

SEP candidate in Illinois holds press conference to announce petition filing for November ballot

Our reporter
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Joe Parnarauskis, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for state Senate from Illinois' 52nd Legislative District, held a press conference Tuesday morning to announce that the party had filed nominating petitions the day before to place his name on the November, 2006 ballot.

The press conference, held in front of the University of Illinois campus in Champaign-Urbana, was attended by reporters from local affiliates of the ABC and CBS television networks, as well as a reporter from local radio station WILL. Reporters from the local newspaper, the *News-Gazette*, and WDWS radio contacted the SEP campaign after the news conference.

"Yesterday," Parnarauskis said, "the Socialist Equality Party delivered to the State Board of Elections nominating petitions bearing the names of nearly 5,000 voters in Champaign and Vermilion counties who signed our petitions in order to place me on the ballot for the November elections. This was an exceptional achievement in as much as our supporters had to overcome enormous obstacles placed in our path by the political structure.

"Third parties are legally required to collect enormous numbers of signatures. At the same time they are effectively banned from circulating petitions in what is classified as private property, such as malls and other places where people congregate, and which have replaced to a great extent the main streets of earlier times. Where there are no such restrictions, Democratic and Republican officials arbitrarily prohibit this activity, as they did in our campaign when we were banned from petitioning outside of the public libraries in Champaign and Urbana.

"These obstacles should not be seen as restrictions simply against the Socialist Equality Party. They are directed against the rights of working people to have a

political alternative to the two-party system. The aim of such measures is to leave working people with nothing more than the right to choose between the representatives of two parties that essentially represent the same corporate interests.

"Why are we running in this election? First, to give voice to all those who oppose the war in Iraq, a war that was organized on the basis of lies and which has already cost the lives of thousands of young American men and women and tens of thousands of Iraqis.

"We are running to oppose the escalating attacks on democratic rights. Under the guise of the "war on terror" the Bush administration, with the active support of the Democratic Party, has spied on the telephone calls and financial activities of the American people, detained hundreds without trial, carried out torture and implemented other authoritarian measures.

"We are also running to oppose the unrelenting assault on the living conditions of the broad masses of American workers. Nourished by a corrupt two-party system, a new aristocracy has arisen in America, which has created levels of social inequality without precedent in the history of this country. Corporate executives slash tens of thousands of jobs, demand pay cuts and the destruction of pensions and other benefits, while rewarding themselves with salaries of millions, tens of millions and even hundreds of millions of dollars.

"Such extremes of wealth are incompatible with a democratic society.

"The SEP will also oppose the anti-immigrant hysteria the two parties in Washington are attempting to whip up. The source of unemployment, low wages and cuts in social programs is not working people from Mexico or any other country, but the financial oligarchy that rules this country. Workers must have the right to live and work

in whatever country they choose.

“We fight for a socialist program to answer these problems, a program that places the needs of society before the profit interests of the wealthy elite. In the course of our campaign we intend to educate working people about what socialism means. The aim of the Socialist Equality Party is expressed in our name: to establish genuine social equality.

“Elections should present before the people a genuine alternative. That is why I am running.

“In conclusion, I want to make a warning. The Democratic Party will stop at nothing to try to prevent our party from being placed on the ballot. In 2004, when SEP candidate Tom Mackaman ran for state representative in the 103rd District, the Champaign County Democrats, directed by state party officials in Springfield, conducted a bad faith challenge to our nominating petitions in an effort to disqualify the signatures of hundreds of legally registered voters.

“They dropped their effort only after we took legal action that showed that the vast majority of their challenges were frivolous and that party officials had used state employees to challenge our petitions in violation of the state’s ethics laws. The press should exercise its responsibility and be vigilant in exposing a similar effort that we anticipate now.”

Parnarauskis reported that a Democratic Party functionary had already copied hundreds of the petition sheets the party had submitted in order to prepare a challenge. He said, “We will conduct a vigorous defense of our rights and the rights of those who want to see a political alternative.”

Following Parnarauskis’ statement, reporters questioned him about his campaign. One reporter suggested that the war in Iraq was a national policy issue and asked what the SEP candidate would do if elected as a state legislator in Illinois.

Parnarauskis responded, “I would use my position to show how the war in Iraq has had a dire impact on working people in the district. Billions are being thrown down the hole for this war that could be spent on vital social programs here. Working people are facing budget cuts, a collapse of the infrastructure, and schools that don’t have new books. Elderly people are facing the choice of buying prescriptions or food because of the high costs of their medicines.

“Tuition has increased sharply for students at the University of Illinois. I’m a registered nurse in the mental health care field and it’s criminal that the mentally ill

don’t have the resources to meet their needs. Imagine what the half a trillion dollars being squandered on this illegal war could be used for. Most of the workers we spoke to understand this and are opposed to the war.”

Parnarauskis was also asked what layers of the population had supported his campaign by signing SEP petitions. He replied, “We gathered our 5,000 signatures in both Champaign and Vermilion counties. What impressed me was that we won support not only from students in the campus towns, where opposition to the war and the attacks on democratic rights is well known, but in the working class districts in Vermilion County, in places like Danville, where there is widespread disenchantment with the war and disgust over the attacks on democratic rights and living standards.

“Most people believe in our right to have ballot access. They want more choices and an opportunity to vote for someone other than the Democrats and Republicans, and to fight against the war and social inequality.”

Parnarauskis was also asked if his campaign would hurt the Democratic Party. The SEP candidate said, “We are running against both big business parties, which are actively supporting the war. My Democratic opponent for state Senate, Michael Frerichs, says he is against the war. If he is against the war, why does he belong to a pro-war party?

“The truth is the Democrats are collaborating with Bush and the Republicans and working people need their own party. Neither one of these big business parties wants a discussion on the war, the attacks on democratic rights and the growth of social inequality. That is why the Democrats, who are supporting Bush’s right-wing policies, are desperate to keep us off the ballot.”



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