
Profile: Gov. Tom Ridge

Pennsylvania Governor, a Nuremberg Criminal

by Philip Valenti

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge, now considered a likely vice-presidential running mate for Texas Gov. George W. Bush, was the target of a large-scale impeachment campaign, spearheaded by Lyndon LaRouche in 1996. This made Ridge too politically “radioactive” for then-Republican Presidential nominee Bob Dole, who dropped him in favor of Jack Kemp.

But Bush’s handlers seemed to have made a number of “shrewd political calculations.” Ridge’s “working class roots” in Erie are supposed to make voters forget that Bush, like his father, was “born with a silver foot in his mouth.” Vietnam veteran Ridge is supposed to counter Bush’s image as an elitist draft dodger, and Ridge the Catholic is supposed to balance Bush’s close association with the Protestant “Religious Right.” The fact that Ridge is a renegade “pro-choice” Catholic (and prohibited from even speaking at any Roman Catholic function in his home diocese), may also be considered a “nice twist,” given Bush’s “anti-abortion” profile.

However, Ridge’s main “claim to fame,” ironically, is his role in reintroducing practices which the moral and legal standards of the postwar Nuremberg Tribunals of Nazi war criminals were designed to prevent from recurring: The budget-cutting and “privatizing,” whose deadly consequences U.S. officials such as Ridge, “knew or should have known.”

LaRouche, campaigning for the Democratic Presidential nomination, called for Ridge’s impeachment on May 16, 1996, the day after Ridge rammed a “welfare reform” bill through the state legislature, which eliminated state health care benefits for more than 220,000 poor and disabled. Ridge’s Act 35 led to deaths and injuries of innocent people, just as LaRouche had warned.

Ridge “knew or should have known,” that innocent people would die, LaRouche said, and therefore had to be held personally responsible for the consequences of his official actions, based on the Nuremberg Tribunals.

“This is murder, Governor Ridge!” LaRouche declared. “Murder! Plain mass murder; and you cannot do it and put yourself in any other category, but the same category which the Nazis we hung at Nuremberg belong to.”

Within a few days, this writer had drafted an impeachment resolution against Ridge, based on the Nuremberg Tribunal standards and the Pennsylvania Constitution. LaRouche’s political action committee printed and distributed hundreds of thousands of pamphlets, entitled “Impeach Governor Ridge

for Nazi Crimes Against Humanity,” while rallies were organized all over the state, culminating in a 150-person rally in the State Capitol Rotunda on June 4, which was covered widely in the press and broadcast live on state-wide cable TV.

LaRouche, who visited Pennsylvania several times during his 1996 campaign, addressed an audience of almost 1,000 people in Philadelphia on July 4. His half-hour television program calling for Ridge’s impeachment was so devastating to the Governor, that TV stations across the state refused to *sell* his committee the time to air it!

Case Studies of Deaths

The first publicized casualty resulting from Ridge’s medical cuts was Wilzon Lescay, 51, a legal Cuban immigrant under treatment for schizophrenia and depression. On July 29, 1996, Lescay was informed that he no longer qualified for benefits, because of Act 35; on Aug. 7, he hanged himself at his residence in South Philadelphia.

“I don’t have any doubts, really,” said Sister Angela Newman, manager of the residence house for once-homeless men, where Lescay had lived since 1993. “I think he became so severely depressed at the thought of not being able to obtain benefits, that it became too much for him. . . . He just couldn’t get over it.”

Forty-eight hours after the Lescay story hit the newsstands, Ridge’s Public Welfare Secretary announced that three provisions of Act 35 were being suspended as unconstitutional, including the clause denying benefits to immigrants. Ridge and his minions cynically offered “retroactive payments” for any immigrant cut off—no mention was made of Lescay’s death.

It later emerged that the Ridge administration was *warned in advance* that the denial of benefits to non-citizens was unconstitutional, but went ahead anyway, in order to remain in lockstep with the immigrant-bashing line pushed by the Gingrichite Republican leadership.

Within weeks of Lescay’s death, State Rep. Harold James, then-Chairman of the state Legislative Black Caucus, issued a report, “The Deadly Impact of Gov. Ridge’s Medical and Health Care Cuts—Case Studies of Deaths, Injuries, and Threats to Life.” James’s report documented dozens of examples of “inhumane treatment of innocent persons, wrongful deaths, injuries, and threats to life,” including those resulting from Ridge’s plan to force the remaining medical assistance recipients into health maintenance organizations (HMOs).

One of Ridge’s top moneymen is Leonard Abramson, founder of the notorious US Healthcare HMO, which merged with Aetna in 1996. Abramson received close to \$1 billion in cash and Aetna stock that year, as his share of the merger deal. Abramson is a member of the “board of directors” of Ridge’s elite Governor’s Club, which includes those contributing at least \$50,000 to Ridge over four years. Another big contributor is US Healthcare Senior Vice President David F. Simon, who was appointed by Ridge as a consultant to the state Department of Health.