



Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick speaks at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, Jan. 17, 2008. Kilpatrick exchanged romantic text messages with top aide, Christine Beatty, contradicting their denials in court that they had romantic ties, a newspaper reported Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2008. A conviction of lying under oath can bring up to 15 years' imprisonment. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

Probe Launched Over Detroit Mayor Texts

By COREY WILLIAMS – Jan 25, 2008

DETROIT (AP) — A prosecutor launched an investigation Friday into allegations that Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick lied under oath about an affair with his top aide. Some political observers are questioning whether the popular yet polarizing figure should stay on the job.

"Can he? Yes. Should he? That's his call," University of Nevada-Reno political science professor Eric Herzik said Friday. "But if you are being prosecuted, your ability to run the city is incredibly compromised."

Others believe Kilpatrick could fight perjury charges and still fulfill his mayoral duties. Victoria Mantzopoulos, chair of the political science department at the University of Detroit-Mercy, said it depends on the political machine he has around him.

"I think he can work through it," Mantzopoulos said. "I've heard people ask that he resign. I think that is more on the issue of the affair as opposed to the true ability to continue in his role."

Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy said Friday that her office would investigate reports that Kilpatrick and Chief of Staff Christine Beatty exchanged romantic text messages after they testified in a trial last summer that they did not have a physical relationship in 2002 and 2003.

The Detroit Free Press examined about 14,000 text messages on Beatty's city-issued pager from those years that indicate the two had been intimate during that period. They reveal the two carried on a flirty, sometimes sexually explicit dialogue about where to meet and how to conceal their numerous trysts.

The Free Press did not explain exactly how it obtained the messages. The newspaper said it cross-referenced the messages with the mayor's private calendar and credit card records to verify events in some of the notes.

Worthy said she was unaware of the text messages until she read the newspaper's report on Thursday.

A conviction of lying under oath can bring up to 15 years' imprisonment. Under Detroit's City Charter, Kilpatrick would be removed from office as mayor if he is convicted of a felony, City Council President Ken Cockrel Jr. said.

Herzik, the University of Nevada-Reno professor, said losing credibility with the public makes it harder for a politician to govern.

"But you can recover from it," he said. "The best thing you can do is come clean. You apologize and attempt to move forward."

Neither Kilpatrick nor Beatty planned on Friday to release any statements regarding the announced investigation, mayoral spokesman James Canning said.

A message seeking comment also was left on Beatty's home phone.

John Riehl, president of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 207, said the union wants Kilpatrick to step down right away. It has 900 members and represents workers in the city's water and public lighting departments.

"He's compromised the public trust," Riehl said. "Nobody can believe a single thing he says from now on."

The city has just fewer than 15,000 employees on its payroll, Canning said.

The trial in question arose from a lawsuit filed by two police officers who alleged they were fired for investigating claims that the mayor used his security unit to cover up extramarital affairs.

The lawsuit ended with the jury awarding \$6.5 million to the two officers. The payout eventually grew to more than \$8.5 million.

The allegations and possible perjury charges have placed Kilpatrick in company that includes President Bill Clinton. Clinton faced impeachment proceedings after repeatedly denying his relationship with intern Monica Lewinsky.

"You have to make a distinction about what's personally embarrassing and what's illegal," Herzik said. "Clinton didn't do anything illegal. The Republicans will disagree, but having sex in the Oval Office, the last time I checked, wasn't against the law."

But for Kilpatrick, continuing to function as mayor likely is out of the question, University of Detroit-Mercy marketing professor Mike Bernacchi says.

"The best thing Mayor Kilpatrick can do, and I think he can do it honestly, is resign and say it's in the best interest of the city," Bernacchi said.

"Detroiters are forgiving. He's a young man. Is there any reason why he couldn't govern again? Absolutely not," he said.