

# Who let the dogs out?

Man's best friend has become the bone of contention in US presidential campaign.

If you're at all interested in what's wagging the dog on the US presidential campaign trail at the moment, get familiar with the four key players: Mitt, Seamus, Barack and Bo.

President Barack Obama and his Republican rival Mitt Romney ought to be consumed with plans to fix the economy and jump-start job growth.

Instead, they've been sideswiped by decades-old stories about how they treat man's best friend that have gone viral, pushed further into the media spotlight by uproarious Twitter exchanges – and not just between everyday Americans, but top campaign officials.

It's only April, and the campaign has already gone to the dogs?

Like a pitbull that clamps down and doesn't let go, Democrats have been gnawing away for months on Romney over his Irish setter Seamus, who spent several stressful hours in a crate atop the family station wagon as they headed out on vacation in 1983.

Democrats have used the embarrassing episode, in which the dog apparently soiled the crate so badly that Romney stopped to hose down Seamus and the car, to make pointed attacks on an "out-of-touch" front-runner and hope the story will resonate with millions of American households.

It has, at least with the thousands of supporters of the "Dogs Against



**Canine demo:** Supporters of Dogs Against Romney protesting outside of the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in New York City. – AFP

Romney" website, which sends out "Mitt is Mean" bumper stickers and "I Ride Inside" bandanas for dogs.

Earlier this year, Obama's campaign chief David Axelrod also ripped Mitt and Seamus, tweeting a photo of Obama and the family dog Bo travelling in the presidential limousine, with the line "How loving owners transport their dogs".

Now the Republicans have found some ammunition of their own.

Earlier this week, the Daily Caller website posted a quote from Obama's bestselling 1995 book *Dreams From My Father*, in which Obama described how he was "introduced to dog

meat" as a child in Indonesia. How did it taste? "Tough," he wrote.

Critics seized on Obama's admission, including senior Romney campaign adviser Eric Fehrnstrom, who on Tuesday tweeted the earlier Axelrod picture with the line: "In hindsight, a chilling photo."

The fur started flying on Twitter, and both campaigns found themselves pressed by relentless media queries. Ann Romney's defence of Seamus's treatment only seemed to make it worse.

"The dog loved it," she told ABC News. "He would see that crate and, you know, he would, like, go crazy

because he was going with us on vacation."

Asked whether Obama was aware that Republicans resurrected his sampling of dog meat, White House spokesman Jay Carney wouldn't bite.

But he said that "making a big deal of it makes it sound like somebody who is trying to get out of the doghouse on something", which of course, gave the story fresh legs.

Newt Gingrich, who remains in the Republican race despite virtually zero chance of winning, called the tit-for-tat between the Obama and Romney campaigns "utterly stupid".

And Romney sought to bring the debate back to things that matter, saying the 2012 campaign must be about "jobs not dogs".

But late on Thursday Sarah Palin, the 2008 Republican vice-presidential nominee, refused to let sleeping dogs lie.

Responding to reports that a Secret Service officer who guarded her in 2008 wrote on Facebook that he was "checking her out", Palin said on Fox: "I hope his wife ... sends him to the doghouse. As long as he's not eating the dog, along with his former boss."

One commentator on the BusinessInsider website who called himself Canadiano seemed to sum up the campaign's dog days succinctly: "You Americans are sick puppies." – AFP