DC students walk out for gun control

BY ISABEL GOTTLiEB-NEMo '21

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Thousands of kids in the D.C. area, including dozens of Burke students, walked out of school on Thursday, March 14th to show support for proposed gun control bill S.42. They gathered in front of the U.S. Capitol, exactly one year after the last national walkout in response to the shooting in Parkland, Florida.

S.42 is the Senate’s version of House Resolution 8, which has already passed the House. It would close the private gun sales loophole, require universal background checks, and prevent domestic abusers, those diagnosed with mental illness, and indicted criminals from purchasing firearms.

The bill faces an uphill battle in the Senate, but students said that they remain invested in the movement, stressing that ones they are old enough to vote, they will use their ballots to make the same statements they made at the rally.

On their march to the Capitol, organized by local student activist groups MoCo4Change and MEChA, two marchers held signs with phrases such as “Blood Money” or “How many more?” in protest of the lack of action Congress has taken on gun control.

“Legally, we have to go to school so it’s [the representatives’] responsibility to ensure that it’s safe,” said Bethesda Chevy Chase High School Sophomore Noah Rands-Lind ’21.

Sophomore Lucian Green from The McLean School in Potomac said that he stressed the social importance of the event over his academics, at least for the day.

“Gun violence is much bigger than a day of education,” Green said. “Gun violence takes away lifetimes in which people could be learning every day.”

Iris Ghorbani, a freshman from BCC, said she agreed.

“In thirty years, what will matter more is that I was there at this historical moment fighting for what I believe in, rather than at school,” Ghorbani said.

After arriving at the Capitol, the sea of students, which shrunk as the event went on, sat down to listen to the rally’s speakers, which included Jamie Raskin (D, MD-8) and Havana Chapman-Edwards, an eight year old activist, as well as

Photo by Zach Thomas-Kuceraik ’19

US Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Chris Murphy (D-CT).

Though many Democratic senators—such as Blumenthal and Murphy—showed their support, the Republican majority will almost certainly not bring the bill up for debate. Even if the bill passed the Senate, Republican President Donald Trump would likely veto it, given his position on gun control and heavy funding from the NRA.

The students and speakers continuously stressed the idea that if the senators didn’t vote in favor of the bill, they would lose their job in the next election.

“We are the future,” said Ghorbani. “And if you want to stay in office, you need to represent your constituents of all ages and demographics.”

Softball seeks fourth straight title

BY WILL KENNEALLY ’22
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As long as she has worn a Burke uniform, Vera Walsh-Alker ’19 has never known anything but winning.

In each of the past three years on Burke’s varsity softball team, she’s seen three straight championships, serving as the team’s starting pitcher for the previous two years.

“There is definitely an apocryph of the school that we would be able to repeat our winning streak and we always surprise ourselves when we do.”

The level of growth and success Burke’s softball team has experienced over the prior three seasons has created a roaring buzz heading into softball season. The team has been handed a tall task: pulling off a fourth straight championship after steamrolling to the last three.

“League competition will be the biggest obstacle.” Coach Scott Reynolds acknowledged. “I think the league is improving.”

The Varsity team has to deal with a new challenge this year as well: after Sofia Ohanian ‘18 sat behind the dish for four years, the team needs a new catcher. Elez Beresin-Scher ’20 is still learning how to catch but she is filling the void at the catching position.

“As catcher, I definitely feel I’ve taken on a larger leadership role on the team,” she said. “This position does add some pressure to wanting to win a championship this year, as I want to continue the accomplishments of the previous alumni players.”

Efficiency from the catcher position is a decisive factor in the team’s success, as the defensive performance of the team is crucial.

“I coach defense first,” Reynolds explained. “I feel like if you don’t give any runs up than you’re going to win. If you teach your team to play solid defense, the runs will take care of themselves.”

About forty-five feet away from Beresin-Scher ’20, stands Walsh-Alker on the mound, the team’s most reliable defensive asset. Walsh-Alker is entering her final year with the team and has pitched the team to a countless number of victories in the past.

“Being the pitcher, it sometimes feels like all eyes are on you,” Walsh-Alker admitted.

“That’s just something you have to take on without letting the pressure get to you.”

Whittle School temporarily halts construction

School blames permitting issue

BY GABRIEL KRAEMER ’23
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The D.C. city government ordered the Whittle School to temporarily stop construction on February 27th due to a permitting issue.

The problem stemmed from the school declining to pursue a local permit to renovate its campus at 4000 Connecticut Avenue, maintaining instead that one from the State Department would suffice.

Whittle, which is set to open this fall in the former Intelsat building across the street from Burke, sits on embassy-related land owned by the federal government. This prompted the Whittle School to get approval from the State Department before starting construction. They did not apply for construction permits from the local D.C. government.

Chris Whittle, the chairman and C.E.O. of Whittle School and Studios, said that because of federal ownership, the school didn’t need local permits for the property.

“We are completely in compliance in every way with our project and construction,” he said, per the Washington Post.

Multiple city officials, such as D.C. Council member Mary Cheh (D-Ward 3), who represents the area around Whittle and Burke, disagreed.

“From all we could tell, they are not immune to our local law,” Cheh said, also per the Post. “I want to take it to court if they are subject to our local law, that they comply.”

“We are looking into whether work was performed without a permit,” said Tim Wilson, a spokesperson for the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, again per the Post.

The State Department, which wrote a letter to the Whittle School in 2017 approving the launch of their construction, said that their permits were not a replacement for the local permits needed.

“The [State] Department’s position is this renovation is subject to the laws of the District of Columbia,” Cheh said, also per the Post.

“We’re confident this technicality will be resolved quickly,” said Whittle. “This project means a lot to the community in multiple ways, including a major, highly innovative educational institution.”

Whittle later applied for a permit and is currently waiting for city approval. However, the school is confident this incident will not delay the school—which bears a $187 million price tag—from opening.

“Every day counts in this world,” said Whittle. “But in a project of this scale and with the amount of experts we’ve got, we can move things around and adapt to that, and we do have contingencies built into the plans.”
Burke students walked out twice last month; once in favor of stricter gun control laws, and once to demand action on climate change.

The walkouts, the latest in a three-year period with what feels like a walkout a month, supported important causes that demand attention and accomplished their initial goal under a right-wing government: raising awareness and encouraging students to become voters.

But with that most achievable goal reached long ago in other protests, a culture has emerged that encourages students to walk out without much, if any, follow-up.

For the students who stayed at the Capitol all the way through March’s gun control rally—a fairly large contingent of Burke’s delegation—the protest’s lack of energy and urgency may have felt disappointing; though the speakers came with lots to say, it ultimately boiled down to “this generation will vote and change things, eventually.”

The walkouts have already engaged future voters and interested students, but beyond that, it’s difficult to track meaningful change—a fact that felt apparent in the distracted crowd at the Capitol, even with students from the area whose absences were unexcused with a penalty.

A different problem also arose: some Burke students took the walkout as an invitation for an afternoon off, leaving the school under the guise of supporting background checks, and instead taking an ostensibly school-approved break. Others made it to the event and then left after fifteen or thirty minutes for lunch.

This makes sense: on top of the lackadaisical energy, the walkouts no longer only attract Burke students truly passionate about the cause, nor do they constitute a sacrifice for the Burke students, as the normal 1% penalty for an unexcused absence does not apply. This is in contrast to the students from other schools who sacrifice their GPAs and even their futures for these walkouts.

Burke’s walkouts are broken — here’s how to fix them

BY THE CAGELINER

BY EDDIE DONG ’20
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The Bryce Harper era in Washington is over. After a long tenure in D.C., the former Washington Nationals right fielder signed a 13-year contract with the Philadelphia Phillies that will run through the rest of his major league career.

Harper’s departure represents the end of the Nationals’ first generation of playoff-caliber talent. Drafted as the #1 overall pick in 2009 as a 17-year-old, he made his major league debut in 2012, and won Rookie of the Year. He continued to flourish on the field during his tenure with the team, unanimously winning National League MVP in 2015.

