

Birddogging 101

The art and science of extracting answers from our congresscritters

GOALS OF BIRDDOGGING:

1. Get answers on the record by asking the right questions, in-public, in-person, and on camera. *See below on impactful questions.*
2. Create movement for good legislation by getting the attention of our MoC and pressuring them directly, without intermediaries—while letting the media know. We almost never speak directly to people with the power to give us what we want, and they almost never hear from us. Election season is crucial!

CORE MISSION+MESSAGING—keep it simple, look to the future! Avoid technical, jargon filled partisan laundry lists, or asking why an MoC did something bad in the past. For birddogging about healthcare, focus on a request for universal, low-cost healthcare that is better and cheaper than we have now, and covers everyone. **Core messages on healthcare:**

We want a gov't-backed system that ensures all of us can go to *nearby* health center, when we need to, get care as good or better than we have now, and pay no more than a very modest sum we can afford.

Drugs should not cost more in the U.S. than in the next 10 richest countries.

High-quality care for everybody regardless of age, income, pre-existing conditions or immigration status.

BIRD-DOGGING BASICS

We aim to win the room, with a deeply felt, widely understood question that your target can neither avoid, nor answer with a “no”, without exposing themselves as a candidate unworthy of votes. They should look good for saying yes, and look bad for saying no.

1. Find an event: Campaign events and town halls. But also, maybe you know your MOC is on the board of the XYZ Club and the XYZ Club is having a donor dinner - show up! We will help you find events.

2. Get a crew: 3-7 people are all you need to successfully direct the conversation at a town hall!

3. Make a specific plan: Agree on a goal, put together 2-3 questions (each more or less the same topic), or, if no Q&A, come up with a chant, tuck paper signs into your clothes. Don't ask questions about more than one or two topics—every question is like a pebble on a scale, and each is more powerful than the previous. Don't scatter your pebbles—tip a scale! *Make sure that **everyone understands everyone's questions**, so you can back each other up. *i.e.* "I was going to ask you about XYZ, but you didn't answer that other person's question over there. Will you get better, cheaper healthcare to everyone?" This helps assure that the event is dominated by your concerns. **The contacts at the bottom of this sheet will, on request, help you develop an event-specific, target-specific plan.**

*Everyone WRITE DOWN ON PAPER your question/s to take to the event. *PRACTICE & role play. A good Q is no more than 60 seconds.

4. Show up early to get GOOD SEATS + check EXITS: Wear generic clothes, avoid activist t-shirts and buttons. Spread out: different parts of the room get called on—but aim for very close to front and center. **Make eye contact with the target. Cheer wildly** so the official identifies you as supporter—not *protester*.

5. Raise your hands FIRST, FAST, & HIGH - you want your questions to be first and frequent. **Do this for every question**, and your team will get all the questions. Remain standing after your question.

6. Execute your plan! Your team can **hit with follow-up with questions** if the MOC avoids or only partially answers the first time. You can also politely interrupt them if you notice they are changing the subject.

7. **Other teammates record** the rep's response: on paper, verbatim + also video. But YOU focus on holding them on topic. Don't hold up a camera during your exchange. DON'T sit down, DON'T give up the mic.

8. Get a **handshake** - often there is a handshake session at the end. EVERYONE rush and get in line together. Take turns asking a 3-4 second question, try to keep shaking their hand. Get a selfie and ask them to autograph something. This slows down the line and gives each member of your team more time to put pressure on your rep. We dominate once again!

9. Find a **journalist to repeat your message**. Answer the question they *should* have asked you, rather than the off topic question the reporter might have asked you. Stay on message! (*i.e.* "I think the real story here today is.."). **Plan a soundbite in advance**. It's easier to be concise when you've planned it.

10. Report back to your group, and to the Right to Health Action Team. Our collective info will be turned into leverage later. If we know exactly what the MOC said in one town hall, we can bring it back to their attention at the next (i.e. “Congressman, at your last campaign event, you promised that you’d only support replacement plans that would reduce out-of-pocket costs and premiums. But since then you’ve voted for 2 bills that would raise the premiums, etc.”).

IF you’re at an event where you can only submit written Qs: consider making your questions vague, but ask your *real* question at the mic. It’s also effective to ask the moderator for advice about your question: Once they’ve given you advice, it’s much more likely they will ask it. **If no chance to speak,** try to raise your hands anyway. Bring signs. Prepare a chant. Stake out and approach the MoC and journalists afterwards.

INGREDIENTS OF AN IMPACTFUL QUESTION (60 seconds or less)

A good question starts with something personal and emotional about you or people you care for (“I lost my beloved aunt to COVID-19...”), generalizes your concern to give a sense of the scope (“10s of thousands of other Floridians have lost loved ones as well”), then ask a question that contains a request for an action *in the future*. (“Will you fight for \$10 billion annually for a global fund to pandemic-proof the planet? We need to make sure this never happens again.”) Don’t ask “What will you do about X?”—instead ask closed-ended, yes or no questions. “WILL YOU PROMISE TO...” “WILL YOU OPPOSE any bill that does not...” and “WILL YOU support only bills that...”

IMPORTANT: your question contains the answer. We have a simple, specific agenda, and do not

want to be distracted by the slippery nonsense that MOCs can raise to obscure that some of their plans do little or leave most people much worse off. You can always focus on requests for action from our set of sample questions, or the core messages above.

Bad question: “What will you do about people losing health care?”

Impactful question: “Will you support only plans that cover *more* people, not less, at *lower* personal costs, not higher?? Will those benefits be at least as good as what we have now, no matter my age, income, or preexisting condition?” Or: “We pay more for medicine than any other country - for drugs that were often invented on the taxpayer dime. Will you support an amendment that revokes a government-granted monopoly if a drug company is charging Americans more than they charge for the same product in the next 10 richest countries?”

SIGN UP FOR B-DOG ALERTS when your MOCs are near you!: pdavisx@gmail.com