

SEP submits petitions for US Senate candidate in New York

A reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) submitted petitions August 22 to place its candidate for US Senate, Bill Van Auken, on the ballot in New York. Van Auken is challenging New York's incumbent Senator, the pro-war Democrat Hillary Clinton, in the November election.

The filing of the petitions, bearing the signatures of nearly 25,000 New Yorkers, marked the culmination of an intense six-week campaign that elicited powerful support across the state. The final total of 24,319 signatures exceeded the state's 15,000 legal minimum for placing an independent party on the ballot by nearly 10,000.

In addition, the state law required that the SEP identify at least 100 registered voters who had signed the petitions in each of at least half the state's 29 congressional districts. The party also exceeded this requirement, providing such names in 17 of these districts, stretching from New York City to Buffalo.

Van Auken turned over a two-foot-high stack of 12 volumes to officials at the state's Board of Elections in Albany. The board will make a "face check" of the petitions within two days to determine that they meet the specifications set by law. Should the Clinton campaign machine decide to challenge the petitions—as the Democratic Party has done in other states—it must state its intentions within three days of the filing deadline.

Reaching these difficult goals in the narrow time frame imposed by the state's election law represents an enormous political achievement for the SEP.

"Our highly successful campaign here in New York signals a shift in the political situation," Van Auken said. "This is clear from the immense class response to our fight to get on the ballot on the basis of a socialist

program to end the Iraq war and battle against the attacks on democratic rights and the deepening social inequality at home.

"But equally important is the campaign itself," he added. "A number of students, workers and professionals—many of them relatively new to our party—carried out tireless political work and made major personal sacrifices to mount the sustained intervention, without which it would have been impossible to meet the onerous ballot requirements set by the Democratic and Republican lawmakers in Albany. This determination represents a conscious articulation of the growing social and class tensions emerging throughout America."

In the course of the campaign, petitioners spoke to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, advancing the SEP's demand for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq, as well as the necessity for the independent political mobilization of working people against both the Democratic and Republican parties.

The response, particularly in the working class neighborhoods of cities like New York and Buffalo, in western New York state, was one of intense hatred of the war and of both the Democratic and Republican politicians who dragged the American people into it based on lies.

At least 125 soldiers from New York have been killed in Iraq since the start of the war in 2003.

In the course of the campaign, a mother who lost her son in Iraq signed the petition in Queens, a borough of New York City, declaring that "something has to be done to end this war." On the Lower East Side of Manhattan, friends of a soldier killed early this month in Ramadi stopped to sign the petition, saying that he had gone into the military to support his family and

earn money for college, and had not wanted to go back to Iraq.

Both active duty military personnel and returned veterans of the conflict signed to place the SEP on the ballot, along with parents, relatives and friends of soldiers serving in Iraq, all of whom said that they wanted an immediate end to the war. Among them was a woman in Buffalo, whose son was a member of the 172nd Stryker Brigade. As they were boarding planes to return to the US after a year in Iraq, the unit's members were told that they were being redeployed to Baghdad for at least another four months.

In a number of areas, young people signed the petition, declaring that they had no intention of going into the Army and were opposed to the war. Some complained bitterly of military recruiters who hound them in their schools and neighborhoods.

The reaction to the war was invariably bound up with anger over deteriorating living standards and social conditions for the majority of the population. During the course of the petitioning drive, New York City saw a blackout that left more than 100,000 people in Queens without power for over a week. The outage took place during a heat wave that claimed the lives of at least 36 city residents, most of them elderly residents in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx.

Working people in Queens expressed agreement with a statement issued by the SEP's candidate, which identified electric utility Con Edison's drive for profit and failure to maintain infrastructure in working class areas as the source of the electricity crisis and demanded the entire energy sector be placed under public control and utilized for the benefit of all.

In many areas of New York City, people spoke bitterly about the way in which the accumulation of wealth by a narrow layer of the population has driven up the cost of living, and housing costs in particular, making it impossible for many to continue living in neighborhoods where they were born and grew up.

In the Buffalo area, there was anger over the drastic cuts in pay and the elimination of benefits for workers at Delphi. The auto parts manufacturer is a major employer in the region.

In many cases, particularly in New York City, immigrant workers were unable to sign the petition, but expressed their agreement with the SEP's program and appreciation for the party's internationalist outlook and

opposition to the political scapegoating of immigrants.

While the SEP was carrying out its campaign across the state, Hillary Clinton was solidifying her support among the corporations and on the right. She repeated her insistence that it is impossible to withdraw from Iraq, or even set a date for a future withdrawal. She announced her unconditional support for Israel's criminal war against Lebanon.

Clinton also has built up a record campaign war chest amounting to approximately \$25 million, much of it coming from the major corporate interests she defends. Among the endorsements that she accepted over the summer was one from right-wing media mogul Rupert Murdoch, owner of the odious Fox News Channel and *New York Post*.

"When Hillary Clinton moved to New York in 1999 to run for the US Senate, she staged a so-called 'listening tour,' which her handlers believed would make her seem sympathetic to voters' concerns, without having to commit herself to any policies whatsoever," said Van Auken. "Five years later, it is clear that Hillary Clinton is stone deaf to the seething anger of working people in New York over the war in Iraq—a war that she voted for and continues to support—and about the gaping social divide between the top 1 percent—of which she is a member in good standing—and the masses of ordinary people, who cannot make ends meet."

He added: "Over the course of the last six weeks, the SEP has carried out a concentrated dialogue with working people across this state. We will use our party's position on the ballot, which 25,000 New Yorkers have demanded, to deepen this dialogue, expose the role of Clinton and the Democrats, while laying the foundations for a powerful independent socialist movement of working people in New York, across the country and internationally."



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