The relative success of Harper and the team in general, has not continued in the postseason. The Nationals have never made it out of the first round of the playoffs, with Harper hitting to an anemic .211 average in the four series in which the team has played.

The Nationals offered Harper three contracts in the offseason: a qualifying offer that ensured that the Nationals received a draft pick as compensation if he signed with another team, and two contract worth about $300 million and $20 million over a decade—though it deferred money into the next four decades, according to the Washington Post’s Barry Svrluga.

“I didn’t know if I fit into their plans,” Harper said to ESPN: The Magazine. “About $100 million of that contract was deferred until I was 65 years old... It’s like, ‘What does that do for me? What does that do for my family?’”

As the offseason rolled on, it became apparent that Harper was looking to break the record for largest-ever sports contract, set by Giancarlo Stanton in 2014.

Finally, on March 2, Harper signed a contract with the Phillies worth $330 million. The contract comes with a full no-trade clause, meaning Harper will likely be a Phillie for the rest of his career.

For Nationals fans at Burke who grew up with Harper on the team, his departure brings mixed emotions.

“He was the star of D.C.,” Daphne Savukas ’20 said. “I’ll miss him so much but I hope he flourishes in Philly, just not against us.”

But Alex Sobey-Strick ’19, another longtime fan, said he wasn’t surprised.

“It seemed like there was going to be no deal between them. I don’t think he did anything wrong, but I think there will be a lot of tension,” he said. “Last season he played inconsistently and felt like he was growing [apart from the team]. He hit a lot of homers, but [I] felt as if he wasn’t dependable.”

Bryce Harper era ends for Nats fans at and beyond Burke

SOFTBALL FROM PAGE 1

Despite the overwhelming amount of tension Walsh-Alker says she must withstand every day, she still cherishes the opportunity of being a part of the Burke softball dynasty.

“I’ve been incredibly lucky to be a part of this team the last three years. To be able to list off our titles is not something I expected when I came to Burke,” Walsh-Alker said. “Burke softball, even without the titles, has still given me some of my best high school memories.”

BY THE CAGELINER

“IT IS NO LONGER ENOUGH TO PROMISE TO VOTE... IT WAS NEVER ENOUGH TO WALK OUT WITHOUT PENALTY BEFORE SKIPPING OR LEAVING THE EVENT EARLY... [LIKE] A ‘GLORIFIED FREE PERIOD.”

Walkouts have become something of a social event driven by peer pressure, events that students grudgingly attend but don’t find compelling. And why not skip the double period if there’s no penalty, if it doesn’t have to be a walkout, if it can instead be a free period downtown?

After last week, it’s clear that everything about walkouts, from the messages and actions, to the way students treat them, to the administration’s policies surrounding them, deserves another look. To fix the problems, groups like Burke’s clubs and MoCo4Change must consider other types of action. MoCo4Change shouldn’t organize another walkout next; instead, they should draw upon their previous experience of running sit-ins at Capitol Hill offices and registering 2,500 new voters.

More events and activities along those lines would create tangible pressure on lawmakers to make a change instead of repeating applause lines. And students who participated almost certainly wouldn’t leave in the middle.

Additionally, students should engage in further actions such as phone banking and canvassing for the issues and candidates about which they’re passionate, perhaps even get arrested for them. For example, last month’s “climate strikes,” made their point, but November’s sit-in at Speaker Pelosi’s office was far more effective.

It is unacceptable for students to treat rallies and protests like free periods. The school administration should reconsider its decision to waive the one percent penalty for unexcused walkout absences.

Although it may result in decreased participation, in the event of another walkout, re-instating the 1% penalty would bring meaning back to these protests, and ensure that the students who attend have a legitimate interest in the cause.
Students show off talent in financial aid fundraiser

BY RILEY DEL SESTO ’24 & MADELEINE LAMPIETTI ’24
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Burke held a talent show in its atrium on March 19th as a fundraiser for financial aid.

“Burke’s Got Talent,” which ran from 6:00 to 8:00 PM, offered students and faculty the chance to perform for the Burke community.

