

# The life and trials of James A. Traficant Jr.

A look back at the life and career of James A. Traficant Jr. of Poland, who rose from humble beginnings to become a popular and controversial U.S. congressman. Traficant's career ended when he was indicted on charges of racketeering, bribery, obstruction of justice and tax evasion in 2002. He was scheduled to be released today after serving seven years and one month in prison.



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**May:** Graduates from Cardinal Mooney High School.

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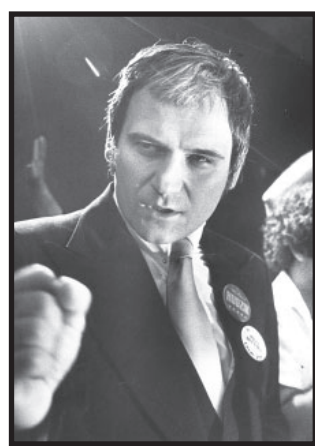
**May:** Graduates from the University of Pittsburgh, where he'd been a star quarterback.

**February:** Named consumer finance coordinator for Youngstown Area Community Action Council after working for insurance companies.

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**February:** Coordinator of the Mahoning County Drug Programs Inc.; later becomes executive director and a popular speaker on drug abuse.

**November:** Named chairman of Mahoning County Welfare Advisory Board.



**MAY 1980: THE SHERIFF**  
James A. Traficant Jr. in 1980, when he ran successfully for Mahoning County sheriff. Traficant sought the sheriff's position after spending 10 years as director of the Mahoning County Drug Program and starring as a high school and college quarterback.

**AUGUST 1982: THE DEFENDANT**  
Here, he is led away in handcuffs in 1982 by FBI agents Larry Lynch, left, and Robert G. Kroner Jr. after he was arrested on bribery and tax evasion charges for accepting mob money during his 1980 campaign for sheriff. Traficant was later acquitted.



**October:** Grand jury absolves him of knowing beforehand of the escape plot that led to the death of reserve deputy John "Sonny" Litch Jr.

**August:** Is seen outside federal grand jury in Cleveland.

**October:** Atty. Don L. Hanni Jr., Mahoning County Democratic Party chairman, suggests Traficant is insane and wants him to be committed for tests. A judge refuses the request.

**August:** Receives notice from IRS that he owes taxes on \$163,000 authorities alleged he took in mob bribes in 1980.



**FEBRUARY 1983**  
Refuses to sign property foreclosures, saying he doesn't want to see people lose their homes. As a result, he is jailed briefly for contempt.

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**March:** Announces a bid for the Democratic nomination for Mahoning County sheriff.

**May:** Defeats George D. Tablack in the primary race for Mahoning County sheriff.

**November:** Defeats Republican Terrence Shidel and independent Walter Vandetti in the general election.

**January:** Institutes 10-hour work shifts and recalls county cars and gasoline credit cards.

**June:** Meets voluntarily with FBI agents, who say he signed a confession that he took mob money in the 1980 sheriff's race and agreed to cooperate — and that he then refused. Traficant later denies that.

**January:** A grand jury in Cleveland probes his sheriff campaign finances.

**March:** Admits he took money from mobsters as part of sting operation. He says he did nothing wrong but expects to be indicted.

**April:** Common Pleas judges ask him to step down as sheriff. He refuses.

**August:** Indicted on charges of tax evasion and taking \$163,000 in bribes, he says the government forged his confession and doctored FBI audio tapes of his discussions with Orland Carabbia and Charles Carabbia.

**March:** Drops his lawyers and says he will represent himself in a bribery and tax evasion trial.

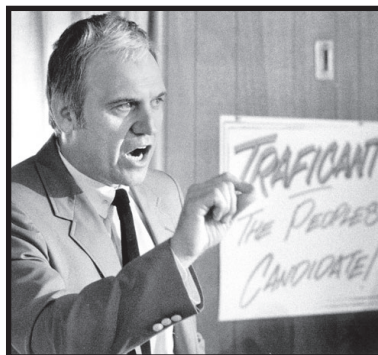
**June:** Cries on steps of the federal courthouse after being found innocent after a seven-week trial and three days of jury deliberations.

**May:** Wins Democratic primary for Congress. Challenges Hanni for party chairman and loses.

**November:** Defeats former Republican U.S. Rep. Lyle Williams and independent Reynold J. Johnjuly.



**FEBRUARY 1985: THE CONGRESSMAN**  
Traficant helped organize a campaign with local union leaders to convince General Motors to build a Saturn plant in the Mahoning Valley. GM opted to build the plant elsewhere.



**APRIL 1987: THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**  
Traficant formed a committee to explore the viability of a run for the presidency. But the underfunded campaign stalled and Traficant ended his bid about a year later.



