



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Hostages No More: The Fight for Education Freedom in America

**Guest(s):** Betsy DeVos

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

**Roger Marsh:** Welcome to another edition of Family Talk, the radio home of Dr. James Dobson, the voice you trust for the family you love. Today, we bring you a timely interview conducted by our co-host Dr. Tim Clinton. He caught up with his very special guest, the former US Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. From 2017 to 2021, Betsy DeVos served as the 11th US Secretary of Education. She previously served as Chairman of the Windquest Group, a privately held investment and management firm based in Michigan. She is also the former chair of the American Federation for Children, the Philanthropy Roundtable, and the Michigan Republican Party. Betsy DeVos is married to Dick DeVos and together they have four children and 10 grandchildren.

Well, we have a lot of ground to cover today. Dr. Clinton will dig in to ask Betsy DeVos several thought-provoking questions about her brand new book called *Hostages No More: The Fight For Education Freedom and the Future of the American Child*. Let's go to that conversation right now.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Betsy has a brand new book out called *Hostages No More: The Fight For Education Freedom and the Future of the American Child*. In the book, she recounts her decades-long battle to put students first, hits back at the woke curriculum in our schools, details reforms America must pursue to fix its badly broken education system. Ultimately, Betsy's laying out a roadmap for reclaiming education and securing the future of our kids and America. And she's going to share some of her vision with us here on Family Talk. Betsy, such a delight to have you join us. Dr. Dobson sends us regards, has such deep appreciation for you and all that you do.

**Betsy DeVos:** Well, I'm delighted to join you and please do give both Jim and Shirley my very best regards.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Let me jump straight into some of the role and calling that God has placed on your life. Former US Secretary of Education under the Trump administration, an amazing journey in that role. And you've been, though, on the front lines for

about 35 years dealing with education and Washington, a lifelong passion of yours. It goes all the way back to Holland, Michigan. Tell us just where those seeds came from.

Betsy DeVos:

Well, I was very blessed to grow up in a home where parents encouraged us to follow our passions and follow the things that we felt called and led to and interested in. But when my oldest son, Dick's and my oldest son, Rick turned ready to go to kindergarten, I started looking around for the right school for him. And Dick and I knew we were going to be able to have him go to whatever place was going to be best for him. And in the process of doing that, I discovered this wonderful little Christian school in the heart of Grand Rapids that was serving all of the neighborhood around. And while we didn't choose that school for Rick to attend, we chose a Christian school closer to our home. I got involved as a volunteer at this school and long story short, the more I got involved there and the more we supported that school, the more I realized that our system of education, the way we fund students is fundamentally unfair for those who do not have the same kind of resources that Dick and I had.

And so, we started first with helping students and families with scholarships. And then I began to get involved with many different organizations, both state and national, that were advocating for policy change, where the funding for children's education would go with that child to whatever school the parents wanted to send him or her. And then it led to the political work on that behalf because we very soon understood that the impediment was a very, very strong association of school unions and all of the allied organizations that continue to lobby for the system itself, not for kids and not for what's best for them.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

I think that's the big statement. I go back to the title of your new book *Hostages No More*. It goes back to, I think, a Horace Mann quote. Can you explain exactly what that means? Hostages to what cause?

Betsy DeVos:

Certainly. Horace Mann, who's commonly considered the father of our education system, our K-12 system, when the system was founded said that educators are entitled to look upon parents as having given hostages to our cause. And I think this last two years, in particular, parents and families across the country have had a front row seat to their children's education in ways they've never had before. And many of them have been very disappointed, if not outright angry, with what has happened, whether it's been the extended lockdowns, the mask mandates, in and out, the distance learning that wasn't really learning or discovering curriculums like critical race theory being infused into their child's classroom. There's a whole host of reasons that parents have become much more aware of, and in many cases, unhappy with where their children are learning. And also out of necessity, many families took their kids and started their own, perhaps a micro school or pod, learning pod or a homeschool consortium or established essentially a little one room schoolhouse. And many of them are finding this is actually working better for our children and so they're starting to demand the kinds of policy changes that I've been advocating for for decades.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I want to bring up the word property for a moment. We're hearing rumblings from the Biden administration. We also hear, go back to Terry McAuliffe, the former governor of Virginia, stating basically that kids were the property of the school system, of the educational system. Explain that to us because I think that's a really important concept, isn't it?

