

Hi, and welcome to Fenimore Art Museum! Our museum has a wide variety of American art, including paintings, sculptures, and Native American art & objects, and right now we're showing a special exhibit of photographs by a man named Pete Souza, who was the official White House photographer for two US presidents: Ronald Reagan, our 40th president from 1981 to 1989, and Barack Obama, who was our 44th president and first African American president, from 2009 to 2016. Pete Souza was able to photograph these two presidents at work and at play. He was in the room during top secret military missions and was out on the golf course during their days off. In this program we're going to use Souza's photographs to learn a little bit more about exactly what the president of the United States does and why their job is so important.

Since 1789 the United States has elected a president of the United States to run the executive branch of government every four years. The executive branch is one of the three branches of government, with the legislative branch and judicial branch being the other two. The legislative branch includes the Senate and the House of Representatives, and they write bills that are voted on and sent to the president. If the president likes them, they're signed into laws, and if not, they are vetoed. The Supreme Court, under the judicial branch, is there to make sure these laws follow the Constitution of the United States. Together these three branches give us the checks and balances that make our system of government what it is today.

The president does more than sign or veto bills, however. The president is known as the Commander in Chief, which means that they are the one in charge of the US Armed Forces including the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. The president can send troops to different parts of the world for peacekeeping missions and occasionally, if necessary, war. In 2011, President Obama and his team watched from his Situation Room in the White House as a special team of Navy SEALs led a successful raid against terrorist leader Osama bin Laden. The president is responsible for the safety of our soldiers too, so when one of them is injured or killed it's important for the president to be there to offer them and their family the support they need. Here we see President Reagan at a Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery in 1984, honoring an unknown soldier who died in the Vietnam War.

Another very important job of the president is to be a key diplomat with other countries. This means that the president not only appoints US ambassadors to represent other countries, but also attends important summits and meets with the leaders of countries around the world to talk about issues that affect everyone including the environment, the economy, and world peace. They meet both with leaders they agree with and with ones they don't. Here's a photo of Barack Obama with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who very much disliked each other, and here is President Reagan with former Soviet Union president Mikhail Gorbachev, leaving a meeting where they couldn't agree on a deal to get rid of their nuclear weapons. These meetings were still important though, because they let these two leaders know where America stands on the issues.

At home, the president works with Congress as they write bills to try to negotiate what will be included in them so they are passed by the Senate and the House. Barack Obama,

for example worked very hard in order to have the Affordable Care Act, a revamp of America's health care policy passed. Pete Souza photographed Obama while he worked on a speech he gave to Congress about the bill in 2009, and was also there when the House of Representatives passed the bill with a majority vote in 2010. The bill had already been passed by the Senate, which means all it needed was the president's signature to become law.

The president is also the person Americans look to for leadership and comfort when a tragedy strikes. Almost everyone who lived in the 1980s remembers when the space shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after launch in 1986. Here, President Reagan and his team watch a taped recording of the explosion before he gave a speech to the nation remembering the astronauts who were aboard, including a schoolteacher named Christa McAuliffe. President Obama as well had to console people after tragedies, such as a tornado which killed over 150 people in a small town in Missouri in 2011.

With everything the president of the United States does, it's important to remember that presidents are people too. They have families. Ronald Reagan's wife was Nancy, and Barack Obama is married to Michelle. Sometimes a president has children who move to the White House with them as well. Many presidents have had pets. Both Reagan and Obama owned dogs, and Reagan even had a ranch where he owned and rode horses. So far, every president our country has been a man, but there's no reason why a woman couldn't be elected too. The only requirements are that they must be a natural born citizen of the US and lived here for at least 14 years, and they must be 35 years old. The peaceful transition of power from president to president is one of the special things about our system of government. Who knows might be holding the job when you grow up. Perhaps it will even be one of you! Thanks for joining us today for a look at these photographs.