

March 10, 2020

Honorable Carolyn Maloney
Chairwoman, U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Jim Jordan
Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Investigating Betsy DeVos' Role In Spying Scheme Against a Teachers' Union

Dear Chairwoman Maloney and Ranking Member Jordan:

On behalf of Accountable.US, a non-partisan government watchdog, I write to you with an urgent request that you investigate whether Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos involved herself in efforts to recruit former intelligence officers to spy on the activities of the American Federation of Teachers.

The *New York Times* reported on March 7th that Secretary DeVos' brother, Erik Prince of Blackwater infamy, "has in recent years helped recruit former American and British spies for secretive intelligence-gathering operations that included infiltrating... labor organizations and other groups considered hostile to the Trump agenda, according to interviews and documents."¹

Reports further indicate that "one of the former spies, an ex-MI6 officer named Richard Seddon, helped run a 2017 operation to copy files and record conversations in a Michigan office of the American Federation of Teachers, one of the largest teachers' unions in the nation."²

The operations were undertaken by Project Veritas, a right-wing group with a lengthy history³ of engaging in so-called "stings" against their political opponents, and which DeVos' brother has hosted at the Prince family ranch.⁴

During her tenure as Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos has been openly hostile to teachers' unions, accusing them of having a "stranglehold on many of the politicians in this country."⁵ Additionally, DeVos and her husband have previously funded at least one organization in Michigan which targeted unionized teachers with advertising campaigns and encouraged them to drop out of their unions.⁶

¹ [Erik Prince Recruits Ex-Spies to Help Infiltrate Liberal Groups](#), *The New York Times*, 03/07/20

² Ibid.

³ [Has James O'Keefe Accidentally Stung Himself Again?](#), *The New Yorker*, 08/09/17

⁴ [The Complete Mercenary](#), *The Intercept*, 05/03/19

⁵ [DeVos: Teachers union has a 'stranglehold' on many federal, state politicians](#), *The Hill*, 11/27/18

⁶ [Behind The Campaign To Get Teachers To Leave Their Unions](#), *National Public Radio*, 07/19/18

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Furthermore, Betsy DeVos and her husband have continued to contribute large amounts from their personal foundation to ideologically conservative groups during her tenure as Education Secretary.⁷ The DeVos Family has also given at least \$2.5 million to DonorsTrust,⁸ a pass-through organization that has funded Project Veritas.⁹

The involvement of DeVos' brother in this scheme to spy on a labor organization in their shared home state of Michigan raises serious questions about what role the Education Secretary played in it, particularly in light of DeVos' history of hostility with the same union.

Did Betsy DeVos coordinate, fund or encourage her brother, Project Veritas or any other group to infiltrate the Michigan chapter of the American Federation of Teachers and engage in furtive tactics that included photocopying documents and removing them from the organization? Are there other efforts DeVos has participated in or asked her brother to undertake to help her push her agenda behind the scenes?

A spokesperson for DeVos has denied her involvement, claiming the Secretary "has absolutely nothing to do with this,"¹⁰ but it stretches the imagination to the breaking point to believe her brother never at least mentioned his intel operation to her. At the end of the day, who would benefit more from this ill-gotten information than the Education Secretary at war with the union?

We believe it is in the best interest of America's children, parents and teachers for them to understand exactly what steps Betsy DeVos has taken behind the scenes to try to discredit teachers' unions who advocate for strong public schools. If she played any hand in these dirty tricks, it would confirm that there is nothing she will not do to undermine public education in America in pursuit of her privatization agenda. The President and his cabinet are not above the law. This case demands your committee's careful scrutiny and if wrongdoing is found in the Trump Education Department, all those involved must be held accountable.

Respectfully,
Kyle Herrig
President, Accountable.US

⁷ [Exclusive: Betsy DeVos' family foundation funnels money to right-wing groups that boost her agenda](#), *Salon*, 12/19/19

⁸ [Exposed: The Dark-Money ATM of the Conservative Movement](#), *Mother Jones*, 02/05/13

⁹ [Koch, Bradley Money Fuels Trump's Right-Wing Echo Chamber](#), *ExposedByCMD*, 07/24/19

¹⁰ [Schools step up closures amid coronavirus outbreak](#), *Politico*, 03/09/20