

January 2010

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## Recommended Citation

Llewellyn, J. (2010). Paws, Pathos, and Presidential Persuasion: Franklin Roosevelt's "Fala Speech" as Precursor and Model for Richard Nixon's "Checkers Speech." *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal*, 37, 64-75.

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***Paws, Pathos and Presidential Persuasion: Franklin Roosevelt's "Fala Speech" as Precursor and Model for Richard Nixon's "Checkers Speech"***

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**ABSTRACT**

*In autumn 1944 Franklin Roosevelt's presidential campaign was losing momentum. Then, in Congressional debate, U. S. Representative Harold Knutson of Minnesota accused Roosevelt of extravagance, claiming he sent a Navy destroyer to the Aleutian Islands to retrieve his Scottish terrier. FDR parried these charges with "the Fala speech," a mocking and acerbic attack on Republicans ("No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala") that reenergized his campaign. "The Fala speech" also indirectly rescued Richard Nixon. Under attack in the 1952 campaign, Nixon saved his vice presidential aspirations and political career with the "Checkers" address. However, the origin of "Checkers" in FDR's "Fala Speech" has been ignored. These rhetorical rescues offer insight into banality and pathos in political rhetoric.*

The connection between U.S. presidents and dogs is an enduring one. The most current instance is provided by Barack Obama. A celebration was held in Chicago's Grant Park on November 4, 2008, to introduce Obama and his family to the American people as First Family-elect. In his remarks, Obama announced to his daughters that they would be getting a long-desired puppy: "Sasha and Malia, I love you both more than you can imagine. You have earned the puppy that is coming with us" ("Tough Decision," 2008, p. 30). While this ceremony was to mark the monumental election of the nation's first African-American president, the puppy revelation became its signature moment.

In the aftermath, the national media featured numerous stories analyzing what sort of breed would be best in the White House (Seelye, 2008). Not to be outdone, two days later President George W. Bush's Scottish terrier, Barney, reclaimed the national spotlight by biting the finger of a Reuters reporter ("Bush's pet," 2008, p. 2). Dogs, or even the suggestion of a dog, galvanize public attention on the White House. Five months after the promise of a puppy, in April 2009 President Obama and his family greeted "Bo," a Portuguese water dog, a gift from Senator and Mrs. Edward Kennedy (Stolberg, 2009, p. A16).

Dogs have found their way into policy statements as well. George W. Bush defended his position on the Iraq war with the hyperbolic claim that he would not change it even if his wife

and Scottish terrier were his last allies: "I will not withdraw, even if Laura and Barney are the only ones supporting me," according to Bob Woodward (Harris, 2006, p. 1).

The Bush statement captured the public imagination, even if the policy did not, because the president made his point while bringing man's best friend into the political equation. Dogs have been fixtures in many presidencies but it has been six decades since their influence was at its zenith (Rowan & Janis, 1997). This article examines the two most prominent dogs ever associated with political campaign rhetoric. Both of these dogs were brought to prominence by Minnesota Congressman Harold Knutson's charges against President Roosevelt. On August 31, 1944, Knutson alluded to a rumor that FDR had sent a naval destroyer back to the Aleutian Islands to collect his Scottie Fala, left behind during a tour of Pacific defense operations (Stuhler, 1990, p. 30). In his September 23 speech FDR rebutted Knutson's charges and used them as a springboard to flay the Republicans for anti-labor policies.

The speeches featuring Fala and Checkers were pivotal in the two most notable campaign rescues in American history. These speeches were not only exercises in political survival but also examples of the one-strike reversal of fortune. Political leaders risk charges of banality or triviality to talk of dogs when national affairs hang in the balance. Yet these two allegedly jejune excursions were singularly successful. These rhetors mounted stridently partisan and effective arguments that are remembered through the disarmingly cuddly synecdoche of the dogs' names. How were these transformations accomplished and what can they show us about the utility of the rhetorical commonplace?

Political observers easily recognize Checkers, Richard Nixon's Cocker Spaniel, enshrined in the eponymous speech where he played a cameo role. The other animal featured is Fala, Franklin Roosevelt's Scottish terrier. This dog was more famous in his own time than Checkers though his rhetorical highlight is less widely remembered. The common features of Checkers and Fala belie the fact that Nixon and FDR, both skilled rhetoricians, are diametrical opposites in ideology and in public memory. This study has nothing to do with the dogs themselves though the familiarity of their names makes them seem like acquaintances. This study examines the rhetorical artfulness of Nixon and FDR in creating dog-themed narratives to mask and transform partisan political attacks into evocative emotion-laden appeals.

