

Texas Personalities

Ross Perot

Best known for: Dallas computer billionaire, philanthropist, and independent (Reform Party) candidate for U.S. president in 1992 and 1996.

At age seven, Perot started working at various jobs throughout his childhood, including breaking horses, selling Christmas cards, magazines, and garden seeds, buying and selling bridles, saddles, horses and calves, delivering newspapers, and collecting for classified ads. After graduation from the Naval Academy, Perot served at sea for four years on a destroyer and an aircraft carrier.

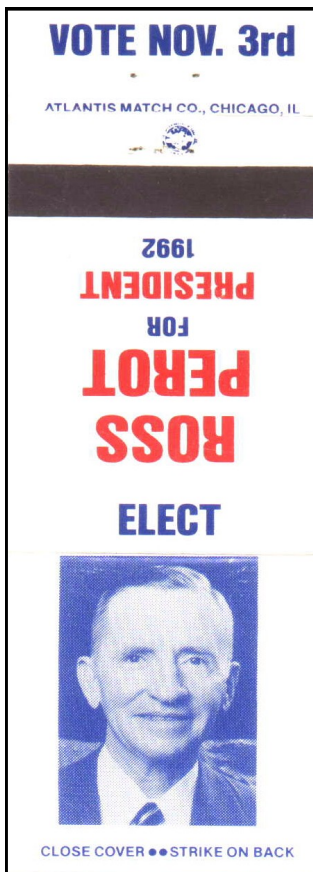
In 1956, he married Margot, whom he met while at the Naval Academy. After being discharged from the Navy in 1957, Ross and Margot settled in Dallas where he went to work for IBM's data processing division as a salesman. By the early 1990s, the couple owned two homes in the Dallas area, one on a twenty-two-acre estate in a posh neighborhood.

In 1969, Perot began to become more deeply involved with the "military-industrial complex." In what would become known in later decades as a hostile takeover, Perot attempted to take control, through a stock swap, of the Collins Radio Company, an Iowa-based CIA and military contractor with a division in the Richardson suburb of Dallas. In 1979, two EDS employees were taken hostage by the Iranian government.

Perot directed a successful rescue mission. The Perot family is also known for more traditional philanthropy. They have given over \$100 million to charitable and civil causes. In 1984, Perot bought a copy of the Magna Carta. It was the only copy allowed to be taken out of Great Britain. Perot loaned the document to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., for display alongside the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Bush's popularity was temporarily high after Desert Storm and a second Bush term seemed inevitable. Then Perot appeared on Larry King's CNN TV talk show and said he would consider running against Bush if volunteers could get his name on all fifty state ballots. Millions of U.S. citizens responded by signing petitions which put Perot on the ballots of most of the states, but not all fifty. Perot began appearing on more talk shows and produced his own half-withdrawing from the race after

*Courtesy of <http://www.famoustexans.com/>
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hour TV info-mercials to explain his positions on national issues, particularly on deficit reduction. Misperceived by the public as a refreshing Washington "outsider," Perot was actually a consummate political insider, knowing many of the government's dirtiest secrets.

The dirty tactics of his would-be opponents and the biased treatment by the media caused him to reconsider whether he would run. On election day the \$57 million of his own money spent on the campaign got him 19% percent of the vote, the highest percentage for a third party candidate since Theodore Roosevelt. In 1995, Perot announced the formation of the Independence Party (now called the Reform Party). The next year, Perot won the Reform Party nomination for president.

As a result of the media's irresponsibility, Perot lost the support of confused voters. Then he was refused a spot in the presidential debates because debate sponsors decided his low poll numbers disqualified him as a serious candidate. President Clinton wanted him in the debates, Republican opponent Bob Dole did not. In the election, Perot won 8 percent of the vote.

Early in the 2000 presidential campaign, the candidates were watching for signs that Perot might make a third straight run

for president. This time, Reform Party rivals for the nomination included former Republican candidate and Nixon staffer Pat Buchanan. Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura, a former Navy Seal and trained covert operations specialist, also became a leader of anti-Perot sentiment within the party. Perot eventually withdrew.

Ross Perot has written several books, including *United We Stand; Not for Sale at Any Price; Save Your Job, Save Our Country; Intensive Care; Preparing Our Country for the 21st Century; and The Dollar Crisis*, co-authored with Senator Paul Simon.