

## We the People State Champions

**Rowan Kelley**  
Staff Writer

Breaking news has reached the Freeman Leadership Program. Mr. Peck's second-period Advanced Placement (AP) Government class placed first at the We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution Virginia State Finals on Feb. 8, 2026. The event, usually held at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, VA, was held at Freeman virtually due to the days missed because of winter weather. The hearings were held in Mr. Peck's classroom while other students were allowed to listen in from various locations. Period two won the State Finals, but also, during the online awards ceremony, the top-scoring unit or units are recognized. For Freeman's team, Unit 5, which focuses on what rights the Bill of Rights covers, received this award. Because of their win, Freeman is now headed to Washington, D.C. for the national-level competition, which spans across three days. All teams attending from across the country will compete for the first two days. Then, the top ten teams that qualify will compete on the third, final day. We the People is something all seniors participate in with their government class. The basic structure of We the People is that a class is divided into six units, all of which have specialized focuses that branch from the main subject: the U.S. Constitution. Students in We the People testify in a mock congressional hearing to a panel of judges that evaluates the criteria they put forward. For State Finals, the students are allowed to know if they are answering questions one or two first, but for

the national competition, you're assigned three questions and are asked them in a random order. One of the questions is asked on the first day, one of the questions is asked on the second day, and if you are one of the ten teams allowed to move on, then you are asked the final question. While they do not know the order of the questions, they will be able to prepare accordingly to what the questions will be about. The judges, of course, get to select the lineup of questions, which is different for each unit. The competition itself, though it may be strenuous, also has a huge influence on the student body. One student, senior Aaron Shook, who is working with Unit 6, commented on the impact of We the People. "I think that this competition is important for purposes of [understanding the Constitution], and the government as an American citizen is vital to life as an adult," he said. "Also, the competition matters a lot to the people in the Center." Unit 6 focuses heavily on what challenges the American constitutional democracy might face in the 21st century. The questions under each unit change yearly, and this year, they were no different in their level of difficulty. "[One question] talks about whether or not you believe a nation should be more in tune [with] its original values or more adaptive to change. So it's a tough question, because obviously you want to honor American ideals, but you also have to recognize that it's important to move on," Shook said. Mr. Peck agreed with his student when talking about the updated questions this year. "The questions are a little more interesting this year. There's a new team at the center for civic education that is writing the questions,

and they're more creative than they sometimes have been in the past," he said. Each student individually has to pull their weight with these questions and dedicate numerous hours to learning the American history behind their unit topic. Every participant has shown their commitment by spending their time in and outside of school attempting to prepare as much as possible for these questions. "I can only imagine hundreds, or maybe even thousands of hours have been spent by people in the classes, learning content to be used during the Q and A sessions... I can't think of a single person [who] isn't fully bought in," Aaron said. The level of seriousness with which these students are considering this competition has been astounding and something Mr. Peck has enjoyed working with. "[T]he classes that are the most successful are the ones that put in the most time. So it almost certainly means something that we

won at states, and they must be putting in the time. [T]heir work ethic has been great," he said. During the Q and A sessions at states, Mr. Peck also gets to sit in and listen to each of the groups. "It's incredibly rewarding and nerve-racking. [W]hen they know an answer, find [it], and articulate it, that's super rewarding. It's a little nerve-racking when they know an answer, but can't think of it on the spot, and you can't help them. You expect them to do great, and then they have a hurdle that they have trouble crossing, but this program is the most rewarding thing I've ever been involved in as a teacher," he said. Not only has this program influenced many generations of students, but it has also brought them closer together and with their teacher. "I called students from previous years and said, 'Who wants to be a mentor to this group?' And I had more volunteers than I could take. So

there's an ongoing community, a community of people, parents, and faculty," said Mr. Peck. Aaron Shook also mentioned how he and his fellow classmates have worked through this program together. "It's one of those things, especially regarding center students, that gets us very heated in terms of opinions on how things are written, what our opinions are, [and] what we need to be preparing for. Being able to work through those bumps and become a better team has been frustrating at times, but I think ultimately, a great experience that has really brought my classmates and me closer," he said. Overall, there is excitement across the board about this competition and what it will bring for Freeman students. The opportunity to be a part of this community is an exhilarating experience. Mr. Peck and his class are excited about the upcoming national event. "[We] are most looking forward to it."



Mr. Peck's AP Government second-block class

## U.S. Supreme Court Makes Decision Regarding President Trump's Global Tariffs

**Nikki Rajan**  
Editor-in-Chief

On February 20, 2026, the Supreme Court ruled against President Trump's tariff policy on other countries. The case, specifically called "Learning Resources v. Trump," sought to outline the powers of the executive branch of the national government. To understand the ruling, the background behind the tariff policies is crucial. At the beginning of his presidency, the president imposed broad tariffs on imports using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). According to a statement made by the President, his reasoning was justified by trade deficits, current drug trafficking, and the announcement of a national economic emergency due to rising inflation. As found in the 1977 written

law, the IEEPA does outline that the president is allowed to "investigate, regulate, or prohibit -- any transactions in foreign exchange" and the "importing or exporting of currency or securities." However, in section 1701 of the law, it has also said that these powers "may only be exercised to deal with an unusual and extraordinary threat." This is where the Supreme Court found its argument. The majority opinion of the Court, a written document explaining the reasoning behind the decision, was written by Chief Justice John Roberts. Along with Justice Roberts, five other justices found the tariffs unconstitutional, while the other three dissented. According to the opinion, the Court found this issue to be one focused on the constitutional separation of powers. More specifically, the document

cited Article 1, Section 8, which states that Congress has the power to impose tariffs. Using a previous court case, "Nicol v. Ames," Chief Justice Roberts wrote: "The Government thus concedes that the President enjoys no inherent authority to impose tariffs during peacetime." The IEEPA was also mentioned, used to explain that there was no mention of tariffs or duties in any clause. "Absent from this lengthy list of specific powers is any mention of tariffs or duties," wrote Chief Justice Roberts. Additionally, several justices have mentioned that major economic powers require congressional approval, as mentioned in K&L Gates News. The major questions doctrine states that courts should require clear congressional authorization for actions with major economic or political consequences. This doctrine provided reason-

ing behind the idea that Congress must oversee major policy decisions. These arguments all contribute to the overall opinion that the tariffs are beyond the president's current authority. The additional justices include Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Justice Elena Kagan, Justice Neil Gorsuch, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, and Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. However, three justices also dissented, with explanations and evidence as well. Written by Justice Brett Kavanaugh, the IEEPA gave the president enough authority to impose tariffs. Given that the law explicitly mentions that a president can, during a declared national emergency, "regulate... importation." According to Justice Law, Justice Kavanaugh argued that historically, regulating imports has always included the ability to impose tariffs or duties if interpreted broadly. "The tariffs at issue here may or may not be wise policy, but as a matter of text, history, and precedent, they are clearly lawful," wrote Justice Kavanaugh. Justice Kavanaugh also explains why the major questions doctrine should not apply in this situation because trade policy is inherently a part of foreign affairs. He further states that Congress intentionally created emergency economic powers to be flexible in times of economic emergencies. Justice Samuel Alito joined this dissenting opinion. Justice Clarence Thomas wrote his own paper, which emphasized that Congress could delegate its trade powers to the president, and the courts should respect that choice. After the court's rulings, there have been some implications for the reversal of these actions. For example, the United States government is now being sued by

many domestic businesses and state governments for their loss in revenue due to the tariffs. The federal government may have to refund money collected in duties, according to Reuters. AP News estimates that \$135 to \$175 billion may be returned to importers. Under sections 232 and 301 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, tariffs on national security and trade disputes will still be valid to protect national interests, as stated by Bracewell LLP. On February 21, 2026, President Trump brought in new 10-15% tariffs, said BBC News. As per The Washington Post, these tariffs were defended by Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, which allows temporary import restrictions. This law states "Whenever fundamental international payments problems require special import measures to restrict imports... a temporary import surcharge, not to exceed 15 percent ad valorem, in the form of duties... on articles imported into the United States." Soon after this ruling, on March 5, 2026, a coalition of 24 states filed a lawsuit to strike down these new tariffs, according to CBS News. As Fortune states, some estimates say the loss of tariff revenue could add up to \$2 trillion to long-term deficits due to reduced revenue and interest costs. CBS News states, a "Court of International Trade judge ruled on Wednesday that businesses that paid IEEPA tariffs are entitled to refunds. Separately, a federal appeals court on Monday declined to delay implementation of the Supreme Court ruling on IEEPA." As the federal government is working to implement new tariff policies, we will continue to watch its effects. This is all we know as of March 9, 2026.

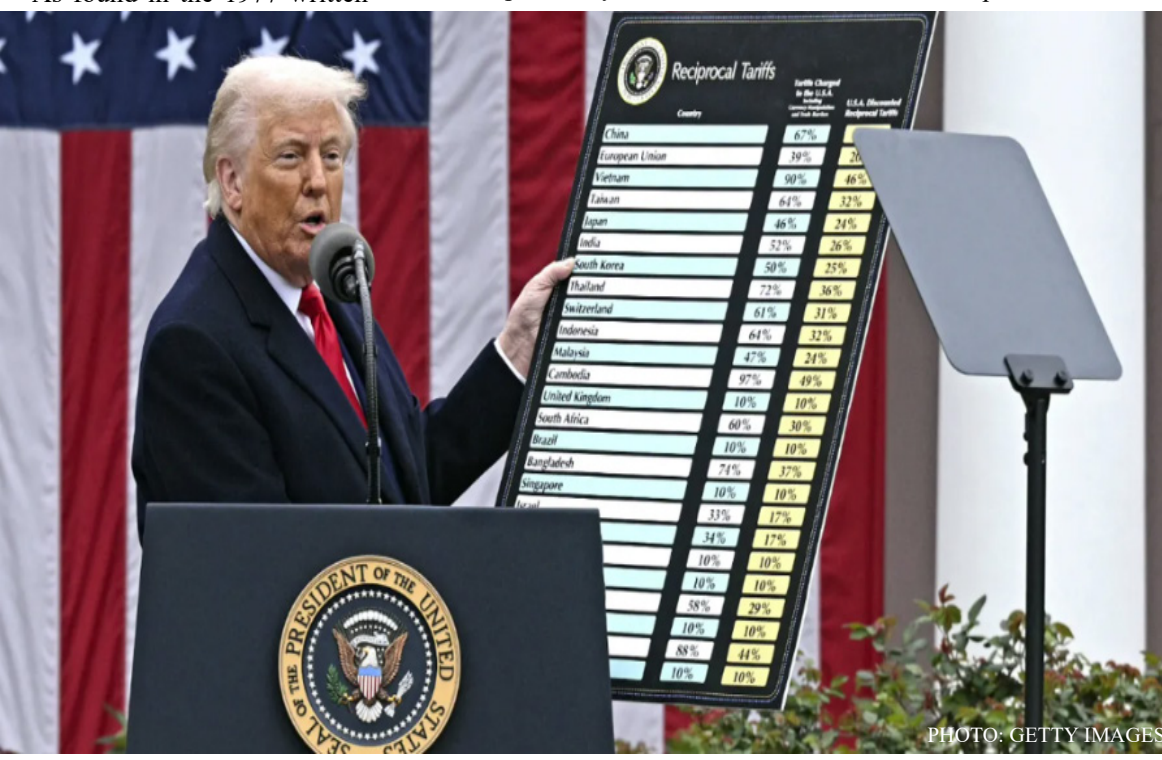


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President Donald Trump delivers remarks on reciprocal tariffs

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# State of Union Address and Governor Spanberger's Response

**Annie Ainsworth**  
Staff Writer

For the first time in his second term, on Feb. 24, 2026, President Donald Trump delivered his State of the Union Address to the House of Representatives and the Senate, as well as Supreme Court Judges and guests. One notable absentee from the address was Virginia Governor Abigail Spanberger, who, after the president's address, delivered her own response remotely on behalf of the Democratic Party. State of the Union Addresses are an annual message to Congress that outlines the state of the nation and agenda for the upcoming year, including economic and political proposals. President Trump's State of the Union Address, clocking in at 1 hour 47 minutes and 40 seconds, the longest ever recorded, centered around Trump's ideal economy, immigration and border security, and foreign policies.

Over the almost two hours President Trump was speaking, he introduced multiple new economic, health, immigration, and housing policies. Notable proposals during his address include "Trump Accounts," which are tax-free investment accounts for children, "Trump Rx," which aims to

lower prescription costs from "the highest price in the entire world to the lowest," President Trump said.

Economically, the president championed his "One Big Beautiful Bill." "[I] want to give money directly to the people, so they can buy their own health care, which will be better at a much lower cost," President Trump said.

In response, Governor Abigail Spanberger said, "The 'One Big Beautiful Bill'... [is] the one threatening rural hospitals, stripping healthcare from millions of Americans, and driving up costs in energy and housing. All while cutting food programs for hungry kids."

Trump's largest focus of the address was the United States (US) economy, his alleged improvements to the financials of Americans, prices for goods and services across the country, and tariffs. Trump claimed that due to his actions, the lives of millions of Americans have improved. "The [Americans are] all gaining. Everybody is up, way up," Trump said. However, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, inflation is up.

Some members of the American public disagree that prices have been lowered since President Trump entered office. "As a consumer, when I go to the grocery store, I notice that the prices have increased. Prices of health

insurance and medications have gone up, too," said Andrea Hale, a finance teacher at Freeman.

Shortly before the State of the Union address on Feb. 24, President Trump's "Liberation Day" tariffs and others under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) were shot down in a 6-3 Supreme Court ruling. This rejection led President Trump to focus on implementing further tariffs in his address. "[T]ariffs, paid for by foreign countries, will substantially replace the modern-day system of income tax," he said.

However, with tariffs, prices are almost unilaterally placed on consumers. "The debate over tariffs is really about a trade-off. [T]he goal is to protect American jobs by making it more expensive to buy foreign products, which encourages people to buy 'Made in America' instead," said Ms. Hale. "Tariffs are essentially a tax, and since most manufacturers can't afford to pay that tax themselves, they pass the cost on to the consumer," she said.

Governor Spanberger echoed something similar, claiming President Trump's tariffs have never had America's best interest at heart. "[S]ince this President took office last year, his reckless trade policies have forced American families to pay more than \$1,700 each in tariff costs," she said.

Affordability and the state of our economy aren't just a matter for adults to wonder about; it's relevant for high schoolers in Virginia, too. "The guarantee of affordability and an economy for the future is relevant," Jackson Mayfield said, a senior and leader in Freeman's Young Dems club.

