

Nancy Pelosi to Parkland students: 'You give us hope'

On the eve of the March For Our Lives, Shareblue Media was invited to meet with students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi was also there, praising these brave young activists.

By [Dan Desai Martin](#) - March 25, 2018

SHARE   



Nancy Pelosi with students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High

I walked into a room full of dozens of [high school](#) students hanging out in small groups, some playing air hockey, and many sprawled on the floor. Laughter filled the room, mingled with the familiar sound of markers scratching across poster board.

While slices of pizza were voraciously consumed by her classmates, Sophia traced out bold black block letters on a white poster board:

NO MORE SILENCE
STOP GUN

"The last word is violence," Sophia, a high school junior, told me. She took a break to greet a friend and talk with me.

I was in a large ballroom in the basement of a hotel in Arlington, Virginia. The room was full of students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High, preparing posters the night before the [March For Our Lives](#). I talked to about a dozen of them throughout the evening.

There's too much focus on school safety and not enough on gun control, Sophia told me. Her friends agreed. They traveled to the nation's capital to

in normal teenage activities (there was a video game system hooked up to a TV at one end of the room, and several kids playing a soccer game) while simultaneously engaged in conversations about life and death situations.

Despite the tragedy, the students were optimistic about changing the country's gun laws. "You can't make change if you are feeling hopeless," said Alexis, an MSD senior. She and her friends are pushing for reforms like a stronger background check system for gun buyers.

"We want to make America safe again," another student interjected. That brought the conversation around to Trump, who was decidedly unpopular among the students.

If this happened at a school that Trump's kid attended, he would probably care, one student told me. But she noted that he doesn't seem to care about other kids. When asked what she would say to Trump, she had a simple answer: "You're doing a horrible job."

The idea of [arming teachers](#) was roundly ridiculed by every student who broached the topic. "You don't solve the problem of guns by adding more guns," noted Danielle, a junior.

Another group of students said the recent legislation in [Florida](#), the first gun control bill passed in [22 years](#), was a highlight of the movement so far. But, they cautioned, they are not done yet. "It's progress," one student said, "but we need more."

In the middle of the evening, House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi stopped by to speak with the students. She highlighted the role young people have played in other momentous events in American history.

Pelosi relayed a conversation she had with civil rights hero and Georgia congressman John Lewis. The idea to march from Selma to Montgomery, across the [Edmund Pettus Bridge](#), originated with high school students who were appalled that their parents and teachers did not have the right to vote. They reached out to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and others, and inspired one of the most crucial events in the Civil Rights Movement.

Pelosi encouraged the students to contact their legislators, and relayed how grateful she was for their activism.

"You inspire us. You give us hope," she told them.

After Pelosi left, I sat down with Hayden, Nicole, Rachel, and Brian, asking how they are doing in the aftermath of a tragedy, and being thrust in the national and international spotlight.

The students laughed off accusations of being "crisis actors," a [smear](#) perpetuated by many Republicans in the aftermath of the shooting. It is such a ridiculous accusation that they regularly call each other crisis actors in jest.

Then the conversation turned serious. "I have friends who are more active on social media than me," Hayden told me, "and they get messages like, 'I wish you were one of the ones who got shot.' That's hard."

They discussed the day of the shooting, and what it was like to huddle silently in a closet, waiting for the tragedy to be over. They described the bond formed between classmates, a bond they hope no other students ever get the chance to form.

Then Rachel recalled receiving a high-five from a random stranger as she walked to school, noting an overwhelming outpouring of love. The walls at

When asked what they hope to accomplish, they reiterated similar demands: stronger background checks, shut down gun shows, and ban assault rifles. "There's no point in having assault rifles," one said. "The only reason for them is to hunt humans."

They also emphasized the need to vote, a refrain heard at the march the following day. Hayden and Nicole, both seniors, have [pre-registered](#) and are planning to vote in November's midterm elections.

While most of the conversation centered on preventing gun violence, the students are drawn to other policy issues, as well.

Rachel is interested in ocean conservation issues. Brian brought up [Dreamers](#), young people who were brought to the U.S. by their parents and are fighting to stay in the only country they know. He recognized Dreamers had been fighting hard for Congress to take action, but the tragedy at MSD overshadowed their efforts.

"So I'm also marching for them, too" he said.

As Pelosi said, these students are an inspiration. They joined a heartbreaking club of school shooting survivors, a club that is growing all too fast.

But in a country divided by politics and led by a man who sows hatred and division, these students are bringing an unrelenting optimism and unbridled energy to change the guns laws in this country.

"Remember," Rachel said to me, "love outweighs the hate."

Dan Desai Martin

Tags: Guns Marjory Stoneman Douglas Nancy Pelosi NRA
Parkland

RECOMMENDED