The connections between "Checkers" and "Fala"—the speeches—and their shared rhetorical history have received little scholarly comment. Each speech is well-known within the discipline. Connections between the two famous addresses have not been noted, much less examined, in the scholarly literature I have investigated. This article transcends the notion of these speeches as merely coincidental or thematically similar in order to seriously investigate the rhetorical theory embedded and demonstrated in these two events. When and how were these two animals' names invoked in the respective speeches and with what result? What can the artfulness of these seemingly banal animal allusions tell us about political rhetoric?

## Background

The “Checkers” speech was given on September 23, 1952; Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Campaign Address to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers” (much better known as “the Fala speech”) was delivered on the same date in 1944. Less than a decade—eight years—separates these two landmark speeches; in hindsight, the political eras in which they were given *seem* very different. The earlier speech occurred in the 1944 presidential campaign during World War II when the war’s outcome was not a settled matter; the second speech was given in the 1952 campaign at the dawn of the Cold War.

In describing Nixon’s preparation of his speech, historian Steven Ambrose (1988) suggests that the intervening period was a long time:

Nixon had a long memory and a nice sense of how to turn the tables. He recalled FDR’s line in the 1944 campaign about how his dog, Fala, had been left behind at an overseas conference and destroyer had been sent to the Aleutians to bring the dog back. FDR had responded to Republican cries of outrage by saying, “The Republicans were not content to attack me, or my wife, or my sons. No, not content with that, now they even attack my little dog, Fala.” Nixon had an idea about how to turn that one back around again. (p. 285)

Ambrose is the only source asserting that Fala was, in fact, left behind and collected by a naval vessel. In extensive research on Fala’s public performances as FDR’s sidekick, there has been no confirmation of the charge and a multitude of denials. Black (2003) reports, “Admiral Leahy, on behalf of the navy, officially confirmed to Speaker Rayburn and Majority Leader McCormick that the charge was unfounded” (p. 1001).

While Ambrose suggests that Nixon needed a long memory to recall the Fala speech, eight years is not a long time in an adult life. Richard Nixon was an astute observer of political rhetoric; it is not at all surprising that he remember FDR’s speech. The larger and more interesting questions are how and why he constructed a parallel instance in an address given to save his political career. Nixon offers some brief clues in his memoirs and in *Six Crises*.

To get the actual remarks on the record, here are the salient portions of each speech. The Republicans intimated through Congressman Knutson that Roosevelt had squandered government funds in the Fala recovery exercise. In addressing the Teamsters that Saturday night, Roosevelt noted:

These Republican leaders have not been content with attacks on me, or my wife, or on my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala. Well, of course, I don't resent attacks, and my family doesn't resent attacks, but Fala does resent them. You know, Fala is Scotch, and being a Scottie, as soon as he learned that the Republican fiction writers in Congress and out had concocted a story that I had left him behind on the Aleutian Islands and had sent a destroyer back to find him—at a cost to the taxpayers of two or three, or eight or twenty million dollars—his Scotch soul was furious. He has not been the same dog since. I am accustomed to hearing malicious falsehoods about

myself—such as that old, worm-eaten chestnut that I have represented myself as indispensable. But I think I have a right to resent, to object to libelous statements about my dog. (Rosenman, 1950, p. 289)

It is axiomatic that the Checkers speech saved Nixon's political career. It is less well-known that the Fala speech fulfilled a similar function by demonstrating FDR's renewed campaign vigor. In the summer of 1944, rumors questioned his health and fitness for another term. Thomas Dewey was campaigning energetically and effectively. FDR's sub-par campaign address in Bremerton, Washington on August 12<sup>th</sup> seemed to confirm the rumors. He gave the speech standing, something he had not done for a year; his braces did not fit correctly due to his significant weight loss. Bremerton was not an effective performance.

Six weeks later in the Fala speech, FDR demonstrated that he was back in fighting trim—energetically upbraiding and making fun of Republicans and reinforcing the accomplishments of his administrations. The health and fitness rumors were laid to rest. In November he won re-election with 54% of the popular vote; five months later, he was dead.

