

# SEP candidate Joe Parnarauskis addresses University of Illinois forum

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Joe Parnarauskis, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for state Senate in Illinois' 52nd District, was invited along with other candidates running for state and national office in Illinois to a forum held Monday evening at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

The event was hosted by the Allen Hall student residence and attended by candidates for State Senate, State House of Representatives, the Champaign County Board, and the US House of Representatives. The SEP, the Greens and the Democratic and Republican parties were all represented.

In their opening remarks to the students, the candidates for the most part avoided the pressing issues confronting working and young people in the 2006 elections: the war in Iraq, the "war on terror" and attacks on democratic rights, and growing social inequality in the US.

Addressing the student audience, Joe Parnarauskis, a registered nursing working in mental health and a life-long resident of the 52nd district, spoke to these issues.

"I am speaking to you today," he said, "in the immediate aftermath of two watershed events in American history—events that demonstrate the bipartisan consensus in favor of war and social reaction in this country."

Parnarauskis said that with the passage two weeks ago of the Military Commission Act of 2006, the US Congress voted for the first time in American history to set aside key provisions of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and formally adopt methods traditionally identified with police states. "They voted to sanction torture as a policy of the United States," he said.

Under the terms of this law, the president can identify any person as an "unlawful enemy combatant." That person can then be arrested, tortured, and jailed indefinitely without legal recourse.

"Then, on September 29," Parnarauskis said, "the US Senate voted 100-0 to approve an additional \$70 billion to finance the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Not one senator—not one—Republican or Democrat, neither [Illinois Senators] Barack Obama nor Dick Durbin, voted against this bill. It should be clear to everyone, following that vote, that the Democratic Party, no less than the Republicans, is a party of war.

"The Democrats and Republicans have squandered hundreds of billions of dollars on the war, which could have been spent to meet the needs of working people: jobs, health care, education, housing." Parnarauskis pointed out that he was the only candidate in the 52nd state Senate race who rejected entirely the framework

of the so-called "war on terror," which has nothing to do with the protection of the American people.

He stressed, "I call for an immediate end to this criminal war and the unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. All those who plotted and carried out this war of aggression—the top military brass and key officials within the Bush administration—should be tried for war crimes on the Nuremberg precedent.

"If the US government was so interested in the security of the American people, why are tens of millions without economic security? Why did they turn their backs on the people of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina?

"Or for that matter—near where I live in Danville—there is a dearth of jobs, owing mostly to the liquidation of the auto and mining industries, and the downtown is boarded up shops and broken glass. Official unemployment is 8.4 percent, the high school dropout rate is 30 percent, and the median income is only \$30,000.

"The one city in which home prices are devaluing the fastest, out of all the towns and cities in the entire United States, is Danville, Illinois. Danville has already seen an 18.7 percent drop in home prices in the last year alone, due to auto industry layoffs and the predatory mortgage policies of the big banks. This year, Danville home prices are expected on average to drop another 20 percent!

"The Democrats and Republicans have together overseen the impoverishment of working people in this area—while at the same time tailoring their policies to enrich the wealthiest one percent of the population, and filling their campaign coffers and personal bank accounts with big business money."

In conclusion, Parnarauskis said, "Fundamentally, the differences between the Socialist Equality Party and all other parties come down to one basic difference of principle: should economic life and the allocation of resources be determined by human need and social rights, or should they be subordinated to the profit system and the profit requirements of big business? I insist that social needs take precedence."

Mike Frerichs, the Democratic Party candidate for state Senate in the 52nd District, centered his remarks on funding inequities in Illinois school districts, continuing his theme of pitting upstate Chicago-area schools against downstate districts.

In his one reference to the "war on terror," he commented, "I'm for civil rights. I think the war on terror has been used as an excuse to discriminate, and I think that's wrong."

Judy Myers, the Republican candidate in the 52nd District, did not attend the event.

Tom Abram, the Green Party candidate for state representative in 103rd state legislative district, also addressed the inequality in the state's education system. "We have one of the most regressive tax systems," he said.