Governor Spanberger and President Trump focused on different key points and held different tones throughout their speeches. "Trump's felt lackadaisical and simply unserious, while Spanberger's felt caring and motherly," Jackson said.

President Trump also focused on international dealings, mentioning the capture of

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and the operation Midnight Hammer in Iran last June.

Happenings at the State of the Union Address included honorings of members of the US military, and an individual protest from Democratic Congressman Al Greene.

Mr. Greene held a sign with the writing "Black People Aren't Apes," which was in direct response to President Trump's post on social media previously.

The juxtaposition between praise veterans received and the protest by Mr. Greene demonstrated the variety of opinions people had on the state of the union from President Donald Trump's past year in office.



Donald Trump giving his State of the Union Address

## ICE Walkouts

**Ava Harrison**  
A&E and Graphics Editor

Walkouts have been a way for students to express and share their opinions for many years. This school year, numerous high school students across Henrico County are utilizing walkouts to protest against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in the area. The high schools participating in walkouts include Hermitage, Tucker, Glen Allen, Godwin, Henrico, and Freeman.

Freeman's first walkout against ICE was on Jan. 23, 2026, during Freeman Focus, a study period for students. Students were asked to gather on the front lawn to show their support. It was also made known that this walkout was not an excuse to skip class, and that students should return to class after the walkout had ended. Approximately 200 students participated in Freeman's first walkout. Many held signs with messages like "Abolish ICE," "No secret police," and "ICE out."

The main organizers of the anti-ICE walkout at Freeman are senior Electra Cimino, junior Adam Krawitz, and senior Nem Murphy. They heard about other schools starting to protest ICE through walkouts and decided to bring the walkouts to Freeman. "We understand that there's a large immigrant student population at Freeman," said Nem. "ICE being in Virginia would greatly affect them."

In terms of planning the walkouts, they knew that they needed to talk to the administration before they followed through. Administrators did not approve the walkout. Students approached the administration with their plans to make them aware. "[They are] able to protect students from adults and other outside forces trying to harm the people participating in the walkouts."

A concern regarding the anti-ICE walkouts was brought to Electra's attention. "A lot of people were worried that [walkouts] would draw ICE to schools and draw attention to this area," she said.

Some people were also worried that students were just participating in the walkout to get out of school. "If [people] see a lot of students who are there who genuinely do not care about the issue, it forces this narrative onto

all students who want to incite change with walkouts," said Nem.

Advertising for the walkouts came from posters hung up around the school. The main way the walkouts were advertised was through social media, especially the DSF Walkouts Instagram account. "Social media plays a huge role," said Nem.

All of the promotion and communication resulted in a surprising turnout for the planners. "We were not expecting 200 people," said Electra. "It was a wholesome thing, and it was enlightening seeing how many people showed up out of support for others and their beliefs."

Electra wants people to know that the purpose of these walkouts is to show that "we care about this [and] we don't want this to happen," she said. "We are doing this because we want to show support to all the families that are being torn apart."

Adam believes that walkouts bring a lot of attention to the matter. "We think it's a really important issue," he said. "It may not seem like it makes a difference, [but] a lot of people showed their support."

Nem feels that walkouts are beneficial. "It increases students' ability to think freely and politically," she said. At the walkout, there was a group of students voicing opposite opinions from the majority. "It's really important to be able to showcase that difference and coexist with it," she said.

Senior Jackson Mayfield participated in the anti-ICE walkout on Jan. 23. "I remember hearing about [the walkout] in class and throughout the day," he said. Jackson participated because his family has a history of fighting for equal rights. "I want to do the same in my own way," he said.

Jackson also remembers Mr. Larkins talking about how Freeman's demographic is very reflective of the United States. "We have a diverse school," he said. "It's important to stand up for our community members and our peers."

Electra, Adam, and Nem are currently planning more walkouts this school year, but they have emphasized that they cannot plan them recklessly. "We are trying to make sure that we can still have these [walkouts] without much consequence."



Freeman's first anti-ICE walkout

## The Mystery Behind Nancy Guthrie's Disappearance

**Sophie Tluchak**  
Staff Writer

On Feb. 1, 2026, 84-year-old Nancy Guthrie, the mother of Savannah Guthrie, was reported missing from her home in Tucson, Arizona, after investigators say she was abducted in the middle of the night. The kidnapper was seen on a doorbell camera, armed and masked. An FBI agent told BBC News that the suspect is believed to be "a male between 5 ft 9 in and 5 ft 10 in...covering a camera lens with some plants...wearing a 25-liter Ozark Trail Hiker Pack backpack," according to the footage.

Pima County Sheriff Nanos said the suspect's clothes in the footage were "believed to have been bought at Walmart," and that "investigators had been reviewing surveillance video from nearby Walmart outlets." Additionally, law enforcement informed CBS News that the suspect had visited Guthrie's front door earlier that day. "I just believe she's somewhere here locally. I don't know why," said Sheriff Faris.

Multiple ransom notes were sent to media outlets, demanding a multimillion-dollar sum to be paid in Bitcoin for information on Nancy Guthrie's whereabouts. So far, none have been confirmed to be sent by Guthrie's suspected abductor, and one of them has even been declared fake, forged by a man in California who was subsequently arrested. Twenty-four days after her mother went missing, Savannah offered the \$1M reward, but "acknowledged Nancy 'may be lost,'" said BBC News.

The news of Guthrie's disappearance has spread worldwide, leaving people in distress and concern. "I think it's truly a tragedy what happened to her," said Nahyla Barakat, a junior at Freeman. Unfortunately, there are still no plausible leads or enough information to identify a definite suspect. Many people following the story are hoping for a good outcome. "I do hope that she has returned safely," said Nahyla. As the search continues, communities all around the world remain attentive to updates, sharing information and expressing their support for the family during this time. Authorities continue to encourage anyone with information to come forward, hoping that new leads may help bring clar-

ity and resolution to the situation.

The entire situation has been broadcast on social media on almost every platform, leading to contradicting beliefs on whether that is helpful. On one hand, people like Nahyla recognize that the popularity of this case could take away from other missing persons cases. "It is upsetting to see acknowledgement of other cases slowly decreasing as the attention of this one increases," she said. On the other hand, many believe the publication of this case is what will lead investigators to Mrs. Guthrie. Another junior says that "People can help find the person and see clues, and if it's somebody they know, they could help find out who it is."

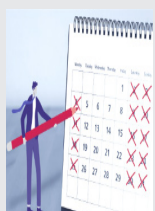
After Mrs. Guthrie went missing, Savannah Guthrie took a leave of absence from her job on the Today Show in order to process the entire situation and be with her family, stepping away from the spotlight to cope with her grief. Tommy Noland, a junior who is a regular watcher of the show, expressed his liking for Savannah, labeling her the "main person of the show." Just recently, she returned to the show and briefly acknowledged the situation. "I am still standing," she said while in between tears. She also came out with a statement before her return that said, "Though we are surrounded by so much darkness and uncertainty, our love burns bright. We love you, Mommy. We miss you so much."

The most recent leads found by local investigators are "DNA samples collected from Guthrie's Tucson-area home in southern Arizona, as well as a backpack worn by a suspect who 'tampered' with her doorbell camera the night of her disappearance," said USA Today. They also mentioned that on March 8, 2026, it was confirmed that a "damaged utility box around the corner from Guthrie's house was 'being reviewed as part of the ongoing investigation,'" according to Tucson news station KVOA. However, on March 9th, it was reported that the utility box is most likely unrelated to the crime.

As the investigation continues, authorities urge anyone with information to come forward. Despite the uncertainty surrounding her mother's disappearance, Savannah Guthrie has continued to express hope that Nancy will be found. "[I] will not give up hope," she said.

Less Work and School?

Page 3



Candy's Bouquet Business

Page 5



Mrs. Polo trapped in Mexico

Page 8



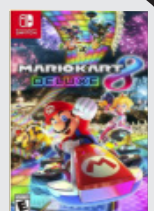
Coach Parpart Wins

Page 9



Freeman Esports Team

Page 11



# A Change in Society: Four Day Work Week and School Week?

**Nina Henley**  
Online Editor-in-Chief  
Centerspread Editor

After being initiated by Henry Ford in 1926, five day work weeks have been the backbone of our society. 40 hour weeks with only two days off and a never-ending cycle of work, rest, repeat became the social norm for many workers in the US. In the last couple of years, however, several groups have been trying to change this. For starters, a nonprofit organization by the name of “4 Day Work Week Global” has made strides by leading an international campaign to shift businesses from a 5-day, 40 hour workweek to a 4-day, 32 hour workweek without any significant loss in pay. The group was founded in 2019 by Andrew Barnes and Charlotte Lockhart. It has advocated that by making this change, it will improve employee well-being, reduce burn-out, and increase productivity by focusing on output rather than the specific hours and time. So far, there have been experiments leading to adoptions in Iceland and Belgium along with ongoing trials in the US and the UK. This growing trend has expanded beyond just work; in fact, there have been many arguments leaning towards a four day school week. So far, this system has been adapted in over 2,100 U.S. schools within 2024-2025, typically in more rural areas. This has led to varying results based on location and grade level. According to a study at Harvard Kennedy school, students, specifically those in rural areas, have been underachieving

since the switch. “Most of the evidence finds that the four-day school week reduces student achievement mostly due to reductions in the amount of time students are in school,” Paul N. Thompson, an assistant professor of economics at Oregon State University wrote in an email to “The Journalist’s Resource” on Aug. 26. 2025.

While there is a lot of evidence against this newfound system, there have been certain studies that have shown positive effects. According to “The Journalist’s Resource,” one study has shown that fourth graders attending schools in rural areas of Colorado have earned higher test scores in reading on a four-day schedule. It also suggests fifth graders at rural schools in Colorado earn higher math scores. Other studies show that districts operating fewer than 30 hours per week drive most of the negative achievement effects, while districts offering 32 hours or more per week show no statistically significant differences in achievement. This shows that there may not be a fair comparison between notations of straightforward ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ effects.

More evidence suggests that there has been no significant changes to support or deny this action when looking at teachers. According to NWEA, across Arkansas, Colorado, Missouri, Oregon, and Oklahoma, four-day schedules are associated with no change or very small changes in retention rates, ranging from slight increases to slight decreases of at most one to three percentage points. Overall, teachers may prefer a four day week, but there is



PHOTO: COU

not strong enough evidence that impacts employment decisions.

Other studies show mixed results. For example, a study in Oregon indicates a four-day schedule might reduce high school dropout rates but increase absenteeism among students in grades 9 to 12. Another example is a study of Oklahoma high school students that suggests a four-day week “probably reduces bullying, fighting, and school bus incidents,” the University of Oregon researchers write. But it appears to have little to no effect on reports of vandalism.

So far, three studies examine changes in student achievement for students in kindergarten through eighth grade in several states. All indicate that a four-day schedule may lower students’ performance in math and likely lower their performance in reading, regardless of whether they attend school in a rural or suburban community. While the system itself may seem straightforward, there

have been many different adoptions of this system. “In reality, four-day week schedules vary a lot — there are ‘hybrid’ schools that use the schedule for only part of the year, and the amount of instructional time that schools add to school days to make up the time on the fifth day can vary substantially,” said Morton, a lead research scientist at Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), to The Journalist’s Resource.

With evidence showing that in 2024, High School Seniors math and English scores dropped to their lowest levels in two decades, is implementing a four day school week the best path to take? While the benefits of boosting teacher and student morale and recruitment, increasing attendance, allowing for more mental health rest days, and providing costs due to reduced transportation and energy use are tempting, the possible downsides may outweigh the positives. Losing sig-

nificant time in the classroom can hurt academic achievement and can cause parental supervision issues as well if parents are working when students are at home.

As a senior in high school, I can say with confidence that having a four day school week sounds like a dream for any student dealing with senioritis or mental exhaustion from school. However, the downsides are not worth it. After the 2020 Pandemic, the importance of students remaining in the classroom is at an all time high right now and while I do believe the school systems could be reworked, switching to a four day school week would be too much of a dramatic change and will lead to more negative outcomes than positive. Being in school for five days a week is not just for academic reasons, it is to help develop essential skills like socializing, critical thinking, problem solving, and focusing, students in an academic setting.



PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Glen Powell

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# Repeated Casting of Actors: Yay or Nay?

**Maggie Walton**  
Staff Writer

Sydney Sweeny is a very talented actress. I’ve seen her in a few films and her performances are always witty with a mix of emotion. Same with Glenn Powell, he brought Top Gun: Mavericks’ Lieutenant Jake “Hangman” Seresin to life with well played charisma and arrogance. They’re both talented crowd pleasers, even starring alongside each other in the 2023 film “Anyone But You.”

Both of these people, among other young actors, have been appearing everywhere in Hollywood. There are many movies that I will make a point to watch, motivated by a favorite actor. However, just because I’m a fan and someone is undoubtedly talented, doesn’t mean they should be featured in any and all productions.

A lot of talent is going undiscovered because the same faces keep getting cast, even if they don’t quite fit a role. Some of the most talented and attractive actors’ faces get tiresome after a while. Yes, they were fantastic in a few productions, but does this mean they both fit every role in upcoming movies?

I’m very biased in my opinion on this. As a Grey’s Anatomy fan, I believe the whole series wouldn’t have been nearly as good, particularly season one, if big names for that time had been cast. By using actors that were new to the craft, the characters felt more relatable than someone known to make thousands, which was part of the premise of Grey’s Anatomy.

Social media has of course expressed annoyance with Hollywood’s casting decisions. Some controversy is sparked purely over the actors appearance, especially in instances of book adaptations. I consider myself an avid reader, and I always have a specific image of a character regardless of what the book says. When I see a movie adaptation where my expectations aren’t met, I’m immediately disappointed.

Furthermore, they should actually suit their role. The person with pale skin might not be the best person to portray a Spartan warrior or Italian character.

Casting choices that make sense are often forgotten because money is the focus of a producer’s mind. Jenna Ortega makes a lot more money than many actresses currently, and significantly more than someone who has barely been cast in advertisements. Regardless of bringing in billions, she doesn’t suit every role.

Image is an important aspect to all of Hollywood. Disney Parks in particular get away with sky-high prices because of how magical their parks are. I can contest this; each park feels so immersive it almost felt like I’d left Florida and was in some imaginary world.

With that being said, it’s no wonder casting directors stick to certain faces. Choosing actors everyone likes seeing on screen almost guarantees that a movie will do well. It’s almost like a popularity contest where the judged criteria is someone’s complexion and body. It’s very superficial, but typical that conventionally attractive people get cast.