Tickets went on sale for five dollars in advance and six dollars at the door, and student government raised money selling food to the dozens of people that filled in the atrium. The evening’s donations totaled up to more than $700, said Co- Presidents Sydney Jackson ’19 and Nailah Tukpah ’19.

The event featured performers from nearly every grade, including music from seniors Kelsey Coleman ’19, Ezra Martin-Rosenthal ’19, and Eleni Retta ’19 and card tricks from Krishna Lyons ’23.

“People were tired of Burkechella,” said grade representative Carrie Johnson ’24. “[We said] let’s just change it to Burke’s Got Talent.”

Airpods seen as a joke, status symbol

BY AIDAS PUSKORIUS ’22
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Apple’s Airpods, wireless earbuds that skyrocketed in popularity at the end of 2018, have become something of a joke.

But as memes circulate the internet, (“I don’t speak broke,” claim Airpod-wearing students on Snapchat stories,) they have also become something of a status symbol and a fad in and around high schools.

Although they come at a relatively expensive $160, they have “essentially gone viral,” said Apple Analyst Neil Cybart, per NBC News.

And if the number of students at Burke without wires dangling below their ears is any indication, Burke is no exception to the trend.

Christina Jorge ’22 said she got her Airpods for Christmas, said that the jokes and the idea of Airpods as a status symbol are overstated.

“People were tired of it,” she said. “I don’t think that.”

“I didn’t like wires hitting me in the face.”

Amos Toh ’22, got his Airpods for his birthday, and Tobias Kains ’29, says his girlfriend found his pair lying under an airplane seat.

“They probably aren’t worth [the price],” said Kains. He also said he thought that the jokes weren’t in good taste.

“Disrespectful,” he said. “People shouldn’t discriminate against [others] for their financial situation.”

Leila Nelson ’22, whose Airpods came for Christmas, said that the jokes and the idea of Airpods as a status symbol are overstated.

“I think that kids just want them,” Nelson said.

“We should probably think, ‘you don’t have Airpods, you’re broke,’ but I don’t think that.”

Mixed reactions to student government grade competitions

BY SOLANA TORRES ’22
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Burke has held several assemblies this year with competitions for grade points, but widespread confusion remains about the exact nature of the system.

Student government presidents Nailah Tukpah and Sydney Jackson ’19 pioneered this system, and they have mentioned some kind of prize at the end although it remains unknown.

“At the end of the year, there’ll be a prize for the grade that has the most points,” said grade rep Lena Streitwieser ’22. Each competition, which SGA creates and assigns a point value, is worth different amount of points, and sometimes have seasonal relevance — and other times, they include drawing Head of School Damian Jones’ face.

The prize has yet to be determined, but may be food related, Streitwieser said.

Currently, SGA is trying to keep track of the points on a chalkboard in the 9th grade commons. The presidents also have the point totals in a Google Doc, though they remain unknown to the student body.

“We have a list [of each point total] and we add them up. We’re supposed to put it up [on the board],” Nailah Tukpah said. Tukpah also said SGA decides the values of each competition. But the points or the prizes aren’t the goal of the competitions. Instead, they are designed to bring the grades together, Tukpah said.

“Grade competitions are just a way to build more spirit and excitement,” Tukpah said. “We also got comments last year about how assemblies were sometimes boring. This is a way to make assemblies exciting.”

Students expressed mixed emotions about the competitions. Katie Hirche ’21 reacted positively: “They’re pretty fun,” she said. “I never join them, and I think they would need a better system of getting people to do it, but they’re fun to watch.”

Others, such as Alexander Gottron ’22, said they didn’t enjoy the longer assemblies as much.

“I want to get the information, and leave,” he said. “We shouldn’t come up with more things to fill assemblies, we should have what we have, and move on.”

The Cageliner

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Photo by Liam Widnell ’22
Inside the Nintendo Switch’s atrium takeover

BY NATE MILLER ’21
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In Burke’s atrium, it’s easy to see a number of students intently focused on small black rectangular devices. They aren’t calculators, laptops or iPads. Instead, they’re Nintendo Switches, and their rapid rise in popularity this year has raised questions about what screens are appropriate at school.

