

SEP Illinois candidate holds press conference on Democrats' bid to block ballot status

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On Wednesday, the Socialist Equality Party held a press conference at the Illini Student Union on the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The press conference was called to discuss the efforts of the Illinois Democratic Party to bar Joe Parnarauskis, the SEP's candidate for State Senate for Illinois' 52nd Legislative District, from the ballot.

Tom Abram, the Green Party candidate for State Representative in the 103rd District, was also in attendance. The Democrats are also challenging the entire statewide slate of the Illinois Green Party.

The press conference was attended by two local television stations, three radio stations, and the University of Illinois student newspaper, the *Daily Illini*.

Joe Parnarauskis was introduced by Jerome White, the SEP's candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th Congressional District. In his remarks, Parnarauskis discussed the preliminary hearing held the previous day in Chicago by the State Board of Elections to review the Democratic Party's objections to the SEP nominating petitions. (See "Attorney for SEP candidate calls on Illinois election board to throw out Democrats' ballot challenge")

At Tuesday's hearing, SEP legal counselor Andrew Spiegel submitted a "Motion to Strike and Dismiss," calling on the State Board of Elections to throw out the Democrats' objections as a bad-faith challenge. In 2004, the Democratic Party waged an unsuccessful attempt to remove the SEP from the ballot for state representative in Urbana and Champaign.

Parnarauskis began his statement by pointing to the historical significance of the attempt to remove the SEP from the ballot:

"It is ironic that yesterday's hearing took place a week after the Fourth of July, which celebrates the birth

of the United States as a democratic republic, and just days after the anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which lifted long-standing legal infringements on the democratic rights of African Americans to vote.

"There is another irony. Illinois proudly calls itself the 'Land of Lincoln.' Yet Lincoln was the standard-bearer of a third party that challenged the old two-party consensus that defended slavery.

"Serious defenders of democracy believe that the electoral process should be a forum for the widest possible discussion and debate on important issues of the day, including the life-and-death question of war. Yet in America, a country with a population of nearly 300 million, with the most diverse social, regional and political interests, there are only two political parties, whose differences on these matters are minimal, at best. The entire political process is rigged to prevent the participation of third party candidates and to narrow the spectrum of political choices.

"Over the course of two months, my supporters gathered nearly 5,000 signatures in Champaign and Vermilion counties, far more than the 2,985 signatures required to place my name on the ballot. The objection filed on July 3rd by Gregory Lietz and John Dreher—two Democratic Party precinct committeemen in Danville—charges that more than half of the petitions I submitted are invalid."

Parnarauskis then pointed to the results of the SEP's preliminary analysis of the Democrats' objections, which has already demonstrated that the entire affair is a bad-faith attempt to obstruct the SEP campaign. Parnarauskis explained that this was a transparent attempt not to reveal the veracity of the signatures, but to keep him off the ballot in order to avoid discussion of the war in Iraq and the attack on democratic rights and living standards in the US.

“The Democratic Party wants no discussion,” Parnarauskis continued, “because they are in collusion with the Republicans behind the war in Iraq, the attack on democratic rights, and the assault on living standards in this district, state and nation. While the Democratic Party grovels before the Bush administration’s national and international agenda, they spare no effort, legal or not, to block third party candidates from the ballot.

“During our petition gathering campaign, we spoke with thousands of people. The vast majority of them expressed opposition to this criminal war, the government attack on democratic rights, and the looting of wealth by the corporate aristocracy that controls both parties.

“The cynical attempt to remove my name from the ballot only demonstrates how this two-party system colludes to block the aspirations of the vast majority of the American people.”

Parnarauskis concluded by noting that the SEP stands together with the Green Party in its attempt to push back the Democratic Party’s effort to remove its entire slate of statewide candidates from the ballot.

Tom Abram, speaking for the Green Party, noted that the Greens had gathered over 39,000 signatures to put their candidates on the ballot statewide, far more than the 25,000 required by law. He also distributed examples of the dubious methods used by the Democratic Party against the petitions of third party candidates, showing reporters a number of petition sheets in which the Greens had recovered far more than 80 percent of the signatures challenged.

White then opened the conference for questions from reporters. A television reporter asked White whether or not the SEP and Greens should not simply “expect” these challenges, since they happen regularly.

“It is indeed the modus operandi of the Democratic Party,” White responded. “But it is not well known among the American people that their democratic rights are so trampled upon. We’re saying that election fraud is taking place. It is your job, the job of the press, to investigate this.

“There was a deep sentiment among the 5,000 people who signed Joe’s petitions to put another choice on the ballot, to expand political discussion. An election should be a period when there is an open discussion of the most pressing political questions. But because the

Democratic and Republican parties conspire to remove third parties from the ballot, politics is reduced to the lowest gutter level of mudslinging.”

Responding to another question, Parnarauskis vowed to continue to fight the Democratic Party’s attempt to remove him from the ballot and to expose as widely as possible the dangerous implications of this assault on basic democratic rights.

We call upon WSWS readers to support Parnarauskis and the SEP by continuing to send letters of protest to the State Board of Elections at webmaster@elections.state.il.us.



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