

Tomorrow's leaders are marching today

Wednesday, March 14, tens of thousands of students across Oregon and the nation walked out of their schools to say "enough."

Enough with gun laws that ignore the scores of dead students in the classroom. Enough with the lip service, the feeble – and egotistic – pronouncement of thoughts and prayers.

In the vacuum of political inaction, students are effectively demanding nationwide attention to end this perpetual political stalemate over sensible gun laws.

And we can't get enough. It's absolutely inspiring.

We're talking, of course, about the next generation of Americans facing off against extraordinary forces, including the powerful National Rifle Association, the gun manufacturers it represents, and the lawmakers it bankrolls.

But gun policy is just one in a string of issues stacking up on the next generation's desk. They include climate change, and all the complications that our warming planet will have in their emerging adulthood. There's the constant challenge to accessing affordable health care, as federal policies chip away at coverage standards and medicaid payments. There are immigration policies that are targeting amazing young adults for deportation to foreign lands over bureaucratic technicalities. It goes on and on.

With these pressures, we're seeing a invigorating brand of youth activism, and it should give all of us inspiration.

Juliana v. U.S. was brought by a group of youths, including many Oregonians, who are suing the government for causing climate change, and thus violating the youngest generation's constitutional rights to life, liberty and property, as well as failed to protect essential public trust resources. They've had early success in the courts, as the case continue to move forward.

And for years, young adults - women, men, cis, transgender, non-binary, straight and queer - have been on the front lines

of gender rights campaigns, pushing for greater understanding, socially and institutionally. They've been leaders in creating change that has saved lives. And they're not finished.

And then there's the incredible resilience of young Dreamers, as they await political action on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA act. Their courage in coming forward, risking their own lives in America, has taught us all a lesson in standing up against Goliaths.

Youths engaged from the earliest days of Black Lives Matter marched, demonstrated and campaigned nationwide for justice for the deaths of unarmed black children and adults at the hands of police. They are changing our world for the better every day.

Now guns. We wonder if this time the powers that be are really listening. And if so, is it because of the grave significance to the lives and futures of children, or just a means to ride out the status quo in this highly charged political atmosphere?

If they really want to listen, EMPOWER, the group behind the national school walkout, and an extension of the Women's March, has outlined a list of demands for gun reform.

They support banning assault weapons and high capacity magazines, expanding background checks to all gun sales, passing a gun violence restraining order law, and passage of the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act. They oppose the conceal carry reciprocity resolution among states, and any legislation that intends to fortify schools with more guns.

For all the talk on how disconnected youths have become - living in some digital distance - there is a fire in their bellies that has burned within every generation.

These are tomorrow's voters, mentors and leaders, and too many of them are facing incredible obstacles every day. Schools, neighborhoods, businesses, civic bodies and families should foster their engagement, and we can all be energized and educated by their voices.

These youth not only deserve our support and attention, they are owed our respect.

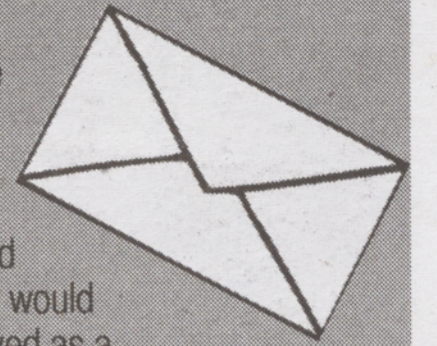


A student from DaVinci Arts Middle School marches as part of the National Walkout Day, March 14, to protest gun violence.

PHOTO BY CELESTE NOCHE

Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Executive Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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EDITORIAL