
Bird-Dogging

Candidates & Elected Representatives on Nuclear Weapons Issues



*A “How To” Guide With Prepared Questions on Preemptive War Policy,
Military Budget & Nuclear Weapons (Including “Depleted” Uranium)*

I. What is Bird-dogging?

Bird-dogging is a tactic that many organizations and concerned citizens, use to pressure candidates or elected representatives to take a public stance on an issue, or to question a stance that they have already taken. It usually consists of one or more bird-doggers who go to a public event where a candidate or elected representative, such as a Member of Congress or a U.S. Senator, will appear. The bird-doggers ask pointed questions about issues they care about in order to elicit a response and educate the media and voters. Because members of the media often attend these events, bird-dogging plays an important role in getting candidates’ positions “on record.” We all know that politicians don’t always keep their promises once they’re elected, so this is a vital part of holding them accountable to their constituents.

Bird-dogging candidates or an elected representative is a great way to raise important issues with them, the media and voters.

II. How to Bird-dog

Here are some tips to help you get started on a successful bird-dogging campaign. Many of these tips come from www.birddogger.org.

A) Find out where the candidate will be.

One of the easiest ways to find out where a candidate will be is to join his or her email list, or to check the website of the candidate or the candidate’s party. If you have good contacts with the media, you might be able to get information from friendly journalists, or those with a progressive point of view. Stay up-to-date with local newspapers and news websites, as they often publish calendars of candidate events. Find out as much about each event as you can, so you know what to expect ahead of time.

You could also consider organizing your own issue forum or candidate debate. This might be easier to do if you co-host the event with other organizations, or with a prominent coalition. One advantage to this kind of event is that you can invite candidates to speak only on the issues you choose.

B) Prepare your questions ahead of time.

You’ll need to have your questions ready before the event. That way, while every one else is thinking of what they want to ask, you’ll already be prepared. If there is an open question and answer period your pre-planning will pay off. Most people don’t raise their hands immediately. But as a well-prepared bird-dogger you can express immediate interest in asking a question - so get your hand up early and often, and sit up front.

**BE SAFE: Take Precautionary Action to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons and to ensure
that the United States does not build dangerous new, more usable nuclear weapons.**

Prepared Questions

Here are some questions you could ask on nuclear weapons, military budget, preemptive war policy and “depleted” uranium weapons.

The questions below come from the Friends Committee on National Legislation (fcn1.org), American Friends Service Committee (afsc.org), and groups in the BE SAFE network, including the “Depleted” Uranium Network of the Hudson Mohawk Region (nysnet-du@yahoogroups.com) and Traprock Peace Center (traprock@crocker.com).

Nuclear Weapons

1) The current administration has requested funding for new nuclear weapons. In addition, the government’s Nuclear Posture review spells out an increased role for nuclear weapons in US military strategy. **What will you do to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons and to ensure that the United States does not build dangerous new, more usable nuclear weapons?**

2) Instead of making us more safe, the policies of nuclear weapons superiority, developing and deploying new nuclear weapons, and using them in first strike attacks takes us back to the hostile days of the Cold War and violates the Non-Proliferation Treaty. **What will you do to get our country back on course toward non-proliferation, multilateral arms control, and elimination of nuclear weapons?**

Military Budget

3) At \$9.1 billion dollars, Star Wars Missile Defense is the largest single program in the military budget, yet many experts say that the program won’t work and that it won’t meet the most likely threats our country faces. **What will you do to ensure that our tax money isn’t wasted on a missile “defense” program that will only offer America a false sense of security?**

4) The U.S. military budget now stands at about \$400 billion a year, more than the world’s next thirty biggest military spenders combined, and that amount does not even include the billion dollars a day to occupy Iraq. Meanwhile, people here are losing medical coverage, educational opportunities, pensions, and can’t find affordable housing. **What would you do to balance federal spending priorities and give us real security?**

