

SEP candidate opposes anti-democratic budget scheme

## Reject Maine's "Taxpayer Bill of Rights"

Eric DesMarais  
7 November 2006

*The following statement was issued by Eric DesMarais, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for state Senate in Maine's 32nd Legislative District.*

On November 7, the people of Maine will be faced with a referendum issue, the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, otherwise known as TABOR. This measure, backed by a spectrum of corporate and right-wing interest groups, represents an extension of the nationwide attacks on democratic rights and principles into the sphere of state and local governance.

Far from being a "bill of rights" in any genuine sense of the term, TABOR undermines a foundational tenet of all forms of democracy—majority rule. TABOR would place limits on state and local budget increases that could be overruled only by a two-thirds super-majority vote of the governing legislative body, and would then have to be followed by another majority vote in a district-wide referendum. This would, in effect, allow a minority to block the will of the majority.

One of the main backers of the TABOR movement is Howie Rich, a real estate magnate based in New York. He has funneled \$7 million into TABOR and similar issues in 11 other states, including Arizona, California, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Oklahoma and Oregon. Rich has served on the boards of directors of a variety of organizations, including Social Security Choice, a group that is attempting to dismantle the national Social Security System.

Support also comes for the Maine Heritage Policy Center, which is connected to the Heritage Foundation, the leading think tank of the Republican right. A variety of corporate and big business associations also favor Maine's TABOR, as does the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce, whose officers include representatives of LL Bean, UNUMProvident, and

Corporate Finance Associates of New England.

Arguments for Maine's TABOR, including claims that it would limit government waste and allow the economy to grow, are aimed at appealing to the working poor in Maine, a state that has seen no economic growth in the last year and has high property taxes. However, a similar TABOR that was enacted in Colorado in 1994 has proven disastrous for workers in Colorado.

Over the past 12 years, even as Colorado's economy has grown, schools have suffered and basic infrastructure has crumbled. Colorado now ranks 49th in the country in terms of per capita K-12 public education spending, a precipitous drop from 35th in 1992, and it has fallen from 35th to 48th in higher education spending.

After passage of TABOR, Colorado fell from 23rd to 48th in the nation in the percentage of pregnant women receiving adequate access to prenatal care, and from 24th to 50th in the share of children receiving full vaccinations.

Since TABOR was enacted, Colorado's roads have deteriorated to the point where 73 percent are now considered to be in poor condition. Overall, TABOR has pushed Colorado to the brink of bankruptcy.

The so-called "Taxpayer Bill of Rights" does nothing to address the real issues facing workers, above all the accelerating concentration of wealth in the hands of a corporate elite, and the war in Iraq.

Most recent estimates put the cost of the Iraq war at approximately \$2 billion a week. The National Priorities Project estimates that the amount of money spent so far in this war could have paid for 3 million new houses, 16 million four-year college scholarships, or health insurance for 200 million children for one year.

According to an Internal Revenue Service report, in 2001 the federal government lost nearly \$340 billion in uncollected taxes. This is not revenue lost through tax loopholes, but the result of the failure of the super-rich and the corporations they control to pay their taxes.

In opposing TABOR, the Socialist Equality Party in no way supports the coalition of Democratic Party politicians, businessmen and labor bureaucrats who support the status quo or some other formula for fiscal austerity.

On the contrary, we advocate a radical change in the tax policies that exist in Maine and throughout the US. These policies must be turned inside out, from a means of plundering the incomes of average working people in order to enrich millionaires and big business, into a means of effecting a radical redistribution of wealth.

The SEP demands the repeal of all the tax cuts for the rich that have been implemented by successive administrations over the past quarter century. We call for a sharp increase in direct taxes on concentrated wealth and the abolition of the loopholes that allow large corporations to pay next to nothing on their profits.

These policies would mark a major step in providing adequate funding for education, health care and social services, and allow a sharp reduction in taxes for the vast majority of the population.

To ensure adequate living standards and economic security for all, the SEP advocates the replacement of the present economic system, in which massive industrial and financial enterprises are privately owned and controlled, by a socialist system based on public ownership and democratic control of the economy.

American workers must unite with the international working class on a platform that articulates their common interests in order to create a movement capable of reversing the falling living standards and attacks on democratic rights now facing workers the world over.

It is on this basis that I call on all workers, students, and young people to vote “no” on TABOR. I urge Maine voters to vote for me on November 7, and voters in other areas where SEP candidates are running to do the same. Study our election program, discuss it with your friends and co-workers, and make the decision to join the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**