

INTERVIEW

The Hon. Harold James,
Pennsylvania House of Representatives

‘The government is supposed to be *for* people’

Harold James (D) has served in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives since 1989, and is currently chairman of the state’s Legislative Black Caucus. Born August 7, 1942, he received the Good Conduct medal while serving in the U.S. Army, and the Valor Award while serving as a police officer in Philadelphia from 1965 until his retirement in 1987.

As a police officer, he worked against racial discrimination and injustice. In 1972, he helped form the National Black Police Association, and became its chairman in 1976. In 1977, he became president of the Guardian Civic League in Philadelphia.

This interview was conducted by Phil Valenti on July 25, 1996.

Fidelio: Last year, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (N.B.C.S.L.) passed a resolution calling for a Congressional investigation of corruption in the Department of Justice, charging the D.O.J. with political targetting of Black elected officials, and Lyndon LaRouche, among others. Do you believe there is a conspiracy to target groups like Black elected officials?

Rep. James: Yes, I do believe—I know that it’s happened, I know that it’s happening. And, I’m not talking about people who cause themselves to do anything wrong or illegal. But, I think that there’s an over-emphasis by certain factions within the Justice Department, within law enforcement, that target African-Americans and minorities who are outspoken, who are independent-thinking, and who expose travesties of justice.

When I met people from the Schiller Institute who asked me about the LaRouche exoneration, I looked at it, and I looked at the fact that they had set up

hearings to examine it, and call for the investigation, and I thought it was important—because lots of times we have a lot of bureaucrats who, as the policymakers change over four years or over elections, a lot of these bureaucrats stay in place, and a lot of time they are insensitive, they are racist in a lot of their policies and opinions. And I think they participate in those kinds of investigations, or those kinds of targetting, that would expose or try to find things which would cause outspoken people embarrassment, or to get them in trouble, or set them up with stings—or, sometimes, to the extent of planting evidence, and situations similar to that.

I know that happens. If you even look at myself, and saw how the police department did me in, when I was just talking about injustices in the police department. And now, in the political arena, I’m pretty sure that it may happen to me soon, that they may try to look for things or find things, in terms of trying to cause you to be embarrassed, or cause you to be investigated, to the extent that it will ruin your reputation and/or your credibility.

Fidelio: Mr. LaRouche has pointed to Dick Morris, President Clinton’s campaign adviser, who used to work for Trent Lott and Jesse Helms—who actually ran Jesse Helms’ racist campaign against Harvey Gantt six years ago, for U.S. Senate in North Carolina. Do you think it would help if some of the people with these attitudes at the higher levels of



These mean-spirited people in the Republican administration represent a bacteria themselves, in some conservative politicians, who’re mean-spirited towards the working populace, heartless to the working poor, indifferent to the elderly, and reckless toward our children, which is our next generation. We have to rise up.

the Democratic Party were removed from their positions?

Rep. James: Oh, yes, I think that’s important. I mean, if you’re going to have people who run racist campaigns—like, we have a legislator who admitted to making racist remarks about a race of people—and then they are still in office, and are still an influence in the Democratic Party, or any party, then let them set up the David Duke Party. Then we’ll all know where they’re coming from, as opposed to getting caught with their sheets off. I think it’s sad that Democrats, or any policymakers, or any leaders, or

People have been coming into my office, fearful that they're not going to be able to make it. Because, if they are unable to get their prescriptions, this could lead to more serious illnesses, and eventually to their death. What are they going to do?

anybody, who hopefully want to reflect the views of all the people, can support or be associated with, racist bigots.

Fidelio: You are one of the 700-plus state legislators who signed the Open Letter to President Clinton, calling for the exoneration of Mr. LaRouche. Can you tell us how you see the importance of Mr. LaRouche's ideas for the United States?

Rep. James: In my limited observation of Mr. LaRouche, it seems that he is very wise as it relates to economy or financial endeavors and, from my understanding, he has made some forecasts or predictions of situations that have happened. It happened in Orange County, as relates to derivatives and financial transactions, etc. If he's able to make those kind of predictions, and they've come out, then I think we need to observe that; our financial people need to observe that, just to make sure that we, or other entities or municipalities or other counties, don't lose because of not paying attention to some financial information.