The image an actor brings to a production can even outshine the very thing one needs to be an actor: talent. After talking to some friends, we mutually agreed that actress Gal Gadot may not actually be as talented as she is gorgeous. Similarly with Finn Wolfhard. One of my friends allotted his continued casting in Stranger Things to simply being there since season one.

The actors themselves are not to blame for all of this. I read the book “The Actor’s Life,” by Jenna Fischer, and my understanding is that actors actually have little control over what roles they get.

If you’re a big star in Hollywood, you might get calls from casting directors offering you roles, meaning you may be their first choice. Most times, you audition and cross your fingers you

fit the casting director’s vision.

Acting is a job, just like finance, or any other position you can think of, except the pay is unpredictable. I understand why actors take every role offered; they don’t know when the next opportunity may arise. Perhaps even the actors themselves feel overcast, however, like everyone else, they need to keep working to sustain themselves.

Despite all of the above, there appears to be some hope for change. Content creators on platforms like TikTok and Instagram made videos for their ideal casting for the leads in the live action version of Tangled. Directors have appeared to have listened to the media, casting Milo Manheim as Flynn Rider and Teagan Croft as Rapunzel, who were featured in many reels I saw.

Teagan Croft is a young Australian actress who visually suits the role of Rapunzel with her blonde hair and blue eyes. She also has only appeared in a small number of productions, similar to Milo Manheim, while he is considerably better known than her.

This casting is a perfect example of Hollywood breaking the cycle of repetition. Disney’s live action casting hasn’t done well in previous years. Fans were displeased with Snow White and The Little Mermaid, but are optimistic about the production of Tangled.

There is so much talent out in the world, but we might not get to see all of it because of Hollywood’s habits. I think we should give all actors a chance, and make choices that appropriately reflect character design. While I still enjoy the performances of Timothée Chalamet, Sydney Sweeny, Jenna Ortega, and many others, I think they should only be cast when they fit the role, not just because they bring in the money or views.

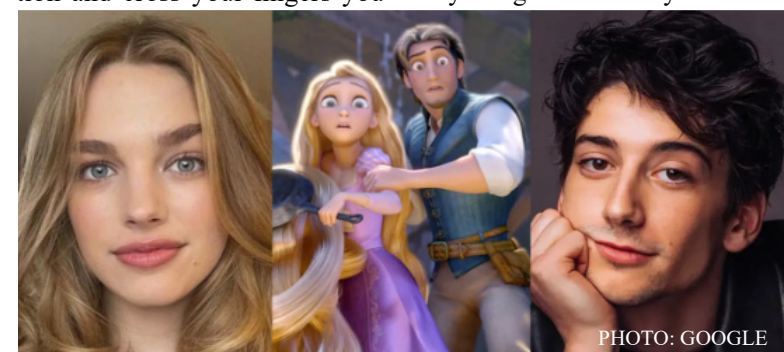


PHOTO: GOOGLE

Teagan Croft and Milo Manheim cast in live action Rapunzel

# The Heart Racing Truth: Are Energy Drinks Good or Bad?

Juliette Lawrence  
Staff Writer

High schoolers love to crack open a crispy energy drink before school as a substitute or a second drink with coffee to get them through the day. Despite that, are these energy drinks ultimately harming us, even with the short bursts of energy they provide?

With their array of flavors and colorful packaging, energy drinks are easy to give into. The flavor profile of energy drinks can range from “Ghosts Sour Patch Blueberry” or “Bangs Whole Lotta Choccolata.” The wide range of flavor variety comes from additives and flavor chemistry. These strategies block out the drinks’ naturally medicinal bitterness.

I am not an avid coffee drinker and I’ve never been reliant on caffeine in the morning. However, I can understand how buying a cheap energy drink that tastes sweet, like a lemonade, may be more appealing than spending 13 dollars at Starbucks before work or school.

We see it daily, Freeman students walking into school holding a freshly opened can of Alani, Celsius, or Bloom Energy, hoping it will allow them to keep up with their rigorous curriculum. Students may think of them as a way to “Lock In” more effectively.

Energy drinks primarily work through high doses of caffeine and

loads of sugar, which increase mental alertness, heart rate, and blood sugar levels. The effect of these can vary for different people. Personally, I get jitters, become super anxious, and shake all day after I drink any type of energy drink. I don’t drink them often, which may be why they have this effect on me. In my experience, energy drinks don’t help me to “Lock In”; they just make me feel worse.

Energy drinks can indeed increase alertness and combat fatigue. These effects can benefit individuals who may play sports, are short on sleep, or are struggling with cognitive performance. Though some students experience these effects, energy drinks still create problems.

Energy crashes can occur from high consumption. Typically, 4-6 hours after consumption of a dose of caffeine, the stimulant wears off. Adenosine, which is a neurotransmitter that induces sleepiness in the brain, floods brain receptors. This causes rapid reversal effects, like fatigue, headaches, and low energy levels.

Insomnia or trouble sleeping can also occur from these drinks. Having caffeine close to bedtime blocks these Adenosine receptors. This ultimately results in a longer time falling asleep, shorter sleep duration, and increased nighttime awakenings. As a Junior with a heavy workload, I know how a lack of sleep can derail the rest of a stu-



Various Alani Flavors

dent’s day, leading to reduced productivity and difficulty focusing.

The accessibility and availability of these drinks cause a spike in negative impacts. Energy drinks are sold at gas stations, convenience stores, grocery stores, and many other businesses. There is no age restriction on how old someone has to be to buy, so technically, anyone can purchase them. This leaves the door for overconsumption wide open.

In my opinion, the addictiveness of the drinks is the real hazard. The high caffeine and sugar levels induce a rapid increase in dopamine levels. They create cycles of dependency, inducing alertness but increasing fatigue, resulting in the consumer drink-

ing again to feel more “awake”.

Not only are there temporary issues that occur from the drinks, life long risks also arise. The large amount of sugar in the drinks can cause diabetes or tooth decay with overconsumption. Many of the non-sugar-free drinks contain 21-30 teaspoons of sugar per can. That is equivalent to around half a piece of cake.

The short bursts of energy they provide increase heart rate. This can result in a risk of cardiovascular issues. Spikes in blood pressure, heart rate, and abnormal heart rhythms can also occur after consuming these drinks.

Excess consumption of these drinks puts teens at risk. Adolescents have a smaller body size and

heightened sympathetic nervous system responses, which increase their chances of problems. It’s also easy for teens to get roped into the flashy, advertised flavors.

Disruption of gut bacteria also occurs, which destabilizes the microbiome. The microbiome helps our bodies to fight sickness and digest complex fibers. It acts as a protective barrier, reducing inflammation, managing weight, and even communicating to the brain, affecting mood swings.

Ultimately, the “quick fix” energy advertised by energy drinks is a dangerous illusion, especially for impressionable high school students. Restrictions or regulations on how many energy drinks a person can consume or buy.

## ‘Ugly Dumpling’ Restaurant Opens in Willow Lawn

Maryam Vohra  
Editor-in-Chief  
Copy Editor

Ugly Dumpling, a New Jersey-originated Chinese restaurant, opened a second Virginia location in Willow Lawn on Feb. 19, 2026. The restaurant mainly serves authentic, hand-crafted Shanghai-style dumplings, called Xiao Long Bao, and other Chinese dishes in a fast-casual setting. It has taken Freeman by storm, and students have been visiting the restaurant.

I had heard whispers and talk about a new Din Tai Fung dupe in RVA, so naturally, I had to give it a try. Din Tai Fung, a New York-based Chinese restaurant, has gone viral because of their to-die-for soup dumplings, cucumber salad, and more. Trying Din Tai Fung has been one of my biggest dreams for some time (which I will hopefully accomplish one day), but Ugly Dumpling will have to do for now. Safe to say I was pleasantly surprised.

Ugly Dumpling was anything but its name. As soon as we stepped in, the atmosphere was everything you would want in a dinner setting. There was a comfortable level of chatter, ambient lighting, and diverse seating options. The wait to be seated was a couple of minutes longer than expected, but the food arrived fairly quickly, and in a logical sequence.

We were seated in a well-lit booth and given ample time to scour the menu, which was needed.

After rereading the menu close to ten times, we decided to sample one item from every menu section: appetizers, soup dumplings, “from the wok,” and greens. Our final order, after much deliberation, consisted of spring rolls, garlic green beans, chicken xiao long bao, shrimp stir-fried noodles, and vegan wontons.

The first dish to arrive was the garlic green beans, which were very convenient because they acted as an appetizer dish. These seriously wowed me. They were a perfect texture, not too soft, but also not too crispy; they held a perfect crunch. There was minced garlic seasoning over the beans, but not too much that it got overwhelming.

Second to arrive were the vegan wontons. We wanted to sample both a meat entree and a vegan entree to test the restaurant’s ability to accommodate different dietary restrictions. The wontons arrived in green wrappers, hence the vegan-ness, and were sitting in an aromatic soup made of soy sauce and various spices. Upon first taste, they were not as good as expected, but after the second taste with extra soy sauce, they became more enjoyable.

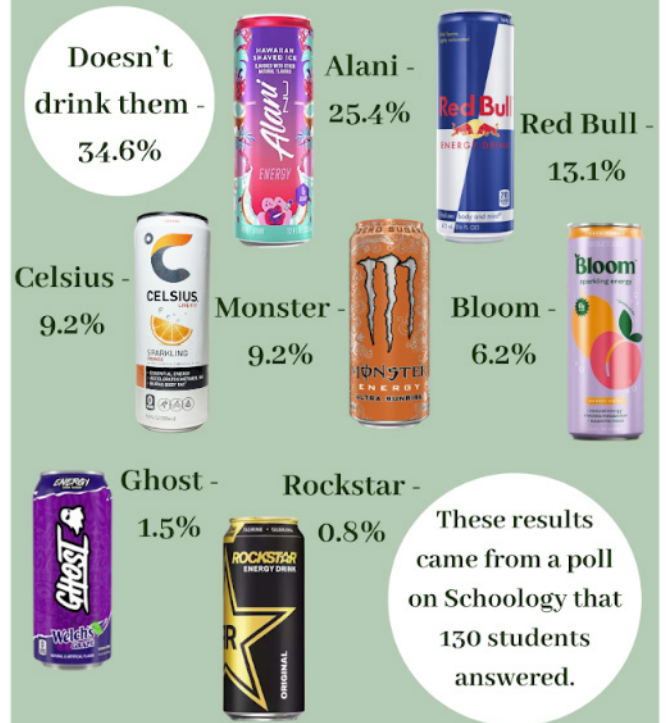
Third to arrive were the spring rolls. I am a spring roll fanatic, and my criteria for spring rolls

are as follows: it must be crispy, the filling must be flavorful, and the sauce must accompany the rolls well. I am pleased to say the spring rolls met two-thirds of my requirements. Still hot and crispy when they arrived, the filling was seasoned well, but the sauce was lacking. It was almost sweet, but peppery, and I would definitely call it an acquired taste. Rather than suffer through the sauce, I enjoyed the spring rolls with soy sauce, which I found complemented the flavors better.

Fourth and fifth to arrive were the chicken soup dumplings and the shrimp stir-fried noodles, respectively. A fun detail added to the dumplings, probably more for the chef’s convenience, was that the dumpling wrappers were dyed pink. In an attempt not to burn our tongues, we cut the soup dumpling open first in our spoons to allow the soup to drain. Both the soup and the chicken filling were delicious, and complemented each other beautifully. After saving our tongues, we sampled the shrimp noodles, which were good, but nothing special. One thing I hate is large shrimp, but the shrimp in the noodles were a perfect, mini size. I would have loved extra soy sauce, which would have made the dish perfect.

If I could go back, which I most definitely will, I want to try the orange chicken, edamame, and fried rice. Another thing I re-

### WHAT ENERGY DRINKS ARE STUDENTS AT FREEMAN DRINKING?



GRAPHIC: AVA HARRISON

ally wanted to try, but opted not to, was a fun drink. Ugly Dumpling’s beverage menu included milk tea, iced tea, honey lemonade, and boba tea. I would have tried the brown sugar boba tea, but at 7 dollars, the price was a little outrageous. I would think twice about spending \$7 for boba at a small cafe, but I wouldn’t think once about spending \$7 for a drink at a restaurant. Sorry! Price-wise, Ugly Dumpling was average, not outrageously expensive, but not cheap. It was an appropriate price, considering the number of items we got and the tip.

Ugly Dumpling is hosting a grand opening event on Wednesday, May 14, 2026, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. A gift-card giveaway will occur, all guests will re-

ceive a free boba tea voucher, and all dine-in guests will receive a 50% discount on food. Additionally, there will be a celebratory lion dance and a grand ribbon-cutting ceremony. It is safe to say that you will catch me skipping school to attend the grand opening.

Overall, Ugly Dumpling offered a wide variety of food options, including multiple entree choices, and remained accommodating to dietary restrictions. On a scale of 1 to 10, I rate it a 8.5/10. Minus one point for the drink prices, overwhelming wontons, and odd spring roll sauce. I could 100% visit again, pick all the different menu items, and be completely wowed all over again, a testament to the versatility of Ugly Dumpling.



UGLY 海派小笼  
DUMPLING

PHOTO: LIBER EATS

# Navigating Her Way to the Naval Academy

Olive Schreher  
Features Editor

Senior Madeline Garret is taking her sailing career beyond high school and to the United States Naval Academy, where she will continue her academic and athletic career at the division one level.

To close off her senior year, Madeline went to Argentina to compete in the Semana Internacional del Yachting 2026, a sailing competition, regatta, that brought together around 300 sailors and their families. Furthermore, the event lasted three weeks, accumulating close to 1,000 kids competing.

The opportunity came through her coach, Tom Pellejero, who is from Argentina. He wanted to have their last race together as their team, Fishing Bay Yacht Club, since three out of four members are graduating this year. "He had wanted the team to come down and race for a while, and given that three of the four people on the team are graduating this year it seemed like the perfect time," said Madeline. "The idea

with this regatta was to have one last regatta together as a team." Although the whole team could not make it, Madeline and her brother, Clark Garret, were able to represent Fishing Bay Yacht Club. The regatta consisted of two days of practice and six days of racing, testing the sailors' adaptability in conditions they weren't used to. "The sailing was super memorable, especially since we weren't used to those conditions. We've never sailed in the South Atlantic or been so completely exposed to the elements, waves in the area can get above 20 feet when the wind is right," she said. On top of this, they had one rest day where Madeline was able to indulge herself in the new country and its culture. "[We had] one rest day at the end [of the trip] where we went to the beach and explored the city," Madeline said. In doing this, she discovered the culture there to be more community based, especially compared to the US. "Argentina is more centered around community and spending time together rather than what we have in the US, which is a lot more isolated," she said. The same could be said for the sailing community there. "At the yacht club, there was a very laid back atmosphere and despite the large crowd, everyone seemed to know each other," Madeline said. "The restaurant was relaxed and people would just pull chairs up to tables with their friends, or sit down and hang out without even ordering food. The whole idea of the restaurant was to be a place for people to gather and not just for people to have a meal."

