

Sumus Leones

December 2025

Edition No.3

Washington Latin

In the Wake of the Shutdown, Students Reflect

By Madelyn Zeller, junior

On November 10, 2025, President Donald Trump signed into law this year's 328-page federal funding bill. With this, the longest government shutdown in the history of the United States came to its official end. The bill will fund most federal agencies until next January. It allocated funds to SNAP food support, the Department of Agriculture, Congress and veterans affairs until next September. On top of that, the bill ensures that all federal workers will get back-pay—payment for the 43 days of the shutdown they went without a paycheck.

However, the bill lacked what Democrats most wanted to achieve through the shutdown. There was no guaranteed continuation of expiring Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") health insurance subsidies that impact around 24 million Americans, keeping their health insurance costs lower.

As the shutdown ended, some rejoiced, while others were left feeling disappointed. Federal workers who'd gone without pay for over a month were largely relieved, but others wished Democrats had held out longer and secured more concessions for this year's finance bill.

Eighth grade history teacher Mr. Byrd said, "People [got] put back to work. So that's the main thing that I was happy about [...] because people had gone a couple of checks [...] and some people had to go to food banks."

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Nonetheless, he added that, “I do think if the Democrats were going to hold out this long that they should have continued to hold out because that would probably have [produced] a better result long term.” He said, though, that “the Democrats felt the pressure to [...] cave because their constituents were hurting.”

People on different sides of the aisle disagreed on which party was at fault for the shutdown. Democrats were blamed for holding out, as it was the healthcare concessions they wanted on the line. Republicans were satisfied with the bill as it stood, but they, as the majority party in Congress right now, received their share of the blame.

Eighth grade history teacher Mr. Byrd said, “I do think that it wasn't necessarily the Democrats' fault [in] the first place because the Republicans, they have the house. They have the Senate, right? They pretty much control the White House. They control Congress, so if they really wanted to end the shutdown, they could have found a way to do it.”

Students whose families were affected by the government shutdown weighed in. Like Mr. Byrd, some lamented the way the shutdown ended.

A student--who wished to remain anonymous to protect her parent's work--shared that her parent felt “disappointed” by the shutdown's end “because she still had things she had wanted to finish” and because “the Democrats had caved.”

Although some relished the additional free time the shutdown brought, for many furloughed workers, it was tough financially.

They were forced to make ends meet for over a month without pay. Therefore, the end of the shutdown came as a great relief.

“The shutdown was hard for my whole family,” sophomore Faith Taylor said. “My aunts, uncles, and even my dad had been furloughed, and my mom was working hard to support our family and pay bills. My dad was stressed, and I was worried, but we pushed through and my dad is now back at work.”

For others, while the shutdown was not that financially difficult, it was still hard mentally. Federal workers on furlough were anxious and concerned for the future of their jobs, especially after Trump threatened further cuts to the federal workforce.

Junior Orode Omatete said, “The government shutdown didn't really have a big effect on my family. Yeah, I know that my dad wasn't working and he wasn't getting paid, but my parents have savings for if these things happen. There was some stuff that we weren't getting done anymore, but it wasn't something that you couldn't live without. I think it had more of a mental impact on my dad because he told me that he wasn't really prepared for the government shutdown.”

Orode added, “I think the government shutdown really had a more prominent effect on families who really rely on [a] two income household or maybe come from a one income household [...] and I know it had a really negative impact on people who rely on food stamps as funding wasn't being given to food stamps. I'm just really glad that it's over though. [P]eople can go back to work and hopefully get the paychecks that they missed.

Government Class Visits the Capitol

By Giselle Norquist, junior

On Monday, December 8th, both Mr. Liu's Government and Ms. Colt's AP US government classes took to the Hill to lobby the members and staff of the US House of Representatives on issues important to them. Early on Monday, the group put on their suits and their business flats and walked through the doors of the Rayburn offices.