Fidelio: You are a leader in the fight against Governor Ridge's elimination of medical assistance for 220,000 working poor and disabled people in Pennsylvania. In your speech on the floor of the House on May 15, you said: "Mr. Speaker, when Pennsylvanians begin to die, as a result of the Governor signing this report, I foresee, upon proper complaint, the U.S. Attorney General's office considering an indictment against Mr. Ridge, possibly for homicide." Please tell us what Ridge did, and what its impact will be.

Rep. James: What Ridge did, in terms of trying to balance the budget, was that he cut nearly 250,000 people, who are going to lose their benefits, out of medical assistance. These were not people on welfare; these are people who are working poor, medically needy only, and disabled. This

is going to cause hospitals to close down, jobs to be lost. Just to wipe out 250,000 people because you want to balance the budget, to save \$210 million on the backs of the working poor.

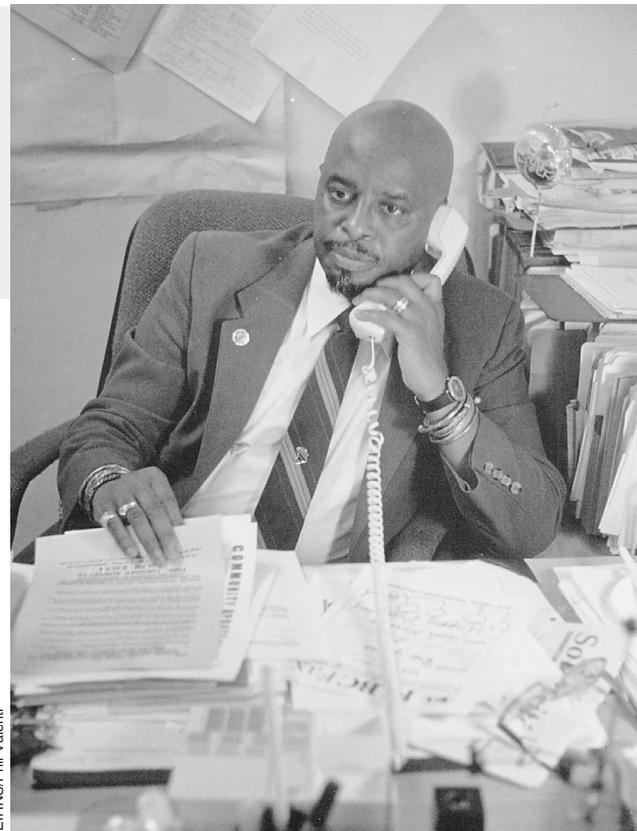
People are going to possibly die as a result of a decision made by us as legislators and led by Governor Ridge, in terms of trying to balance the budget so that he can look good for Washington, and look good for Gingrich and Dole. I think it's mean-spirited, and we as policymakers have to be held accountable for some of our actions that hurt or harm people.

So, just the fact that a governor can do this, and it can be shown that this helped cause the deaths of people, and that someone should start taking actions as a result of this—I think as policymakers, we'll have to look more at what we do, not cut people off in a way that's going definitely to contribute to, or lead to them dying.

That is not what the government should be about. The government is supposed to be *for* people, not for them to die, or to lose all their health benefits. We should be giving everyone health benefits.

Fidelio: Lyndon LaRouche, on May 16, the day that Ridge signed this bill, called for Ridge to be impeached, saying that this is mass murder, and comparing it to the same kind of crime that the Nazi war criminals were convicted of at the Nuremberg Tribunals. What was your response?

Rep. James: I thought it was a good idea, because if you have a governor who doesn't care about the health or well-being of the people, and who is doing this



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to balance the budget on the backs of those people, then it's a good idea. As it is related to, what you just described in the Nuremberg Trials, and this is the same mechanism that was used, then someone needs to look at that, so that we can be in front of it, and don't wait till the tragedy has happened as a result of nobody doing enough about that before.

Fidelio: The pamphlet that's now being circulated by the LaRouche campaign shows that Hitler also began by eliminating budgets for the poor, the elderly, and the mentally disabled, for economic motives, and that ultimately those "small beginnings" were what led to the Holocaust later on.

