

## How to Bird-Dog A Candidate or Politician

The term "bird-dog" comes from hunting; the bird-dog's job is to flush the birds out of the bushes and into the open. Politicians are like the birds--they try to keep their positions hidden behind vague rhetoric. Using tightly crafted questions, the successful bird-dog forces candidates to reveal their position on an issue.

Here are some tips on preparing for your bird-dog mission adapted from [NH Citizen Action](#):

- **Find out where the candidate will be and when.** If you are interested in a particular candidate, plan ahead by calling his or her campaign office. The phone number is usually available on the campaign Web site.
- **Know the candidate's position.** Ask a question that shows you know something about the candidate's position (ex: "You have said you'd like to increase the use of technology in public schools..."), and link it to a budget priorities question (" ... would you eliminate wasteful spending in the Pentagon budget to pay for classroom computers?").
- **Have your question ready.** Make sure your question is brief, fact-based and direct. Practice asking your question to yourself and with family or friends until you can do it without notes and in your regular cadence. It's good to have a second question ready, in case someone asks yours before you have a chance to.
- **Arrive early.** This is especially important if the candidate is very popular, leading in the polls, or if it is late in the primary season. If there is a question-and-answer session you'll want to be close enough for the candidate to see you and call on you. *Be forewarned: Campaign schedules change quickly, and it is a rare candidate who arrives on time for an event, so build in some extra time.*
- **Ask your question early.** When candidates invite questions, most people will not immediately raise their hands. If you do, you are more likely to be called upon.
- **Be calm and reasonable.** Maintaining a respectful tone will get a more positive response from the candidate, their staff and the news media. People who are angry, sarcastic or emotional will be ignored. You can even start your question by praising something the candidate has just said in her or his prepared remarks.
- **Be in the candidate's path.** Many candidates want to shake hands and meet as many people as possible at these events. The informal, unscripted contacts are extra opportunities to ask your questions. Position yourself in

the candidate's path, and ask your question as you're gripping his or her hand.

- **Bring other people with you.** Since bird-dogging can make some people nervous, it is good to go in teams of two or more people. Not standing together will also improve the odds that more than one of you will get to ask the question. Be prepared to ask a follow up question if you feel the candidate dodged your question or if you want more details.
- **Take notes.** The only way to track the responses of candidates is to have a record of what they said. It is also helpful to have notes if you are trying to frame a follow-up question. If you have a friend with you, each of you can write down the response to the other's question.
- **Be prepared to speak to the media.** Journalists often like to talk to someone who has asked the candidate a question. Remember to stay on message and talk to the reporter about the issue you asked about. Your response could be: "The Senator says he wants to represent me and is asking for my vote. I'd like to know if he really does want to represent people like me by supporting an amendment to the Constitution which clearly states that corporations do not have inherent rights under the Constitution, and money is not speech."
- **Be creative and improvise when necessary.** Being a bird-dog is not just about asking questions. Use other ways to raise public and candidate awareness.
- **Reflect on what you have learned.** Back in your car, or at home, take a few moments to jot down what you asked the candidate and what her or his response was. Share what you learned with others. Send a press release or make a public statement in response.

Thank you to Move to Amend for this information.