

RETAIL POLITICS IN THE 1952 ELECTION

Campaigning in New Hampshire

It's said all of the time, but it is indeed true that New Hampshire presents a "level playing field" for the candidates. And what must the candidates do once they make it out onto the "field"? In addition to the obvious tasks of organizing an fundraising, grassroots style campaigning is requisite—whether you're an underdog or establishment candidate. This involves going straight to the people in places like living rooms, town halls, fire stations, school gyms, community centers, diners, club meetings and civic gatherings. Sometimes referred to as "retail politics," this style of campaigning was begun, begrudgingly, by the dour Senator Robert Taft of Ohio in 1952, when he undertook an intense three-day, twenty-eight town tour across New Hampshire in a doomed effort to defeat his immensely popular Republican opponent, General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

On the Democratic side in 1952, the folksy Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee welcomed this new campaign style as much as Taft resisted it. Kefauver upset incumbent President Harry S. Truman, who did not bother to campaign in New Hampshire, and forced him out of the race. Kefauver clearly enjoyed campaigning in New Hampshire and engaging in genuine retail politics during its infancy.

*This document has been edited to make it easier to read.



Notice & Wonder

- Take note of any words you don't know and look them up in a dictionary.
- How is New Hampshire a level playing field for presidential candidates?
- What are some examples of retail politics in this account?