



Noah Gray records a press conference of Democratic presidential hopeful Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., Sept. 8, 2007 in Coral Gables. He can't vote, but Noah has been to half a dozen events for presidential candidates, most as a credentialed member of the media. (AP Photo/Luis M. Alvarez)

Fla. Teen Documenting '08 Election

By JESSICA GRESKO – 8 hours ago

MIAMI (AP) — Tenth grader Noah Gray quietly pulled out his iPhone in English class and saw the e-mail he'd been waiting for. "You're in!" He smiled and hid his phone. The 15-year-old hadn't gotten in to a party or a sports event. The e-mail was from a spokeswoman for Univision, the Spanish television station. The news: He'd have a press pass for Sunday's Republican presidential debate in Florida.

Not to be cocky, but Noah kind of expected it. He can't vote and still has braces, but since August he has been to half a dozen events for presidential candidates, most as a credentialed member of the media.

A local progressive radio show helped him get press credentials after interviewing him at a peace rally he organized in May.

He has interviewed four of the eight Democratic candidates and Sunday's debate will be his first chance to interview the Republicans. He also has just finished a 12-minute video called "Virgin Voting" that encourages young people to vote, and he hopes to expand the film.

Noah says part of his goal is to ask about issues important to young people and get them to care about the election.

"It's more than voting. It's better than voting," he said.

Still, his parents will have to drive him to Sunday's event. And his age has created some quizzical looks despite the tripods, lights, toolbox of microphones and a professional-grade camera he totes to campaign events.

University of Miami spokeswoman Margot Winick says she was initially puzzled and skeptical when Noah arrived to claim a credential for September's Democratic Univision debate, which was held on the school's campus and was the first ever broadcast in Spanish.

Then Noah brought out his business card, which reads "Cat Eat Cat Productions," a nod to documentary filmmaker Michael Moore's "Dog Eat Dog Films." That blew her away, she said.

"Hats off to a kid that's that savvy," Winick said.

Professional reporters and cameramen have sometimes been taken aback by Noah's age, but have also helped him set up equipment or get a video feed, Noah said. Candidates' staffs also have been accommodating.

He made a good impression on Sen. Chris Dodd's staff when he covered the announcement of Dodd's Cuba policy in Florida in September.

"I was struck by his poise and the way that he conducted himself. He was very professional," spokeswoman Colleen Flanigan said, adding that Noah sent a "thank you" note afterward.

Noah's parents say they weren't surprised when he decided to document the 2008 election. He's been interested in politics since third grade, in 2000, when he sat in front of the television on election night and charted the number of electoral votes going to each candidate. In 2004, he got up early and asked to be driven around to polling places so he could film. His parents let him skip school that day.

Noah's mom, Ellen Gray, says he has made the family more involved in politics. And she cautiously agrees with him that it's more important than school, though she worries about a

sprinkling of Cs on his report card and how that might affect getting into college.

Predictably, his favorite class at Miami Palmetto Senior High School is film, first period. He watches news at noon instead of eating lunch.

He says it can be frustrating that other kids his age don't share his interest in politics. He tried interviewing students on campus one day about who they thought would make a good presidential candidate.

"They thought I was talking about the homecoming court," he said.

For Noah, politics is exciting.

"I could have been standing in the room with the next U.S. president and might even have him or her on tape," he said.

Noah wants to attend the Democratic National Convention in Denver next August and interview more candidates. Someday he hopes to make documentaries or maybe be involved in journalism.

Oh, and there's one other thing, he said: "I really want to vote."

On the Net:

- Noah Gray: <http://www.virginvoting.com>