council's (ALEC) annual gathering. Betsy, and several members of the DeVos Family have been a financial contributor to ALEC over the years. Then, just a few months ago, **the Acton Institute hosted their annual gathering, where DeVos was again the keynote speaker**. Betsy DeVos and other members of the family have contributed substantially,

but the Secretary of Education used to sit on the board of the Acton Institute. Betsy's mother, Elsa Prince Broekhuizen, is a current member of Acton's board.

Less than two weeks ago, DeVos was the keynote speaker at the annual education summit hosted by the Foundation for Excellence in Education. DeVos was a member of the Foundation for Excellence in Education board of directors, until she was chosen by President Trump to run the Department of Education. As in the case of the other examples, the **Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation have contributed significantly the Foundation for Excellence in Education**.

The **Foundation for Excellence in Education** is a group founded by former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush. The mission and focus of the group is around so-called School Choice, which essentially means they promote charter schools and school privatization.

Like many of these right wing think tanks, the Foundation for Excellence in Education (FEE) works closely with the American Legislative Exchange Council on education reform policies. FEE also is a member of the State Policy Network, which provides resources and guidance on implementing neoliberal policies at the state level.

You can read the speech that DeVos delivered at the annual education summit, but there wasn't anything knew or terribly interesting. DeVos continued her usual talking points around making students and parents her priority and why education reform – charter schools, school privatization – are necessary.

There were two things that DeVos said, which are worth pointing out. First, DeVos thanked the woman who introduced her, Denisha Merriweather, was a recipient of at FEE scholarship while attending school in Florida and is now working for Betsy DeVos at the Department of Education.

The other comment from DeVos worth mentioning, also came at the beginning of her speech, when she said:

I'm happy to be back with so many friends at Excel in Ed, especially as you celebrate the 10th anniversary of this National Summit on Education Reform. The Summit has welcomed visionary and inspiring leaders from across government, business and academia, and, as those of you who attended the 2011 Summit in San Francisco will remember, even some friends from Sesame Street made an "unscheduled" guest appearance! I hope they're not joining us again today!

What DeVos inadvertently does, is to acknowledge that people have been resisting the school privatization agenda for as long as she has been promoting it. Here is a **short video**, featuring the first Foundation for Excellence in Education summit speaker, Rupert Murdock, being interrupted in 2011.

When Betsy DeVos spoke at this year's Foundation for Excellence in Education Summit, **teachers again rallied to protest her visit to Nashville**, where the summit was held just 2 weeks ago.

Betsy DeVos Watch: More student protests and hypocritical commencement speeches

https://griid.org/2017/12/22/betsy-devos-watch-more-student-protests-and-hypocritical-commencement-speeches/

What has come to be commonplace when Betsy DeVos visits a campus or speaks publicly across the country, **she is greeted by people who protest her policies and her presence.**

Earlier in the week, DeVos gave the commencement address at the University of Baltimore. As has happened at other campuses where DeVos was scheduled to speak, students and faculty attempted to get the administration to cancel the Secretary of Education's talk.

Before the graduation ceremony people gathered outside of the auditorium to protest the decision of the university to have DeVos as the commencement speaker, as you can see in some of these photos above.

During the commencement speech by DeVos, about 50 students that were graduating turned their back on DeVos, while others booed during her comments as can be seen in the photo below.

In addition, to the protests that confronted DeVos during her speech, it is worth looking a bot at what she had to say. In many ways, what the Secretary of Education had to say was what she has said in previous talks. However, there were a **few things Betsy DeVos had to say**that is worth discussing.

DeVos was talking about three character building points that will help students succeed in the world. These three are the challenge to be thoughtful, the challenge to be selfless and the challenge to persevere. She then set out to explain what she meant by each of these character building points.

On the matter of being thoughtful, she said:

Spend just a few minutes watching cable news and you'll encounter folks who haven't followed that advice. On social media and on many college campuses, groups and individuals pit themselves against each other — not to discuss and debate deeply held beliefs or ideas — but to raise decibels, score "got'cha" points or shout down an opponent's voice.

But we will not solve the significant and real problems our country faces if we cannot embrace this paradox of silence.

There is an element of truth to what DeVos is saying here, but when you look at the context of the current political culture, it makes complete sense that people do not want to have a dialogue or a debate with white supremacists, misogynists or homophobes

and transphobic people. In fact, there has been a push for people to be "civil," when in fact this push for civility has led to compromise and complicity in hate speech and hate-based violence.

In addition, the DeVos Family is notorious for spending millions of dollars to buy candidates and lobby policies. This political spending is considered a form of speech that seeks to silence those who do not have deep pockets, like the DeVos Family. Betsy DeVos herself has said, "*I have decided to stop taking offense at the suggestion that we are buying influence. Now I simply concede that point…..we do expect something in return*." This admission should be understood from a class point of view that rich people, by virtue of their wealth, have the loudest voices in society today.

In regards to the second character building point, DeVos stated:

T*hat brings me to a related challenge: to be selfless. This might also come off as counterintuitive in today's "me-first" culture. But we would do well to recognize that we are — and always will be — greater than the sum of our parts.*

I'm inspired by these lines from Scripture: "the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor."

Too many try to invert the Golden Rule. "Don't do to others what you would not want done to you." The inversion suggests that if we just look out for ourselves, we'd all be better off.

Talking about being selfless, when one comes from a millionaire family and marries into a billionaire family seem rather hypocritical. The DeVos Family, which owns numerous homes across the country, has their own yacht, airplanes and helicopters seems a bit like the "me-first" culture the Secretary of Education is referring to. Betsy DeVos has lived her entire life in a me-first culture, where she has never known what it means to go without, to have to make the difficult decision as a parent to provide food to her children or a warm home to live in.

In fact, it is insulting for DeVos to refer to the "Golden Rule," unless of course she means, that those with the Gold, should rule.

The third, and last character building principle the Secretary of Education elaborated on was:

The last challenge I'm going to lay out today – to persevere – may well be the most difficult to actually do. That's because our culture seems to promote the ideal of a sheltered life, free of hardship. This siren song tempts us to always take the easy road, the path of least resistance.

Again, the idea of perseverance from someone who has known material comfort and excess her entire life, seems rather shallow. I'm not saying that billionaires never have to persevere, but it's hard to take someone like Betsy DeVos seriously, when talking about avoiding the least path of resistance.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Billionaires and Populist Rhetoric

https://griid.org/2018/01/24/betsy-devos-watch-billionaires-and-populist-rhetoric/

As of this writing, the Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, **has posted 26 speeches on the Department of Education website**. Of those 26 speeches, some of them have been given during college or university commencements, while others have been with other state or national education conferences.

However, there are a disproportionally high number of speeches that Betsy DeVos has delivered that specifically addresses organizations and associations that are far right politically and embrace education privatization.

Here is a list of the speeches she has delivered to these far right and other groups representing the current Neoliberal establishment:

2/23/2017 Conservative Political Action Conference

3/29/2017 Brookings Institute

5/22/2017 American Federation of Children

6/13/2017 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

7/20/2017 American Legislative Exchange Council

10/13/2017 Washington Policy Center

10/27/2017 Future Farmers of America

11/30/2017 Foundation for Excellence in Eduction

1/16/2018 American Enterprise Institute

(*Editor's Note: This list of speeches by Betsy DeVos, does not include the speech she gave at the Acton Institute's annual dinner in Grand Rapids on 10/18/2017*)

As you can see, of the 26 speeches that Betsy DeVos has given (as listed on the Dept. of Ed site), nine of those speeches have been given to far right and current Neoliberal establishment groups.

We have reported on two of these speeches, including her comments at the **ALEC conference** and the **Foundation for Excellence in Education Summit**.

Now, we would like to provide some analysis of the speech she gave last week to the **American Enterprise Institute**.

Early on in the Secretary of Education's **speech** to the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), she acknowledges how AEI has, "*influenced and shaped the way Americans think about so many issues in the public square.*"

Betsy DeVos also says she is honored to call the CEO of the Brookings Institute, Arthur Brooks, a friend.

DeVos then goes on to say:

The vast majority of learning environments have remained the same since the industrial revolution, because they were made in its image. Think of your own experience: sit down; don't talk; eyes front. Wait for the bell. Walk to the next class. Repeat. Students were trained for the assembly line then, and they still are today.

I actually agree with this statement from Secretary DeVos. However, we disagree entirely on in what direction public education should go.

Betsy DeVos then offers criticism of both the No Child Left Behind policies of the Bush administration and the Race to the Top policies of the Obama administration. DeVos then uses language as if she wants to come across as a populist by saying, "***Washington bureaucrats and self-styled education "experts" are about as far removed from students as you can get.***"

About half way through her speech, Betsy DeVos finally gets to her solution, which is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Here is what the Secretary of Education thinks ESSA is a step in the right direction:

The Every Student Succeeds Act charted a path in a new direction. ESSA takes important steps to return power where it belongs by recognizing states – not Washington — should shape education policy around their own people. But state lawmakers should also resist the urge to centrally plan education. "Leave it to the states" may be a compelling campaign-season slogan, but state capitols aren't exactly close to every family either. That's why states should empower teachers and parents and provide the same flexibility ESSA allows states.

Essentially, DeVos is promoting the long-standing far right mantra of States Rights. However, as you read in the above comment, she is not just advocating turning power over to states, she is suggesting that even take legislatures can be a barrier to education. This is what Betsy DeVos has been working on for decades,

whether it is with the American Federal for Children, the Great Lakes Education Project or the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. The pro-voucher, pro-charter, pro-privatization agenda is exactly what the Secretary of Education is promoting. The only difference is, she wants to present her approach as looking out for poor, urban school districts. DeVos states, "*So let's face it: the opponents of parents could repeal every voucher law, close every charter school, and defund every choice program across the country*.

But school choice still wouldn't go away. There would still be school choices…for the affluent and the powerful."

How ironic that someone who comes from a millionaire family and marries into a billionaire family, now claims to be for poor, working class parents and students. However, this is exactly the same language that Donald Trump used during his campaign, presenting himself as being empathetic to the working class factory workers who have lost jobs to bad trade policies like NAFTA and then turning around and passing tax policies that benefits the billionaire class that he and Betsy DeVos are part of. Indeed, we live in Orwellian times.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Fake Sympathy from DeVos on MSU victims, while undermining the existing Title IX protections against sexual assault

https://griid.org/2018/01/28/betsy-devos-watch-fake-sympathy-from-devos-on-msu-victims-while-undermining-the-existing-title-ix-protections-against-sexual-assault/

After dozens of testimonies and a trial that lasted several weeks, USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University doctor Larry Nassar was finally sentenced and will most likely spend the rest of his life in prison.

However, there is growing scrutiny of what MSU officials and anyone in a position of power at MSU, who could have done something, and didn't. Those who did nothing or worse, enabled the abuse, include campus police, MSU officials and possibly the MSU football and basketball programs.

According to a recent investigation by **ESPN's Outside the Lines**, it seems pretty clear that the complicity in allowing abusers to either get away with violence or to be let off the hook with minor consequences.

According to the **ESPN report**:

Over the past three years, MSU has three times fought in court — unsuccessfully — to withhold names of athletes in campus police records. The school also has deleted so much information from some incident reports that they were nearly unreadable. In circumstances in which administrators have commissioned internal examinations to review how they have handled certain sexual violence complaints, officials have been selective in releasing information publicly. In one case, a university-hired outside investigator claimed to have not even generated a written report at the conclusion of his work. And attorneys who have represented accusers and the accused agree on this: University officials have not always been transparent, and often put the school's reputation above the need to give fair treatment to those reporting sexual violence and to the alleged perpetrators.

This ESPN report makes it clear, that while Nassar's crimes have been uncovered, the football and basketball programs have not been properly investigated and held accountable. This, no doubt, is in part due to the fact that MSU football and basketball bring a lot of money to the campus and to East Lansing. Anytime big money is involved, those who stand to gain from the profitable football and basketball programs will do whatever is necessary to silence any criticism, even if it means silencing the victims of sexual assault.

Betsy DeVos and Fake Sympathies

On Friday, January 26, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, released the following **statement** in light of the verdict against Nassar.

"My heart breaks for the survivors of Larry Nassar's disgusting crimes. What happened at Michigan State is abhorrent. It cannot ever happen again — there or anywhere. Students must be safe and protected on our nation's campuses. The Department is investigating this matter and will hold MSU accountable for any violations of federal law."

Now, I can't claim to know if Betsy DeVos actually feels sorry for the victims of Larry Nassar or not. What I do know, is that she has spent a great deal of time during her first year in the Trump administration to weaken and attack Title IX protections around sexual assault. Therefore, it is hard for me to take seriously the sincerity of Betsy DeVos' claim that she thinks that what happened at MSU should not happen on any campus ever again. It is what we might name as, good old fashioned hypocrisy.

Last July, we reported on the groups working with Secretary DeVos to weaken Title IX. We noted that groups like National Coalition for Men, an anti-feminist organization, was working with DeVos to undermine Title IX.

Another group invited by Secretary DeVos to the Title IX listening session was Stop Abusive and Violent Environments (Save). SAVE is another anti-feminist organization that believes that campuses are experiencing "rape culture hysteria."

According to a recent article on **Slate.com**, "*The Southern Poverty Law Center has identified SAVE, which opposes rules that prevent defense attorneys from entering evidence of a survivor's sexual history in a rape trial, as a planet in the "**manosphere**" of misogynist online forums. SAVE lobbies against domestic violence protections, claims that the "leading reason" for abuse is "female initiation of partner violence," and calls falsely accused perpetrators the "true victims of abuse."*

Now, having Title IX protections in place, doesn't mean that a campus will comply with those regulations. Again, the ESPN article is important as is states:

*On Thursday, **Outside the Lines reported that MSU officials** in 2014 did not notify federal officials that the university had dual Title IX and campus police investigations of Nassar underway, even though federal investigators were on campus that year scrutinizing how MSU dealt with sexual assault allegations. The Outside the Lines report also found that MSU administrators still have not provided to federal officials all documents related to the Nassar allegations.*

The interesting thing about Secretary DeVos' actions against Title IX and the MSU revelations, is that just two days after DeVos was in Grand Rapids to be part of the celebration of the new MSU building in downtown – a celebration that involved DeVos having informal conversation with MSU President Lou Anna Simon – is when DeVos weakened Title IX protections for sexual assault, as was **reported by Diana Moskovitz**.

In addition, there was a protest organized by MSU students and faculty the day she visited Grand Rapids for the MSU ribbon-cutting ceremony **on September 20th**. You can see from the signs above that much of the focus of the protest was related to her undermining of Title IX protections.

Two weeks after Betsy DeVos and Lou Anna Simon met in Grand Rapids, MSU asked to have Title IX federal monitoring come to an end. In this instance, both the President of MSU and Betsy DeVos are complicit in the sexual assault crimes committed on MSU's campus. How many more victims of sexual assault must come forth before we take their pain seriously?



Betsy DeVos Watch: 2019 Education Budget request and the expansion of the Neoliberal agenda

https://griid.org/2018/02/19/betsy-devos-watch-2019-education-budget-request-and-the-expansion-of-the-neoliberal-agenda/

Last week, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos released the **following statement**:

"The president's budget request expands education freedom for America's families while protecting our nation's most vulnerable students," said Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. "The budget also reflects our commitment to spending taxpayer dollars wisely and efficiently by consolidating and eliminating duplicative and ineffective federal programs that are better handled at the state or local level. I look forward to working with Congress to pass a budget that puts students first and returns power in education to where it belongs: with states, districts and families."

This statement by DeVos, provides us with a clear framework for how the current administration plans to move forward on education. When Betsy DeVos says "education freedom," it is fundamentally code for defunding public education while directing more funds to charter and private schools.

When DeVos says that the education budget will spend taxpayer money to, " *wisely and efficiently by consolidating and eliminating duplicative and ineffective federal programs that are better handled at the state or local level,"* she means that she wants to continue to implement **a Koch-funded/ American Legislative Exchange Council's states rights policy on education.**

Devil's in the Details

The 2019 Education Budget document is not particularly long, nor is it a comprehensive look at what is actually being proposed. However, there are certainly things we can take away from the document that point out specific trends in what the current administration has in mind for education that expands the neoliberal economic model.

The proposed 2019 Federal Education Budget includes the following:

- $1 billion for a new Opportunity Grants program that would expand both private and public school choices, particularly for students from low-income families or attending schools identified for improvement under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- $500 million for the Charter Schools program to strengthen State efforts to start new charter schools or expand and replicate existing high-performing charter schools, while providing up to $100 million to meet the growing demand for charter school facilities.
- $20 million to support innovative Career and Technical Education programs in STEM fields, including computer science, through awards to consortia of secondary and postsecondary providers that would work with employers and local workforce agencies to ensure that these programs are aligned with regional workforce and labor market needs.
- Expanding the Pell Grant program to cover short-term programs. The Department's fiscal year 2019 Budget proposes to expand Pell Grant recipients' eligibility to include high quality short-term programs that provide students with a credential, certification, or license in an in-demand field, with sufficient guardrails in place to balance students' needs with protecting taxpayers' interests.
- $12.8 billion to maintain the Federal investment in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act State formula grant program to help offset the cost of providing special education and related services to approximately 6.8 million children with disabilities.

These five 2019 Education Budget programs are not the only ones included in the proposed budget, but they are the main budgetary items.

Points 1 and 2 are pretty straight forward, with a redirecting of public money to more privately controlled educational systems, an area which Secretary DeVos has been working on for several decades now.

Points 3 and 4 increases the amount of public tax dollars to push a business class agenda, with an emphasis on creating a labor force for that meets specific needs of the business class. Note the language used when it says, "***would work with employers and local workforce agencies to ensure that these programs are aligned with regional workforce and labor market needs***."

While it is important to provide adequate funding for students with disabilities (Point 5), it seems rather contradictory, **considering the administration's attack on the American's With Disabilities Act**. What will it mean for students with disabilities, who upon entering the workforce or just trying to access businesses facilities, is that those businesses can get away with not complying with or delaying their having to provide full access to people with disabilities.

Lastly, the 2019 proposed Federal Education Budget also calls for a $25 million reduction in funds designated for national school safety activities, compared with 2017. President Donald Trump's budget would eliminate altogether a $400 million grant program that districts can use, for example, to prevent bullying or provide mental health assistance. Sort of a slap in the face, considering the most recent school shooting in Florida.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Deconstructing the 60 minutes Interview

https://griid.org/2018/03/13/betsy-devos-watch-deconstructing-the-60-minutes-interview/

*The following **interview by 60 Minutes** with Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, aired on Sunday, March 11, 2018.*

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos is a devout Christian grandmother from Michigan — who has spent most of her life trying to improve the quality of education for poor kids. So how in the world did she become one of the most hated members of the Trump Cabinet? [*How media people frame things is important. Lesley Stahl states as a matter of fact that Betsy DeVos has spent most of her life trying to improve the quality of education for poor kids, yet there is no evidence presented to substantiate this claim.]*

She is dedicated to promoting school choice [*School choice is code for undermining public education and promoting charter and private schools*.] but her critics say she really wants to privatize the public school system that she once called, quote, “a dead end.”

Now, after the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, her portfolio is expanding. Monday, President Trump is expected to appoint her as head of a new commission on school safety charged with developing policies to prevent school violence.

Betsy DeVos visited the school in Florida on Wednesday, but **like almost everywhere else she goes**, she faced criticism. Some of the students sent out angry tweets: “You came to our school just for publicity and avoided our questions.” “Betsy DeVos came to my school, talked to three people, and pet a dog.” Many of the students are frustrated at the administration for talking about school safety, but not acting.

Betsy DeVos: I give a lot of credit to the students there for really raising their voices, and I think that they are not going to let this moment go by.

Lesley Stahl: They want gun control.

Betsy DeVos: They want a variety of things. They want solutions.

Lesley Stahl: Do you think that teachers should have guns in the classroom?

Betsy DeVos: That should be an option for states and communities to consider. And I hesitate to think of, like, my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Zorhoff, I couldn’t ever imagine her having a gun and being trained in that way. But for those who are– who are capable, this is one solution that can and should be considered. But no one size fits all. Every state and every community is going to address this issue in a different way. [*When DeVos and others use the claim that it is up to state and communities to make these decisions, they are really echoing talking points from the **American Legislative Exchange Council** (ALEC) and the **State Policy Network** (SPN), both of which are funding by the Koch Brothers*.]

Lesley Stahl: Do you see yourself as a leader in this– in this subject? And what kind of ideas will you be promoting?

Betsy DeVos: I have actually asked to head up a task force that will really look at what states are doing. See there are a lot of states that are addressing these issues in very cohesive and coherent ways.

Lesley Stahl: Do you feel a sense of urgency?

Betsy DeVos: Yes.

Lesley Stahl: ‘Cause this sounds like talking. Instead of acting.

Betsy DeVos: No, there is a sense of urgency indeed.

The reason Betsy DeVos wanted to be secretary of education was so she could promote school choice, offering parents options other than traditional public schools – where 90 percent of kids go. She has proposed massive cuts in public education funding and wants to shift billions to alternative players like private, parochial and charter schools. [*This is an accurate statement, considering what the budget was in 2018 and what is* ***being proposed for in 2019***.]

Betsy DeVos: We have invested billions and billions and billions of dollars from the federal level And we have seen zero results.

Lesley Stahl: But that really isn’t true. Test scores have gone up over the last 25 years. So why do you keep saying nothing’s been accomplished? [*Challenging question that should be asked to all politicians*.]

Betsy DeVos: Well actually, test scores vis-à-vis the rest of the world have not gone up. And we have continued to be middle of the pack at best. That’s just not acceptable.

Lesley Stahl: No it’s not acceptable. But it’s better than it was. That’s the point. You don’t acknowledge that things have gotten better. You won’t acknowledge that, over the–

Betsy DeVos: But I don’t think they have for too many kids. We’ve stagnated

Lesley Stahl: Okay, so there’s the big argument. So what can be done about that?

Betsy DeVos: What can be done about that is empowering parents to make the choices for their kids. Any family that has the economic means and the power to make choices is doing so for their children. Families that don’t have the power, that can’t decide: “I’m gonna move from this apartment in downtown whatever to the suburb where I think the school is gonna be better for my child” if they don’t have that choice – and they are assigned to that school, they are stuck there. I am fighting for the parents who don’t have those choices. We need all parents to have those choices. [*If Secretary DeVos wants all parents to have a choice to move and put their kids in a better school, she should advocate for making the minimum wage $15 an hour, change the tax system to divert more money from the rich and stop supporting the federal government’s massive subsidies to*

corporations, while reducing public funding for education and other social services. However, advocating for parents in this way is completely counter to the neoliberal economic policies that the US government promotes and that benefits members of the capitalist class, like the DeVos Family.]

Question is: does her solution work? Do choice schools perform better than public schools? Naturally — there are conflicting studies. It's complicated.

But DeVos spends a lot of time showcasing choice schools like Cold Spring Elementary, a public school in Indianapolis – that was allowed to get rid of the local teachers' union and create an innovative curriculum.

But when parents choose these options, taxpayer funds follow the child and that means that the public school left behind can end up with less money.

Lesley Stahl: Why take away money from that school that's not working, to bring them up to a level where they are– that school is working?

Betsy DeVos: Well, we should be funding and investing in students, not in school– school buildings, not in institutions, not in systems.

Lesley Stahl: Okay. But what about the kids who are back at the school that's not working? What about those kids?

Betsy DeVos: Well, in places where there have been– where there is– a lot of choice that's been introduced– Florida, for example, the– studies show that when there's a large number of students that opt to go to a different school or different schools, the traditional public schools actually– the results get better, as well. [*No specific study is cited to verify this claim. There are several studies cited in a Center for Media & Democracy piece from 2017,* ***linked here****.*]

Lesley Stahl: Now, has that happened in Michigan? We're in Michigan. This is your home state.

Betsy DeVos: Michi–Yes, well, there's lots of great options and choices for students here.

Lesley Stahl: Have the public schools in Michigan gotten better?

Betsy DeVos: I don't know. Overall, I– I can't say overall that they have all gotten better.

Lesley Stahl: The whole state is not doing well.

Betsy DeVos: Well, there are certainly lots of pockets where this– the students are doing well and– [*For all the **millions of dollars DeVos and her family invested** in the Great Lakes Education Project, it has not resulted in public education improving in Michigan*.]

Lesley Stahl: No, but your argument that if you take funds away that the schools will get better, is not working in Michigan where you had a huge impact and influence over the direction of the school system here.

Betsy DeVos: I hesitate to talk about all schools in general because schools are made up of individual students attending them. [*Avoiding the question*.]

Lesley Stahl: The public schools here are doing worse than they did.

Betsy DeVos: Michigan schools need to do better. There is no doubt about it.

Lesley Stahl: Have you seen the really bad schools? Maybe try to figure out what they're doing?

Betsy DeVos: I have not– I have not– I have not intentionally visited schools that are underperforming. [*An important admission*.]

Lesley Stahl: Maybe you should.

Betsy DeVos: Maybe I should. Yes.

DeVos is the only Cabinet secretary protected by a squad of U.S. Marshals because she's gotten death threats. She's frequently met by protesters who accuse her of pushing an elitist agenda.

She often manages to offend, as when she called historically black colleges and universities "pioneers" of "school choice" – as though they had a choice.

At this commencement speech at Bethune-Cookman University, **students booed and turned their backs to her.**

Lesley Stahl: Why have you become, people say, the most hated Cabinet secretary?

