

**Speeches of and Interviews with Students and Community Members attending the West Virginia
Teachers' Strike Student Rally**

Where: West Virginia State Capitol

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

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Speeches and interviews from the West Virginia Teacher Strike Student Rally 3.2.18

Lindsey Stiltner, Mingo Central High School

Speech by LS: My name is Lindsey Stiltner from Mingo Central High School in Mingo County (cheers) standing with our teachers today. As we were chanting in there with you guys before, we're fired up and we are fed up! (cheers) Teachers come to school every day, they put up with the good students, the bad students, they have the great things, the bad things, the fact that all of you out here-- I know my teachers right here--they're feeding the kids who cannot afford to eat while you all our striking. That should tell our legislators something. You are helping the students when you're going out on a limb and helping yourself. We must stand with them. If we don't stand with our teachers-- students out there-- if we don't stand with our teachers, who will stand for us? (cheers) I don't know about you all, I don't know about you all but every person who's ever went up to bat for me is a teacher. (cheers) Somebody in the educational business. This past Wednesday, I was here as a delegate, and my teacher Kevin Witt showed up while he was on strike to support me and my friend. That should tell you guys everything. All of you all out here-- thank a teacher. Take your time. Right now, turn to a teacher and say thank you. Thank you for getting me here today. (cheers) Thank you for the knowledge! Thank you for allowing me to stand here! (cheers) Thank you.

Elliot Ventura, Spring Valley High School Student

EV: My name is Elliot [?] Ventura and I go to Spring Valley High School and I'm from Wayne County and I just wanted to say that the reason why we're here, the reason why I'm here is because, you know, all this stuff that's going on, you know, this is history in the making, you know, and I just wanting to be here to support my mother since she is a Spanish teacher from Spring Valley and I just wanted to be here and part of my fellow students, you know? Cause they're-- some of them couldn't make it here today--they just don't have rides and I know that they wanted to be a part of this, and this is something that we all just need to be here and be a part of and support because we have you know, nothing else. If this doesn't work, our money and our household's gonna go down, my mother's gonna have to pay like an 800 something insurance-- it's crazy. It really is crazy. And you know, to begin with when I first started out doing this stuff, I didn't really personally realize what was going on and then as I went through, and you know, heard what was going on, heard all the things that were happening, I felt so entitled to just be here and speak in front of everybody and just be a part of this.

EH: How did you get your information?

EV: A lot of the information I got from was from my mother. She explained it to me a lot when I asked her-- hey what's going on, hey what is this all about, you know, and you know, she would just tell me-- we have so many problems with our insurance. The PEIA and all that-- it's just not funded! You know? And it's just crazy the fact that they keep pushing it away like we keep trying to change things, we come here every day that we're not able to make it to school or work, and you know we're trying to get the word out, but they're just walking away from us, you know? I just think that's-- it hurts everybody's feelings, it makes everybody mad because we come here for a reason--that's the change.

EH: And you said that you felt this was historic, how do you see it fitting in with West Virginia history?

EV: Well, you know, back in-- we had this similar issue back in-- I think it was... I can't remember the exact year, but it was back in the past, back in the 1980s, right? Pretty sure.

EH: There was a teacher strike in 1990.

EV: 1990--that's what it was, 1990. And you know, now we're here back, 20 or... is it 20 years later? Yeah, we're back here... sorry, not 20 years later, sorry.

EH: 30.

EV: 30! Oh, sorry. And you know, I'm just--it's all happening again right in front of my eyes and it's all something my mother had to go through and you know, I'm just happy to be a part of this movement, you know, I really am.

Zora Dans, student at New River Gorge Learning Co-op in Fayette County

ZD: My name is Zora Dans and I'm from Fayette County and my school is the New River Gorge Learning Co-op. It's a Montessori School so it's not that popular, but I like it. And the reason I'm here today is cause our school wants to help out to the teachers' cause and we think it's the right thing to do.