Nixon's remarks were given in a live television performance without precedent in American politics. As the 1952 campaign was taking shape, Nixon was accused of having a "slush fund," and many voices in the Republican Party were calling for him to step aside to preserve Eisenhower's chances of winning the presidency. Others found in this charge a convenient opportunity to rid the ticket of a candidate that they had never favored. It soon came to light that the Democratic presidential nominee, Adlai Stevenson, had a larger fund that was unaudited and run by the candidate himself rather than by a trustee (Jamieson, 1996, p. 74).

Nixon's Checkers performance was a *tour de force* that invented the televised *apologia*, saved his place on the ticket, and made it clear he was a gifted and inventive rhetorician. While televised performances by politicians are now commonplace, Tom Wicker (1991) set Nixon's actions in the context of the times: "In 1952 it was a sensational thing to do" (p. 95). This speech was judged the sixth most significant speech by an American in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a survey of 137 public address scholars (Lucas & Medhurst, 2007). In these rankings it is surpassed by only Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream," John Kennedy's Inaugural, FDR's First Inaugural and Pearl Harbor address, and Barbara Jordan's keynote address to the 1976 Democratic National Convention.

Without this successful defense of his character in 1952, Nixon would not have been in any position to run for president in 1960, and subsequently to win in 1968. The speech was both a career-saving performance and a point of persistent ridicule for Nixon. He conveys the ambivalent dimension of the Checkers' legacy in his 1962 book, *Six Crises*:

A distinguished political science professor, after making a thorough study of the 1960 election, stated his considered judgment that if it had not been for the fund broadcast I would have been elected President of the United States. It was a neat theory, brilliantly supported by facts and figures, but like most classroom theoreticians he had not faced up to the hard reality of the alternative. If it hadn't been for that broadcast, I would never have been around to run for the presidency. (p. 129)

On that Tuesday in September, Nixon spoke in a rented Hollywood theater, the El Capitan, which had been converted to a television studio. Its 750 seats were empty; media watched a feed in a nearby room. Nixon spoke to an empty hall and “before the largest audience in the history of mankind” (Ambrose, 1988, p. 284). After much talk of accountants, legal opinions, and the inner workings of Congressional offices, Nixon noted:

One other thing I probably should tell you, because if I don't they will probably be saying this about me, too. We did get something, a gift, after the election. A man down in Texas heard Pat on the radio mention the fact that our two youngsters would like to have a dog, and, believe it or not, the day before we left on this campaign trip we got a message from Union Station in Baltimore, saying they had a package for us. We went down to get it. You know what it was?

It was a little cocker spaniel dog, in a crate that he had sent all the way from Texas, black and white, spotted, and our little girl Tricia, the six year old, named it Checkers.

And you know, the kids, like all kids, loved the dog, and I just want to say this, right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we are going to keep it. (Wicker, 1991, p. 98)

### **Connections Between the Speeches**

Are the two speeches intentionally connected? Nixon endorses the claims of Ambrose. He leaves no doubt as he speaks to the linkages, although cryptically: “Thinking back to Franklin Roosevelt’s devastating remark in the 1944 campaign – ‘and now they are attacking poor Fala’— I decided to mention my own dog Checkers. Using the same ploy as FDR would irritate my opponents and delight my friends, I thought” (Nixon, 1962, p. 103). Wicker (1991) echoes this view: “Remembering Franklin Roosevelt’s devastating use of his ‘little dog Fala’ to torment Republicans in 1944, Nixon decided with a certain malicious humor to turn the tables and refer to his own dog – Checkers” (p. 95).

FDR’s famed advisor and speechwriter, Samuel Rosenman, completed the draft of the Teamsters remarks. He brought them to the president for his final review. While there was a distinguished stable of speechwriters supporting Roosevelt, he was actively involved in the crafting of his messages. FDR reviewed and analyzed multiple drafts; he knew them nearly by heart when it came time to deliver them. The Teamsters/Fala speech is no exception. In fact, Rosenman makes clear that FDR was the originator and author of the Fala passage. Rosenman notes that while he was preparing an initial draft during a Maine vacation, FDR was attending the second Quebec conference where he drafted and sent along the Fala portion from his own pen “just as a happy thought” (Rosenman, 1952, p. 473). Neither Rosenman nor FDR foresaw just how successful the speech and its signature passage would be. Rosenman called it FDR’s best political campaign speech that precipitated a groundswell of campaign energy: “Bremerton was forgotten” (Rosenman, 1952, p. 478).

The central device of the Fala speech—biting ridicule through humor—was one that FDR artfully practiced. In the 1940 campaign he had energized crowds with the refrain of “Martin, Barton and Fish” as he named—and then denounced—three Republican congressmen impeding the implementation of the New Deal. Audiences would chant the names as Roosevelt presented a litany of their shortcomings.

