

A usually quiet library transformed into a lively public forum with all tables full and people spilling into aisles last Wednesday, February 7. Attendees held signs that read, "Impeach Trump," "ACA Works in WV," and "C(R)APITO Throwing Kids Under the Bus."

The Morgantown Public Library was where Hampton Cokeley, field representative for Sen. Shelley Moore Capito spoke to a large group of people to answer their questions and discuss current political events, especially the senator's vote of confidence in Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education.

"It's not about money or partisanship, it's about the decisions she's making for West Virginia," Cokeley said as he addressed the crowd. "We may not always agree, but that doesn't mean she's not listening."

Topics brought up ranged from education to the environment, health care to terrorism. Current events spurred emotions in many in the crowd, some were even brought to tears. The topic that most people were voicing their opinions on was Betsy DeVos, President Trump's pick for Secretary of Education.

DeVos was chosen by President Trump for his cabinet in November 2016. She is a Republican from Michigan. Upon her nomination, democrats around the country opposed her due to her lack of experience in the education field and her support of charter schools over public schools. After a drawn out debate from democratic leaders arguing to not allow DeVos to be a part of Trump's cabinet, Vice President Mike Pence cast a historic tie-breaking vote in favor of DeVos, securing her spot in Trump's cabinet.

"If I had to describe my reaction to the first few weeks of the administration, I would say, 'I'm terrified,'" said Morgantown resident Barry Wendell.

Wendell wrote a letter to read to Capito's representative, discussing education, the environment and discrimination based on race, religion and sexual orientation.

"You voted for Betsy DeVos, who wants to destroy public schools in favor for profit charter schools, which as Senator Manchin pointed out, would be unworkable in a predominantly rural state, or even a small city like Morgantown," Wendell said.

Susannah Mathews also wrote a letter to read to Capito's representative. Mathews is a mother of twin boys. This was Mathews' first time attending and speaking at an event like this.

“I see this vote for DeVos as a vote against the children of this state,” Mathews said “I see Capito as a woman who is strip mining the soul away from the state.

“I feel disgusted that she has taken the great narratives of our people... and cashed it in by voting for Betsy DeVos,” Mathews said.

Peter Gentile was another attendee of this event. He is a research assistant at West Virginia University and has been in the state since 2010. Gentile said he came to the library today because, “there were a lot of concerns that I had.”

Gentile, like the vast majority of attendees was most concerned about Capito’s vote for DeVos.

“When her phone lines are jammed with people saying ‘We do not want DeVos’ We got DeVos.” he said “It’s this thing that you’re telling us one thing and then doing the other.”

For some, this was the first time attending an event like this and voicing their opinion to a public official. The majority of people at this event wanted one thing: for Capito to host a town hall meeting so the public directly voice their opinions.

“I’m imploring [Capito] to do this town hall. I want to hear her solutions, I want to hear her thought processes” said Natalie Shaffer, an attendee of this event.

Cokeley provided papers for the people at the event to fill out to explain their concerns and problems, which will be given to Capito.



