

Illinois SEP candidate Joe Parnarauskis participates in debates

Socialist program reaches wide audience

Tom Carter
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Over the past week, Joseph Parnarauskis, the SEP candidate for state Senate in Illinois' 52nd District, participated in two major debates. On Friday, October 20, Parnarauskis debated Democratic candidate Mike Frerichs and Republican candidate Judy Myers on WILL Channel 12 TV. Then, on Monday, October 23, Parnarauskis again debated his opponents on WDWS AM 1400.

Both programs aired to the area encompassing the 210,000 voters of the 52nd District and are being posted on the broadcasters' web sites. The WDWS radio broadcast is posted under the station's listing "52nd State Senate District Debate" and the WILL-TV broadcast will be available near the bottom of the channel's archived programs page under "Election 2006: 52nd State Senate"

In each debate, Parnarauskis aggressively distinguished the program of the Socialist Equality Party from those of the two big business parties, and encouraged viewers and listeners to study the SEP's election statement on the *World Socialist Web Site*. The topics discussed included the impending AmerenIP rate freeze, the raid by the Democrats on the state employees' pension fund, education, abortion rights, gay marriage, stem cell research, political corruption, the death penalty, and campaign finance reform.

AmerenIP, one of the two major energy companies in Illinois, recently announced that it would hike rates by as much as 50 percent this January, following the expiration of a 1997 state bill regulating energy prices. Working people throughout Illinois were outraged by this proposed move, which would go into effect in the dead of winter, and which would send the average home's electric bill above \$1,000 a year. In response, a three-year price freeze on electricity has been proposed by a few Democrats in the Illinois legislature. After AmerenIP President Scott Cisel threatened to fire a quarter of the workforce in the

event of a freeze, the official debate has been over whether or not a freeze would be "good for the Illinois economy."

At the beginning of Monday's 50-minute debate on WDWS radio, each of the three candidates was asked to make a statement.

"As many of you know," Joe Parnarauskis told listeners in his opening remarks, "the Illinois Democrats spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in their effort to keep me off the ballot, because they did not want a candidate in the elections who would articulate the popular opposition to the war, the attacks on democratic rights, and the pro-big business policies of both the Democrats and Republicans. They did not want a candidate who would point out that the two parties worked together to spend hundreds of billions on the war, and to pass legislation at home making torture a policy of the United States.

"The Democrats and Republicans claim that there is no money for improving social programs, especially in public health care and education. At the same time, Illinois taxpayers have spent almost \$20 billion on the war on terror, and the wealthiest 19 individuals in Illinois have amassed assets totaling \$40 billion. I say there's plenty to pay for full healthcare, jobs, housing, retirement, education, and a comfortable standard of living for everyone!"

Midway through the debate, the discussion bogged down as Republican Myers and Democrat Frerichs accused each other's party of giving too few tax breaks to businesses. Myers said that "too many taxes on business" under the Democrats had "scared away" a Honda plant, which was recently built across the border in Indiana. In order to "attract jobs," she said, the state must do away with "all these taxes on business."

Frerichs responded that the state should be "smart"

about its tax breaks for businesses, focusing tax breaks on “our strengths as a state,” such as the University of Illinois. “The university is a good economic engine,” he said. “If we’re going to compete with countries like China, we need a highly skilled workforce.”

Parnarauskis intervened, saying, “Look, the two parties are always saying there’s not enough money to pay for jobs, education, and housing. I’ve made a proposal. We’ve got 19 billionaires in this state; I want to ask my opponents: what’s wrong with using that money to pay for social needs?”

An uncomfortable silence followed, after which Frerichs and Myers each attempted to duck the question. The moderator, sensing their discomfort, suggested that the candidates “move on” to a new topic. Later, Frerichs said, “well, if you start taxing those 19 billionaires, they are just going to pack up and move to a different state.”

In his concluding remarks, Parnarauskis stated, “Both of the major parties are thoroughly implicated in a war that has now cost the lives of over 650,000 Iraqis and 2,700 American youth. For decades, both parties have taken turns trampling on the jobs, economic security, and living standards of working people, while the wealthiest 1 percent has doubled its share of the national wealth.

“I’m not carrying out any personal attacks during my campaign, and I have no need to falsify the record. I stand on the strength of the platform of the Socialist Equality Party, which I encourage every one of you to read on our web site.

“The SEP fought hard to get on the ballot, and the Democrats spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to block us every step of the way. We fought so that working people would be able to have their own voice in the elections.

“I’m telling working people—don’t throw your vote away with one of the two parties of big business. Make your vote count! Vote for the SEP and build a genuine party for working people, independent of the banks, wealthy investors, and corporate CEOs.”

On last Friday’s televised debate on WILL, the question of a three-year freeze on energy prices was introduced by the moderator. Myers responded by saying that although she thought the rate increases were “too much,” she would support a freeze only if “we failed to get everyone to sit down to the table” and negotiate a compromise. Frerichs said he would vote for the freeze, and said he favored a return to the regulation of these industries.

Parnarauskis reminded viewers that AmerenIP’s profits had already doubled from \$300 million to \$600 million

during the 10 years of regulation. This winter’s price hikes are expected to provide an additional \$600 million to \$700 million in profits for the company.

“Institutions like AmerenIP cannot be in the hands of individuals who use them to make a profit,” Parnarauskis said. “They have to be brought under the democratic control of working people.”

On the subject of education, Frerichs and Myers each peddled their plans for reshuffling the state budget to provide additional funding for education. Myers called for 51 percent of new state revenues to be allocated for education, while criticizing the Illinois Democrats for introducing “too many new programs.”

Frerichs’s education plan includes a “property tax swap,” wherein the section of the population that pays property taxes would be provided with tax relief, and Illinois’ flat income tax would be raised to make up the difference. This would, according to Frerichs, provide for more “equality and fairness” in the school system.

Parnarauskis dismissed these meager promises. “We’ve got 19 billionaires in this state, who between them have a total of over \$40 billion dollars,” he said. “At the same time, Illinois taxpayers have spent a total of \$20 billion on the so-called war on terror. It’s time to put that wealth to where it’s needed. We’ve heard the same excuses from Democrats and Republicans year after year.” Parnarauskis called for a heavily progressive tax on the rich of Illinois to make higher education available to everyone.

In the course of the program, Parnarauskis affirmed the right of all women to abortion on demand. Supporting embryonic stem-cell research he said that “science and technology should be used to the fullest.” On the issue of gay marriage, he said that any two consenting adults should be able to legally marry and be afforded all the legal rights of that union.

At the Urbana Farmers’ Market the next day, Parnarauskis was approached by a number of people who had seen him on the television program, expressed interest in the SEP campaign and felt he had won the debate.



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