Betsy DeVos: Well, in that governor's race in Virginia, that was really the defining moment for that race. When asked by, I believe, a parent in an audience about getting involved in their children's schools and he famously said, "I don't think parents should be involved in what happens in the child's school." And many thought that he would roll back what was considered a major gaff, but instead he doubled down on it. And in fact had Randi Weingarten closing out his campaign the night before the election. Glen Youngkin acknowledged and campaigned the whole rest of his race as an underdog initially on the importance of parents having all kinds of involvement in their children's education. And in fact, with the ability to control and direct their child's education, which is precisely where the purview should be. Clearly, the system has considered very differently, and I think that's become increasingly clear to families in the last couple of years again, as well.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There's a lot of politics here, a lot of power, a lot of money, isn't it? And it drives this whole system.

Betsy DeVos: Yeah. It is really centered around power and resources, money. And we saw school unions and all their allied organizations basically extract \$200 billion in COVID relief monies during the past year and a half. And the reality is, that was only part of the agenda. In many large urban areas, they refused to open back up unless a whole list of other demands were met. And it's not student-centered on what's best for the kid. It is very adult centered. And so before the pandemic, we had major issues and problems for many children. Many of them who have been stuck in assigned schools with no other option and being really failed in their learning opportunities. All of the data coming out well before the pandemic has continued to indicate that those at the bottom end of the spectrum continue to do more poorly than those at the top.

And in fact, those at the top end of the performance spectrum have plateaued out in the last number of years before the pandemic. So the system itself has been broken for a long time and it has revealed itself for what it is, really bent on serving itself, not on serving students. So it's time to change that and put the power into the hands of parents and the resources that are already expended on those children, attach them to that child metaphorically to their backpack and let them find the right learning environment for each child.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, we sure do stand with you on that, that's for sure. When I was going through your book, I saw that quote, actually is a Hitler quote, I think. "He alone who owns the youth gains the future." And do you think that's really at the heart of this what's going on?

Betsy DeVos: I do. I think it's been a long concerted effort. It was crystallized at the federal level when the federal Department of Education was constituted in 1979. It was a payoff that Jimmy Carter made to the teachers unions for their endorsement during that presidential race. It was the first time they had endorsed a presidential candidate and he came through and formed the Department of Education. But so much of policy and regulation has originated in that department for all of these decades and the vicious cycle between the status quo, the blob as I affectionately refer to it, and the politicians to whom they give money, who then turn around and vote for the very things that school unions and the blob want. And it does not honor and respect the central role of the family in the education of their child, and it's time that we reverse that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's just appalling to me. You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, our special in studio guest today is former U.S. Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, someone who has been on the front lines championing parental rights and the importance of educational freedom. Her new book out, we're talking about it. *Hostages No More*. If you don't have a copy of this, you need to get it. The subtitle, *The Fight for Education Freedom and the Future of the American Child*. Mom, dad, everybody, you need to turn the radio up and take serious this conversation we're having. Betsy, I want to go back to our direction today for a moment. I saw where a lot of how you developed your perspective was around this statement, "No child is average." And you said, this is important because I think you used an Air Force analogy where you were talking about planes and pilots and how it was important the plane had to fit the pilot. Right?

Betsy DeVos: Right. And all kinds of planes were crashing and this is a great story that Todd Rose included in his important book, *The End of Average*. And what they finally realized was they were taking measurements of what the average pilot looked like or was like physically, and when they did a closer study found that no one actually fit that average. And instead of having pilots conform to a one size fits all cockpit and all of the configuration and controls, they started demanding of the manufacturers that they actually put in some customization features so that they could adjust to what the pilot, the arm length, their leg length, whatever, and suddenly the rate of crashes plummeted. So the point being, there is no child that is average, and yet everything about our 175 year old industrial model of education suggests that every child should fit into this average scale and framework.

