

Detroit Free Press

POLITICS

James responds to Islamophobia accusation, vowing to target Muslim org



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Updated July 7, 2026, 9:12 a.m. ET

As he campaigns to lead a state home to a large Muslim population, GOP gubernatorial candidate U.S. Rep. John James suggested in a recent interview that Muslims in Dearborn who participated in a religious gathering were extremists, and amid backlash, vowed to target a prominent American Muslim civil rights organization.

In a Monday, June 29, interview on the conservative news channel Newsmax, anchor Rob Finnerty asks James about the [Ashura](#) procession in Dearborn the previous day, in which Shia Muslims came together to mark the death of a religious leader in a 7th century battle.

Presented with footage from the event during the interview under the caption "RADICAL ISLAMIC TAKEOVER OF AMERICA CONTINUES," James said, "I didn't go and fight extremists to have them on our doorstep here. Under no circumstances will we be a home in Michigan for extremism."

The Shelby Township Republican, who often highlights his background as a combat veteran who served in the U.S. Army during the Iraq War, faces accusations from local political and Muslim leaders that his comments traffic in Islamophobia.

"John James is very much ignorant, and he's a bigot," said Dearborn Mayor Abdullah Hammoud. "He's not somebody who shows up in this community. He's not somebody

that stands with this community, and Dearborn actually represents the best of America," he added.

State Rep. Alabas Farhat, D-Detroit, said that "instead of getting to know one of the largest communities in the state" and learning about the Ashura march, James is "choosing to make harmful, bigoted stereotypes."

"It's very unbecoming of somebody that wants to hold the highest office," Farhat said.

Following the Newsmax interview, Dawud Walid, executive director of the civil rights organization the Council on American-Islamic Relations Michigan Chapter (CAIR-MI), [lambasted](#) James for his comments, saying "we stand against those who would seek to demonize and try to usurp the constitutional rights of Muslims in Dearborn."

In response to allegations of anti-Muslim prejudice, James' Press Secretary Alyvia Bailey took issue with his critics. "John James will be governor for all Michiganders and will fiercely defend the religious liberty and safety of every law-abiding citizen of this state, but he will not pretend the threat isn't real, apologize to those who defend the people making it, or be bullied into silence by politicians who promote extremism," Bailey said in a statement.

James pledged action against "extremists who threaten our way of life," saying those who come to the U.S. and fail to assimilate "will go home" in a Friday, July 3 statement included in a news release. That same release called CAIR "a radical extremist group" and promised James would designate it as a terrorist organization, something legal experts say Michigan's governor doesn't appear to have the power to do.

James' campaign said CAIR has a history of supporting Hamas and was an unindicted co-conspirator in a terrorism financing case that began in 2004. CAIR wasn't charged with committing a crime, Walid noted, and the group says it has consistently condemned terrorist acts by Hamas.

"We would have hoped that (James) would offer the community an apology instead of trying to attack one of the community's well-established organizations," Walid said.

If elected, James' campaign said the GOP hopeful would follow in the footsteps of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis – both Republicans who have declared CAIR a terrorist organization in moves that have been challenged in the courts and might not be possible to replicate in Michigan.

"I'm not aware of a legal process whereby the governor has the authority to declare an entity a terrorist organization," said Christina Grossi, partner at Honigman law firm who previously serviced as Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's chief legal counsel.

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Bailey said in an email that James "would use every available authority under Michigan law to ensure state agencies do not contract with, fund, or otherwise legitimize organizations tied to extremist ideology."

Following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attack, [Michigan's Emergency Management Act](#) was [amended](#) to give the governor the ability to declare a "heightened state of alert" amid suspected terrorism in the state to exercise the same powers they have during a state of emergency.

James' Newsmax interview follows Republican attempts to make inroads with Muslims in Michigan. During the 2024 election cycle, for instance, imams took the stage to announce their support for President Donald Trump at one of his [campaign rallies](#) in Novi.

James, in his campaign, has noted his support for legal protections for religious freedom. Hammoud cast doubt on James' commitment, saying "you can't say in one breath that you support the freedom of religion and then in the other condemn Muslims for celebrating their faith."

James has emphasized his own Christian faith in his campaign, and in the Newsmax interview described Christians as under attack. "We're going to make sure that

everybody's religion is respected but of course, even standing up for Christianity's going to be something that I do to lead by example," James said.

Michigan has recently experienced some high-profile attacks on places of worship for various religious groups. A man [attacked](#) The Church of Latter-day Saints in Grand Blanc Township in September 2025 motivated by anti-Mormon beliefs, according to the FBI. In March, a man drove his truck into [Temple Israel](#) in West Bloomfield in a targeted attack against the Jewish community per the FBI. In June, a man was recently [arrested](#) for alleged threats against a mosque in Madison Heights.

In the Tuesday, Aug. 4 GOP gubernatorial primary, James faces former Attorney General Mike Cox and businessman Perry Johnson. The Democratic primary features Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson and Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson. The winners of each primary will face off in the Nov. 3 election. James has Trump's support in the race.

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