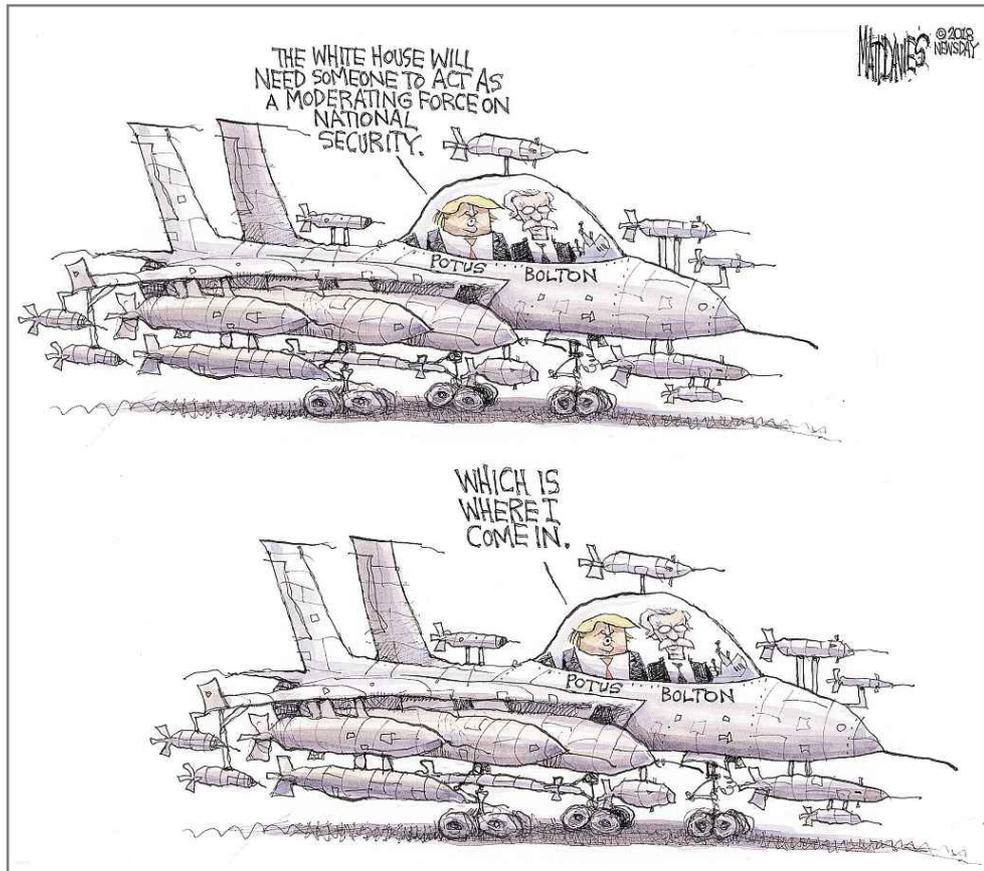


MATT DAVIES



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BOTTOM LINES

I began a journey to unravel the mystery of my mother's military service that continues to this day. I got some of her naval records. Her unit scrambled and unscrambled Allied messages. In two years, she was promoted three times. She was no secretary, and her duties were hardly ordinary. My mother was a Code Girl.

— GAIL SIMMONS, [NEWSDAY.COM](http://newsday.com)

Progressives are not stupid and evil. Conservatives are not racists and misogynists. Our fellow Americans who disagree with us are not our enemies. They are our fellow Americans who differ with us. And we should not put up with politicians, on the left or right, who can't seem to understand this.

— MARC A. THIESSEN, [THE WASHINGTON POST](http://theWashingtonPost.com)

In its most recent study, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calculated that 1 in 6 adults binge drinks about once a week, consuming an average of seven drinks per episode. As one of the few people at any given gathering who don't drink, this comes as no surprise to me.

— ESTHER J. CEPEDA, [THE WASHINGTON POST](http://theWashingtonPost.com)

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The grunt work of democracy

OPINION

Young people are working within our institutions to deliver the change we need



Michael Dobie

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You don't have to be a gun control supporter to be excited at the sight of teens by the hundreds of thousands taking to the nation's streets to demand that adults do a better job at protecting them from gun violence in our schools.

It's probably easier to feel the thrill of endless rivers of young marchers all over the country if you're someone who wants universal background checks, a ban on assault weapons and the like. But it's not necessary.

Because as important as the cause is to many of us, there's something else going on here that should matter even more to Americans of all political persuasions.

Our teenagers — led by students from Parkland, Florida, but marching at more than 800 locations in all 50 states — have made clear that they are disgusted with the political system as it is. They're frustrated with its dysfunction, its lack of action and the influence of moneyed special interests.

But they aren't turning away from it. That's critical.

Theirs is not an anarchic response. They're not trying to burn it down in a fevered backlash. Instead, they're embracing the system as a way to change it. They're digging into our institutions to make them work. Because they believe in them as vehicles to get things done.

That's a vital and warming message at a time when the nation's president works relentlessly to weaken our institutions.

And it's an echo of the massive women's marches last year and the subsequent deluge of women running for office, and winning, and gearing up for more races in the fall and beyond. They're mad as hell, too, and unwilling to take it anymore. Both groups are setting out to seize the reins and reshape things to their liking.

The teens who went to work after

the Feb. 14 Parkland shooting that killed 17 people, including 14 students, have been learning the grunt work of democratic change. They're writing petitions, getting permits, pressuring politicians, making signs, planning walkouts, plotting march routes, using social media to communicate with the country, and raising their extraordinary voices to deliver impassioned speeches, as they did Saturday in Washington and elsewhere. They're building their toolbox.

And they've already had some successes. Florida's legislature passed a sweeping gun control bill. Florida's U.S. senators, Republican Marco Rubio and Democrat Bill Nelson, introduced legislation to use due process to take guns away from people deemed dangerous to others. Some businesses have disassociated from the National Rifle Association. Citigroup placed restrictions on gun sales by businesses that are its customers.

How will the teens deal with inevitable disappointments? In the days before Saturday's rallies, they learned that Congress would allow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to do research on gun violence and modestly tighten the background check system, but nothing else. Some lamented that it had been nearly 40 days since Parkland without significant action.

Can they keep the faith? Will they sustain their energy and momentum and understand they're playing a long game? I'd like to think they will. They certainly don't lack for motivation. A Washington Post study last week found that more than 187,000 students in at least 193 primary or secondary schools have experienced an on-campus shooting during school hours since Columbine in 1999. The number, sadly, is growing.

There are short-term wins to be had. They can register to vote, which sounds simple, but young people lag far behind older people in turnout rates. They can elect sympathetic candidates, beginning in November.

And they can keep marching. The worst thing they could do in trying to change the system is to be infected by the worst aspect of it, the chronic cynicism that nothing can change.

Michael Dobie is a member of [Newsday's](http://newsday.com) editorial board.

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