



TOP TEN RESPONSES TO “I LOVE KUCINICH ... BUT HE CAN’T WIN”

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INTRODUCTION: The Most Effective Strategy Now To Gain New Votes For Dennis Kucinich

How many times have you heard someone say: “I love Kucinich ... but I just don’t think he’s electable?” I often encounter staffers for other candidates out here in Los Angeles where I’m based, and even they often say these words to me. Saul Landau recently said on National Public Radio that Dennis’s name has apparently been changed to the hyphenated “Kucinich–ButHeCan’tWin.” The Congressman himself has been asked about the phenomenon repeatedly in the presidential debates.

Our campaign’s overarching theme is “Fear Ends / Hope Begins.” Over and over again, people say to us: “Dennis stands for so many of my hopes and dreams. But I so intensely fear George Bush’s re-election ... that I will not vote for Dennis, or donate to Dennis, or volunteer for Dennis. I will support instead some other, lesser candidate who does not really reflect my aspirations for the human community, but who has a better chance of winning on November 2nd.”

At the Kucinich campaign, we believe our single most effective strategy now to gain new votes is to move these individuals to change their minds.

Now that the cold primary season has commenced, there is little doubt that this is our most fertile garden to till. This is about mobilizing support from those who are already with us! These are votes that are already rightfully ours! This is about persuading people to defy their fears, and to vote their hopes and dreams.

NUMBER TEN: The Democratic Primaries Are Far From Over. The Nomination Could Still Be Seized By Anyone.

The results in Iowa left the presidential race more muddled and uncertain than at any time in recent memory. Most normal Americans (i.e., those who don’t obsess about politics as much as the people probably reading this essay) have just since the New Year started paying any attention to the Democratic presidential contest at all. All winter long, the polls forecast a Howard Dean and Dick Gephardt battle for victory ... only to have John Kerry and John Edwards emerge suddenly ascendant. All the remaining seven candidates have significant strengths that are bound to translate into significant vote totals. All have weaknesses – a shortage of money and organization here, a shortage of experience or a shortage of charisma there. Many of the multiple February 3rd states, at least as they are polling today, are simply too close to call. It is difficult to imagine any alternative to numerous candidates garnering numerous delegates in the primaries over the next six weeks. We are not even close to a “presumptive nominee” – not even John Kerry if he wins New Hampshire as well as Iowa.

We at the Kucinich campaign would not wish ourselves to be so far behind today in money, endorsements, and poll numbers. But because that is where we find ourselves at the dawn of 2004, the “expectations” for our candidacy among the pundits and the party establishment are extremely low. If we simply do “better than expected” in Iowa and New Hampshire, it could unleash a tidal wave of new endorsements, new donations, and new voter support – precisely from the “I love Dennis but he can’t win” crowd. The enormous amount of dormant support out there for Dennis is our secret weapon! If the first 7 or 8 primaries both see Dennis do “better than expected” and leave the race quite muddled and uncertain, Dennis could emerge as no less than the new media darling of the presidential contest.

NUMBER NINE: Dennis Is The Most Electable Candidate In A Face-Off Against George Bush.

We believe that Dennis may well be the candidate best equipped to ensure that George Bush emulates his father – and rides off into the sunset as another failed one-term president. What was the consensus verdict after the 2002 Congressional election debacle for the Democrats? That if Democrats run like Republicans, Republicans will surely win. That the Democrats need to present voters with a clear distinction, a clear choice, and a clear alternative vision. “It’s Democrats above all who need big ideas,” says former Clinton and Gore pollster Stanley Greenberg, “who need to create an election that is about something.” The lesson of 2002 is that the candidate with the best chance to beat George Bush will be the candidate who offers the starkest contrast to George Bush. And no one can dispute that that candidate is Dennis Kucinich.

Is there any Democrat who would better motivate our liberal and progressive base in November 2004 – generating not just votes, but midnight oil and shoe leather? One of the central theses of both John Judis and Ruy Teixeira’s 2003 book *The Emerging Democratic Majority* and E.J. Dionne’s 1997 book *They Only Look Dead: Why Progressives Will Dominate the Next Political Era* is that broad demographic, geographic, economic, and political changes are making us more and more a Democratic country. But historically among voters of color – who become a greater proportion of the electorate with every election cycle – the more progressive the candidate the greater the turnout on Election Day. Dennis, indeed, is the candidate who can best mobilize this “emerging Democratic majority.”

