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## Interview: LaMar Lemmons, III

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# Deindustrialization Turned Smiling Neighborhoods to ‘Snaggle-Tooth Housing’

*Michigan State Rep. LaMar Lemmons, III gave a video interview to Robert Johnson of the LaRouche Youth Movement early in February.*

**EIR:** I’d like to start by asking you about some background on some of what’s happened to Detroit here in the last couple of decades. You grew up in Detroit, correct?

**Lemmons:** That’s correct.

**EIR:** And you’ve been representing this district for how long?

**Lemmons:** Almost a decade now.

**EIR:** I wanted to ask in particular about, just what has been the effect in Detroit over the years, of this scaling-back of the number of people employed in manufacturing jobs? What’s been some of the effects on the community, including things like education and drug use, and poverty? And how have some of these other factors interrelated with the problem of the collapse of industry in the city?



*LaMar Lemmons: “It’s a fight, but that’s what I’m used to.”*

**Lemmons:** First of all, let me say this: As I grew up here, on the east side of the city of Detroit, the economy was basically booming; people could leave one factory and go to another if they were dissatisfied with the working conditions, or the management, or their treatment. There was a time when people were still migrating here from the South, to take advantage of these good-paying jobs here in the city. It was the largest homeowner population for African-Americans in the entire United States. And as I entered the workforce when I graduated from high school, there were many options, in terms of finding employment.

Many of those factories—most of those factories—almost *all* of those factories are gone. Those jobs and those opportunities have dissipated. And what’s left, are young people who are no longer successful in getting an education, and the quality of education has gone down immensely; those who are able to achieve, leave Detroit, seeking better opportunities. So, it’s become a town of the very poor, and the aging. That’s the city of Detroit that I’ve come to know now. And so, I’ve been doing whatever I could to change those conditions, as a legislator.

As a legislator, I came in contact with Mr. LaRouche and his programs, and his programs were something that I had been advocating, prior to that, was just the Roosevelt program. I think that we need to institute Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s program, the WPA, the Conservation camps, etc., because we are in a severe depression—not recession, *depression*—particularly in the African-American communities across in the United States; but not just in the African-American communities, cities throughout Ohio, and this entire region. People are unable to find gainful employment and enough to sustain a family.

**EIR:** You’ve recently taken up the call, echoing the call that LaRouche put out to the U.S. Senate, when he called on the Senate to really take the spearhead, in taking emergency action to retool the automobile and related machine-tool indus-

tries. I understand you've introduced a resolution to the Michigan State Legislature calling on the Congress to do just that, and convert, essentially, the automobile industry into an industry that's now going to be producing things that are probably going to have a much more beneficial effect on the economy as a whole, than just cars that are going to sit on a lot.

**Lemmons:** Exactly.

**EIR:** But, actually producing things like trains, power plants.

**Lemmons:** Trains, power plants. And if we're going to build power plants, it should be with the new technology, the fuel cell and the hydrogen fuel cell, in that direction. We can't lament that that time is gone, in terms of the auto industry and its competition.

But what I found interesting with Mr. LaRouche, is when he talks about building the infrastructure—and remember, Franklin Delano Roosevelt put people to work building these highways, and building the infrastructure of America, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, etc. Those type of things, those projects.

And not to mention the fact, that there needs to be a redevelopment of the urban areas throughout the United States, which are now aging and falling apart, because they were built almost a century ago. And so, Mr. LaRouche is the only one that I know, that is calling for that—in a serious call, and continuing to put on pressure, and not just throwing up his hands.

There are others who claim, "I talked to some Democratic colleagues," and they say, "Mr. LaRouche says he's the only one that says that, but I've said that." And I said, "But what are you doing about it? What are you doing? And how consistent, and where it is in terms of your priorities? Or have you just thrown up your hands?" See, I refuse just to say that "the other side of the aisle, the Republicans, won't do this or that"; that means it's time for *me* to take some other course of action. And so, I'm taking that course of action now. And I join with Mr. LaRouche in his call for the United States to institute an FDR-like recovery.

**EIR:** So, it's a fight.

**Lemmons:** It's a fight. But, that's what I'm used to. I mean, I grew up in the Civil Rights era, right after the Civil Rights era, when that baton was passed up, so I'm used to that type of fight. And Mr. LaRouche, and now his Youth Movement, are the only people that I see that are willing to engage in this fight. Too many people, again, are just throwing up their hands, and just saying "that's just the way it is"—and it doesn't have to be that way.