Betsy DeVos: I'm not so sure exactly how that happened. But I think there are a lot of really powerful forces allied against change. [*Again, to evidence presented or naming specific forces allied against change*.]

Lesley Stahl: Does it hurt?

Betsy DeVos: Sometimes it does. Sometimes it does. Again, I think– I think–

Lesley Stahl: Do you ever say–

Betsy DeVos: –I'm more misunderstood than anything.

Some of the criticism, she feels, is unfair, especially when it involves her wealth. She faced a hostile question about it during a speech at Harvard last year.

Harvard Question: So you're a billionaire with lots and lots of investments. And the so-called school choice movement is a way to open the floodgates for corporate interests to make money off the backs of students. How much do you expect your net worth to increase as a result of your policy choices? [*For a detailed account of Betsy DeVos' investments, go to this* ***link***.]

Moderator: You can choose not to answer that secretary.

Among President Trump's cabinet of moguls and titans, DeVos is the richest: she grew up wealthy and married even wealthier. In their hometown of Grand Rapids, the DeVoses have been exceedingly charitable, their name decorates buildings like the civic center and children's hospital. [*For a more complete critique of the DeVos Family impact in Grand Rapids/West Michigan, see our* ***DeVos Family Reader***.]

At her bruising confirmation hearing, she was grilled about her wealth and lack of experience. She's been an advocate, not an educator.

Lesley Stahl: What happened there?

Betsy DeVos: I've not had a root canal, but I can imagine that a root canal might be more pleasant than that was.

Lesley Stahl: So you've been on the job now over a year. What have you done that you're most proud of?

Betsy DeVos: Yeah. We've begun looking at and rolling back a lot of the overreach of the federal government in education.

By overreach she means regulations. And like most of President Trump's cabinet, DeVos is a devoted de-regulator. Part of her job as Secretary of Education is overseeing guidelines that protect the civil rights of students.

Just days after being confirmed, she rescinded a guideline implemented under President Obama that allowed transgender students to use the bathrooms of their choice – sparking even more protests.

She is now considering scrapping the Obama-era "guidance on how to identify, avoid and remedy discriminatory discipline," which aims to prevent schools from punishing students of color more harshly than their white classmates.

Betsy DeVos: We are studying that rule. We need to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn in a safe and nurturing environment. And all students means all students. [*This statement is in direct conflict with the* ***2018 federal education budget cuts****, which disproportionately impact students of color. The* ***de-regulation around civil rights within education*** *also conflicts with DeVos' claim to create a safe space for all students*.]

Lesley Stahl: Yeah but let's say there's a disruption in the classroom and a bunch of whites kids are disruptive and they get punished, you know, go see the principal, but the black kids are, you know, they call in the cops. I mean, that's the issue: who and how the kids who disrupt are being punished.

Betsy DeVos: Arguably, all of these issues or all of this issue comes down to individual kids. And–

Lesley Stahl: Well, no. That– it's not.

Betsy DeVos: –it does come down to individual kids. And–often comes down to– I am committed to making sure that students have the opportunity to learn in an environment that is conducive to their learning. [*Here, the Secretary of Education ignores decades of discrimination against African American students within the education system. It's as if she was saying, "All student lives matter," which is a ridiculously false notion that makes black student lives invisible. See our post* ***Betsy DeVos and White Savior Politics*** *and see the report,* ***DeVos Watch Year One****.*]

Lesley Stahl: Do you see this disproportion in discipline for the same infraction as institutional racism?

Betsy DeVos: We're studying it carefully. And are committed to making sure students have opportunity to learn in safe and nurturing environments. [*Again, avoiding the question about institutional racism*.]

While this regulation is under review, she has already drawn fire for changing Title IX guidelines on handling sexual assault on college campuses. She's allowing colleges to require stronger evidence from accusers, and give the accused a greater benefit of the doubt. [*See our post,* ***Fake Sympathy from***

DeVos on MSU victims, while undermining the existing Title IX protections against sexual assault.]

Lesley Stahl: Are you in any way, do you think, suggesting that the number of false accusations are as high as the number of actual rapes or assaults?

Betsy DeVos: Well, one sexual assault is one too many, and one falsely accused individual is one too many.

Lesley Stahl: Yeah, but are they the same?

Betsy DeVos: I don't know. I don't know. But I'm committed to a process that's fair for everyone involved.

Lesley Stahl: The Me-Too Movement has come along at the same time. This is all feeding into it. We're not talking about colleges anymore. We're talking about men in positions of power in industry and government. Have you ever had an issue?

Betsy DeVos: I can recall a number of moments in the past– several decades ago that I think today would just be viewed as unacceptable. Yeah.

It's been an unlikely journey and balancing act for grandmother Betsy DeVos, from her sheltered life in Michigan – to her life now as a lightning rod in Washington. [*Not sure this is a fair comment, since Betsy DeVos has not been sheltered, as she was the head of the GOP in Michigan for years and active in numerous national groups and campaigns to undermine public education around the country. See the article* ***Betsy DeVos' Holy War***.]



The day after her 60 Minutes Interview, Betsy DeVos was right back at it advocating for Neoliberal education policies at the American Enterprise Institute's World Forum

https://griid.org/2018/03/15/the-day-after-her-60-minutes-interview-betsy-devos-was-right-back-at-it-advocating-for-neoliberal-education-policies-at-the-american-enterprise-institutes-world-forum/

On Monday, March 12, the day after **60 Minutes aired an interview with Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos**, she spoke briefly at the American Enterprise Institute's annual World Forum.

You can read Betsy's **comments here**, which continues what she has been saying over the past year, which is to push for Neoliberal Education School policies.

Now, the **American Enterprise Institute** is one of the most powerful right-wing think tanks in the US and has been supportive of the larger neoliberal agenda: the transfer of public funds to the private sector, dismissing Climate Change, opposing an increase in the federal minimum wage, supporting US wars abroad and opposing any regulation of the economy.

Betsy DeVos did sit on the board of directors for the American Enterprise Institute, until the end of 2016, but now that she is part of the federal government, her husband, **Dick DeVos has taken her seat at the table**.

It is rare to actually read comments from the American Enterprise Institute's World Forum, since the event is private. In fact, most of the people who attend the event are billionaires and millionaires, along with some politicians who embrace the AEI mission.

The event is so private, that the American Enterprise Institute's **own website** doesn't even mention forum and the only access to the forum electronically is by invitation, as is **shown at this link**.

Whatever one thinks about how the 60 Minutes interview with Betsy DeVos, it is clear that she is going to continue to address audiences that share her world view, the world view of the rich and powerful.

New School Safety Commission has no experience in promoting safety, lots of experience in protecting privilege and criminalizing communities of color

https://griid.org/2018/03/29/new-school-safety-commission-has-no-experience-in-promoting-safety-lots-of-experience-in-protecting-privilege-and-criminalizing-communities-of-color/

Last week, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, announced that a new School Safety Commission has been formed.

The announcement from DeVos also stated, "***The Commission has been charged with quickly providing meaningful and actionable recommendations to keep students safe at school."***

This new commission has been created, in light of the recent school shootings, but is not limited to just gun violence. If the goal is to keep students safe while attending school, then we can make some assessments based on who has been name to sit on this 4 member commission.

Betsy DeVos

Since Betsy DeVos was put in charge of creating this new Commission on School Safety, she has designated that she would be one of the four members of the commission. Her qualifications in this area are rather vague, plus she has inherited a system that in many ways is not committed to student safety.

For instance, since the 1990s, the Department of Justice funded the "Cops in Schools" program, costing taxpayers $750 million. One of the results of the Cops in Schools program, "*has led to the a massive increase in the arrests of students that fundamentally undermines the educational mission of schools, turning them into an extension of the larger carceral state and feeding what has come to be called the school to prison pipeline*," according to Alex Vitale. (*The End of Policing)*

The presence of police in schools has also resulted in more suspensions and detention for students, especially students of color and student from families living in poverty.

This is a system that Betsy DeVos has inherited and she has given no indication that she we de-militarize schools, by removing police officers.

Secondly, Betsy DeVos worked to diminish Title IX policies, thus making it harder for students who have been sexually assaulted on campuses across the country, to get justice.

Third, Betsy DeVos has made no public statements against Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials from coming into schools or waiting at school to arrest parents of students who are undocumented.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions

First, according to a recent **article on Buzzfeed**:

*Sessions had earned top grades from the advocacy group over his two decades as a senator, and the director of the NRA's lobbying arm, Chris Cox, boasted about Sessions's record in an **op-ed last January in USA Today**. The firearm advocacy group announced in a press release at the time that it would **spend at least $100,000 on commercials** to boost him to the top post of the Justice Department.*

Second, just after the school shooting in Florida in February, Sessions, while attending a Sheriff's Convention in Washington, DC, made the following statement:

"I think effective enforcement of our gun laws, focusing on criminals and dangerous people, mentally ill people that have been — where we have the legal ability to do so — can reduce violence in our communities and improve public safety," Sessions said. "It is not good if we got gun laws that say criminals can't carry guns and they never get enforced. So we intend to enforce our laws."

A **Think Progress article** responded to this statement by saying:

*But there are a couple obvious problems with Sessions' idea. Nikolas Cruz, the 19-year-old allegedly responsible for using an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle to murder 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, **bought his military-caliber weapon legally**. Cruz also **had no criminal record**. So it's hard to see how stronger enforcement of existing gun laws could have prevented the carnage.*

Third, Attorney General Jeff Sessions has made it clear that **he will begin deporting more undocumented immigrants**. This will create more stress, anxiety and fear for students who have parents that are undocumented, since schools will be places that ICE agents will target while immigrant parents pick up their children.

Lastly, J**eff Sessions announced last year in a memo**, that he is giving cops permission to continue and expand targeting blacks. This too creates more anxiety, stress and fear for black students if they or their families members will be targeted by law enforcement.

Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen

*Nielsen is a longtime Homeland Security Department official who served as Kelly's chief of staff when he was DHS secretary and **accompanied him to the White House** as his deputy. She also worked at the DHS during the George W. Bush administration and founded a consulting firm focused on risk and security management,* according to a **Washington Post story** last year.

After the Florida school shooting, the Department of Homeland Security **announced they were** drafting a guide to help schools and law enforcement create Targeted Violence Prevention Plans.

"These plans outline procedures for schools on how to create multidisciplinary threat assessment teams, establish central reporting mechanisms, identify student behaviors of concern, define the threshold for law enforcement intervention, and identify intervention and management strategies for decreasing the risk of a targeted attack," a Homeland Security news release said.

This announcement doesn't really sound like this effort will keep students safer, instead it will likely result in profiling students over "behavioral concerns."

Lastly, upon taking office in December of 2017, Nielsen made it clear where she stands on immigration issues, when she stated:

"The president has made it clear that my number one priority as secretary of Homeland Security is to protect America from all threats," Nielsen told the Washington Examiner on Friday. "As I discussed this week, making America safe starts with securing our borders, increasing interior immigration enforcement, protecting our communities, and dismantling transnational criminal organizations."

Like her colleagues on the School Safety Commission, Nielsen is equally committed to rounding up undocumented immigrants, which will created a larger climate of fear for students of immigrant parents.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar

Azar comes to the Trump administration as the former president of the U.S. arm of Eli Lilly & Co. Eli Lilly has a history of **spending millions of dollars** to get candidates elected and to lobby for policies that would be financially beneficial to the pharmaceutical industry.

Azar has no real world experience around public safety issues, let along school safety. However, the head of Health & Human Services has said that he would support the CDC in conducting more extensive research into gun violence.

As you can see, it would be unreasonable for the public to have expectations that this new commission will actually make a difference in school safety. On the contrary, this commission will likely result in firming up the already systemically violent relationship to students, particularly black students and students from immigrant families.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Adding another anti-civil rights lawyer to the Dept. of Education

https://griid.org/2018/04/24/betsy-devos-watch-adding-another-anti-civil-rights-lawyer-to-the-dept-of-education/

Last Wednesday, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, announced the confirmation of Carlos G. Muñiz as the Education Department's General Counsel. In a **statement that DeVos released**, she said:

"*We are pleased to finally have Carlos on the team. After a protracted confirmation process, Carlos can at last get to work on behalf of our nation's students. He has dedicated his career to upholding the law, and his insight and expertise will be invaluable as we work to advance educational opportunities for all students.*"

As a lawyer, Muniz is currently a partner with McGuireWoods LLP and a senior vice president in the National & Multistate Strategies group of McGuireWoods Consulting LLC. Muniz previously worked as Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi's chief of staff for three years, between 2011 and 2014. During his time in that capacity, Muniz represented Florida State University in a lawsuit brought by a student who accused the former quarterback Jameis Winston of raping her in 2012. That **case was settled with the accuser for $950,000**, but the Office of Civil Rights opened an investigation after it was discovered that the university barely investigated the rape case.

In addition, Carlos Muniz helped to defend the Florida Attorney General's decision to sit out legal action against Trump University, a controversial real estate seminar owned by Donald Trump.

As General Council to the Department of Education, Muniz will decide which school legal battles to pursue. The Department of Education has already come under fire, because Secretary Betsy DeVos has already said that she will limit the amount of civil rights cases her department will hear. **DeVos has also made it clear that Title IX cases will be treated differently**, since she has chosen to bring in several Men's Rights groups who claim that there are plenty of cases on college campuses where women are falsely accusing men of rape.

Betsy DeVos has also diminished the Department of Education's role in defending the rights of LGBT students, students with disabilities and students of color. Bringing in Muniz, is just one more confirmation of the Department of Education's lack of commitment to civil rights issues within education.

Lastly, Muniz is part of the **Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies**, a conservative Libertarian group, which receives funding from numerous large right wing foundations, supports the **American Legislative Exchange Council** (ALEC) and is a member of the **State Policy Network**. Both ALEC and the State Policy Network work at the state level to push a right wing agenda, which includes the privatization of education, which Betsy DeVos supports.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Another speech at a religious university founded by Billionaire Christian Tom Monaghan

https://griid.org/2018/05/10/betsy-devos-watch-another-speech-at-a-religious-university-founded-by-billionaire-christian-tom-monaghan/

As we **reported on in December**, Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education has a penchant for speaking at organizations or educational institutions that shares her ideological perspective.

It seems clear by now that DeVos choses to speak in public at places where she is welcomed, **because virtually every other place she has given a speech has been met with significant resistance**.

Therefore, it is no surprise that on May 5th, Betsy DeVos chose to give a commencement speech at a University that shares her values. The Secretary of Education spoke at Ave Maria University last week, a conservative Catholic university that was founded by Domino's Pizza CEO Tom Monaghan.

Just days before Betsy DeVos delivered the commencement speech at Ave Maria University, it's president, Jim Towey, wrote an article on the school's blog, entitled, ***Why We're Honored To Host Betsy DeVos At Our University's Commencement***. In that article, Towey was hyper-critical of the Obama administration's policies that were adopted through the Education Department's Office of Civil Rights (OCR). Towey then goes on to write:

One of the biggest threats to Ave Maria and other higher education institutions in the Obama era was the 2011 OCR directive on how colleges were to proceed in investigating Title IX sexual assault claims on campus. While the goal was widely supported – to ensure colleges "take immediate and effective steps to respond to sexual violence in accordance with the requirements of Title IX" – the implementation and fear of a forced settlement agreement meant that university officials everywhere scrambled to hire "regulatory czars" and more staff to deal with the mountain of new requirements. By government edict, the evidentiary standard on sexual assault cases was lowered to a "preponderance of the evidence test" and any college with a higher standard or other safeguards for the accused had to amend their procedures and rules . . . or else.

This clear overreach by social engineering zealots in the upper echelons of the Department defeated the laudable intent of protecting students from sexual assault and bringing justice to perpetrators. OCR boasted at the end of Obama's eight years that it had "proactively initiated" over 200 investigations and received a record-breaking 76,022 complaints. Maybe so, but the dragnet also surely victimized students wrongfully accused of sexual assault. In addition to being denied their right to due process, they have and will suffer immeasurably from the ordeal. Many colleges chose not to defend their practices but instead took the equivalent of a "plea deal" by signing "resolution agreements" to escape OCR's investigative tentacles.

Towey also writes about the abomination of gender identity that now operates outside of the male and female gender framework. The Ave Maria University president said that the idea that people can self-identify on their gender, "***sent shivers to any faith-based or other college like ours who values religious liberty and devotes a great deal of study to theology and the "assigner" who created us."***

With this kind of worldview, you can see why the university invited Betsy DeVos to give their commencement address.

Again President Towey gushes over the Secretary of Education, in his introduction of her before the commencement speech. Towey even thanks Dick DeVos for accompanying his wife to the campus and praises their commitment to family values.

DeVos didn't have much to say in her commencement address, other than to highlight and honor Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa, both examples of conservative Catholic values in the 20th Century.

However, DeVos does acknowledge the founder of Ave Maria University, Domino's Pizza CEO Tom Monaghan. Monaghan has supported conservative and rightwing Catholic groups for several decades.

I first became aware of Monaghan's politics in the early 1980s, when he was deeply involved in an Ann Arbor-based group called the Word of God (also often referred to as WOG). The Word of God group was connected to the Catholic Charismatic movement, which wedded Catholicism and Pentecostalism. In addition, the Word of God community was very involved in supporting the conservative catholic community in Central America in the 1980s, which opposed the influential Liberation Theology movement.

Monaghan provided financial support to the conservative Catholic movement in Honduras and Nicaragua in the 1980s believed that the US government needed to support the terrorist group known as the Contras. According to Russ Bellant, author of *The Religious Right in Michigan Politics*, Monaghan was quoted in the early 80s as saying about the need to support the Contras, "***Talk about dominoes if we lose! It's going to be El Salvador, it's going to be Panama, it's going to be Mexico. We could have a Soviet client state along our border.***"

In addition to funding the Word of God community in Ann Arbor and founding Ave Maria University, Monaghan also founded the group known as **Legatus**. Legatus is an organization made up of Catholic businessmen, which refers to itself as **Ambassadors for Christ in the Marketplace**.

Legatus is also based in Ann Arbor and has chapters all over the US, including in Grand Rapids.

Once again, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos gave a speech at a religious university, that; 1) shares similar conservative values, 2) is openly supportive of the Department of Education's watering down of civil rights and the undermining of Title IX provisions, and 3) was founded by a billionaire Christian businessman, just like members of the DeVos Family.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Promoting Private Education, New York fundraisers and references to Acton Institute founder Fr. Robert Sirico

https://griid.org/2018/05/25/betsy-devos-watch-promoting-private-education-new-york-fundraisers-and-references-to-acton-institute-founder-fr-robert-sirico/

On May 16th, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, was once again speaking at an event hosted by an organization that funds private, religious education.

DeVos was the featured speaker at a fundraiser for the Alfred E. Smith Foundation, a foundation that supports Catholic Education. Named after a former New York Governor, the **Alfred E. Smith Foundation** not only supports Catholic education, they provide grants to other Catholic social service agencies.

In her comments at the annual fundraiser by the Alfred E. Smith Foundation, DeVos cites Pope Leo the 13th:

"The contention that the civil government should — at its option — intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household is a great and pernicious error." Pope Leo was right! Government can't know the needs of individuals better than a parent, a pastor or a friend.

Not surprising that DeVos would use such a quote from Pope Leo the 13th, since it justifies her position of limiting government influence in private education and her undermining of public education.

DeVos goes on to talk about changes to state constitutions that would prohibit tax dollars to support private, religious schools – something that DeVos ironically calls bigotry.

DeVos continues with an ideological framework around education, when she says:

That's why I'm committed to expanding education freedom for families across America. You've heard me described as "pro-school choice." Well, I am, but

choice in education is not limited to a student picking this building or that school – using this voucher or that scholarship. And it's not public versus private. Parochial versus charter. Homeschool versus virtual. Choice in education is bigger than that.

Choice is about freedom! Freedom to learn, and to learn differently. Freedom to explore. Freedom to fail, to learn from falling and to get back up and try again. It's freedom to find the best way to learn and grow…to find the exciting and engaging combination that unlocks the God-given potential in every individual.

DeVos then refers to a student in Grand Rapids, Michigan, who received a scholarship from Sacred Heart Academy. Sacred Heart Academy, used to be Sacred Heart of Jesus School, but in 2013-2014, the school changed it's focus under the leadership of Fr. Robert Sirico, the founder of the rightwing group, the **Acton Institute**.

Fr. Sirico utilizes the resources of the Acton Institute, to provide programing at Sacred Heart Academy, which is **reflected in the curriculum and programing offered at the school**. It is no surprise that Betsy DeVos speaks highly of Sacred Heart Academy and Fr. Sirico, especially since the DeVos Family has contributed millions to the Acton Institute and Betsy herself, used to be a board member of the free market think tank.

DeVos continues in her speech at the foundation to talk about a program in Pennsylvania, where millions of dollars were redirected from public education to private education and the importance of 529 plans.

529 plans are a market-driven plan for families to save money for their children's college tuition. However, last year, some of the provisions of 529 plans were changed, which allow families to cover tuition not only at colleges and universities, but also at private elementary and high schools. You read that correctly, it provides parents a way to use government money to help pay for private education. Below is a useful graphic which shows how 529 plans work and the December 2017 changes.

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, once again demonstrates her commitment to privatizing education and using religion as a means to achieve her goals.



Betsy DeVos Watch: A Corporate Education Appointment and Students as Workforce Development

https://griid.org/2018/07/06/betsy-devos-watch-a-corporate-education-appointment-and-students-as-workforce-development/

In April, **we reported** on the Department of Education adding another anti-civil rights lawyer, Carlos G. Muñiz. In late June, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, **announced yet another confirmation to the Department of Education, Frank Brogan**.

Brogan has served in several different educational capacities and will serve as Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education. Brogan is the former President of Florida Atlantic University and was later Lt. Governor of Florida in Jeb Bush's administration. The last position that Brogan held was Chancellor of the **Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education**.

During Brogan's tenure in Florida he supported redirecting public money to private schools and the downsizing of educators within the public school system. As the Washington Post reported recently, Brogan was part of Jeb Bush', "***corporate school reform movement*** ***that sought to operate public schools as if they were for-profit***

businesses." Thus, adding Brogan to the Department of Education is consistent with the education privatization model that Betsy DeVos has been pushing since she became Secretary of Education in 2017.

Students as Workforce Talent

One of the trends in the attack on public education is recent decades has been the way that the business community has framed the role of students. Students are no longer thought of as developing critical thinking skills or as being engaged in the humanities, students are now seen as talent. For the business community, they see students primarily as future employees and they want students to have the skills needed in order to join the workforce.

In West Michigan, this narrative about students is embraced by the leading CEOs in the area, through a group known as Talent 2025. T**alent 2025 is one of the organizations that is part of the Grand Rapids Power Structure.**

Betsy DeVos has been promoting student development as talent development for the business community long before she became Secretary of Education. So, it's no surprise that the Secretary of Education would attend and speak at the annual conference for SkillsUSA.

SkillsUSA is a national organization that promotes a relationship between students, teachers and businesses for the purpose of developing future employees. **SkillsUSA has numerous corporate partners**, such as 3M, General Electric, Lowes, Snap-On and State Farm.

Betsy DeVos spoke at the SkillsUSA annual conference and competition in late June. In her speech at SkillsUSA, DeVos uses this opportunity to not only talk about career development, the Secretary of Education also used this platform as an opportunity to talk about the "need" to fill jobs in the manufacturing sector.

In **her speech**, Secretary DeVos stated:

We're fundamentally reevaluating what we do and how we do it. Washington's bloated bureaucracies do not meet the needs of our global economy and labor market, and they create artificial barriers between education and workforce programs.

This statement makes it clear that what Betsy DeVos is ultimately interested in, as far as students are concerned, is the expansion of US markets. More specifically, the expansion of US markets, through the eyes of Betsy DeVos, really means increased corporate profits. This ethos of education as profit making was underscored by last week's announcement that the Trump Administration wants to merge the US Department of Education with the Department of Labor.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Freedom, Prosperity and other lies of Capitalism

https://griid.org/2018/07/31/betsy-devos-watch-freedom-prosperity-and-other-lies-of-capitalism/

Last week, hundreds of high school students from around the country attend a conference in Washington, DC, hosted by the ultra-conservative group Turning Point USA.

From the **Turning Point USA website**:

Turning Point USA's mission is to educate students about the importance of fiscal responsibility, free markets, and limited government. Through non-partisan debate, dialogue, and discussion, Turning Point USA believes that every young person can be enlightened to true free market values.

Therefore, it stands to reason that **those invited to speak at this high school summit**, were those who also embraced the mission of the organization, such as Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Senator Orin Hatch, Senator Rick Santorum, billionaires Peter Thiel, Mark Cuban and Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos.

DeVos spoke to the gathering of conservative high school students on Wednesday, July 25. In her **prepared remarks**, DeVos addressed several issues. DeVos began by speaking about the Parkland, Florida school shooting, stating that President Trump has taken swift action to respond to this kind of violence, by appointing a Federal Commission on School Safety, **which has no real experience in this area**, but reassuring the crowd that whatever schools do to respond to violence is really up to states and school districts.

DeVos used her states rights mantra on school safety to then talk about applying the same principle to all aspects of education. DeVos clearly panders to an audience of young people who embrace her philosophy of freedom or more specifically, freedom to chose.

The Secretary of Education then goes on to make the following statement:

There's one thing for sure: you'll enter an economy that's the strongest it's been in years! After the historic Tax Cut and Jobs Act, confidence is at a new high and unemployment – in nearly every sector – is at a new low. Nearly 3 million jobs have been created since President Trump took office, and Americans are more hopeful about their futures!

