

Socialist Equality Party to contest state elections in Illinois, Maine, Oregon and Washington

15 May 2006

The Socialist Equality Party will run candidates for state office in Illinois, Maine, Oregon and Washington state. These campaigns are in addition to the those of the SEP candidates for US Senate in New York (Bill Van Auken) and US Congress in Michigan's 12th District (Jerome White) and California's 29th District (John Burton) (See: "Socialist Equality Party announces candidates in New York, Michigan and California").

As with our campaigns for US Senate and Congress, our ability to win ballot status in these four state races depends upon the active support and participation of our readers and supporters, and all those who want to oppose militarism and social reaction and see the need for a socialist working class alternative to the two parties of the American corporate elite.

In Illinois' Legislative District 52, Joe Parnaruskis will be the SEP candidate for state Senate. The district includes the counties of Vermilion and Champaign and the twin cities of Champaign-Urbana in the east central part of the state, the site of the main campus of the University of Illinois.

A life-long resident of the district and a registered nurse for two decades, Parnaruskis, 52, grew up in Westville, a community rich in the history of coal mining. Parnaruskis is running against Michael W. Frerichs, a long time fixture in state and local Democratic politics, who promotes fiscal conservatism and restrictions on abortion rights. He also enjoys close relations with Barack Obama, the US Senator from Illinois who has called for the bombing of Iran to stop its nuclear program. The Republican challenger is former State Senator Judy Myers, who advocates further tax cuts for big business.

In Maine's 32nd Legislative District, centered in Bangor and Hermon, Eric DesMarais, a graduate student at the University of Maine in Orono, will be the SEP candidate for state Senate. Bangor, with a population of 31,473, is the economic hub of the northern, central, and eastern parts of Maine.

A resident of Bangor for three years, DesMarais is running against Democratic incumbent Joseph Perry and Republican challenger Frank Farrington. Perry, a small businessman in Bangor, is chairman of the state Senate Joint Standing Committee on Taxation and has promoted various efforts to cut taxes for business. Farrington, the president of Farrington Financial Group and a member of the Bangor City Council, also wants to create a "better business climate," i.e., reduce corporate taxes and further slash social protections for working people.

In Oregon's 19th District, which includes a section of southwest Portland and the suburbs of West Linn, Wilsonville, Lake Oswego and Tualatin, Christie Schaefer will be the SEP candidate for state Senate. Her opponent will be Richard Devlin, the incumbent senator.

This is the first time the SEP has run a candidate in Oregon, demonstrating the growth of the party's influence through the expansion

of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Due to Oregon's onerous requirements for gaining ballot status as a recognized party, Schaefer, a service worker, will be seeking ballot status as an independent, without party affiliation identified on the ballot.

In Washington's 36th Legislative District, Paul Palinkas, a 31-year-old computer consultant, will be the SEP candidate for state representative. The 36th District includes the Seattle neighborhoods of Ballard, Phinney Ridge, Magnolia, Queen Anne, Belltown and parts of Greenwood and Greenlake.

The incumbent candidate is Democrat Helen Sommers. The chair of the Washington State Legislature's House Appropriations Committee, she has held the state representative's seat for 34 years.

The SEP candidates will provide a socialist alternative to the Democrats and Republicans and advance a political strategy for working people to oppose the war in Iraq, defend democratic rights and fight the attacks on jobs and living standards by big business.

Through our election campaign, the SEP is seeking to give voice not only to the intense anger and opposition of millions of working people to the policies of the Bush administration, but also to their disgust with the spinelessness and right-wing policies of the Democratic Party.

The candidates of the Socialist Equality Party call for the independent political organization of the working class, in opposition to the Republicrats, on the basis of socialist policies.

The SEP campaign insists on the necessity for a common struggle of workers in the United States in alliance with workers in every part of the world. There is no national solution to the problems of war, exploitation, unemployment, poverty and attacks on democratic rights. All these problems stem from a central fact: world capitalism subordinates all social, economic and political decisions to the interests of corporate profit and the accumulation of personal wealth by a tiny ruling elite.

Our aim is not the reform of capitalism, but its replacement with a socialist system in which the economy is organized to serve the needs of working people, not the greed of corporate executives.

In all of the districts where our candidates are running, the bipartisan policies of war, social reaction and attacks on democratic rights have created crisis conditions for the working class.

Illinois' 52nd district is largely agricultural, with a mix of small industry in the Danville area to the east. The University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana is the major employer in the western part of the district, along with food processing companies like Kraft. The area is home to tens of thousands of students who face ever-rising tuition as a result of a 20 percent cut in higher education funding.

The district is also home to a growing Hispanic immigrant population and tens of thousands of working people struggling to make ends meet. The jobless rate is particularly high in Vermilion County, where General Motors, General Electric and the forklift manufacturer Hyster have shut

down several factories over recent decades. The official unemployment rate in the county is 6.5 percent, compared to the state average of 5.1 percent, but there are large numbers of workers and young people who have given up looking for non-existent jobs.

