

Points on Pets: Many a pet has helped a presidential aspirant

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Are there examples of pets that have helped presidential candidates win elections? Do candidates ever use their pets in their campaigns? It seems to me that some of the candidates for the 2008 election might benefit by including their pets in their campaigns. Given that more households in the United States have pets than have children, it make sense to me that having a warm, fuzzy pet might be a real asset to a presidential candidate.

A. There are several outstanding examples throughout presidential campaign history of pets that have helped win elections for their owners.

When Herbert Hoover was running for president in 1928, his advisers told him to get a dog and have his photograph with the dog distributed widely. His advisers hoped that this would give Hoover, a politician with little natural warmth, a softer image. Therefore, he obtained a German shepherd and named him King Tut. Pictures of Hoover with King Tut were disbursed widely throughout the United States and Hoover was elected!

The Fala speech given on Sept. 23, 1944, is credited with winning a fourth term for President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Republicans had circulated a rumor that when Roosevelt's Scottish terrier Fala had been left behind on the Aleutian Islands, a destroyer had been sent to fetch the dog at a cost of thousands of dollars to the U.S. taxpayers.

Roosevelt made light of this in his famous Fala speech to the Teamsters. The U.S. public immediately caught on to this. First lady Eleanor Roosevelt in her book, "This I Remember," wrote that Roosevelt's speech really laid the foundation for Thomas E. Dewey's defeat and the president's re-election. There is now a bigger than life-size statue of Fala in the Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The now-famous Checkers speech given by then-Sen. Richard Nixon when he was running as Dwight D. Eisenhower's vice presidential candidate in 1952 is another example of when a family pet saved a politician's place on the national ballot. At the close of his nationally televised speech on Sep. 23, 1952, Richard Nixon said his daughters had been given a black and white cocker spaniel puppy. Nixon said that no matter what anyone said, the family was going to keep the gift.

This speech precipitated a landslide of telegrams and telephone calls to Eisenhower encouraging him to keep Nixon on the Republican ticket. In November 1952, Eisenhower and Nixon were elected to office.

Nearly every U.S. president has had close ties to family pets. Many of these pets have lived at the White House. Although it is unlikely that he actually said this, President Harry S. Truman is attributed with saying,

"If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog."

However, this probably does sum up the feelings of many of those who have occupied 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

Q. Our dog has begun chewing on her feet almost all the time when she is not eating or sleeping. She has draining sores between her toes. Is this problem most likely due to allergies? Can this problem be treated and prevented?

A. Of course, without actually seeing your dog it is impossible to tell you what is causing the sores and constant chewing. However, your description is classical for interdigital pyoderma. This is simply an infection involving the skin between the toes. The draining that you described is most likely pus.

The pyoderma is most likely secondary to an abrasion or skin cut. However, it is possible that an allergy caused enough irritation to induce your dog to chew on her feet enough, which then caused abrasions and a secondary infection. Interdigital pyoderma is usually treated by thoroughly cleaning the feet and applying appropriate antibiotics. Of course you should have your dog examined by your veterinarian as soon as possible.

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