Of course, Secretary DeVos provided no evidence to support any of these claims, the claim about the economy in general, the claim about the Tax Cut and Jobs Act (**which really benefits the wealthy**) or the claim about job creation. Of course, Secretary DeVos doesn't have to verify these claims, because if people like her just say it, they must be true.

Betsy DeVos also made the following claim in her speech:

So, let's conclude by returning to the idea that made this country great: freedom! You're blessed to live in the most free and most prosperous country in the history of human civilization. Most free and most prosperous. That's no accident. You cannot have one without the other.

Again, no substantiation of such a claim is necessary. In fact, that the US is the most free and prosperous nation in the history of the world is just a truism. It just is. And to question such a claim, borders on treason and heresy.

The high schools students who attended to the Turning Point USA summit certainly believe this truism, that the US is the greatest country in history. In fact, it is a fundamental belief that isn't just embraced by conservatives, but by many liberals as well. In fact, those who are the beneficiaries of this freedom and prosperity, people like the DeVos Family, are well aware of the fact that the prosperity of the US really means the prosperity of the few, act the expense of the many. The lie of wealth accumulation is that anyone can do it. However, the reality is that those who are part of the billionaire class, like the DeVos Family, are well aware of the fact that their wealth is predicated on the poverty and exploitation of others.

This was really the message that Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, was delivering to the 800 students gathered last week in the nation's capitol…….if you believe in capitalism, then you can do whatever you want with your life. To hell with the masses of people who will suffer while you make millions.

Betsy DeVos Watch: At the G20 Summit, DeVos shares her Neoliberal Education vision while Argentinians hold a massive strike

https://griid.org/2018/09/12/betsy-devos-watch-at-the-g20-summit-devos-shares-her-neoliberal-education-vision-while-argentinians-hold-a-massive-strike/

In late July, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos traveled to Argentina to participate in the G20 Summit forum on education.

The G20 meets annually and is made up of the the countries with the 20 largest economies. These gatherings are designed primarily for heads of state from those countries and the leading global financial institutions to figure out how to continue expand neoliberal economic policies that will benefit these 20 countries at the expense of the rest of the world.

These gatherings are always met with significant opposition and this year's summit was no different. There were major demonstrations with a massive strike organized by labor unions in Argentina, as you can see in the video below.

This is the context for the education forum at the G20 Summit, which included Betsy DeVos and her counterparts from other other countries. **A major focus of the education forum was to discuss the link between education and work**.

This link was also part of **Betsy DeVos' brief message** delivered at the summit, where she said:

This gathering provides an important opportunity to learn from each other, acknowledging the vital link between education and the economy. Here, we can discuss our respective challenges, and, importantly, discuss ways to improve education for all students on their lifelong learning journeys as they prepare for today's and tomorrow's careers.

Indeed, education and the economy are indivisible, especially given the interconnectedness of the world today. In the United States, we are focused on expanding pathways to success. We recognize that a dynamic and changing economy requires dynamic and changing approaches to education.

We must first acknowledge that every student is an individual. There is no one-size-fits-all approach that works for every student – and there is no such thing as an "average" student. Each of them come to learn with different experiences, different needs, different learning styles and different dreams. Their education must be equally customized and individualized.

DeVos makes it clear that her vision and that of the US administration is to focus on: 1) what those within the neoliberal education model identify as talent creation, where education is a means to create future workers; and 2) that the best way to create future workers is to change the education system that is more focused on job skills, especially outside of the current public school structure.

In the end, what Betsy DeVos and the other G20 participants were doing was to further a world agenda that the people in Argentina were protesting outside the summit. Betsy DeVos is not only dangerous to the future of education in the US, but the future of education globally.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Freedom, Free Speech on Campus and the National Constitution Center

https://griid.org/2018/10/01/betsy-devos-watch-freedom-free-speech-on-campus-and-the-national-constitution-center/

A few weeks ago, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos spoke at an event organized by the National Constitution Center for their annual Constitution Day.

The speech that DeVos gave in September, was instructive on many levels. A primary theme of the Secretary of Education's speech centered around freedom and freedom of speech. In many ways, Secretary DeVos was chastising both students and campus

administrators of limiting ideas and information. Such a claim seems rather laughable coming from a person who justifies her family's contribution of millions of dollars during election cycles as "free speech."

Another point that DeVos addressed was the issue of civility. Civility is a topic and theme that more and more campuses are pushing, especially since there are more and more students and community members who are challenging what they would identify as hate speech.

A good example of hate speech is the student-led protests that have confronted the white supremacist leader Richard Spencer. More and more student groups or community groups that are marginalized – black, latino, immigrant or queer communities – are protesting, interrupting or even trying to prevent those who promote white supremacy, homophobia, closed borders and privatizing education, as a few examples.

These are examples that are in sharpe contrast to the examples that Betsy DeVos does provide. One example, DeVos gives states:

An official student activities board at the College of William & Mary, a public campus in Virginia, recently hosted a director of the American Civil Liberties Union for a discussion on free speech. Almost as soon as the event got underway, students rushed the stage and began to shout down the ACLU representative, an organization typically allied with many of the same causes shared by those who were shouting. The event never resumed.

What DeVos failed to mention is that those protesting the event were members of a Black Lives Matter chapter that were specifically challenging the ACLU's defense of people like Richard Spencer and other white supremacists to have a public forum to spew their hate. This protest was held in October of 2017, so the BLM protest was drawing attention to the ACLU's defense of the white supremacist gathering in Charlottesville, Virginia.

A second example that Betsy DeVos gave in her speech was about U of M students bringing Alveda Kingto campus and then being charged by the university to provide security. DeVos also mentioned that she was the niece of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. What DeVos failed to mention in her speech was that Alveda King was invited to campus, since she was an anti-abortion activist and was invited by an anti-abortion student group. When other students found out that King would be speaking about her anti-abortion views, the university decided that security would be needed and then charged the group that brought King to campus.

One last example that DeVos mentions was the joint statement that Princeton's Robby George and Harvard's Cornel West issued on freedom of thought. While Cornel West issued such a statement, DeVos again failed to mention that Dr. West was part of the counter-demonstration in Charlottesville attempting to shut down the white supremacy march.

Betsy DeVos also stated that the country has “abandoned truth.” Yes, a person who grew up in a wealthy family that was part of the religious right and married into an even wealthier family that is part of the religious right movement that seeks to impose its values on the rest of society, had the audacity to tell students that people have abandoned truth.

Patriarchy Pushes Back: DeVos-led Education Department provides more protections for those accused of sexual assault with Title IX revisions

https://griid.org/2018/11/19/patriarchy-pushes-back-devos-led-education-department-provides-more-protections-for-those-accused-of-sexual-assault-with-title-ix-revisions/

We have seen the power of the MeToo Movement in recent years, with more and more women finding the courage and the support to confront and name their abusers.

However, so many of society’s institutions still operate within a framework of patriarchy, where the normalization of male dominance reigns supreme. We see this within religious institutions, the legal system, the military industrial complex and the entertainment industrial complex.

The most recent institutional push back against feminism is the US Department of Education’s revision of Title IX. According to a **November 16 Press Release**:

“Throughout this process, my focus was, is, and always will be on ensuring that every student can learn in a safe and nurturing environment,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. “That starts with having clear policies and fair processes that every student can rely on. Every survivor of sexual violence must be taken seriously, and every student accused of sexual misconduct must know that guilt is not predetermined. We can, and must, condemn sexual violence and punish those who perpetrate it, while ensuring a fair grievance process. Those are not mutually exclusive ideas. They are the very essence of how Americans understand justice to function.”

A Washington Post article published last Friday, says that Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos sees the new Title IX revisions as a balancing of the rights of sexual assault survivors and those who are accused of sexual assault.

As we have reported in previous Betsy DeVos Watch articles, the Education Secretary has been providing significant input from anti-feminist organizations across the country, in what DeVos was calling Title IX “listening session.” These groups have providing DeVos with a framework to influence the Title IX revisions, a framework that is essentially anti-feminist and one that embraces patriarchal values.

For instance, the group **The National Coalition for Men**, has an insidious video on their homepage, which asks the question, **Is Feminism a Hate Group?**

Another group, the **Foundation for Individual Rights in Education** (FIRE), which believes that college campuses have an inherently "liberal bias," released a statement on Friday in response to the new Title IX guidelines. **FIRE states**:

The proposed regulations are a marked improvement over the previous guidance in a number of important ways.

By taking the rights of both complainants and accused students seriously, these proposed regulations make important strides toward ensuring that complaints of sexual misconduct will be neither ignored nor prejudged.

The proposed regulations define sexual harassment in accordance with established Supreme Court precedent, eliminating the confusion that has led institutions nationwide to adopt overly broad definitions of sexual harassment that threaten student and faculty speech.

The anti-feminist group **Stop Abusive and Violent Environments (SAVE) wrote about the new Title IX ruling**, "*The rules come after years of rising pressure on universities to better respond to allegations of sexual assault and other misconduct. They land at a time when the #MeToo movement brought increased public scrutiny and accountability to harassment and assault.* ***This proposal, by contrast, pushes the pendulum in the reverse direction.***"

SAVE works closely with the **Center for Prosecutor Integrity**, which makes the defense of those accused of sexual assault their primary focus.

Another group that has had Betsy DeVos' ear in the process of rewriting Title IX is the **Coalition to End Domestic Violence**. This group has also pushed back against the "feminist bias" on campuses, believes in the "preservation of family" (which is code for the preservation of Patriarchy) and promotes the notion that there are too many false allegations against men accused of sexual assault.

Lastly, the group Families Advocating for Campus Equality (founded by parents of students accused of sexual assault), which has yet to post a response to the new Title IX guidelines, does feature an article on their main page with the following headline: **Finally Powerful Women are speaking up for the Rights of Men**. That headline sums up the essence of the push back from Patriarchy to feminism and the recent MeToo Movement.

To view a 1 page summary of the Department of Education's new Title IX guidelines, **click here**.

To review the proposed Title IX rule's section-by-section summary, click **here**.

To read the entire Title IX document changes, **go here**.

Offering up students to the Captains of Industry: Betsy DeVos, Talent Pipelines and the Neoliberal model of education

https://griid.org/2019/01/27/offering-up-students-to-the-captains-of-industry-betsy-devos-talent-pipelines-and-the-neoliberal-model-of-education/

Public education historians have always recognized that schools in the US were designed in part as a mechanism to socialize children to follow orders and have the necessary skills to function as workers. (See a well researched history of public education in the US, by teacher and researcher John Taylor Gatto, *The Underground History of American Education, Volume I: An Intimate Investigation Into the Prison of Modern Schooling.)*

However, in recent decades there has been an increasing desire upon the part the capitalist class to push education systems to create a more deliberate ***talent pipeline***. Translated, this simply means that the business community wants education systems to provide them with more influence and more access to schools in order to groom the future workforce.

This message is exactly what Betsy DeVos delivered at the **87th annual Mayor's Conference** last week, held in Washington, DC. You can read her speech by **going to this link**, but what follows are the most relevant quotes related to the theme that DeVos addressed.

First, DeVos promotes the link between the neoliberal capitalist economy and education:

Despite a booming economy with record-low unemployment, employer after employer reports that they cannot find enough qualified people to hire. I'm sure you've heard the same. There is a disconnect between education and the economy, just as there is often a disconnect between a child and the school they're assigned to.

Second, DeVos enrolls mayors from across the country to assist the business community by pushing the talent pipeline mantra:

As mayors, you have an important opportunity to build relationships between employers and educators. Today giant silos exist between educators and employers, between students and success. But students are better prepared for what comes next when their teachers learn from and partner with their community's builders and doers.

Third, DeVos provides examples of where these business/education partnerships already exist, when she says:

At Harper College outside Chicago, I was impressed by the non-traditional apprenticeships, like ones in banking, insurance, and supply-chain management. These

kinds of apprenticeships are common in other parts of the world, but aren't yet here. They need to be.

Then there's Mercedes and BFGoodrich which partner with Shelton State Community College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to offer students excellent opportunities to upskill in their current profession or start a new one. Employers and educators working hand-in-hand to develop stronger community – in every sense of the word.

These examples are encouraging. Students need more of them. Many more! Employers need them, as do educators. Most importantly, your communities need them.

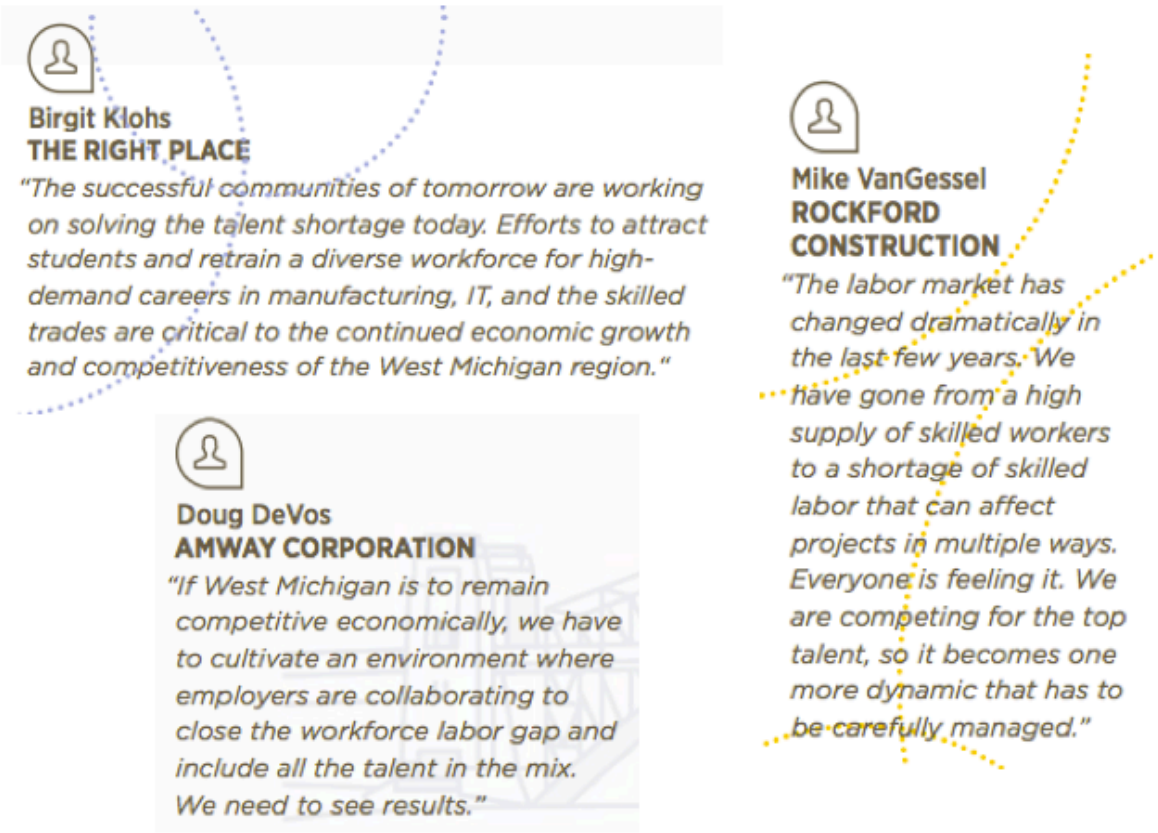
Of course, this is nothing new coming from Betsy DeVos. For the past 20 years, she and other members of the DeVos family have been pushing for a great role for the business community to play in public education. This philosophy of creating a talent pipeline from schools to businesses was a cornerstone in the DeVos creation of the **Great Lakes Education Project**, which was designed to influence education policy in Michigan. DeVos has also been part of the creation of other regional organizations across the country that have also sought to influence both state and federal education policy, as we **documented when Trump nominated her as Secretary of Education**.

We have also reported on these dynamic in West Michigan, both within the Grand Rapids Public Schools and the business-dominated groups that are seeking to create a larger, more institutional talent pipeline in the area. Groups like Believe 2 Become, Talent 2025 and the West Michigan Policy Forum.

In 2017, a report was produced locally, **Workforce Opportunity in West Michigan:Connecting a Qualified Workforce to High-Growth Opportunities**, which demonstrates that the local power structure sees students primarily as workers they can make money off of.

The contemporary business community uses terms like talent management and workforce development, but these are essentially modern terms for what 19th century writers would refer to as wage slaves.

Look at these comments from Business Leaders and you can see how they view students:



Each of these members of the capitalist class make it clear that the function of education is to prepare people to be good and obedient workers.

The talent management group **Talent 2025**has identified these three goals (on the right) for West Michigan, if the economy is to grow.



These goals are instructive, since they make it clear that education should serve business interests, corporate funding should drive greater economic opportunities and the education system should change, meaning it should become more privatized to serve business needs.

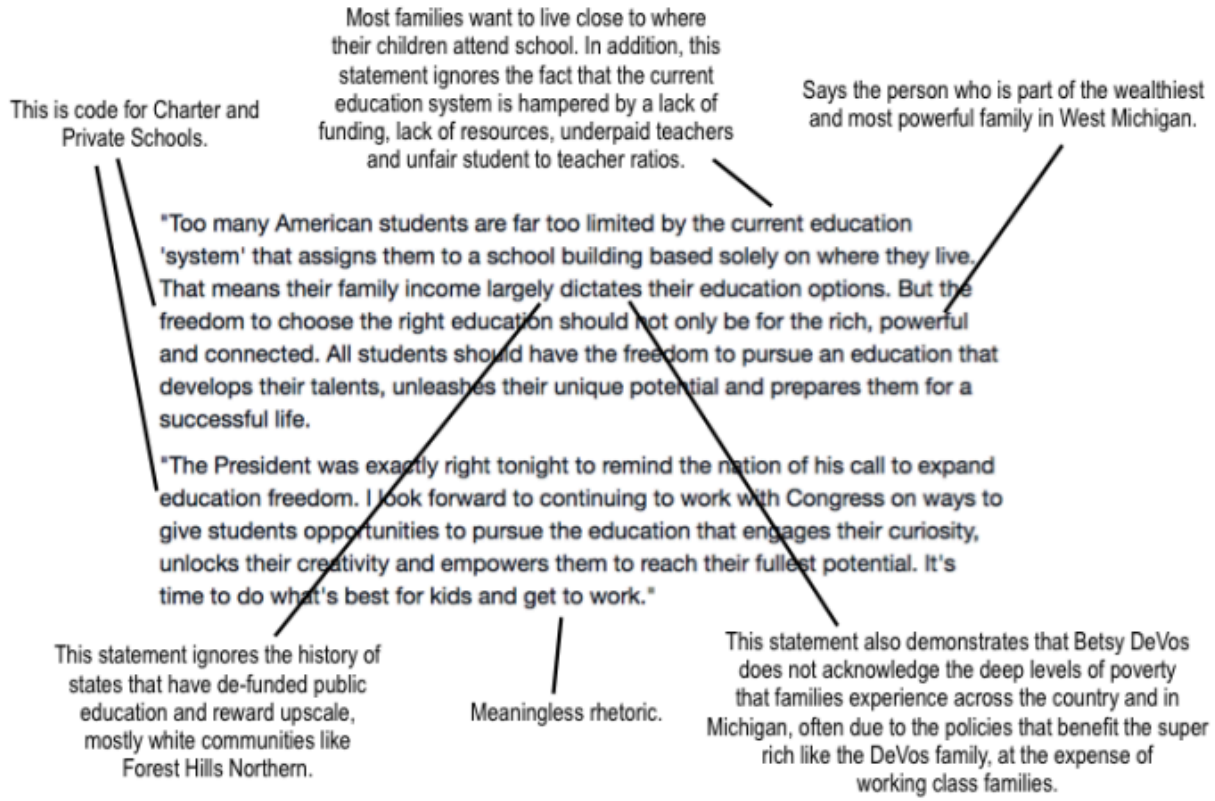
It is crucial that we all not buy into the Orwellian use of language and promote talent creation, talent management or workforce development. This language is simply meant to deceive us into believing the lies of an economic system that only benefits a small percentage of people, like the DeVos family and other members of the capitalist class.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Cheerleading for Trump and School Choice

https://griid.org/2019/02/07/betsy-devos-watch-cheerleading-for-trump-and-school-choice/

After the State of the Union address on Tuesday, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos took the opportunity to thank President Trump for his comments about "education freedom" and her own call for expanding School Choice in a **statement released the same day**.

We decided this would be a useful opportunity to do a simply deconstruction of what Betsy DeVos had to say, which you will find here below.



Betsy DeVos Watch: Newly announced Education Freedom Scholarships has been part of the Betsy DeVos Agenda for the past 20 years

https://griid.org/2019/03/03/betsy-devos-watch-newly-announced-education-freedom-scholarships-has-been-part-of-the-betsy-devos-agenda-for-the-past-20-years/

Last Thursday, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, along with U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) and U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne (R-AL), announced a new federal program called the Education Freedom Scholarship **in a speech she delivered**.

According to DeVos, "*The policy will make a historic investment in America's students, injecting up to $5 billion yearly into locally controlled scholarship programs that empower students to choose the learning environment and style that best meets their unique needs*."

In addition, DeVos wrote an **opinion piece for USA Today**, as another way of promoting this new plan to push an education agenda that she has been backing for the past 20 years.

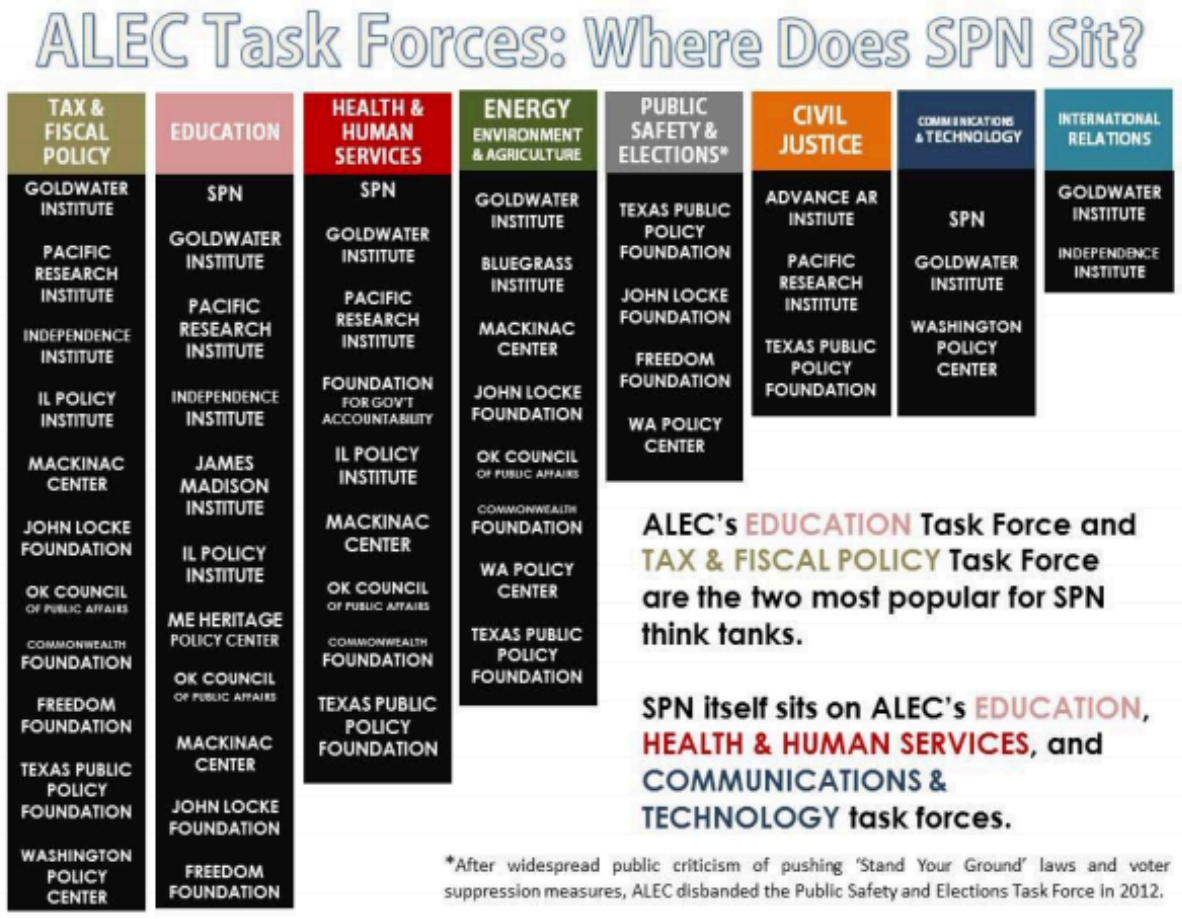
More importantly, the Secretary of Education and her department have created a **stand alone website**, specifically dedicated to the Education Freedom Scholarships. The site provides several fact sheets with the intent of trying to dismiss any criticism of the policy. In the speech DeVos gave on February 28th, she made it a point to say, "***So, you'll hear that our proposal is an attack on public education. But beware: that's fake news!"***

Even if Betsy DeVos uses the Fake News ploy, we should not be fooled by what this policy will do to further erode public education across the country. It should be noted that these kind of tax credit scholarship programs are **already used in 18 states** to provide students with the opportunity to attend schools other than their nearest public school. These programs allow people and corporations to donate to a designated scholarship granting organization (SGO) and be reimbursed in the form of a tax credit. With the DeVos plan, states would designate the eligible SGOs, but the federal government would fund the tax credit reimbursement, up to $5 billion total.