This connection is something

that Madeline has found time and time again through sailing. Before starting competitive sailing at nine years old, Madeline grew up around the sport, sailing with her family. "I've been sailing my whole life. My grandparents owned a cruising sailboat, so they would take me on trips all over when I was young, especially in Maine or the Bahamas," said Madeline. "We also had small sailboats, called dinghies, at our river house and yacht club that my dad loved to take out with me and my younger brothers." The fun and lightheartedness she found for sailing in the beginning has now turned into a serious athletic commitment, but one Madeline loves nonetheless. Despite being on the track team at Freeman, she still considers sailing her most demanding sport, physically and mentally. "It's the hardest sport I do," she said, "[but] there's really no other feeling like it, it's so freeing to move using just the wind." The combination of challenge and freedom is what continues to motivate her. For her, the constant decision-making and multi-tasking is what really relies on her mental strength, "Racing is like a puzzle," she said, "...you have to make sure your boat is moving fast while paying attention to the wind, current, waves, pressure, and making sure you don't foul other boats or break any rules." These strategy skills will be essential as she moves on to sail at the collegiate level, which is a big commitment. Madeline will report to Plebe Summer in late June, an intense training period at the academy to prepare incoming students. "The goal is to test us under pressure; they make us do a bunch of

drills and workouts while yelling at us the whole time," she said. Because of this, Madeline will miss most of her summer before college. "I'm missing pretty much all of my summer," she said, "I'll only have a month after graduation, in which I'm taking a two-week vacation, volunteer coaching at my club's sailing camp, and then leaving for training... [which] doesn't end until mid-August." Despite this, Madeline still views sailing as something that is close to her heart. Not only this, but it has helped to shape her identity over the past years, making her motivated and resilient. "Sailing has shaped the person I am today; whether pushing through 9-hour practices in the middle of summer, spending hours and hours racing in windy conditions, or getting through the outskirts of a hurricane, sailing teaches im-



Sailboats in the regatta.

portant lessons and values," she said. In conjunction with this, "[Sailing] has brought me closer to my family and introduced me to some of my closest friends from around the world," said Madeline. From lighthearted days with her family on the boat, to days that test her grit, sailing has remained central to Madeline's identity. Her journey reflects years of dedication to the sport, one that will continue beyond high school. As she prepares to leave for Annapolis in June, her experience in Argentina remains as a milestone and a preview of her future at the Naval Academy. Through it all, one thing remains certain: Madeline's unwavering love for the sport, "Sailing is my favorite thing ever," she said, "I just love every aspect of it, whether day sailing, racing, or cruising."

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Madeline sailing in Argentina

## Blooming Around Freeman: Candy Hernandez's Bouquet Business

Kaylee Bendheim  
Staff Writer

Between balancing being a Freeman student in the Advanced Career Education Center (ACE) center, Candy Hernandez also manages her own bouquet business. Candy Hernandez, also known as @bouquetsbynati, runs a small bouquet business with the support of the passion to make her clients happy while exploring the challenges of being a teenage entrepreneur. She found her interest in making bouquets when her social media algorithm started showing her bouquet-making videos, "I found the process really interesting and creative, and it gradually became something I felt passionate about," she said. This growing interest turned her passion into a small business. Candy finds most of her clients through people she knows outside of school and work, mutual friends, or individuals that discovered her business through her Instagram page. Social media has helped her stay connected to her current clients while introducing her business to new ones: "Social media has been helpful in showing my work and allowing new customers to find my business," she said. She often notices her clients ordering for special occasions or holidays such as birthdays, Valentine's Day, and Christmas. Many of her clients often buy bouquets for their loved ones. "I find it cute when couples are very eager to make sure that the bouquet is perfect for their part-

ner and it's something that they know they will enjoy," said Candy. Candy tries to make her bouquets affordable for her clients. She calculates her pricing based on the amount of detail required for each order, not a fixed price per bouquet. "I typically determine my prices by charging per flower and adding additional costs for customizations such as writing on ribbons or other decorative add-ons," she said. Not only has her business taught her to explore her passions, but it has taught her the importance of skills such as communication, time management, and responsibility. "When working with customers, I have to understand their ideas, answer their questions, and adjust designs based on what they want. I've also had to learn how to manage my time by balancing school, work, and bouquet orders." Her commitment to these skills has been noted by her clients, who value her professional and reliable approach. "She treated me really well and was quick to respond. The flowers were made quickly. I submitted my order last minute and she made time to meet my expectations," said Edgardo Acosta, a client of Candy's and a student at Freeman. Edgardo discovered Candy's business through Instagram and decided to purchase one of her bouquets. He wanted to surprise his significant other with a bouquet, confiding in Candy. "She had my bouquet quickly done and I was impressed with her time management. I love how the flowers come out each time and how quick they come," he said. He believes Candy's prices are affordable and adjustable to the

client. "I think her prices are amazing compared to other people. She could easily over charge, but she chooses to charge at a fair price without compromising the quality of her bouquet" said Edgardo. He only goes to her now when needing a bouquet, having become a loyal customer who's consistently impressed by the care she puts into every arrangement. Educators who have come across her business are equally impressed by her sophisticated management style. Mr. Behne, a Business teacher and Future Business Leaders Of America (FBLA) sponsor, has never had Candy as a student, but was nevertheless intrigued after learning the techniques she uses to run her business. "Time management is one major skill you need to be successful in most businesses. You must develop a good plan for different situations while being adaptable to constant change, which is a skill Candy seems to succeed with," he said. Mr. Behne believes that passion is a primary driver for student success in entrepreneurship. "Students getting involved in creating a business can give them a drive of passion when deciding their future career path, whether sticking with their business or not," he said. "This can show how a student overcomes obstacles to be successful. How they use Creative and Critical thinking (some of HCPS Durable Skills) to solve issues in the business." Not every teen entrepreneur might stick with their business plan after high school, but they can still learn valuable lessons from their time running it. "I don't see a lot of your entrepreneurs sticking with these early ideas, but,



they are developing skills to be successful entrepreneurs and employees," said Mr. Behne. Candy sees herself continuing running her bouquet business after graduating high school. "I believe I will have more time to be consistent with it," she said. That time period will give her the opportunity to fully focus on making bouquets and taking care of her customers. For the upcoming year, she wants to improve her creativity in design and variety in products when making bouquets. "I want to ex-

pand my bouquet designs and experiment with new materials. I am looking forward to exploring different designs while fulfilling a client's vision," she said. No matter what type of event Candy is creating a bouquet for, she is happy she took the route to explore her interest in bouquet-making to fulfill her passion and customers. "Being able to make bouquets for people to give to their partners or loved ones and seeing the reactions when they receive them brings me a lot of joy and satisfaction," she said.

## Freeman at Scholastic Art Competition

Emerson Post  
Sports & Copy Editor

Several students from Freeman High School (DSF) earned Gold Keys in the regional level of the Scholastic Art and Writing Competition, recognizing their artwork among submissions from across the region. The awards highlight student work in different areas like film, painting, writing, and digital media. Students submit their work to the regional competition, where judges review them based on criteria such as originality, technical skill, and the communication of their ideas. Gold Key winners move on to national judging, where their work is considered among all submissions from students throughout the country.

Two of the students who received Gold Keys were seniors Sarah Fuller and Marley Anderson. Sarah earned Gold Keys for

multiple pieces of artwork, while Marley received the recognition for a short film that she created. Their projects were developed over several months and submitted earlier this school year as a part of the competition process.

The regional exhibition for the Scholastic awards takes place at the Visual Arts Center of Richmond, where selected student artwork is displayed in a gallery type setting. By doing this, it allowed the artwork to be viewed in a more professional setting rather than a regular school art show.

Sarah Fuller submitted several pieces to the competition, including a watercolor painting, a three-dimensional sculpture, and political cartoons. Two of those works earned Gold Keys. One of her recognized pieces was a watercolor painting showing the interior of a house used as a metaphor for

the 2 sides of the human brain. Sarah said the idea came from the theme she chose for her AP Art sustained investigation project. "We pick a theme for the artworks to correlate to for the [year] and mine is about opposites," she said. "I feel like one of the biggest opposites to me is the difference between your right side and your left side of the brain, so I was trying to give commentary on how if we're viewing our brains as houses, we have to keep them clean, and we have to maintain them [so] that obviously your right side of your brain looks a lot different from your left side."

In the artwork, the house is divided to represent different ways of thinking. She explained that one part of the concept was meant to compare analytical subjects with more creative ones. "I kind of took it into a different perspective, and had kind of the sciences

and the maths be represented on one side, and [then] art and the humanities on the other, etc." Sarah described how the process of creating these projects can be long, but worth it. "I usually listen to audio books while I work, so I listened to an entire book series. So probably around 27 to 35 hours," said Sarah. "I felt pretty excited. I've done it before, so it's kind of like a very repetitive cycle, but I was happy [for] that piece, because I spent so much time on it, [and] it got some recognition." Another one of her Gold Key pieces was a three-dimensional sculpture built inside of a cigar box. The piece represents a breakfast nook scene in miniature form. Another student who received a Gold Key was Marley Anderson. Marley earned the recognition for a short film that she made titled "With or Without you." The film focuses on a relationship and

shows the story before and after a breakup through flashbacks. Marley said the project "originally started as a part of my college application process when I applied to film school... I started working on it last April. I wrote the script and started storyboarding it." Unlike many of her previous submissions, Marley said this project was different because she typically works more with painting rather than film. Because of that, submitting the film to the Scholastic competition felt like a new experience. She said that fewer students from Freeman usually submit writing pieces, which could give other students another opportunity to participate in the future. As their work moves on to the national level of judging, both students said they were happy to see their projects receive recognition and encouraged others to consider submitting their work in the future.

# Senior Walk '26

**Vrusha Pramod**  
Online Editor-in-Chief  
Centerspread Editor

In our community, there is a tradition for high school graduating seniors to return to their elementary schools and process down the halls, giving high fives to excited children. While there's a significant difference in height, the smiles are the same for both the young and older students. Graduation season is upon us. Just a couple weeks ago, millions of high school seniors across the country walked through their old elementary and middle schools in their school's graduating caps and gowns. The event is an excit-

ing time for us seniors and our families as it marks a pivotal point in our lives, but it's also a time for reflecting on how far we've come. The looks on the seniors' faces when they saw the little ones hollering for them and going for high fives says it all. It's a huge deal for us to realize where we started and now where we're headed for the next few years of our lives. It's also dawning on us that we aren't really kids anymore and are leaning into the start of our adulthoods. It feels so special to see

younger students become inspired by seeing what's in store for them the day that they also graduate. Many of these kids made posters and signs for the seniors to support them during the walk as well. Alongside the students, our old teachers were waiting for us to come up to them and snap a picture or two for remembrance. For seniors, it is a reminder of how much we have grown, and for the younger students, it is a glimpse of what they can one day achieve. Moments like these make graduation meaningful!



PHOTO: GABRIELLA MAZZEO



PHOTO: JULIETTE SCHNEIDER

# A Guide to the Perfect Prom

**Nina Henley**  
Online Editor-in-Chief  
Centerspread Editor

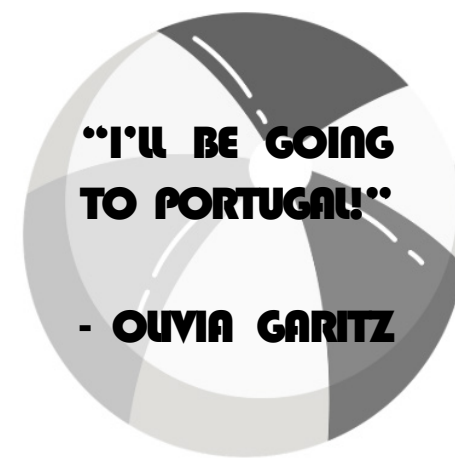
As we are approaching the end of the school year, it is arguably the hardest time of the year, especially for our juniors and seniors. Luckily, prom season has just begun and there are lots of fun distracting topics to guide students through these rough couple of weeks. Whether it's talking about what dress you bought or who you are going with, prom sparks all kinds of different conversations. Now, prom can appear to be overwhelming and making plans for it may feel confusing, so here it is: A guide to prom plans. As a senior who has been to all the dances that Freeman has hosted, I would like to advise anyone who is planning on wearing a dress to find one early. It is undoubtedly the worst feeling finding a dress last minute and the Windsor in short pump only has so many backup options. Moving onto actual prom plans, whether you are going with

your friends or your partner, having a structured idea of what you are going to do never hurts. Next step and while you do that, it's probably a good idea to figure out how you are getting to and from the dance because downtown parking can be miserable. The dance goes on from 7:30 to 10, so figuring out how long you want to stay and if you are going to do anything afterwards is the next and final step to prom plans. Depending on if you are up for an even longer day, having a sleepover with friends, watching a movie with your partner, or getting together with a group to hangout are all plausible options. This prom season is coming up quickly so it would be wise to start planning. Whatever you decide to do, make sure that it is safe and that you have lots of fun.



PHOTO: PINTREST

# Summer Plans



# Spring Word Search

- BLOSSOM
- BLOOM
- FLOWERS
- RAIN
- SHOWERS
- EASTER
- SPRING BREAK
- GRASS
- HATCH
- BIRDS
- SUNSHINE
- SEASON
- MARCH
- APRIL
- MAY

N L M O R D Y S M B M O O L B  
 N I A R M E L E S E E A W O G  
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 X L R O V Z R C O J B R I N O  
 F I S E A R A K S L E I O E L  
 B L O S S O M C B J W B M O B

# Spring Break Mania

**Vrusha Pramod**  
Online Editor-in-Chief  
Centerspread Editor

Spring break gets treated like it only matters if someone is getting on a plane, going somewhere tropical, and coming back with perfect pictures. That idea is way too narrow. A good spring break does not have to be flashy to be meaningful. Sometimes the best kind of break is the one that actually feels like a break. By the time spring break arrives, most students are exhausted, especially our seniors. School has a way of piling everything on at once, from tests and projects to jobs, sports, clubs, and family responsibilities. After weeks of that fast-paced stress, students need time to step back. That is why staying home for spring break should not be looked down on. A lot of people act like going home is boring, but it can actually be the most relaxing option. Being in a familiar place, catching up on sleep, eating real meals, and spending time with family can be more refreshing than trying to make a trip feel exciting enough to be worth it.