**EIR:** And I'm sure that some of the reactions that you get from Republicans and even Democrats on the state and Fed-



EIRNS/Steve Carr

*One of Detroit's devastated neighborhoods. Some have gone so far as to suggest that entire sections of the city be completely closed off, since the city is unable to provide infrastructure and support to the people who live there.*

eral level, are obviously going to be the question of "Where's the money going to come from?" How have you dealt with that question?

**Lemmons:** Well, first of all, we print the money! We decide. And Mr. LaRouche has come up with a plan—and I'm not an economist, so I have to step back on that one, so I defer to someone like a Mr. LaRouche, in his Hamiltonian approach to the economy in terms of the banking system, and putting these banks into reorganization, bankruptcy reorganization, and allowing the economy to be redirected in a way that would allow us to finance this type of development.

But, I think our greatest asset has to be the human capital that we're throwing away, generation after generation. And people, without any way of survival, will do whatever they can. First of all, half the population, or a percentage of the population, particularly in the African-American community, have just given up, and they don't know where to turn. They medicate themselves with drugs and alcohol. And it's created an industry—a legal industry and illegal industry, with both high alcohol and drug use in the community. And the people who sell, the illegal industry, the drugs, they've created that type of an environment. And when we go out [to film the area], hopefully we'll go over and see some of the abandoned factories—which is stark—but we can look at what some of the neighborhoods look like. And I can tell you, Detroit did not look like this, when I grew up as a kid.

**EIR:** What type of response have you gotten?

**Lemmons:** First of all, people try to marginalize Mr. LaRouche, and say that he's a fringe, or they make other types of disparaging remarks. I say, "Well, look: I'm not asking you to identify with Mr. LaRouche. I'm asking: Look at this

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program. Evaluate it on its own merit. And if it has merit, then we should do it. And if it doesn't, then we shouldn't." And, then there's little that they can say after that.

**EIR:** Hmm! Well, I'd like to switch gears for a second, because, I'd like you to describe some of the aspects of this process of collapse over the last 30 or 40 years, in terms of what's happened to the health-care system, the educational system, and so forth, as these good, high-paying, skilled jobs have left the area.

**Lemmons:** The immediate effect is, of course, on the family. Because in these areas, we have 70-80% of mothers bearing children out of wedlock, because fathers don't wed them because they don't have the jobs to take care of them, and the government steps in and provides these welfare programs. Then, there was a movement from the right, to attack the welfare programs, and to attack these women as being "welfare queens." The family has to have a support mechanism to augment the educational system. Even if you have the finest schools, when you go home, if you don't have the support, then your chances of success are greatly diminished.

The second part, of course, is that without the tax dollars to finance the other parts of the infrastructure, the hospitalization, etc., then we see a demise of those. And without the health care, without the people having the good-paying jobs with health care—because with the jobs came health insurance packages, which also allowed them to have good health care—now we see people using the emergency room as a primary source of health care, which is far more expensive. And in my area, we've had the closing of about four or five, six hospitals: Saratoga, Samaritan, one of St. John's hospitals; we've had Riverview close and another hospital take it over. So, we've seen the demise of the health-care system in this area.

And the quality of the education, again, without the parental support, you get young men, of adolescent age, without having fathers at home: You can imagine what they do. They form their own families, in gangs and other things. And all this is connected to having a good income; a good, strong nuclear family, which could help raise children, which helps support the school system, which helps support the other infrastructure, which is the hospitals, etc. So, we've had reductions in our police force, reductions in city services, all those things.

And, again, this is very complicated; I know, Mr.

LaRouche says it's very simple, but to the lay person—and I am included as a lay person—it's very complicated. So, I've known that I've had to come up with some type of solutions, otherwise I'm not worth my salt. When people elect me, they elect me to come up with solutions to make their life better.

**EIR:** Sure. Do you want to say something about some of these automobile factories?

**Lemmons:** There are so many factories that are closed. We're talking about the Cadillac plant, the Chevy plant—and sometimes I can't even find where they were, there's so much overgrowth and other decay, and it's blended. But at one point, there were thriving centers of employment, and those centers formed the community—housing and things built around the factories. People wanted to live in close proximity to where they worked. And people would shop in close proximity to where they worked.

And so, now we have total devastation.