In addition, no one could secure the allegiance of more Ralph Nader voters than Dennis Kucinich. Al Gore and Nader together received 3.5 million more votes than George Bush in November 2000. But not ALL those Nader voters will likely vote for ANY Democratic nominee in November 2004. Surely, more of them would turn out to support Dennis than they would any other Democratic candidate. And given how many states would have swung the other way but for the Nader candidacy (he received 99,000 votes in Florida), these voters could make absolutely the decisive difference in the 2004 election.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, Dennis has a great many weapons to wield in the national security debate. Dennis can make a comprehensive case that George Bush’s foreign policies have generated new foreign enemies. That George Bush’s defense policies have weakened our defenses. That George Bush’s responses to 9/11 have made future 9/11s far more likely to occur. (So much for Republicans being “strong on defense.”) And our man has a comprehensive alternative to offer. Dennis Kucinich will accommodate rather than alienate, employ carrots far more than sticks, and dry up the swamps of hopelessness and humiliation that cause insecure youth to head down the

terrorist road. Dennis Kucinich will be both tough on terror and tough on the causes of terror. In Dennis Kucinich’s America our nation will abide by Lincoln’s precept: “The only lasting way to eliminate an enemy is to make him your friend.” And that is a winning message for the post 9/11 world.

Also contrary to the conventional wisdom that sees Dennis as “too far left” to attract swing voters, Dennis has a history of winning votes from blue collar “Reagan Democrats” – because no one better illuminates how Bush’s policies favor the rich and leave them out in the cold. Dennis has a track record in building broad ethnic coalitions. And Dennis is an experienced and seasoned politician, having fought and won grueling political battles as a city council member, a mayor, a state senator, and a member of the U.S. Congress.

Finally, Dennis is from Ohio, a key Midwestern battleground swing state with 20 electoral votes. Dennis has defeated Republican incumbents three times in Ohio. No Republican in the history of this nation has ever been elected President without carrying Ohio. Dennis can win Ohio for the Democrats. And as Ohio goes, so goes the nation.

NUMBER EIGHT: If Voters Believe Dennis Truly Has No Chance Of Winning the Nomination – Then For Them There’s No Danger In Voting For Him In The Primary!

When people say, “Dennis cannot win,” they themselves are often unclear about what they mean. Do they mean Dennis cannot win the nomination? Or do they mean that if Dennis does in fact win the nomination, he cannot win the general election? These two very different propositions lead to very different conclusions.

If Voter Vanessa likes Dennis but believes Dennis would lose to George Bush on November 2nd, then a decision to vote for someone else in the primaries might make sense if Dennis was a frontrunner, if Vanessa believes that Dennis has a real shot at the nomination, if the pundits thought Dennis had any chance at all of becoming the Democratic candidate for president.

But they don’t.

Most voters and most of the punditocracy have written off any possibility that Dennis can win the nomination. Here in my town the mighty Los Angeles Times never refers to our man as anything other than “long shot candidate Dennis Kucinich.” Ted Koppel famously dismissed him as a “vanity candidate.” If Vanessa believes that Dennis has no chance of emerging as the nominee, ***then a primary vote for Dennis carries no danger of anointing the wrong candidate to face-off against George Bush.*** For Vanessa, there is no risk that she will help choose a candidate who is going to get blown out in the general. There is no peril. There is no worst-case scenario.

NUMBER SEVEN: Dennis Will Support The Nominee.

Dennis is unalterably committed to supporting whoever emerges as the Democratic nominee for president, and to working tirelessly this fall to defeat George Bush. Dennis toiled arduously in 2000 to win Ohio for Al Gore. There is no "Nader scenario" regarding Dennis Kucinich, because Dennis Kucinich is a Democrat, not a Green. A vote for Dennis in January or February or March will not take a single vote away from the Democratic nominee in November. How does a dollar or a day or a vote devoted to Dennis in early 2004 adversely affect the prospects of the eventual nominee in November 2004?

NUMBER SIX: The Nominee May Adopt Some Of Dennis's Ideas – If Dennis Gets Enough Votes.

