



Trumbull Times (CT)

April 23, 2009
Section: News
Page: 1A, 12A

Youthful optimism reaches the Oval Office

Donald Eng Deng@Hersamacorn.Com

In a potential re-election race in 2012, President Barack Obama has one vote locked up already. Trumbull teen Casey Mack, 14, a student at Hillcrest Middle School, is among the 179 young authors selected to have their letters to Obama published in a new book "**Dear President Obama: Letters of Hope from Children Across America.**"

The book's authors, Bruce Kluger and David Tabatsky, got the idea for the work in the days after the November, 2008 election, when they saw a wave of optimism sweep across the country.

In an attempt to capture the feeling for posterity, the pair solicited letters from children of their family and friends. To their surprise, their request for letters about a campaign became a campaign all its own.

"The children and parents we'd contacted not only responded positively, but launched an unexpected grassroots effort of their own, forwarding our e-mail to their relatives and friends, in the end reflecting the same kind of infectious enthusiasm that fueled the Obama campaign itself," the two wrote in the forward to their 200-page book.

Eventually receiving more than 1,000 letters, the pair winnowed the entries down to 179, including one from a young Trumbull fan.

"You being president made me feel very excited," Casey wrote. "I was happy to see that someone who looks like me can be President of the United States of America."

Casey's letter, which receives prominent placement on page six, details the sometimes heated political debates taking place even at the middle school level.

"I have had some hard times at my school during the election," he wrote. "The kids have been saying some mean things about people who look like us. I tried talking to the students - it did not work."

But one of Obama's campaign slogans, "Yes, we can," resonated with Casey.

Ironically, the line came in a moment of defeat, following the New Hampshire primary.

"I started to believe we can change the student's negative points of views at school," he wrote.

Casey has another reason for welcoming an Obama presidency: The health problems he and his brother have make it difficult to get health insurance.

"My Mom has been worried all these years that we would not get health insurance because of our terrible sickness. If my brother does not have health insurance he would not get his medicine, and he would die," he wrote.

In fact, his mother, Donna Mack, moved the family from Florida to Connecticut to take advantage of the state's health care laws. Though Casey still misses the Sunshine State, his health and family are more important.

"I really miss Florida because I miss my family and friends," he wrote. "However, I realize that it is better to have insurance. Maybe, someday we can have insurance and live anywhere we want to live. I believe this is possible because you are going to be President."

Though there are still about 1,300 days until the 2012 election, Casey had made up his mind who will receive his first-ever ballot.

"P.S. I can vote for you in the next election." he concluded his letter.

More information about the book is on the authors' Web site, obamakids.us. Read the full text of Casey Mack's letter at trumbulltimes.com.

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