

DeVos One Step Closer to Department of Education, But Questions Remain

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The vote was 12-11 in favor of moving the nomination. Republicans hold a slim majority on the HELP Committee, having lost one committee spot due to the 2016 elections.

The nomination now moves to the Senate floor for consideration. That vote has yet to be scheduled but should take place in short order.

The HELP Committee confirmation is notable for a couple of reasons. First, two Republican members of the committee signaled that DeVos has work to do in order to secure their support in the full Senate vote. Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) voted to support DeVos on the grounds that all senators should be given the option for an up-or-down vote on Cabinet nominees. Senator Murkowski noted the “thousands” of communications she received in opposition to the nomination and said DeVos “has not yet earned my full support.” DeVos needs the support of 51 senators to be confirmed, and Republicans control 52 seats.

The second interesting part of the hearing was the level of contention between Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA). While the two had formed a collaborative relationship during the consideration of the Every Student Succeeds Act, there was a definite rift over the process and substance of the DeVos nomination hearings. Things came to a head today over Murray’s characterization of DeVos’ “opaque” finance filings and the fact that Alexander refused to further delay the hearing, citing the fact that DeVos had answered more than 800 written questions.

It remains to be seen how this nomination (and the pending Obamacare repeal fight) will affect the prospects for reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Vince Sampson focuses on helping clients predict, navigate and understand the increasingly complex involvement of federal agencies and Congress.

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