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Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick resigns

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He pleads guilty to two felony charges related to his affair with his chief of staff; he will pay \$1 million in restitution and serve four months in jail.

By P.J. Huffstutter, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
September 5, 2008

Ending a seven-month political soap opera that consumed the city, Detroit Mayor Kwame M. Kilpatrick pleaded guilty Thursday to two felonies related to his affair with a top aide and resigned from office.

In an agreement with prosecutors, Kilpatrick, 38, pleaded guilty to two counts of obstruction of justice and will serve four months in jail. He also agreed to pay the city \$1 million in restitution. He cannot hold public office during his five-year probation period, his law license will be revoked and he will give up his state pension.



Kilpatrick
Kwame Kilpatrick, Detroit mayor, jailed

When Kilpatrick will officially step down was unclear. His resignation letter, one sentence on his office stationery, said it was effective Sept. 18. But observers said the city charter required that any elected official convicted of a felony be removed from office immediately.

Kenneth Cockrel Jr., the City Council president and an 11-year veteran of the body, will become interim mayor. City officials were still weighing whether Cockrel -- the son of the late activist and councilman Ken Cockrel Sr. -- will fill the role until the next general city election in November 2009, or if a special election will be held.

"It is a very sad day for the city of Detroit, but I think we also have to recognize it's also a day of hope and renewal," Cockrel told reporters. "While our thoughts and prayers are with Mayor Kilpatrick and his family, we have to be ready to move forward with the business of the city."

Kilpatrick's downfall began last year, when he and former top aide Christine Beatty testified in a whistle-blower trial that they did not have a romantic relationship.

The Detroit Free Press later published excerpts from more than 14,000 text messages -- some racy, others romantic -- sent to and from Beatty's city-provided pager. Kilpatrick sent one to Beatty in 2002 that read, "I'm madly in love with you."

Both were married at the time. Beatty, who has since divorced, is charged with seven felonies.

Kilpatrick also submitted a no-contest plea Thursday in an assault case in a separate hearing. Those charges -- assaulting or obstructing an officer -- stem from an alleged incident July 24 in which an investigator tried to serve a subpoena to a friend of Kilpatrick's who was to have testified in the perjury and obstruction of justice case.

On Thursday morning in court, Wayne County Circuit Judge David Groner asked if Kilpatrick understood that he was giving up the right to be tried as an innocent man.

"I gave that up a long time ago," Kilpatrick replied.

Kilpatrick told reporters later that resigning was "the most difficult decision of my life," and that "I take full responsibility for my actions, for the poor judgment they reflected."

But he remained defiant: "Detroit, you done set me up for a comeback."

The son of Democratic U.S. Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, Kilpatrick was the youngest mayor ever elected in Detroit. He won points early in his term for reorganizing the city's Police Department and pushing for urban renewal in downtown Detroit.

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