

Kucinich gets the party started

■ Faithful happy to hear fiery rhetoric after setback in gubernatorial recall election

By Josh Richman

STAFF WRITER

SAN JOSE — Presidential contender U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich helped California Democrats kick off their annual convention Friday with a fiery address to a cheering crowd eager for a lift.

"We are the party of the people!" Kucinich, D-Ohio, roared, literally bouncing up and down with excitement, and the crowd roared back.

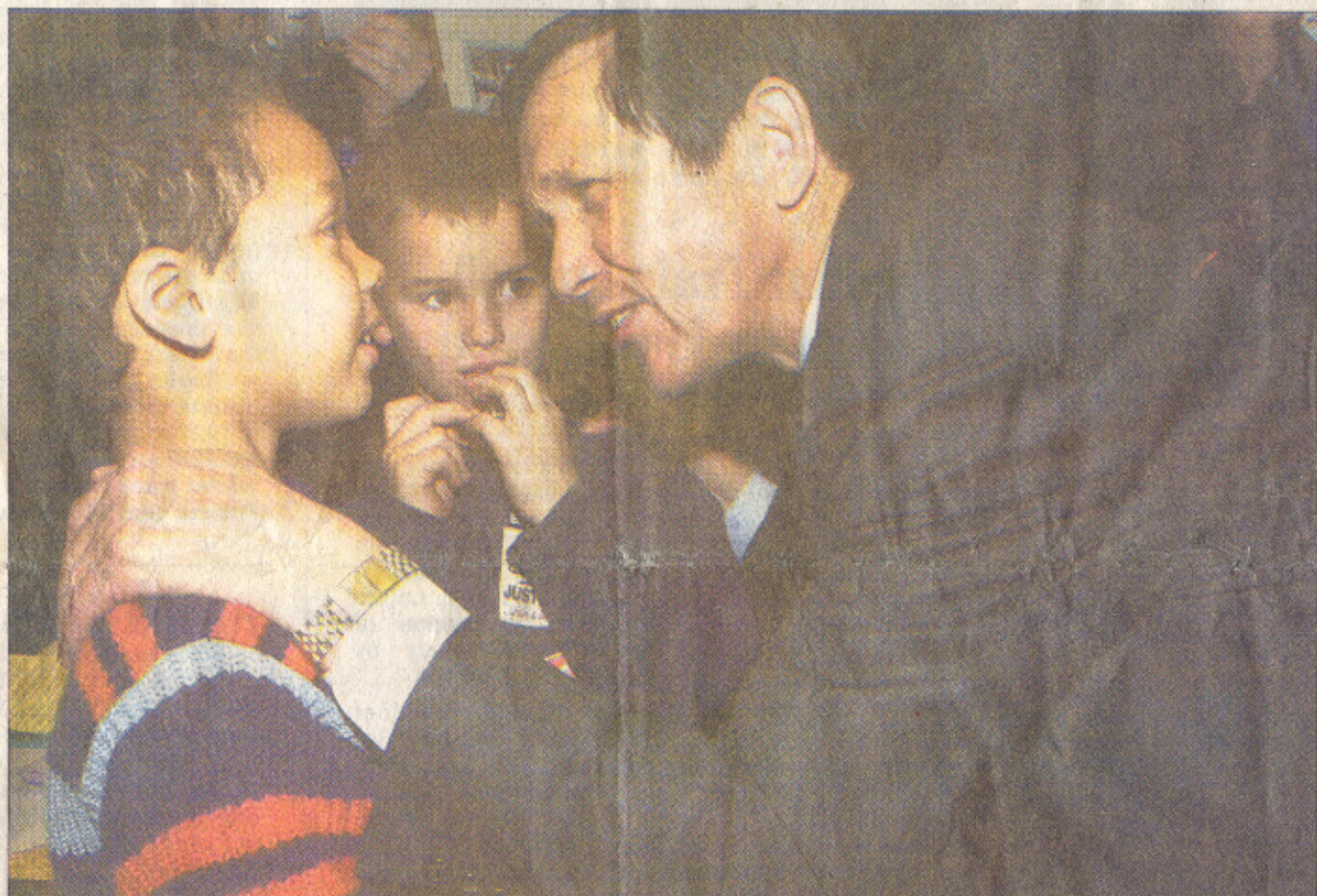
Kucinich promised that as president he would go to the United Nations with "a whole new approach for peace" — putting U.N. peacekeepers into Iraq and bringing U.S. troops home.

"Don't let any Democratic candidate tell you that we're stuck," he urged the crowd, in a dig at his rivals for the party's nomination. "It was wrong to go in and it's wrong to stay in."

But his rivals didn't hear him — most of them remain in Iowa, waging their last-minute battles before that state's influential caucuses Monday night. Kucinich is the only candidate who will be addressing the California Democratic Party convention this weekend. The Rev. Al Sharpton's address, also scheduled for Friday night, was scrapped after he was delayed due to bad weather back east.

Even without much attention from the presidential candidates, and even with the still-fresh memory of the drubbing Democrats took in last October's gubernatorial recall, party leaders and delegates strove Friday to be optimistic and forward-looking.

"Are we unhappy we lost the recall? Absolutely," party chairman Art Torres



BEA AHBECK — Staff

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE DENNIS KUCINICH talks to Michael Moore, 7, of Hayward while Ryan Patton, 7, also of Hayward, listens after Kucinich spoke at the California Democratic Party convention Friday night in San Jose.

told reporters at an opening press conference. "Has it destroyed the spirit of the party? Absolutely not."

Democrats remain focused on delivering the state unto the Democratic presidential nominee this November, Torres said, and this weekend's conference is "really (U.S. Sen.) Barbara

Boxer's convention because she is our No. 1 priority in 2004."

Boxer has no opponent in the March 2 Democratic primary, but several Republicans are vying for the right to challenge her in November.

In Sacramento, Torres said, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's personal

movie-star appeal remains intact but doesn't necessarily extend to his policies. Democrats have room to be a "loyal opposition," he said, working with the governor on some issues but standing up for their own core constituencies on others.

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