Not every break has to be busy to be valuable. Plenty of students in high school and college have so many different responsibilities and activities on their plates, from part-time jobs to homework, sports, and their individual hobbies. Many full-grown adults do not even know how to easily navigate so many obligations and activities at once, so students certainly need to be given substantial breaks once in a while to allow them to destress and have the ability to catch up with anything pressing. While spring break should be a time for fun, it is also the perfect time to regroup and catch up with any important assignments or study materials that have been pushed aside over the course of the semester. Even if some students find spring break as an ideal opportunity to catch up on some of their classes or other responsibilities, a portion of their week should absolutely still be used for unwinding and taking a mental break.

Spring break also matters because stress does not just affect students mentally, but can also wear them down physically, too. When students are constantly tired and overwhelmed, even a short break can make a difference. More rest, less pressure, and time away from constant deadlines can help people feel more like themselves again. That matters more than people give it credit for. At the same time, it makes sense that travel became such a big part of spring break culture. Over time, the break turned into something associated with expensive vacations and long trips. That image became so common that people started treating it like the standard version of spring break; however, just because that image is popular does not mean it should define everyone's experience. The problem is that this puts unnecessary pressure on students. Not everyone has the money to travel, and not everyone wants to spend their break in a

crowded place trying to force fun. When spring break starts to feel like another competition, it defeats the point. Students should not come back from a week off feeling like they did it wrong just because they stayed home or kept things simple. Spring break is important because students need time to breathe. Whether that means traveling, working, visiting family, or doing almost nothing at all, the point is still the same. A real break should leave students feeling rested and more prepared to finish the school year when they return!



PHOTO: PINTREST

# The Ultimate Senior Wishlist

- MONEY OR GIFT CARDS
- COLLEGE DORM SUPPLIES/MERCH
- SNACKS/CANDY
- CLOTHING
- DIGITAL CAMERA



PHOTO: PINTREST



PHOTO: PINTREST

## RVA Local Wins Grammy

**Anna Minkler**  
Staff Writer

Rapper and musician, Skillz, also known as Donnie “Mad Skillz” Lewis, has spent decades producing and writing original hip-hop music while staying closely tied to his hometown of Richmond, Virginia. He has created 12 studio albums, often referencing Richmond in his music, and is commonly known for his famous end of year “Rap Up” videos on YouTube that typically gain over 200,000 views. Skillz, the Richmond native, snagged his first Grammy win on Feb. 1st, 2026, after being nominated twice. He won the Grammy Award for “Best Spoken Word Poetry Album” with his latest project titled “Words For Days Vol. 1.” Skillz first emerged in the 1990s as an involved member of the up-and-coming Richmond hip-hop scene, which was not widely known as a hub for musical creation but has since become a thriving community for local musicians. Music at this time was mainly shared in “tight-knit communities” through independent labels, according to Richmond Magazine. According to the University of Richmond, “Skillz got his start rapping on air at WDCE, the University’s radio station.” Later, “Mad Skillz won second place in a national freestyle competition, which led to a recording contract with Atlantic Records.”

The rapper’s debut album, “From Where???” was released in 1996 and poked fun at the small town nature of Richmond. Since then, he has also been a ghost writer for music for popular artists such as Will Smith, P. Diddy, and Nicki Minaj. He also wrote Jay-Z’s 2021 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction video. Although his personal projects garner less streams, his ghostwriting is well known. “I have heard of [Skillz] but I’ve never listened to one of his albums... I have definitely listened to the songs that he helped write,” said junior hip-hop fan Finnegan Ragland.

On a more local scale, Skillz has become increasingly involved in Richmond’s musical and artistic communities. In 2018 he became the University of Richmond’s first Artists in Residence. He continues to work as an adjunct instructor of liberal arts at the School of Professional and Continuing Studies. Students and professors at the university were excited to hear of his win: “I was beyond excited when I learned [Skillz] won his first Grammy... This is a big win for him, but it’s also a win for the University and the city of Richmond as a whole,” said co-teacher Erik Nielson according to UR Now. Beyond awards, Skillz has also gained recognition through his unique annual tradition he began in 2000: the “Rap Up.” Each year Skillz releases a song recapping the year’s most significant events ranging from music and art to sports and culture. The tracks mix humour with heaving political and social commentary. His 2025 Rap Up gained over 150,000 views, touching on topics like President Trump’s reelection, AI in music, and the hit movie Sinners. These

short form videos are beloved by the internet. “[Skillz] has been doing these rap ups since I was a teenager and still the best to ever do it. It’s not a new year if Mad Skillz is not doing the Rap Up,” said commenter @kenny.b.729 on Skillz’s 2025 Rap Up video.

Even through his Rap Up videos, he pays homage to his hometown of Richmond. Despite his strong national connections through world famous artists, he remains devoted to uplifting his local culture and community. He stays involved on the University of Richmond campus and is credited with widening hip-hop education. “Mad Skillz is a familiar face on the University of Richmond campus... I can say without hesitation that he’s one of the most talented people I have ever met. What’s more, he’s a terrific teacher,” according to Professor Nielson via UR Now.

Mad Skillz won a Grammy in the category Best Spoken Word Poetry Album. This category was introduced in 2023 and the previous winners were J. Ivy and Tank and the Bangas. The category was presented on Sunday, Feb. 1st, 2026. The ceremony was held at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles, just before the main 68th Annual Grammy Awards telecast for live television. This win followed a nomination in the same category in the previous years Grammys for his project ‘The Seven Number Ones.’

Although the music industry has rapidly changed since Skillz debut, he still remains relevant in the music scene. Through his teaching and repeated investment in his local culture, he can produce relevant and quality music.

Skillz has been an outspoken advocate for reinvestment in small town art and hip-hop communities. Through his involvement at University of Richmond to his loyalty to young voices in hip-hop, Skillz has continued to keep Richmond arts alive. His philosophy, as displayed in his debut album, is that it does not matter where you are from, all music has value. Richmond’s former mayor, Levar Stoney, even formally recognized Feb. 13 as the official ‘Mad Skillz Day’ to celebrate the 23rd anniversary of “From Where???” and to honor Skillz’s influence on the city. According to 12 On Your Side, “[The album] showcases the collaborative spirit of Virginia’s music community, featuring 16 additional creative artists from the state, including 14 from Richmond.”

Mad Skillz’ long career in the arts and hip-hop has certainly left its mark on the industry, Virginia, and even Richmond. After more than two decades, he achieved one of the highest awards an artist can get, ultimately demonstrating the grit and value of the small town art scene. “I want this win to inspire and uplift every creative from where I’m from. Through hard work and dedication, you can achieve any dream you have. It may not happen when you want it to... but if you stay on your path with your passion, it will happen,” said Mad Skillz via Instagram after his Grammy win.

## Mrs. Polo Caught in Mexico Amid Rising Cartel Violence

**Colleen Conway**  
Staff Writer



PHOTO: ALJAZEERA.COM  
Fires in Mexico

Mrs. Polo, one of Freeman’s history teachers, was recently stranded in Mexico for an extra six days because of cartel violence in Jalisco. She was staying in Sayulita, about an hour outside of Puerto Vallarta and a one to two-hour drive from the airport.

Mrs. Polo was originally in the area to attend a family wedding for one of her husband’s friends, and she was only supposed to be in Mexico from Friday, Feb. 20, to Monday, Feb. 23. However, her plans soon derailed when she learned what had happened. “On Sunday morning, my husband suddenly got a text from his sister: ‘Everything is being boarded up, there’s cartel attacks going on,’” said Mrs. Polo. The head of one of the biggest drug cartels, Jalisco New Generation Cartel, had been killed by the Mexican government, and chaos had ensued.

Right after receiving the news, Mrs. Polo texted her colleagues at Freeman, briefing them on her newfound situation. “I sent our whole social studies department a text, and I said I think I might have some trouble leaving the country. It became clear pretty much immediately that that was the case, and all flights were canceled immediately,” said Mrs. Polo.

The whole situation was unnerving, as no one knew what would happen. “It was the not knowing [that was the worst], and I was anxious. Sunday was scary,” said Mrs. Polo. She and her husband had a short time to run to the store and grab a couple of things before they were told by the resort to stay in the hotel room for their safety. Residing anywhere else was uncertain. “We had friends that were staying in an Airbnb in town, and we were like, you’re not staying there; they slept on our floor,” Mrs. Polo said.

Throughout the day, the aftermath of the chaos was visible from their hotel windows as well. “We could also see smoke in the sky, and it got foggy and dark,” said Mrs. Polo. However, this only lasted a short while, and by Monday, things had seemed to calm down. “When we woke up the next day, it almost seemed like things were back to normal,” said Mrs. Polo.

However, because Mrs. Polo and her husband were originally scheduled to fly out on Monday, they were among the last to be re-booked. This meant they couldn’t get a flight until Friday and had to spend extra days in Mexico.

During this time, Mrs. Polo unfortunately had no way to set up lesson plans, log in to Google Drive, teach, or contact her students. Her only form of communication was by email on her phone. As a result, Mrs. Striker, another

Freeman history teacher, took over the lesson plans, while Mrs. Polo sought to maintain consistency in her classroom by scheduling the same substitute, Mr. Bullock, for most of her absences. This fact was significant as it was crucial to achieve a sense of normalcy in her class despite her predicament. “I think it’s pretty important that we get some stability in the room, and [the office replied] ‘Yes, this is important,’ and put him in here. So that was nice and made me feel better,” Mrs. Polo said.

This aspect was very helpful for her students as well. “We had the same sub for all three days, and it was nice and consistent,” said a 9th-grade student of Mrs. Polo’s, Anna Reppard.

Despite this, her students missed her greatly in the classroom, and they were happy when she returned. “Everybody was excited to see her back! Mrs. Polo brings a very exciting energy that just makes the students realize how much she loves teaching what she teaches. She’s so vital to the classroom,” said Anna.

While her safe return brought relief to the Freeman community, her experience also highlighted the larger situation unfolding in Mexico at the time. Drug cartels and the violence they produce have been a conflict within Mexico for over three decades, peaking in the years following 2006 when the “Mexican Drug War,” a direct, militarized conflict between the government and cartels, began. Cartels have now become some of the most dominant groups in Mexico. “Mexico was reaching a point where the cartels were, in a sense, running the government of some states and in some places,” said Mr. Larkins, a Freeman history teacher.

The United States has also played a role in this, becoming the prevailing problem it is today. “The United States has a very complicated relationship with this Mexican cartel violence because it wouldn’t be as big a problem if the United States didn’t consume as many illegal drugs as we do. It’s a trillion-dollar business, and we

are the number one consumer of these [drugs],” said Larkins. As a result, lots of drug cartels have a very high presence in areas close to the United States. “The cartels have a lot of power and influence, particularly in areas close to the United States, because they want control of the drug routes into [the country],” Mr. Larkins said.

However, the recent situation, in Feb. 2026, received specific attention due to various reasons. The first reason was that the Mexican government killed the major leader of a drug organization, El Mancho, and publicly took credit. “When the leader of a large group of people, whether it be a country or a criminal organization, is killed, all of a sudden, they are gone. This creates a power vacuum, and then organizations want to lash out,” said Mr. Larkins.

Additionally, the location of the conflict was vital to why it sparked conversation. “This incident got a lot more attention because some of the violence was in a very popular tourist city for Americans and other foreigners. So that’s why it was unusual,” said Mr. Larkins. This contributes to lots of other instances, like Mrs. Polo’s, where tourists were unable to leave.

Some also say the Mexican government’s action was due to the upcoming World Cup, jointly hosted by Canada, Mexico, and the United States. “I also think the Mexican government really wanted to send a message, or have something like this occur, before the World Cup starts, because you’re going to have lots of people from around the world coming to Mexico, Canada, and the United States. You don’t want cartel violence to get in the way,” said Mr. Larkins.

Overall, the cartel violence in Mexico has been around for numerous years, recently spiking due to the action taken by the Mexican government. This triggered conflict across the surrounding areas, harming residents and tourists. Mrs. Polo’s prolonged stay was a result of this; however, the Freeman community is happy she is back!



PHOTO: ALJAZEERA.COM  
Car crashes in Mexico

## A Taste of Paris: Show Choir Brings Paris to Freeman

**Ingrid Jones**  
Sports Editor & Copy Editor

Show Choir is a class at Freeman High School that choreographs and rehearses shows that involve singing, dancing, and the band, to ultimately compete against other schools. Every year, the show has a different theme and this year’s theme is Paris, titled “Bienvenue Paris.”

The process of show choir is a lengthy one. From rehearsals to performances, there is a lot of time put into the show. Preparation itself starts in August with a “pre show choir” camp. “The prep process is almost all year,” said Freeman junior in show choir, Reed Jones.

The camp involves team bonding, revealing the theme, working on songs, running numbers, getting choreography and blocking, and finally, making sure everyone is performing well on stage.

On every day off school when they can’t rehearse in class, there are rehearsals from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. through the months of August, to February. The week before Martin Luther King Junior day, the group works with their show designer, Ryan, who helps with

any struggles and makes changes.

The lengths of competitions can go from lasting four to 18 hours, including warm ups, performances, and awards. Schools are categorized into different tiers based on their size and a school’s tier indicates who they compete against. The last competition of the season is the ‘Grand Champ’ and involves schools from every tier.

There are a lot of different aspects to competitions, and Freeman junior Rose Keiper’s favorite parts are “making fun memories and performing in front of the schools we haven’t seen yet.”

The overall atmosphere of the show choir community is one of its highlights. “My favorite part of show choir is being really close with everyone who’s in it. It’s a really good environment,” said Raina Moreno, Freeman junior in show choir. The team themselves do not perform for the whole time, so while they wait there are many forms of entertainment available. “There’s food trucks, vendors, and tons of fun things,” said Rose.

There are many different groups that contribute to the success of a performance, including the crew and the school’s band, also known as the ‘Schwazz’ band.

“They’re really important because you can’t compete without the live band,” said Raina.

