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**NATION**

# 'Welcome to the revolution': Parkland students lead emotional March for Our Lives rally

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Published 3:12 p.m. ET March 24, 2018 | Updated 10:25 a.m. ET March 27, 2018

*Corrections & Clarifications: An earlier version of this article gave an incomplete description of Emma Gonzalez's speech.*

Six weeks ago, they were just high school kids in Parkland, Fla.: cramming for tests, plodding through college essays, jousting with friends.

Now, they are a thundering force on the national stage, unrelenting voices determined to upend the history of gun violence in the U.S.

"Welcome to the revolution," said Cameron Kasky, who was the first student speaker at the massive March for Our Lives in Washington on Saturday. "My generation has spent our entire lives seeing mass shooting after mass shooting," and that needs to end now.

Within 24 hours of the Feb. 14 shooting rampage at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in which 17 people were killed, the Parkland students catapulted themselves into the forefront of the gun-control movement — calling out lawmakers who take contributions from the NRA and vowing that they would be the "last" mass shooting.

Their words Saturday echoed through streets packed by the thousands in the nation's capital as the students — young person after young person — took turns speaking on the main stage in stirring pleas for an end to gun violence.

Emma Gonzalez, whose powerful speech at a Fort Lauderdale rally three days after the Parkland rampage made her the face of the student movement, gave an emotional tribute to her fallen friends as a painful hush fell over the crowd. She then stood silently for several minutes.

The speech and the moment of silence lasted six minutes, meant to mark the little over six minutes it took for the gunman to snuff out 17 lives, Gonzalez said on Twitter.

"Fight for your lives before it is someone else's job," Gonzalez implored in her speech.

The Parkland students were anxious but energized as they waited to speak before the throngs on Saturday.

"My heart is beating so fast because it's so amazing that all these people showed up from all over the world and all over the country to be here," Sarah Chadwick said. "I think that's so empowering, to just see everyone's faces because we're all on the same side here."

And the Stoneman Douglas students weren't shy about showing off their school pride.

Freshman Anna Landon, 15, chanted "MSD strong" along with a group of parents and fellow classmates.

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Anna arrived Friday to make it in time for the march. She knew eight of the victims, and said she was in D.C. in their honor. "I'm so happy that everyone is supporting us and everyone wants a change," she said.

Brothers Juan and Santiago Munera were tired but determined as they walked on Pennsylvania Avenue toward the main stage. They arrived in the nation's capital by bus two hours before the rally.

It was a long 23 hours, but sophomore Juan Munera, 17, said it was worth the trip.

"Before the shooting we didn't think we could make a difference as teens," Juan Munera said.

But his mindset changed following the shooting and seeing his Stoneman Douglas peers support one another and demand stricter gun-control laws.

"Now we're trying to change gun laws," he said.

The brothers were both in the freshman building where shots were fired. Juan Munera said speaking up about the experience has helped them cope.

Junior Emily Silver, 17, arrived in Washington on Friday and proudly wore a maroon shirt that read “MSDstrong” as she made her way through the crowds Saturday.

“It’s overwhelming, but I’m excited to see everyone here from Parkland and everyone in the country coming together,” she said.

Her mom, Ivy Silver, and stepdad, Ben Ditsch, walked alongside her as they pushed through crowds to meet other Parkland families closer to the stage.

Ditsch said he’s never been more proud of his stepdaughter and her classmates.

“If you try to argue with this generation, you won’t win,” he said.

The Kuperman family wore matching maroon T-shirts and walked side by side to their hotel after the rally ended at 3 p.m.

It was a long and emotional day for the family of five. They met with other Douglas families and alumni at a nearby hotel for breakfast around 8 a.m. before joining demonstrators on Pennsylvania Avenue.

“There are so many people who showed up for us,” Rachel Kuperman, 14, said in amazement. She held a sign with a photo blown up of her friend, Peter Wang, a JROTC cadet who died helping classmates escape from the gunman.

The freshman, and her siblings, Evan, 16, and Lauren, 17, also Douglas students, said they never imagined they would one day visit the nation's capital under these circumstances.

“It's crazy to think that (the shooting) happened at our school,” senior Lauren Kuperman said.

On Feb. 14, the siblings were scattered across different buildings on campus. Lauren was the only one in the freshman building when shots rang out but was able to evacuate safely.

Evan, a sophomore, who at the time thought it was just a fire drill, started a group chat with his family when he realized it could be something more. The family communicated via text before reuniting hours later.

“I wanted to let my parents know what was going on,” he said.

Sheri and Craig Kuperman said they were worried sick at the time but are thankful today for the opportunity to stand beside all three of their children.

Sheri Kuperman described the march as both sad and joyful: Sad because they mourned the loss of so many friends, she said, but joyful because they were all speaking up to make sure this doesn't happen again.

"We want to make a change," she said.

*Contributing: Marilyn Icsman*