

*"One person can
make a difference"*



Is Kucinich Electable? Can He Beat Bush?

If any Democrat has a history of attracting swing voters and "Reagan Democrats" in winning elections against better-funded Republican opponents, it is Dennis Kucinich. He has repeatedly defeated entrenched incumbents. He beat a Republican incumbent for mayor in 1977, for state senator in 1994 (overcoming the national right-wing tide), and for Congress in 1996.

His Congressional district includes the suburb of Parma, Ohio, described as "one of the original homes of the Reagan Democrats." An Ohio daily calls it a "conservative Democratic district," which he carried by 74% in 2002. Being a success there may be a better predictor of national success than holding statewide office in a liberal stronghold like Vermont or Massachusetts.

Kucinich is a winner because he builds Wellstone-like grassroots campaigns against bigger-spending opponents. He is a winner because of his blue-collar roots and populism, reflected in his battles for heartland voters against unfair, corporate-friendly trade deals.

He is an unabashed progressive who wins because swing voters who don't agree with him on every issue still see him as a fighter for their interests, as someone who will put the interests of workers and middle-class consumers ahead of big-money interests. No Democrat is better positioned in 2004 to attract "Reagan Democrats" and swing voters with a frontal attack on how Bush policies hurt them and favor the rich.

Republicans use "wedge" issues to pry away traditionally Democratic white working class voters—a tactic that has not succeeded against Kucinich. In 1996, for example, Republicans used his support of gay rights as a wedge, and he stood firm and triumphed.

On the other side of the spectrum, no other candidate can attract disaffected voters, third party voters, and Ralph Nader supporters to the Democratic column like Kucinich. Across the country, Nader 2000 voters and Green Party sympathizers are joining his campaign, as are other third party supporters.

It's been a long while since progressives and the Democratic base have been so motivated—and so angry—over manipulation and deceit that began in the 2000 election and continued through the Iraq war (now finally catching up with the Bush team). No candidate can better tap into and mobilize the anger of the Democratic base than Kucinich, who has never wavered in his opposition, who has courageously led the way in exposing war manipulation, and who speaks with passion to the big issues that animate Democratic and progressive activists.

Kucinich has been a winner in a swing district in the swing state of Ohio. And Ohio has 20 electoral votes. It is the state that is key to national victory; only two candidates in the 20th century won the presidency without carrying Ohio.

Al Gore lost Ohio in 2000 despite the Herculean efforts of Kucinich, as vividly described by journalist James Ridgeway in an article written days before the election:

"Kucinich is a shoo-in, but hauling Gore along will be a daunting task. Shutling back and forth from Washington, Kucinich has put together an old-fashioned canvassing operation throughout Cleveland and its suburbs that is one of the largest such efforts in the nation. By election day, 400 to 500 people will be on the streets..."

"Day after day, members of the laborers, electricians, plumbers, and steelworkers unions crowd into Kucinich's tiny office on Lorain Avenue, piling signs into the backs of cars and pickups before hitting the neighborhoods. The general approach is for volunteers to use Kucinich's name to get a foot in the door, then ask for support for a Democratic judge before uttering the vice president's name."

Kucinich's best efforts couldn't win Ohio for Gore in 2000, but Kucinich can win Ohio himself if he is the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate. And in presidential politics, as Bush-strategist Karl Rove knows well: As Ohio goes, so goes the nation.