Preemptive War Policy

5) The invasion and ongoing occupation of Iraq was based on the doctrine of “preemptive” war, which suggests that the US can unilaterally attack any country or other entity that it deems a threat. This doctrine has weakened international law, and now there is nothing to prevent another country from citing this doctrine when launching an aggressive attack. **How will you work with the international community to strengthen norms against the use of “preemptive,” unilateral force?**

6) The policy of preemptive war is not only a prescription for war without end, but also creates a dangerous precedent for regional conflicts in the Middle East, South Asia, Russia and Africa. **What will you do to promote nonviolent resolution of international conflicts?**

Troops and Civilians Exposed to “Depleted” Uranium Weapons

7) Under the Geneva Convention, weapons are banned if their effects indiscriminately target civilians and last after the cessation of hostilities. “Depleted” uranium (DU) weapons and tanks produce radioactive, toxic heavy metal dust when fired or penetrated. Inhaling this dust exposes humans to radiation and heavy metal poisoning for years, as it can remain lodged in the lungs, and slowly migrates to bones and lymph nodes, where it continues to damage tissue. DU dust can travel on the winds for untold miles, so it can cross into other countries. The U.S. military is downplaying the danger of these radioactive remnants of war. **How would you help to bring the U.S. into compliance with the Geneva Convention? Do you support a ban on the U.S.’s use of “depleted” uranium weapons?**

8) Troops now in Iraq have undoubtedly been exposed to “depleted” uranium (DU) from their own weapons and DU armored tanks, which produce radioactive dust when fired or penetrated. Inhaling this dust exposes our troops to radiation and heavy metal hazards. The military is ignoring the radiation hazards and compounding the error by providing inadequate testing designed not to measure DU exposure. A 2004 military directive calls for mandatory testing for those most directly exposed and testing for those who request it (such as driving by a burning tank hit with DU munitions). **How are you supporting our DU injured troops and ensuring that they are fully informed of the hazards of these weapons and receive prompt and effective testing and medical care?**

U.S. Communities & Workers Exposed to “Depleted” Uranium Hazards

9) “Depleted” uranium (DU) weapons and DU armored tanks produce radioactive, toxic heavy metal dust when fired or penetrated. Inhaling this dust exposes people to radiation and heavy metal hazards. These health hazards affect our troops, as well as American communities and workers where DU has been manufactured and tested. The federal health and defense agencies have ignored the radiation hazards and refused to conduct community health studies. Compensation cases for poisoned workers 25 years ago have still not been resolved. **How will you ensure that the manufacturing of DU weapons does not poison our communities and workers? How will you ensure that effective testing, proper medical care, health studies and compensation is provided to those who have been affected?**

Transporting Uranium Weapons

10) I am concerned about the tons of radioactive and toxic uranium and nuclear weapons being shipped on our highways, railroads and ships. **Are firefighters in your district aware that uranium weapons are currently shipped on our highways without labels warning that these munitions made of radioactive waste are a contamination hazard in the event of an accident, fire or explosion?**

III. Bird-dogging Tips

Here are some additional tips to make your bird-dogging effort a success.

A) Sometimes only members of the media are allowed to ask questions. In this case, see if you can get a journalist to ask some of the questions you’ve prepared.

B) Work in teams of two or more people and disperse. Bird-dogging can sometimes make people nervous so it’s best to go in teams of two or more for support. Also, if you have two people in a team, one can ask the question while another writes down the response. It’s best if you can get the candidate’s response on camera, but either way, get an accurate

quote of what was said so you can pass the information on. Please send candidate responses to BE SAFE at annerabe@msn.com and post them on www.birddogger.org.

C) When you ask a question, be prepared with a follow up question - you might just get the opportunity to ask it. And, this way if someone else asks your question you’ll have a backup. If you have a group of people at the event, split them up. Dispersing at the event might allow everyone in the group to ask a question.