Switches, released in 2017, are portable video game consoles that enable the user to play video games in almost any location. The most popular game at Burke appears to be Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, an exciting game with cartoon-like graphics that cannot be played on a laptop or phone.

The device’s convenience and popularity has prompted some sophomores and juniors—predominantly male—to bring Switches with them into school on a daily basis, playing Smash and other games in the atrium at lunch and during free periods. Because the device easily accommodates two controllers, students also often play multiplayer games.

Leo Escobar ’20 said he brings his Nintendo Switch to school almost every day and has never been told by a teacher to put it away. Jeremy Kappa ’20 said he uses his device whenever he has an opportunity.

But Dean of Tenth Grade Alexis Martina said she was concerned that Nintendo Switches make students less social. “I wish that kids would talk to each other more,” she said.

Martina also noted that when a trend like this gets going “it’s going to be distracting.”

Some students, such as Natalie Thorpe ’21, said they agreed with Martina’s outlook.

“I think they should be allowed, but only after school,” she said. “I think it can be distracting if some people are charging them in classes and playing them in classes, but I don’t have issue with kids playing them after school,” she said.

Since Switches began to dominate the atrium, rumors have circulated that the administration is considering restricting their use, but Head of School Damian Jones said that teachers and staff have not yet discussed the issue.

In the meantime, Adams remained steadfast in his support for playing Switch.

“By allowing us to play on our switches during free periods, we are able to sort of detox and relax.”

Takoma Park a major influence at Burke

BY JENNIFER CHIANCONE
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Although Burke draws families from Prince George’s County to Tysons Corner, students may have noticed a large number of Takoma Park, MD residents in the student and teacher population.

Despite the fact that downtown Takoma Park is at least a 20 minute drive (and a 13 stop Metro ride) from Burke, students and teachers are seemingly drawn to the Burke community. Twenty-three students and three teachers currently live in Takoma Park.

Many residents, such as 7th grade dean Susan Hearn, say that Takoma Park and Burke have so many overlapping values, it can seem as though the two places are a continuation of each other. “The Venn diagram of Burke and Takoma Park’s visible values has a big middle area,” Hearn said. “Politics and environmental interests, and even things like the TV shows we watch and the food we eat are similar.”

“The activism, progressiveness, being engaged in the world, trying to make the world a better place are in both the Takoma Park and Burke culture,” said music teacher and longtime Takoma Park resident John Howard. The New York Times agrees with both Howard and Hearn’s assessments, dubbing Takoma “one of the most progressive cities in the U.S.,” also noting its nuclear-free pact and large numbers of former Peace Corps volunteers.

Takoma Park also seems to be a place where many families begin to settle down because they find it a safe and inviting community, Hearn said.

“We thought that it would be a good place to start a family because it’s very kid-friendly. We liked how the neighbors seemed to know each other and that there was a downtown area,” she said.

Many Takoma residents talk about the community having a very friendly and welcoming vibe, one they feel is similar to Burke’s.

“Our neighborhood is really close. We have regular gatherings. We celebrate people’s birthdays,” Hearn said. “Today, it feels more common than not for people to not know their neighbors and that’s not true in our neighborhood.”

Student and Takoma Park resident Ellie Salyers ’20 described both places as having the same casual environment.

“I feel like both places have a pretty laid back environment compared to some other private schools in D.C.,” Salyers said.

But some differences exist between the two communities: Takoma Park is more suburban, while Burke is in an urban community. Hearn also said she believes there are differences in diversity.

“Takoma is diverse if you look at it as a whole but there are these concentrated areas that are not at all diverse.” Hearn said.

She believes that Burke does a better job of creating an environment where diversity is present throughout the entire community.

Michael Sturley ’25, a Takoma resident said that he sees it differently. “In Takoma Park there are many different religions and different races and people come from different places. I would definitely say that is similar to Burke because everyone at Burke is different from each other in some way.”

The similarities may well drive many Takoma residents’ decision to enroll at Burke. Or perhaps they explain why Burke accepts so many students from Takoma Park. Either way, the neighborhood shows no sign of releasing its grip on the school any time soon.