The band also plays a key role in adapting to what is going on during the performance. When asked about the band, Reed shared that, “They really make sure that they’re following the tempo that is given by the girls and making sure they are following their dynamic too.” There are also other people who help behind the scenes, including the crew, who take care of important details to alleviate any stress during a show. “They help us change really fast and do all the things we shouldn’t be worrying about,” said Raina.

The crew is also sometimes involved in small elements of the performance on stage, whether that is being a side character, or handing the girls props. “They just really make the show come alive by adding little things,” said Reed.

With the band and crew playing important roles in the show’s success, the girls make sure to incorporate them in the tight knit community of show choir. “[The girls are] super inclusive with the crew and everything,” Reed said.

With all of the time spent together the team gets to bond and grow very close. The group’s dy-

amic is strong and serves as a safe space. “Our team dynamic is very positive and a sisterhood that is so special. [There are] girls you can talk to, and you know they won’t judge you,” said Rose.

Show choir may seem like it’s all fun, but it can come with challenges as well. One challenge is time management. “The hardest part is getting into the groove, you lose a lot of free time and that’s hard for people to adjust to,” said Rose. When these challenges get tough, the group’s environment stays positive and ready with encouragement. “It’s always very uplifting and no one’s ever upset, if someone is upset, then, everyone just uplifts each other,” said Raina.

With the theme of the show this year being based around Paris, there is an essence of Paris brought to life with the performance. “This is what Paris would be like and it’s all fun and glittery and romantic,” said Reed. Some of the songs even incorporate the native language of Paris. “We are speaking in french for one whole song and the beginning of one of our other songs,” said Rose. Some other exciting parts of the show are the tricks in the closer. “There are really cool moments in the closer, like, I backflip and there’s jump splits,” said Raina. Freeman’s show choir dedicates themselves to make the show the best that they can. As the competition season continues, Freeman will have the chance to watch the show and be brought to Paris.



PHOTO: MAGDELENA JONES  
Freeman students after show

# Coach Parpart Wins NFHS National Coach

**Charlotte White**  
Staff Writer

As the spring sports season begins, the girls' tennis team is ready for another season after their recent four State titles. The team has received more attention this year due to head coach Clarence Parpart being awarded as one of the NFHS National Coaches of the Year. Only 24 coaches are chosen nationwide.

This award selects twenty-four high school coaches from across the country. This award highlights the spirit and determination of each coach. The award "honors coaches in the top 10 girls sports and top 10 boys sports," said NFHS. Each coach is recognized for different aspects of their coaching.

Many decisions go into the selection of this award as there are many nominees. Coach Parpart met many of these standards due to his outstanding achievements. "No head coach in Virginia high school girls tennis history has more wins than Douglas S. Freeman High School coach Larry Parpart, who continues to add to the record books after 47 years in the position," said NFHS.

Coach Parpart has been a prominent part of Freeman Athletics as he has coached Basketball, Cross Country, Track, and Ten-

nis. He is now primarily coaching girls' tennis and is creating a motivating atmosphere for them after their previous wins. "He has a very big impact. He's always encouraging us to do our best, but also not pushing us over our limit," said senior Annie Flippin.

Coach Parpart has led the team to four prior state championships for Freeman, and they are hoping to continue this streak this upcoming season. "We want to help our four outstanding seniors write the final chapter of their tennis career at Douglas Freeman," said Coach Parpart.

The impact that Parpart has on the team is one of the primary reasons that he received the award. "From him, I've learned that one match doesn't define everything. A lot of times in tennis, you think if you lose a match, it's gonna affect you a lot, but he reminds us to keep going and keep getting better," said Annie.

The titles that they have won have not come easily. Lots of hard work, strategy, and teamwork go into each one of their successes. "Understanding that each match is important, and regardless of the opponent's record, they have to be ready to play and be focused for each and every match. And try to make sure we are well rested and healthy," said Parpart.

One of the team's sayings is to

always have a lot of "GUSTO" when they are playing. This is defined as "enjoyment or vigor in doing something." This is what the team is cultured around and focuses on achieving every day, both individually and together.

"To me, GUSTO means to be kind to people and be kind to your teammates and never give up," said junior Josie Fonville. This is Josie's second year on the team, and this is something that Coach has taught her, which she applies to many parts of her life.

Coach Parpart not only cares about the success of the team, but he also values the connections made within the team. "Outside of tennis, he's a very funny person. He has a lot of personality, and that helps us connect with him better," said Annie. "We know him on a very personal level, rather than just being our coach."

Although tennis is an individual sport Coach Parpart has a different perspective on the way the sport is centered. He brings all players together creating a team not just individual players. "Parpart, a VHSL Hall-of-Famer since 2021, said he emphasizes making tennis a 'team sport' for his student-athletes," said NFHS.

Not all matches are wins for the teams, but Coach Parpart creates a positive atmosphere for everyone involved. "He motivates us, he

tells us to focus on the little things, rather than like the whole picture, not just win or lose, but each point, kind of focusing on what comes next, which helps all of us just be less nervous," said Annie.

The moments that happen throughout the season stick with Coach Parpart and the players on the team. They make new connections every year, which makes the team even stronger. "I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to work with so many fantastic individuals who have their own special qualities, and each player and team has given me so many wonderful memories," said Parpart.

These words from Parpart not

only affect the team in the moment but also carry on with them outside of their life. "He has taught us to be better people, to be kind to everyone, and do good in everything you do, whether it's school work or in other things in life," said Annie.

Ultimately, all of the aspects contributed to Coach Parpart's nomination for National Coach of the Year. He is passionate about what he does, which is what makes the team. "Being around outstanding young people who are enthusiastic about being a part of a team and who work very hard to continue to improve in everything they do is my favorite part of coaching," said Parpart.



PHOTO: @DSFGIRLS TENNIS

Girls' tennis team wins 5th straight State Championship

## 'Blade Angels' Skate Their Way to Victory

**Ellie Broocks**  
Staff Writer

Dating back to as early as 1924, the Winter Olympics have been an exciting event viewed from many countries around the world. It was known as International Winter Sports Week before coining the iconic name that we all know today. Opposing what is most likely popular belief, the Figure Skating portion was added to the Summer Olympics in 1908. It appeared 10 years later in 1920, and after another 4 years, it was finally added as a permanent part of the Winter Olympics.

In general, the Olympics create a lot of buzz, but recently, the Winter Olympics have been a hot topic, with top athletes from all over the world competing for gold. One of the most dedicated groups in our time has made a star appearance recently. A group referred to as the "Blade Angels," led by figure skater Alysa Liu, alongside Amber Glenn and Isabeau Levito, stood out amongst the Olympic viewers due to their pure enjoyment of the sport and dedication to their team and country. The group is considered to be some of the "strongest US competitors in history" and is often called "American showgirls on ice." Although the group was competing against each other during each event, they came together to support one another, using inspiring words throughout each performance, coining their group nickname. Each girl has openly expressed their strong love and bond with one another, highlighting the importance of female friendships within sports where rivalry and competition tend to take over.

Amber Glenn, a 26-year-old, is a three-time US champion known for her artistry, athleticism, and being an openly-queer skater. Growing up in Plano, Texas, she

began skating as early as 5-years-old in a local shopping mall skating rink before later moving to Colorado Springs to train. The new location gave her access to an Olympic Training Center, which provided her with more resources to take her skating to the next level. The 2026 Olympics were her first year after missing the 2022 Beijing Olympics. She placed fifth in the women's singles category and 13th place in the short program category. She skated to Madonna's "Like a Prayer."

Alysa Liu is a widely known skater, originally from the San Francisco Bay Area. She spent a lot of time training at the Oakland Ice Center, and eventually began homeschooling to help progress her skating and prioritize finding a balance between schoolwork and training. From there, she competed in the 2022 Beijing Olympics. Originally, she retired following Beijing, where she placed 7th in the Women's Singles category, but decided to return for 2026, becoming a worldwide champion by winning Olympic gold in the Women's singles and the team event. She skated to "Promise" by Laufey and "MacArthur Park" by Donna Summer.

Isabeau Levito is a 2023 U.S. champion, also competing in the 2026 Olympics, placing 8th in the Women's Singles category. She grew up in Mount Holly, New Jersey. She began training at the age of three, primarily practicing in South Jersey. She mostly skated at the Igloo Ice Rink in Mount Laurel for the majority of her career. Her coach, Julia Kuznetsova, has worked with her since she began to skate, helping her reach her goal of competing in the Olympics. During her 2026 performance, she skated to "Zou Bisou Bisou" from the Millionaires and "Almost in Your Arms" from Houseboat.

Many members of the Freeman community are aware of

the accomplishments that the 'Blade Angels' have made during this past Olympic season. Grace Deng, Freeman junior, had a lot to say on the topic. "I've never watched the figure skating part of the Olympics," she said. "Once I saw Alysa Liu's performance online, I decided to watch other skaters and thought it was really entertaining." When asked about what platforms she saw the performances on, she said, "I saw them on Instagram and TikTok. I only saw Alysa's performance, but I got curious after and decided to watch the two other girls."

The Blade Angels have been gaining more and more popularity as of late. Freeman junior Trista Vu noted how she watches the Olympics often and has been following the 'Blade Angels' throughout the entire experience. "I always wanted to go watch the Olympics in person when I was little," she said. "Seeing the friendship and bond of everyone on the US team, especially the girls, is really inspiring to me," Vu noted. Almost all of my friends don't know about the Blade Angels, and she has been trying to get them invested in their competitions and introduce them to the Olympic experience.

Although all 3 members of the "Blade Angels" have been gaining popularity, Alysa Liu has made an impact on the world overall. She has recently appeared on The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon, The TODAY show, and 60 Minutes, following her Olympic performances. She discussed things surrounding her retirement, comeback, and sudden rise to fame.

The whole world is waiting patiently to see what is in store for the 'Blade Angels,' following each of their journeys closely. Whether it be from their couch watching on a home screen, or real life in person at the Olympics, everyone is staying tuned in to see what happens next for these rising stars.

## Twin Wins

**Sophia Bove**  
Staff Writer

This year at the 2026 Winter Olympics, history was made. The United States Men's Ice Hockey team won gold for the first time in 46 years. In a truly historic feat, they did it alongside the U.S. Women's team. The two teams accomplished something no American team has ever done before, defeating the Canadians in 2-1 overtime victories to win gold at the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics.

Exactly 46 years to the day after the "Miracle on Ice" team played at Lake Placid in 1980, the United States added to the Olympic lore when center Jack Hughes scored the golden goal in overtime. Hughes received a pass from Zach Werenski, a defenseman, and scored through the Canadian goalie's legs to complete the game

in this room is special. He was with us in spirit the whole tournament."

Unlike the men's hockey team, the U.S. ladies are no strangers to a gold medal. Before this year, they also won gold in 2018 and 1998.

For women's hockey, which was played two days before the men's on February 19, 2026, they trailed Canada 1-0 most of the game, and then tied up the score when forward Hilary Knight scored a goal in the last two minutes, sending the game into overtime.

Just four minutes into overtime, defensewomen Megan Keller scored the winning goal after capitalizing on a line shift by Canada to seal the USA's 2-1 victory. Through this win, the United States avenged their 2022 loss in the Beijing final to Canada, and it solidified Hilary Knight's legacy as arguably the "greatest women's hockey player" in history, said ESPN.



Johnny Gaudreau's kids joined Team USA to celebrate

in sudden-death overtime and end the 46-year gold medal drought.

In the first of three 20-minute periods, Matt Boldy of Team USA broke through Canada's defense to score the first goal of the game. During the second and third periods, Canada intensified the pressure after a goal by Cale Makar, allowing the game to go into overtime.

Despite Hughes being the one to score the game-winning goal, U.S. goalie Connor Hellebuyck was described as "the best player on the ice" by ESPN for making a total of 41 saves, allowing the U.S. to stay afloat and win.

During the celebratory photo, the team brought out the children of the late Johnny Gaudreau. He was an American left winger for the Calgary Flames and then the Columbus Blue Jackets, and would have been a candidate for this Olympic team. The men's team dedicated Gaudreau "his own area in the locker room," said ESPN, and honored his legacy by having his children join the team on the ice to celebrate.

"To be able to get it done like that, to win, to have [Johnny Gaudreau's] jersey out there in the team photo, have his kids come out and be with us, we're obviously thinking of him," said Auston Matthews, the team captain. "The impact that he's had on so many guys

Freeman's resident hockey enthusiast, junior Ella Maltby,

was excited to hear that both the men's and women's teams had won the finals. "I was shocked. I was celebrating with my mom and family," she said. Ella was especially impressed with how the women's team rallied in the final moments. "It was just awesome how the women's team came back in two minutes," she said.

She admires players like Layla Edwards and Megan Keller. "I grew up watching Megan Keller play hockey," as well as the Hughes brothers, as her cousins are New Jersey Devils fans, so "[she's] become a fan as well, being around them so much," said Ella.

Women's hockey captain Kendall Coyne Schofield said, "We're not playing for medals; we're playing to inspire the next generation."

Reflecting on visibility, Ella acknowledged a challenge for women's hockey: "Because the women, often winners, don't play in the NHL, they get really overlooked. Honestly, I'm [happier] about their win than the men's."

For Ella and many others, it wasn't just about the wins, but about how the players embraced each other afterward, the sense of camaraderie and spirit that was evident both on and off the ice. "It's not just a sport, it's a family," said Ella.

## Ilia Malinin

AKA THE "QUAD GOD"

AMERICAN FIGURE SKATER BORN  
IN FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

2026 OLYMPIC GAMES TEAM  
EVENT GOLD MEDALIST

PLACED 8<sup>TH</sup> IN THE 2026  
OLYMPIC MEN'S SINGLES EVENT

2X WORLD CHAMPION

4X U.S. NATIONAL CHAMPION



## Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" Enters Theaters!

**Caitlyn Kennedy**  
Staff Writer

Emily Brontë's novel "Wuthering Heights," published in 1847, was adapted into a movie and released in theaters on February 13, 2026. The movie was directed by Emerald Fennell and stars actress Margot Robbie and actor Jacob Elordi as main characters Catherine and Heathcliff.

The movie's total global gross has surpassed \$200 million, with over \$34 million in North America. As viewers watch the production, controversy has emerged over whether the movie correctly aligns with Brontë's novel, which is based on a tragic love story that takes place in the Yorkshire Moors of England.

Anaya Kaul, a junior at Freeman, explains her take on the novel, despite not yet watching the movie. The book takes a spin on the commonly glamorized look of love and shows how it can be expressed in many ways. "It showed the duality of love," said Anaya. "Everyone portrays love and romanticizes it, but really, there [are] two sides to it."

