

Dennis J. Kucinich Receives the Croatian American Bar Association's First Annual 2008 Vinodol Code Award

January 12, 2009



The Croatian American Bar Association (CABA) is pleased to announce that Dennis J. Kucinich is the recipient of this year's CABA Vinodol Code Award for his outstanding contribution to the law as a tireless advocate for workers' rights, civil rights and human rights.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, on October 8, 1946, Kucinich is the eldest of the seven children of Frank and Virginia Kucinich. His Croatian father was a semi-trailer truck driver; his Irish-American mother, a homemaker. By the time Dennis was 17 years old, he and his family lived in twenty-one places, including a couple of cars.

Kucinich first came to national prominence in 1977 when he was elected mayor of Cleveland at age 31; the youngest person ever elected to lead a major American city.

However, his term was not without controversy. In 1978, Cleveland's banks demanded that he sell the city's 70 year-old municipally-owned electric system to its private competitor (in which the banks had a financial interest) as a precondition of extending credit to city government. Kucinich refused to sell Muni Light. In an incident unprecedented in modern American politics, the Cleveland banks plunged the city into default for a mere \$15 million. Kucinich lost his re-election bid in 1979. Fifteen years later, Kucinich made his first step toward a political comeback, winning the election to the Ohio Senate on the strength of the expansion of the city's light system which provides low-cost power to almost half the residents of Cleveland. In 1998, Kucinich's early efforts were recognized when the Cleveland City Council honored him for, "having the courage and foresight to refuse to sell the city's municipal electric system."

Kucinich has also been a prominent player on the national political stage. He was a presidential candidate in 2004 and 2008, running as an opponent to the war in Iraq. He has also promoted a national health care system, preservation of Social Security, increased Unemployment Insurance benefits, and the establishment of wholesales cost-based rates for electricity, natural gas and home heating oil. When the Supreme Court ruled that mandatory arbitration could be a condition of employment, Kucinich introduced a bill to reverse the Court's decision.

In his Cleveland, Ohio district, Kucinich has been recognized by the Greater Cleveland AFL-CIO as a tireless advocate for the social and economic interests of his community. He is currently leading a civic crusade to save Cleveland's 90 year-old steel industry and the thousands of jobs and retiree benefits it provides. While hundreds of community hospitals have been closed throughout the country, Kucinich led a powerful citizens' movement which reopened two Cleveland neighborhood hospitals. He was prepared to block a railroad merger at the Surface Transportation Board until he gained an agreement from the nation's largest railroads which improved rail safety while diverting a heavy volume of train traffic away from heavily populated residential areas. His promotion of rail safety improvements gained him the top award from the Ohio PTA in 2000. His efforts on behalf of Cleveland's poor gained the recognition of the National Association of Social Workers. He continues to be a local and national advocate for the homeless.

Congressman Kucinich acts upon his belief that protection of the global environment is fundamental to preserving the life of all species. He has been honored by Public Citizen, the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and the League of Conservation Voters as a champion of clean air, clean water and an unspoiled earth. He was an early critic of nuclear power as being risky economically, and environmentally, raising questions about nuclear waste byproducts. As a state senator, he raised so many questions about a planned nuclear waste dump site in Ohio that the idea was eventually scrapped. Early in his first term in Congress he thwarted an effort to repeal a provision of the Clean Air Act. As a congressional representative to the global climate treaty talks, Congressman Kucinich encouraged America to lead the way toward a sustainable, shared stewardship of the planet through carbon reduction, and investment in alternative energy technologies.

He not only believes in sustainability, he practices it. Congressman Kucinich is one of the few vegans in Congress, a dietary decision he credits not only with improving his health, but in deepening his belief in the sacredness of all species. In the 106th Congress, his call for labeling and safety testing of all genetically engineered foods provoked a \$50 million advertising campaign by the biotech industry. Kucinich hosted an international parliamentary session, attended by officials of 18 countries, on the social, economic, political and health impact of genetic food technologies. More recently he was one of the

principal speakers at an international conference on water rights, where he called for governments to reserve public ownership of water resources. Kucinich is a dynamic, visionary leader who combines a powerful activism with a spiritual sense of the essential interconnectedness of all living things. His holistic worldview carries with it a passionate commitment to public service, peace, human rights, workers rights, and the environment. His advocacy of a Department of Peace seeks not only to make nonviolence an organizing principle in our society, but to make war archaic. He is a powerful, ethical voice for nuclear disarmament, preservation of the ABM treaty, banning weapons in outer space, and a halt to the development of a 'Star Wars' - type missile defense technology.

He has been recognized for his advocacy of human rights in Burma, Nigeria and East Timor and is the 2003 recipient of the Gandhi Peace Award. Together with the late Rep. Joe Moakley (D-Mass), he has led a concerted effort to close the School of the Americas, which has been an incubator of human rights violations in Central America. On the eve of the World Trade Organization's Seattle conference, Rep. Kucinich organized 114 Democrats to help convince President Clinton to seek human rights, workers rights and environmental quality principles as preconditions in all US trade agreements. Kucinich marched with workers through the streets of Seattle protesting the WTO's policies and with students through the streets of Washington, DC, challenging the structural readjustment policies of the IMF.

Kucinich is a member of the Congressional Croatian Caucus that works to continue the strong relationship between the United States and Croatia. He has supported Croatia in its time of need and is an advocate for the protection of human rights in Croatia, including freedom of expression. Speaking in support of H. Res. 529, Recommending the Integration of the Republic of Croatia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Congressman Kucinich said:

When Croatia was struggling for its independence and survival I was one of the American political figures who challenged my own government for its lack of support for Croatia at a critical hour. Here I take great pride in asking my government in the House of Representatives as a Member to support the integration of the Republic of Croatia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I take great pride in my Croatian heritage. My grandfather was born in what is now Croatia. My father made sure that we stayed close to the Croatian culture and language while we were growing up in Cleveland, and greater Cleveland has a very large Croatian community. I take great pride in the achievements of my Croatian brothers and sisters in the United States as well as in Croatia and those around the world. And I agree that Croatia ought to be fully integrated into the European Union as well as NATO.

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Croatia desires to be in NATO to protect itself from outside forces. I want to make sure Croatia is protected from threats to freedom of expression inside the country of Croatia.

The Croatian American Bar Association is honored to present Dennis J. Kucinich with the 2008 Vinodol Code Award. We wish Mr. Kucinich continued success and congratulate him on his re-election to a seventh term in the U.S. House of Representatives.



About the Croatian American Bar Association (CABA)

The CABA is an association of Croatian-American lawyers and Croatian lawyers from around the world. For more information, please visit www.CroatianAmericanBar.com. The CABA established the Vinodol Code Award to recognize persons of Croatian descent who have excelled in the practice of law and/or made an outstanding contribution to the law or legal scholarship. The award is named after the Vinodol Code (Vinodolski Zakon) written in 1282—the oldest legal text in Croatian and written in Glagolitic letters. Please send your nominations for the 2009 CABA Vinodol Code Award to the Vinodol Code Award Committee: vinodol@croatianamericanbar.com