**January:** Elected president of the 13-member House Democratic freshman class.

**March:** Introduces bill to impose death penalty for certain drug-related offenses, an early campaign promise.

**June:** Wants federal courthouse in downtown Youngstown.

**May:** Defeats Michael Antonoff and Frank E. Hane in the Democratic primary; vows again to challenge Hanni.

**July:** Fires his lawyer for his tax trial and represents himself; judge rules that alleged confession and mob tapes can be used as evidence.

**April:** Forms committee to explore viability of a Traficant-for-president campaign. Introduces legislation to protect taxpayers from "an overzealous IRS."

**February:** Citizens League of Youngstown plans media campaign in several states to let voters know about his "previous involvement with organized crime figures."

**May:** Receives enough votes to send one delegate — Hanni — to Democratic National Convention in Atlanta. Hanni is later replaced by Ann Higgins. Defeats Van Williams in the Democratic primary.

**March:** Announces that he got a verbal agreement with Peter J. Schmitt Co. to build distribution center in North Jackson; it later closes.

**August:** Intervenes in the case of suspected Nazi guard John Demjanjuk; loses appeal on tax case.

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**February:** Works to bring a GM Saturn plant to Mahoning Valley and resurrects Lake Erie to Ohio River canal project.

**April:** Goes to Japan to try to bring Mitsubishi plant to Mahoning Valley. His mother dies.

**July:** IRS says he didn't pay taxes on mob bribes. Case set for trial but postponed until after 1986 election.

**March:** Urges local officials to create a regional water authority, an issue he raises often in subsequent years.

**November:** Defeats Republican James H. Fulus for second term; testifies at four-day tax trial in Cleveland.

**September:** Federal tax court judge rules that he owes taxes, penalties and interest on \$108,000 in mob bribes he failed to report as 1980 income.

**November:** Settles long-running feud with Hanni and names Hanni to head his presidential campaign in Ohio.

**December:** Successfully pushes a \$3.5 million program to provide counseling services to homeowners facing foreclosures. Appeals tax verdict.

**July:** Ends his presidential bid and releases Higgins to Michael Dukakis. Oral arguments begin in tax appeal.

**November:** Defeats Republican Frederick Lenz for a third term.

**July:** Pledges to push for a federal prison in the Valley.

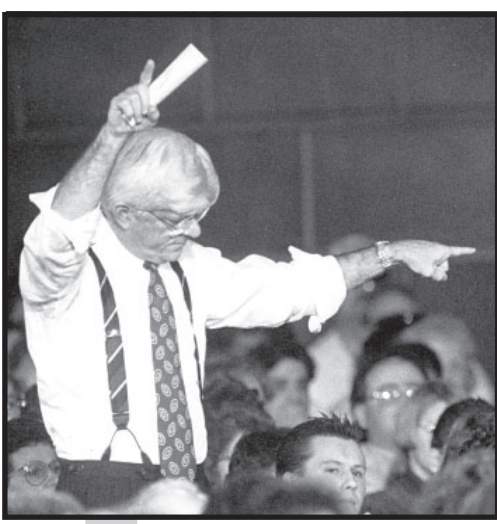
**December:** Fails to meet deadline for petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court to review a lower court ruling that he owes IRS tax, penalty and interest.



**March:** Appears on the "Donahue" show in March and is praised by host Phil Donahue.

**April:** Clinches deal to get a Veterans Administration clinic in Youngstown.

**May:** Defeats Leonard A. Viselli in the Democratic primary. Takes up the case of German NASA rocket scientist Arthur Rudolph, accused of having brutalized prisoners in Nazi slave labor camps. Local Jews object and demand apology.



**OCT. 1990: THE SPECIAL GUEST**  
Traficant has long been a sought-after guest on national television and radio programs. In October 1990, Phil Donahue brought his television show to Stambaugh Auditorium in Youngstown with Traficant as the featured guest.

**October:** Says four new C-130 transport planes will boost future of 910th Tactical Air Force Base.

**November:** Defeats Republican Salvatore Pansino for a fifth term.



**SEPT. 1993: THE ADVOCATE**  
Traficant has championed many controversial causes over the years. He flew to Israel in 1993 to help return retired Cleveland autoworker John Demjanjuk to the United States after the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that Demjanjuk was not Nazi death camp guard "Ivan the Terrible." Traficant was one of the most public defenders of Demjanjuk.

**January:** Funding for second federal courthouse approved.

**April:** Backs Hanni in the party chairman's fight against Michael Morley and Democrats for Change. Hanni loses.



Hanni

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**August:** Tapes "60 Minutes" interview that is shown before the November election.

