

Of Dogs and Politics

Throughout history, dogs have influenced Americans' choice of presidents.

By Maryann Mott

Nearly all of our nation's leaders have owned dogs during their administrations. These pets not only provided love and companionship, but helped boost the presidents' popularity with voters.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's constant companion, Fala, is credited with cinching his owner's fourth term in office.

The black Scottish Terrier accompanied Roosevelt during a trip to Alaska's Aleutian Islands, where he was accidentally left behind. The president immediately ordered a Navy ship to retrieve him, but upon hearing of the incident, Republicans howled about wasting taxpayer dollars.

The president responded to the criticism in a speech to the Teamster's Union in 1944, defending his Scottie. "I don't resent attacks," Roosevelt said. "And my family doesn't resent attacks, but Fala does resent them. ... His Scotch soul was furious."

The crowd roared with laughter.

Eleanor Roosevelt later wrote in her memoirs that she believed the speech played a part in turning around the election.

During the 1928 presidential campaign, Herbert Hoover, who was shy with strangers and uncomfortable in front of large crowds, was advised to get a dog to appear friendlier. So he purchased a German Shepherd Dog named King Tut, and autographed photos of the two were sent to thousands of voters around the country.

The power of the pooch seemed to work. Hoover became the 31st president of the United States.

While pets can increase a politician's approval ratings, they can also hurt. During a 1964 photo session on the White House lawn, Lyndon B. Johnson picked up one of his Beagles, named Him, by the ears. The image appeared in newspapers across the country, sparking outrage among animal lovers and even worrying Johnson about how the bad publicity might affect his political career.

Historic White House dogs: Miss Beazley and Barney, Scottish Terriers; Spot, English Springer Spaniel

— George W. Bush: Buddy, chocolate Labrador Retriever

— Bill Clinton: Millie, English Springer Spaniel, and Ranger, one of Millie's puppies

— George Bush: Lucky, Bouvier des Flandres, and Rex, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

— Ronald Reagan: Liberty, Golden Retriever

— Gerald Ford: Checkers, Cocker Spaniel; Vicky, Poodle; Pasha, Terrier; and King Timahoe, Irish Setter

— Richard Nixon: Beagle, Little Beagle, Him, and Her, all Beagles; Blanco, a white Collie; and Yuki, a mixed-breed dog

— Lyndon B. Johnson: Charlie, Welsh Terrier; Pushinka, mixed breed; Shannon, Irish Spaniel; Wolf, Irish Wolfhound; and Clipper, German Shepherd Dog; and Butterfly, White Tips, Blackie, and Streaker, Pushinka and Charlie's pups

— John F. Kennedy: Heidi, Weimaraner

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

To learn more about these dogs, and the 400 other animals that have called the White House home, visit the Presidential Pet Museum in Williamsburg, Va.

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