Let’s understand the **definition of bird-dogging**. Bird-dogging is when advocates or activists attend the public events or appearances of politicians and ask questions or draw attention to a specific issue. The goal is to have direct contact between an advocate and policy-maker and put that decision-maker on the spot for the given issue and get a commitment from them. This is usually done in a question/answer format during a town hall meeting, but can also be a sign or banner during a high profile event or even chanting from the crowd. To get an answer to a question or commitment is especially useful in front of a crowd, because it helps us hold these politicians accountable to their word. It is particularly useful during election season as politicians are trying to garner public support and are more open to the opinions of constituents.

**First, choose the right event.** Check out events and town halls sponsored by current members of Congress or candidates running for office. If you are targeting a candidate, call their office for more information. Often, for campaign events, a ticket is required for entry so be sure to the necessary details to get in. If tickets are unavailable, ask if you can sign up to volunteer at the event. Also be sure to ask if there will be a question and answer period at the event.

**Gather some friends** and prepare to bird-dog! Planning is very important for these events. First, write all of your questions in advance and give a copy to each member of the group. It is best practice to come up with two or three questions and follow-up topics just in case the target gives an incomplete answer. Good bird-dogging requires good teamwork.

**Be there early.** This is big. An hour early for a small meeting, half hour early for a coffee shop-type event, and three hours early for a big rally. You want to have someone in the front row, near the aisles, or near microphones set up for question/answer.

**Get noticed** so they call on you. You can do this in a number of ways: wear a campaign t-shirt, sticker, or 3 buttons, or clap and cheer really loudly when they speak, or wave pom poms and hold a poster with your support. They will notice on you and feel more inclined to call on you during a question/answer session.
your hand **first, fast, and high**. If you forget everything else about bird-dogging, remember this: first, fast, and high. You could actually raise your hand before they finish asking for a question/answer period. Sometimes, even if there isn’t a pre-scheduled period, and you raise your hand in the first row, they may call on you and spontaneously decide to answer a question. You have practiced asking your question, but feel free to check the paper you’ve written it down on. It’s better to say it correctly!

**Go to the handshake line.** Your team should not be sitting together during the event, but you should become a mob for the handshake line. Draw them to you by asking for photos or to sign paraphernalia. Re-ask (or ask for the first time) your question while shaking the candidates hand and don’t let go of the hand until you have your answer. Politicians are used to this. Have another team member snapping photos or videos of the interaction.

**Get Quoted** You aren’t done yet! You need to get quoted. It’s crucial to share with the media and constituency how the candidate is or isn’t responding to constituent requests — this will give you much more leverage in the long-run. Go straight to the press and tell them about your experience: your topic, how many times you have asked, the response of the candidate. Prepare your quote for the press just like you prepared your question. Keep the discussion on what YOU want to share, not the story the reporter has already started writing in his or her mind. You can ignore a question and say exactly and only exactly what you prepared to say.

**Finally,** notify your network. Email your network to let them know how it went. This is great to share and celebrate your experience, but also to give them a chance to potentially follow up and pressure the same candidate at an event near them.

**Question Tips** Put the answer in your question. Make it a close-ended yes or no with a decisive result and polarize the issue (imply that by answering the wrong way, they are going to be on the bad side of history, essentially). Do your research and connect your issue to them personally. Contain an “I” statement that represents the concerns and needs of the constituency they need electing them. Name their opponent.

*And remember: don’t be hostile, but be direct and clear. Be sure to bird-dog BOTH candidates on both sides of the aisle. You will have a much bigger impact this way.*

Let us know how it went! Email GCE-US at info@gce-us.org