Furthermore, in her novel, Brontë emphasizes the complexity of the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff. "It does a really good job at confronting gender roles," said Anaya. "It shows that the man isn't the only one capable of abuse, but the woman is just as capable of doing it too."

Anaya thinks that the movie can't cover the book in the right way. "I don't think the movie can capture the essence of the book," she said. This is because the book was written in the nineteenth cen-

tury. Since then, our perspectives and lifestyles have changed. "I feel like the modern perspective could muddy the waters with the way the movie was produced," said Anaya.

Juliet Gardner, a senior at Freeman, recently saw the movie and did not necessarily enjoy it. "It was very different from what I was expecting, and it was not emotional for me," she said. Although she has not read the book, she thinks that if she had, her perspective might have differed with more knowledge of what it included. "I think it would have been more interesting if I had [read the book]," said Juliet.

This unanticipated reaction to the movie's plot was agreed on by others, too. "I originally thought it was going to be a cute and exciting romance story between Heathcliff and Catherine," said Braedan Conway, a freshman at Freeman. "Instead, I walked into an overwhelming film mixed with frustration, confusion, and tragedy."

However, Juliet was impressed with the movie's specificity. "The movie had an insane attention to detail," said Juliet. "Wuthering Heights" took nine months to produce and had an \$80 million budget, spending time and money on the sets and decorations. "They put a lot of time into the movie, and you can tell," she said.

The performance of the actors has been applauded as well. "I thought Jacob Elordi and Margot Robbie were great actors," said Braedan. "Wuthering Heights" was Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi's first time acting together. "They executed their roles very clearly and beautifully and worked very well together in the film," said Braedan.

In addition to the entertain-



"Wuthering Heights" cast on the red carpet.

ment provided by the acting, the soundtrack of the movie has also been appreciated. "Wuthering Heights" features a companion album with pop singer, Charlie XCX. "I really loved the soundtrack, and I really liked 'Chains of Love,'" said Juliet.

Overall, those who have seen the movie think reading the book prior would have given them a better idea of what the movie entailed. "I would like to read the book to totally compare the two," said Braedan. "I've heard the book dives deeper into the intricate and deeper elements of the overall relationship," she said.

Juliet has a very similar take on how the book might alter her impression. "I would maybe be inclined to go watch it again if I read the book," said Juliet. "I think that [it] would

be interesting to see if my perspective [changes]," she said.

People who saw the movie after reading the book have more knowledge of what it is about and a more vivid differentiation of the two. "I want to see if the book was as good as some people say the movie is, or vice versa," said Juliet.

Juliet thinks that the movie has left a split effect on viewers. "You either think it's super emotional, a really great story, and you can't stop thinking about it, or you thought it was mediocre and not so great," said Juliet. For her specifically, she did not leave the movie emotionally unstable. "When I wasn't distraught and when I wasn't sobbing, that's when I was like, it's a failure," she said.

On the other hand, Braedan was left perplexed and sorrowful with how the movie ended. "Ev-

erything was sad and happened super fast," she said. This ending is what Brontë intended when writing what she expected to be a story with a "destructive relationship."

In Juliet's opinion, despite its rocky plot and surprising storyline, the movie, for the most part, was put together nicely. "I think that there are some really iconic scenes and some cool parts," said Juliet. "I think that the acting was good, and they were cast well," she said. These various pieces worked to build the movie adaptation.

If you are interested in figuring out the correlation between written and filmed versions of Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights," pick up a copy at any local bookstore or grab a friend and go to the movie theater. The movie is expected to remain in theaters until late April 2026.

## Esports Has Unlocked a New World

**Maria McGuill**  
Opinions Editor

As of 2026, Freeman has gained a new Virginia High School League (VHSL) team. Esports (Electronic Sports), a video game team, has been rising in popularity among high schools. In the Henrico County area, Godwin, Deep Run, and Hermitage high school have all jumped into this new world of sports and electronics.

Esports are multiplayer video games played at a competitive level. The games mimic real life sports and common video games. Over the past five years, Esports has increased its market value by 70%, starting at \$957 million in 2019 and \$1.6 billion in 2024. Currently, there are more than 8,000 schools in the United States with an Esports team. Teams often compete for prizes and are streamed by live audiences.

A couple of years ago, Richard Orr, a business teacher, sparked the idea. Years later, at the beginning of 2025, it came to fruition when Henrico County applied for and received the grant from the Virginia Department of Edu-



One of many Esports games.

cation to create Esports teams in all high schools. Since then, Mr. Fabian, an AP government teacher, has led the team at Freeman.

When the team was first developing, they faced technical challenges that have since been resolved. "I was brand new to this, so I was learning how to do it. Now, we think we've got the system down pretty well," said Mr. Fabian. Their current obstacle is to get the members more competition-ready. "Just like any other sport, the more you practice, the better you get," he said. Furthermore, Mr. Fabian continues to grow the team's popularity at Freeman in hopes for a larger team over the next few years.

The addition of Esports to Freeman has given students another opportunity to become involved

in the school. "I really love that it has given a couple of kids a place to be that they wouldn't have otherwise...and it's great, they're taking it seriously, and it's created this fun, small community," said Mr. Fabian. Students have had access to varsity sports, music, and the arts, and now have adopted the opportunity to play competitive online games outside of their bedrooms. This opens up another outlet of community. "The other thing about it is that it really encourages kids who are in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)," he said. Also, students do not have to give up this outlet, as many colleges have started to offer their own Esports teams.

It is like any other VHSL team to become a member of the team. Students must keep a certain grade

point average and must be taking an adequate amount of classes: 5 classes per semester. Students must also not exceed the maximum number of absences each semester. The code of conduct is also expected to be upheld before, during, and after making the team, along with maintaining respectful behavior at school.

The Esports team has practices each Monday and competes with other schools on Thursdays. "I also have a lot of the members of the team frequently come during Freeman Focus to play and just kind of hone in their skills," said Mr. Fabian. The team does not know who they are competing against until the day of the event. Mr. Fabian has added Godwin to the rival list, but has yet to challenge them.

On the day of a competition, the team meets, logs on to compete, and has two students play at a time. The team has a chat box in order to contact their opponents, but they are unable to verbally communicate with the other team during a match. Mr. Fabian is working to grow their team. "Freeman competes in Mario Kart, but in the fall, we're going to expand that to some other games," he said. Currently, they have played Northern Vir-

ginia schools. If Freeman makes it to the playoffs, they will compete in divisions and regionals at the beginning of April 2026, with the opportunity to go to Old Dominion University for a state in-house competition at the end of April.

College Esports has over 200 institutions in the NACE (National Association of Collegiate Esports). Some offer varsity programs and many colleges now also offer scholarships for Esports. "When I went back and got my second master's degree, the university had an Esports program that offered scholarships for different Esports players," said Mr. Fabian. After college students can further an interest in Esports, as they have professional leagues. The teams are growing globally through streaming platforms, live speculations, and sponsors.

As time goes on, Mr. Fabian wants to keep the team alive. "My big hope for the future is just that we'll have more kids coming out," he said. The team can have a total of 15 members, but there are plans to create an Esports club for interested students who did not make the team. Esports is on the rise, and Mr. Fabian is excited to see its growth in the following years.

## TikTok to the Top: Underground Artists Breaking Into the Mainstream

**Tylerson Twardy**  
A&E/Graphics Editor

A lot of people used to discover music through the radio, TV, or by hearing about new artists from friends. Now, for many teenagers, that happens on TikTok. The app has changed the music industry in a huge way because it gives smaller and lesser known artists a chance to be heard by millions of people almost overnight. What starts as a short clip attached to a trend, dance, or edit can quickly turn into something much bigger. In some cases, an artist who was mostly unknown can suddenly end up climbing the charts, getting signed, or becoming a name that people everywhere recognize.

What makes TikTok so different is how fast music spreads on it. A song does not need a full radio rollout or a huge promotional campaign before people start hearing it. Sometimes all it takes is one catchy lyric, emotional line, or beat that fits a trend. Once people start using that sound in their own videos, the song can spread quickly. Then, more users hear it, save it, and go stream the full version on Spotify or Apple Music. Because of that, TikTok has created a new path for artists who might not have had access to the traditional music industry before.

For underground artists, this has opened a lot of doors. Instead of waiting for a label or manager to notice them, they can post their own music directly and see what happens. That makes the pro-

cess feel a lot more accessible. A teenager making songs in their bedroom technically has the same chance of reaching people online as someone with a professional studio, especially if their song connects with listeners. TikTok can reward music that feels authentic, relatable, or easy to use in content, and that helps independent artists stand out, such as Mae Stephens, whose song blew up on TikTok, said, "It proves that TikTok can really take someone and boost them so far," which supports the idea that the app can help unknown artists break into the mainstream.

At the same time, going viral is not always as simple as it looks. From the outside, it can seem like a random video just blows up and changes someone's life. But behind that, there is usually more going on. Artists often post multiple clips of the same song, interact with comments, tease unreleased music, and try to build attention before the full track even comes out. In that way, TikTok is not just a place where songs randomly trend. It is also a place where artists have to market themselves constantly. They are not only musicians anymore. A lot of them have to act like content creators as well.

That can be both good and bad. On one hand, it gives artists more control over their own success. They do not have to wait for

someone else to tell them they are worth listening to. On the other hand, it can put pressure on them to always be online, always posting, and always trying to chase the next viral moment. That pressure can make music feel less about artistry and more about what will perform well in the algorithm. A great song might not get attention if it does not fit what people want to use in videos, while a short catchy part of another song might take off for reasons that have nothing to do with the full track itself.

Another interesting part of this is how much power listeners have now. People on TikTok do not just listen to music. They help decide what becomes popular. A song can gain momentum because users choose to make edits with it, use it in storytimes, attach it to funny trends, or turn it into a dance. That means fans and regular users play a huge role in shaping what rises. In a way, the audience has become part of the promotional process. That is different from older music industry models, where labels, radio stations, and critics had more control over what people heard.

Even though TikTok can launch an artist fast, it does not always guarantee long term success. Some artists go viral for one song and then struggle to keep that same attention afterward. That is because there is a difference between hav-

ing a trending sound and building a real career. A trend might last for a few weeks, but a music career takes consistency, strong releases, and an audience that stays interested after the viral moment fades. Because of that, TikTok fame can be a starting point, but it is not always enough by itself.

Still, it is hard to ignore how much the app has changed the way artists break through. It has made the music industry feel more immediate and more connected to everyday people. Someone can hear a 15 second clip, look up the artist, stream the full song, and become a fan all in the same day. That speed has helped underground artists get opportunities that would have been much harder to get in the past.

Overall, TikTok has become one of the biggest tools for music discovery today, especially for younger audiences. It gives underground artists a real chance to be heard, and it has made mainstream success feel more reachable than before. At the same time, it has also created a new kind of pressure where artists have to balance their music with constant online promotion. Even with those challenges, one thing is clear: TikTok is no longer just an app for trends and short videos. It is now one of the most powerful places where the future of music is being shaped.



PHOTO:OXFORD ECONOMICS

# Megan Moroney's Richmond Pop-Up Show

**Saanvi Gourishetty**  
Head of News

On February 21, 2026, country music artist Megan Moroney performed a special acoustic pop-up concert at The National in Richmond, Virginia, as part of her promotional tour titled "9 Cities. 9 Days." The tour featured a series of performances across the country to celebrate her new music and connect with fans on a smaller scale. What made the Richmond stop stand out was partially its accessibility. Tickets for the show were priced at just \$9, with proceeds going toward the Megan Moroney Foundation, an organization focused on youth support through mental health awareness and anti-bullying initiatives. Richmond was one of only nine cities selected for the tour, making the event feel unique for fans in the area. Senior Juliette Schneider, who previously attended Moroney's concert during the Virginia State Fair on September 24, 2023, believes the city's music culture likely played a role in the decision. "I think Richmond has a really strong country music fanbase, especially with a lot of college students and people our age who listen to her," she said. For Juliette, seeing Megan

Moroney live in 2023 gave her an impression of the artist's stage presence. She described the experience as memorable, stating that the artist stood out as a performer who connected with the crowd. "She has a really strong stage presence," Schneider said. "From what I remember, she was a great live singer and connected with the audience." Throughout the concert, the audience played a major role in the atmosphere of the show. "From what I remember, the crowd was really energetic. People were singing along and waving their phones," she said. Although Schneider attended the 2023 state fair performance rather than the 2026 pop-up show, her experience offers insight into what many fans may have expected from Moroney's Richmond appearance. At the state fair concert, she arrived early to secure a good view of the stage. "I got there about one or two hours before the show started because I had been there for the state fair, and I also had seats towards the front," she said. Tickets for the state fair performance were relatively easy to obtain compared to what many people experience today for more mainstream concerts. "When I saw her in 2023 at the Virginia State Fair for the Lucky Tour, it was

actually really easy to get tickets because the event was a part of the fair," Schneider said. "Compared to now, they were really affordable, and I ended up getting front-row seats." Moroney's decision to price tickets at \$9 for the "9 Cities. 9 Days." tour created a rare opportunity for fans who might not normally attend concerts due to cost. Schneider believes the idea could be beneficial if more artists adopted similar strategies. "I definitely think more artists should try something like that," she said. "It makes concerts way more accessible for fans who normally wouldn't be able to afford them." For many fans, especially students, lower ticket prices can make a major difference in their ability to experience live music. The charitable aspect of the event also added significance for attendees. According to Juliette, knowing that ticket sales supported an organization focused on young people likely would have made the experience more meaningful. "Yes, definitely," she said. "It would make it feel like the concert wasn't just entertainment but also something supporting something important." The Megan Moroney Foundation focuses on initiatives related to mental health awareness and anti-bullying, issues that affect

many teenagers and young adults. Being chosen as one of the nine cities on the promotional tour also gave Richmond fans a sense of exclusivity. Schneider described the opportunity as something that made the event feel more special for the local community. "It felt special knowing only a few cities got the experience," she said. Even though Juliette did not get the chance to meet Moroney in person at the state fair concert, she said there is something she wishes she could have told the singer. "I didn't get to meet her, but I wish I had told her how good she sounded live and how much her music means to a lot of her fans," she said. Live music experiences often leave lasting impressions on audiences. Juliette believes Megan

Moroney's concerts offer an environment that many fans appreciate. "I'd tell them it's definitely worth going," she said when asked what she would say to someone who has never attended a Megan Moroney show. "She sounds amazing live, and the environment at her concerts is so welcoming." If Moroney were to return to Richmond in the future, Schneider said she would likely attend again. "Definitely," she said. "After seeing her live once, I'd definitely go again if the ticket prices were affordable and if it were to be close by again." By offering affordable tickets and donating proceeds to a charitable cause, the "9 Cities. 9 Days." tour created a concert experience that was for entertainment and impact.