**EIR:** You want to talk about the Model T?

**Lemmons:** Ah! The Model T and Highland Park, you know. Highland Park is a city within a city: It sits smack in the middle of the city of Detroit, and they have their own municipality. And there are all types of stories that Henry Ford wanted to keep it separate from the rest of the city, and so they were totally incorporated. But, let me tell you, it was a very middle-class to upper-middle-class place, that had—within 2.9 square miles—over 60,000 people. And all their activity, their management, and their workers centered around that Model T plant that was there. And of course, it went from Model T to other models, but it started off as the Model T. And today, again, another empty shell: Highland Park now has less than 12,000 people, and most of them are poor and aged. The housing decay is older.

And the same story throughout the United States, with urban centers: There's no urban redevelopment program. And Mr. LaRouche is the only one I've heard talk about urban redevelopment planning and building the infrastructure of our city. I've heard talk about building the infrastructure of Baghdad, after we bombed it, but I don't hear talk about building the infrastructure of our own neighborhood cities! We saw what happened to New Orleans, but Detroit has had an economic Katrina: An economic hurricane has hit Detroit.

**EIR:** And isn't Highland Park a city in receivership, to the state?

**Lemmons:** It is in de facto receivership to the state, and has a manager that manages, so the City Council and Mayor basically have no power.

**EIR:** Wow—so, you could say that what happened to Highland Park, that could happen to any city or town in Michigan, where you had factories just closing?

**lemmons:** What happened to Highland Park happened to all of Detroit, and that's just a microcosm. If it was a cell of a living body, you would say that this diseased cell has cancer. And that cancer is the deindustrialization of our society, and the lack of replacing those jobs with viable opportunities. Which is why I introduced House Resolution 13, which said: We take those factories, we take those industrial infrastructure, and we put something else there, whether there be trains—or, Mr. LaRouche talked about these maglev trains that use magnetic levitation, that really float—and we relieve some of the overcrowding and congestion at the airports; we have viable transportation.

We can take these same centers, and put people to work *rebuilding our cities*. For instance, the sewer system in the city of Detroit: Some of it is so old, that it has *wooden* sewer lines. We need to rebuild. But the city can't afford to rebuild its own sewer system—I mean, there are hollowed-out trees, still to this day, in the sewer lines!

**EIR:** I've noticed that the drainage around here has gotten really bad.

**Lemmons:** It is. It's terrible. It's terrible.

**EIR:** There's nowhere for the water to drain.

**Lemmons:** The entire infrastructure of this city, and other urban areas are the same. So, what needs to happen is, Mr. LaRouche's plan. First of all, this has happened over a period of time, and it's had an adverse effect on the family and the family structure. So now, we have a generation of people with no skills, who need to be trained, and I heard Mr. LaRouche talk about doing something similar to what FDR did, in terms of taking people out of these environments, which are toxic—I mean, socially toxic, in terms of raising families, in terms of developing the character of individuals. And these are the type of things that must happen. And he's the only one that is talking about it, is giving it a priority.

**EIR:** I've heard you use the term "snaggle-tooth housing" to describe some of the neighborhoods around here, where you have, on some blocks, only one or two houses—

**Lemmons:** Exactly. There was a smiling neighborhood; now, it's snaggle-tooth, which is a reflection of the poverty, like some of the people who cannot afford dental care. And so, in that neighborhood, it seems it can't afford to have consecutive housing in a nice neighborhood, and so we call it "snaggle-tooth housing."

**EIR:** When you have these neighborhoods that are cleared out like that, how able is the city to provide fire protection and police stations and things like that?

**Lemmons:** Good question: There have been suggestions, under another administration, that we close off entire sections of the city and move everyone out, and just close it off, because we can't afford to provide infrastructure and support for the population that's there—

**EIR:** And you could create a wildlife preserve for endangered fire hydrants!

**Lemmons:** I was about to say, that many of them have become overtaken by large trees and weeds, etc., and also it's hard to secure. And the city has difficulty, in maintaining its property.

**EIR:** So, it's really getting impossible for most people to even, just live and survive in Detroit.

**Lemmons:** It's very difficult, and it's very expensive to live in the city of Detroit. And so only the dedicated, the very wealthy, and the very poor. And a few of the trapped, which tend to be poor as well.

So, we've got a New Orleans situation. With any type of catastrophe, New Orleans-like, Katrina-like catastrophe, which could happen here probably with some blizzard or something—we could have similar effects. And at the same time, we're sending money "billions for Baghdad," as I say.