

Bird-Dog Manual

**How to Help
Politicians Commit to
Do the Right Thing**

Backbone Campaign



Bird-Dog Basics

In a political context, bird-dogging means going to an elected official's speaking event to thank them in public, to call them to action, or to ask them to take a leadership role on an issue.

This manual is organized based on the themes of the Backbone Campaign's "Procession for the Future," which address the focus of a progressive movement. Each theme has bird-dog questions about the most critical issues facing the United States and its people.

Do Your Homework

- Find a local party activist who is willing to pass on information to you.
- Find friendly members of the media to get information from.
- Check media sources such as newspapers and newspaper websites for calendars announcing when political candidates will appear.
- Find out where the official will be speaking.

Get Familiar with the Official

- Subscribe to candidate, state, and party email and snail mail lists.
- Go to the candidate's website or campaign headquarters. Access national Congressional websites through www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.
- Other politicians can be found at the "political futures" column of ABC and MSNBC: abcnews.go.com/Politics/TheNote/story?id=140388, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14708421/

Work in Teams

- Prepare the question(s) you want to ask and rehearse it.
- Arrive early to get seats close to the front and/or near the microphone if there's a mic for the Q&A.
- Have others sit in different areas of the room to maximize your impact.
- Raise your hand immediately when the Q&A starts. If you respond enthusiastically to the official, that also increases your chance of being called.
- Be confident and considerate when you ask the question.
- Don't get distracted or angry if your question is blown over, but *do* be persistent about getting your question answered, including repeating the question and asking for an appropriate response.
- Have a note-taker jot down all info and promises made by the official.
- Designate a videographer, as You-Tube, Google , and other methods are an excellent way to amplify your message.

After the Meeting

- After the meeting talk with media about issues if they weren't covered.
- Seek out the candidates after the meeting to introduce yourself and follow up on your question, or ask it if you were not able to ask the question during the meeting.
- Leave the event with a clear plan to follow up with their staff.

Democracy & Election Integrity

Civil Rights The President has passed legislation where he can spy on all our calls and emails, lets him put anyone he wants in jail with no recourse, and allows him complete control over the National Guard—essentially giving the President dictatorial powers. Would you sponsor a law to eliminate these clear infringements of our constitutional rights?

Public Financing of Elections To remove corporate and lobbying influence in elections, do you support requiring full public funding for all federal, state, and local elections?

Election Integrity Since the 2000 election there has been clear ballot box vote corruption. Would you support legislation that ensured voting machines have open source code, were publicly owned and managed, and had a voter-verified paper ballot?

Dismantle Oppression, Separation of Church & State

Removing Corporate Tax Breaks Do you support removing tax breaks and loopholes for wealthy corporations and people, since the top one percent owns 25% of the wealth in the US and the top 200 corporations have 25% of the world's money, yet employ fewer than one percent of the people?

Same Sex Marriage Equality Long-term same sex partners are currently denied visitation rights in hospitals, the ability to include their spouse on their insurance, and aren't eligible for their partner's Social Security benefits. Would you support marriage equality so that same sex couples who share their deep love for each other can receive the same marriage benefits as different sex couples?

Abortion Rights If you had a daughter who got pregnant but wasn't prepared to raise a child, would you force her to go through with the pregnancy, or would you allow her to have an abortion?

HIV/AIDS Around 40 million people worldwide are infected with HIV/AIDS, 90% of whom are in developing countries. Would you support cancelling the debt of countries where more than 5% of their populations are infected with HIV and using that money for stopping or slowing the spread of this disease.

Community Investment, Health & Security

Health Care We spend about twice what other countries do for health care yet we have 47 million people with no health insurance and huge medical bankruptcy rates unheard of in other developed countries. Would you put American's health ahead of enriching insurance companies by supporting a national single payer health system to ensure that everyone has the health care they need and deserve?

Prison, Drug Legalization If the prison population was a city, it would be the fourth largest city in the US. At 2.2 million prisoners, the US has 25% of the world's prisoners. One quarter of all US prisoners are in for non-violent minor drug offenses. Would you support legalizing marijuana so that it's regulated and taxed?

Social Security Privatizing Social Security would mean billions of dollars for investment bankers at the expense of everyday Americans. Will you take an active role in ensuring that Social Security is not privatized?

Climate Change, Ecological Well Being

Reduce Greenhouse Gases Specifically would you support a legislative package requiring a 10% reduction in U.S. greenhouse gases within three years, and a 90% reduction by 2050?

Increase Gas Mileage Would you support a law requiring cars to get at least 50 miles per gallon by 2020?

No New Nukes Do you support a moratorium on all new coal and nuclear plants?

Notes

Sustainable Energy, Food & Commerce

Energy Independence The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 passed last year, but important green power tax incentives and a new national standard to promote renewable power were cut from that legislation. Would you support re-adding these so we could create more environmentally sound energy, employ millions of Americans, and make us less dependent on foreign oil?

Renewable Energy Would you support a requirement that 50% of all industrial, farm, and home energy be generated from renewable sources by 2040?

Sustainability Do you support a U.S. Energy Sustainability program that would withdraw \$80 billion in annual subsidies from fossil fuels and establish equivalent subsidies for clean energy sources; and rapidly convert U.S. food and farming, transportation, industry, and utilities production to renewable energy so that sustainable practices become the norm in all sectors of the economy?

