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Hair stylists urge politicians to stick to a few mane rules

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Hair is just hair, even if those locks have a title like Hair Force One.



When Hillary Clinton decided to look less like a first lady and more like a senator, she ditched the headbands and got a sharper cut.

At least that's how people should think about Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson's new hairdo, said Tino, the stylist owner of Salon Tino in Clocktower Village.

"Definitely, people make too big a deal of hair," he said.

But even Tino admits that when you're a politician like Democrat Nelson, whose silver-turned-auburn locks have been in the news lately, hair is more than just hair. It's part of who you are, your image, your public presentation.

The cut, the color, how much they're willing to pay to get it done — \$400, in the case of Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards — and what changes they make can reflect a politician's character. And, believe or not, even allude to their politics.

"We read into the hair a lot," said Becky Rupiper-Greene, an Omaha-based image consultant for Terot International. "People are always making visual assessments. It's not just hair."

Because of this, politicians should follow a few rules.

Male politicians should have "clean and tidy" hair to appeal to a broad constituency, said Joe Scoville, owner of Joe Company, a salon near 120th Street and West Center Road. This makes them seem orderly and dependable.

Inconspicuous hairstyles also put the focus more on the message, Rupiper-Greene said. "Their hair is not a distraction."

That rule goes for females, too.

When Hillary Clinton was trying to change her image from that of a softer, more matronly first lady to that of a no-nonsense Democratic senator and presidential hopeful, she took off her headbands and got a sharper, more professional-looking cut.

Female politicians should keep their hair pulled back if it is too long, and cut in a style that is current but not overly trendy, Rupiper-Greene said.

If a politician has a hairstyle that is up-to-date, people assume their knowledge is too, she said.

When it comes to color, hue doesn't matter much. But in political circles, it is generally better to stick with your natural color. Authenticity indirectly implies you aren't trying to cover up anything.

When people recently accused Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney of coloring his hair black, he vehemently denied it. A few years ago, a news story that tied a dye job by former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to his credibility resulted in a court case.

"Some people think by dyeing your hair, you are not being truthful about who you are or what you are," Tino said.

Gray can actually be more of an asset for politicians because it implies wisdom, Scoville said.

And stability, said Rupiper-Greene.

"We don't trust the new kid on the block as much. We embrace the stability the grayness brings."

If a politician does decide to change hairstyle or color, it should be gradual — and definitely not drastic. People can associate a change in a politician's appearance with a change in his or her beliefs.



"You think, 'He's changing his hair, so what else is changing about him?'"
Rupiper-Greene said. "Is his stance changing too?"

Presidential hopeful Mitt Romney recently denied accusations that he — gasp! — colors his hair.

Nelson did the right thing by making light of the sudden color change, and admitting that it was a mistake, said Anne Fenner, another Omaha image consultant.

Rupiper-Greene said Nelson should gradually go back to gray instead of dyeing it immediately.

Tino, on the other hand, thinks Nelson's new color looks great. He thinks it's silly that Nelson can't experiment with color a little bit. But the reality is that a stable image is important to a politician.

"Because people are looking at him and evaluating him on something as silly as his hair, he should probably take it to heart," Tino said.

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