

# 'Reverse bias' claims disputed

## Legislator disputes existence of quotas and set-asides in Pa.

By Frank Reeves

Post-Gazette Harrisburg Correspondent

HARRISBURG — For Rep. Harold James, chairman of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus, the statistics discredit charges of reverse discrimination against whites.

At a Capitol news conference yesterday, James, a former Philadelphia police officer, disputed claims that affirmative action programs unfairly hurt whites, especially white men.

"Some opponents of equal opportunity have proposed false solutions to a problem that does not exist — calling for an end to set-asides and quotas," said James, D-Philadelphia. "However, our research reveals that there are no laws on Pennsylvania's books that mandate set-asides, quotas or preferential treatment."

He noted that two former governors, Dick Thornburgh and Robert P. Casey, had issued orders calling for affirmative action in state agencies, but said the orders "require equal opportunity. They do not call for preferential treatment."

Rep. Ron Gamble, D-Oakdale, has introduced legislation to abolish affirmative action programs in pub-

JAMES FROM PAGE B-1

lic employment, public education and the awarding of contracts in state projects. He has assailed affirmative action programs as a form of discrimination that especially hurts white males.

James said that if blacks, Hispanics, women and disabled people had been given preferential treatment through set-asides and quotas, as critics of affirmative action charge, they would hold a greater proportion of the state's higher-paying and professional jobs.

Instead, he said, they have achieved only "minimal access with respect to contracts, employment and public benefits."

"[O]ften there are structural and

systematic barriers that prevent the best and most qualified being hired or securing contracts," he said. "Affirmative action is about eliminating these barriers."

With charts as props, James ticked off statistics that he contended bolstered his case:

- White males make up 33 percent of the U.S. population, but they make up 80 percent of tenured college professors and 97 percent of school superintendents.

- About 12 percent of Pennsylvania's population is black, yet black people make up 7 percent of the top officials and administrators in state agencies and commissions. White people have 90 percent of those jobs; Hispanics have fewer than 1 percent. In state government as a

whole, black people make up 11 percent of the work force and whites about 86 percent.

- In the 14 state-owned universities, such as Indiana University of Pennsylvania, California University of Pennsylvania, and Slippery Rock University, 92 percent of the students are white, 5 percent are black, 1 percent are Hispanic, and 1.5 percent are Asian.

- In 1994, \$400 million worth of state construction contracts were awarded. Firms owned by members of minority groups won only 4.8 percent of the contracts.

- In 1994, minority firms received less than 1 percent of the \$8 billion in service contracts the state awarded.

SEE JAMES, PAGE B-4