



President Kucinich

A vegan dynamo hits the campaign trail *By Mat Thomas*



OF THE MORE THAN 500 MEMBERS OF Congress and the numerous 2008 Presidential candidates, Rep. Dennis Kucinich is the only vegan. Can you imagine it? A *vegan* President of the United States. Kucinich can. Sure, he's one of the darker horses running in an increasingly crowded field, and he only got about four percent of the vote in the 2004 race. Even so, the 60-year-old congressman from Ohio says his record as a public servant uniquely qualifies him for the Oval Office this time around.

For one thing, he is the only candidate who has consistently opposed the Iraq War since before it started, a critical fact to an electorate that wants to bring the troops home. He declared his candidacy because Democratic leaders plan to continue funding a conflict that even military officials say cannot be won. Kucinich agrees, and has proposed a 60-day plan for withdrawing US forces. He says his presidency "would create a moment of transformation for America away from a country on the warpath to one that uses its resources to create good jobs, universal health care and access to higher education while protecting the global environment."

But what else, besides being vegan and consistently anti-war, sets Kucinich apart from the competition? To get an idea, we can look at who he is, where he comes from, and what he has accomplished so far.

Kucinich's rise out of abject poverty in

Cleveland to being elected, at age 31, the youngest mayor of that city (or any other major city in US history) reveals an exceptional capacity to set and achieve goals. The oldest of seven children, his working-class family was so poor that they were sometimes homeless, bringing harsh life lessons that shaped his worldview. "My formative experiences taught me compassion for those who are struggling," Kucinich says. "I can understand firsthand the imperative of human unity, of how we need to live together with the intention of creating a better nation and a more peaceful world."

This concern for the welfare of others is reflected in the broad range of progressive issues Kucinich has worked on during his six terms in the House of Representatives, from campaign-finance and health-care reform to sustainable agriculture, food safety and civil liberties. Of course, being vegan, Kucinich plays a leading role in many important animal-protection causes. He helped secure increased funding for enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act, and co-sponsored successful legislation to promote humane alternatives to animal testing and ban the importation of products made from dog or cat fur.

Notably, Kucinich was the only member of Congress to vote against the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, a new law that threatens Constitutionally protected free speech. For Kucinich, this is an issue that affects both human and animal rights. "If protesters are

branded as 'terrorists,' people may be afraid to stand up for animals," he points out. "Animals will then suffer even more because the public won't be as informed about the abuse taking place behind closed doors."

After the Democrats won Congress, Kucinich was appointed Chair of the Government Reform Committee's newly created Domestic Policy Subcommittee, which oversees dozens of government agencies, among them the FDA and the Department of Agriculture. This puts him in a position to review federal policies affecting millions of people and billions of animals. He also hopes it will be easier to pass animal-welfare legislation now that fellow Democrats are in control of both houses.

Kucinich says he is ready for the challenges ahead, both in Congress and his bid for the White House. A vegan since 1995, the candidate credits his diet for the extraordinary levels of health and energy he enjoys. **"Being vegan gives me the clarity to make good decisions and a vitality that people want in their leaders.**" As president, my diet would probably cause a lot of people to become interested in veganism."

To learn more about Dennis Kucinich, visit kucinich.us. 

Mat Thomas is a staff writer for *In Defense of Animals* and lives in San Francisco. Read more of Mat's writing on his website, animalrighter.org.