



Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick resigns

By Tim Jones | Chicago Tribune correspondent
7:31 PM CDT, September 4, 2008



Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick pleaded guilty to felony obstruction charges Thursday in a sex scandal, forcing him out of office after months of defiantly holding onto his job leading the nation's 11th-largest city. (AP photo / Carlos Osorio) (September 4, 2008)

Mired in a sex scandal that crippled the governance of Detroit all year, the city's troubled mayor chose Thursday to walk out of office, rather than run the increasing risk of being heaved out.

The tawdry drama of Democrat [Kwame Kilpatrick](#), the once-promising 38-year-old mayor of the nation's 11th largest city, ended in a wood-paneled courtroom when a subdued Kilpatrick, after months of defiant claims of innocence, meekly pleaded guilty to reduced felony charges and agreed to serve 4 months in jail and pay up to \$1 million in restitution.

"I lied under oath," Kilpatrick told the court, conceding what growing numbers of Detroiters have suspected for months — he covered up an affair with his former chief of staff, Christine Beatty, that was at the center of a lawsuit settled by the city for \$8.4 million.

In live remarks broadcast by Detroit TV stations Thursday night, Kilpatrick said he takes full responsibility for his "poor judgment."

Kilpatrick, sometimes called the "hip-hop mayor" first elected amid great fanfare in 2001, is scheduled to leave office no later than Sept. 18. But in a city whose residents are well aware of the steamy details of text messages between Kilpatrick and Beatty, widely reported in the media, the mayor is already history.

"I think there is a giant sense of relief in the city and the entire state over the events of today," said Larry Dubin, a professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. "This is like opening up an artery and permitting the blood to flow again for the city."

Kilpatrick will be succeeded by Ken Cockrel Jr., 42, the city council president.

In recent weeks it became clear that time was running out for Kilpatrick. Business and religious leaders and the city's African-American newspaper said Kilpatrick should quit. The prurient interest of the scandal made Detroit the butt of late night talk show jokes. Sales transactions aimed at balancing the city's budget were stalled. And Wednesday, [Michigan](#) Gov. Jennifer Granholm began expulsion hearings, fanning a flurry of activity aimed at a plea bargain.

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Granholtz, who halted Thursday's scheduled hearing after Kilpatrick's plea, called the events of the day "a sad but historic story" that is coming to an end.

Michigan Atty. Gen. Mike Cox, attending the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, called Kilpatrick's exit "a great day for the city of Detroit and the state of Michigan."

Such a scenario did not seem likely seven years ago, when the charismatic 31-year-old state legislator and son of a powerful congresswoman took over the reigns of the shrinking city and seemed to energize the city by force of will. Spending irregularities began to multiply and reports circulated of a wild party at the mayor's mansion, involving strippers and members of the mayor's security detail. While Kilpatrick was re-elected in 2005, he had earned a reputation of political immaturity.

When the Detroit Free Press published texts of salacious messages between Kilpatrick, married and the father of three children, and Beatty, a divorced mother, contradicting courtroom claims that there was no romantic relationship, the reservoir of goodwill toward the mayor began to dry up.

Although his mother, U.S. Rep. Carolyn Kilpatrick, chairs the influential Congressional Black Caucus, Kilpatrick became a political pariah. Assault charges last month resulted in his being fitted with a court-ordered electronic tether. He was prevented from leaving the city, much to the relief of Democrats uncomfortable with the prospect of Kilpatrick attending last month's Democratic National Convention in Denver.

His political capital spent and his electoral promise squandered, Kilpatrick struck the plea deal as Granholtz was preparing the second day of expulsion hearings.

"This has been a great distraction. Now we can begin to rebuild the image of the city," said John Mogk, who ran for mayor of Detroit in the 1970's and now teaches law at Wayne State University. "Everyone at all levels is relieved that the mayor has resigned."

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