Election board refuses to certify Illinois SEP candidate for November ballot

Jerome White
9 September 2006

The Illinois State Board of Elections on Friday refused to certify Socialist Equality Party state Senate candidate Joe Parnarauskis for the ballot in the upcoming November election. Parnarauskis is running in the 52nd Legislative District.

The board recessed until September 18 without voting on the ballot status of the SEP candidate, knowing that the ballots for the November election will be printed next week, prior to its September 18 meeting, and as a result they will not list Parnarauskis' name.

This is a flagrant violation of the board's legal obligation to place qualified candidates on the ballot.

Parnarauskis, who, according to the election board's own hearing examiner, collected more than enough valid signatures to secure ballot status, has been left in legal limbo by the board's action. The body, which consists of four Republicans and four Democrats, has been deadlocked by the adamant refusal of its Democratic Party members to allow the SEP candidate to be placed on the ballot.

On Friday, Parnarauskis was informed that local election officers in Champaign and Vermilion counties, as well as the city of Danville, would begin printing ballots next week and would not include his name unless the election board certified him.

The SEP intends to fight aggressively and take all necessary measures, including legal action, to compel the State Board of Elections to certify its candidate for the November 7 election.

The machinations the Democratic Party reveal its utter hostility to the democratic rights of thousands of voters in the 52nd District who signed the SEP petitions so as to have a political alternative on the ballot to the two big business parties. The Democratic Party has exposed its contempt for the electorate as a whole and its lack of any genuine commitment to democratic principles.

Their flouting of the law reveals their political bankruptcy. They are well aware of the mass discontent among their traditional constituents—the widespread disgust with the Democrats' pro-war policy and cowardice and complicity in relation to the Bush administration—and they are fearful of any challenge from the left.

The tactics the Democrats are employing against the SEP underscore that their chief concern is blocking the development of a political opposition to the reactionary agenda of corporate America.

There is no legal justification to bar the SEP from the ballot. After an exhaustive examination of the signatures submitted by the SEP, the hearing examiner appointed by the election board concluded last month that the party had collected 3,229 valid signatures—well above the 2,985 required. He rejected the efforts of the Democrats to use a petty technicality to toss out the signatures of nearly 300 registered voters, and recommended that Parnarauskis be placed on the ballot.

With a legal mandate to certify all candidates by September 1, the election board met August 31. The four Democratic commissioners voted against the recommendation of the hearing examiner, but failed to get a majority to remove Parnarauskis from the ballot. With the board deadlocked, the Republicans acceded to a threat by the Democrats to block the certification of some 100 candidates throughout the state, and agreed to act on the SEP separately at a hearing the following week.

On September 7, the Democrats again failed to get a majority vote to remove Parnarauskis from the ballot.

According to Illinois law, ballot access is presumed unless a majority of election board members sustain the

© World Socialist Web Site

objections to a candidate's nominating petitions. Once the board failed to do this, it was obligated to certify the SEP candidate through a simple administrative act.

The four Democrats on the board, however, have defied this mandate and the Republicans have, it appears, gone along with their obstruction by agreeing to put off any definitive action until after the ballots are printed.

Richard Winger, a election law expert and the publisher of *Ballot Access News*, told the *World Socialist Web Site* on Friday that this situation was unprecedented not only for Illinois, but for the entire country.

Meanwhile, popular anger against these undemocratic measures continues to grow in the 52nd District, which includes the twin cities of Champaign-Urbana, the home of the University of Illinois, along with Danville. Workers and students have reacted with disgust and the local media has denounced the election board's actions.

The Champaign *News-Gazette* ran an editorial Friday entitled "Unsavory Tactics Despoil Our Elections," which described the effort to bar the SEP from the ballot as "sickening." The editorial denounced the Democrats and their state Senate candidate Michael Frerichs for using a "frivolous objection" to knock Parnarauskis off the ballot, saying they were involved in "nothing less than an assault on the concept of the rule of law."

The editorial added that both parties were driven by partisan aims and said, "if the tables were turned, the Republicans would be doing the same thing." It concluded by saying that the election board had "disgraced itself" and "could only mitigate the damage slightly" if it put Parnarauskis on the ballot.

The *Daily Illini*, the student newspaper at the University of Illinois, also denounced the election board, saying, "the ridiculous circumstances of this political circus puts into question the validity of the State Board of Elections as an impartial party. There is no longer any doubt that it serves as nothing but a pawn of the two-party system, continuing to create an illusion of fair and competitive elections. If this is how they treat a simple ballot challenge, our faith in them to handle the election wanes."

The editorial concluded: "This conflict is yet another example of Illinois politics at its worst, as well as a microcosm of the decay in the democratic process in this nation as a whole. Our political parties have devolved even further as self-serving institutions."

The Socialist Equality Party urges its supporters and all those who defend democratic rights to email letters of protest to the State Board of Elections at: webmaster@elections.state.il.us. Please send copies of all messages to the WSWS.

The fight to attain ballot status also requires substantial resources for legal fees and other costs. Please send donations to:
http://www.socialequality.com/donate.html

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site