As outlined in his campaign literature, Abram advocates "shifting education funding from property taxes to state income taxes through legislation such as House Bill 750, or similar proposals." Abram stated, "We need to stop the fiscal irresponsibility in Springfield."

While presenting themselves as an alternative in the 2006 elections, Abram along with other Green Party candidates at the local, state and national level call for minor reforms to capitalism, while maintaining that the profit system should remain intact. As the Greens make explicitly clear in their program, "corporations have become the dominant economic institution of the planet," and they need merely to be made more socially and environmentally responsible.

On the question of war, the Green Party candidate for Illinois Governor, Rich Whitney, who did not attend Monday's forum, pledges to "veto any further mobilization of the Illinois National Guard for purposes of serving in Iraq," but does not advocate the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Tom Abram's Democratic opponent, Naomi Jakobsson, the incumbent state senator in the 103rd District, declared in her opening remarks, "Education is one of my priorities," and said that she had worked to secure more money for Illinois schools.

Parnarauskis pointed out that Jakobsson, along with other state politicians, led by Democratic Governor Rod Blagojevich and Democrats in the state House and Senate, had "secured this money for education, but at the same time raided the state pension fund to the tune of 1.2 to 1.8 billion dollars," by halting contributions to state workers' retirement funds.

"The Democrats and Republicans talk about the state's fiscal crisis," Parnarauskis said, "while the 20 wealthiest individuals in Illinois have amassed personal assets of over \$40 billion."

Jakobsson made a feeble attempt to defend herself by arguing over the precise definition of a "raid"—citing the Webster's dictionary definition of a raid: "When you break down a door and take something that's not yours"—but not denying that the matching contributions had been cut.

Students were then given the opportunity to pose questions to the candidates. One student asked how the candidates proposed tackling inequality in the state's schools. Another asked their attitudes towards issuing drivers' licenses to undocumented workers.

Before the forum began, Socialist Equality Party campaign supporters distributed copies of the SEP's 2006 Election Statement to all those in attendance. One student pointed to the passage in the program that states that there has been no explanation "of the astounding intelligence and security 'failures' that allowed a group of known Al Qaeda operatives to commandeer aircraft and fly them into the World Trade Center and Pentagon. There is, however, a mass of evidence that the hijackers were being monitored by American intelligence, leading to the

conclusion that a decision was made within the upper echelons of the government to allow them to proceed with their plot."

The student asked, "You say you oppose the 'war on terror.' But do you think there are people out there who want to hurt and kill American citizens?" He also asked, "Why do you want to disband the Department of Defense?"

Parnarauskis responded, "The Department of Defense is designed to protect the people who are in control, not the American people. And what has the US done in Iraq? The war there has claimed the lives of more than 100,000 Iraqis and more than 2,700 US soldiers.

"The events of 9/11 have never been adequately investigated; the 9/11 commission was a whitewash. It has now also been revealed that the CIA had warned the Bush administration of an impending attack and it took no action.

"There are people around the world who want to attack the US, but it is the policies of the Bush administration—and the complicity of the two-party system—that has turned people against this country."

Frerich reacted angrily to this exchange. "I keep hearing this about the Democrats being a party of war. They are not a party of war. Guys like [Illinois Senator Barack] Obama, our senator, are not pro-war."

Lending legitimacy to the Bush administration's war policy, he added, "I don't believe there is a conspiracy among those in power. I do believe there has been ineptitude in the handling of the war on terror."

As the meeting broke up, a number of students stayed behind to speak with the candidates informally. A discussion continued between Parnarauskis supporters and several students who, while saying that they opposed the war in Iraq, continued to argue that the Democratic Party is the "lesser of two evils" and that a socialist campaign is not a practical solution.

Students were urged to study the SEP's election statement and to attend a lecture by David North sponsored by the Students for Social Equality entitled "War and the Crisis of American Democracy" being held Tuesday, October 17, on the University of Illinois campus.



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