

Teen Obama supporter returns from the DNC

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STAMFORD -- Thomas Dec started his senior year at Wilton High School this month. But the 16-year-old was not on Kristine Lilly Way when classes started on Aug. 25. He was in Denver, showing his support for Sen. Barack Obama at the Democratic National Convention.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime kind of thing," said Dec, who documented the entire convention on his Web site <http://thomasdec.com>.

Although Obama's acceptance speech was the high point for Dec -- who has been campaigning for the Illinois senator for a year-- the politically-savvy teen was constantly starstruck by the political process and by the countless politicians and pundits who surrounded him during his week in Denver.

"(I saw) Pat Buchanan and Chris Matthews from MSNBC, just all the politicians and media in the same location. When you're rubbing shoulders with Al Sharpton, quite literally, it's just a mind blowing experience," said Dec. "Every time you turn around you see someone new."

Dec, who is the Connecticut high school state coordinator for Sen. Barack Obama's campaign, flew out to Denver on Aug. 21, and came back on the red eye on Aug. 29. In that time, he attended two conventions, breakfasted with the Connecticut delegation and got to see the nomination of the first black candidate to run for president on the ticket of a major political party.

"(One of the high points was) when he got the nomination, the roll call..." said Dec. "That was really exciting, to see the nomination process unfold before my eyes."

Dec's parents, Joseph and Marianne, were a little wary of their son's missing the first week of school to go to Denver, but ended up supporting the effort.

"Our first reaction was, it's the first week of school, you should be in Wilton, not Denver," said Joseph Dec, Thomas's father. Once Dec revealed his plans, however, which included the College Democrats' Convention, the Decs were supportive.

Add to that the fact that the teen raised the money for his Denver trip through his very own "Dec in Denver" fundraising campaign (mostly directed at family and friends, says his father) and his family gave the trip their blessing.

"We're very proud of him," said Joseph Dec.

Politics is very much a part of Thomas Dec's life. Dec first became interested in politics during the 2000 presidential election.

When President George W. Bush and Al Gore battled for Florida, Dec, then eight years old, sat with his

grandparents and watched, awestruck.

Dec got involved with the current race about a year ago, when candidates began announcing interest in presidential runs last year. He went looking for a campaign to support. Obama's campaign, he said, spoke to him.

In the last year, Dec became very involved with Sen. Barack Obama's campaign. In January, he was among thousands of volunteers who traveled to New Hampshire for the state's primaries. He's traveled to Iowa for the senator and hopes to see Obama inaugurated.

When he's not traveling, Dec makes his political opinions known at home. Despite his studies, the college application process, involvement in the student newspaper, debate club, students in politics and Model U.N. as well as a part-time job, Dec blogs about politics and runs an online radio program called the Weekly Filibuster. The program, which he founded and runs with four other young pundits, has hosted guests like former presidential candidate and Alaskan senator Mike Gravel, David Schuster from MSNBC and former ambassador and candidate Alan Keyes.

He also worked at the polls this summer when congressional candidate Jim Himes was challenged in a primary by Lee Whitnum. According to Peggy Reeves, Wilton's Democrat registrar of voters, Dec was one of two high school students who volunteered at the polls during the primary. He was stationed at Driscoll school.

"He worked the morning shift, so he had to be there at 5:15 in the morning, so for someone that age, I'm really impressed," she said.

This fall, however, Dec is dedicating his time to the Obama campaign. It is time for that final push towards the election, he said.

Despite all his involvement in the Obama campaign, Dec will be unable to do one important thing this November. At 17 years old, he will be too young to cast his vote for the senator from Illinois. But Dec says he doesn't mind.

"Honestly, being able to do my part --registering people to vote, talking to people and canvassing -- that's my vote, per se," said Dec. "And that's nice. There's going to be someone who maybe I had an influence on to vote for the senator."