

SEP candidate D'Artagnan Collier files petitions for Michigan state election

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On Wednesday, July 14, one day before the filing deadline, supporters of Socialist Equality Party candidate D'Artagnan Collier submitted petitions containing the signatures of 1,129 voters in Detroit in order to place his name on the ballot for the November 2 state elections. Collier is running for Michigan State House of Representatives in the 9th District, on Detroit's northwest side.

SEP members and supporters gathered nearly twice the number of signatures required to place Collier on the ballot. The signatures of 600 qualified voters are needed for an independent candidate to qualify, according to Michigan election law.

Collier, 42, is a well-respected city worker and lifelong resident of Detroit whose father retired from Chrysler. Last year he was the SEP candidate for mayor of Detroit and has spent his entire adult life as a leading member of the socialist movement fighting in the interests of the working class. Most recently, Collier was a commissioner in the Citizens Inquiry into the Dexter Avenue Fire and is currently a member of the Committee to Oppose Utility Shutoffs (CAUS).

Collier's campaign is a major step forward for the working class in opposition to the unrelenting demands by Democrats and Republicans that workers and their families pay for the economic crisis. Michigan is second only to Nevada for the highest unemployment rate in the nation. The real unemployment rate in the state's largest city, Detroit, has reached the Depression-era level of 50 percent.

In Michigan, where the Democrats dominate state and city governments, 87,000 people are affected by the failure of the federal government to extend unemployment benefits, and one in four are on some form of state assistance.

In Detroit, the state-appointed school director is in the

process of closing 140 schools—half the district's learning facilities—and officials have threatened to close 77 parks. In addition, the city's millionaire Mayor David Bing has outlined a plan to relocate poor residents and shut down whole areas of the city deemed too impoverished to provide city services.

Many people signed the petition to place Collier on the ballot because of his opposition to utility shutoffs, another symptom of the massive crisis facing the working class. Nearly a dozen people—including small children, senior citizens and disabled workers—lost their lives in house fires last winter after energy giant, DTE, shut off gas and electrical service to their homes. According to the Michigan Public Services Commission, over 176,000 households in the state have already had utilities turned off during the first five months of the year.

Collier is running in a working class area that stretches from the border of the city at 8 Mile Road to Fenkell Road on the south, and between Redford Township on the west and a few blocks east of Southfield Road on the east. His principal opponent is the 25-year-old Democrat Shannell Jackson, who is the incumbent. According to filing records Jackson had considered running for the Michigan State Senate position before withdrawing one day later. To qualify for the elections Jackson and her fellow Democrats only needed to pay \$100 to place their names on the ballot and did not have to collect the signatures of registered voters required of independent candidates.

Despite the immense propaganda campaign promoting the election of President Obama, the administration's pro-business agenda has intensified the social crisis gripping Detroit. Last year, the White House carried out the forced bankruptcy and restructuring of General Motors and Chrysler, setting

into motion the destruction of tens of thousands of auto jobs and a drastic reduction in living standards of current, retired and future auto workers. In addition, while handing over trillions to the Wall Street banks, the administration has offered no relief to states and local governments, which are carrying out unprecedented cuts in education, health care and other vital services.

All resistance to these attacks has been suppressed by the United Auto Workers and other unions, which have worked hand in hand with the Obama administration and state and local Democrats and Republicans. In exchange for its betrayal of auto workers—including reducing the wages of young workers to near poverty levels—the UAW has been given a substantial ownership stake in the auto companies.

The successful petition drive is a sign of the enormous social anger building up in the working class and the strivings of working people to find a political alternative to the two big business parties and the pro-company unions.

In the course of the election campaign Collier will advance a socialist program to mobilize the working class independently of the corporate-controlled parties to defend the right to decent jobs, living standards and social programs. The SEP rejects the claim that there is no money to meet the needs of working people and calls for a radical restructuring of the economy, including the nationalization of the banks and basic industries under the collective and democratic control of the working class.

Collier's campaign will also fight for the unity of all workers—black, white and immigrant in the US, and workers in every country of the world—against the efforts to pit workers against each other on the basis of race and nationality. Workers in the majority African American city of Detroit face the same problems—job losses, budget cuts, home foreclosures, plummeting home values and skyrocketing debts—as workers in the suburbs. Collier will also make a special appeal to youth, students and young workers facing school closings, unbearable student debt burdens and the prospect of low-paying jobs or fighting in future imperialist wars.

One worker told this reporter that she signed the petition because she is opposed to the decision by Congress not to renew the unemployment extension.

“Look, I have been laid off from the city for over a year, and they have just cut me off. I have two kids, one in college, and I cannot afford my house.” She said she is going to lose her home without the benefits. “They can bail out the banks and Wall Street,” she said “But they can't give working people an extension on their unemployment.” She said as far as she was concerned the entire government was responsible, including Obama. “What is he doing? I don't see it,” she stated.

Speaking to the WSWS, Collier thanked the workers who signed his petitions and his supporters who collected them. “There is a strong feeling that something has to be done, and that it is not being done by either the Democrats or Republicans,” Collier said. “Many people signed the petition after we explained our opposition to utility shutoffs. It shows that people are moving beyond whether or not they know the face of the person running to reacting to basic class issues. This is why we are confident we can win widespread support,” stated Collier.



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