**October:** Calls Congress "a house of political prostitutes." He later apologizes. Donahue brings his show to Stambaugh Auditorium with Traficant as guest. Takes up case of Bernard J. "Pete" Bucheit to get money Saudi Arabia owes Bucheit.

**November:** Defeats Republican Robert R. DeJulio Jr. for a fourth term.

**September:** Helps create Western Reserve Port Authority to run Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport after Youngstown threatens to close it.

**November:** Ohio lawmakers reject his bid for a seat on House Ways and Means Committee.

**March:** Pursues Defense Financial and Accounting Service center for the district.

**June:** Defeats Democrat M. Ross Norris in the primary for renomination.

**August:** Continual efforts to secure "Buy-American" provisions land him on "60 Minutes" again.

**February:** Proposes second federal courthouse for downtown Youngstown.

**March:** Clinton administration rejects local bid for a DFAS center. Votes against Clinton budget bill.

**June:** Announces deal to expand air base as consolation for area losing Pentagon center.

**September:** Travels to Israel to lend support for Demjanjuk's return to the United States.

**May:** Unopposed in Democratic primary.

**November:** Defeats Republican Mike Meister for a sixth term; says he'd like to run for governor or senator in 1998.

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# THE LIFE & TRIALS OF JAMES A. TRAFICANT JR.



Strollo



O'Nesti

**March:** Secures \$15 million from HUD for small business loans as part of mini-loan program.

**July:** Meets with Clinton during a visit to Youngstown and demands \$47 million for airport.

**November:** Defeats Natural Law candidate James M. Cahaney for a seventh term.

**December:** Supports his top local aide, Charles O'Nesti, who is linked to mob boss Lenny Strollo in FBI affidavits.

**January:** Earns "most errant Democrat" title because he opposed his party in 77 percent of recorded votes.

**February:** Supports minor league baseball stadium project for Niles.

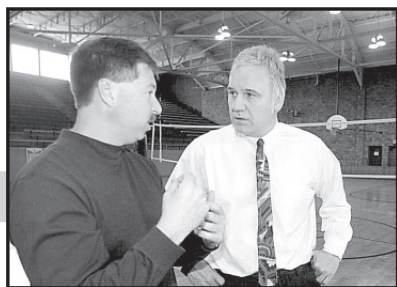
**July:** Clinton signs major IRS reform bill, including Traficant provisions.

**December:** Unveils three-county tax for development authority, but it later dies for lack of support.

**March:** Senate panel gives final approval for second federal courthouse downtown.

**June:** Announces deal to bring two new private prisons to region.

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**JANUARY 2000: THE PROMOTER**  
Traficant has worked to bring professional sports teams and a convocation center to the region.

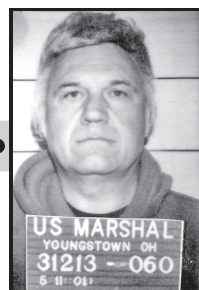
**February:** FBI questioning prominent business people about goods and services they provided to Traficant to determine if he paid them. He says he expects to be indicted by grand jury in Cleveland hearing evidence in FBI-IRS probe.

**November:** Clarence T. Broad of Salem, who used to work on Traficant's family farm, pleads guilty to a charge of trying to influence a federal grand jury witness.  
■ Wins re-election to his ninth term in Congress getting about 50 percent of the vote.  
■ Paul Marcone, Traficant's chief of staff, resigns at the congressman's urging to take a job with a nonprofit company. Traficant told Marcone to look elsewhere for a job because of the federal investigation.



**NOVEMBER 2000: THE VICTOR**  
Traficant celebrates his victory for a ninth term in the House. Traficant received 50 percent of the vote in a crowded field.

**December:** Denies he had any involvement in a death threat against his 17-year horse trainer.



**May:** Indicted by the federal government on 10 felony counts including racketeering, bribery, obstruction of justice and tax evasion.

**February:** Trial begins in federal court in Cleveland with Traficant defending himself.

**April:** A jury in U.S. District Court in Cleveland finds Traficant guilty of all 10 counts he faced after a 10-week trial.

**July:** By a vote of 420-1, the House expels Traficant.  
■ U.S. District Court Judge Lesley Brooks Wells sentences him to an eight-year prison sentence with time off for good behavior. She orders Traficant to pay a \$1,000 special assessment, \$150,000 fine and \$96,000 forfeiture. The jury that found Traficant guilty determined that he owed \$96,000 derived from a staffer's kickbacks, cash bribes, gifts and services. He's taken away in handcuffs immediately after the sentencing.

**September:** In a low-budget campaign television ad filmed the day before he received his sentence, Traficant asks voters to re-elect him to show they don't fear their government. The imprisoned nine-term former congressman runs as an independent for the 17th Congressional District seat while in prison.

