

Every declared Presidential candidate was invited to deliver a speech on public policy issues and policy alternatives at the Take Back America conference. The Campaign for America's Future and the Institute for America's Future do not endorse candidates.

## **DENNIS KUCINICH**

### **Presidential Candidate**

## **Take Back America Conference**

### **Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future**

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**Washington, DC**

Leo Gerard, thank you very much for that very kind introduction. I know you have to run out to a meeting, but there are three things I want to say to you immediately. And that is, how pleased I was to work with you in saving that steel mill in Cleveland. As we know from our experience, it is so urgent that we come together in this election and come forward with a program to rebuild America's manufacturing base. It's time that we had a solid economic program that recognized that the maintenance of steel, automotive and aerospace is essential for our economy! And Leo, we all remember what Franklin Delano Roosevelt did in the 30s to help bring America back on its feet economically. He created a WPA type program and we're going to do the same thing: we're going to rebuild America's cities and we're going to rebuild them with American steel! This is the time! Rebuild America! Create millions of jobs, rebuild our infrastructure, new bridges, new water systems, new sewage systems, new energy systems. This is the time, America, to step forward and to look at those areas where we've lost jobs, and to look at those areas where worker's rights have been undermined, and human rights have been undermined, and environmental quality principles have been trashed. I want you to know that my first act in office will be to cancel NAFTA and the WTO!

We will return to bi-lateral trade and it will be conditioned on workers' rights. By workers' rights, I mean the right to collective bargaining, the right to organize, the right to strike, the right to earn decent wages and benefits so you could be able to sue your employer if your employer maintains an unsafe workplace, the right to secure retirement and the right to participate in the political process. We need those rights in our trade agreements. And we need to stand for human rights in our trade agreements and environmental quality principles. Trade can be a vehicle by which we lift up the whale. It is time, America, to rejoin the world and cure and heal the world. We can't do that without commerce and we won't be able to do that without policy of National Security, as well.

My friends, I just came back from the Congress of the United States where just before I left for this speech I put in House Resolution 260 to provide for a resolution of inquiry, which is a process that demands that the administration produce its evidence about what they said they had on weapons of mass destruction. Now is the time! Now is the time! Where are the weapons of mass destruction? We're going to find out! They're going to tell the truth!

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I am proud to have led 126 Democrats who voted against the Iraq resolution. And we've been saying it all along, as you've been saying it all along. Let this be a moment of truth-telling for America that there was no connection between Iraq and 9/11, there was no connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda, there was no connection between Iraq and the anthrax attack on this country. Iraq did not have those weapons of mass destruction. But this administration went in anyway and created a pretext for war and this war was wrong, this war was fraudulent, and we must expose this administration! Yesterday I had the opportunity to be on CNN and Aaron Brown said, "well, some people are saying that Saddam Hussein was a weapon of mass destruction" and I said, "well, that's fine, we can't find him either!"

As Leo mentioned, I come from the city. I was a child of the city. I understood growing up as the oldest in a family of seven, that as Langston Hughes once put it, "life for me ain't been no crystal stair." I remember where I came from. I think that I could be of help to this administration in its effort to find weapons of mass destruction because, Mr. President, they're here at home! Poverty is a weapon of mass destruction! Homelessness is a weapon of mass destruction! Joblessness is a weapon of mass destruction! Poor health care is a weapon of mass destruction! And when a government lies to its people, that is a weapon of mass destruction!

Now, there have been those in our Democratic Caucus who have been well-meaning and they were saying last year, "you know, we don't think the President is telling the truth, but we think that we need to take this war off the table." That's what they said. Take the war off the table and let's talk about all the other issues that we're so good talking about. And at that moment, in my capacity then as Chair and now co-Chair with Barbara Lee of the Progressive Caucus, I said in those meetings, "if we say we're going to take this war off the table, we're kidding ourselves because this administration only wants to talk about a war. They don't want to talk about Enron, they don't want to talk about fraud against stockholders, they don't want to talk about the corruption of Wall Street, they don't want to talk about all the people out of work, they don't want to talk about all the people without health care. They don't want to talk about our children going to schools that are falling apart. They don't want to talk about any of those things. All they want to talk about is war!" And so, that's all they talked about. As a result, because our leadership wasn't successful enough in challenging them and meeting them toe to toe on the issue of war, we lost the chance to take back the Congress! Let me tell you what's going to be different in this election: I'm going to challenge this administration, step-to-step, toe-to-toe on all of their fraudulent foreign policies that lead to war. And then we're going to be able to get to that domestic agenda and we will win the domestic agenda by triumphing over them on the foreign policy agenda and exposing their march to war, exposing the fraudulent basis for war, exposing what they've done to build up the military budget, exposing what they've done to cause fear in our society, exposing what they've done to depress our economy! That's the way we're going to win this election, challenge this administration! And I am prepared to do it!

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We not only must challenge them on trade, we not only must challenge them on the issues of corporate power, but we must challenge them specifically on issues which reflect the fact that government has gone such a distance from the people. It's interesting how health care is emerging as an "issue" in this campaign. It's amazing what happens when the political process begins to come close to being in touch with people's practical aspirations. But what's not amazing is that almost every one of the other candidates has proposed a compromise with the health care system, not really disturbing the comfortable position of insurance companies. Not really doing anything about controlling costs in the basic health care system. Not really understanding that what people fear is not being able to have health care, or being priced out of health care or having co-payments jacked up, or having deductibles increase or not being able to get the care they need, or being told they can't have the surgery because the insurance agent said it wasn't going to be allowed.