Betsy DeVos has been directly involved in getting these tax credit scholarship programs in the states in the graphic above, through a network of organizations that mirror groups in Michigan like the Great Lakes Education Project and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. Across the country, the **State Policy Network**, which brings together groups that primarily push for policy changes at the state level.

For years, the State Policy Network think tanks have join ALEC in pushing a broad education agenda to privatize public schools, including pushing for-profit online schools, for-profit and other charter schools, using taxpayer dollars for vouchers to for-profit schools, and even so-called “parent triggers” to allow a group of parents to close a public school for current and future students, and turn the school into a charter school or require a voucher system that takes away from traditional public schools.

In the graphic below, you can see some of the think thanks that the State Policy Network partners with the push these so-called School Choice policies.



[Source: The Center for Media and Democracy: SPN Ties To ALEC]

Again, it is important that we recognize that what the new Education Freedom Scholarships policy would do is not totally new, but it would mean that there would be matching federal funds for states which would want to adopt the “school choice” plan being pushed by Betsy DeVos.

The encouraging news is that teachers, students, parents and communities are mobilizing across the country as a counter to the privatization/charter school push, with teacher strikes that have mostly resulted in victories for public education. These campaigns must be supported by a broad sector of the population and by other

movements for social justice, especially since the future of public education is connected to so many efforts to bring about greater equality, justice and freedom.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Making God and the Market central to Education Policy
https://griid.org/2019/03/24/betsy-devos-watch-making-god-and-the-market-central-to-education-policy/

Anyone who is familiar with the DeVos family, knows that the two central ideological pieces their family embraces are, Christianity and Capitalism.

To be clear, the kind of Christianity that the DeVos family practices is a mix of Calvinism and Christian Reconstructionism. Calvinism is evidenced by their, "we are part of the chosen, therefore God has blessed us with great wealth," and Christian Reconstructionism can be seen in their desire to put biblical law over US Constitutional law. For more on the family's history see our ***DeVos Family Reader: We're Rich and We Do What We Want***.

Within the past two weeks, with two separate announcements, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, put God and the Market as talking points for recent policy decisions.

On **March 11**, DeVos made this announcement:

The U.S. Department of Education, in consultation with the U.S. Department of Justice, determined the statutory provisions in Section 1117(d)(2)(B) and 8501(d)(2)(B) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that require an equitable services provider to "be independent of … any religious organization" are unconstitutional because they categorically exclude religious organizations based solely on their religious identity.

DeVos went on to say:

"The Trinity Lutheran decision reaffirmed the long-understood intent of the First Amendment to not restrict the free exercise of religion. Those seeking to provide high-quality educational services to students and teachers should not be discriminated against simply based on the religious character of their organization."

So much of constitutional law comes down to interpretation, but what is really at issue here is not the discrimination of religious educational institutions, but the use of public funds for said institutions.

The second major announcement came on **March 21st**, with Betsy DeVos' statement on the Trump administration's Executive Order on higher education.

We believe that these important reforms, along with the Department's ambitious negotiated rulemaking agenda, will make college more affordable, break down barriers

to innovation in higher education, and encourage new approaches and new partnerships for the benefit of students.

While this Executive Order does deal with tuition costs and loan payments, the important point to note in the statement above is "***new partnerships for the benefit of students***."

What Betsy DeVos means when she talks about new partnerships, is specifically partnerships with the private sector – the corporate and business community. This focus, from the Secretary of Education was reflected a few days earlier, on March 18, when Betsy DeVos was speaking at a **meeting for the National Council for the American Worker**.

Here Betsy DeVos is very clear about what the objective of higher education should be, when she says:

"To meet the needs of our nation's students and our growing economy, we must rethink higher education. Right now, there are 7.3 million unfilled jobs in the United States, yet too many Americans remain out of the workforce because they lack the skills necessary to seize these opportunities. We must do better for our students and workers."

In many ways, these two major announcements, which have occurred within the past two weeks, are a clear indication of Betsy DeVos' desire to make God and the Market central aspects of the US education system.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Winning an award from a Right Wing Think Tank provides an opportunity to trash teacher unions
https://griid.org/2019/05/05/betsy-devos-watch-winning-an-award-from-a-right-wing-think-tank-provides-an-opportunity-to-trash-teacher-unions/

On the day that millions of people celebrate International Workers Day (May 1), Betsy DeVos was the recipient of the Alexander Hamilton Award from the Manhattan Institute in New York City.

The **Manhattan Institute** is a far right think tank, similar to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, based here in Michigan. The Manhattan Institute is a member of the **State Policy Network**, the American Legislative Exchange Council and a recipient of significant funding from the Koch Brothers.

The Manhattan Institute is a climate change denier and they think that bi-lingual resources are a waste of money. Charles Murray, author of the white supremacist diatribe, *The Bell Curve,* was a fellow at the Manhattan Institute. David Frum, who was the speechwriter for President George W. Bush and coined the term "Axis of Evil," went to the Bush White House from the Manhattan Institute.

However, one of the main issues that the Manhattan Institute has invested their analysis and financial resources on, is to dismantle the public school system in the US. In fact, the Manhattan Institute has been involved in the current "education reform movement," the one that Betsy DeVos and her family have spent millions on as a counter to public education.

Betsy DeVos gave a speech, sharing her thoughts on winning the award from the Manhattan Institute, even posting the speech on the US Department of Education's website. It's instructive to note that if you look at the archives of her posted speeches, since becoming Secretary of Education a little more than 2 years ago, you notice that many of her speeches have been at annual far right think tank events or conferences put on by groups that promote charter schools and the privatization of education and educational services.

So what pearls of wisdom did Betsy DeVos share with those attending the Manhattan Institute's Annual Dinner?

DeVos began her comments talking about the wisdom of Alexander Hamilton and then used her brief referencing of Hamilton to claim that only, "*15% of America's students have a reasonable understanding of American History*."

The Secretary of Education then went on to dismiss the amount of money that the City of New York was spending on public education as "wasteful" and stated:

Education spending, Milton Friedman said, "will be most effective if it relies on parental choice and private initiative."

However, the main thrust of DeVos' comments were framed by this statement:

"a cabal has rooted itself between students and their education to protect "what is" at the expense of what could be. Their fingers are in their ears, too, refusing to hear the chorus of voices demanding better. Instead of pursuing innovations for students, they pursue protections from politicians for themselves."

What DeVos refers to a cabal, she means teacher unions.

Betsy DeVos then goes on to say that her department is "***breaking the stranglehold Washington has on America's students, teachers, and schools starting with all the social engineering from the previous administration.***"

For Neoliberal capitalist like Betsy DeVos, all social programs, like Title IX are nothing more than a form of social engineering and must be dismantled at all cost. DeVos and her fellow ideologues believe that the market, not social programs, will provide people the freedom they need to be successful in life.

DeVos continues to criticize public education spending and then counters that spending with her own spending scheme known as Education Freedom Scholarships.
The **Education Freedom Scholarships** are essentially a way for the federal

government to subsidize states which will then offer the money to students to attend charter schools instead of public schools.

DeVos ends her comments with some nationalistic sentiments that border on the bizarre:

American education must lead the world because America must lead the world. America is still the beacon of hope for freedom-loving people. And more freedom at home means Lady Liberty's torch shines even brighter abroad.

When people like Betsy DeVos mean that the US should lead the world, she means the US should be in charge, both economically and militarily. However, there is great irony in the last sentence about freedom and the state of liberty, especially for an administration that is hell-bent on arresting, detaining and criminalizing millions of immigrant families to the point of locking them in cages. DeVos' concept of freedom here is straight up Orwellian and should be a clear indication to how she and her family view the world.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Secretary of Education speaks at the Young America's Foundation – an anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, pro-capitalist and principal outreach organization of the Conservative Movement

https://griid.org/2019/05/20/betsy-devos-watch-secretary-of-education-speaks-at-the-young-americas-foundation-an-anti-muslim-anti-immigrant-pro-capitalist-and-principal-outreach-organization-of-the-conservative-move/

On Friday, US Education Secretary Betsy DeVos once again spoke to an audience that shares her ideological positions, the Young America's Foundation (YAF).

The speech that DeVos delivered was held at Rancho del Cielo, formerly known as the Ronald Reagan Ranch or the Western White House.

DeVos didn't really share any new ideas or thoughts, since she mostly talked about freedom, God and again used the phrase "education Cabal" in referring to teacher unions and other organization committed to protecting public education. DeVos also talked about the **Education Freedom Scholarships**, which is federal education funding that states can apply for and can be used for Charter Schools and other education systems outside of Public Education.

Beyond the repetitive comments in her speech, what is most important to talk about was who the Secretary of Education was speaking to. The **Young America's Foundation** not only embraces deeply conservative values, it actively promotes them on campuses across the country.

Founded in 1960, at the home of William F. Buckley Jr., YAF has been a leading entity in promoting US imperialism around the world and far right domestic principles. The Young

America's Foundation has been a leader in the anti-Muslim movement even before 9/11, helping to craft the Anti-Muslim playbook.

YAF has always embrace deeply nationalistic and xenophobia values, as is evidenced in their recent **statement on President Trump's immigration reform plan**:

The President's plans for immigration reform will:

> *Fully secure the border*
> *Protect American wages*
> *Attract and retain the best and brightest talent*
> *Prioritize immediate families*
> *Strengthen our workforce*
> *Preserve our humanitarian values*

The President's proposal will protect our nation by continuing to add to the 400-plus miles of border wall underway in key locations.

The proposal will empower immigration officials to protect American communities, increasing their ability to remove criminal aliens and alien gang members. It will also restore integrity to our asylum system and expedite the asylum review process for immigrants.

The President's proposal will stop the deluge of child smuggling and quickly reunite unaccompanied children with their families back home.

The President's proposal will put our country's interest first—like so many other nations do for their own citizens—moving to a merit-based immigration system to protect American workers.

Today, vulnerable Americans are the ones hurt the most by the current immigration system, which undercuts wages and drains our social safety net programs.

The President's proposal includes the "Build America Visa," which selects immigrants based on high-skill categories: extraordinary talent, professional and specialized vocations, and exceptional academic track records.

The Young America's Foundation provides a who's who list of speakers that students can bring to campus. The list includes John Ashcroft, Ward Connerly, Steven Crowder, Dinesh D'Souza, Newt Gingrich, Jonah Goldberg, David Horowitz, Michelle Malkin, Oliver North, Ted Nugent, Karl Rove, Rick Santorum, Jeff Sessions and John Stossel……just to name a few. These speakers represent the worst of the far right and include war criminals and white supremacists among them.

If it hasn't been clear to people before, it should be clear that in addition to radically restructuring the US education system in America, Betsy DeVos makes it a point to address organizations that embrace far right politics in order to reassure these entities that she is equally committed to the far right agenda and to rally the base of the far right

and white supremacist organizations that are absolutely necessary for the capitalist class (like the DeVos family) to remain in power.

Betsy DeVos Watch: New Treasury Department regulations will assist in the efforts to transfer public money to private & charter schools

https://griid.org/2019/06/20/betsy-devos-watch-new-treasury-department-regulations-will-assist-in-the-efforts-to-transfer-public-money-to-private-charter-schools/

Last week, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, announced that the US Treasury Department released final regulations on charitable contributions and state and local tax credits.

In a **statement that DeVos released**, she said:

"America's families need more education freedom, not less. This week's actions demonstrate that this Administration continues to listen to students and taxpayers. One of the most important aspects of the final rules and additional guidance will be to ensure taxpayers who choose to donate to state tax-credit scholarships are not penalized.

We are deeply grateful to the families, donors, non-profits, and state and federal policymakers who raised their voices about the benefits of education freedom and who articulated the unintended consequences of the proposed rule during the public comment process. The final rules and additional guidance announced this week are fair to students and taxpayers alike."

As **we reported on in March**, what DeVos is conveying in this statement is that the new regulations by the US Treasury Department are paving the way for the Education Freedom Scholarships, which will ultimately allow more public money to be directed to private and charter schools. The Freedom Scholarship Programs are similar to the kinds of tax credit scholarship programs that are **already used in 18 states** to provide students with the opportunity to attend schools other than their nearest public school. These programs allow people and corporations to donate to a designated scholarship granting organization (SGO) and be reimbursed in the form of a tax credit. With the DeVos plan, states would designate the eligible SGOs, but the federal government would fund the tax credit reimbursement, up to $5 billion total.

According to the US Treasury Department, which **released a statement about these new regulations on June 11**:

The regulations provide exceptions for dollar-for-dollar state tax deductions and for tax credits of no more than 15 percent of the amount transferred. Thus, a taxpayer who receives a state tax deduction of $1,000 for a contribution of $1,000 is not required to reduce the federal income tax deduction to take into account the state tax deduction; and a taxpayer who makes a $1,000 contribution is not required to reduce the $1,000 federal income tax deduction if the state or local tax credit received or expected to be received is no more than $150. The final regulations are effective August 11, 2019, but apply to contributions made after August 27, 2018.

So, it appears that the US Treasury Department is working hand in hand with the Department of Education to facilitate a massive transfer of public dollars into the private and charter school system.

These are the kinds of policies that the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), along with the State Policy Network have been working on for the past two decades. You can see from the graphic below that the **State Policy Network has a radical agenda** to undermine numerous issues at the state level and now they have a federal government that is even more zealous about pushing these kinds of policies like defunding and privatizing public education.

Lastly, it should be noted that these kinds of policies are connected to what is happening at the Grand Rapids Public Schools, as we noted in **yesterday's post**.

Betsy DeVos encourages Community College graduates to be selfless and then talked a lot about God

https://griid.org/2019/06/27/betsy-devos-encourages-community-college-graduates-to-be-selfless-and-then-talked-a-lot-about-god/

On Tuesday, **Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos gave a commencement address** for graduates from Tulsa Community College's Second Chance program. The Second Chance program is a collaboration between Tulsa Community College and several jails/prisons in Oklahoma and was created in 2007.

The Second Chance program has received pell grants from the Department of Education beginning with the Obama administration and now the Trump administration wants to make it permanent.

Betsy DeVos's comments during the commencement were not particularly enlightening and she said nothing about the fact that the US has more people in jail/prison that any other country on the planet. In fact, DeVos had no critique of the **Prison Industrial Complex**, instead she chose to focus on what the individual student who participated in the program could achieve. A lack of an systems analysis has been the norm for the current Secretary of Education, since she believes that everyone has the ability to make it on their own.

There were a few comments from DeVos' commencement address that are worth discussing. First, she says:

And you'll contribute to an economy—the strongest it's been in years! There are about 8 million unfilled jobs today. Small businesses are opening at record numbers. Wages are growing and unemployment is shrinking—for everyone. Our economy is expanding faster than anyone predicted.

Remember, these are students who were taking classes in jail/prison, so getting hired is not an easy thing for people with a criminal record. In addition, DeVos does not back up her claims about the economy being strong and wages going up. This is because it just

isn't true. Wages have only grown in a significant way for the 1% and the .01%, **according to the site Inequality.org**.

Secondly, DeVos talks a great deal about God in the later part of the commencement speech, saying things like people are born in the likeness of God or that whatever talents people have are God given. To make matters worse, she then cites convicted criminal turned evangelical christian, Charles Colson as an example of someone who was "redeemed."

Using Charles Colson as an example of redemption is instructive, especially since Colson embraced the same kind of far right christian values that Betsy DeVos has. While alive, Charles Colson spoke out against gay marriage, against women's reproductive rights, he endorsed US wars abroad and he was a frequent speaker for the pro-patriarchy group, **The Promise Keepers**. Thus, using Colson as an example of "redemption" was just another way of for DeVos to inject conservative religious values into her speech.

Lastly, near the end of her speech, the Secretary of Education encouraged the students to be "selfless." Now, where I come from, the idea of being selfless means that you give of yourself for others and don't do things to put yourself first. How is it that Betsy DeVos, who is from a millionaire family and married into a billionaire family, who owns jets, yachts and numerous homes, how can she encourage selflessness, when clearly she is part of the billionaire class?

Betsy DeVos Watch: Secretary of Education equates criticism of Israel with Anti-Semitism

https://griid.org/2019/07/18/betsy-devos-watch-secretary-of-education-equates-criticism-of-israel-with-anti-semitism/

On Monday, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos made comments that would seem to be outside the lines of what someone in her position would say.

At what was billed as a Summit on Anti-Semitism, DeVos stated, "***a movement to boycott Israel has become a pernicious threat on college campuses and is fueled by bias against Jews."***

For those who are not familiar with Betsy DeVos, the DeVos and Prince families, taking a position in support of Israel has been something that the Secretary of Education, along with her family of origin (the Princes) and the family she married into (the DeVoses) have done for many years. In fact, the Prince and DeVos families could be categorized as Christian Zionists,

What is Christian Zionism? **According to those who embrace it**:

Christian Zionism merges theology and politics. It teaches that the secular State of Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Christian Zionism believes that this fulfillment of Biblical prophecy began when European Jews started moving to Palestine in the 1800s, and continued as Israel became a nation in 1948. Christian Zionists believe that modern Israel is a continuation of Biblical Israel and therefore should enjoy special privileges. They declare that it is the responsibility of Christians to support the State of Israel and its policies.

In addition, as Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos does deal with issues that arise on college campuses, such as the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions (BDS) movement, which began in 2005. The BDS Movement is using the same kind of strategic approach that the South African Anti-Apartheid movement used, which is to boycott, divest and call for sanctions against Israel for its internationally recognized illegal occupation of Palestinian land.

On Monday, DeVos also stated, *"Peace in the Middle East begins with recognizing Israel's right to exist. Israel is a light to the region, but we all know it's surrounded by jihadists who embrace evil."*

Such a statement by DeVos is rife with exaggerations and half-truths. Israel, is surrounded by countries like Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Now, many of these countries have poor human rights records, but this has not prevented the United States government from providing military and selling weapons to countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iraq since WWII. However, **Israel has been the largest recipient of US military aid since the mid-1970s, at an average of roughly $3 billion per year**, regardless of who sat in the White House.

What Betsy DeVos and Attorney General William Barr were stating at the Summit on Anti-Semitism, a summit that was hosted by the Department of Justice, is that criticism of Israel or support of the BDS movement are forms of anti-Semitism. This is simply not true. There is nothing anti-Semitic about people being critical of Israeli human rights violations, particularly in their treatment of Palestinians. The **BDS Movement addresses the issue of anti-Semitism on their website** saying:

BDS campaigns target the Israeli state because of its responsibility for serious violations of international law and the companies and institutions that participate in and are complicit in these Israeli violations. The BDS movement does not boycott or campaign against any individual or group simply because they are Israeli.

While some of the speakers at the Anti-Semitism Summit address real examples of anti-Semitism, some reporters acknowledged that the summit was more of a Pro-Israel rally, which is exactly what a **Yahoo News reporter called it**.

However, the effectiveness of equating criticism of Israel or involvement in the BDS Movement with anti-Semitism is a very effective strategy, since people generally do not want to be accused of being anti-Semitic, even if what they are saying or involved in is not anti-Semitic.

It is important to note that even the most credible organization in the US, which monitors anti-Semitism, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) states in a **2018 report**:

ADL is careful to not conflate general criticism of Israel or anti-Israel activism with anti-Semitism. However, Israel-related harassment of groups or individuals may be included when the harassment incorporates established anti-Jewish references, accusations and/or conspiracy theories.

Anti-Semitism is on the rise in the US and it should be condemned whenever it occurs. However, it is not accurate or honest to conflate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, no matter what Betsy DeVos or any other member of the US government says.

Betsy DeVos used a poll conducted by a pro-education privatization group to justify Department of Education policies

https://griid.org/2019/08/21/betsy-devos-used-a-poll-conducted-by-a-pro-education-privatization-group-to-justify-department-of-education-policies/

On Tuesday, US Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, **released a statement**, which said in part:

American families want more control and more options when it comes to education, which is why every poll conducted shows the growing, bipartisan support for education freedom. This research is just the latest indication that voices of America's parents are growing louder in demanding something other than a government-assigned, union-controlled school for their children.

The "research" that DeVos was referring to was a new poll taken by the group, Education Next. The poll, conducted in May 2019, asked 3046 adults a variety of questions. The data from the poll can be seen at **this link**.

While Betsy DeVos emphasized that this poll showed that people support federal funds for education being turned over to state governments, so that states can decide how to use the funding, DeVos failed to mention that the poll also supported other positions.

The poll showed that a majority of people supported things like increased teacher pay, local schools, increased education spending and free college for those who want to attend a public college or university. All of these opinions, reflected in the poll, were casually omitted in Secretary of Education DeVos' comments.

However, the poll also showed that there was significant support for school vouchers & tax credits, charter schools and Common Core State Standards.

Another glaring omission from Betsy DeVos was that she never identified what the group Education Next was affiliated with. Education Next, **according to SourceWatch**:

*is a propaganda outlet for corporate **education reform** policies such as charter schools, school vouchers, and merit pay. Its editorial board consists of the members of the **Koret Task Force**, the education task force of the conservative think-tank the **Hoover Institute**.*

None of this is surprising, considering that Betsy DeVos has been spending the past 25 years promoting and defending her own ideological positions on education, positions which seek to undermine public education, attack teacher unions and to re-direct public funds to pay for privatized forms of education, like Charter Schools.

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos began her "Back to School" tour at a closed-to-public-school-parents meeting at a religious private voucher school in Milwaukee

https://griid.org/2019/09/17/secretary-of-education-betsy-devos-began-her-back-to-school-tour-at-a-closed-to-public-school-parents-meeting-at-a-religious-private-voucher-school-in-milwaukee/

On Monday, US Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos, kicked off her "Back to School" tour at St. Marcus in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. While there was plenty of news coverage about this Back to School tour, numerous media outlets failed to acknowledge that DeVos chose this school because Milwaukee was the birth place of the School Voucher movement, a movement that Betsy and her husband Dick DeVos have been part of from the very beginning.

DeVos acknowledges in **her speech** that she came to Milwaukee for this very reason, to honor those who were part of the School Voucher movement at the start. DeVos uses this opportunity to to talk about freedom in education and how poorly the US is doing, but she was primarily using this forum to promote her department's program, the Education Freedom Scholarships.

In March, **we documented how the Education Freedom Scholarships** was just the most recent part of the Neo-Liberal education model. The Education Freedom Scholarships is a program to allow people and corporations to donate to a designated scholarship granting organization (SGO) and be reimbursed in the form of a tax credit. With the DeVos plan, states would designate the eligible SGOs, but the federal government would fund the tax credit reimbursement, up to $5 billion total. In her speech, Betsy DeVos also refers to the Education Freedom Scholarships as, ***"the most transformative idea for American education in decades."***

There isn't much else in DeVos' speech worth critiquing, since she sticks to the same talking points over and over again. However, despite the fact that her visit to St. Marcus's was closed to the public, this did not stop people from protesting DeVos and her department's attacks on public schools, **as was reported on by a local TV station in Milwaukee**.

In addition to the protest outside of St. Marcus School, there were other groups voicing their objection to the Secretary of Education's decision to kick off her "Back to School" tour at a private school that has benefited from the voucher program.

The Wisconsin Public Education Network released this **statement** the day before DeVos spoke at St. Marcus.

*On the eve of a **visit to Milwaukee** by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, public school parents and advocates from across Wisconsin wondered why Secretary DeVos's visit and policies neglect public school children. Secretary DeVos's visit is occurring as **parents in the Palmyra-Eagle School District attempt to save their kids' school system from closure**, and as **voters across Wisconsin approved a record amount of school referenda to enhance aging facilities and/or maintain programming**. Despite the calls nationwide for targeted support aligned with the needs of local students, Secretary DeVos proposed to cut $7.1 billion in federal funding from America's public schools, while dramatically increasing funding to private and privately-operated schools.*

While Secretary DeVos launches her "Back to School" tour Monday with a closed-to-public-school-parents meeting at a religious private voucher school in Milwaukee, advocates all over the state express frustration with her focus on expanding a program that has failed to deliver results in Wisconsin, diverting funds from public schools statewide and putting children at risk.

As **we have noted in previous Betsy DeVos Watch postings**, the Secretary of Education has been confronted by parents, students and community organizers across the country since she joined the Trump administration in early 2017.

Betsy DeVos ended her private/charter school tour and the first place she goes to continue to push the Education Freedom Scholarships is the American Enterprise Institute

https://griid.org/2019/10/03/betsy-devos-ended-her-private-charter-school-tour-and-the-first-place-she-goes-to-continue-to-push-the-education-freedom-scholarships-is-the-american-enterprise-institute/

On Tuesday, US Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, fresh off her "**Back to School" tour**, where she was promoting the Education Freedom Scholarships program, spoke at a forum hosted by the most influential think tank in the US, the **American Enterprise Institute** (AEI).

The American Enterprise Institute fully supports the administration's education policies, policies which have been embraced by the last several administrations, but now accelerated under Betsy DeVos. These education policies are fundamentally promoting a neo-liberal education model, where public schools have seen significant reduction in funding, which leads to public schools adopting a charter-school like approach and partnering with the business community. The neo-liberal education model also means

re-directing public funds to private and charter school options, often presented as "school choice."

