

Illinois SEP candidate faces off with Democratic opponent at Sierra Club

Tom Carter
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On Tuesday, the Champaign Prairie Group of the Sierra Club hosted its bi-annual “Political Forum on the Environment,” where local candidates can state their positions on environmental issues and answer questions from the public. Joe Parnarauskis, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for state Senate in Illinois’ 52nd district, participated in the 90-minute forum, which was aired on local public television and radio stations. About 50 people attended the event, which was held at the city hall in Urbana.

In his opening remarks, Parnarauskis said, “As many of you probably know, the Democratic Party has thrust tremendous resources into the fight to keep me off the ballot. In fact, I just returned from a courtroom in Springfield, where I was defending my right to be on the ballot, and the right of voters like yourselves to vote for me.

“Turning to questions of importance to the Sierra Club, I want to make my positions as a socialist on environmental issues very clear. First of all, socialism means the rational stewardship and allocation of humanity’s resources to meet our needs. Under the present setup, every important economic decision is made by individuals with an interest only in short-term financial gains.

“As a socialist, I do not believe any genuine or lasting solution to environmental problems can be found without drastic changes to our social system—that is, without taking humanity’s resources back from the wealthy corporations and placing them under democratic control. The rich have had control of our environment for hundreds of years, and look where we are today!

“The bottom line is, there are plenty of resources to pay for a decent standard of living, good education, free health care, and even housing, all while keeping our

water, air and soil clean. The problem is that our resources are being squandered irrationally, not only on the war in Iraq, which has cost hundreds of billions of dollars, but on the ridiculous new salaries of Wall Street CEOs.”

Participating in the debates were Tom Abram (Greens), Rex Bradfield (Republican), Naomi Jakobsson (Democrat)—candidates for Illinois House, 103rd District; Mike Frerichs (Democrat), Joe Parnarauskis (SEP)—candidates for Illinois Senate, 52nd District; and David Gill (Democrat)—candidate for US House of Representatives, 15th District.

The candidates fielded questions on a number of subjects, ranging from global warming to water preservation to alternative fuel sources. Throughout the course of the evening, Parnarauskis distinguished himself from the Democratic and Republican candidates present, as well as the Green Party’s candidates, who claimed the environment could be protected by appealing to the “good sense” of the corporations and by implementing the mildest restrictions on their profit-making operations. Parnarauskis denounced the pro-business policies of the Bush administration and the Democrats and insisted that measures, such as sharply increasing taxation on corporate profits and wealthy individuals, were needed to fund a vast expansion of public transportation and the development of clean and renewable fuel technologies.

Tuesday’s debate was the first of many in which Parnarauskis will participate before the elections this November. Mike Frerichs, his Democratic opponent, has indicated through his campaign manager and in person that he is willing to engage in more debates with Parnarauskis, regardless of the outcome of the court proceedings next week. Frerichs’s position up until

now was that he was only willing to debate candidates who were “on the ballot.” Tuesday night, he told the WSWS, “I’m tired of waiting for the election board, let’s get these debates going.”

This reversal is an indication of Frerichs’s plummeting electoral prospects. In its campaign to keep the SEP candidate off the ballot, the Illinois Democratic Party machine has discredited its local candidate, who has become identified with its ham-fisted and undemocratic methods. Trailing in the polls, Frerichs has apparently given up the ghost, although he has refused to denounce or call off the efforts of his Democratic Party handlers.

Yesterday, Frerichs revealed his nine-page “Economic Development Plan,” an eclectic mix of meager outlays for community colleges, new taxes to check “outsourcing” and plans for “business attraction” and small-business development. Parnaruskis’s reply was featured on the local evening news.

“Frerichs does not address the real cause of the social and economic crisis in east central Illinois: the capitalist system, which enriches the few at the top at the expense of working people,” Parnaruskis said. “A serious solution—the vast expansion of public works projects, transforming the major corporations into publicly owned enterprises and ending tax cuts to the rich—requires reorganizing economic life to meet human needs, not more prostration before the demands of big business, as Frerichs suggests.”



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