One of the brains behind this operation, History and AP Government teacher Ms. Colt, reflected on the group's success and the challenges they faced in organizing the field trip. She said the best part was seeing students "struggle to get appointments initially" and then witnessing the mood boost after they received responses. Seniors Lily Edwards and Ruby Churches, who focused on lobbying congressional offices on preventing consolidation in the healthcare industry, greatly appreciated this unique experience.

Lily said her favorite part was "being able to see a part of the city I'd never gone to before and feeling like I was making a difference."

Ruby added, "It was so cool to see the inner workings of a building that does so much for the country."

The two seniors said they talked to a lot of staffers, including those under New York representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Maryland representative Jamie Raskin.

Both Government teachers emphasized that this was a good opportunity for students to practice

Mr. Liu added that the trip was important, "because it was not just a thought exercise or role play, but a real-life experience. Students felt extra nervous and a sense that this [was] real, which I think really helped them take it seriously and get the most out of it."

Students prepared for about a week, working on one-pagers that summarized their issues as well as the elevator pitches to use when walking into offices.

Mr. Liu pointed out that the preparation forced students to dig into the inner workings of Congress. "They learned how to come up with a plan for which offices it made sense to reach out to based on what they were advocating for, requiring them to learn more about committees, individual members of Congress, the difference between the political parties and the legislative process."

Upon asking students what they would have changed, Ms. Colt found that "most students just wanted more time with it."

On another hand, Mr. Liu would personally revise the project to "[help] the students better prepare for the real practical questions they could get asked, like how realistic is their proposal, how much would it cost, so they could better respond to questions that any policymaker needs to be able to answer."

He added that, "It's one thing to WANT something to happen, it's another to understand what it would take for it to actually become a reality."



Thanksgiving Outside the Box

By Genesis Fuentes Ramirez, sophomore

The month of November holds many awaited moments like sucking up the last moments of sweater weather until the sudden switch to puffer jackets and the cold winter air. However, between those moments is a special holiday sometimes forgotten: Thanksgiving! It's a time to celebrate with food alongside the most cherished people in your life. So, how did Thanksgiving come to be?

Thanksgiving first began in 1621 when Plymouth colonists and Wampanoag people came together to share a harvest feast. This moment represents the cooperation and survival of both groups throughout the season. This tradition continued to grow and become more common throughout individual colonies for centuries to come. Eventually in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln declared the holiday national event all over the United States as an action of unity during the civil war. Fun fact: he also scheduled the holiday to take place on the last Thursday of November so that's why the date for Thanksgiving always changes every year!

This Thanksgiving, members of our school community celebrated in ways that stretched far beyond the typical turkey-and-pie tradition. Upper School Latin teacher Mr. Nikota, returned to New York City, the place he called home during his PhD years. "My family doesn't celebrate Thanksgiving because they're Canadian," he explained, "so it turned into an international Friendsgiving." He was surrounded by friends from Canada, Germany, the Dominican Republic, Italy, and China. He spent the holiday break revisiting old spots, relaxing at a Russian banya, and enjoying a full line up of foods from Chinatown: dumplings to ramen to classic

American stuffing. Even without family nearby, he found warmth in a table full of travelers who came together to celebrate an American holiday in their own global way.

Sophomore Gio Rogers spent the week in Turin, Italy reconnecting with his roots. He said, "I was with my grandparents the whole time, and they were showing me all these cool spots."

His trip also featured sight-seeing and unforgettable food experiences, including watching a woman in a mountain make pasta. "It wasn't one big thanksgiving meal," Gio shared, "but seeing my family all week felt like Thanksgiving in its own way."

Meanwhile, others preferred a more basic Thanksgiving celebration in the warmth of their house. Freshman Everett Gallas celebrated at home with a traditional feast. "We invited family over and had a big dinner," Everett said, listing turkey, mashed potatoes, collard greens, and more. For Everett, the best part was simple: "I was really looking forward to break-time to rest and see my older brother."

