

The Egalitarian

UCHS: Compassion, Conviction, Hope

By Lindsey Arevalo

Thousands of students prepared for a nationwide student-organized walkout and other protests scheduled for Wednesday, March 14th. UCHS students waited anxiously to strike and protest against gun violence. The walkouts were planned to last 17 minutes, each minute symbolized the number of victims who were murdered Feb. 14th at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland Florida. The nation-wide memorials also will be used to push lawmakers to pass stricter gun laws, ban assault weapons, and require universal background checks.

Empower, which is the youth branch of the Women's March, planned more than 2,500 walkouts, according to their website. They stated that the walkout is open to students, school staff, and teachers. They have also noted that the walkouts will allow the students to exercise their first amendment rights.

The administration at UCHS had a different plan of their own. Instead of allowing the students to go into the streets of the Union City for the safety of everyone, the administration decided to plan an assembly to discuss the matter at hand, and showcase their stance against gun violence and acknowledge the victims of Parkland Florida, who heinously lost their lives at the hands of a mentally incompetent teenager.

The assembly began with Principal Mr. Ryan Lewis, who spoke about the importance of keeping the students safe and being able to express themselves. He also added how the Union City public school district was recognized as the fourth safest school district in the state. As the crowd cheered he stated how this is something that is not accomplished by accident but because of the great support that we have from the superintendent, students and others in the school district. He also

stated how our school is filled with counselors who are able to help the students in their moment of need. Then he finished off his speech with the famous motto, "If you see something, say something."

The Senior Class President Cindy Guillon walked into the spotlight of the gym. She started off with the wicked truth: since 2013 there have been 200 school shootings in this country. If you think about it, it is a large number especially in a country that people from other countries believe to be safer, compared to from where they came. As Cindy continued to speak in the spotlight, the school witnessed a moving tribute to the fallen victims of Parkland, Florida-- posters with the names and ages of those 17 who were killed. The PGC and student council students holding the posters formed a circle in the middle of the gym. This made students stop and think about the slain people who could have been peers, teachers, even friends here.

A movement always starts with a voice. Every single change that you see in this world started through the eyes of one person.

The attention of the crowd never left the middle of the floor the entire time as Alysson Martinez went up and told the audience ways to stop these crimes from happening again. She told the people who were able to vote in the upcoming election to show that we also have a voice that needs to be heard. But not only to vote, but to also speak out at town hall meetings, hold conversations with others, and participate in marches and protests and reach out to local officials. She also included how Major Brian P. Stack is just "one phone call away." And to those who



Photos by Alvin Baugh

are unable to vote she said that they are able to participate in all this by becoming more educated by keeping up with the news and current events. She implored those listening to hold important conversations like these with family members and teachers.

Alysson also stated the idea of leaving a suggestion box in the main high school building and in the AEA for students to voice their concerns.

Alysson finished her speech with some inspiration: "A movement always starts with a voice. Every single change that you see in this world started through the eyes of one person who wanted to see a positive change, a person who spoke up, and a person that fought for what they believed was right."

Following Alysson's speech, Catherine Jacomino emphasized how young people all are the voice of the future, and how the change begins with students. She stressed the importance of how we should not "represent what we are fighting," and acknowledged how Union City allows the students to engage in civic activities and have their voice be heard. She told the student body how we should not take for granted part of the nationwide dilemma that we have in this country. Because as we see more and more of this violence we become immune to something "so sickening." Students should not be complacent to the fact that crimes like these have become the new norm. She expresses how students do have a voice in this school, that we have resources that the students can go to, to be heard. She emphasizes the importance of the new ideas, for example the suggestion box, and the hero system and enforcing teachers to wear uniforms. She ended by saying "Enough is Enough!" the main phrase that Catherine used not only used throughout her speech, but is

also used by the EMPOWER youth movement.

As the walkout assembly reached its end, the students and the staff of UCHS, held a moment of silence for the departed victims of Parkland Florida.

As powerful, moving and important this assembly was, some students wished they could have joined thousands around the country by walking outside.

Danny Brenton brought up a good point by saying "The assembly, I don't know, that just goes against what we were trying to do, the whole point of the walkout was just to get the government's attention and tell them 'Hey we are tired of our lives being at risk and we are tired of going to school and fearing for our life, so we want to do something.'"

Kaitlynn Vega agreed with the idea of keeping the students in the gym "because of safety, and we were able to do a moment of silence. The fact that we are more than 3,000 students in this school imagine us walking out. I thought it was better because it was a way of uniting our voices in the gym."

Alex Rodriguez agreed with Kaitlynn when he said "it's a unique way of doing it, we were spreading our support. Instead of walking out individually we were united as one."

However many students were disappointed that the protest was moved to the gym

"It would be preferable that people could walk at least to show the community that we are caring about people around the world, and it's something everyone can participate in," Osiris Estrada said.

Students who feel this way will have their chance to have their voices heard. A national march calling for stronger gun control legislation is planned for March 24.