And the contention is for me, and many others, that we need to really totally rethink that. We have spent over a trillion dollars at the federal level alone to close achievement gaps, hasn't narrowed one little bit. In fact, it's widened in many cases. And so this notion that we just keep putting more and more and more taxpayer money into a framework and a system that is simply not working for too many kids is ill placed. And as Albert Einstein said, is the definition of insanity. And as Secretary, I visited hundreds of schools looking for ones that were actually doing things somewhat differently and were acknowledging in

some way that no child is just average. And I highlight those in the book. I talk about them.

I also talk about a myriad of ways in which families can take control of their kids' futures and importantly, how they can get involved with ensuring that elected officials are going to support the policies that will allow the funds for those children to follow them to wherever their families decide they want to go. So this June, we saw a victory for education freedom in the main Supreme Court decision that further affirmed that possibility. I think the time is very ripe and I just urge and encourage all families and grandparents to really pay attention to and support those who are going to support kids and their futures.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The dispute we're talking about that was resolved via the Supreme Court ruling on June 21st in *Carson v. Makin*. It actually began as a challenge to the system that Maine uses to provide a free public education to school-aged children. In some of Maine's rural and sparsely populated areas, school districts opt not to run their own secondary schools. Instead, they choose one of two options, sending kids to public or private schools that the district designates or paying tuition at public or private schools that each student selects. But in the latter case, and this is the key, state law allows government funds to be used only at schools that are non-sectarian. In other words, schools that don't provide religious instruction like Christian schools.

Betsy DeVos: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So two of Maine's families went to court arguing that the exclusion of schools that provide religious instruction violates the First Amendment's free exercise clause. This is amazing. The justices agreed. Let me repeat that. The vote was six to three, a clear decision. The Supreme Court has taken side with those families and religious schools are no longer exempt.

Betsy DeVos: Yes. Basically the court, in three relatively recent decisions, has doubled down on the notion that there cannot be religious animus when it comes to education. And they have also clarified again that any time a family or a parent is making a decision or a choice, if they decide to send their child to a faith-based school, that is their choice. It is not the government making that decision. A very clear indicator that that's where the decision making lies and that it is not a violation of the church state separation. It's a family decision.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Love it. Your mantra, probably a common term that people would use is around school choice. I think your term of choice is educational freedom. Can you explain it to us? And you also say it's morally just, and that it works, that there's research behind it all.

Betsy DeVos: Certainly. Well, I called what we're talking about school choice for many, many years and many people do. But I have, in the last few years, broadened it to say, we need to be talking about education freedom, because I think many people,

when we say the phrase school choice, immediately think of putting up other buildings and infrastructure, and thinking around learning as infrastructure. But I have come to learn that education takes place a lot of different places, and it doesn't have to be in a school building. There's a school in my hometown of Grand Rapids, a high school that basically has the city as its learning environment. The kids, they have a small classroom at the home base, but they're out all the time learning around the community and around the area, and they're choosing to do that. We need to think more broadly and more creatively about how can we help kids unlock their potential and really stoke that wonder and that curiosity that's innate in every child.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In your book, you then explain the different things like public charter schools, public school choice, magnet schools, home schools, tax credit, scholarships, education savings accounts, vouchers, and so much more. I wanted to ask you, what do you think the impact of all that is on teachers and on parents for good or bad?

Betsy DeVos: Well, first of all, for parents, it's a huge opportunity. If the policy supports their making a choice and the school to which their child is assigned or where they decided to live to send their child to school is working, that doesn't mean you have to change at all. That is great. You could use your education funding for that school for that experience. But if it doesn't, you have other options. In places where there are robust programs around this, there are a lot of resources for families to avail themselves of to help understand what the options are. So that's for parents and families.

