



Birddogging: engaging candidates on data center issues

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**Elected officials hear from
countless people every day.**

**When constituents
consistently show up, it
sends a powerful message -
these issues matter to
voters.**

Ensuring candidates hear from us

- One way to do this is via birddogging
 - Attending public events where candidates are speaking (forums, debates, town halls, meet-and-greets, radio call-in shows, on-line
 - Asking questions about our issues
- Once elected, we want them to support our position
- Added benefit - educates voters in the audience, as well as media



Photo by Pam Mackey Taylor

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Photo of data center in Council Bluffs
by Tom Reardon

Introducing speakers

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Find an event to birddog

- Subscribe to the candidate's email list; also to their party's email
- Follow them on Facebook
- Call their campaign offices and ask where their events are
- Reach out to newspapers, TV, radio stations to see if they are hosting events



Photo of a data center in Council Bluffs by Tom Reardon

Events to birddog

- Forums or town halls - ideal because there will be a room of people who can hear the questions and responses
 - a. Search candidate's website and newsletters for locations
- Talking 1-on-1
 - a. Stop and talk to a candidate at a fair, festival, farmers market
 - b. Have a short comment ready if you only get to shake their hand
- Weigh-in through media
 - a. Post questions on social media
 - b. Respond to polls with your priorities
- Submit letters-to-the-editor



Photo of a data center in
Council Bluffs by Tom Reardon

Prepare and practice

- Figure out the process
 - a. Signing up in advance
 - b. Raising your hand
 - c. Writing the question on a card
- Plan your question
 - a. you will be given time for 1 or 2 sentences
 - b. Ask a specific question that requires a yes or no answer
 - c. Ask even if you know the answer
- Bring a friend for moral support, to ask a question, to ask a follow-up question



Photo of data
center by Jess
Mazour

If you know their answer. . .

- If they have taken the wrong position
 - a. Ask “in the past you’ve stated ___, but now that we know ___, would you be willing to support ___?”
- If they have been supportive, still ask the question
 - a. It reminds the candidate that the issue is important
 - b. It will inform the audience



Photo by Pam Mackey Taylor

Practice

- Practice your question
- Also practice a follow-up question if the candidate avoids answering the question



Photo of a data center in Cedar Rapids by Pam Mackey Taylor

At the event

- Arrive early
- Dress nicely
- Smile and look pleasant
- Sit toward the front, near the audience microphone if there is one
- Raise your hand immediately when it is announced that questions will be taken
 - a. That ensures that you have a chance to ask your question
 - b. It gives time for a follow-up question, if needed



Photo of a data center in Council Bluffs
by Tom Reardon

Asking your question

- Don't give a long introduction to your question
 - a. You might be cut off by the moderator the moderator could summarize your issue
 - b. The more explanation, the more things the candidate can talk about instead of answering your question
- Be calm, reasonable, and respectful
 - a. Avoid being confrontational or rude
 - b. Avoid accusing like "why haven't you ____?" or "I'm disappointed you ____"
- Don't be intimidated - they are looking for your vote
- Be ready to ask a follow-up question, just in case
 - a. "So, you are saying that you would support legislation to ____"



What if you don't get to ask your question

- Try to get to the front of the line as the candidate is leaving and then ask your question
- Or, if the candidate is shaking your hand, give a short sentence describing the issue and your position
- Tips
 - a. Keep it short - 15 seconds
 - b. Be specific - "Ensure ___ happens"
 - c. Tell them your position
 - d. Say it right away and don't be intimidated



Afterwards

- Write an email to the candidate and thank them - “It was nice to meet you yesterday. I enjoyed talking to you and am glad to hear that you are supportive of _____. I look forward to working with you to make this bill a reality. Thank you again.”
- Write a letter to the editor applauding the candidate’s position or showing your dismay.
 - a. That puts their position on record
 - b. It shows the candidate and the public that the issue is important



Photo of Iowa capitol by Pam Mackey Taylor

Concerns about electricity needs

- Large uses of electricity, straining the existing system, requiring new generation, may have impacts on rates
- Current infrastructure may not be able to support electricity required by a data center
 - Would require buildout of transmission lines, power generation
 - Affects rates consumers pay for electricity



Photo of data center in Council Bluffs, by Tom Reardon

Concerns about water requirements

Large quantities of water are needed to cool the computer hardware

- Water usage can put huge strains on aquifers, surface water, and groundwater
- Cities and rural water associations might need to build new infrastructure (wells, water towers, treatment capacity)
- Risk of depleting the aquifers in Iowa, the state does not have a lot of data on how much water is in the aquifers; aquifers are slow to recharge
- Other customers can be impacted by rising costs for the infrastructure
- Some data centers use air cooling and are more efficient in use of water



Photo by Jess Mazour

Speculation on building data centers

Some of the data centers are built on speculation, with a risk of overbuilding of the structures and the infrastructure

- If the bubble bursts and buildings are abandoned, the infrastructure costs (water, electrical generation and transmission) will still need to be paid for
- Will fall on other customers unless there is ratepayer protection



Photo of data center construction in Cedar Rapids, by Pam Mackey Taylor

Concerns about diesel generators

- Diesel backup generators emit harmful pollution
- Noise



Photo of data center in Council Bluffs, by Tom Reardon

Sample questions on water

- Data centers use large quantities of water for cooling. Would you support requiring that any project be required to use a closed-loop system?
- Many of our water systems are aging and increased water demand for data center cooling will further strain those systems. What will you do to ensure that any upgrades or new infrastructure to our water systems is being paid for by big tech?
- The use of PFAS, a forever toxic chemical, is frequently used to help cool the equipment in data centers. How will you ensure that these chemicals are not simply discharged into our wastewater treatment facilities that lack the ability to treat these chemicals, and thereby simply discharged into our water that we use for drinking, fishing and swimming?



Photo of data center by Jess Mazour

Questions on energy

- How would you ensure that big tech companies will be required to pay for their fair share of the generation and transmission costs needed to meet their demands?
- Renewable energy is the cheapest power available. How can big tech buyers ensure that new renewable energy is "additive," rather than just transferring existing clean energy away from residential and small business customers and leaving us with more costs?
- With the speculation and rush to build data centers, what will you do to ensure that we are building the electricity resources that are actually needed rather than over-building power plants and creating resources we have to cover as ratepayers?
- Frequently, data centers make use of diesel backup generators in the event of a power outage. Not only are the generators loud, but they also evade air quality standards. The EPA just closed a comment period on "minor source permits", which, as proposed, would allow the generators to run with virtually no pollution controls and without a public comment period. How would you protect our communities from unregulated air pollution from data centers?



Photo of data center by Jess Mazour

More questions

- Data centers have made use of non-disclosure agreements to hide the details of projects from communities. Would you support broader public participation in the process of siting future projects?
- The EPA just closed a comment period that would in essence keep communities from having the opportunity to raise concerns about pollution coming from sources like diesel generators at data centers. What would you do to help ensure that lowans can be involved in the decisions that impact their community and health?
- Noise and high decibel levels from the cumulative impacts of data center operations, including generators and cooling equipment, are a growing concern for many communities. What noise mitigation and/or buffering methods would you propose?



Photo of data center by Jess Mazour

Next steps

- Find out who your candidates are:
 - Governor, State House, State Senate (even districts), Supervisors
- Find out when they are holding events
- Make a plan and ask your question
- Follow-up with the candidate
- [Report back](#) what you hear in this form
- [Birddogging guide](#)



Photo of a data center by Jess Mazour

Thank you

For further questions, please reach out to:

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