

SEP candidate Joe Parnarauskis demands inclusion in Illinois election debates

Elisa Brehm

26 August 2006

Joe Parnarauskis, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for the Illinois Senate from the 52nd District, is calling for his inclusion in all debates to be held by candidates for the state legislative post in the run-up to the November election.

On Thursday, the Democratic candidate in the 52nd District, Michael Frerichs, released a letter challenging his Republican opponent, Judy Myers, to a series of debates. His letter proposed ten debates in cities and towns throughout the district, and stated, "In the spirit of open and responsive government, I think we should take this campaign directly to the voters and let them judge us first-hand."

One debate has thus far been scheduled. It is to be held September 26 and broadcast by WILL TV, a Public Broadcasting System channel.

Frerichs's avowal of support for open debate is false and hypocritical. He made no mention of Parnarauskis, nor did he invite the SEP candidate to participate.

Frerichs's party is engaged in a crudely anti-democratic effort to keep Parnarauskis off the ballot. In June, the SEP candidate submitted nominating petitions with the names of nearly 5,000 voters, far above the 2,985 signatures of registered voters required for third party candidates to obtain ballot status under state election laws. Nevertheless, the Illinois Democratic Party has conducted a campaign, which is ongoing, to throw out hundreds of valid signatures, disenfranchising registered voters who signed the SEP petitions, in an effort to deny the socialist candidate ballot status.

This flagrantly undemocratic and bureaucratic exercise has aroused widespread opposition among voters in the east central Illinois district, which includes the main campus of the University of Illinois in Champaign, as well as Urbana and Danville.

Shortly after Frerichs issued his press release calling for the debates with Myers, blogs began appearing on Internet sites asking about the exclusion of Parnarauskis. The university newspaper, the *Daily Illini*, as well as the local Champaign newspaper contacted the SEP campaign for a statement on the issue.

On Friday, Republican candidate Judy Myers publicly called for a three-way debate, arguing for the inclusion of Parnarauskis. She further called on Frerichs to repudiate the effort of the state Democratic Party to deprive the SEP candidate of ballot status.

Parnarauskis told the *World Socialist Web Site* on Friday: "These developments demonstrate the impact of the SEP campaign. There is no question that many voters want to see the SEP on the ballot because they are seeking a genuine alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. They want their voices heard.

"Our campaign articulates the opposition of working people and students to the war in Iraq, the chilling attack on democratic rights, the growth of social inequality, and the worsening economic conditions facing masses of people. It offers the only serious alternative to the two-party system, through which a financial elite maintains its political monopoly over the country. I am running on a socialist program that calls for the reorganization of society to meet the needs of working people.

"I call for my inclusion in any and all debates because genuine democracy requires the fullest and most open discussion of the issues facing the electorate. Why should voters only hear part of the story? Why should they be allowed to hear only from the Democrats and Republicans? Both of these parties support the war in Iraq and promote domestic policies that cater to the interests of the rich and the super-rich.

Voters should have the right to hear the views of all candidates.

“Five thousand voters in this district signed petitions to place me on the ballot. They, and many thousands more, want the chance to vote for a candidate who advocates fundamental change in the interests of working people and opposes the existing economic and political set-up. My participation in debates of candidates for state Senate from the 52nd District is a matter not only of my rights, but the democratic rights of the voters in the district.”

The Illinois State Board of Elections is required to render a ruling by August 31 on whether the SEP candidate should be placed on the ballot. Despite an exhaustive review by the Election Board, which concluded that at least 3,229 of the signatures collected by the SEP were those of registered voters in the district—244 more than the requirement for ballot status—the Democrats are still seeking to throw out hundreds of valid signatures to deprive Parnarauskis of ballot status.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on all its supporters and all those who defend democratic rights to flood the offices of the Illinois State Board of Elections with letters of protest demanding that it place Joe Parnarauskis on the ballot. Emails can be sent to the Illinois State Board of Elections at webmaster@elections.state.il.us. Please send copies of all messages to the WSWS.

The SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* also call on all supporters and readers to donate to the SEP election fund to defray the costs of the fight against this antidemocratic process (Make a donation today!)



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact