



# Ideas for Identifying and Supporting Dog-Friendly Candidates

Primary elections are narrowing the slates of candidates for federal, state and local offices, and the November election date is fast approaching. As campaigns heat up and candidates make increasingly impassioned appeals to voters, it's important to identify dog-friendly candidates and use your vote to elect those who will protect the rights of responsible dog owners and breeders.

Your vote and voice are more important than ever, especially in light of increasing legislative and regulatory measures that affect dog owners and breeders. Here are four steps every dog owner should take in this critical 2014 election cycle:

1. Register yourself and others to vote—consider hosting a voter registration drive at an upcoming dog show or event.
2. Find out where, when, and how to vote—including absentee and early voting options.
3. Become an educated voter—*identify and support* those candidates who respect your rights as a responsible dog owner.
4. Mark your calendar for the upcoming elections, then get out and vote!



But how do you know that you are voting for someone who will support your rights? How do you become an educated voter? Here are some suggestions on how to determine if a candidate will work to protect your rights as a dog owner:

## **Research Incumbent Voting Records**

If candidates are incumbents, research their voting records on issues that impact dog owners. For federal and state office holders, you can find information about their actions during their most recent terms by visiting AKC GR's 2014 Legislation Tracking page. Click on individual bills to see who sponsored a measure and to view the votes that were cast in committees and on the floor of the legislature.

Analysis of selected issues going back to 2003 can be found by visiting AKC GR's Legislative Alerts page. View prior years by clicking on the "previous years" link at the bottom of each page. You can also visit your state's legislative web site to research information on current and past bills. Highlights of relevant legislative and regulatory issues can be found in past issues of the *Taking Command* newsletter.

Some county and city web sites provide current and archived meeting minutes that record the votes on local measures. If they do not, contact the city or county clerk's office to request the vote record for an issue of interest. These records are available to the public.

## **Research Candidate Endorsements**

Another good way to learn about candidates is to research their endorsements. It can be helpful to see which special interest groups have endorsed or "rated" a candidate on animal issues. Check organizations that you agree with as well as those with whom you don't agree. Some candidates will also be endorsed by public officials. Consider whether these officials understand key animal issues. Many candidates publish endorsements on their personal or campaign web pages.

## **Ask the Candidates**

An effective way to find out a candidate's views is to ask him or her directly. This not only helps reveal candidates' opinions and attitudes on canine issues, but it also lets them know that these issues are important to you, the voter. Attend town hall meetings, public forums, debates, and other public events that allow voters to ask the candidates questions about issues important to them. You can find upcoming opportunities on websites hosted by the candidate's political party, if applicable, and on the candidate's website. Look for lists or calendars of upcoming events.



Do not ask them their opinions about specific organizations, as they may not be aware of where various groups stand on dog issues. Rather, asking them policy questions will give you a much better idea of their positions. Follow up with their campaign office and ask if you can meet with the candidate or their staff to discuss canine legislation issues. ***Be sure to let them know that the candidate's positions on these issues will impact how you vote!***

If the candidates are not familiar with the issues, evade a question, do not share your views, or have not voted how you want in the past, view this as an opportunity to educate them. Be sure to have some talking points prepared to provide information on issues of concern to you as a responsible dog owner. Visit the online AKC Government Relations Toolbox for resources you can give candidates to help educate them about the importance of supporting responsible dog ownership. Invite candidates to your next club meeting or dog show to talk about canine legislation issues.

### **Conduct a Candidate Survey**

Conduct a survey of candidates' positions on key dog ownership/animal issues on behalf of your club or other dog organization. Contact candidates ahead of time to let them know you are sending them this survey. Let the candidates know that you and your colleagues will use this to consider how to vote in the upcoming election. Follow up after you have sent it to answer any questions they may have. If candidates are not familiar with the issues, this is an opportunity to educate them.

***You've identified the candidates who will receive your vote. Now what?***

### **Volunteer**

Get involved in campaigns that are important to you. Let your candidates know why you support them, and volunteer! Even if you have only limited time, taking a few hours to stuff envelopes, answer phones, or put up signs is a great way for candidates to see that responsible dog owners care about legislation and will support those who will protect our rights. Helping on the campaign is a wonderful way to establish a relationship with elected officials for when canine legislative issues arise.

### **Go Local**

Candidates for federal and state offices often get the most press, but local decision makers tend to have the greatest and most immediate impact on dog owners. Take time to meet with local officials and candidates, learn their positions, educate them about yours, and offer to serve as a reliable resource for accurate and sensible information about dog care, events, and breeding.

Are you a member of a political party? Does your party maintain a local office, hold scheduled meetings, host speakers, or organize community events? If so, get involved! This offers an excellent opportunity to get to know community leaders and policy makers one-on-one outside the legislative arena.

### **Spread the Word**

Electing lawmakers who respect the rights of animal owners helps ensure that the concerns of dog owners are heard and understood when canine legislation is considered. If you identify a dog-friendly candidate for office, spread the word to other animal owners, your club's Legislative Liaison, and the AKC GR team.

The AKC has established the AKC Political Action Committee (AKC PAC), a fund that combines donations from individuals who believe strongly in the need to take a stand in support of the rights of responsible dog owners. One hundred percent of donations go directly to the campaigns of candidates for federal and state offices who share the commitment to preserving and defending these rights. Donations to the AKC PAC may not be earmarked for individual candidates, but donors may make recommendations to the PAC Board about candidates they believe are worthy of support.

If you would like the AKC PAC Board to consider supporting the campaign of a candidate you have identified as dog-friendly, please contact [AKCPAC@akc.org](mailto:AKCPAC@akc.org).