Megan Pictured on stage in Richmond, VA.

# Remembering Eric Dane

**Vrusha Pramod**  
Online Editor-in-Chief  
Centerspread Editor

Eric Dane, a television actor known to many viewers for his roles on "Grey's Anatomy," "The Last Ship," and "Euphoria," died on February 19, 2026, in Los Angeles at the age of 53. A statement released by his family and confirmed by People, described his final days as being spent surrounded by close friends, his devoted wife and his two daughters, Billie and Georgia. The family asked for privacy as they navigate this difficult time. "With heavy hearts, we share that Eric Dane passed on Thursday afternoon following a courageous battle with ALS," the statement read. "He spent his final days surrounded by dear friends, his devoted wife, and his two beautiful daughters who were the center of his world." Dane first went public with his ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) diagnosis in April 2025, revealing that he was grateful for his family's support and planned to continue working while navigating his illness. ALS, a progressive neurodegenerative disease, affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, eventually leading to loss of muscle control and paralysis. In the year following his diagnosis, Dane continued to be involved in projects and advocacy. He was scheduled to attend events supporting ALS research, although physical limitations related to his condition prevented him from attending some of these engagements. Over the course of more than three decades in film and television, Dane became a familiar presence on American

television. While he appeared in a variety of projects, his career was often associated with long running ensemble dramas that attracted dedicated audiences. Eric William Dane was born on November 9th, 1972, in San Francisco, California. He grew up in the Bay Area and was involved in athletics during his teenage years. Surprisingly, he initially had little interest in acting; however, that changed after he took part in a school production of "Arthur Miller's All My Sons." The experience led him to consider acting more seriously, and after graduating from high school he moved to Los Angeles to pursue work in the entertainment industry. Like many actors starting out in television during the 1990s, Dane built his early career through a series of guest roles and small appearances. He appeared on several network shows including "Saved by the Bell," "The Wonder Years," and "Married... with Children." Although these early roles offered limited screen time, they allowed him to gain experience and visibility in an extremely competitive field. Over time, he continued to appear in television and gradually established a steady presence within the entertainment industry. Dane rose to international fame for his portrayal of Dr. Mark Sloan, also known as "McSteamy," on the long-running medical television show, "Grey's Anatomy." His work on the series turned him into a household name within pop culture history. Dane remained an integral part of the series until 2012. During this time, his character's storyline expanded beyond its original introduction as a rival to other doctors on the show. Writers

developed Sloan into a more complex character whose personal life consisted of a variety of friendships, romantic relationships, and unexpected responsibilities. Following his death, the cast of "Grey's Anatomy" and the show's creator Shonda Rhimes have spoken out. On behalf of her company, Shondaland, Rhimes wrote: "Eric Dane was a beloved member of the Shondaland and 'Grey's Anatomy' families. He was truly a gifted actor whose portrayal of Dr. Mark Sloan left an indelible mark on the series and on audiences around the world." She continues, writing "We are grateful for the artistry, spirit, friendship and humanity he shared with us for so many years. Our hearts are with his family, loved ones, and all who were touched by his work." After "Grey's Anatomy," Dane joined the cast of HBO's newest 2019 teenage drama, "Euphoria," which explored the lives of teenagers dealing with identity, relationships, and addiction. He played Cal Jacobs, a role that differed significantly from many of Dane's earlier performances. Rather than portraying a heroic or positive figure, Cal Jacobs was written as a complicated and often controversial character. The performance not only introduced Dane as an actor to younger generations, but also demonstrated his willingness to take on darker material that viewers hadn't seen from him as much before. Dane's career developed during a period when television itself was undergoing significant change. When he first began acting, network television dominated the entertainment industry and guest appearances on established shows were a common entry point for as-



Memorial of Eric Dane poster.

piring actors. By the later stages of his career, streaming platforms and premium cable networks had become major sources of how people watched their TV. This made his last years as an actor significantly more impactful and gave him the opportunity to make himself even further known as an entertainer.

Eric Dane will be remembered as a remarkable actor whose talent and dedication left a lasting mark on television and on the hearts of viewers. He will be deeply missed, but the impact of his work and the characters he brought to life will continue to be remembered and celebrated for years to come.

## Coming Soon to Altria Theater



& Juliet



Mamma Mia!



Dirty Dancing

A Celebration of Creativity, Skills, and Performance

## Turmoil



### The Canadian airplane

At about 11:40 PM on Sunday March 22nd, a Canadian airplane landing in New York's LaGuardia airport crashed into a fire truck at about 100 miles per hour. Prior to the incident, another flight attempting take off aborted due to an odor detected by pilots. A firetruck was called and began crossing the runway, but seconds later was told to stop. As a result, the truck was in the path of runway four, and the Canadian airplane t-boned the vehicle. Officials are still investigating the incident, however the death of both pilots has been confirmed.



### A crowded airport

Crowded airports have been a source of traveller dismay as TSA lines have become hours long due to a partial government shutdown keeping agents from getting paid, resulting in some workers quitting. These understaffing issues were recently exacerbated by the above incident at LaGuardia airport. This has also negatively impacted travel through rerouted or cancelled flights. To aid the situation, the Trump Administration has deployed ICE agents to assist with security checks; however, that has been met with controversy concerning their qualifications.



### ICE officers in airport

Some of the nation's busiest airports have had ICE agents deployed in an attempt to speed up TSA security checks and to provide crowd control at airports that have been severely affected by the Homeland Security Department shutdown. More than 11% of TSA workers have either quit or called out of work due to a lack of payment, resulting in longer wait times for security checks. ICE has assisted by monitoring exits and being a security presence amid the safety concerns during the war on Iran.

Content by Maggie Walton

### Caitlyn Kennedy Staff Writer

On Wednesday morning of March 25, 2026, NATO members Estonia and Latvia claim stray drones were brought into their territory during Russia's drone attack on Ukraine. NATO members have said that this was one of Russia's biggest daytime drone attacks since Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion four years ago.

Estonia's Internal Security Service explained that the drone entered the country from Russia's territory and collided into the chimney of the Auvere power plant in Ida-Viru County. On the other hand, Latvia's armed forces have shared that the drone crashed into the southern Kraslava region of Latvia without any damage following.

There is controversy between the two countries on where the drones originated from. Estonian officials claim the stray drone came from Russian airspace amidst a Ukrainian counter attack. In contrary, Latvia's President, Edgars Rinkevics says the drone was Ukrainian. The most recent drone incur-

# Iran Strikes U.S. Military Bases



PHOTO: REUTERS

## Iranian strike overseas boat.

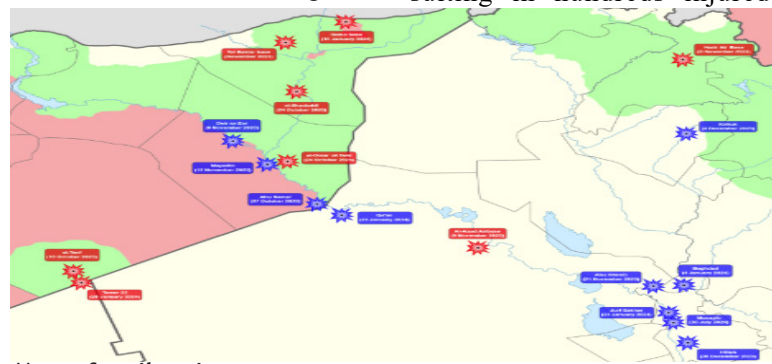
### Anna Minkler Staff Writer

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the U.S. recently rekindled their half-century-old conflict this past February. President Trump and Secretary of War Pete Hegseth launched "Operation Epic Fury," the latest conflict in an accumulation of decade-long proxy wars between the two nations. During World War II, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union gathered at the Tehran conference and agreed to formally acknowledge Iran as an independent territory. Later, in 1953, the U.S. government secretly fueled a coup that ousted Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosad-

degh, over oil concerns. Mosaddegh was replaced by Iran's last shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was an ally to the U.S. The relationship took a turn after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, transforming the nation into the strict Islamic Republic of Iran, ruled by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeini pushed the nation into harsh theocratic rule, vowing the U.S as their sworn enemy. Since small singular conflicts surrounding the Iranian-backed terrorist organization Hezbollah and various U.S bombings lasted until 2000. Reagan's scandals regarding the use of secret Iranian weapon sale funds to fuel the anti-communist group the Contras and 9/11 only heightened these tensions. Tensions bubbled up again in 2018 after President Trump withdrew

from the nuclear deal and imposed restrictive economic sanctions on Iran's economy. In June of 2025, the U.S. bombed several Iranian nuclear sites to stop their nuclear weapons program, claiming the attacks were fully successful. This year, the U.S and Israel began large-scale attacks on Iran again, with unclear motives, killing hun-

dreds and assassinating Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. To retaliate against these attacks, Iran has launched around 170 missiles on Israel, the Gulf states, and four US military bases in the Middle East. U.S bases in Qatar, Kuwait, U.A.E, and Bahrain were struck, resulting in hundreds injured.



Map of strike sites

## Journalists at ABC strike for the first time in 20 years

### Colleen Conway Staff Writer

On March 25, over 1,000 journalists from Australia's national broadcaster (ABC) walked off the job, going on strike for the first time in 20 years. The action involved members of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU). The staff started the strike at 11:00 am (local time), and it lasted a duration of 24 hours. During this time, scheduled broadcasting was interrupted, as reruns and preprogrammed shows aired instead.

The strike was a result of several factors, including the advance of AI in the workplace and working conditions; however, it was primarily caused by ABC's economic proposal. ABC had revised the proposed enterprise agreement, claiming that their new offer reflected the highest level of pay they could give while being a government-funded outlet. "The pay offer reflects the maximum level the ABC can sustainably provide and is balanced when

looking across all the factors that we need to consider," said ABC managing director Hugh Marks. However, the staff did not agree with these statements. "[The offer gave] limited improvements to job security but no increase to pay or key conditions, with a one-off \$1,000 payment offered in lieu of a base salary increase," said an International Federation of Journalists staff writer.

Additionally, the offering proposed a 10% total salary increase over three years, 3.5% in the first year and 3.25% in the following two years. Australia's annual inflation was 3.8% in January, meaning the pay offer fell below the inflation rate. As a result, over 60% of staff rejected the agreement and went on strike to protest the pay they felt they deserved. "Public broadcasting is the hope of the future of journalism, and it has to keep up with wages... and promise secure futures for those who invest their lives in it," said ABC veteran David Marr. The staff is also aiming for more job security, speaking out against how the broadcast might let AI

replace them and ABC's reliance on short-term contracts. There have been many situations where workers have to face choices concerning whether the short-term contracts are worth staying at ABC for. "It's really stressful, I love my job, and I want to stay, but that's the decision I have to make," said a woman working in podcasting on a short-term contract. Overall, Australian journalist

want to have their work recognized and accounted for. "ABC plays such an important role in our society and in Australian storytelling. It's really important ABC management comes to the table," said a member of the Community Public Sector Union, Melissa Donnelly. In the future, the ABC will take the matter to Australia's workplace tribunal, the Fair Work Commission, in a bid to solve the conflict.



Showcase of protest poster

## Estonia and Latvia Say Territories Hit By Stray Ukrainian Drones



A Ukrainian woman was wounded by the Russian drone attack as a result of a nine-story apartment building being hit in Lviv, Ukraine.

sions followed one of Russia's largest scale aerial assaults on Ukraine since the war first started. According to the Ukraine Air Force, on Monday evening, March 23, 2026, Russia launched around 1,000 drones towards Ukraine. On Tuesday afternoon, over 550 drones were launched, targeting the western regions of Ukraine. This area is where Ukraine borders NATO member states.

On Tuesday, Ukraine's public broadcaster aired a video clip presenting a Shahed drone made by Iran crashing into a building near a church in Lviv, a historical center, which is around 40 miles from the Polish border. This is a weapon Russia has heavily used throughout the war. Soon after,

a second drone struck a residential area there, injuring 22 people.

In a social media post, Ukrainian Foreign minister Andrii Sybaha said that from these actions, "Russia proves its status of a terrorist state." He then drew parallels between the Russian attacks with the attacks being carried out by Iran across the Persian Gulf, involving civilian infrastructure.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy has stressed that Putin's increasing aggression is a threat to not only Ukraine, but countries beyond them. "There are signals encouraging Russia to continue what they have been doing for years, only increasing their aggressiveness," he said. "This is dangerous for everyone."

## Parliamentary Elections Taking Place in Hungary

### Sophia Bove Staff Writer

Over the course of the last 20 years, Hungary has had a major flip in its government structure, transforming from a liberal democracy into an electoral autocracy.

The goal of this change was to keep the roots of the old democracy while simultaneously uprooting it. Since around 2010, there has not been a free and fair election within Hungary, which has concerned many of the people living there.

A popular topic that has risen this year is the previously elected prime minister, Viktor Obran, who is currently at stake of losing his position, following the upcoming election on April 12.

Obran has been serving as prime minister for approximately 16 years, leading to a rise in fear throughout the public and his large mass of supporters. The reason for his massive support amongst the population is the border that he had built to prevent any refugees from illegally entering Hungary.

This border could be put at risk if he loses the upcoming election, causing a large amount of panic throughout the country.

There has been a recurring tension between him and his opposing candidate, Peter Magyar, beliefs

around different policies, including migration, LGBTQ+ rights, and financial aid for Ukraine.

Not only are these candidates on strictly opposite sides of the spectrum, but this has caused a major divide with their supporters.

Magyar has launched a new party, gaining attention from the public. He is especially popular with voters under 45, attracting a large younger audience.

Magyar is overall known for his connections and campaigns for alliances with the EU and NATO, launching him into popularity. He has made it clear that he plans to tackle the issue of corruption in Hungary, shifting the position of Hungary as the EU's "black sheep".

Voter turnout in the previous years have fallen short, leading to a very small amount of valid voters in order to finalize the election.

With the new addition of Magyar, the voter turnout this year is looking more like 80%, one of the largest percentages of voters that Hungary has had in the past 20 years.

The population of Hungary is seemingly in favor of this new face, but the decision between him and their faithful minister remains a root of tension. The election is slowly closing in, leaving everyone at the edge of their seats, waiting for their new Prime Minister.