The AEI event began with Betsy DeVos making some opening comments about the Education Freedom Scholarships. DeVos made the following statement in regards to those sectors which are not endorsing the Education Freedom Scholarship proposal:

"Big union bullying is unfair to the many students and parents who simply want better futures for their sons and daughters. I've been blessed to get to know many, many families who exercise education freedom…They couldn't care less about how a school is legally structured or how the funds flow. They care about their kids."

DeVos went on to give an example of how unions are against education freedom, by citing the teacher strike in West Virginia. DeVos said the teacher strike was, "*anti-teacher and anti-student*." The fact is, that the teacher strikes in West Virginia were not only led by teachers, but they won on several fronts, which ultimately means that the students won. In fact, students and their parents were involved in the strike, according to Eric Blanc's recent book, *Red State Revolt: The Teachers' Strikes and Working Class Politics.*

After her opening remarks, DeVos was joined on stage by White House Counsel, Kellyanne Conway and a moderator from the American Policy Institute. Conway was rather unimpressive, repeating some of the same talking points that DeVos presented and using the opportunity to criticize Democrats who don't endorse the Education Freedom Scholarship proposal, which you can read about at this **link**.

Both Conway and DeVos were later joined on stage by Tennessee Representative John DeBerry (D), Pennsylvania Speaker of the House Mike Turzai (R), and Arizona Treasurer Kimberly Yee (R). Not surprising, each of these three elected officials endorse the Education Freedom Scholarships. **Rep. DeBerry has even come under fire from fellow Democrats for supporting school vouchers in Tennessee** and **Rep. Turzai recently introduced legislation that would allow students in the Harrisburg area (PA's state capitol) to access public funds to attend private schools**.

One of the major things missing from the discussion was any historical context for why public schools were doing so poorly or why they were underfunded. This context is significant, since DeVos and others who spoke at the AEI event kept saying that the Education Freedom Scholarships would benefit "African American and Hispanic students." Again historical context is critical, since there was no acknowledgement of the fact that after force busing and the de-segregation of schools began in the 1970s, white American and the suburbanization of the country led to white families pulling their kids out of urban public schools and putting them in either more elite, racially segregated public schools or placing their children in private schools.

This shift in education began the steady decline of funding for urban public school systems and created an opening for the charter school/voucher/privatizing education movement that was led by people like Dick & Betsy DeVos and the organizations they helped to create in the 1980s, many of which are rather powerful today.

Of course, I would not expect this kind of information to be shared at a forum hosted by the American Enterprise Institute. If you want to sit through the 2 hour AEI forum with Betsy DeVos, Kellyanne Conway and pro-Education Freedom Scholarship politicians, here you go. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oY_sGU3CkeA&feature=emb_logo

While commercial media focuses on Betsy DeVos' contempt of court case, she continues to push her Neo-Liberal Education model virtually unnoticed https://griid.org/2019/10/30/while-commercial-media-focuses-on-betsy-devos-contempt-of-court-case-she-continues-to-push-her-neo-liberal-education-model-virtually-unnoticed/

There have been dozens of news stories in recent weeks about how a US federal judge is holding Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos in contempt of court. **According to one article**, she is being held in contempt of court, "***for failing to comply with an order to stop collecting loan payments from former students of Corinthian Colleges, a defunct for-profit college company that defrauded tens of thousands of borrowers***."

This is an important matter to report on, especially considering DeVos' involvement. The judge issued an **8-page ruling**, a ruling that is worth reading. The judge also ruled that the Department of Education must pay the $100,000 fine, instead of DeVos directly.

Right after Betsy DeVos was found in contempt for defrauding students, **A. Wayne Johnson**, who was in charge of the Department of Education's financial aid and student loan system, resigned and is now running for the Senate in Georgia, with a major platform piece being that he wants to cancel student debt.

Again, this is also newsworthy, especially considering how massive student debt is in the US. However, what all of this news coverage means is that the ongoing efforts on the part of the Department of Education to impose a Neo-Liberal Education model doesn't garner the kinds of headlines that this court case has.

It was completely appropriate for news agencies to report on the recent federal court ruling that resulted in DeVos being held in contempt, but it is no less important to provide ongoing coverage and analysis of what this Neo-Liberal Education model looks like.

It is worth noting that this Neo-Liberal Education model did not begin with Betsy DeVos, it has only been accelerated under the current Secretary of Education. As **Diane Ravitch has stated**:

Previous education secretaries, including Arne Duncan under President Obama and Rod Paige under President George W. Bush, have pushed school choice policies based on free-market ideology. But during the Obama years, the Department of Education vocally supported charter schools while pretending it

could draw the line at vouchers. DeVos, to the contrary, makes no bones about her goal of clearing the path for vouchers.

Since Betsy DeVos was nominated in early 2017, we have been writing about her policy decision as the Secretary of Education in our section entitled **Betsy DeVos Watch**. We have reported on the disastrous Titled IX changes her department has made, changes that provide greater protections for perpetrators of sexual assault.

However, what we have noticed over the past two and a half years, is that the Secretary of Education has spent virtually all of her time going to schools, conferences and other events that are being hosted by entities that fully embrace the Neo-Liberal Education model. The Neo-Liberal Education model includes a concerted effort to undermine public teacher unions, push public school into looking more like charter schools, a redirecting of funds towards charter schools, promoting private schools and the promotion of school voucher programs. In these past 30 months DeVos has made it her goal to virtually avoid going to public schools and just attend private or charter schools across the country.

Just as the news about DeVos being found in contempt of court was breaking, the Secretary of Education was once again at an event celebrating the 15th anniversary of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. You can **read her speech from that night on October 23rd,** but essentially DeVos doesn't stray from her ongoing mantras about school choice and how education must serve parents and students. One of the talking points was to push her Freedom Education Scholarships program, which will divert more funding to private and charter schools.

DeVos needs to stick to these kinds of narrow talking points, since when she is asked questions that fall outside of her Neo-Liberal Education model comfort zone, she ends up sounding like she doesn't know what she is talking about, as was the **case with her 60 Minutes interview** from March of 2018.

The thing is, Betsy DeVos will continue to follow this playbook of promoting a Neo-Liberal Education model until, 1) there is both of movement in the US to challenge this anti-public education model, and 2) the news media provides ongoing analysis of what how this education model doesn't work and has actually had devastating effects on communities across the country.

There is a growing movement to challenge the Neo-Liberal model. Just look at the Chicago Teachers strike is doing and what their demands are. This same reactions has been happening in numerous states in the last two years, where teachers have been going on strike with clear demands and winning. In Grand Rapids, there is the newly formed Grand Rapids for Education Justice, which is attempting to inform the community about how the Grand Rapids Public Schools have been embracing a Neo-Liberal Education model for more than a decade, along with wanting to push for policy changes.

Unfortunately, most of the commercial news media is not writing about or providing ongoing analysis of the Neo-Liberal Education model that Betsy DeVos is wanting to

impose on the rest of the country. Reporting on the contempt of court case, while important, doesn't address the larger, more systemic changes of the Neo-Liberal Education model. We need news sources and reporters who are willing to look closely at this model and to provide the public with robust analysis to understand how a Neo-Liberal Education model will impact our communities.

Betsy DeVos Watch: A Detroit educator responds to the Secretary of Education's awful comment about Detroit Public Schools

https://griid.org/2019/11/07/betsy-devos-watch-a-detroit-educator-responds-to-the-secretary-of-educations-awful-comment-about-detroit-public-schools/

Last week, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, gave **a speech** on the 2019 National Assessment of Education results.

In that speech, DeVos referenced several school systems across the US. However, her most damning comments were directed at the public schools in Detroit.

What is worth noting is that Betsy DeVos, along with the rest of the DeVos family has contributed millions of dollars to Republican legislators, many of which have been attacking the Detroit Public Schools for decades and in 2016 were calling for the Detroit Public Schools to dissolve.

This is all well documented in a 2016 Michigan Campaign Finance Network article, ***Big Donors Have Been Big Players In Fight Over Detroit Public Schools Turnaround.***

In fact, the organization that Betsy DeVos created in 2001 to push her privatized education agenda, the **Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), was also calling for the Detroit Public Schools to dissolve**. You can see from the graphic below that GLEP has also contributed significantly to (mostly) GOP legislators who are supporting what GLEP is calling for.

DeVos's rhetoric on this issue is important, so we asked a Detroit educator, Kaitlin Popielarz, to weigh in on this issue. What follows is a clear deconstruction of what Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, had to say about Detroit Public Schools in her speech from October 30th.

Betsy DeVos*: And then there's Detroit.*

The city's academic struggles are infamous. Faced with the Motor City's bankruptcy and consistently poor student achievement, the state government has been obliged to intervene and take control not once, but twice.

Kaitlin: In Detroit, we know that the state-takeover in 1999 and 2008 was due to austerity policies enacted by Governors Engler, Granholm, and Snyder, and backed by DeVos through venture philanthropy, paid-for legislation, and the corporatization of the

public good. Detroit Public Schools were successful for decades before forced state intervention. In Detroit, we know that emergency management of Detroit through forced state takeover has only wreaked havoc on the stability of Detroit public schools and communities. DeVos has worked for decades to dismantle Detroit public schools and Detroit's teachers unions to no avail. Detroit continues to resist through grassroots community mobilization and organization. Significantly, Detroit students continue to excel and achieve within academics, the arts, STEM, athletics, and service. Many young people in Detroit are also involved in grassroots organizations, such as Detroit Area Youth Uniting Michigan (DAYUM), in order to work toward intersectional social justice within education.

***Betsy DeVos**: Still today, more than 90 percent of Detroit's community schools' eighth graders cannot read at grade level.*

Kaitlin: In Detroit, we know that NAEP scores, along with other state and nation-wide high stakes standardized test results, are often conflated and misunderstood. Education "reformers" like DeVos utilize the NAEP scores to advocate for harmful education reform efforts that privatize and charterize public education and the public good. In Detroit and across the country, educators have critiqued the use of NAEP scores, in addition to other state and nation-wide high stakes standardized testing practices, which push harmful policies and reforms upon predominantly low-income Students of Color:

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb18/vol75/num05/The-Problem-with-£Proficient£.aspx

https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2016/06/13/the-naep-proficiency-myth/

https://morganpolikoff.com/2015/10/06/friends-dont-let-friends-misuse-naep-data/

***Betsy DeVos**: Things have gotten so bad there that students and families are suing for a right to read.*

American students should not have to sue their way to literacy—to learning.

Kaitlin: The right to literacy lawsuit largely names and challenges many of the education "reforms" that DeVos has implemented for decades in Detroit and in Michigan. The right to literacy lawsuit is a direct critique of the education "reforms" that DeVos advocates and implements, which only further exacerbates systemic racial and socioeconomic segregation within public education. For more information on the literacy lawsuit and what it's actually fighting for, please see these links:

https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/how-lawsuit-over-detroit-schools-could-have-earth-shattering-impact-n1072721

https://sites.google.com/view/detroitequity/resources/right-to-literacy

https://www.detroit-accesstoliteracy.org

These are the kinds of well thought out, reasoned and well sourced responses we need when responding to the propaganda of the Neo-Liberal Education Model that DeVos and others are using on a daily basis.

Betsy DeVos Watch: The Secretary of Education receives an award from an anti-feminist women's organization

https://griid.org/2019/12/04/betsy-devos-watch-the-secretary-of-education-receives-an-award-from-an-anti-feminist-womans-organization/

Last month, US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos received an award from the group known as the Independent Women's Forum (IWF).

According to the Independent Women's Forum **website**, it states:

We work every day to engage and inform women and create a community to discuss how policy issues – including paid leave, health care, taxes, energy, minimum wage, and education – impact them and their families.

The IWF does work on these issues, but they function from a patriarchal framework.

The IWF was founded by a group of women who were upset that Clarence Thomas was being accused of sexual harassment during his nomination to the US Supreme Court. **According to Sourcewatch**, the IWF is an anti-feminist organization predominantly funded by right wing foundations.

The IWF is also connected to groups like the American Exchange Legislative Council (ALEC) and Americans for Prosperity. The IWF has defended right wing radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, they opposed teaching "global warming" in US schools and they oppose VAMA, the Violence Against Women Act.

However, the Independent Women's Forum is primarily focused on supporting GOP candidates, especially those who are the most anti-feminist. **For example**, the *IWV made $67,242 in independent expenditures aiding Missouri U.S. Senate candidate Todd Akin with calls and independent voter outreach in November 2012, after Akin claimed on August 19, 2012 that rape victims couldn't get pregnant because "if it's legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down."*

Betsy DeVos was thrilled to receive an award from this anti-feminist group and she used the opportunity to preach her own anti-feminist perspectives.

The Department of Education **posted Betsy's speech online** in mid-November. In that speech, DeVos claimed that Title IX was ***overreach.*** DeVos also goes out of her way to dismiss Title IX in her acceptance speech, framing the issue in what she believes is justice. However, **as we have reported previously**, what Betsy DeVos has done to Title IX, was to provide anti-feminist organizations a platform to push their agenda, an

agenda which seeks to minimize campus sexual assault and provide greater protections to perpetrators.

Of course, Betsy DeVos also used her acceptance speech as an opportunity to push her Neo-Liberal Education model, specifically the **Education Freedom Scholarships**, which provides matching federal funds for states which would want to adopt a "school choice" model.

Betsy DeVos presents at the ALEC Conference: Just one more example of how the Neo-Liberal Education model is being promoted by the US Secretary of Education

https://griid.org/2019/12/10/betsy-devos-presents-at-the-alec-conference-just-one-more-example-of-how-the-neo-liberal-education-model-is-being-promoted-by-the-us-secretary-of-education/

Last week, the **American Legislative Exchange Council** (ALEC) hosted their annual States & Nation Policy Summit.

The ALEC policy summit was held in Arizona and featured speakers who fit their long-term agenda, which is to transform state and federal policy that furthers Neo-Liberalism. You can see this reflected in **their agenda**, which features speakers and facilitated workshops on areas that have been part of the ALEC agenda for decades. You can see if the graphic below the ALEC agenda and which think tanks/groups are involved in each area. Notice that Fiscal policy and Education policy have the largest number of groups working on those respective areas.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that US Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, was one of the featured speakers at this years ALEC policy summit. As we have documented in previous **Betsy DeVos Watch articles**, the Secretary of Education spends a great deal of her time speaking to organizations that embrace the Neo-Liberal Education Model.

DeVos delievred a speech, no doubt written by her staff, a speech which begins with this statement:

It's good to be with so many friends and leaders shaping policy across all 50 states. For more than 30 years, state-initiated solutions to intractable issues were my primary focus—and they still are. States are where the action is—or, at least, where it should be.

In the rest of DeVos' speech, she using standard content from the Neo-Liberal playbook, arguing states rights, choice, the market-place of ideas and even attempting to use language such as, "We the People." One aspect of the Neo-Liberal playbook is to convince people that whatever policy the right wants to promote is all about freedom and liberty. In addition, one other major theme is to attack the federal government. This

message has been central to every administration since Ronald Reagan, even though the Neo-Liberal agenda is not always against the Federal Government. For instance, entities like ALEC or the State Policy Network a deeply in favor of government intervention and policy when it comes to the annual US military budget, tax policies that benefit the wealthy and massive subsidies for corporations. Thus, the Neo-Liberal Agenda is quite selective in their notion of choice and freedom, especially when it comes to policies that benefit the Capitalist Class.

Betsy DeVos continued this theme in a brief interview she did with ALEC TV. Pay close attention to the language used in the questions and the language used by DeVos, which is all right out of the Neo-Liberal Agenda playbook.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

Lastly, Betsy DeVos was at the ALEC policy summit to make sure that those attending the gathering were committed to getting her Education Freedom Scholarships adopted. The Education Freedom Scholarships are another example of promoting a Neo-Liberal Education Model, since they allow for individuals and corporations to contribute funds to private & charter schools and then claim it as a tax write-off. This also makes the Education Freedom Scholarships policy just another way for those in the Capitalist class to transfer public money to private interests, which is the foundation of the Neo-Liberal Agenda.

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos is proposing new rules that could result in allowing faith-based educational organization to discriminate against vulnerable individuals

https://griid.org/2020/01/21/secretary-of-education-betsy-devos-is-proposing-new-rules-that-could-result-in-allowing-faith-based-educational-organization-to-discriminate-against-vulnerable-individuals/

Last week, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos announced that the Department of Education was updating rules on prayer in schools and a proposed rule on faith-based education institutions.

None of this has received much attention in the mainstream commercial news media, but we believe it is important for people to be made aware of any new or proposed policies, particularly that rely on public tax dollars. This is especially the case with this issue, particularly since Betsy DeVos identifies very publicly as a Christian and as someone who embraces a very conservative theological framework.

In the announcement from the Depart of Education, Secretary DeVos says, "*The Department's efforts will level the playing field between religious and non-religious organizations competing for federal grants, as well as protect First Amendment*

freedoms on campus and the religious liberty of faith-based institutions. ***I proudly share President Trump's commitment to religious freedom and the First Amendment***."

It is well know that Betsy DeVos and the DeVos family support a form of Christian Reconstruction, which essentially means that society should be run by biblical values, rather than secular values. DeVos has continued to inject her faith-based values since she became the Secretary of Education in 2017, something we have been documenting in our **Betsy DeVos Watch** articles and it is the main topic of a well researched article that appeared in Mother Jones in 2017, entitled, **Betsy DeVos Wants to Use America's Schools to Build "God's Kingdom."**

The updated prayer guideline can be found at this **link**, which was originally part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and further strengthen in the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). The Every Student Succeeds Act was an extension of the No Child Left Behind Act, with some modifications.

The proposed rule that was announced last week and is not yet policy, is what DeVos and the Department of Education have been working on since the **US Supreme Court ruling in the case of** Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer. In that ruling, **which we reported on in 2017**, which basically means that the State of Missouri must give taxpayer funding to a house of worship.

In the new proposal, announced last week by the Department of Education, it would pave the way for allowing faith-based institutions to access more federal funding and it would provide more opportunities for faith-based entities to discriminate against vulnerable populations. The **ACLU reaction** to this new proposal from the Department of Education is instructive:

The Trump administration proposed multiple new regulations today that will roll back critical legal protections under the guise of religious liberty.

The proposed regulations would revoke key protections for beneficiaries of government-funded social services, eliminating requirements that religious providers refer individuals who ask to a secular alternative and notify individuals of their rights. Agencies affected touch nearly every area of life, and include: Veterans Affairs, Health and Human Services, Labor, Agriculture, Education, Justice, Homeland Security, and International Development.

The regulations also would make it more difficult for some individuals to access critical social services funded by the government. Specifically, the new rules would ease certain restrictions that have prevented federally-funded religious social service providers from imposing religious requirements on individuals seeking help or turning them away just because they are LGBTQ or follow a different faith, in situations where no secular alternative provider is available.

Again, it is important to note that this is only a proposal, but it could become formal policy unless there is organized opposition.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Deconstructing Trump and DeVos after the State of the Union address https://griid.org/2020/02/05/betsy-devos-watch-deconstructing-trump-and-devos-after-the-state-of-the-union-address/

On Tuesday night, President Trump gave his State of the Union address. He touched on several topics, including education in the US.

In addition, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, released a brief statement in response to what the president had to say. Actually, DeVos had nothing to really add to Trump's comments, other than to continue using the same Neo-Liberal Education buzzwords and to plug the Education Freedom Scholars.

We offer this brief deconstruction of Trump's comments and the Press Release sent out by Betsy DeVos from Tuesday, February 4, 2020.

The entire State of the Union address can be found **here**.

The next step forward in building an inclusive society is making sure that every young American gets a great education and the opportunity to achieve the American Dream. Yet, for too long, countless American children have been trapped in failing government schools. To rescue these students, 18 States have created school choice in the form of Opportunity Scholarships. The programs are so popular, that tens of thousands of students remain on waiting lists. One of those students is Janiyah Davis, a fourth grader from Philadelphia. Janiyah's mom Stephanie is a single parent. She would do anything to give her daughter a better future. But last year, that future was put further out of reach when Pennsylvania's Governor vetoed legislation to expand school choice for 50,000 children.

1. The President refers to public schools as "government schools," which is deliberate, since part of the political right's playbook is to get the public to equate anything that the government intervenes in as negative. Public schools are funded by the public and are democratically run (in principle) with Boards of Education that are elected by the public. Each public school district is autonomous and only relies on the state for funding and curriculum standards.

2. The term school choice is a term created by those who favor Charter Schools or Private Schools. School Choice is code for redirecting public money to more private and less accountable forms of education.

3. Opportunity Scholarships, another Orwellian term, provides tuition assistance of several thousand dollars per year for awarded students who enroll in a participating nonpublic school. There is some variation with the 18 states that currently have Opportunity Scholarships, but the funding comes from private donors, who can deduct their contributions for tax purposes. Essentially, states reward private donors who provide funds for students to attend Charter or private schools.

In her **Press Release**, Betsy DeVos continues to use the political right's playbook strategies, attacking government with the phrase:

Every student, parent, and teacher should be excited by this bold agenda to free them from a government system that limits their success.

DeVos then points out that, "*one in four eighth graders is functionally illiterate*." While this is true, there is no evidence that suggests that Charter Schools or other Neo-Liberal education models are working. In fact, there is plenty of documentation demonstrating how Charter Schools are failing, both in academic terms and in wasting money. See the report **Still Asleep at the Wheel: How the Federal Charter Schools Program Results in a Pileup of Fraud and Waste**.

In her Press Release, DeVos ends with a push for Congress to pass the Education Freedom Scholarships proposal. The Education Freedom Scholarships would do what the Opportunity Scholarships are already doing, which is to allow people and corporations to donate to a designated scholarship granting organization (SGO) and be reimbursed in the form of a tax credit. With the DeVos plan, states would designate the eligible SGOs, but the federal government would fund the tax credit reimbursement, up to $5 billion total. Once again, public money (in the form of tax credits) would be used to support Charter and Private school systems.

Lastly, it is interesting to note that while both Trump and DeVos are critical of government involvement, they want Congress to pass the Education Freedom Scholarships, which means they want the federal government to be involved in how schools are funded. Apparently they have no problem with government intervention, especially when it promotes the Neo-Liberal Education model.

Betsy DeVos Watch: 2021 Education Budget proposal will do for public education what Citizen's United did for the electoral process

https://griid.org/2020/02/12/betsy-devos-watch-2021-education-budget-proposal-will-do-for-public-education-what-citizens-united-did-for-the-electoral-process/

On Monday, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, posted a a **press release about President Trump's proposed education budget**. DeVos refers to the budget proposal as. "a transformative, student-first budget."

The press release goes on to say:

"This budget proposal is about one thing—putting students and their needs above all else," said Secretary DeVos. "That starts with creating Education Freedom Scholarships and helping 1 million more students find the best educational fit for them. We know education freedom helps students succeed, and it's long past time for Congress to act to give students and their families more choices and more control."

Once again, Betsy DeVos loves to claim that the Department of Education is all about "putting students and their needs above all else." She supports this claim by suggesting that Congress pass the Education Freedom Scholarships bill, which essentially allows people and corporations to donate to a designated scholarship granting

organization (SGO) and be reimbursed in the form of a tax credit. With the DeVos plan, states would designate the eligible SGOs, but the federal government would fund the tax credit reimbursement, up to $5 billion total. Once again, public money (in the form of tax credits) would be used to support Charter and Private school systems.

Equally disturbing is the fact that the proposed education budget would consolidate, "*nearly all existing K-12 formula and competitive grant programs into one block grant to States, called the Elementary and Secondary Education for the Disadvantaged (ESED) Block Grant."*

This means that programs like Migrant Education, Neglected and Delinquent Education, English Language Acquisition, Education for Homeless Children, Rural Education, Native Hawaiian Education, Alaska Native Education, Arts in Education and a whole list of programs have NO money allocated to them in the 2021 Education Budget. Instead, States and local school districts would have complete control over how the ESED Block Grants would be spent, which means that States and local school districts would have the power to channel funding to the projects they support, which many NOT include funding for some of the most vulnerable students in the country. For a full list of the programs impact in the proposed consolidation, click **here**. Notice that in the 2021 Budget Request there are no funds that are earmarked for these programs.

At the end of the press release, DeVos includes comments from 10 supporters of the proposed education budget. Some of those included are politicians, while others are CEO's of organizations that embrace the Neo-Liberal Education model such as Project Lead the Way and the National Skills Coalition.

Interesting to note that there are already numerous entities that are speaking out against the Trump/DeVos proposed Education Budget. The **Council for Opportunity in Education** says that the proposed budget would slash overall funding for the TRIO programs by 13% or $140 million.

Americans for the Arts wrote a critique of the proposed Education Budget and is calling on Congress to not only reject this misdirected budget request, but further increase funding for these important cultural agencies.

The American Library Association said:

The White House proposal to eliminate the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) again dismisses the value of America's 120,000 academic, public, school and special libraries. The administration's new budget not only brushes aside IMLS, it decreases funding for other library-eligible education programs.

Even the **National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**, an entity which has benefited from the Neo-Liberal Education Model, came out against the proposed Education Budget with this comment:

"President Trump has consistently said that school choice is a priority for his administration, but this budget, if enacted, would leave families in need with fewer

school options. The education vision put forward by this budget is chilling. It would provide—through the proposed 'Education Freedom Scholarships' tax credit—extra federal financial help for families to access private schools, while withdrawing support for public school choice for our most vulnerable families by doing away with the Charter Schools Program (CSP).

We must not be fooled by Betsy DeVos's claim that the budget is all about empowering students and parents. The proposed Education Budget for 2021, will continue to push the Neo-Liberal Education model, especially if Congress passes the Education Freedom Scholarship bill that will do for education what Citizens United did for the electoral process.

