

Democrats withdraw objections to SEP petitions: Tom Mackaman to be on the ballot in Illinois

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The attorney representing Tom Mackaman, Socialist Equality Party state legislative candidate in Illinois' 103rd District, received word late Thursday that the Democratic Party was withdrawing its objections to the SEP candidate's nominating petitions. The following is an initial report on this development. Further reports and commentary will follow.

The Champaign County Democratic Party official who initiated the challenge to the nominating petitions of Socialist Equality Party state legislative candidate Tom Mackaman formally withdrew her objections Thursday, acknowledging that the SEP candidate had more than enough valid signatures to be placed on the ballot in November's election.

This brought to a conclusion a month-long campaign by state and local officials of the Democratic Party to disenfranchise hundreds of legally-registered voters who signed the SEP petitions, in order to remove Mackaman from the ballot. The Democrats began their effort to deny the SEP candidate ballot status on June 22, the day after the SEP filed 2,003 signatures with election authorities—far more than the 1,325 required to gain ballot status.

State employees on the staff of Democratic Speaker of the House Michael Madigan copied and reviewed Mackaman's nominating petitions. Partisan activity carried out at taxpayer expense by state employees is a violation of the Illinois Election Code and the State Employees and Officials Ethics Act.

On June 28, Geraldine Parr, the vice-chair of the Champaign County Democrats, filed her Objector's Petition, which alleged that 1,021 signatures—more than half of those submitted by the SEP—were invalid.

In a legal motion faxed late Thursday afternoon to the

offices of Andrew Spiegel, the attorney representing the SEP, the lawyer for Geraldine Parr withdrew Parr's petition, admitting that half of the Democrats' signature challenges had been either withdrawn as unsustainable or overruled by the Champaign County Electoral Board. Acknowledging that the electoral board was about to recognize at least 1,524 signatures, nearly 200 more than the required number, the motion stated that the objector "is otherwise satisfied that the Candidate has filed the minimum number of valid signatures" and "would like to withdraw her objection to the Candidate's nomination papers."

The Motion to Withdraw Objector's Petition includes the statement that the Democrats "withdrew certain objections [actually 508 of the 1,021 challenges] based on information received by the Objector after she filed her petition." This statement only confirms what the SEP has said all along: the Democrats arbitrarily selected hundreds of voters to disqualify, without bothering to check whether or not they were registered.

When Democratic petition checkers were presented with the voter registration rolls during a preliminary examination by the County Clerk's office, they refused to withdraw the objections, even when shown proof that the signers were legally registered. As this was occurring, a spokesman for Madigan, one of the top Democratic officials in Illinois, slandered the SEP with the false accusation that it had submitted "phony petitions."

The Democrats' obstruction went on for weeks, until the Tuesday, July 27 hearing of the Champaign County Electoral Board, when the Democrats were finally required to substantiate their signature challenges. The attorney for the Democratic Party could not present any

credible justification for the wholesale challenges, and instead argued that signatures of registered voters should be stricken from the petitions on such trivial grounds as the use of maiden or middle names, or the omission of apartment numbers. After a six-hour session, over 60 percent of the bogus objections were tossed out.

Andrew Spiegel, the attorney representing the SEP, said, “Unfortunately, they didn’t look at the registration rolls as closely before they filed the objections as they did during the hearing. That would have saved us a lot of misery.”

Spiegel, who is also representing independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader against a Democratic challenge to 20,000 of the 32,000 signatures submitted on his nominating petitions, added, “Every time you go through an experience like this you realize the ballot access laws in the US must change. The American people are supposed to choose who represents them, but they can’t if the power-brokers keep their choices off the ballot.”

SEP candidate Tom Mackaman said the following, “The withdrawal of the Democrats’ bogus objections is a victory for democratic rights and one step forward in the fight for the political independence of the working class. Against a barefaced attempt by the Democratic Party to strip voters of a core liberty, the right to vote for a candidate of their choice, the Socialist Equality Party prevailed.

“On the surface, the confrontation between the Democratic Party and the SEP would appear to be a mismatch. The Democrats, after all, have a powerful and corrupt political machine at their disposal, millions upon millions of dollars, high-priced lawyers, and even the illegal services of state employees. How could the SEP prevail against these odds?

“We did not back down from the Democrats’ challenge. We understood from the beginning that the attempt to remove us from the ballot was an attack on the working class, and a desperate attempt to keep it chained to the corporate-dominated and militarist Democratic Party by preventing the emergence of a ballot option that represents the deepest-felt interests of workers and students: opposition to the war in Iraq, opposition to the destruction of democratic rights, and opposition to the lowering of living standards.

“The SEP and the WSWS saw the struggle for ballot

access in Illinois as a critical part of the party’s intervention in the 2004 elections. In defending our right to appear on the ballot, and the right of citizens to place us there and vote for our candidate, we sought at every point to draw the essential political lessons for the entire working population.

“Chief among these lessons is the deeply reactionary nature of the Democratic Party and the two-party system as a whole. Both of these parties of big business are willing to dispense with democratic rights. While the Democrats capitulated to the Republican theft of the 2000 election, they showed that they would spare no effort to bar socialists and other antiwar candidates from the ballot.

“We were able to win in large part because of the intervention of WSWS readers worldwide. Their emails protesting the Democrats’ brazenly anti-democratic actions put local politicians on notice that their machinations were being watched and that opposition would continue to grow. I would like to thank all those who wrote letters on our behalf. Your efforts were central to this victory.

“I would also like to call on all WSWS readers to step up their support for the Socialist Equality Party’s 2004 election campaign by volunteering and offering donations. The victory in Illinois came at great expense, but months of campaigning lie ahead. Already, at this early stage of the election, we have seen the importance of the SEP’s campaign.”



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