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FEATURED

Excelsior rally calls for more gun restriction

Paige Kieffer Oct 9, 2018



Left to right, Minnetonka High School sophomore Eleanor Dolan, Orono High School senior Gabriella Bann and Minnetonka High School sophomore Virginia Morrow, all West Metro Walkout leaders, attend The Winds of Change: Westside Rally Against Gun Violence Oct. 6 in Excelsior.

(Sun Sailor staff photo by Paige Kieffer)

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The Winds of Change: Westside Rally Against Gun Violence was Oct. 6 in the Commons Park in Excelsior where more than 100 people gathered to advocate for gun reform.

Adults and students attended the rally and carried signs, wore five-cent price tags to signify how much lawmakers value a life and wore orange, the color hunters wear to stay safe.

The rally was sponsored by Protect Minnesota's student caucus, Students Protect Minnesota. Protect Minnesota is a nonprofit organization that works to reduce gun violence while respecting the Second Amendment.

The Rev. Nancy Nord Bence, executive director of Protect Minnesota, spoke in favor of gun reform legislation that failed to pass in Minnesota. Numerous bills were passed across the nation.

"Our lawmakers do not care enough about the safety of our students, of the safety of our communities, workplaces or homes to do what needs to be done to pass sensible gun laws," Bence said.

The group is pushing for legislation on expanded background checks on all gun sales including private sales, and a red flag law or an extreme risk protection order, which permits police or family members to petition a state court to order the temporary removal of firearms from a person who may be dangerous to others or themselves.

Sen. Steve Cwudzinski (DFL-Eden Prairie), a retired Eden Prairie High School teacher, spoke at the rally advocating for stricter gun laws. He spoke about his concerns for students' safety both in and out of school.

"I continue to be sick and tired of our young dying in the prime of their lives," he said. "The American dream for far too many has become the national nightmare. Many of our young are suffering from PTSD that will affect them for the rest of their lives and it's not from going off to war but from going to school. Our youth are losing confidence in us to keep us safe. ... The youth are again waking us adults out of our slumber."

Many students from the West Metro Walkout attended the rally to advocate for gun reform. The group was formed in response to the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Leaders including Minnetonka High School sophomore Eleanor Dolan, Orono High School senior Gabriella Bann and Minnetonka High School sophomore Virginia Morrow said that the biggest thing people can do to advocate for gun reform is to get out and vote if they can't campaign for candidates who are pro-gun reform or encourage others to cast their ballots Tuesday, Nov. 6.

"If people don't vote for candidates who support gun reform or listen to their constituents, we're never going to get anything done," Dolan said. "Right now is the time to take action and we need to encourage our fellow students to get out there and vote because November is coming."

"The clock is ticking with the election and we need to take action now on this epidemic of gun violence," Bann added. "We need to be a united country and tackle these issues."

"Change is coming," Morrow said.

Wayzata High School Achievement Specialist Joyce Hayden from Medina spoke at the event about losing her 25-year-old daughter Taylor Hayden to gang violence July 2016 in Atlanta. She later developed the Taylor Memorial Fund which works to end gun violence.

"Gun violence is wrong and we need to stop it," Hayden said. "We have to arm ourselves with the desire to get this stopped."

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School senior Aalayah Eastmond from Parkland, Florida also spoke to tell her story and discussed about how gun violence impacts all communities. "We need to talk about it," she said. "If I can do it, you can to. No excuses."

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