People are concerned that this system cannot work in their favor. I've heard these complaints; I've heard families tell me that they're concerned that one illness, one illness will cost them their life savings. One illness will stop them from living in the home they're living in. One illness will cause their retirement to be gone. One illness will cause their child to lose the dream of a college education. I say that this system is broken and the only way that we can fix it is to finally reclaim for every American the right to health care and the way that we will do that is Medicare for all, single payer, universal health care. Take the profit out of health care!

Right now, health care is about 14 percent of our gross domestic product, about 1.4 trillion dollars for health care in America. People are already paying for universal health care right now, they're just not getting it! There will be a lot of talk about reform, you'll hear it. You'll hear it in your communities. You'll hear, "I have a plan! If we only give tax credits, why, we can make the system work! Just a little tax credit can help cure the system. If we only give employers more tax credits we can make the system work!" But the truth of the matter is, unless America steps forward and responds to the practical aspirations of people, no one in this country, no one, no matter what their income happens to be, will be able to have the health care they need. This country and this election must be about telling the truth. Not only with respect to health care, but with respect to issues of retirement security.

Do you remember a few years ago when they were talking about privatizing Social Security when the market was high? And then all of the sudden the market went down, and people's 401Ks turned into 201Ks or whatever they call them. Remember? You didn't hear too much talk about it, but now all of the sudden there's the drumbeat again. Privatization, privatization, privatization! As President of the United States, I will protect Social Security and block the privatization of Social Security! That money belongs to Main Street, not Wall Street! There are so many needs in our country, needs for housing, needs for health care, needs to provide for a response for hunger. There are so many things we need to do and you know what we're told, "we don't have the money, we don't have the money." We, the Congress, just passed legislation a few weeks ago

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to increase the Pentagon budget to over \$400 billion. They're going to have increases for high-tech weaponry. It's not enough to go into Iraq and to plan to go into Iran, and North Korea, and Cuba, or wherever. No, they want to plan now for World War III, and that's very expensive. And when you have to put weapons in space, when you have to have your National Missile Defense, even though it can't pass a test. We have to make sure our kids can pass a test, but not our weapons systems! Even though these systems don't work, that hasn't stopped the money from continuing to advance while they're making plans for research on nuclear weapons, destroying all the ideas of nuclear disarmament.

Well, let me tell you what I intend to do, and I may be the only candidate ready to say this. I know where the money is, to meet America's domestic agenda and you know where the money is too. That money is in the Pentagon budget. As President of the United States I intend to get the money that we need for housing, for hunger, for all the social programs, for education for our children, for daycare. I'll take it out of the Pentagon budget, I'll take it out of the National Missile Defense, I'll take it out of nuclear weapons technology, and I'll create an America that meets the needs of the people. We don't need nukes. We need peace and prosperity and the money's in that budget!

People are afraid of looking weak on defense, so they don't want to talk about reducing the defense budget, even though they know the Pentagon can't match a trillion dollars in accounts. Oh yeah! At least Enron, even though Arthur Andersen were crooks, at least they had accountants! They can't match a trillion dollars in accounts! My election as President will change the direction of this country in a number of ways. One way it will do this will be to pursue policies that set aside strategic doctrines of intervention and preemption that sets aside a nuclear arms review which calls for nuclear first strike. As President, I will lead the way working with officials around the world to say that we must create a world that is free of nuclear weapons. It is time to work again for total nuclear disarmament. It is time for America to rejoin the world, my friends. It's so lonely when we shut ourselves apart from the world. The Oval Office can be so lonely! But if we choose to rejoin the world community, it could be a place of joy. And as President of the United States, I intend to lead this country in the direction of signing the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Small Arms Treaty, the Landmine Treaty, and the International Criminal Court. It's time to rejoin the world America! The world's a beautiful place, let's rejoin it! And we need to move forward as a sign of global times, it's time to sign the Kyoto Treaty. It's time to work for sustainability, for energy policies that are renewable. It is time, America, and it's time to work for peace.

Fifty members of Congress have joined me in a visionary proposal that seeks to create a Department of Peace. "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one!" That was John Lennon. I think that this is the time for us to draw on our capacity to evolve. We know that we have that, that's what brings us here, this belief that not only can we be catalysts for positive change, but that we can draw down that vision of a future and

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bring it into today, that's what we must believe. The dream of Gandhi, the dream of Dr. King, which would make non-violence an organizing principle in our society.

15,000 Americans every year die from violent crimes. We need to look at those issues in our own society: domestic violence, spousal abuse, child abuse, gangs, racial violence, violence against gays, and all of those things that show that America has much work to do and we can do that. We can do that with compassion, we can do that without judging ourselves, we can do that with great love for ourselves and for our country. As we do that, we show our capacity for growth as a nation, which is so much ingrained in the idea of creating a more perfect union. As we do that, we can work with the world community in achieving that dream that has eluded humanity for so long, but that I believe it is our destiny to take up the work and that is to make war itself archaic. We can do that; this is the time for us to make that beginning. We have to have confidence in our dreams. We have to believe that we can create a new world!

The poet Tennyson once wrote, "come my friends, 'tis not too late to seek a newer world. My friends, 'tis not too late, let us go forward joyously, courageously, expectantly, to create a new world." And the time to begin is now! And the time to take off is 2004! Thank you very much. Thank you.