The more support Dennis generates this winter and spring, the more likely it will be that the eventual nominee – if it is not Dennis – will choose to incorporate some of Dennis's important ideas. If Dennis does better than expected in money, in volunteers, and in votes, the Democratic candidate who emerges may conclude that there is indeed support for things like the abolition of nuclear weapons, a great crusade for economic justice, and the conviction that an expanded ethic of human unity will be no less than the Great Story of the 21st Century. The nominee, consequently, may embrace some of these ideas and explicitly campaign upon them.

This phenomenon has already played out in the campaign. For example, after Dennis strongly rejected Bush's request for \$87 billion for Iraq, both John Kerry and John Edwards followed his lead. Dennis's unapologetic opposition to NAFTA and the WTO has caused all the candidates to talk more about fair trade.

And consider the other, bleaker scenario. If all the "I love Kucinich – but he can't win" crowd support someone else, the 2004 Democratic nominee AND the Democratic Party establishment AND the chattering classes will conclude that there is not much support for the things our candidacy is about. "Gee," they will say, "there's not much interest in withdrawing from NAFTA and the WTO, for putting the brakes on the PATRIOT Act, for creating a Department of Peace to stand alongside the Department of Defense, is there? After all, Dennis Kucinich ran for president on that stuff – and he never did better than 3%."

"Win or lose the nomination," says Kucinich endorser Ben Cohen, "his grassroots presidential campaign is the vehicle for expanding the party, moving it in a progressive direction, bringing in new voters, and reaching out in a serious way to bring back disaffected voters." The more votes Dennis receives this winter and spring, the more power progressives will exercise to shape the character of the Democratic platform in the summer of 2004, and of the Democratic Administration which we fervently hope will take office on January 20, 2005.

NUMBER FIVE: At A Brokered Convention, Dennis Could Play A Crucial Role.

Several pundits have raised the possibility that 2004 might see the first brokered Democratic convention since 1960. That means that the Democratic primaries may not decisively settle on a candidate, and that the decision will have to be hammered out at the convention itself – with delegates as the currency of negotiation. And that means that Dennis's influence could be quite tangible and quite decisive.

Many factors point to a real possibility of the first brokered convention in a generation. The rise of proportional voting over the previous winner-take-all systems in state primaries. The importance of the nearly 800 party honcho "super-delegates" (which means that a candidate cannot guarantee the nomination unless he wins more than 60% of the elected delegates). The accelerated front-loading of the process (which means that by the morning of March 3rd nearly half of the delegates will already have been chosen, making it simply mathematically more difficult for any presumptive frontrunner to achieve victory after that time).

If the brokered convention scenario does come to pass, every single vote cast for Dennis in January, February, and March will translate into delegates that Dennis will wield in Boston in July. Those delegates will enable Dennis to tangibly influence the platform and positions that the Democratic candidate adopts. Those delegates could enable Dennis to decisively influence who the Democratic candidate will be. And who knows? At a brokered convention, the Democratic Party just may conclude that the candidate with the best chance to defeat George Bush is the one who poses the most striking alternative to George Bush – Dennis Kucinich.

NUMBER FOUR: Electoral Outcomes In 10 Months – Or A Better World In 10 Years?

Mother Jones writer George Packer recently quoted D.H. Lawrence: "The ideas of one generation," wrote Lawrence in *Making Love to Music*, "become the instincts of the next." "There is something worse than losing," continues Packer, "and that is losing pointlessly. ... The way for the party not to lose pointlessly is to proceed incautiously. The most attractive candidate will be the one who airs ideas that risk alienating ... because the ideas might be good ones, and might catch the public pulse ... and might make future victories possible."

Has there been any political candidate since Bobby Kennedy and Gene McCarthy more capable of mobilizing the fires in the bellies of committed activists than Dennis Kucinich? If voters support Dennis with their money and their sweat and their votes, it will stoke the engines of social change – far beyond the fate of Kucinich for President.

"Victory," says the inestimable Jonathan Schell, "does not come through the ballot box alone. It sometimes comes by circuitous paths. ... Changing hearts and minds can at

times be as important as changing the President. ... When in doubt, it's best to err on the side of speaking the truth."