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**March:** Defeats Robert F. Hagan, George J. Tablack and Christopher Doult with 51 percent of primary vote.

**April:** Says he will cross party lines and vote to re-elect Republican Dennis Hastert as speaker of the House.  
■ Paul Marcone, his chief of staff, receives a subpoena to testify in front of the grand jury investigating Traficant.

**August:** Accuses Attorney General Janet Reno of treason.  
■ Refuses to respond to a court motion compelling him to turn over certain documents to federal authorities, who are investigating him.

**October:** Robert W. Barlow, his campaign treasurer, is called before the federal grand jury becoming at least the sixth Traficant staffer to be subpoenaed.  
■ A. David Sugar, a New Middletown contractor who did work at Traficant's farm, was found guilty in U.S. Court in Cleveland of perjury, obstruction of justice and witness tampering. Sugar, the first person convicted in the Traficant investigation, admitted he lied to a federal grand jury and told his secretary to misrepresent facts about fake invoices.



Sugar

**January:** Says he has information that some Mahoning Valley people who attended an anti-Mafia seminar in Italy took campaign contributions from the mob. He would not identify the people in question, but includes an affidavit from a felon into the Congressional Record saying Mahoning County Sheriff Randall Wellington is corrupt. The sheriff denies the allegation.  
■ As promised, Traficant crosses party lines and votes for Republican Dennis Hastert as speaker of the House. Democrats call the move a betrayal and exclude him from House committee assignments. Traficant says he will seek committee assignments from the Republican caucus.

**March:** Is one of only 10 Democrats to vote in favor of President George W. Bush's tax package.  
■ Acknowledges he will serve in Congress without a committee seat; the first rank-and-file congressman to do so in nearly 100 years.

**August:** He's taken to the Allenwood Federal Correctional Complex in Pennsylvania, a minimum security prison.  
■ Named five times in the Washingtonian magazine's annual "Best & Worst" survey, based on votes from 1,200 Capitol Hill staffers. He was chosen for congressman who "will be missed the most," voted third funniest House member, and "worst follower." He also drew strong support for the category he had won since 1986: "fashion victim."  
■ Tish Traficant, his wife, appears on Fox News Channel's "On the Record," hosted by Greta Van Susteren, acknowledged that her husband's hair was "a nightmare."

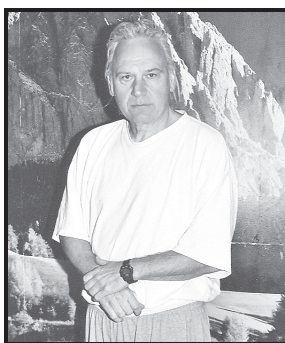
**November:** Finishes a distant third for the congressional seat that was won by Tim Ryan of Niles, then a state senator who used to work for Traficant.

**May:** Traficant's annual pension of roughly \$40,000 starts after turning 62 years old. October: He's placed in isolation for violating an undisclosed prison rule.



Tish Traficant

**March:** The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upholds his conviction and sentence.



**January:** Traficant's pen pal and fellow artist, Sybille Oelschlagler of Schuyler Falls, N.Y., sells some of Traficant's paintings on eBay, with the idea of giving some of the proceeds back to him for art supplies.



**BARN SCENE:** One of Traficant's works of art.

**March:** A federal prosecutor wants to tap into Traficant's state pension of nearly \$1.2 million to satisfy what the ex-congressman still owes on a court fine.

**June:** A judge orders that \$250 of Traficant's \$1,037.79 monthly state pension be applied to his court fine.

**December:** Traficant rejects an offer to move to the Community Corrections Association's halfway house on Market Street in Youngstown.

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**December:** The Federal Bureau of Prisons transfers Traficant to the Federal Medical Center in Rochester, Minn., for an undisclosed physical or mental health condition. He serves out the remainder of his sentence there.

**January:** The U.S. Supreme Court refuses to hear Traficant's appeal.

**February:** More than 300 people come to the Chevrolet Centre to attend a town-hall-style debate, "Jim Traficant: Saint or Sinner?" It focuses on whether the former nine-term congressman has been good or bad for the region.  
■ The ex-congressman's projected release is extended from Aug. 10, 2009, to Sept. 2, 2009, meaning his behavior has failed to earn him "good time."



**August 2009:** The Mahoning Valley Scrappers cancel their planned Traficant Release Night event, after receiving complaints.

**Today:** Traficant is released from federal prison after serving 7 years, 1 month and 3 days.  
■ **Sunday:** Supporters organize a Jim Traficant Appreciation Dinner at Mr. Anthony's.