

Itchin' for Kucinich

Eugene crowd rallies around progressive candidate.

Efforts to bring presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) to Eugene by local supporters paid off at the last minute when the Congressman flew in Sunday, July 20 to attend a sizzling Lane County Democratic Party chili cook-off at Morse Ranch Park and to give a speech to an enthusiastic, 300-strong crowd on the UO campus.

At 6 pm, following introductions by local Kucinich campaign organizer Adin Rogovin and law Prof. Michael Rooke-Ley, Kucinich strode briskly through the crowd and jumped onto the platform adjacent to the podium in 180 PLC. His fired-up energy drew the crowd, which included many long-time Eugene activists, to their feet, whooping and cheering.

Yet the "Hello Eugene!" and "When I'm president, I'll sign this executive order and that executive order" rock star persona seems somehow ill-fitting on this 57-year-old, 5'9" or so, roughly 150 lb., brown-eyed brunette, who seems ultimately more sincere — and comfortable — speaking one-on-one in a shady campus parking lot than doing the required rah-rah stumping before an adoring crowd that followed shortly thereafter.

Kucinich writes his own speeches that are as full of New Age spirituality as they are of agenda-setting rhetoric; still, you get the real picture when he's talking like just a regular guy, not a campaigning politico. And during the more intimate dialogue, he reveals that his campaign is "gaining momentum" and throughout the country, the public's enthusiasm is fired by "a message of hope, optimism, and joy."

But can Kucinich dare to challenge an incumbent president who's master of money-making? "This isn't going to be about money," he insists. "I'm the only one offering real change. I'm the one offering real reforms."

Those reforms include jobs, corporate responsibility, social security, taxes, health care, education, campaign finance, family farms, energy and the environment. He is also outspoken on withdrawing from NAFTA and the WTO, the rights of workers to unionize, and the rights of women to reproductive choice.

But when asked what the single most pressing issue that gets the greatest reaction from the populace is, Kucinich smiles. "Hands down, it's the need to cut Pentagon spending," he says.

As the ranking Democrat on the Senate subcommittee that has jurisdiction over the Pentagon, Kucinich questions the gaps in information the military provides. "There is \$1 trillion in accounting they cannot reconcile and \$30 billion in inventory they cannot find. And there's no auditor. Even Enron had crooked auditors. The Pentagon has none."

In addition, Kucinich points out the lies easily bandied about by the Bush administration. For example, the National Missile Defense System doesn't work. "They fudged the tests; the results were fraudulent and it still

got funding," he says. "This administration won't fund school systems if kids can't pass a test but they will fund missile systems that fail."

Kucinich is calling for a 15 percent reduction in the Pentagon budget. He's earmarked the savings — roughly \$60 billion — to fund universal pre-kindergarten for ages 3, 4 and 5. "Many parents can't afford daycare if they work," he says. "We're spending more on daycare than college." But college is also spendy. To fix that, Kucinich would repeal the Bush tax cuts and use that money to fund universal college education.

In addition, Kucinich touts universal health care as the only real option for Americans' well-being. "Everywhere I go, people talk about how the private sector has failed," he says. He proposes a 7.7 percent payroll tax that would pay for everything: medical, dental, vision, mental health and prescriptions. "The money's already in the system," he says. "We're already paying for universal health care. We're just not getting it."

Re-allocating Pentagon spending to domestic programs won't just help everybody, but will protect us from a violent future, says Kucinich. "The spending we're doing on weapons now is gearing up for World War III. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Weapons, war, weapons, war. Now we're looking at nuclear missiles in space and first strike capability. It's all antithetical to what our purpose is as a nation."

And that purpose, he says, is "to permit the unfolding of each individual into a community where health, education and economic opportunity are assured for all, to create an environment at home and in the world based on peace, sustainability and hope."

If we continue on our current course, we cannot see positive change, Kucinich says, and he tells the crowd gathered in 180 PLC, "This administration is preparing for the end of the world. Now I have an idea. Let's help their world end in 2004."

But what about Bush's approval ratings? Americans dig war. His numbers are high.

"As the American people understand we went to war based on a lie, as we understand, that will change," says Kucinich. "The president's popularity will begin to melt and he will face a contest in 2004. I'm the only one who offers sharper contrast and deepest change. I'm giving people a real choice. Why else would they vote?"

Overly confident? Perhaps. After all, the mainstream media have ignored Kucinich's campaign thus far, dismissing him out of hand as a "no contest." But is he daunted? No way.

"I got elected to Congress on my fifth try," he's quick to remind naysayers. "You're looking at a person who, if nothing else, is determined."

EW

For more information, see www.kucinich.us For information on the local campaign, call 543-9616, or e-mail snowcastle@comcast.net



Dennis Kucinich

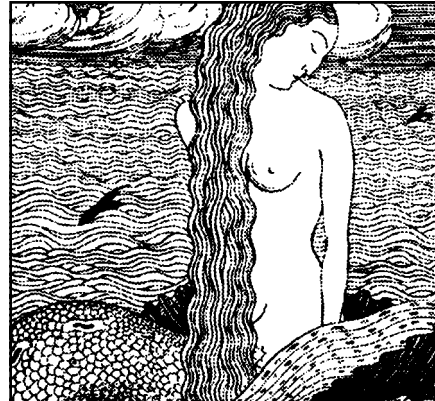


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