Must we resign ourselves only to vote for a candidate who can rescue us from a dismal present? Or can we free ourselves to vote for a candidate who can lead us toward a brighter future? Are we concerned solely and exclusively about what is going to happen in America in 10 months? Or can we interest ourselves in the human condition and the fate of the earth in 10 years and beyond? There is much more at stake here than simply choosing a candidate for president. A vote for Dennis Kucinich is a vote for the American dream, for the promise of what America can become. As the poet Langston Hughes so eloquently put it: "America, you've never been America to me; and I swear this oath: you will be!"

NUMBER THREE: The Left, The Right, And The Center ... Can Change.

We reject the notion that the American electorate is set in stone – e.g., 45% hard left, 45% hard right, and an all-coveted 10% “in the center.” We know that the center has moved over time. A great many ideas and initiatives that were once considered hard left – women’s rights, civil rights, human rights, gay rights, labor protections, environmental protections – are now much more in the mainstream, much more “moderate,” much more “centrist.” The anti-war, anti-corporate, and anti-globalization movements of recent years – manifesting in some of the largest demonstrations in history – are surely not far behind.

We believe that many Kucinich proposals now considered hard left will one distant day be similarly considered as mainstream, centrist, and broadly accepted by most of the right-thinking people of the time. One of the best vehicles for accomplishing that shift in the center of American politics is a liberal and progressive presidential campaign. And Dennis Kucinich is the most liberal and progressive candidate American voters have had the opportunity to embrace in quite a long time. A vote for Dennis Kucinich is a vote to shift the center of gravity of the American political debate. For 2004 and beyond.

NUMBER TWO: Living Up To Your Own Ideals.

“If it feels good – do it” said one of the mottos of the 1960s. While one might debate whether that guidance is optimal for all of life’s scenarios, it certainly is for the great democratic act of voting. We believe that it simply feels better to walk out of the voting booth knowing that you were true to yourself, that you stood up for what you believe. Demonstrating support for the things you support is the essence of what voting is all about. We believe that the whole point of democracy is to vote for the world you aspire to create. Election Day is a day to let go of doubts

and fears. Election Day is a day to reach for our hopes, to cleave to our dreams, and to stand up for the America we can become. That is the only way to be fully a citizen of any political community.

A vote for Dennis today is a vote for what the Democratic Party OUGHT to stand for at the dawn of the 21st Century. And it’s a vote for what the Democratic Party CAN stand for – if only the people who believe in Dennis actually have the courage and integrity to vote for Dennis.

Especially now. There will be plenty of time to choose between the lesser of two evils in the general election. As the Texas sage Molly Ivins exhorts us: Vote with your head on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. But in the caucuses and primaries, vote with your heart.

NUMBER ONE: Moving History Forward – Like Other Noble Presidential Candidacies Of The Past.

Presidential campaigns in American history have often been about much more than winning and losing. Presidential campaigns can be about driving the engines of history. Consider Bruce Babbitt and Jesse Jackson and Paul Simon in 1988, Gary Hart and Jesse Jackson and Alan Cranston in 1984, John Anderson in 1980, Eugene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy in 1968, Adlai Stevenson in 1952 and 1956 (laying the groundwork for both John Kennedy and the 1960s), Norman Thomas and Eugene Debs in the first decades of the 20th century (without whom Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal would have been inconceivable), Teddy Roosevelt’s Progressive campaign of 1912. None of these efforts resulted in triumph at the ballot box. Yet all of them broadened the public conversation. They pressured the structures of power. They inspired new generations of progressive activists. They were beacons in the political night. They served to generate debate, to inject new ideas into the public arena, and to accelerate our progress toward a brighter morning.

And so too will be the presidential candidacy of Dennis Kucinich. *BUT NOT VERY MUCH ... unless those who believe in him actually vote for him.*

Victor Hugo famously said: “No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come.” Many of Dennis’s ideas, we might admit, are ideas whose time has perhaps not quite yet come. Our job is to bring their time ever closer, to hasten their arrival in the train station of history. How will the time for such ideas ever come, if we do not choose to vote for those with the vision and integrity to articulate them? A vote for Dennis Kucinich is the quintessential exercise of what Thomas Jefferson liked to call “practical idealism.” If politics, as every undergraduate knows, is the art of the possible, then a vote for Dennis Kucinich is a mechanism for expanding the parameters of political possibility.