

SEP to file petitions to place Joe Parnarauskis on the ballot in Illinois

Kate Randall
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Socialist Equality Party supporters gathered more than 1,300 signatures in the final weekend of campaigning in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois to place Joe Parnarauskis on the ballot for state Senate from Illinois' 52nd Legislative District.

On Monday, the campaign committee will submit petitions bearing the signatures of more than 5,075 registered voters to election officials in the state capital, Springfield. Supporters of Parnarauskis' socialist campaign obtained far more than the 2,985 signatures required to gain ballot access.

This weekend's efforts were a powerful culmination of a campaign that has battled attempts by local authorities to block petitioners' constitutionally protected right to collect signatures to place their candidate on the ballot. Both the Urbana Free Library and the Champaign Public Library banned SEP supporters from collecting signatures on public property outside the libraries, and a Champaign police officer threatened an SEP campaign worker petitioning on a street corner near the University of Illinois.

The SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* launched a campaign against this political harassment, and scores of supporters from across the country and around the world wrote to the mayors of Urbana and Champaign in protest. City officials in both towns refused to lift the ban on SEP petitioning outside the libraries.

On Saturday, the *News-Gazette*, a local newspaper in Champaign-Urbana, published an article on the controversy over the SEP's right to petition outside the libraries. The article quoted SEP attorney Andrew Spiegel, who said the petitioning ban was a violation of First Amendment rights.

Many residents of Champaign and Urbana with whom SEP petitioners spoke were aware of the dispute and expressed outrage at the flagrant attack on

democratic rights.

The bulk of the signatures collected over the weekend were obtained at the Taste of Champaign festival, held at a public park in the city. Festival organizers initially attempted to stop petitioners from collecting signatures beside a booth for SEP candidate Parnarauskis, which his campaign had reserved in advance of the event. However, after checking with their legal department, they backed off.

SEP supporters encountered a powerful response, especially to the party's opposition to the war in Iraq. Many people had family members or friends who were in the military. There was also a strong response on the question of worsening social conditions and the growing chasm between the financial elite and the broad mass of working people. Many were particularly angered over the squandering of hundreds of billions of dollars on the Iraq war while urgent social needs at home went unmet.

Parnarauskis, 52, is a life-long resident of Illinois' 52nd District. He grew up in Westville and has worked as a registered nurse for two decades.

He thanked his supporters and said he looked forward to representing the Socialist Equality Party in the upcoming campaign:

"Many people look with disgust on the two-party system and understand that neither of the major parties speaks for working class people. They're willing to support my candidacy and the SEP because we oppose the war, the assault on democratic rights, including government spying, and the attacks on jobs and living standards.

"People responded to our campaign and were grateful to see a candidate take a stand for their interests. They look and see that billions are being spent in Iraq that could be spent on vital social programs. I spoke to

many people who are concerned about the rising cost of health care, including seniors, and they were particularly disgusted by the rising cost of medicines.

“When a handful of billionaires are pocketing the wealth of society and so many are going without, something is woefully wrong. Our campaign is about providing a socialist solution to this crisis.”



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