

Foster's Online

At UNH, Kucinich says education is a point for fundamental change

By Damian J. Troise, 11/4/03

DURHAM — Dennis Kucinich wants to make fundamental changes in American society and education is one of the most likely starting points.

That's the message the presidential candidate gave to about 50 students and observers at the University of New Hampshire's Huddleston Hall Monday afternoon. He said he's ready to be president and has the policies and courage to improve the life of all Americans.

But the focus of the forum, sponsored by the Every Child Matters Education Fund, was education from prekindergarten to college. Each candidate has been invited to meet with the organization. Kucinich is the sixth to attend the forum.

"What are our priorities as a nation," he asked several times throughout the forum.

Education and health care should be the priorities he said. And he would pull money from Pentagon budget to fund those priorities. He's proposed a universal prekindergarten plan that would serve children from ages 3 to 5, five days per week.

Parents spend between \$5,000 and \$7,000 each year on child care, more than the average cost of tuition at most public university's, he said. By reducing the Pentagon budget by 15 percent, he could shift the necessary \$60 billion toward the

program.

"The Pentagon's budget has become a racket and it's draining resources of the U.S.," he said.

The forum was moderated by WMUR anchor Scott Spradling and Michael Petit, founding president of Every Child Matters. Several questions also came from the audience.

Benji Greenfield, a junior, asked Kucinich about his plan to encourage college students to give back to the community and society as a whole.

Kucinich said people would first need more accessible opportunities to attend college.

"I understand it's not an academic matter what it costs for tuition. it's a real problem." he said.

"Why is it when you start talking about money for college, America is like this," he said, pulling out both of his pockets, which were empty."

Kucinich feels the same way about health care he said.

"We're at a point where people can't afford to be sick or well. "What's going on in this country."

Kucinich has long been an advocate of universal health care. He said his democratic opponents are onto something when they talk about health insurance for every child, but it's only a start.

"I want everybody to have health care, I'm not selling insurance," he said. "As long as it's (health care) a business, the American people will never have the health care they need."

His plan is to cover everybody by taking the revenue already in the system, about \$1.4 trillion, he said, and putting it toward a not-for-profit public health care model.

He laid out his plans for health care and education, often tying the two together and connecting those issues with poverty and his views on peace. He has more than just experience as a politician working on these issues, he said.

"By the time I was 17, I lived in 21 different places, including a few cars," he said. "Yes, I'm quite sympathetic to the issues of the poor and working class, because folks, I call that home."

Several students said they like Kucinich's way of showing how all the issues were connected and proposing direct solutions.

"He wants to fix things on a fundamental level," said Dan Vorosmarty, senior, in a conversation with fellow students after the forum.

"I think he's exactly what we need in this country," said Adam Shelvey, freshman. "He knows exactly what he wants."