SEP candidate Joe Parnaruskis' initial political experiences, first as a high school student and then at the University of Illinois, were shaped by the mass protests against the Vietnam War and for civil rights. As a health care worker, he is intimately familiar with the impact of federal and state budget cuts and the lack of medical insurance for working people.

A member of the Socialist Equality Party for the past 3 years, he was the campaign manager for Tom Mackaman, the SEP candidate for state representative in Illinois' 103rd District in the 2004 elections. He played a central role in the campaign that defeated the Illinois Democrats' efforts to keep Mackaman off the ballot by disqualifying the signatures of hundreds of legally-registered voters who signed SEP nominating petitions.

As petitioning has begun to gather a minimum of 3,000 signatures of registered voters by June 27 to place Parnaruskis on the ballot, there are already indications that the Illinois Democratic Party machine is gearing up once again to block third-party candidates from gaining ballot access.

Maine has long suffered from the decline in the textile, lumber and paper industries, and has recently seen an increase in low-wage call centers and retail employment. Bangor has an average per capita income of only \$19,295, with 16.6 percent of individuals and 11.9 percent of families falling below the official poverty line. The conditions are worsened by the skyrocketing cost of housing, stagnant wages and lack of transportation, particularly in rural areas.

Maine is also under corporate pressure to roll back environmental legislation that protects the region from the importation, dumping, and incineration of toxic waste, including millions of pounds of dioxin-producing plastics, arsenic-coated wood, and wood coated with paints containing mercury and lead. Maine already leads the nation in childhood asthma rates and dioxin levels in wildlife.

To achieve ballot status, SEP candidate Eric DesMarais must gather the signatures of 200 registered voters from within the district. The signatures must be verified by the municipalities by May 25 and delivered to the secretary of state by June 2.

Oregon's once outstanding public education system has deteriorated sharply over the past two decades, in parallel with huge tax cuts that have enriched the corporations and the most privileged social layers. The near-collapse of public education and health and social services in Oregon is inextricably tied to these tax cuts.

While Oregon's Department of Human Resources faces a gap of \$172 million and its largest city, Portland, is planning to close six schools and consolidate many others due to a \$57 million shortfall in state funding, corporations may receive, under the state's unique "kicker" law, a tax refund of \$205 million in 2006.

As reported in an April 16, 2006 *Oregonian* article, Intel Corporation, listed by *Fortune* magazine as the 49th largest corporation in the US with a 2005 income of \$12.6 billion, may be required to pay only Oregon's minimum corporate tax of \$10 in 2006. This is one of many global corporations in Oregon that pay the minimum tax.

The state of Oregon has the lowest corporate taxes in the US. That has not stopped the clamor of the Republicans, Democrats and corporations for new tax cuts and the implementation of a regressive sales tax that would disproportionately impact the poor and working class.

Supporters of SEP candidate Christie Schaefer must gather the signatures of 750 registered voters by August 29 to place her on the ballot.

In Washington, the aircraft manufacturer Boeing has since the 1990s eliminated more than 40,000 jobs, the vast majority in the western part of the state, including Seattle. Last year, 18,000 machinists went on a three-week strike against company demands for pension reductions and other

concessions.

Despite the decline of the city's formerly dominant employer, Seattle has grown tremendously in the last two decades with the rise of Microsoft and other software and computer-related firms, as well as the growth of coffee retailer Starbucks. Other large metropolitan Seattle employers include Costco, the University of Washington, Amazon.com, and Alaska Airlines.

Although these are the largest employers in Seattle, the largest proportion of workers in the state are employed as low-wage salespeople, cashiers and clerical workers. The tech boom of the late 1990s, hailed as the key to the Puget Sound economy, has meant for many only an increase in housing prices and worsening economic inequality. The region has seen a marked growth of poverty and homelessness.

The state of Washington requires that independent and minority parties hold conventions during the last week in June. This means that, in order to place SEP candidate Paul Palinkas on the ballot, supporters must gather 100 valid signatures in a one-week period. While the total is not onerous, restrictions on time and place are designed to make it difficult for independent and third-party candidates to gain ballot status.

As with the campaign to place our US Senate and congressional candidates on the ballot, these state election campaigns will require a political battle against the anti-democratic restrictions imposed by both big business parties to defend their political monopoly and disenfranchise the working class. While in most cases the signature requirements are lower than those needed for our US Senate and congressional candidates, petition gatherers will still face many obstacles, including fighting for the right to petition in locations where voters congregate. Even after the SEP gathers the requisite number of signatures, it must be anticipated that local election boards will use every possible technicality to strike out signatures on nominating petitions.

Such methods are a response by the American ruling elite to growing popular disgust with both big business parties, and reflect its determination to employ the most undemocratic means to maintain the two-party system, its mechanism for maintaining a political monopoly.

The Socialist Equality Party makes an urgent appeal to our readers and all those looking to develop an independent political movement of the working class against the two capitalist parties and their policies of war, social reaction and repression to actively assist us in the effort to place our candidates on the ballot.

To participate in the SEP election campaign, click here.



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