Betsy DeVos thinks Trump is doing a great job responding to the COVID-19 crisis and she is trying to ram through more Neo-Liberal Education policies

https://griid.org/2020/04/01/betsy-devos-thinks-trump-is-doing-a-great-job-responding-to-the-covid-19-crisis-and-she-is-trying-to-ram-through-more-neo-liberal-education-policies/

At a **Press conference on Friday**, US Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, had this to say about Trump and the COVID-19 response:

Let me start by saying thank you, Mr. President, for your clear-eyed leadership during these challenging times for our country and for the world. The bold actions you have taken are making a significant difference.

Look, it is not really important whether or not DeVos actually believes that Trump is providing "clear-eyed leadership," but what is important is that the Secretary of Education is perpetuating a narrative that the Trump administration is doing all that it needs to do in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. The **commercial news media is also guilty** of perpetuating the same narrative.

However, beyond Betsy DeVos' complicity in the administration's oppressive response to the COVID-19 crisis, it is important that we recognize how the US Secretary of Education is using this crisis to push for more Neo-Liberal Education policies.

Like most bureaucrats, DeVos uses lots of vague and lofty language in her comments from last Friday, such as providing learning opportunities and making sure that the most disadvantaged students are getting their education needs met.

However, the devil is always in the details. In her comments, Betsy DeVos said that the US Department of Education would be providing micro-grants to students and teachers. DeVos states:

One area is providing direct financial support to students, families, and teachers. We will propose Congress provide microgrants to help students continue to learn. These would be focused toward the most disadvantaged students in states or communities where their school system has simply shut down. I've always believed education funding should be tied to students, not systems, and that necessity has never been more evident.

We will also support microgrants to teachers, to help them pivot to supporting all of their students in a different environment than they've been used to. We know they are dealing with an unprecedented situation. It's been truly inspiring to hear story after story of teachers rising to the occasion and meeting the unique needs of their students.

Unfortunately, Betsy DeVos does not provide any information about how to access these micro-grants and there is nothing on the US Department of Education's website about these micro-grants. Now, if recent history has taught us anything, then we should be very concerned about what these micro-grants and how they will be used. Much like the **Freedom Education Scholarships**, which is just another way to redirect public funding for private and charter schools, we should be concerned about the micro-grants that Secretary DeVos is proposing.

The online education news source, **Chalkbeat**, reported that an Education *Department spokesperson said later Friday that the proposed grants could be used for tuition and fees for an online program at a public or private school.* The Chalkbeat report then said:

The idea — especially the grants for students that could pay tuition — is a glimpse at how DeVos will use the upheaval to advance her ideas about education. A proponent of private-school vouchers and school choice, DeVos has long downplayed the role of the federal government and scoffed at those who see school buildings or school districts as education's key organizing principle.

We know that after **Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Maria**, that the Department of Education leveraged its power to push for the privatization of public education. The current COVID-19 crisis provides yet another opportunity to push the larger Neo-Liberal Education model and undermine public education.

Betsy DeVos is giving $65 million of public money to Charter Schools across the country, despite the long-standing lack of accountability with Charter Schools https://griid.org/2020/04/13/betsy-devos-is-giving-65-million-of-public-money-to-charter-schools-across-the-country-despite-the-long-standing-lack-of-accountability-with-charter-schools/

Last Friday, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, announced that the **Department of Education has awarded $65 million to create and expand Public Charter Schools**.

In a Press Release, DeVos claimed that hundreds of thousands of kids were on a charter school wait list and that these charter schools would serve, "***families living in economically distressed communities."***

This claim, made by many Charter Schools advocates, that they will serve students in economically distressed communities, is a rather deceptive way of framing the issue. Charter Schools were created across the country by people like Betsy & Dick DeVos as a way to bring organized religion into schools, to re-direct public funding for private educational systems, and to undermine public teacher unions.

The Department of Education's press release, doesn't mention anything about how the federal agency will monitor and account for the effectiveness of the $65 million that are being allocated to the 13 Charter Schools systems across the country. This should be an urgent matter for taxpayers, especially since Charter Schools across the country have a fairly poor track record when it comes to federal funding.

According to the 2019 report, ***Still Asleep at the Wheel: How the Federal Charter School Programs Results in a Pileup of Fraud and Waste****,* there has been over $1 billion in federal funding for Charter Schools that either never opened or have since closed. The report's Executive Summary states:

It is impossible to document total waste for the entire 25 year program because the Department never required the states to report the names of funded schools until 2006. However, we have now documented $502,468,123 (28 percent of the total database amount) that was awarded to schools from grants that were active between SY 2006-07 and SY 2013-14 that never opened or that have closed. Applying that percentage to the total expenditures ($4.1 billion) of the CSP programs designed to create new schools, approximately $1.17 billion in federal funding has likely been spent on charters that either never opened, or that opened and have since shut down.

In addition, of the 13 Charter School programs that are recipients of this latest round of Department of Education's Charter School Program (CSP), some of them have ties to the DeVos network, while others have been charged with misuse of funds.

For instance, IDEA Public Schools, which is based in Texas, will be receiving $8.1 million from the federal government. According to an **article from Education Week**, *the **IDEA charter school network**, a recipient of federal charter grants, has spent money on pro basketball tickets and said they were planning to lease a private jet.*

A second example, Achievement First, Inc., which will receive $3.5 million, has had issues around racism. According to a recent **article in Forbes**:

*Achievement First, Inc of Connecticut was in the news a year ago when events at one school **forced management to take a hard look** at its handling of racism, discipline and leadership. AF hired independent investigators, made personnel changes, and by fall of 2019 **expressed a commitment to a culture change**.*

A third example is Mater Academy, Inc, which will be receiving $19.2 million, has come under a great deal of scrutiny, much like many of the private and charter schools in Florida, where Mater Academy, Inc. is based. According to a 2019 **Washington Post article**, Mater Academy Inc, was being audited. The Office of Inspector General, writes the Post reporter:

OIG's audit of the two Mater charter schools identified related party transactions between the for-profit Academica and a real estate company that leased both buildings and security services to the schools.

One last example is Responsive Education Solutions, which will receive $14 million of public money for their charter schools. Responsive Education Solutions runs Charter Schools in several states and **these schools are run through a partnership with the ultra-conservative Michigan school, Hillsdale College**.

Even though $65 million is a small amount of money in the larger scheme of things, those who are concerned about accountability and the larger war on public education, this new announcement from Betsy DeVos should be of great concern to us all.

To join the fight for public education in Grand Rapids, go to **Grand Rapids for Education Justice**.

Betsy DeVos makes statement about how US History is taught

https://griid.org/2020/04/27/betsy-devos-makes-statement-about-how-us-history-is-taught/

On Thursday, US Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, **released a statement** on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2018 Civics, Geography, and U.S. History Assessments for 8th Graders:

"America's antiquated approach to education is creating a generation of future leaders who will not have a foundational understanding of what makes this country exceptional. We cannot continue to excuse this problem away. Instead, we need to fundamentally rethink education in America. It is the only way our nation's students will be in a position to lead our nation and the world.

The results are stark and inexcusable. A quarter or more of America's 8th graders are what NAEP defines as 'below basic' in U.S. history, civics and geography. In the real world, this means students don't know what the Lincoln-Douglas debates were about, nor can they discuss the significance of the Bill of Rights, or point out basic locations on a map. And only 15% of them have a reasonable knowledge of U.S. history. All Americans should take a moment to think about the concerning implications for the future of our country."

While I agree that the way US history is taught in American schools is deeply troubling, what Betsy DeVos thinks is important about US history and what should be taught about US history are vastly different.

Betsy DeVos' father-in-law, Richard DeVos Sr., had a view of US history, one that has been taught for a long time. The co-founder of Amway, in his book *Believe,* when talking about freedom and the founding of the US, says:

"that call of freedom went forth from a rugged wilderness, and Europe and Asia and Africa sent their sons of adventure to hew out a new society in a land of forests and savages."

Is this what Betsy DeVos means by a foundational understanding of what makes this country exceptional? The statement above by Richard DeVos *is* reflective of one of the foundational aspects of US history, namely the genocide of Indigenous people. The other major foundational aspect of US history is the enslavement of African people, the very same people who created a great deal of the wealth in the US, but did not benefit from their labor.

Indeed, based on the lived experience of Betsy DeVos, growing up as part of the Prince family and then marrying into the DeVos family, the US Secretary of Education would see US history through the lens of someone who is deeply privileged. Betsy DeVos no doubt views US history as something that the capitalist class built, a history that believes the US was founded on Christian principles, and one that is governed by White Supremacy.

US History has primarily been taught through the view of the historical victors, as Howard Zinn used to say. US history is always about the powerful, those with great wealth and very much centered on wars and US global dominance.

This type of US history began to be challenged at the university level in the 1960s, with the introduction of women's studies and ethnic studies, particularly black studies. Unfortunately, what is being taught at the university level hasn't always trickled down to the K-12 level. There are some amazing US history teachers across the country, but they are in a minority. Some of these US history teachers have been influenced by Zinn's, *A People's History of the United States* or the resources offered through groups like **Rethinking Schools**.

The group Grand Rapids for Education Justice has heard from the black, latinx and Anishinaabe communities that they want to see their communities' history taught and not just the dominant. white version of history.

US Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, is right to point out the antiquated way in which US history is taught. However, we cannot and should not allow people like her to determine how US history is taught, nor what version of US History.

"I'm worried that students will take their obedient place in society and look to become successful cogs in the wheel — let the wheel spin them around as it wants without

taking a look at what they're doing. I'm concerned that students not become passive acceptors of the official doctrine that's handed down to them from the White House, the media, textbooks, teachers and preachers." Howard Zinn

The wealth of Betsy DeVos expanded by $100 Million in 2019, but none of the West Michigan news sources have reported on that fact

https://griid.org/2020/06/14/the-wealth-of-betsy-devos-expanded-by-100-million-in-2019-but-none-of-the-west-michigan-news-sources-have-reported-on-that-fact/

Transparency is rare with the members of the Capitalist Class, and the DeVos family is one family that doesn't like to share it personal wealth.

However, when one of the members of your family happens to be part of the federal government, then there are some requirements about divulging your personal wealth. Based on the documentation that Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos was legally required to submit, we get a closer understanding of how much her wealth grew in 2019.

According to **research by the group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington** (CREW), Betsy DeVos expanded her personal wealth by at least $50 million in 2019, but quite like by more than $100 million. According to CREW:

It is possible that DeVos earned significantly more than $100 million in 2019 because she is not required to specify amounts received from particular assets above $1 million for her spouse or amounts above $5 million for herself. In her most recent disclosure, DeVos reported income from 11 sources that exceeded $1 million or $5 million without specifying the actual amount received.

If you look at the **77-page document** submitted by Betsy DeVos, you can see exactly what the researchers at CREW were talking about in regard to the vagueness surrounding assets that Betsy and her husband Dick DeVos have.

Many of us who have followed the DeVos family closely over the years are aware of assets such as Alitcor, RDV Corporation, The Windquest Group, RDV Sports, The Stow Company, Boxed Water and Neurocore, but there are dozens of asset entries that are not as familiar.

Betsy DeVos has assets in numerous Grand Rapids and Holland real estate entities, such as DBD Properties LLC, Ada Holdings LLC, 130 Central Avenue LLC, 139 River Avenue LLC and Holland Property Holdings LLC, just to name a few.

Then there are some assets that she has investments in, such as CWD 111 Lyon LLC and DWD Urban Fund, both of which show that she has over $1 million in assets. Again, this is rather vague, because it could mean multiple millions in those assets.

Betsy DeVos also lists assets with GR Michigan Street Holdings, 50 Monroe II LLC, Northside Entertainment Holdings and the Bridge Street Capital Fund.

Now, it should come as no surprise that people who are part of the federal government are personally worth a disgusting amount of money. **OpenSecrets.org provides us with the personal wealth of those in Congress**, where we find that the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, is worth $114 Million.

However, the personal wealth of those who claim to be working for the public, should be a major issue and a major concern, especially in light of the fact that the wealth gap between the super rich and everyone else has grown at a staggering rate over the past 20 years.

Lastly, it is rather troubling that none of the West Michigan news outlets have reported on the matter of the growth of Betsy DeVos' personal wealth while serving as Secretary of Education, especially since so much of her wealth is tied to this community. We need the kind of journalism that will not hesitate to provide a detailed accounting of those who are members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, in order to be able to effectively organize against those with tremendous economic and political power in West Michigan.

What can we expect in West Michigan from the recent Supreme Court ruling that would force taxpayers to underwrite religious education?

https://griid.org/2020/07/01/what-can-we-expect-in-west-michigan-from-the-recent-supreme-court-ruling-that-would-force-taxpayers-to-underwrite-religious-education/

On Tuesday, the **US Supreme Court ruled in a 5 – 4 vote**, that public tax money can be used for religious education, which as many organization have already noted makes a laughing stock of the separation between Church and State.

The ruling was in regards to the case known as **Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue**. Last year, the **ACLU framed this case with the following summary**:

At issue in Espinoza is a voucher-type program in Montana designed to divert millions in government dollars to private schools, the overwhelming majority of which are religiously affiliated. The program, enacted in 2015, allows taxpayers to receive dollar-for-dollar tax credits for donations to Student Scholarship Organizations, which then award scholarships to students attending private elementary and secondary schools. In other words, if a taxpayer owes the state, say, $100 in taxes, she can decide instead to send that money directly to an SSO, which will then spend it on private-school scholarships. In practice, the tax-credit program has served its unmistakable goal of funneling government dollars to religious education: The only SSO operating in the state supports 13 private schools, 12 of which are religiously affiliated, and over 94 percent of program scholarships have gone to finance religious education.

The **American Federal of Teachers** weighed in on this decision, by saying:

"Never in more than two centuries of American history has the free exercise clause of the First Amendment been wielded as a weapon to defund and dismantle public education. It will hurt both the 90 percent of students who attend neighborhood public schools, by siphoning off needed funds, and, in the long term, those who attend religious schools by curtailing their freedom with the accountability that comes with tax dollars."

On the other end of the spectrum, the **White House released a statement yesterday**, a statement calling for a celebration. Betsy DeVos, who has been one of the major architects of the privatization of education movement, joined the White House in celebrating this legal decision, with **her own statement released on Tuesday**:

"Today's decision is a historic victory for America's students and all those who believe in fundamental fairness and freedom. Each and every student needs the freedom to find their education fit, and today the Highest Court in the Land has protected that right by ensuring that families can use taxpayer funds to choose schools that match their values and educational goals, including faith-based schools. I applaud the Court's decision to assign a manifestation of the 'last acceptable prejudice' to the dustbin of history where it belongs. Montana and other states should be very clear about this historic decision: your bigoted Blaine Amendments and other restrictions like them are unconstitutional, dead, and buried. Too many students have been discriminated against based on their faith and have been forced to stay in schools that don't match their values. This decision represents a turning point in the sad and static history of American education, and it will spark a new beginning of education that focuses first on students and their needs. I'm calling on all states to now seize the extraordinary opportunity to expand all education options at all schools to every single student in America."

For those who have been following the political agenda of the DeVos family would not be surprised by this decision and Betsy's ringing endorsement, especially since the Prince and DeVos families have spent millions to support political candidates and organizations across the country that share the belief that the US should operate by the Ten Commandments and not any other legal, secular framework.

One of the organizations that the Prince and DeVos families have funded in West Michigan is the far right Think Tank, the **Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty**, which we have **written about** extensively. **Earlier this year**, the Acton Institute referred to the Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue case as an example of anti-Catholic bigotry. As of this writing, we have not seen a formal response to the US Supreme Court's ruling on Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue from the Acton Institute, but it is only a matter of time until they do.

Now, considering that West Michigan is deeply conservative, both politically and religiously, what impact do you think this will have on public education in the short term and the long term?

One of the largest Charter School Corporations already exists in West Michigan, the National Heritage Academies. The DeVos family and other members of the Grand Rapids Power Structure have been working to influence how the Grand Rapids Public

School functions. Plus, Public Schools are already struggling financially, and Betsy DeVos recently allowed COVID-19 relief funds to go to Charter and other private education institutions.

Lastly, the group that Betsy DeVos founded, the **Great Lakes Education Project** (GLEP), also weighed on the Supreme Court ruling, saying:

"The ruling in Espinoza v. Montana means more students in those states will have access to additional school choices, empowering parents to select and students to attend the school that best meets their needs. The ruling does not immediately or directly affect current Michigan law, but it signals to parents across the state the Supreme Court's willingness to defend their constitutional rights, and their right to choose the schools that best meet the needs of their children."

What GLEP had to say should tell us that Michigan is likely to face more legal challenges around school funding, especially from religious schools and the organization that support them. It is incumbent upon all of us to remain vigilant and see how this ruling by the US Supreme Court will impact education in the state and right here in West Michigan.

Goya CEO, Betsy DeVos and the White House Hispanic Prosperity Initiative

https://griid.org/2020/07/15/goya-ceo-betsy-devos-and-the-white-house-hispanic-prosperity-initiative/

When the CEO of Goya, Robert Unanue, meet with President Trump sang his praises, little did he know there would be backlash for his actions.

An informal boycott is now happening against Goya, with a wave of posts on social media about the company.

What hasn't received as much attention is the reason why the CEO of Goya was meeting with President Trump in the first place. The Trump White House had announced on July 9th, a new program called the **White House Hispanic Prosperity Initiative**. Based on the White House statement, released on July 9, the Hispanic Prosperity Initiative will, "***improve Hispanic Americans' access to educational and economic opportunities***."

The White House statement lays out a framework for what the initiative is all about, which lists the following items:

(i) identify and promote educational and workforce development practices that have improved educational, professional, and economic outcomes for Hispanic Americans;

(ii) encourage private-sector initiatives and foster public-private partnerships that improve access to educational and economic opportunities for Hispanic Americans;

(iii) develop a national network of individuals, organizations, and communities, with which to consult and collaborate regarding practices and policies that improve access to educational and economic opportunities for Hispanic Americans;

(iv) monitor the development, implementation, and coordination of Federal Government educational, workforce, and business development programs designed to improve outcomes for Hispanic Americans; and

(v) advise the President, through the Secretary of Education (Secretary), on issues of importance to Hispanic Americans and policies relating to Hispanic Americans' prosperity.

This description around "school choice" and "public-private partnerships" should raise lots of red flags for anyone who is concerned about how this initiative could negatively impact the latinx community. In many ways, the language used by the White House fits well within their larger Neo-Liberal Capitalist plans, especially for communities of color. Even more alarming, is the fact that this initiative seems to fall under the control of the Department of Education, which means Betsy DeVos.

As Secretary of Education, **DeVos also released a statement** on July 9, praising the White House Hispanic Prosperity Initiative, stating:

"Hispanic families, like so many families across America, want their children educated in personalized ways that meet their unique needs and their family's values. We know that a great education is also the launching pad to a great job and long-term prosperity. I applaud President Trump's strong leadership in support of more educational opportunities and greater prosperity for all Hispanic Americans. At the U.S. Department of Education, we're working to open up new career pathways including apprenticeships and earn-and-learn opportunities, expanding support for Hispanic Serving Institutions, prioritizing new public charter schools in Opportunity Zones, and fighting for education freedom so Hispanic students—and all students—can find their right fit."

We should also find this statement from DeVos rather alarming, since it clearly signals another push with this administration to lure communities of color into the privatized educational sphere. This strategy of undermining public education first educes funding for public schools, and then provides a whole menu of incentives for charter and other private educational models to use public money.

In Grand Rapids, we can see how the GRPS continues to deal with reduced budgets, which leaves Black and latinx students with less resources and quality teachers. Faced with these dynamics, latinx parents will look to other education opportunities for their children, which often means looking at Charter Schools or other private educational models.

While some might see the Hispanic Prosperity Initiative as nothing more than a ploy to **reach latinx voters for Trump**, we should be concerned about how the Hispanic Prosperity Initiative will play out and how it will impact students who are currently in the public education system.

Betsy DeVos sends an additional $85 million of public money to private schools in the nation's capital https://griid.org/2020/07/26/betsy-devos-sends-an-additional-85-million-of-public-money-to-private-schools-in-the-nations-capital/

There has been a fair amount of pushback from educators and parents across the country, with the increase of funds being allocated from the Department of Education. At the behest of Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, millions of taxpayer money has been allocated to private schools.

Several states, **including Michigan**, have filed lawsuits against the Department of Education for using public money for private education. The NAACP also announced recently that they too would be filing a lawsuit against the Secretary of Education, **citing this reason**:

"In a moment of crisis — when public school districts are called upon to educate their students in unprecedented circumstances, to protect their students and staff from disease, and to feed families who have been plunged into poverty, all with decimated state and local revenues — it is unconscionable for Defendants to siphon away the CARES Act's desperately needed funds for the benefit of more affluent private-school students."

At about the exact same time that the NAACP had filed their lawsuit, it was announced by the Secretary of Education, that an additional $85 million in public money would be going to private schools in Washington, DC. This announcement came on July 22nd, with the headline, *T**rump Administration Announces $85 Million to Support Disadvantaged Students in Nation's Capital Attending K-12 Private Schools of Their Choice**.*

What is even more interesting is that Betsy DeVos's office announced that the $85 million would not be going directly to private schools, but would be managed by an organization called Serving Our Children. This particular, where the federal government provides public money to private schools in DC, **began in 2004** from legislation that was crafted by the Heritage Foundation, plus it was the first time that federal funds were allocated to private schools.

Just two years before this program was instituted in Washington, DC, the husband of Betsy DeVos, Dick DeVos, gave a speech at the **Heritage Foundation**. In that speech DeVos lays out a strategy for attacking and undermining public education. Here is a video clip of that speech:

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com

This program in DC is called the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (DCOSP), but it is essentially a school voucher program, where public money goes to private schools, which is exactly what Dick and Betsy DeVos had been attempting to implement in Michigan, with an unsuccessful ballot initiative in 2000.

There have been numerous entities that have evaluated the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and most of those evaluations are not favorable. **According to an article** at the Center for American Progress:

*In the spring of 2017, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the independent research arm of the Education Department, published a study that found that D.C. students who used a voucher scored 0.12 standard deviations lower in math than students who were not offered a voucher and remained in a public school.**35** The evaluation assessed the outcomes of students from the 2012, 2013, and 2014 lotteries. This 0.12 score drop is the equivalent of an average student in the 50th percentile dropping to the 45th percentile after participating in the D.C. voucher program for one year.**36** According to the IES study, participating in the D.C. voucher program had no statistically significant effect on reading achievement.**37***

It is deeply troubling that the Trump administration, through the efforts of Betsy DeVos, have been pushing for an increase in public funding for private education. Many of these private schools are also faith-based, which calls into question the so-called separation between Church & State. What is equally problematic about this trend is that there is not enough opposition from teacher unions or other groups, which should be making this fight for public education a priority.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Department of Education affirms its commitment to supporting religious education with public money https://griid.org/2020/08/18/betsy-devos-watch-department-of-education-affirms-its-commitment-to-supporting-religious-education-with-public-money/

In early July, we **posted an article** about what the Supreme Court ruling in the Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue, which essentially rules that public money can be used for faith-based education, and what it could mean moving forward with Betsy DeVos as the Secretary of Education.

Last week, Betsy DeVos affirmed her department's commitment to making sure that faith-based education programs and schools will benefit from this administration. DeVos stated:

This Administration will continue to protect the religious liberty and First Amendment rights of every student, teacher and educational institution across the country. Too many misinterpret the 'separation of church and state' as an

invitation for government to separate people from their faith. In reality, the First Amendment doesn't exist to protect us from religion. It exists to protect religion from government. Today's guidance reaffirms our commitment to protecting our first liberty and ensuring that discriminatory restrictions on access to federal grant funding are no longer tolerated.

Such a proclamation from the Secretary of Education makes it pretty clear where she stands on this matter. The danger with this Supreme Court ruling was reflected in a **recent ACLU position**, which states:

*The court's ruling could effectively mean that, when states offer school vouchers or similar funding involving indirect aid — such as Montana's tax credit scholarship program — they now must extend the aid to religious schools, too. This is despite the fact that millions more in government funds will be diverted from public schools as a result, and taxpayer dollars will be used to support religious indoctrination and training for future religious leaders and adherents. This also means that the government will fund discrimination against minority-faith and LGBTQ students and job applicants, as well as students and prospective employees with disabilities, whom many religious schools refuse to admit or hire. Indeed, earlier this year, the court heard arguments in **two cases** that could expand the ability of religious schools — the very same ones that often receive voucher funding — to discriminate in hiring and firing based on any ground the schools want, including race and ethnicity.*

In her recent affirmation of Department of Education support for faith-based education, **DeVos included a list of guidelines** her department will use to guide faith-based educational systems. Those guidelines include:

• Affirms that religious organizations are equally eligible to participate in ED-administered programs as their secular counterparts

• Affirms that financial award decisions are made based on merit, not based on an organization's religion, religious belief, or the lack thereof

• States that religious organizations receiving federal financial assistance under a Department program must comply with program-specific legislation and regulations, but clarifies that these organizations may continue to carry out their missions and maintain their religious character. However, direct federal financial assistance may not be used for religious worship, religious instruction, or proselytization

• Reminds states that they may not use discriminatory Blaine Amendments to deny faith-based organizations contracts or grants, as this violates Department regulations against discrimination on the basis of an organization's religious character or affiliation

• Affirms that students and/or borrowers seeking to participate in Department loan programs and beneficiaries seeking to participate in Department social service programs will not be penalized or singled out for disadvantages on the basis of religion

• Clarifies the role of the Department's Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives (CFOI) as a Department office that collaborates with faith and community leaders to maximize participation of religious organizations in Department programs while eliminating barriers in the grantmaking or regulatory process to safeguard religious liberty

These guidelines are highly problematic and it will be interesting to see if this ruling will increase the amount of faith-based educational programs/schools applying for public money. In addition, when we say faith-based educational systems, we really mean Christian, since we all know that Betsy DeVos and the DeVos/Prince families have a deep commitment to ultra-Conservative Christian values. This issue of using public money for faith-based schools and educational programs is not getting the attention it should be, but make no mistake about it that groups like the Great Lakes Education Project, are working hard to make sure that the candidates they are endorsing in Michigan (**all of the GLEP-endorsed candidates won their primary in Michigan**), will be committed to channeling public money to religious schools.

