



Logan Wroge/Wisconsin State Journal via AP

About 40 students from across Wisconsin march in Madison, Wis. on their way to Janesville, Wis. as part of a "50 Miles More" event to protest gun violence and advocate for gun control Monday.

## YOUNG VOTERS: 'They've got the energy ... passion'

Continued from 1A

dollars to ensure that young voters' passion and enthusiasm doesn't fade before the November midterm elections, when the Republican Party's control of Congress will be put to the test.

"Other people look at those young people and think organizing them makes no sense because they don't vote," said Tom Steyer, the billionaire hedge-fund magnate-turned-liberal activist who has committed at least \$31 million this year to what is believed to be the largest youth vote organizing effort in American history. "We really believe in this generation."

Past voting patterns show how much work Steyer and others have ahead of them. Just 15 percent of eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 20 cast ballots in the last midterm election.

Still, the mobilization of young people following last month's shooting at a Parkland, Florida, high school has raised the prospect of a shift that could re-shape the American political landscape this fall — and perhaps for much longer.

Student leaders from Parkland have already succeeded in keeping the gun debate from quickly fading, as is often the case after mass shootings, though that hasn't resulted in any significant congressional action. Hundreds of thousands of people, many of them in high school, participated in protest marches across the country Saturday. New waves of protests are already being planned for next month.

Their efforts are being aided by powerful groups that favor stricter gun laws. Everytown for Gun Safety, an organization backed by billionaire Michael Bloomberg, expects to spend more money shaping the 2018 midterms than any other election — and much of it on youth engagement, said chief operating officer Matt McTighe.

The organization already spent more than \$1 million to help student organizers participate in last weekend's marches. They're now focused on helping high school and college students nationwide organize their own "Students Demand Action" groups, a spinoff of the organization's "Mom's Demand Action" against gun violence chapters. Everytown also helped young people establish the non-profit group that coordinated the weekend marches, while in some cases paying for nuts-and-bolts items like sound systems and stages.

"They've got the energy. They've got the passion. They don't necessarily have the resources or the policy expertise," McTighe said. "We're going to be investing heavily in these students and making sure they engage in politics in every race and every single district across the country."

Additionally, groups backed by Steyer, Bloomberg and former Rep. Gabby Giffords will launch nationwide voter drives on high school campuses in the coming weeks. The operation, according to Giffords' executive director Peter Ambler, will especially target "districts and states where new young voters can have the most impact." Giffords' group, like its allies, will also devote significant resources to sophisticated get-out-the-vote operations targeting young voters.

"They're very powerful right now," Ambler said. "I'm very excited to see what they do with that power."

Republican strategists suggest that the youth movement could prove particularly troubling for their candidates in America's suburbs, where dozens of vulnerable GOP House incumbents already face a wave of Democratic enthusiasm and skepticism from moderate Republicans dissatisfied with President Donald Trump's job performance.

It's less clear whether a surge in youth turnout would sting Republican candidates in Senate races playing out in rural states like North Dakota and West Virginia, where a fight over gun control could motivate Trump's most passionate supporters as well.

Republicans are skeptical that young voters, who typically favor Democratic candidates by large margins, will stay interested.

"Motivation is fleeting," said Republican strategist Chris Wilson.

While equally skeptical about the short-term impact, Republican pollster Frank Luntz warned his party that a mass migration of young voters to the Democratic Party could endanger GOP candidates for years to come.

"There are a lot of dark clouds ahead for Republicans," Luntz said. "The impact of the youth vote isn't immediate, but it could well have the greatest impact of all."

Young voters, with few exceptions, have struggled to maintain interest in politics over the last half century.

In 1972, when the voting age was first lowered to 18, nearly 56 percent of eligible 18- to 20-year-olds voted, according to an analysis by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University. Participation has trended downward ever since, with one exception being President Barack Obama's first presidential election.

But in the first midterm election of Obama's presidency, participation rates for 18- to 20-year-old voters regressed to just 18 percent.

"This energy we're seeing right now is in March. The election is seven months away. It takes a lot to keep up this enthusiasm," said Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, director of the Tufts center.

She suggested that interest groups and political campaigns could help motivate young people, as Obama did in 2008, but young voters are more likely to be influenced by people they encounter at home or school.

