

SEP candidate speaks at environmental forum in Champaign, Illinois

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18 September 2004

Thomas Mackaman, Socialist Equality Party candidate for State Representative in Illinois District 103, participated in a candidates' forum on September 8 at the Champaign Public Library in Champaign, Illinois. Hosted by the Sierra Club of Champaign-Urbana, the event focused on environmental issues that confront citizens locally and throughout the state and nation. The Sierra Club is a national organization dedicated to protecting the environment and is active in promoting legislation that maintains and advances such protections.

Approximately 50 people were in attendance to listen to the candidates' responses to questions posed by the Sierra Club and the audience. Joining Mackaman were his opponents, Democratic incumbent Rep. Naomi Jakobsson and Republican contender Deborah Frank Feinen, along with Dr. David Gill, Democratic contender for the US House of Representatives in the 52nd District, and a representative from the local office of the Republican incumbent, Rep. Timothy Johnson, Gill's opponent.

After initial introductions by the candidates, the moderator of the forum posed questions to the candidates, giving each of them two minutes to respond. The representative for Timothy Johnson announced that he would not respond to the questions, as he was not familiar with Johnson's environmental viewpoint or voting record on such issues. This brought an angry response from an audience member who pointedly asked the reason for his even attending the forum if he could not answer questions. Johnson's representative apologized and asked audience members to approach him after the forum with questions he could forward to the congressman.

The questions posed by the Sierra Club and audience members dealt with issues such as state government

using environmental funds for other uses, such as roadway repair, and cuts in funding to purchase lands that are environmentally sensitive and increasingly rare in the state of Illinois. Other issues included the Bush administration's weakening of the Clean Air Act and laws that protect wetlands nationally, the promotion of public transportation versus automobile use, the use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) on public lands, and continued urban sprawl versus planned development.

The audience was especially incensed that the tax on corporations that funded the Superfund Trust Fund to clean up toxic waste left by those corporations was eliminated by the Bush administration and placed on the backs of taxpayers nationwide. The audience called for renewable energy resources such as wind power versus oil and the need to maintain clean water resources by strengthening laws regarding sewage discharges. They expressed concerns about global warming and the Bush administration's continued denials that such warming is man-made.

The responses of the candidates to these questions were especially telling. Mackaman's opponents Jakobsson and Feinen touted the lack of adequate monies to fund state and national projects caused by the current downturn in the economy. Both candidates pledged not to raise taxes and pointed out that difficult choices would have to be made regarding what projects could get adequate funding versus cuts in such funding.

SEP candidate Tom Mackaman informed the audience that there was more than adequate financial resources to fund environmental projects, but that those financial resources were being squandered in an illegal war against Iraq. He pointed to the immense increases in military spending; financial resources that could be used better for social programs, including environmental programs at home. Mackaman stressed

that the private accumulation of immense wealth into the hands of a few was a direct result of state and federal tax policies that favor corporations and the rich at the expense of the poor and middle classes at home and abroad.

Dr. David Gill, the Democratic contender for US Congress, said he agreed that the war in Iraq was a mistake and that he opposes it. Mackaman pointed out the absurdity of his opposition, as the Democratic Party—and their presidential candidate John Kerry—not only supports the war against Iraq but promises to expand it and “do a better job.” Gill’s only response was to shrug his shoulders.

Despite Mackaman’s repeated denunciation of the war in Iraq, the vast increases in military spending and state and federal tax policies favoring the rich, candidates Jakobsson and Feinen remain mute to the argument that these policies are directly responsible for the fiscal crisis facing the voters in District 103, the residents of the state of Illinois and nationwide.

In his arguments during this and previous forums, Tom Mackaman has consistently argued that only a socialist alternative to a capitalist economy will solve the issues confronting working people today. That message, warmly received by those in attendance at the Sierra Club forum, will continue to serve as the foundation of his campaign for State Representative in the 103rd Illinois District.



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