Interview with student organizer from the Sunrise Movement, which protested outside of Betsy DeVos's home https://griid.org/2020/08/24/interview-with-student-organizer-from-the-sunrise-movement-which-protested-outside-of-betsy-devoss-home/

On Thursday, members of the Sunrise Movement organized a demonstration outside of the multi-million dollar mansion of Dick & Betsy DeVos. About 40 people with the Sunrise Movement took part in the action.

The action was part of Sunrise's Wide Awake direct action program, a homage to the mid-nineteenth century abolitionist movement that disturbed the sleep of government officials who resisted abolition. The same method of nonviolent direct action is necessary today, Sunrise says, because " While they profit, we lose sleep, our teachers and students have to choose between an education and their health. While the stock market booms, public schools all over the country are losing funding if they don't open and teachers are tasked with the impossibility of teaching a full curriculum while supporting students in a pandemic".

According to the group's Media Release:

The rise in Covid-19 case numbers across the United States, the global leader in infections and deaths from the virus, have many students and educators concerned about plans to return to in-person education in the fall. There are fears that such a return to in-person

instruction would inevitably lead to more cases, placing further strain on an inadequate healthcare system and ultimately resulting in more death. Many have raised the concern

that those most affected by a return to school will be those from impoverished, disadvantaged, and marginalized backgrounds where parents don't have the flexibility to keep their children home in a hybridized model.

The issue was addressed by one of the speakers, Siena Ramirez, a high school student and Sunrise organizer from the Grand Rapids area, "Betsy and our institution of education have built their foundations on giving away BIPOC bodies that aren't theirs to give away". The bucket banging, cheers, and applause that followed her statement suggested that the pain she felt was shared.

We had the opportunity to interview Siena once GRIID had heard about the action at the DeVos mansion in Holland.

GRIID – What was the primary motivation for your protest outside of the DeVos home in Holland?

Siena – Our motivation is definitely rooted in the reality that time and time again billionaires, such as the DeVos family, profit at the expense of all of our lives. While this is the reality, our movement is dedicated to creating a new day and in turn a new reality where we no longer suffer at the hands of billionaires. A lot of us are also students and teachers that understand in-person schooling directly endangers us, our families and the public and we believe Betsy needs a wake up call.

GRIID – What are the main issues you have with DeVos as Secretary of Education?

Siena – I think a really big issue with Betsy is that she is forcing us back into schools with extremely unsafe conditions where the most vulnerable folx will be affected (low-income, BIPOC and marginalized districts and students), we've also seen her threaten to take funding away from schools with already stretched budgets, if they choose not to return to in-person instruction. Betsy has essentially engineered this crisis, falling asleep at the wheel, at the cost of thousands of students' and teachers' lives. Even before her call to return to in-person schooling, we've seen her efforts to funnel public funding into charter schools, taking money away from districts that need that funding the most. Betsy hasn't listened to us, the students and teachers on the front lines, we are the folx she is supposed to serve yet all she has done is deepen and design this crisis.

GRIID – What connection, if any, do you see between the DeVos push to re-open schools and the capitalist class push to re-open the economy in the midst of a pandemic?

Siena – I think DeVos has been advised that without reopening schools completely, the economy will be devastated by the loss of parents who need to stay home to care for their young students. We are also heading into another recession, that could be exponentially worsened by the loss of so many workers, Betsy would rather see profits than protect us from being exposed to COVID-19 in our schools nationwide. This is also connected to the capitalist class exploiting workers by exposing them to COVID-19 in their rush to reopen the economy, so I believe there's a heavy connection.

GRIID – Did you get any kind of response from DeVos or her handlers for the protest? Did the police show up? and what did think about the **article that MLive ran**?

Siena – As far as I know, nobody associated with DeVos have commented. The police were definitely around, no sirens or arrests but quite a few cop cars were paying attention to us. I think the article did a good job of articulating why we're angry but I also think it left out a major part, that being we see how this crisis, Betsy's support of privatization of education and essentially the whole reason she's even the Secretary of Education is directly tied to capitalism in this country.

*For additional analysis of the policies that Betsy DeVos has initiated in her position as Secretary of Education, go to our **Betsy DeVos Watch** section.*

Education Secretary DeVos says pandemic is a good thing to push the school policies she wants https://griid.org/2020/08/31/education-secretary-devos-says-pandemic-is-a-good-thing-to-push-the-school-policies-she-wants/

On Friday, during an interview on SiriusXM Business Radio show, Wharton's Business Daily, US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos stated that "***it's a good thing that the coronavirus pandemic will force the nation's schools to make changes that should have happened many years ago.***"

The interview, which only lasted for 1 minute and 50 seconds, can be heard at **this link**. In those brief comments, DeVos referred to recently introduced legislation, known as the **School Choice Now Act**, which essentially would provide, according to the Washington Post:

"one-time" emergency federal funding for state-approved scholarship-granting organizations to provide families with "direct educational assistance." This assistance would help them pay for things like private school tuition and home schooling expenses. This emergency funding would constitute 10 percent of emergency education aid for state education departments and local school districts.

In addition, the bill would create permanent tax credits of up to $5 billion annually for scholarship-granting organizations in states for similar purposes. The section of the bill dealing with these tax credits states that nothing in it "shall be construed to permit, allow, encourage, or authorize any Federal control over any aspect of any private, religious, or home education provider.

Like the Secretary of Education's friends, who are part of the Capitalist Class and are using the pandemic to redirect public funding to the 1%, DeVos wants to use the pandemic as an opportunity to push through policy that will achieve what she has been

attempting to do since the early 1990s, when she and her husband, Dick DeVos, tried to get a School Voucher ballot initiative passed in Michigan.

None of this should come as a surprise, since the Capitalist Class loves Disaster Capitalism, which is the use of a crisis to further their own interests.

We encourage people to stay informed about what Education Secretary DeVos is up, which we try to monitor on an ongoing basis through our **Betsy DeVos Watch** section.

Betsy DeVos in Grand Rapids to visit a Private School, with ties to the Acton Institute https://griid.org/2020/09/13/betsy-devos-in-grand-rapids-to-visit-a-private-school-with-ties-to-the-acton-institute/

On Saturday, **MLive reported** that US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos would be in Grand Rapids to visit a school, "*with the intent of showcasing how the school safely reopened during the coronavirus pandemic."*

DeVos has come under fire since she first began pushing for schools to re-open in mid-July. Then on **August 31st, DeVos wrote an opinion piece for the Detroit News**, which was framed as a letter to parents across the country. The letter follows the same mantra from DeVos, always claiming that it all comes down to parental choice. However, Betsy DeVos didn't miss the opportunity to push her "school choice" message, which is essentially the promotion of school vouchers, the expansion of charter schools and other private school options.

Coming to Sacred Heart Academy

Therefore, it should not be surprising to anyone that the school Betsy DeVos is visiting on Monday morning is Sacred Heart Academy. Sacred Heart Academy is a Catholic School that requires tuition.

The MLive article says that they reached out to the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Grand Rapids, but did not receive any response before they posted the story. However, MLive could have contacted another source, more directly related to Sacred Heart Academy, the pastor of Sacred Heart Church, the Rev. Robert Sirico. Of course, Rev. Sirico is also the founder and President of the Acton Institute.

Since Sirico took over as the priest at Sacred Heart, he has had a significant influence on the direction of Sacred Heart Academy, with major changes in the curriculum during the 2013 – 2014 school year. The fact that Betsy DeVos is visiting the school that the founder of the Acton Institute has control over makes complete sense.

Betsy DeVos and Rev. Sirico have a long history together. Sirico presided over the wedding of her brother Erik Prince, the DeVos family has contributed millions to the

Acton Institute since 1990, and Betsy DeVos, her mother and her son Rick DeVos, have all served on the Acton Institute's Board of Directors.

Betsy DeVos was the keynote speaker at the Acton Institute's Annual gala in 2017, plus Sirico has gone out of his way to defend the Secretary of Education on numerous occasions, like he did in June of 2018, in an **opinion piece the Acton founder wrote in the Detroit News**.

However, the relationship between Rev. Sirico and Betsy DeVos can best be summed up by their commitment to Capitalism.

It is also worth noting that the Sacred Heart Academy Board of Directors is made up of people who embrace the same ideological values that DeVos and Sirico embrace. First, there is J.T. Weis, who is the CEO of Arbor Industries, a company based in Holland. **Weis participated in a panel hosted by the Econ Club of Grand Rapids last year**, which talked about the importance of hiring people out of prison, because *it opens up a whole new pool of potential employees.* Weis and his family are involved in the conservative Catholic radio station Holy Family Radio and they are active participants in the anti-abortion March for Life actions.

Then there is Michael Miller, who is the Director of Acton Media and a Research Fellow at the Acton Institute. Miller has written a great deal for the Acton Institute's blog, plus he influences much of the media content for Acton.

Lastly, there is Patrick Kilchermann, who is the founder of the national Concealed Carry University, which provides training for people who want to own guns. Kilchermann believes that God called him to start Concealed Carry University.

Let's be clear about the fact that Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education, is in Grand Rapids to visit a private school, with direct ties to the Acton Institute, which the DeVos and Prince families have supported with millions of dollars for decades.

Small group of protesters send a message to Betsy DeVos while leaving the private school she visited today in Grand Rapids https://griid.org/2020/09/14/small-group-of-protesters-send-a-message-to-betsy-devos-while-leaving-the-private-school-she-visited-today-in-grand-rapids/

As was **mentioned in our previous post**, Betsy DeVos was at Sacred Heart Academy this morning to meeting with staff, students and founder of the Acton Institute, Rev. Robert Sirico.

DeVos arrived at the school earlier than MLive had suggested in their article from Saturday, so when protesters arrived there was already GRPD presence and the black

SUVs parked next to the school entrance. The black SUVs also included members of the US Secret Service, which have been guarding Betsy DeVos almost since the beginning of her tenure as Secretary of Education, especially since she has been confronted by protests where ever she goes.

In the picture above, Acton Institute founder, Rev. Sirico, is seen talking to DeVos who had already entered the black SUV. Sirico is the shorter of the two priests that can be seen in the above photo.

Several protesters arrived just before 8am to confront DeVos on her policies as Secretary of Education. Jack Prince, with Grand Rapids for Education Justice (GREJ) made the point that DeVos has been pushing her school privatization plan, and that it was an insult to students in the Grand Rapids Public Schools, for DeVos to visit a private Catholic school.

Some of the other talking points that GREJ brought up were:

1. We object to the fact that Secretary DeVos is visiting a private school to see how coping with the pandemic is going, when so many other schools, which are financially struggling should be getting attention.

2. We object to the fact that all throughout the pandemic, Betsy DeVos has been advocating that public money should go to private schools.

3. DeVos chose Sacred Heart Academy, specifically to elevate a private school that is run by the founder of the Acton Institute, Rev. Sirico, who is ideologically aligned with Betsy DeVos on education matters.

4. That Betsy DeVos is coming to a private school during a pandemic and has been pushing for more public money for private education, is consistent with this administration, which has done very little to provide financial relief to working class families, Black families and other families of color, many of which are unemployed and facing eviction, while the wealth of billionaires – like the DeVos family – has increased during the pandemic.

Betsy DeVos thinks young people are an unholy mob

https://griid.org/2020/10/21/betsy-devos-thinks-young-people-are-an-unholy-mob/

It has been six and a half months since the US Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has given a public speech. **Back in late March**, DeVos made some remarks on COVID 19 and education, but began her comments by thanking President Trump for his "***clear-eyed leadership during these challenging times***."

Six months later, there have been 221,000 deaths in the US because of the pandemic. So much for clear-eyed leadership.

Once Betsy DeVos decided to leave the confines of Washington, DC, or one of the many DeVos mansions, she chose to go to the most non-threatening place she could find to give a speech, Hillsdale College.

Hillsdale College is an arch-Conservative school that has a long history of promoting free market Capitalism and US global supremacy. One of the college's former Presidents, George Roche, was on the advisory board of the US affiliate of the World Anti-Communist League. Roche also was vehemently anti-public education and believed that the US government should not be involved in the education of American children.

So, you can see why Betsy DeVos would decide to make her first public appearance in six months at a college that shares the same ideological framework that she does.

DeVos's speech before the Hillsdale College audience was sort of what you would expect from the champion of the Neo-Liberal Education model. There were standard comments about "school choice" and putting parents in charge of their children's education. However, there was a an even meaner, nastier, maybe more desperate aspect of Betsy's speech. At one point she said, ***Let me suggest we could fix education for so many children in America if we "go Dutch.."***

Now, to those at Hillsdale College, listening to DeVos's speech, the idea of going Dutch might not have been offensive. However, when one considers that a disproportionate number of Black and Latinx public school students in the US, the idea of going Dutch might seem offensive, even ridiculous.

DeVos clarifies her point about what she means to go Dutch, saying:

That means we embrace the family as the sovereign sphere that it is. A sphere that predates government altogether. It's been said, after all, that the family is not only an institution; it's also the foundation for all other institutions. The nuclear family cultivates art, athletics, business, education, faith, music, film—in a word, culture. And just as the family shapes its culture, it also shapes its government.

Following her narrow definition of what the family means, DeVos then continues her school choice mantra and more attacks against teacher unions.

About two thirds of the way into the speech, DeVos then shifts gears and begins to trash the idea of Socialism.

Too many today—especially among our rising generation—don't seem to understand the dangers of such a view. They somehow have come to believe that socialism is the cure, not the deadly disease it really is.

Tragically, it's because no one has taught them differently. And worse, some have been indoctrinated to believe not in themselves, but in government.

Not only is she trashing Socialism, DeVos is talking shit about young people. I know lots of "our rising generation" from my own first hand experience and I can confidentially say

that they understand a great deal about economics and how the world works…….mostly against them.

When Betsy DeVos says, "***It's ignorant to hate capitalism when you don't really know how communism hasn't worked. It's ignorant to hate freedom, when you don't really know how tyranny hasn't worked,"*** how can we possible take her seriously? This is a person who was born into wealth and privilege and then married into even more wealth and privilege. In addition, Betsy reflects her own narrow binary view of the world, by thinking there is either capitalism or communism, and nothing else.There have been countless economic models that humans have used and created, many of which were based on cooperation. Just because Betsy's family in part of the Billionaire Class doesn't mean that Capitalism works for everyone.

DeVos, then gets real nasty, saying:

So, the unholy mob thinks our economies need redistributing. It thinks our Constitution needs rewriting. It thinks our families need restructuring. One prominent group was explicit about its desire to "disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure."

That's taken right from the old Marxist playbook. It admits the goal is to "[do] away with private property and [educate] children on a communal basis, and in this way [remove] the two bases of traditional marriage."

When DeVos says "the unholy mob," she is referring to the hundreds of thousands of people, most Black people, who have taken to the streets over the past several months, demanding an end to police brutality, mass incarceration, and the plague capitalism, which has devastated Black communities.

Betsy DeVos can't even imagine that the people on the streets are anything other than Marxists ideologues. Living in an ivory tower has prevented DeVos from being on the ground with real people who are not only tired of the lies of Capitalism, they are tired from having 2 or 3 jobs just to pay the bills an pay off the students loans. DeVos would also learn that people all over the US are practicing Mutual Aid, where they take care of each other in multiples ways, including financially. The rising generation is practicing community care, cooperation, and compassion.

As long as Betsy DeVos stays confined to her $40 million yacht, in one of her multi-million dollar homes, in the halls of government, or the ideologically safe confines of Hillsdale College, she will never really understand that most people are struggling to barely survive under Capitalism. They know that the system isn't working for them and they want something else and are likely to get want they want by any means necessary.

Even though she is out as Secretary of Education, we are going to continue to monitor the actions of Betsy DeVos

https://griid.org/2020/11/12/even-though-she-is-out-as-secretary-of-education-we-are-going-to-continue-to-monitor-the-actions-of-betsy-devos/

Like many, I will be delighted to see Betsy DeVos be forced to leave her position as US Secretary of Education. How wonderful it will be for her to be shown the door in the coming weeks.

For those of us in West Michigan, we understand that she has spent the last 4 years in the Trump administration attacking public education and expanding funding for Charter and private schools. However, we also understand that Betsy DeVos has spent the last three decades attacking public education and re-directing funding for Charter and private schools through school vouchers and other tactics.

Over the past four years, we have been writing about Betsy DeVos, from **the time that she was first picked by the Trump administration**, to the **Grand Rapids Public School Superintendent celebrating Betsy's selection** as the Secretary of Education, to that **instructive moment when DeVos's financial holdings were being scrutinized**.

GRIID then spent the past 4 years providing regular analysis of policy decisions and deconstructions of speeches by Betsy DeVos in our column called **Betsy DeVos Watch**.

We produced 70 articles investigating Betsy DeVos during her tenure as Secretary of Education and are proud of that work.

However, despite our glee with the soon departure of Betsy DeVos from her position, we will continue to monitor the actions of Betsy DeVos. The reason why we will continue to monitor Betsy, is because she did as much damage to public education before becoming the Secretary of Education.

People are somewhat familiar with what Betsy DeVos has done in Michigan since her failure School Voucher ballot initiative in 2000. After that loss, Betsy created the Great Lakes Education Project and continued to work closely with groups like the DeVos-created Michigan Freedom Fund, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the Acton Institute, all of which spend significant time on pushing for privatized education by using a "School Choice" mantra.

On the national level, Betsy DeVos has been working with groups like the American Federation of Children, All Children Matter, the American Enterprise Institute, the Manhattan Institute, the American Legislative Exchange Council and many more.

Betsy DeVos is also still a darling in the Republican Party and will now be able to contribute money again to the GOP, along with her family, which **contributed over $20 million during the Trump years**.

It is important to celebrate the fact that Betsy DeVos will no longer be the Secretary of Education. However, we should not assume that the incoming Secretary of Education will be a defender of public education, especially since Arne Duncan was no real champion of public schools, **as Diane Ravitch points out in her excellent article from 2017**.

It is equally important that we continue to monitor how Betsy DeVos will work to undermine public education through her nationwide connection to far right groups that embrace a Neo-Liberal Education model.

Betsy DeVos Watch: Schools as a Talent Pipeline for the Private Sector

https://griid.org/2020/11/19/betsy-devos-watch-schools-as-a-talent-pipeline-for-the-private-sector/

Before Betsy DeVos is forced out of the federal government, she is not wasting what few weeks she has left sulking.

The **Secretary of Education spent time last week meeting with the Secretary of Labor, Business leaders and one student to discuss the need to "Rethink Work-Based Learning**."

"Before the pandemic, there were more than seven million unfilled jobs in the United States waiting for workers with the right skills and a personalized education. And more than 80 percent of HR professionals report they've had difficulty finding qualified people for open positions. More than 4 in 5 say this," said Secretary DeVos. "Employers can't find enough qualified people to hire because ***there are too many disconnects between education and the economy****, just as there are often too many disconnects between a child and the school they're assigned to by government."*

Assistant Secretary for the Office of Career Technical and Adult Education, Scott Stump, also stated, ***"it is our hope that attendees heard and are ready to respond to the call to action to expand employment opportunities for youth as America emerges from the pandemic."***

This is not a new issue or theme for Betsy DeVos. Last year, at the **annual US Mayor's Conference**, DeVos had a similar message an was soliciting help from US Mayors to create a Talent Pipeline from schools to the business sector.

Seeing students as workforce talent is dangerous. First, this kind of thinking commodifies students to be used by the private sector. The other reason why the notion of students as workforce talent is dangerous, is because it minimizes and detracts from students being able to develop critical thinking skills that can provide them with the ability to make important decisions an choices about what they want to do with their future.

The same kind of thinking is very much part of the West Michigan ethos, with groups like Talent 2025 and Believe 2 Become, which also produced a report in 2017 and organize a conference on workforce development, where local CEOs were pushing the notion that education was all about talent development for the private sector. Here are what some of the **West Michigan CEOs had to say in the report**:

For those who value public education, we need to pay attention to the business class and how they want to influence both higher education and K-12 school systems. We also need to resist the business class and their desire to see students as nothing more than profit making talent, a message that Betsy DeVos has been pushing for the past 4 decades.

Betsy DeVos' resignation was cowardly and in no way diminishes her complicity in the harm that the Trump Administration inflicted on the world

https://griid.org/2021/01/08/betsy-devos-resignation-was-cowardly-and-in-no-way-diminishes-her-complicity-in-the-harm-that-the-trump-administration-inflicted-on-the-world/

On Friday, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, resigned from the Trump Administration, just weeks for she would have had to vacate her position.

DeVos, who is part of one of the most powerful family mergers in the country – the DeVos/Prince Family Cartel – sent a **letter of resignation** on Thursday to President Trump.

The letter of resignation from DeVos is instructive, for a variety of reasons.

First, DeVos spends the bulk of the letter highlighting her accomplishments within the Trump Administration, even speaking fondly of Trump and his efforts to champion the Neo-Liberal Education model DeVos has promoted for decades.

Second, DeVos even takes yet another opportunity to denigrate teacher unions by saying, ***"Millions (of students) are being denied meaningful access to education right now, in no small part because of the union bosses who control so much of the traditional system."***

Third, it is not until over halfway through the letter that DeVos expresses her sentiments about what happened on Wednesday at the Capitol. "***That behavior was unconscionable for our country. There is no mistaking the impact your rhetoric had on the situation, and it is the inflection point for me."***

Ok, so putting immigrant children in cages and separating them from their parents was not an inflection point for you Betsy? How about four years of endorsing White Supremacy with the Trump Administration, which not only fostered a climate for white nationalists to intimidate and harm Black, latinx and indigenous people, it sanctioned and nurtured a long standing practice of law enforcement agencies to brutalize Black, latinx and indigenous people. This was not a point of inflection for you Betsy?

Fourth, Betsy then seems to care about how the MAGA coup attempt at the US Capitol may have impacted children who were watching what went down. Really! How does Betsy think that children, who saw her ascendancy, as a billionaire, into the Trump Administration, with no previous public education experience, would react to what went own on Wednesday? More importantly, how will the parents and teachers help make meaning of what happened at the US Capitol. Will they challenge the official version of US history, a version that DeVos embraces when she says things like the children, "must know from us that America is greater than what transpired yesterday," or will they expose them to a more honest People's History version of how systems of power have functioned in the US since it was founded on Settler Colonialism and Slavery?

Fifth, the fact that DeVos is trying to distance herself from what happened at the US Capitol on Wednesday is also a desperate attempt to deflect the fact that the **DeVos family spent millions in the last four years to elect Republicans**, many of which have encouraged the White Nationalist who attempted the coup, plus they contributed to Trump's re-election in 2020.

Lastly, it is worth saying that Betsy's resignation is just another attempt by those who have benefited from Trumpism to try to save face. The reality is that the resignation of Betsy DeVos was a cowardly act, in a long line of cowardly acts that she and the rest of the Capitalist Class have been committing for a very long time.

After 21 years of fighting to get public funding for private education in Michigan, Betsy DeVos finally gets what she wanted with new legislation passed last week
https://griid.org/2021/10/24/after-21-years-of-fighting-to-get-public-funding-for-private-education-in-michigan-betsy-devos-finally-gets-what-she-wanted-with-new-legislation-passed-last-week/

Betsy DeVos and her husband, Dick DeVos, have been at the forefront of the anti-public education movement for more than three decades. They both embraced the Heritage Foundation's effort to undermine the public school system, which began during the Reagan years.

In 2000, Betsy DeVos led a campaign to put the issue of school vouchers on the ballot in Michigan. That ballot initiative failed, but DeVos did not give up. Betsy made the decision to diversify the kind of tactics that the so-called School Choice movement.

These tactics included financially backing candidates at the state and federal level, candidates who would push for an anti-public education platform.

A **second tactic** employed by Betsy DeVos, was to attack public teacher unions. This involved putting out misinformation about public school educators, but it also meant that policies would be adopted that undermined teacher unions and hurt them financially, forcing school districts to diminish public school teacher benefits.

A **third tactic** used by the former US Education Secretary was to work with far right think tanks like the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**, the **Acton Institute**, and any other think tank that was a member of the **State Policy Network**. This tactic was useful in that this network of think tanks would craft position papers, engage in public misinformation campaigns and work to influence state legislators on public school policies. In addition, Betsy DeVos and other members of her family would make significant financial contributions to these think tanks, along with acting as members of the Board of Directors.

One **last tactic** that Betsy used, a tactic that began right after her 2000 School Voucher ballot initiative was defeated, was to create her own front group in Michigan, known as the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP). GLEP became a primary mechanism to influence state legislators and to attack public education and public school teachers unions.GLEP has been instrumental in weakening public school districts across Michigan, with **Detroit being one of the best examples**.