It's also unclear whether issues alone, even one as powerful as gun violence, can lead to lasting political change. Kawashima-Ginsberg's center studied the impact of high-profile ballot issues that might appeal to young voters — the legalization of marijuana and same-sex marriage — in past elections, finding that such social issues alone typically had little impact.

Steyer, for his part, is prepared to spend whatever it takes to ensure young voters don't get distracted. His \$31 million pledge, he said, is simply "the floor" of what he's prepared to spend this year.

"What we're trying to do is organize as well as possible to make sure that they get a chance to raise their voices," he said, "but also to make sure their votes are counted on Nov. 6."

# MARCH: 'We as a nation have resigned ourselves to a life where kids go to school to die'

Continued from 1A

to vote. Organizers had arranged for a booth nearby for anyone who wanted to register.

The voter registration booth fit in with a theme many of the students espoused: thoughts and prayers were welcome, but only if they were accompanied by action.

PHS junior Samuel Attridge said before the march that the high school had provided an alternative to recent student protests, encouraging 17 days of kindness instead of walking out of school for 17 minutes in honor of the 17 students and staff who died at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. He said people could be kind while also advocating for new laws and practices.

"Kindness is great. Everyone should be kind. I don't think anyone in this march thinks kindness is stupid," he said. "We're just more focused on legislation that can make a difference rather than hoping that kindness will prevent another school shooting."

The march drew mixed reactions from people downtown. One man stood on the edge of the gathering crowd near the beginning of the event holding a flag depicting an assault rifle and the words "Come and take it." At another point, as students marched down the street chanting "We want change!" a woman walking in the opposite direction told them, "Give up your cell phones." At other points, drivers passing by waved or gave a thumbs-up out their windows.

As Attridge emceed Saturday's march, he told everyone gathered at the park that the march was not "anti-gun" or about bashing a certain political party. The only thing it was about was urging adults old enough to vote and run for office to do more than "a couple of sad tweets" to protect kids from shootings.

"We as a nation have resigned ourselves to a life where kids go to school to die," he said.

Keyshawn Jackson and Giovana Angel performed a slam poem driving home that same message, starting off with a barrage of texts between mother and son, as the boy in the poem texted his mother that he was hiding under his



Staff photos by Kathy Aney

A counter protester showed up at the March for Our Lives on Saturday in Pendleton.



Samuel Attridge and other student organizers speak during the March for Our Lives on Saturday in Pendleton.



Two youngsters take part in the March for our Lives on Saturday in Pendleton.

desk, scared, as he heard gunshots and screams.

"They tell us to run, hide and don't panic," the teens said in unison.

Kathy Perez said she grew up with a turbulent home life and school used to be one place she felt a sense of security. Now she felt scared someone there would pull out a gun and start shooting.

Chen, too, told the audience of adults she was afraid to die at school. Most high school students are not old enough to vote, she said, so they need adult help to effect change.

Ellen Paulsen, 14, said she was frustrated the government was letting more school shootings happen as politics divided

the conversation. "I didn't know 'children shouldn't be shot' was a controversial statement," she said.

After the speeches the group marched to the courthouse, chanting "Protect our youth! Protect our lives! Our future, our rights!" on the way there and "We want change!" on the way back. At the courthouse, Democratic Congressional candidate Jamie McLeod-Skinner addressed the group briefly, saying that adults had failed the students and that needed to change. She urged everyone to talk with others about their ideas for preventing school shootings and to keep an open mind even if they disagreed with the ideas.

"To the children, please find your voice and share your ideas. Please be patient with the adults," she said.

At the end of the march, Attridge urged everyone present to continue taking action.

"Please don't let this movement die," he implored.

Over in Hermiston, students didn't come together to plan a large-scale March for Our Lives event, but four people did get together on the corner of Highway 395 and Main Street Saturday morning to hold signs.

Contact Jade McDowell at [jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com](mailto:jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4536.

EAST OREGONIAN Hermiston Herald

# BUTTE CHALLENGE

## SATURDAY, MAY 12, 2018

### 5K RUN, 5K WALK AND 10K RUN

All races begin & end at Hermiston's Butte Park

DRAWINGS FOR PRIZES  
FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Online registration & race information at  
**WWW.BUTTECHALLENGE.COM**

REGISTER ONLINE BY APRIL 28TH TO ORDER  
A CUSTOM TECHNICAL RACE T-SHIRT

All proceeds benefit THE HERMISTON CROSS COUNTRY PROGRAM  
*Thank you for your support!*