

Illinois election board certifies SEP candidate for November ballot

Tom Carter
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The Illinois State Board of Elections voted unanimously yesterday afternoon to certify Socialist Equality Party state Senate candidate Joseph Parnarauskis for the November 7 ballot. The election board, which had delayed certification of the SEP candidate for three weeks, was under order by Sangamon County Circuit Court Judge Patrick Kelley to fulfill its statutory duty and place the SEP candidate on the ballot by 2 p.m., September 20, or face being held in contempt of court.

Parnarauskis has now been officially recognized as a candidate for the midterm elections, and his name and party affiliation will appear on the ballot in the 52nd District, which includes the east-central Illinois cities of Champaign, Urbana and Danville. Attorneys for the Illinois Democratic Party, which has carried out a three-month campaign to bar the SEP from the ballot, have indicated that there will be no further appeals or efforts to remove Parnarauskis.



Joe Parnarauskis outside the State Board of Elections

Parnarauskis said today,

“This is not only a victory for the Socialist Equality Party, it is a victory for citizens in the 52nd district and throughout the country; it is a repudiation of the undemocratic efforts by the Democratic Party to deny voters in my district the right to vote for a candidate of their choice.”

Parnarauskis thanked all of the people around the world who wrote letters to the Illinois election board defending his right to run, as well as those who gave financial aid, whose support was critical in overcoming this attack. The Illinois Democrats spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in the campaign to keep the SEP candidate off the ballot, and deployed dozens of their key personnel. This included attorneys from a top Chicago law firm—with close ties to the leading powerbrokers of the Illinois Democratic Party machine—who spent hundreds of hours concocting bad-faith arguments to challenge Parnarauskis’s nominating petitions.

Yesterday, as the board prepared to vote on Parnarauskis’s candidacy, Democratic member William M. McGuffage looked frantically for a way out of the judge’s order. He asked, “Shouldn’t we just certify [Parnarauskis] with objections? Isn’t there an objection pending?”

Steve Sandvoss, the general counsel for the State Board of Elections, replied that no, there were no objections pending, as Kelley’s ruling had found that the objection had been overturned on August 31. McGuffage continued, “Well, there was no notice of appeal?” to which Sandvoss replied that the Democratic attorney representing the objectors, Courtney Nottage, had indicated that the Democrats will appeal neither the decision by Judge Kelley nor the decision by the board not to sustain the objection. McGuffage then sighed and threw in the towel, voting “aye” to the motion to certify Parnarauskis for the November 7 ballot as the Socialist Equality Party candidate in the 52nd state Senate legislative district.

McGuffage led the Democrats' repeated efforts to block the certification of the SEP candidate. On August 31 the Democrats deadlocked the eight-member bipartisan board in a 4-4 tie, along straight party lines, and blocked the certification despite the fact that the board's own examiner and legal counsel had recommended that Parnaruskis be placed on the ballot. Again on September 7, even after the Democrats failed to get a majority to uphold their objections, McGuffage and his fellow Democrats refused to vote for certification, producing another 4-4 impasse.

During the September 7 board meeting McGuffage sneered at the signatures on Parnaruskis's petitions, saying, "Have you ever gone to a shopping center and seen people signing petitions? They will sign anything. You put a petition in front of them and they will sign it." These remarks epitomized the Democrats' hostility towards the workers and students who dared to nominate a candidate not controlled by the two big business parties.

The election officials of Champaign and Vermilion counties, as well as the Danville Election Commission, were formally notified yesterday at 2 p.m. that Parnaruskis's name had been added to the ballot.

From a legal standpoint, the Democrats' attempt to block Parnaruskis's access to the ballot by locking him in legal limbo until the ballots would have been printed wound up backfiring. The limit beyond which there can be no petitions for judicial review of a candidate's certification is 10 days after the board's vote on objections to nominating petitions, i.e., August 31. Judge Kelley ruled that this was the "final act" of the board despite the continued delaying tactics by the Democrats. Since the board was deadlocked until weeks after that date, when the SEP won its lawsuit and won Parnaruskis's certification, it was too late for the Democrats to seek a reversal through the court system.

Even after the board's certification there were indications that the Democrats might make a last ditch effort to seek a judicial review. Late Thursday afternoon the attorney for the SEP, Andrew Spiegel, received a phone call from Courtney Nottage, the attorney for the Democratic objectors, who said that the Democrats might still take additional legal action to remove Parnaruskis from the ballot. Several hours later, however, Nottage notified Spiegel that the Democrats had decided not to seek any review of the board's decision and had dropped their efforts against the SEP candidate.

The struggle to secure Parnaruskis a place on the ballot lasted 170 days. During the 90 days leading up to June 26,

the deadline for filing nominating petitions, SEP members and supporters gathered nearly 5,000 signatures in the district, well above the legal requirement of 2,985. Then, after the treasurer and chief legal counsel of the Democratic Party in Illinois, Michael Kasper, filed the original objections on July 3, it took 80 days of administrative and judicial hearings, as well as a painstaking records examination of the SEP petitions, to finally secure a place on the ballot.

"In the final analysis, what our case has shown is the real state of democracy in America, and the completely antidemocratic nature of the entire political system," said Parnaruskis. "Illinois' massive signature requirements are some of the highest in the world. And, as we found out, even if you meet them, the two parties simply proceed to throw up additional obstacles. They wage a concerted campaign to remove you from the ballot, and even if you prevail, ultimately, after countless administrative and judicial hearings, you have exhausted enormous resources. The operative principle of the American political system is exclusion, not inclusion."

"I look forward to an aggressive campaign to bring a socialist platform to voters in my district. The Democratic Party locally and nationwide is aware that students and working people are fed up with their claims to represent the interests of working people when, in fact, the Democrats are the second party of war and big business. That is why they fought so hard to keep me off the ballot—because I fight for a program that advances the interests of working people, and not the profit interests of corporate America."



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