Worker Dignity in a Global Economy

Full Employment In 1946 Congress proposed a Full Employment Act, but it was gutted by business. Would you support a Full Employment Act so that every American has a job at livable wages and could support themselves and their families?

Remove Outsourcing Subsidies The US is losing its manufacturing base because our policies give tax breaks and subsidies to businesses that send jobs overseas. Will you remove these policies and allow only subsidies which actively create more jobs in the US?

Repeal NAFTA Would you support a repeal, or at least a renegotiation, of NAFTA and GATT, so that Fair Trade, environmental sustainability, and food sovereignty, become the foundation of our trade policies, rather than increasing the profits of multinational corporations?

Just Security & Global Justice

Getting Out of Iraq 80% of the people in Iraq and 70% of Americans want the US to leave their country. Would you support withdrawal of all US troops and military bases within 120 days to honor Iraqi wishes and use the money saved for real reconstruction in Iraq and needs of our people here at home?

Military Budget The United States spends more money on military costs than all other countries combined, yet geographically we are also the country that is the most protected. Will you push to reduce the military budget in half so we can use the savings for REAL security by building schools, better transportation and infrastructure, affordable house loans, etc.

Government Transparency, Truth & Accountability

Finding the Truth About 9/11 The Jersey Girls and other family members of those killed on 9/11 have called for a comprehensive and truly independent investigation to address the many inconsistencies in the official 9/11 story. This is especially important to honor those who died that day and because it was the excuse for invading Iraq and Afghanistan, to take away our rights, and to make the government more secretive. Will you support the 9/11 families by initiating a 9/11 Commission with independent journalists and researchers?

Government Secrecy The federal Committee on Oversight & Government Reform found that the Bush administration has undermined the Freedom of Information Act, has limited access to Presidential records, and committed various other actions that keep Americans from finding information about our own country. Will you ensure that members of this administration are held accountable and prosecuted for what they have done to America?

Surveillance Will you disclose the full scope of Bush Administration domestic surveillance activities affecting American citizens, including all surveillance actions that were undertaken outside of the framework of law, as well as the legal opinions that were generated to justify them?

Resources

Below are sample website resources where you can find additional information about the various issues in this manual. The Backbone Campaign is also preparing one and two page fact sheets on these issues which you can use to increase your own knowledge or an official's knowledge.

Civil Rights

American Civil Liberties Union www.aclu.org

Electronic Frontier Foundation www.eff.org

Public Funding of Elections

Public Citizen www.citizen.org/congress/campaign/index.cfm

Common Cause www.commoncause.org/CleanElections

Ballot Box Corruption

Election Defense Alliance www.electiondefensealliance.org

Ending Corporate Tax Breaks

Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy www.poclad.org

Same Sex Marriage Equality

Freeheld (Academy Award-winning film) www.freeheld.com

Inlaws & Outlaws (film) www.inlawsandoutlawsfilm.com

Abortion Rights

NARAL Pro-Choice America www.naral.org

Health Care

Physicians for a National Health Program www.pnhp.org

Prison, Drug Legalization

AFSCME-ACU www.afscme.org/workers/10178.cfm

Schaeffer Library of Drug Policy

www.druglibrary.org/Schaffer/debate/debate.htm

Social Security

AFL-CIO www.aflcio.org/issues/retirementsecurity/socialsecurity/

Reduce Greenhouse Gases

Project Hot Seat <http://members.greenpeace.org/hotseat/>

Increase Gas Mileage

Fuel-Efficient-Vehicles www.fuel-efficient-vehicles.org/energy-news/?p=382

No New Nukes

National Resources Defense Council www.nrdc.org

Energy Independence

Apollo Alliance www.apolloalliance.org

Renewable Energy

Alternative Energy www.alternative-energy-news.info

Sustainability

Grassroots Netroots Alliance [www.grassrootsnetroots.org/
environment.cfm](http://www.grassrootsnetroots.org/environment.cfm)

Full Employment

National Jobs for All Coalition www.njfac.org

Remove Outsourcing Subsidies

Good Jobs First

www.goodjobsfirst.org/accountable_development/model_legislation.cfm

Repeal NAFTA

Public Citizen www.citizen.org/trade/nafta/

Getting Out of Iraq

Source Watch

www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Out_of_Iraq_Congressional_Caucus

Military Budget

International Peace Bureau www.ipb.org/milspending.html

Finding the Truth About 9/11

Family Steering Committee www.911independentcommission.org

Government Secrecy

Open the Government.org <http://openthegovernment.org>

Surveillance

Tracked in America (film) www.trackedinamerica.org

To print your own copies of this brochure, go to: www.backbonecampaign.org/birddogmanual

The Backbone Campaign would like to thank the organizers of the Grassroots Netroots Alliance for their Candidate Survey and the Progressive Challenge for their 2008 Progressive Priorities. We hope that our Bird-Dogging Manual compliments their efforts to raise citizen expectations for the future and to hold candidates and elected officials accountable to a higher standard. Please support and learn from their efforts by visiting: www.grassrootsnetroots.org and www.progressive2008.org. To learn more about the Backbone Campaign's full Progressive Platform go to: www.backbonecampaign.org/platform.

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