Whether spent in the heart of New York City, across the cobblestone streets of Italy, or around a familiar dining table at home, each of these experiences reflect the true meaning of Thanksgiving: taking time to appreciate the people and places that shape us to be who we are. These stories remind us that gratitude isn't limited to one meal or tradition, but instead it's found in reconnecting with family, sharing food with friends from around the world, and pausing long enough to enjoy the moments that matter.



Editorial: Don't Get Stuck in Second Quarter Slumps

By: Avery Park, Gio Rogers, and Leila Elfath, sophomores

As the first quarter approaches its end, Latin students are starting to feel pressure mount. From college applications, to early admissions, to club responsibilities and tests, the second quarter adds extra weight to the shoulders of students and staff.

For seniors specifically, the pressures compound into feelings of low motivation and “senioritis.” Although seniors are looking forward to college and the reward of a diploma and a handshake, it’s still difficult to overcome burn out. Many seniors feel tired and bored with school, as they are distracted by college applications and have mentally checked out.

Seasonal depression, too, is hitting Latin students hard. When daylight’s in short supply, so is motivation.

Junior Sydney Shepherd said that she is “tired” because of the shifts in weather and has “no motivation to do anything because of how dark it gets so early.” She added, “when the sun is out, so am I.”

Senior Sophia Showalter also said that the winter weather affects her academically. “Winter makes it harder for me to do homework because I want to do homework when I get home, but it’s already dark outside at that point.”

The winter blues get to teachers as well, but many already have ways to manage them.

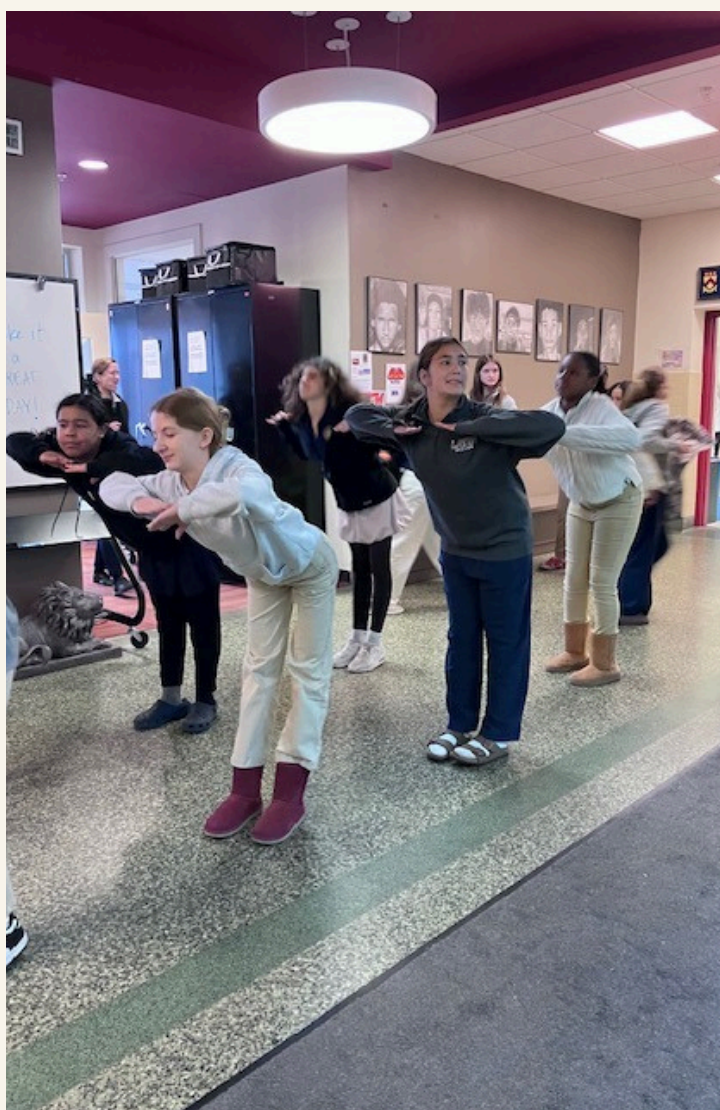
Science teacher Ms. Goldstein said that the cold weather makes it “harder to go outside as it gets colder and darker quickly,” which bums her out as she enjoys her time outdoors.