Rep. James: I think the people have to rise up and do something about it, and I think that if a groundswell of people would impact upon the policymakers, that you cannot do these things to us that are going to hurt us, cause us to die, we just have to do something. You talk about illness and sickness: These mean-spirited people in the Republican administration are part of the disease, and I mentioned it in my remarks on

My bill would put a two-tenths of a percent tax on the selling of stocks, bonds, derivatives, and other financial securities, which today are not even taxed at all. That would hopefully increase revenue, to help restore funding cuts in Pennsylvania's medical assistance programs, and other vital services, that were cut by our mean-spirited Governor and the mean-spirited Republican administration.

the floor, that they represent a bacteria themselves, going on in some conservative politicians, who demonstrate that they're mean-spirited towards the working populace, heartless to the working poor, indifferent to the elderly, and reckless toward our children, which is our next generation. We have to rise up.

Fidelio: Mr. LaRouche has caused a big uproar by calling this a "Nazi" crime. What do you think about calling Ridge's policy a Nazi policy?

Rep. James: I don't think I know enough about it to correlate or relate the two. I just haven't read that much on it. But I know that this is a devastating policy, that it's going to cause people to lose their lives. We've already had representatives that have been holding meetings. People have been coming into my office, fearful that they're not going to be able to make it. Because, if they are unable to get their prescriptions, this could lead to more serious illnesses, and eventually to their death. What are they going to do? And if that can be attributed to a policy that we implement, then there may be some liability that the people can get from the government or state, as a result of somebody dying.

But why do we have to wait till somebody dies? Let's go to prevention. Let's give everybody health care. Let's deal with the root causes of crime, so we can stop all the building of jails and making it the new industrial complex.

Fidelio: On June 27, you introduced House Bill 2833 to address the issue of financing. Could you discuss that?

Rep. James: I introduced this bill on the last day of the session, before our summer break, after reviewing some information that had been shared with me by

yourself and the Schiller Institute, in terms of a possibility of implementing a securities transfer tax, that would put a small sales tax on financial transactions, which are made by wealthy individuals. My bill would put a two-tenths of a percent tax on the selling of stocks, bonds, derivatives, and other financial securities, which today are not even taxed at all. When you compare that small sales tax, to the sales tax which we have in our state—which is six percent, where everybody pays, poor, disadvantaged, everybody has got to pay six percent sales tax—and where you have these wealthy financial investors making these kind of transactions, and gambling, and doing this without paying any tax! They can afford to pay two-tenths of a percent.

So, I introduced a bill that would hopefully increase revenue, to help restore funding cuts in Pennsylvania's medical assistance programs, and other vital services, that were cut by our mean-spirited Governor and the mean-spirited Republican administration. So they made these cuts, and now here is an opportunity where we can raise some revenue. At twenty cents per one hundred dollars, it can hardly be noticed by the average person investing in stocks and bonds, but if you trade \$100,000, the tax would only be \$200. And these are the people that are selling and making these transactions every day.

The revenue that can be raised goes up into the high millions of dollars, enough that would definitely be able to restore the \$210 million that was cut out of medical assistance, and much more than that in terms of vital services that we need in Pennsylvania.

I'm on the finance committee, so I've talked to the majority chairman and the Democratic chairman and asked them

to have some informational meetings on the impact of this on the investment community and possibly increase a lot of our revenues, to explore this. I hadn't heard about it or thought about it before, but I do know that Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) had come up with this kind of idea as it relates to Congress. And I'll share this with our financial people. So that's why I would like to put together an informational meeting with the committee, to explore this more.

Fidelio: Do you see the potential that this could be introduced in other states?

Rep. James: Yes. I had the opportunity to be at the Eastern Regional Conference of the Council of State Governments and met legislators from New Jersey and New York, who were interested in it. Even at a meeting in Washington, D.C. that same week, legislators from Mississippi, Indiana, and Tennessee all got copies of the legislation, and were interested in it, in terms of introducing this in other states. When I go out to the National Council of State Legislators and meet with other legislators, and also other members of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators that we'll be meeting out there in St. Louis, I'm going to share this opportunity with them.

What we are all looking for is not taxing poor or middle income people more, but if we can tax the ones that can afford it, or not so much just tax them, but get them to help contribute by long-term investment in job creation, I think it would be beneficial to the economic development in our community and to the working poor and the average middle class American.

Fidelio: Anything you wish to add?

Rep. James: I just hope, that with your network, you will continue to explore the rising racism that's coming up, and that's being more exposed in our legislators and racist public policymakers throughout the country, and hope that you will start compiling information. I would definitely encourage the N.B.C.S.L. to work closely with you on that, and also the Legislative Black Caucus, as we continue to expose that. There's nothing worse than having racist public policymakers.