What do Nixon and FDR gain by speaking of, or even through, their pets? There are three benefits to this device: delivering ridicule or defense through humor or pathos, softening partisanship, and labeling with memorable names. The mechanism of alluding to the dog enables FDR and Nixon to make their opponents appear ridiculous without requiring that the speaker be hard-edged in doing so. FDR points to Fala to decry the charges of Congressman Knutson and condemn the motives of Republican critics (“No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala”). Nixon recounts the story of Checkers to ridicule his critics for hounding him (“One other thing I probably should tell you . . .”). His ostensible targets are Democrats and an aggressive media, but Nixon knew that some Republican factions were after his scalp as well.

### **Benefits of this Strategy**

In each instance, the dog narrative evokes a warm and fuzzy image thus softening the edge of the speaker’s partisan denunciation of his accusers. Positioning the pet as the victim of critics’ charges takes the politician and his actions out of the spotlight and allows him to denounce the attackers while making the charges themselves seem ludicrous (e.g., the charge that FDR was free-wheeling with government prerogatives is condensed to the claim that the Navy was sent to rescue Fala; the accusation that Nixon had taken improper benefits as a public servant becomes a move to take away a child’s pet). Thus the vehicle of the pet gives the speaker special leverage with the charges. He can reduce their scope, suggest their absurdity, and then dismiss them with homey pet-based reasoning (e.g., Fala is infuriated at the charges and the Nixon family is keeping Checkers no matter what).

The final benefit is in the naming of the speeches. Neither rhetor selected the names that have been applied through history but both speakers did select the stories that made those names possible. History has applied the dogs’ names—in themselves cute and harmless—as the enduring shorthand labels for these speeches. Nixon had ambivalent feelings about the speech and yet he celebrated its anniversary every year (Ambrose, 1988, p. 295). He often called it the “Fund Speech” though he grudgingly acknowledged the name “Checkers” as well. “It was labeled as the ‘Checkers speech’ as though the mention of my dog was the only thing that saved my career,” Nixon wrote (1962, p. 125).

The ultimate rhetorical fact is that the Checkers speech is not about Checkers and the Fala speech is not about Fala. Both speeches are full of the rough and tumble of partisan political discourse and yet they abide in history and the public memory with soft, furry, innocuous names. It is as if the historical event of the speech has itself been made our pet; we

recall political arguments through memories of cold noses and wagging tails, not bared fangs. That fact cushions a stark reality: Roosevelt and Nixon were doing partisan political business in these speeches and fighting for their political lives. Despite his avowed distaste for the "Checkers" label, what would Nixon have preferred his remarks be called? The "I-am-not-a-crook" address? "The it's-not-really-a-slush-fund" speech? Would Roosevelt have selected "denouncing the Republicans" or "I am not over the hill" as the label for his address? The naming of these speeches serves the very important function of sanitizing and domesticating these intensely partisan arguments through the synecdoche of the pets.

This impact of the name of a speech is reminiscent of public perceptions of Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Speaking of civil rights, King clearly charges, "America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned" (Hansen, 2003, p. 53). King's speech accuses American society of breaking promises and turning its back on Blacks; it calls on the nation to "live out the true meaning of its creed." However, it is much more palatable and politically calming for society to remember this speech through the image of a dream rather than through the image of a bounced check. The "defanged" dream label allows Americans to embrace and celebrate King and the speech while blithely ignoring the harsh realities he described. Similarly, Roosevelt and Nixon could be hard-hitting and partisan in their remarks while veiling that partisanship with a dog-based anecdote laden with pathos. Thus the speakers obliquely rebut the charges against them, allowing the listeners to "laugh it off" (for FDR) or "cry it off" (for Nixon).

Even without the dog stories, both speeches were long on pathos. FDR's address brought the room (and many others hearing it) to an emotional pitch: "The audience loved it. They howled, clapped and cheered," even the president's daughter, Anna, had tears in her eyes (Goodwin, 1994, p. 549). Nixon's public performance famously ended with him burying his face into Bill Knowland's shoulder and sobbing in relief (Ambrose, 1988). Those were hardly the only tears evoked by "Checkers." As candidate Eisenhower watched the speech from the safe distance of Cleveland, his wife, Mamie, sat near him sobbing; in the El Capitan Theater members of the camera crew who had broadcast the remarks were tearful as well (Wicker, 1991).