Amelia Bennett, student at New River Gorge Learning Co-op in Fayette County

AB: My name is Amelia Bennett, I am from Fayette County and I go to the same school as her--the NRGLC. And I'm just here to help out the teachers and protest for their cause.

Jake Bennett, student at New River Gorge Learning Co-op in Fayette County

JB: Hi my name is Jake Bennett and I go to the same school as them and I am in Fayette County.

EH: And why are you here today?

JB: To support all the teachers and that.

Rose Pettritige, student at New River Gorge Learning Co-op in Fayette County

RP: My name is Rose Pettritige and I go to the New River Gorge Learning Co-op and it's a co-op school and they do a lot of field trips and but... it's not normal, it's just like-- we try to help out people. Our last field trip was going to a the...going and doing pottery so we could help people out and... people who didn't have food and that would be in a food pantry, so...

EH: And how are you helping people today?

RP: Because they don't have food and they need food to survive so we're helping them so they can survive and so they can live a good life.

Julia Miner, South Charleston High School Student

EH: What's your name, county, and school?

JM: Julia Miner, Kanawha County, South Charleston High School.

EH: And why are you here today?

JM: I just want to show my support 'cause I have many family members who are teachers that work in the school system, but I also have a strong passion for my teachers at my school.

Jerra [Jara?] Oden, South Charleston High School Student

JO: My name is Jerra Oden and I'm from Kanawha County and I go to South Charleston High School. I'm here today because my mother's a teacher and both of my parents are public employees and I just

think that they should be given the same opportunities and the same benefits that other employees are given.

Erica McClung, Kanawha County

EM: My name is Erica McClung and I'm from Kanawha County. I'm here to support our educators and to help support our state employees who have really gotten shafted out of this whole deal. And I'm tired of the promises--they've known that PEIA is in a bad way--they keep pushing it off and pushing it off, and when we've had town halls, we've called, we've written, and they've... and it's all fell on deaf ears. The teachers are the one who are able to strike and we fully support them and I hope they stay out until somebody gets it done. And I don't want to hear about how Jim Justice has got his best men on it right now-- in 2020 we might have something. No.

EH: Anything else you'd like to add?

EM: We stand with you, West Virginia!

Heath Axe, Executive Chef at Berry Hills Country Club (contacted via email)

EH: Could you tell me your name and where you're from?

HA: My name is Heath Axe and I'm the Executive Chef at Berry Hills Country Club.

EH: And you said your wife is a teacher?

HA: My wife teaches at Riverside High School--she's a math teacher.

EH: And what are you doing here today?

HA: Today we're spending our time out here to support our teachers from Berry Hills Country Club, trying to make sure everyone gets taken care of and fed.

EH: What are you serving?

HA: We're serving hot dogs and we're serving hamburgers and boneless wings and chips and all the fun stuff.

Bethany, Harrison County, Bridgeport High School Student/ Natalie, Winfield Middle School

My name's Bethany, I'm from Harrison County and Bridgeport Middle-- I mean High School, sorry.

EH: And why are you here today?

B: My mom's a teacher, fighting for her rights.

EH: And what about you?

N: My name is Natalie, I go to Winfield Middle and my aunt's a teacher, and she's here fighting for her rights.

EH: And why did you decide to come help support?

N: Every person counts that comes.

Tori Petry, Riverside High School Student, Boone County resident

TP: My name is Tori Petry, I live in Boone County but I go to Riverside High School. Both of my parents and most of my family are state employees and this isn't just affecting them, this is affecting my life and my future. I feel the need to help them because they've helped me my entire life.

Kristen, 16, Sherman High School student, Boone County

K: My name's Kristen, I'm 16 and I go to Sherman High School in Boone County. My mom's a teacher at Sherman High School and she's so dedicated to helping her students and I really feel like I need to help her too. She wasn't able to be here today because she had health issues, but I really wanted to be here because she helps me and I am friends with so many teachers because of that and I just feel like they're not getting what they deserve.