

Kucinich Visits Eugene

Presidential candidate touts passion for peace

Dennis Kucinich, the Democratic presidential primary contender with the strongest anti-war record, spoke about his passion for peace to a crowd of about 600 last week in Eugene and received standing ovations.

Kucinich, a U.S. representative from Ohio, opposed the Iraq war from the beginning and has called for an immediate pull-out and end to war funding. "There's no one else running for president who has the record I have on these things," he said.

Kucinich ran for president in 2004, but finished sixth in the Democratic primary. In Eugene, Kucinich won 26 percent of the vote compared to 69 percent for John Kerry.

Kucinich's plan for Iraq is to immediately stop additional funding. Already approved funding will support the troops through mid-July. By that time they will have all been brought home, he said.

A U.N. peacekeeping force including large contingents from Muslim nations would stabilize Iraq as U.S. troops leave. The plan acknowledges the fact that "the occupation is fueling the insurgency," Kucinich said.

He said the U.S. should not abandon Iraq but owes it to the Iraqi people to "spend the rest of our lives" to repair and reconstruct the war-torn nation. "Perhaps as many as a million Iraqis have been killed," Kucinich said. "Our nation in our name has been responsible for their murder."

"We need to redeem the soul of our nation," Kucinich said, calling the war "a stain on our national history."

Kucinich decries the current reconstruction effort as a "criminal enterprise," describing the \$10.8 billion in \$100 bills shipped to Iraq that disappeared without accounting. He describes Blackwater and other security firms as private armies who make money by perpetuating war.

Kucinich said Bush administration officials should be "brought to justice" for their torture and illegal imprisonment policies. "They must be held accountable," he said. "Every single one."

The mainstream media have already dismissed Kucinich as a long shot. Kerry outspent him 20-fold in the 2004 primary. But Kucinich describes himself as the determined underdog that could.

Kucinich said even at 4'9" and 98 lbs. he made his high school football team as a third string quarterback. "Sometimes I was a quarterback and sometimes I was a football," he joked. Growing up in Cleveland, he said he lived in many different rentals, and twice he lived in cars.

At 23, Kucinich was elected to the Cleveland City Council and at 31, won election as the youngest mayor of a major U.S.



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—Dennis Kucinich

city. While he was mayor, banks tied to a corporate utility threatened to put the city into loan default unless Kucinich agreed to sell the city's public utility to the corporation, he said. Kucinich refused, and the banks threw the city into default, costing Kucinich his reelection. Fifteen years later Kucinich was acclaimed for saving the city a fortune by having the foresight to not sell the municipal utility. The praise helped propel him into his congressional seat, he said.

Along the way Kucinich had a daughter, divorced twice, became a vegan, changed from anti-abortion to pro-choice and married a British woman with long red hair who's several inches taller than he but half his age of 60.

Two months before the 9/11 attacks, Kucinich called for the creation of a federal Department of Peace to pursue domestic and global nonviolence.

The "war on terror" is "a monstrous lie told to keep war in perpetuity," Kucinich said. Now, "our leaders act as sociopaths in the world community," he said. "We can't keep doing this."

"All over the world people are waiting for a new America to emerge," he said describing travels with his wife, Elizabeth. Just after the recent Israeli bombing of South Lebanon using U.S. bombs, Kucinich describes crying at the grave of a "cherubic" toddler who died when a U.S.-made bomb destroyed his apartment building. "Tell the American people we don't like your leaders, but we love them," Kucinich said members of a gathered crowd told him. "We don't hate Israel. We want to live in peace."

Kucinich called on voters to not be "dazzled by an *American Idol* type campaign" but to focus on real issues.

Kucinich said as president he would ban nuclear weapons and land mines, strictly limit global warming, protect endangered species and promote conservation and renewable energy. He said he would do away with international trade agreements such as NAFTA, GATT and the WTO that don't protect the environment and workers' rights.

"America should be leading the race to the top, not to the bottom," Kucinich said. **ew**

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