However, she added that this time in year she already has a routine set up and that she knows her students better than at the beginning of the school year. Sometimes winter even makes her more productive. “It gives me more motivation to be productive because there’s not as much time to do fun things to distract me,” she said.

This feeling of burnout has been a common emotion throughout the upper school. Similar to Ms. Goldstein, some students see the second quarter as a chance to improve. Miles McCartney, a sophomore, said that he believes the second quarter to be an “opportunity for growth” and that whatever he wasn’t able to accomplish in the first quarter, he “will be able to do in the second.”



A positive attitude like Miles' is vital as temperatures and motivation sink. Students and teachers alike should take this second quarter as a sort-of second chance. With the second semester coming soon, we hope all students feel encouraged to spread their wings and flourish in new ways. So if you see a fun club, if you want to try a new sport, or even a new elective, now is the perfect time to sign up! Don't get stuck in cycles of procrastination, putting yourself down, or getting hung up on bad grades, have fun! You'll only be a Latin Lion once!



Almost Maine Hits the Stage

By: Ella Davis and Harper Robinson, eighth grade

Washington Latin, puts on a fall play every year, directed by Mr. Birkenhead. This year's production was *Almost Maine* by John Cariani, which ran November 13th to 16th. The play is composed of nine vignettes and a prologue, interlogue, and an epilogue. A vignette is a self-contained scene, meaning instead of having one story over the course of the whole play, it was 9 separate short stories.

Mr. Birkenhead enjoyed directing this "magical" play, and anyone that saw it could tell how heart-warming and mystical this production was. "I choose this play because it's about people believing in the possibility of magic." He added, "If you make yourselves available to each other, magic can happen. I feel like that's a really good fit for Latin because that's one way of thinking about things like trusting courageously and... seeking the conversation with each other and finding community."

Almost Maine was quite different from plays in years past, and there was a reason behind that. "We are living through a pretty difficult time in our country and city and the good feeling of love in the play hit hard in the best type of way. I really enjoyed working on something with that kind of feeling in it," Mr. Birkenhead explained.

Almost Maine was 8th grader AJ Jacobs' first play at Washington Latin. AJ said they, "[liked] the vignette style a lot for a play like this. It can show so many things happening at once, which I thought was pretty cool, and I like how all of the stories were somewhat interconnected." As for

cast connections, AJ said that it was sort of difficult to get to know the rest of the cast because the scenes were so self-contained, but they "managed to still talk with people who weren't in [their] scene."

Ada Frankiewicz, a sophomore and actress in *Almost Maine*, compared this play's format with previous years, noting that the small scenes changed the overall dynamic of the performance.



"[My first play] was only one cast so everyone was together," she noted. "Last year it was still two different casts, but we met up so much in our casts that you got kind of closer with the people in your cast. But this year, there is such a divide with the upperclassmen and the lowerclassmen." She admitted that she "couldn't remember who was in [her own] cast."

The style of vignettes made it more difficult not only to connect, but to rehearse in general. "Already with the two casts, you're going to meet less," stated Ada. "And with the vignettes, for it just being your scene, you meet even less. You'd meet maybe once a week. That's not a lot of rehearsal time."



While the actors got less time to rehearse, they got to fully experience the meaning of their vignettes because they only had to focus on one scene. Having scenes "allowed people to see the deeper meaning of [their] scene[s]," Abby Fitzpatrick, a stage manager, observed.

Ultimately, *Almost Maine* was a special, unique experience for cast, crew, and audience members. Sophomore Max Smudde summarized the play as "special moments that [...] connect with your heart" rather than one "main plot."