In 2006, Dick DeVos ran for Governor of Michigan, which included a “school choice” platform. Dick DeVos lost that election, but ten years later, Betsy DeVos would land an even bigger political position, becoming the US Secretary of Education in the Trump administration. As Secretary of Education, DeVos used her position to continue to push for education policies that would further undermine public education and promote charter and other private or religious schools. One major **policy initiative that Betsy DeVos pushed was Education Freedom Scholarships**, which would allow public money to be used for private and religious education. The legislation that Michigan adopted last week, is essentially what Betsy DeVos intended with her Education Freedom Scholarships, which would allow individual states to determine the use of public money for private and religious education.

Michigan Legislators passes bills to further the DeVos education agenda

On Tuesday, **MLive reported**:

Senate Bills 687 *and* ***688*** *and* ***House Bill 5405*** *passed Tuesday morning through House and Senate education committees and were approved by the Senate 20-16 shortly after. The House voted 55-48 Tuesday afternoon on a separate, similar package.*

Republican sponsors of the legislation say it would offer more flexibility and choices in education and would address disparities in educational options available to students.

These bills will allow for public money to be used for private and religious education. In laying out the tactics used by Betsy DeVos above, you can see how those tactics were utilized in the passage of these new bills last week.

First, the DeVos family and their friends have contributed millions to state legislators to make sure they will introduce and vote for legislation that undermines public education.

Second, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, was one of the **main proponents** of the education bills passed last week.

Third, the DeVos-created Great Lakes Education Project, on the same day as the anti-public education bills passed, **posted a statement** in support of these same bills.

Last year, after the November Election, **we posted an article** talking about why it is important to continue to monitor the activities of Betsy DeVos, even after she stepped down as Secretary of Education.

What happened in Lansing last week, with the adoption of these set of bills that will further erode public education, clearly demonstrates that the influence of Betsy DeVos and her vast network are just as effective as having her in the Trump cabinet. The question for all of us is, ***how do we further prevent this type of attack on public education in the future?***

DeVos created/connected groups are criticizing the number of public schools that are not going back to in person learning due to the COVID virus
https://griid.org/2022/01/19/devos-created-connected-groups-are-criticizing-the-number-of-public-schools-that-are-not-going-back-to-in-person-learning-due-to-the-covid-virus/

The COVID pandemic has been used by political groups and those of various ideological persuasions to pit people against each other or to attack institutions like government and education.

The attacking has been very visible on the matter of public school closings because of the COVID pandemic. On January 7th, the DeVos-funded group, the Michigan Freedom Fund, post a piece entitled, **Governor Whitmer's Silence is Deafening**. The post attempts to not only lay the blame at the feet of Gov. Whitmer for some school districts shift to virtual learning, but also blames "**union bosses and school bureaucrats**." There is also a Michigan Freedom Fund created video that just edits together a series of people stating that the best place for kids to be is in schools and that Gov. Whitmer is silent on the issue.

On that same day, January 7th, the right wing think tank, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, posted a piece entitled, **School Districts Shut Down Classrooms Again**. The Mackinac article provides a more data-driven response than the Michigan Freedom

Fund post, but it also uses the opportunity to criticize Gov. Whitmer. The Mackinac article then states:

*Many school districts, along with **private schools**, have found a way to remain open. Admittedly, school systems are struggling with a host of challenges after the prolonged impacts of COVID-19. Those challenges include everything from difficulties finding substitute teachers and bus drivers to shifting requirements for virus testing and quarantine procedures. In some cases, there are **enough students absent** and quarantined to cancel class.*

This paragraphed is certainly more nuanced and it does acknowledge the complications around what has been causing some school districts to close, such as having too many students and staff with COVID. This was certainly the case with a school in Grand Rapids, where COVID and staff shortages led to the decision to go to virtual learning, as **reported on by MLive**.

The Mackinac article also provides a link to private schools finding ways open safely, but the link that the article provides is from March of 2021, some 10 months ago. If there is anything that we have learned during the pandemic is that nothing stays the same, with COVID cases spiking and new variants emerging all the time. It also happens that the link that was included is from the same Mackinac Center for Public Policy writer **Ben DeGrow**, who writes exclusively for Mackinac around education issues, where he consistently attacks public education and advocates for privatization.

There is a third DeVos connected entity, the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), which also attacks Gov. Whitmer in their January 10th post, entitled, **Gretchen Whitmer's War Against Kids**. The GLEP article also blames "bureaucrats and union bosses," but little substance to back up their claims. This is standard operating procedure, since GLEP was created by Betsy DeVos and one of its board members is Greg McNeilly, who not only runs Dick & Betsy DeVos's Windquest Group, but is the President of the Michigan Freedom Fund.

Just a few days ago, the **Great Lakes Education Project posted an additional attack** against Gov. Whitmer and the Democratic Party, this time using the claim that Michigan Democrats don't think that parents should have a say in what public schools teach. This response from GLEP was based on a meme posted by the Michigan Democratic Party, shown here on the right. There was so much backlash against this, that the Michigan Democratic Party removed the meme from their Facebook page. On Monday, **according to the Detroit News**, the Michigan Democratic Party made the following statement:

"Parents need to have a say in their children's education, end of story. The post does not reflect the views of Michigan Democrats and should not be misinterpreted as a statement of support from our elected officials or candidates."

Getting beyond the often banal partisan politics involved, what seems to be missing in much of the criticism about public schools that are shifting to virtual learning again is the

realities of what has been happening with COVID in recent months, particularly with the omicron variant.

On **January 13, MLive reported** another record breaking day of new COIVID cases in Michigan, **with an average of of 16,000-plus cases a day**.

In regards to schools, the data is also fairly alarming. **MLive reported on January 11th**:

In total, health officials are aware of 225 active school-related outbreaks affecting at least 5,706 students and staff, according to a report published by the state Monday, Jan. 10.

The January 11 MLive article also provides detailed information on reported COVID cases by schools across the state, **with a searchable database that is 63 pages long**.

One last component that is also omitted from the larger discussion of public school and COVID polices/closings, is the fact that there is now a **growing number of student-led strikes/walkouts across the US** that is directly because more and more students don't feel safe in schools.

One example is from Okemos, Michigan, where students walked out of school over COVID and other issues. The Lansing-based TV station, **WLNS 6**, also includes a student created flyer that is calling for an addition Sit-Out, as seen here.

It is understandable that parents are upset about how schools are responding during the pandemic. All of our lives are in an upheaval because of the pandemic, but policy makers and partisan politics are generally not making things easier for the public, for parents, and definitely not for students during this crisis.

Betsy DeVos moderates panel of carefully selected people to promote the Let MI Kids Learn Ballot Initiative
https://griid.org/2022/02/02/betsy-devos-moderates-panel-of-carefully-selected-people-to-promote-the-let-mi-kids-learn-ballot-initiative/

On Wednesday morning, the Let MI Kids Learn campaign hosted a 45 minutes zoom call, featuring former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.

In late October, **we reported** on the Senate and House bills that passed in the Michigan Legislature, bills that will do what Betsy DeVos has been attempting to do since 2000, with her failed school voucher ballot initiative. Then in November, **GRIID reported** as a response to Gov. Whitmer's veto of the legislation passed in October, the Let MI Kids Learn campaign had begun to undo Whitmer's veto and put the issue on the ballot in 2022.

Betsy DeVos spoke briefly at the beginning of the forum, making her usual remarks about so-called school choice, critiques of public education and how parents are not

included in their children's education. All of these claims have been her main talking points since **she began to work on dismantling public education over the past several decades**.

Nothing of what DeVos had to say was new. However, what was both interesting and instructive, were the other people who were part of the zoom call.

The forum was hosted by a staff member of **Let MI Kids Learn**, Amy Hawkins. Hawkins runs and operates **Generation Strategies**, which claims to help group deliver their message. Hawkins is part of the Conservative Christian movement and her website says that her work is trusted by the likes of Hillsdale College, Unlock Michigan – which opposed the Stay at Home orders in 2020, Sen. Mike Shirkey and Citizens for Traditional Values, to name a few.

Those who were hand picked to be on the zoom call with Amy Hawkins and Betsy DeVos were Celeste Mentag, Jay & Kate Woodhams, Cameron & Shante Pickford, Jimmy Greene and someone named Shayla. Shayla, who claimed to be a public school teacher, never gave her last name, never named the school she worked for and said that she had her daughter in a private school.

Celeste Mentag is part of the **Detroit Founders Classical Academy** This school is sponsored by the Conservative Christian school Hillsdale College. The website for the school isn't very transparent, plus there wasn't a great deal of information for the public to access. However, **the Facebook page** for Detroit Founders Classical Academy was rather telling. There are posts saying that schools are teaching the Black Lives Matter principles, other posts that are dismissive of Critical Race Theory and Charlie Kirk, who is with the far right group **Turning Point USA**.

There are similar posts on **Celeste Mengas' Facebook page**, such as anti-CRT posting and even a meme with **Trump 2024**.

Jay and Kate Woodhams did not identify with a particulate group and they were both reading from a script.

There was also Cameron & Shante Pickford, who identified as homeschooling parents. What they didn't tell you is that **Cameron Pickford is the communications director for the DeVos-created political group, the Michigan Freedom Fund**, and has been in that position since 2017.

The other person who spoke on the forum hosted by Let MI Kids Learn, was Jimmy Greene. Jimmy Greene is the President of Associated Builder and Contractors of Michigan, who spoke most about students learning trades so they could better enter the workforce. Greene is also a Black Conservative, who has endorsed John James (heavily funded by the DeVos family) and many other Republican members of the the Michigan Legislature.

One thing we know about the DeVos family is that they are very strategic and that do not want to be part of efforts unless they can control the narrative. This zoom call with

Betsy DeVos, which was hosted by the Let MI Kids Learn campaign, clearly demonstrated that they only wanted people invited to present who would present the same ideological and political views that the DeVos family has been about for the past three generations.

If you want to endure the content of this forum, you can watch it by going to **this link**.

Connecting the dots on the School Choice Week event and the DeVos family obsession with destroying Public Education
https://griid.org/2022/02/13/connecting-the-dots-on-the-school-choice-week-event-and-the-devos-family-obsession-with-destroying-public-education/

A couple of weeks ago, **we wrote an article** about an event organized by the group Let MI Kids Learn. The event was a panel discussion, featuring Betsy DeVos, which also included several carefully selected guests, some of which were directly connected to Betsy DeVos and her family. One such guest was Cameron Pickford, who is the Communications Director for the DeVos-created and DeVos funded Michigan Freedom Fund.

During the previous week, on Thursday, January 27th, the group **Parent Advocates for Choice in Education** (PACE), held an event inside the Lansing State Capital for what they called National School Choice Week. The DeVos-created group, the **Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP) stated**:

Last week hundreds of teachers, students, parents and activists swarmed the state Capital in Lansing to celebrate National School Choice Week and to celebrate the brighter futures, the hope, and the opportunities that can happen when we prioritize students in our schools, not bloated bureaucracies.

People did not swarm the State Capital, since they had a permit for inside the Capital, with a podium and a PA system for their speakers.

The first speaker at the National School Choice Week event was **Amy Dunlap**, who teaches with the Michigan Connections Academy. The **Michigan Connections Academy is an online charter school**, even though Dunlap was identified as a public school educator. There was also a Catholic School Student talking about the benefits of attended a private school and **Jessie Bagos**, a mother who is part of a lawsuit filed by the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation against the State of Michigan.

The featured speaker at the event was **Corey DeAngelis**, who is the national director of research at the American Federation for Children. The **American Federation of Children** is a national group that was started in part by Dick & Betsy DeVos, **with several million dollars coming from the DeVos family over the years**, as the

American Federation of Children is somewhat of a clearing house for the so-called school choice movement.

The National School Choice Week event was **co-hosted** by the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**, a far right Think Tank that has also received millions in contributions from the DeVos family, along with several DeVos family members serving on the Board of Directors over the years.

There was also a representative from Let MI Kids Learn at the National School Choice Week event. The representative used the opportunity to talk about their ballot initiative, a ballot initiative, which has **received at least $300,000 from the DeVos family**, according to data from the most recent campaign finance deadline.

The Let MI Kids Learn group also shares something else in common with the Parent Advocates for Choice in Education. They share the same address. Both the Parent Advocates for Choice in Education and Let MI Kids Learn groups have as their address, **2145 Commons Parkway, Okemos, MI 48864**.

Interestingly enough, this is the exact same address for the Unlock Michigan campaign, which was a GOP campaign designed to oppose the early Stay at Home orders from Gov. Whitmer. But wait, there is still more at the 2145 Commons Parkway, Okemos address. That address is also the location for Doster Law Offices, PLLC. Doster Law Officers was founded by Eric Doster, who was longest-serving General Counsel in the history of the Michigan Republican Party, having served in this position from 1992 to 2017. This was the same time period that Betsy DeVos was the Michigan Republican Party Chair. Doster's wife, Mary Doster, is a GOP insider who is treasurer of the nonprofit Michigan Redistricting Resource Institute. **Mary Doster is also listed as the Principle Officer with the group Parent Advocates for Choice in Education**.

So it seems that there are several groups that not only share the same address, they share the same ideological framework, they all receive lots of funding from the DeVos family and they have clear connections to Michigan GOP insiders. Plus, all of these groups are committed to dismantling Public Eduction as we know it.

Betsy DeVos, election deniers and campaign contributions: How she doesn't give a damn about setting an example for children, not when it comes to power

https://griid.org/2022/10/23/betsy-devos-election-deniers-and-campaign-contributions-how-she-doesnt-give-a-damn-about-setting-an-example-for-children-not-when-it-comes-to-power/

Last week, Betsy DeVos was at the Gerald R. Ford Museum, talking about her new book with the Executive Director of the museum, Gleaves Whitney. DeVos loves this kinds of forum, since she knows that she will not be challenged by the likes of Whitney, who was the former speech writer for Gov. John Engler.

During the Q & A, DeVos was asked about the January 6th riot. **According to MLive**, this was response from DeVos:

*"It was a very tough day," she said. "I was in my office in the morning, and I could see the Capitol right in my office. I ultimately resigned because I didn't feel the president … **I didn't feel he did what he needed to do to stop what was happening**."*

She added, "I thought about kids watching what was happening on TV and their confusion around that, and just the kind of example that adults were setting in that case or not setting."

Betsy DeVos sent the Trump Administration a **letter of resignation** two days after the January 6th riot, on January 8th. Here is what she wrote in that letter:

We should be highlighting and celebrating your Administration's many accomplishments on behalf of the American people. Instead, we are left to clean up the mess caused by violent protestors overrunning the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to undermine the people's business. That behavior was unconscionable for our country. There is no mistaking the impact your rhetoric had on the situation, and it is the inflection point for me.

Impressionable children are watching all of this, and they are learning from us. I believe we each have a moral obligation to exercise good judgement and model the behavior we hope they would emulate. They must know from us that America is greater than what transpired yesterday. To that end, today I resign from my position, effective Friday, January 8, in support of the oath I took to our Constitution, our people, and our freedoms.

What is instructive about her comments from her resignation letter was the sentence, "***There is no mistaking the impact your rhetoric had on the situation***."

Now, considering what DeVos said in her recent talk at the Ford Museum and what she wrote in her letter of resignation – where both statements make former President Trump complicit in what happened on January 6th – why would she and her family members provide significant campaign funding to candidates in the current election cycle, candidates who have publicly stated that they believe the 2020 Election was stolen from Donald Trump?

We know that the GOP Candidate for Governor stated in May that she believed the 2020 Election was stolen from Donald Trump. However, **in recent months**, Dixon has been more hesitant or even evasive in her response to questions about the 2020 Election. As we reported just after the Primary Election in early August, the **DeVos/ Prince family had collectively contributed $164,450 to Dixon**, even though that

number will likely go up after the October 25th campaign finance filing deadline before the November 8 Election.

You can **check who Betsy DeVos has directly contributed to in the current election cycle,** by going to this link on **OpenSecrets.org**, then compare that to an **article from Michigan Advance** that appeared on October 9th, with the headline, Here are the election deniers running for the Michigan House and Senate on Nov. 8.

It's unfortunate that journalists who were at the Betsy DeVos Ford Museum talk, didn't press her on the matter of her and her family's financial backing of candidates who believe that Trump won the 2020 Election. When Betsy DeVos stated at that speaking engagement at the Ford Museum, "*I thought about kids watching what was happening on TV and their confusion around that, and just the kind of example that adults were setting in that case or not setting."* Do you think Betsy has thought about the kind of example that her and her family's campaign contributions to election deniers will have on children? In the end it doesn't really matter to DeVos or anyone else with that kind of political or economic power, they could care less about setting an example for adults or children.

Betsy DeVos is now saying she would be willing to be part of a second Trump administration

https://griid.org/2024/08/13/betsy-devos-is-now-saying-she-would-be-willing-to-be-part-of-a-second-trump-administration/

Just two days after the failed January 6th, 2021 insurrection in Washington, Betsy DeVos submitted a **letter of resignation** from the Trump Administration.

I wrote a response to the resignation letter from the former Secretary of Education, pointing out numerous aspects of the letter that were disingenuous and cowardly.

Despite Betsy DeVos's attempt at distancing herself from Donald Trump, she is now saying that she would be willing to be part of a second Trump Administration if asked.

The **New Republic reported** – as did many other news outlets – that DeVos said she would return to the post of Secretary of Education, but with one condition, she would like to serve with the "***goal of phasing out the Department of Education as we tried to do through the budgetary process in the first administration***."

The New Republic article went on to say:

*DeVos also said that she would like to pass "**a major education freedom bill in the form of a tax credit mechanism**," alluding to school choice vouchers at the federal tax level, part of conservatives' grand plans to eventually get rid of **public education** in America.*

I have no doubt that Betsy DeVos would do the things she said she would do if Donald Trump asked her to head up the Department of Education again. During her stint as Secretary of Education from 2017 – through her resignation, GRIID wrote dozens of articles providing analysis of her actions during those years, which you read at the **GRIID Betsy DeVos Watch** section.

Betsy DeVos was in Detroit recently at a GOP fundraiser when she made these comments about her willingness to be part of another Trump Administration. And while she has not personally endorsed Trump as the GOP presidential candidate for the 2024 Election, DeVos did say she will, "*definitely be supporting the Republican ticket.*" Just more evidence of the ruthlessness of Betsy DeVos and the DeVos family.

Fox News asked Betsy DeVos what she would do if she was Secretary of Education in the 2nd Trump Administration

https://griid.org/2025/03/11/fox-news-asked-betsy-devos-what-she-would-do-if-she-was-secretary-of-education-in-the-2nd-trump-administration/

A month ago, **Betsy DeVos was interviewed by Fox News**, where she was asked about being the Secretary of Education in the second Trump Administration, along with what she thinks the Trump Administration should focus on regarding education policy.

Of course, Betsy DeVos was passed over, with Trump nominating Linda McMahon as the new Secretary of Education. However, this didn't stop DeVos from speaking her mind about what the 2nd Trump Administration should do regarding the Department of Education.

Here are some highlights from what Betsy DeVos had to say:

- She hopes that Trump will complete the education agenda from the first term.
- DeVos believes that the Department of Education has been a completer failure, since its founding in 1979.
- DeVos said that one trillion has been spent on the Department of Education, with zero or near zero benefits.

- DeVos said, we are not talking about defunding or eliminating the budget, but having the money be more effectively spent – block granting back to the state and directly to families who need it the most.
- In response to "critics" of school choice programs, Betsy DeVos said that those are opposed to school choice have been around for a long time, but the achievement levels have increased with school choice programs.
- DeVos also claims that teachers will benefit under the Trump Administration's education priorities.
- DeVos claims that the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) reform will be beneficial to students, since it will move "professionals" into administering student loans, which means privatizing federal loans, which DeVos believes would mean more accountability.
- DeVos would also love to see the Education Freedom Policy implemented.

So far the Trump Administration has signed two Executive Orders related to the Department of Education and education policy – **Keeping Education Accessible and Ending Covid-19 Vaccine Mandates in Schools**, and **Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling**.

GRIID methodically monitored the 4 years that Betsy DeVos spent in the Trump Administration, wiring about what the billionaire was doing and what her agenda was as the Secretary of Education. I put those articles under the section – **Betsy DeVos Watch**.

GRIID made it very clear in 2016, **when Donald Trump asked Betsy DeVos to be his Education Secretary**, that she has always been an enemy of public education. Betsy DeVos led a school voucher campaign in Michigan, a campaign that was defeated in 2000. Betsy didn't let that stop her efforts to undermine public education, because the very next year **she created the Great Lakes Education Project**.

Betsy DeVos has always seen **education as a talent pipeline for the business community**, but more importantly, she has been promoting a NeoLiberal Education model for more than 3 decades.

During an **American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) summit**, DeVos used standard content from the Neo-Liberal playbook, arguing states rights, choice, the market-place of ideas and even attempting to use language such as, "We the People." One aspect of the Neo-Liberal playbook is to convince people that whatever policy the right wants to promote is all about freedom and liberty. In addition, one other major theme is to attack the federal government. This message has been central to every administration since Ronald Reagan, even though the Neo-Liberal agenda is not always against the Federal Government. For instance, entities like ALEC or the State Policy Network a deeply in favor of government intervention and policy when it comes to the annual US military budget, tax policies that benefit the wealthy and massive subsidies for corporations. Thus, the Neo-Liberal Agenda is quite selective in their notion of choice and freedom, especially when it comes to policies that benefit the Capitalist Class.

This is why Betsy DeVos promoted what she called Education Freedom Scholarships. According to DeVos, “The policy will make a historic investment in America’s students, injecting up to $5 billion yearly into locally controlled scholarship programs that empower students to choose the learning environment and style that best meets their unique needs.” These programs allow people and corporations to donate to a designated scholarship granting organization (SGO) and be reimbursed in the form of a tax credit. With the DeVos plan, states would designate the eligible SGOs, but the federal government would fund the tax credit reimbursement, up to $5 billion total.

Betsy DeVos has been directly involved in getting these tax credit scholarship programs in the states in the graphic above, through a network of organizations that mirror groups in Michigan like the Great Lakes Education Project and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. Across the country, the **State Policy Network**, which brings together groups that primarily push for policy changes at the state level.

The claim made by the former Secretary of Education that School Choice is better and that achievement levels have increased is in sharp contrast to the data and analysis of a 2019 report entitled, **Still Asleep at the Wheel: How the Federal Charter School Programs Results in a Pileup of Fraud and Waste**. There has been over $1 billion in federal funding for Charter Schools that either never opened or have since closed. The report’s Executive Summary states:

It is impossible to document total waste for the entire 25 year program because the Department never required the states to report the names of funded schools until 2006. However, we have now documented $502,468,123 (28 percent of the total database amount) that was awarded to schools from grants that were active between SY 2006-07 and SY 2013-14 that never opened or that have closed. Applying that percentage to the total expenditures ($4.1 billion) of the CSP programs designed to create new schools, approximately $1.17 billion in federal funding has likely been spent on charters that either never opened, or that opened and have since shut down.

Facts and data don’t matter to people like Betsy DeVos, not when their deep commitment to Capitalism and their ideological belief in God drives them.

When Betsy DeVos gave a speech at the far right school Hillsdale College, DeVos was more candid than usual, since she was speaker to those with the same ideological commitments. In part of her speech, DeVos didn’t mince words about what she really thinks of the American public that doesn’t embrace God and County, when she said:

So, the unholy mob thinks our economies need redistributing. It thinks our Constitution needs rewriting. It thinks our families need restructuring. One prominent group was explicit about its desire to “disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure.”

That’s taken right from the old Marxist playbook. It admits the goal is to “[do] away with private property and [educate] children on a communal basis, and in this way [remove] the two bases of traditional marriage.”

While I miss the opportunity to critique Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, whatever the Trump Administration plans to do with the Department of Education and the Education budget will lean heavily on the network of charter schools and private schools across the US, along with think tanks, associations and organizations that are a part of the State Policy Network, all of which Betsy DeVos and her family have had a hand in crafting and funding. The battle for public education will be waged at the local and state level, regardless of whether or not the Department of Education will be dismantled under Donald Trump.

Additional Resources:

Books:

Redeeming America: Piety & Politics in the New Christian Right, by Michael Lienesch

The Coors Connection: How Coors Family Philanthropy Undermines Democratic Pluralism, by Russ Bellant

Old Nazis, the New Right, and the Republican Party: Domestic fascist networks and their effects on US cold war policies, by Russ Bellant

Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right, by Sara Diamond

The Religious Right in Michigan Politics, by Russ Bellant

Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right, by Jane Mayer

Amway: The Cult of Free Enterprise, by Stephen Butterfield

The Betsy DeVos Story, by Jason Linkins

A Wolf at the Schoolhouse Door: The Dismantling of Public Education and the Future of School, by Jack Schneider and Jennifer Berkshire

Online:

https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Richard_DeVos

https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Dick_DeVos

https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Betsy_DeVos

http://www.rightwingwatch.org/people/dick-devos/

http://www.politicalresearch.org/2015/12/22/the-koch-like-family-youve-never-heard-of-influencing-state-legislatures/#sthash.ujTc5KZC.dpbs

http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/01/devos-michigan-labor-politics-gop/

http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/features/trump-education-secretary-betsy-devos-a-win-for-the-christian-right-w470605