For teachers, education freedom would unlock the world for them as well. It would be awesome for teachers to be able to work in an environment where they can find the best fit for them. And I think about the teachers that have chosen to be teachers at this outdoor school, it's unusual to all of us who've known one size fits all system, but I think that many teachers eyes have been open to a lot of possibilities during the last couple of years as well when their system or their building might have been shut down for months, and they maybe were hired by several families to help teach multi-age kids and maybe that's working for them. They ought to have that opportunity to teach and share their gifts in that environment too. And so I just know that a full education freedom environment would elevate them in a way that they have never had experience of before.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Betsy, I wanted to ask you about the growing animus I think that's out there to where people with sincerely held religious beliefs. They're seeing CRT, gender ideology, even at the collegiate level, the fight they're under the lawsuits that are coming, the title for funding issue, Title IX concerns, and more. Just a broad statement, what do you think is happening and where do you see it going?

Betsy DeVos: Well, I think unfortunately the far left of the Democrat party has really been the tail wagging the dog in many respects. And it's very concerning to see how much of the good work that the last administration did to reassert and re-clarify the

importance of religious freedom and your ability to practice your faith in all aspects of your life, it's under attack everywhere. It's not just in education, but it's especially so in education because that's where young people are formed. Again, I think revelations of some of the things that have been going on in classrooms for probably a lot longer than people realize has, again, awakened parents and grandparents and friends in ways that they had never really known before. The time for demanding change and demanding the ability to control and direct their own child's educational futures, it has never been more ripe. And I do think that while we're seeing a lot of action at the federal level right now that is antithetical to what many parents and families want, it is also our right in our democracy to speak up and change people in office who are ultimately making these decisions.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You bet. I know in your book, you were very concerned to speak to that mom or dad who feels like they may not have the knowledge or the voice on what to do. If they feel like they're up against the wall, maybe they're in a school system where they are feeling a lot of pushback, but can you give some words of hope and encouragement here as we go, Betsy?

Betsy DeVos: Well, certainly. I just will urge and encourage all parents to pay attention to this moment and feel emboldened in your efforts to advocate for your own children. And for those in your family and your neighborhood, we need to make sure that parents and families are put back in control of their children's futures. And it's been very clear in the last two years, in particular, that the system that we have long thought has been serving us well has not been doing the job for too many kids and for too many families. And for those who are in a great place and have an environment that is supportive of them being the prime educators of their family, that is wonderful. Protect that and encourage and nurture that. And for those who want something different for their children, help be part of the chorus that has been building to change that dynamic and to give you and your friends and neighbors the opportunity to make those decisions for your children. There are a lot of people that are in your camp, in your court, and just be emboldened to do what you need to do next to make that change.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Betsy, thank you for serving our great country in that role as Secretary of Education and for all you continue to do. And congrats again on the new book. It's *Hostages No More: The Fight for Education Freedom and the Future of the American Child*. Every parent needs to have a copy of this book. And by the way, we need to be showing up at those school board meetings. We need to be running for the school board. We need people in those positions, having a voice for such a time as this, standing strong on the values that do matter to us all.

Betsy, on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the entire team of Family Talk and more, we, again, so salute you and thank you for the good work God's doing in and through you. Thank you for joining us.

Betsy DeVos: Thank you so much, Tim.

Roger Marsh: Fascinating perspective from someone who's been standing strong for conservative values and is a defender of our kids right to equality and unbiased education. This has been Family Talk with our own Dr. Tim Clinton interviewing Mrs. Betsy DeVos on her new book called *Hostages No More: The Fight for Education Freedom and the Future of the American Child*. I'm Roger Marsh, and we're out of time for today, but thank you so much for listening. By the way, to learn more about the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). And remember, you can also call us as well at (877) 732-6825. We would love to hear from you. Until next time, may God continue to richly bless you and your family as you grow deeper in relationship with him and be sure to be with us right here for the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.