Catching up to the Lions: Cross Country

By Giselle Norquist, junior



In the last issue, *Sumus Leones* covered the Lady Lions and Busboys on the field and the Volleyball teams, but they are not the only Lions making a name for themselves in public charter school sports. This year, coaches Mr. Hotchkiss and Mr. Berger and senior captains Milo and Nina Harris, Catherine Paci and Cillian Lyster expertly led the Cross Country Team.

Latin took 2nd place in the PCSAA championship meet here in DC this fall, following a long season of grit, hard work, and many, many ups and downs.

On the boys side, Senior Captain and now school-record-holding Cillian Lyster came in first place with a blazing 15:36 at his race during Latin's first visit to North Carolina for the Great American XC Festival, continuing on to set his PR of 15:21 for the season later on. Peter Clausen and Ben Hitt ran the season alongside each other, often placing next to each other, with Peter's PR of 17:33 and Ben's PR of 17:41. Liam Pittard and Ruark Jennings also had fast times, with Liam's PR of 19:45 and Ruark's PR of 19:15.

The last memorable moment for the team was the Southeast Regional Cross Country Championship, in North Carolina which just a few Latin runners attended. Sophomore Ben Hitt noted, "Due to its distance, we are only able to bring a few of our most competitive runners on the school van."

Ben reflected on his excitement at this opportunity, "Personally, as this is my first year in HS cross country, it was an amazing and novel experience to be traveling so far to run and compete with that many top-level athletes from all over the [Southeast]! It was a very different experience running alongside 300+ other runners at the same time, compared to our local meets, with maybe 50-60 people running at the same time."

Captains reflected on how they felt the season went.

Senior Captain Catherine Paci, who has been running since 2nd grade said, "The season so far has been good. We have a giant team (~40 runners)! As far as I can tell, the team has done an excellent job welcoming in the new Cooper Campus kids. We've had tons of PRs (Personal Records) for

individual runners. The girls, although few, remain strong and fast! We stick together.”

Senior Nina Harris noted that despite setbacks from injuries, the team moved ahead. She said, “There have been many injuries. There have also been some crazy, fast runs. Of course with all of this we’ve also had fun and I’ve enjoyed spending time with lots of these people for my final season in cross country.”

As the season reached its close, runners touched on what makes Cross Country unique.

Catherine said, “Cross Country is special because the sport is mostly mental. Sure, a runner’s legs have to move and their lungs have to work, but the main barriers are in our heads. Having a team to support you, no matter the difference in speeds, means that the mental load is lightened just enough to keep going.”

Nina added, “The cross country team is unique because it’s not a sport most people would choose. Lots of people would rather not be running for 3.1 miles before finishing. It’s a really hard sport. This sport plays with your mind. All that’s out there when you run in a meet are your thoughts. Though this is a tough sport, we make the most of it and have fun.”

Seniors also shared a little wisdom they’ve gleaned in all their years of Cross Country.

Catherine said, “It sounds cliché, but learning to separate my worth from the expectations of others and the abilities of others is the main lesson Cross Country has taught me. Also, that I can do hard things.”

Nina added, “I’ve learned that it takes hard work

to become part of the team. You can’t just sign up and declare yourself part of the team. You need to show up to practices and be present. You need to put in the work. By the end of the season, if this is done correctly, the team will tend to feel like a family.”

The underclassmen runners also reflected on their short, but meaningful time on the team thus far. Freshman Henry Faranda-Harris said he has been running since fifth grade and enjoys it because, “it pushes [him] further and gives [him] an excuse to workout.”

Freshman Liam Pittard noted that Cross Country mentally challenges him and motivates him to push through pain, especially during races.

All in all, to summarize this year’s team Coach Berger said, “There is a lot of talent around, and everyone has great enthusiasm. In one word, I would describe the team as eager.”



Memes

By: Judah Harris, sophomore



Photos at The Hook