### **How These Speeches Work**

The rhetorical critic seeks to understand exactly what is going on in and between these two addresses. There is a clear historic link; Nixon acknowledges as much. There is the memorable thematic overlap: family dog as political touchstone. There is the rhetorical effect of these speeches: each saved a politician and a presidency.

It is logical to begin an analysis with Lloyd Bitzer's (1968) foundational concept of the rhetorical situation: "the nature of those contexts in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse" (p. 1). Two other elements of Bitzer's formulation are significant as well. The exigence is "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (Bitzer, p. 6). Ideally, the exigence found in

the rhetorical situation should evoke a “fitting response,” one that “meets the requirements established by the situation” (Bitzer, p. 10). Bitzer concludes with rhetoric’s philosophical justification: “it provides principles, concepts, and procedures by which we effect valuable changes in reality” (p. 14). In these two speeches there were exigencies: Roosevelt was rumored to have lost his edge as a campaigner and Nixon was accused of being corrupt. The speakers’ reversals of these harrowing situations, turning challenges into stunning triumphs, confirm the quality of these responses and the value of examining them.

Studying the speeches and the historical record of the reactions to them brings many terms to the analysis: banality, triviality, pathos, ridicule, sentimentality, jejune, saccharine, maudlin, anthropomorphism. All of these terms merit brief descriptions from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, 2010): banality—lacking in originality, obvious, boring; triviality—of little value, trifling or unimportant; pathos—a quality that evokes pity or sadness; ridicule—the subjection of someone or something to mockery or derision; sentimentality—excessive tenderness, sadness or nostalgia; jejune—wanting in substance or solidity, especially in speech or writing; saccharine—excessively sweet or sentimental; maudlin—characterized by shallow sentimentality, mawkishly emotional; and, anthropomorphism—the attribution of human characteristics or behavior to a god, animal or object.

How do these terms shape our understanding of “Fala” and Checkers”? For all of their commonalities, in a fundamental way these speeches differ. FDR attacks his Republican accusers and the entire party in his remarks. He goes on the offensive and stays there. Nixon, on the other hand, gives a speech of explanation in which the attacks on Democrats, and on some Republicans, are much more oblique. The general viewer hears the story of the “respectable Republican cloth coat;” astute observers of both parties see a skilled rhetorician create and master a form in real time. Nixon proves himself to be a man to be reckoned with under all circumstances.

Roosevelt delivers the essence of his ridicule of the Republicans through the putative emotional responses of Fala. By anthropomorphizing Fala into the vehicle for his disdain for Republican actions and policies, he deepens the mockery and derision. He claims that the party is attacking the dog and the dog finds their actions infuriating and absurd. What would be a conventional political denunciation is put into the mouth of a popular pet so as to render his opponents laughingstocks.

While FDR and his dog are attacking, Nixon is trying to hold his ground (and position). Contemporary and historical commentaries on “Checkers” have described it as sentimental to the point to being mawkish or maudlin. Commentators suggest it is beneath the standing for a public figure to give such a demeaning performance. As Nixon later pointed out, without this speech he would have ceased to be a public figure on the national stage. The story of acquiring the Cocker Spaniel puppy and the family’s determination to keep a child’s pet seemed to go too far down a tear-stained path. The image may be unsophisticated but it is also, like a denunciation by a Scottish terrier, unassailably powerful. Nixon laid out his family finances and his humble origins

to win the public's support; then he won it again by refusing to offer up the puppy on the altar of his critics. Maudlin it may have been; Nixon achieved every goal he sought through "Checkers."

So are these speeches actually banal? Would that judgment make Roosevelt or Nixon any less effective? Skillful rhetoric works with the materials at hand. In these cases, stories about dogs were crafted into speeches that saved presidencies. Banality is not the issue, rhetorical artistry is.

### **Limits of Pathos**

While pathos can be a powerful tool, the issue remains: how much pathos is enough and, more importantly, how much is too much? Roosevelt and Nixon produced brief and remarkably similar pathetic appeals. The power of the dogs' names and their depoliticizing effects are further reinforced by the awareness that the memorable passages in these two speeches are quite brief: only five percent of FDR's remarks (164 of 3181 words) and three percent of Nixon's (171 of 4625 words). Both speeches dealt with many more topics than mere references to cute animals, and yet it is by the snippets alone that they are known and remembered. It is further remarkable that these two brief passages are virtually identical in length. What gives this brevity its power? Perhaps their effect in leavening a partisan attack is enough; the pathos is a respite from the gritty business at hand. Conversely, too much pathos entails risk: a political speech becomes a soap opera and the speaker, a weakling.

