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The Bane That Is Betsy DeVos

Watch out, the secretary of education is on the loose.



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Today let's talk about the evil deeds of Betsy DeVos.

We've been distracted, what with Omarosa and the Manafort trial and that \$90 million military parade we were so looking forward to. At the same time, our secretary of education has been busy, working to protect for-profit colleges from their students.

Yes! We keep being told that Donald Trump was elected because working-class Americans were worried that their kids wouldn't be able to move up in the world. And now DeVos is making it easier for those very same kids to be cheated when they try to prepare for a career.

It's quite a story, just as DeVos is quite a gal. Probably the first secretary of education with a \$40 million family yacht that's registered in the Cayman Islands, presumably to avoid American taxes.

Is that the yacht that got mysteriously untied the other day?

Yes, it was moored in Ohio and an unknown person set it adrift, causing up to \$10,000 in damage. We do not approve of this sort of behavior, people! Somebody could have gotten hurt. And the DeVos family might have been without a floating residence, except for the other nine yachts they own.

But before I permit any more distractions, we need to discuss policymaking at the Department of Education:

The Obama administration worked very hard to weed out bad for-profit colleges. The policy it finally came up with was to compare an average graduate's debt with the average graduate's earnings. Then cut off federal grants and loans to the schools that had a really terrible ratio. And give the students who'd gotten a raw deal a chance to get their loans forgiven.

Excuse me, but does this apply to, say, philosophy majors? My grandson is finishing up at the state university and I do not see how all these courses on Heidegger are going to get him work.

No, we're talking about schools that are just there to prepare students for a career, whether it's computer engineering or cooking or auto mechanics. Your grandson is in a privileged minority. If you want an American college student to worry about, Suzanne Martindale of Consumers Union says you should think less about a kid on a four-year campus and more about "someone 29 with three kids."

Or Stephanie Stiefel, who enrolled at the now-defunct for-profit International Academy of Design and Technology in Tampa to get a B.A. that she was assured would lead to a good-paying position in interior design: "They made it seem so simple — just do well in class and finish the program." She graduated with a 3.8 and \$62,000 in debt, then discovered that the only jobs she could land were minimum-wage positions she could have gotten without any training at all. Other schools wouldn't accept her credits when she tried to get an advanced degree. Now, 10 years later, she's finished a tour of duty in the Army and owes \$110,000. "At this point I just make the payment and cry about it," she said.

DeVos, meanwhile, is worried about the government making "burdensome" demands on the for-profit schools. We will take a break for a minute to sigh.

Oh gosh, this is so depressing. I hate thinking about the things this administration is doing to ordinary people. Is there any chance you could distract me by working in Omarosa?

Well, be a good citizen and stay with me for a minute.

DeVos loves for-profit education — you may remember she championed an overhaul of the Michigan school system, which replaced troubled public schools with truly terrible charter schools, most of them for-profit.

So she's chipping away at anything the for-profits don't like. Like the Obama rule allowing aggrieved students to petition to get their loans forgiven. The new idea would pretty much limit relief to people who've fallen into deep financial distress. Nobody seems to have seen that one coming.

And lord knows what's next. Amy Laitinen, at the nonpartisan think tank New America, is worrying that the department will “allow a college to outsource its program to an unaccredited provider.” Which in theory could mean that when you pay your tuition to what seems to be a legitimate school, you could find yourself bused over to Trump University for classes.

I'm so glad you got Trump University in there.

DeVos has stuffed her department with people from the for-profit education industry. The guy who's supposed to be overseeing fraud investigations is a former dean of a for-profit named DeVry University, which paid \$100 million to settle a lawsuit over misleading marketing tactics.

But you still promised me Omarosa. Find a way to work her in.

The famous memoir claims Trump calls his secretary of education “Ditzy DeVos” and vowed to get rid of her. The first certainly sounds likely. But by now we are well aware that the current president of the United States is incapable — oh, irony of ironies — of firing anybody. And I don't want to give you the impression that Trump has any reservations about for-profit colleges that make grandiose promises to their students about future careers, while taking their money and preparing them for nothing whatsoever.

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