D) Keep it cordial. You are likely to get more of a response from candidates, and make a positive impression on the media, if you are calm and respectful in your demeanor. Hardly anyone is 100 percent opposed to your views, so try and come up with a compliment on a candidate’s position that you can mention before you ask your question.

For more information on these issues, contact the following organizations.

Alliance for Nuclear Accountability,
www.ananuclear.org 1914 N 34th Street, #407,
Seattle, WA 98103, 206-547-3175.

Global Resource Action Center for the Environment,
www.gracelinks.org 215 Lexington Ave. #1001, NY,
NY 10016, 212-726-9160.

Military Toxics Project, mtp@miltoxproj.org
P.O. Box 558, Lewiston ME 04243-0558,
207-783-5091.

Peace Action & Peace Action Education Fund,
www.peace-action.org 1100 Wayne Ave., Suite
1020, Silver Spring, MD 20910, 301-565-4050.

Presidential Candidates Report Card:
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation has a Report Card
for Presidential Candidates at
www.wagingpeace.org/menu/programs/nuclear-dangers/report-card.htm

Support a precautionary approach to prevent nuclear weapons hazards.

■ Sign on to the BE SAFE Precautionary Platform at www.besafenet.com, which will be delivered to the newly elected President in 2005. (See next page.)

■ See the Blueprint for Precautionary Action on Nuclear Weapons, Fact Sheets and Action Alerts at www.besafenet.com/nuclear.htm

By the BE SAFE Network, September 2004.

BE SAFE Platform

In the 21st century, we envision a world in which our food, water and air are clean, and our children grow up healthy and thrive. Everyone needs a protected, safe community and workplace, and natural environment to enjoy. We can make this world vision a reality. The tools we bring to this work are prevention, safety, responsibility and democracy.

Our goal is to prevent pollution and environmental destruction before it happens. We support this precautionary approach because it is preventive medicine for our environment and health. It makes sense to:

- *Prevent pollution and make polluters, not taxpayers, pay and assume responsibility for the damage they cause;*
- *Protect our children from chemical and radioactive exposures to avoid illness and suffering;*
- *Promote use of safe, renewable, non-toxic technologies;*
- *Provide a natural environment we can all enjoy with clean air, swimmable, fishable water and stewardship for our national forests.*

We choose a “better safe than sorry” approach motivated by caution and prevention.

We endorse the common-sense approach outlined in the BE SAFE’s four principles listed below.

Platform Principles

HEED EARLY WARNINGS

Government and industry have a duty to prevent harm, when there is credible evidence that harm is occurring or is likely to occur—even when the exact nature and full magnitude of harm is not yet proven.

PUT SAFETY FIRST

Industry and government have a responsibility to thoroughly study the potential for harm from a new chemical or technology before it is used—rather than assume it is harmless until proven otherwise. We need to ensure it is safe now, or we will be sorry later. Research on impacts to workers and the public needs to be confirmed by independent third parties.

EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

Precautionary decisions place the highest priority on protecting health and the environment, and help develop cleaner technologies and industries with effective safeguards and enforcement. Government and industry decisions should be based on meaningful citizen input and mutual respect (the golden rule), with the highest regard for those whose health may be affected and for our irreplaceable natural resources—not for those with financial interests. Uncompromised science should inform public policy.

CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTION

Decision-making by government, industry and individuals must include an evaluation of alternatives, and the choice of the safest, technically feasible solutions. We support innovation and promotion of technologies and solutions that create a healthy environment and economy, and protect our natural resources.



Take precautionary action to protect Sign onto the BE SAFE Platform.

Be counted when we deliver this national platform to the White House in 2005.

Endorse the platform today at www.besafenet.com



The BE SAFE Platform is coordinated by the Center for Health, Environment & Justice.

To sign the platform or for more information, contact us at CHEJ, P.O. Box 6806,

Falls Church, VA 22040, 703-237-2249 or 518-732-4538 or visit the website at www.besafenet.com