A related observation examines where within these speeches the core of pathos is found. When is the right time to "be cute" in a political speech? Again, there is a striking similarity between the two speeches. Both animal stories come after the half-way point of the speech and before the three-quarter point. In fact, Fala is discussed when 72% of the speech has been delivered (2310 words out of 3181); Checkers arises at the 60% mark (2767 words out of 4625). This similarity might be coincidental but it seems strategically sound to do more than half of the serious work of the speech, bring in an enlivening anecdote, and then conclude with the serious policy matters. It is hard to imagine either speech being as effective with the anecdote located close to the beginning or the end. Used too early in the speech, the story could seem flippant. Putting it too close to the end could render the conclusion too light-hearted, blunting the serious points being made. These two experienced and savvy speakers used anecdotes of nearly identical length and located them in virtually the same place in the flow of the respective speeches.

### **Conclusions**

Perhaps the anecdote is not merely an anecdote but also a distillation of the speaker's entire argument as well as a form of "comic relief" for the heavy ideological tone in the speech. The "Fala" story asserts that the Republicans are misguided and have stooped to slandering a family pet. The "Checkers" passage implies that Nixon's critics are wrong on the facts and

would stoop to taking away the children's pet. So the rhetors have reinforced the larger points of their addresses through touching anecdotes; the stories are presented off-handedly and seem to be side-bars but they are doing exactly what the larger speech intends through a cunning use of emotional appeal.

The similarities between these two speeches include their prominence in public memory, their featuring of dogs as rhetorical centerpieces, and their depth of pathos. It seems likely that there is a synergy among these elements. In addition, the portions of the two speeches that highlight the dogs are notably similar in length and placement. Two instances do not establish a pattern but do suggest a logic for the use and placement of pathetic elements.

There are also some differences worth noting. Checkers' fame was rooted in these remarks and the dog itself had no real public persona. The Checkers show opened and closed on the same night though it was a hit while it lasted. Checkers stood for any dog and children's affection for it.

In contrast, Fala's role with FDR has unique features in American political history. He came to the first family in 1940, when FDR had already been president for two terms. Like a character added to an established television series to offer new plot lines, Fala became a resource for stories of whimsy and warmth. Fala was a sidekick, a jester, and a mascot for the president. He was a public figure in his own right: discussed ten times in presidential press conferences and mentioned 31 times in the *New York Times*. He starred in a 1942 movie that is still shown at the Hyde Park National Memorial. This level of popularity made it possible for Roosevelt not only to mention Fala but also to cast him as a character in a melodrama of outrageous Republican charges (" . . . his Scotch soul was furious. He has not been the same dog since.") much to the public's delight.

When Fala died, (he was in fact put down to end suffering), the story and his picture ran on the front page of the *New York Times* ("Fala 'Sleeps Away'," 1952, p. 1). President Truman's firing of Attorney General J. Howard McGrath led the news that day. Fala's story ran in the lower left corner, next to an account of a lieutenant, the son of the general under whom he served, who had been shot down and was feared lost in Korea. Fala's burial was covered the next day on page 27. He was buried at his master's feet ("Fala Buried," 1952, p. 27). When the sculpture at the Roosevelt Memorial on the Mall in Washington was dedicated in 1997, it depicted FDR seated with Fala nearby, at his feet.

It is fair to conclude that Fala, the animal, had a life before and after becoming Fala, the campaign symbol—embodiment of anti-Republican fury. In contrast, Checkers was a prop in Nixon's address, not unlike Pat Nixon herself, though without an on-camera role. Having served his function, Checkers, the apotheosis of self-pitying sentimentality, "faded away" from the public mind. The public lives of Fala and Checkers were as distinct as those of their respective masters. Nevertheless, both dogs served as the narrative bedrock for Roosevelt and Nixon whose skillful use of them produced messages that turned a Scottish terrier and a Cocker Spaniel into rhetorical lifesavers. None of these developments would have been possible without the opening created by Congressman Harold Knutson's allusion to the rumor of the Fala rescue operation.

This Minnesota politician inadvertently sparked two prominent moments in the rhetoric of American presidents. Franklin Roosevelt's skill as a political counter-puncher turned Knutson's charge into rich political fodder; Richard Nixon watched FDR and learned a lesson that saved his political career.

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