

SEP demands right to participate in debates for US Senate candidates in New York

A reporter
3 October 2006

Bill Van Auken, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US Senator from the state of New York, demanded that he be included in debates scheduled this month between incumbent Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton and her Republican challenger, former Yonkers mayor John Spencer.

In October 2 letters addressed to the sponsors of the debate as well as to the Democratic and Republican candidates, Van Auken insisted: "Tens of thousands of New Yorkers signed petitions to place my party and my name on the ballot because they oppose the war in Iraq, the attacks on democratic rights and the assault on living standards that are being carried out by both major parties. They have a right to have their concerns heard in a public candidates debate."

Van Auken, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* and resident of Queens, New York, issued his statement on the same day that the New York State Board of Elections announced it would certify the socialist antiwar candidate for the November 7 general election ballot. Some 25,000 registered New York state voters signed nominating petitions to place the SEP on the ballot during the six-week petitioning period this summer.

Debates have been scheduled between Clinton and Spencer on October 20 in Rochester, sponsored by New York City television news station NY1 and in New York City, two days later, by WABC-TV.

In New York's Democratic primary, NY1, owned by Time-Warner, refused to set up a debate between Clinton and her challenger, Jonathan Tasani, on the grounds that Tasani's failure to raise at least half a million dollars in campaign funds meant he was not a serious candidate.

"Once again, these kind of arbitrary and grossly undemocratic criteria are being applied to exclude any

real alternatives and narrow the political debate to what is acceptable to the corporate donors who finance both the Democratic and Republican campaigns," said Van Auken.

Unlike Spencer, who calls for continuing the Bush administration's disastrous war in Iraq, and Clinton, who supports continuing the occupation through a revamped militarist program to "win the war in Iraq," Van Auken is demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops and calls for those who conspired to wage this illegal war be held politically and criminally responsible.

Spencer supported Congress's legalization of the Bush administration's policy of torture and indefinite detention without trial, while carrying out ultra-right election propaganda juxtaposing images of Clinton and Osama bin Laden. For her part, Hillary Clinton refused to wage a struggle against this legislation, while voting in favor of the anti-immigrant wall on the Mexican border.

Van Auken calls for a counteroffensive against the assault on democratic rights, through the repeal of the Patriot Act, the dismantling of the Department of Homeland Security and the defense of all the democratic and social gains won by generations of working people, including for immigrants.

The SEP is campaigning in this election for a break with the two parties controlled by big business and the building of a mass socialist movement of the working class as the only means of defending these rights.



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