

ILLINOIS GREEN PARTY CONDEMNS “PUBLIC” TV STATION WTTW FOR HOSTING EXCLUSIONARY DEBATES

WTTW, the Chicago PBS affiliate (Channel 11), is once again hosting candidate debates that exclude the ballot-qualified candidates of both the Green Party and the Libertarian Party -- this time in the races for Illinois Comptroller and United States Senator from Illinois.

It is excluding these candidates despite the fact that well over 100,000 Illinoisans signed petitions to place Green Party Comptroller candidate Tim Curtin and Senate candidate Scott Summers or their Libertarian counterparts on the ballot for the 2016 general election, with both parties overcoming one of the most restrictive ballot-access laws in the United States.

It is excluding these candidates despite polls showing that 57 percent of Americans say that a third major political party is needed in the U.S. – up 11 percent from just four years ago -- and over three-quarters of American voters would like to see the national presidential debates include third-party candidates – indicating that a similar percentage would like to see third-party candidates included in other debates.

It is excluding these candidates despite the fact that WTTW is a public television station that receives and relies upon U.S. and Illinois taxpayer funds for a large proportion of its operations. WTTW is itself a tax-exempt organization. Its offices, broadcasting equipment, studios, and parking lot are all located on property owned by the State of Illinois.

WTTW's failure to include all of the ballot-qualified candidates in the debates is a betrayal of its own mission statement, which claims that it is committed to “diverse perspectives, accessibility, innovation, community engagement, and life long learning,” and claims that the station is “balanced in our independent, objective, in-depth reporting and encourage[s] [its] audiences to engage in dialogue and make informed decisions.”

Ironically, both the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* newspapers included Curtin in a four-way debate for comptroller. In fact, the *Tribune* has made the entire one hour debate available on line, to help voters determine who is the best candidate. Yet the so-called non-commercial “public” television station, WTTW, has refused to let Curtin and Summers participate in the debates for Comptroller and U.S. Senate.

The excuse given by WTTW management is that only “viable” candidates should be included in the debates. This is flawed, circular reasoning. Candidates become “viable” when enough voters decide to support them. Voters may decide to support a candidate when they learn more about that candidate’s platform, policies, and plans if elected to office. Because of the institutional and monetary advantages already held by Democratic and Republican candidates, alternative party and independent candidates have to rely on the fairness of some news media and opportunities for debate in order to have a reasonable *chance* to persuade voters that they are the best candidate B and bring their polling numbers up.

Inclusion in debates, therefore, is one principal way in which candidates *become* “viable.” WTTW is actually foreclosing an opportunity for other candidates to become viable by *preemptively* declaring that only Democratic and Republican candidates are “viable,” thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. To say

that a candidate has to demonstrate a large degree of support *before* the debates are held is like telling a jockey that he or she must demonstrate an ability to be competitive in a horse race B before being given a horse to ride.

WTTW's discrimination in favor of the two corporatesponsored parties is unfair and disrespectful to the people they are supposed to be serving B the voters, and the public at large. It means that **taxpayer money and the public airwaves are being used to further tilt the playing field against the candidates of alternative parties, in favor of the two parties that *already* hold a huge advantage in money, media exposure and power.** This is an outrageous betrayal of the public trust. It violates the requirement of the Federal Communications Act that every broadcast station – let alone a “public” station – serve the “public interest, convenience and necessity.”

For government to truly reflect and serve the public interest in a democratic republic, the people have to be *informed* about all of their choices B so that they can make a truly informed decision on Election Day. The best way to do this is to put the ideas and proposals of *all* the candidates to the test of debate, so that voters can judge for themselves who is the best candidate. Holding Aby invitation only@ debates limited to the A good old boys@ club of Democrats and Republicans misinforms and manipulates voters by reinforcing the view that there are only two A serious” or A legitimate” choices B which usually don't present much of a choice at all.

Finally, WTTW's decision is tragic, insofar as Curtin and Summers both champion the policies that would best serve the people of Illinois. Among the Comptroller candidates, only Tim Curtin offers a solution to the state's deep financial crisis. He alone supports the proposed LaSalle Street Tax, a miniscule tax on the trading of speculative financial transactions that would raise about \$13 billion a year in new revenues. Such new revenues would restore funding for public education and needed social services, help ease the pension crisis and allow the budget to be balanced.

Among the Senate candidates, Summers alone supports a Green New Deal – a bold federal plan to create full employment while simultaneously addressing the climate change emergency by promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable transportation practices. He also supports an improved Medicare-for-all health-care system, monetary reforms that include write-downs of student debt, and he opposes U.S. military aggression overseas.

The Illinois Green Party urges all concerned Illinois voters to contact WTTW management and let it know that you do not support WTTW's exclusionary debate policy. Demand that the debate include *all* ballot-qualified candidates. Let WTTW know that you will no longer donate to the station during its pledge drives until the station honors *its* pledge to support the public interest.

To do so, write to Daniel J. Schmidt, President and Chief Executive Officer, WTTW, 5400 N. Saint Louis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60625-4698, contact WTTW management at (773) 583-5000 – or send the station a comment on-line at: <http://chicagotonight.wttw.com/contact>