After jailing, Detroit mayor faces strong pressure to resign

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There is increasing political pressure on Detroit's Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick to resign, as the mounting scandals and legal problems surrounding him have become an embarrassment for the Democratic Party establishment, both in the city and nationally.

On August 7, Kilpatrick was sent to the Wayne County Jail for violating the travel restrictions on a bond, which had allowed him to remain free while awaiting trial on multiple felony counts, including perjury, misconduct in office and obstruction of justice. After spending the night in jail, Kilpatrick was arraigned on two additional charges of assault, bringing the total to 10 felony counts.

The *Detroit Free Press* recounted the extraordinary events. "In a seven-hour span Friday, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick endured a surreal journey that found him pleading to get out of jail in the morning, facing a pair of new felony charges shortly afterward, standing glumly for an eerie video arraignment in the afternoon and finally arriving back at city hall wearing jeans, a dress shirt and electronic tether."

The ignominious stay in jail is the latest blow to the mayor whose political career truly began to unravel in late March. At that time, he was charged with various felonies, stemming from his decision to have the city of Detroit—one of the poorest in the nation—pay $8.4 million in hush money to several former policemen whose eyewitness accounts of Kilpatrick's behavior would have been politically damaging.

Kilpatrick and his former chief of staff, Christine Beatty, were charged with lying under oath during civil lawsuits brought by three policemen, who claimed they had been fired to cover up an affair between the mayor and Beatty, his longtime aide. In January 2008, the *Detroit Free Press* published extensive excerpts from text messages between the two, which apparently confirmed both the affair and the retaliatory character of the three cops' firing.

In jailing Kilpatrick, 36th District Court Judge Ronald Giles said the mayor was being treated no differently than any "John Six-Pack" who had violated the terms of his bond. Giles rejected the mayor's claim that he had been urgently summoned to a meeting across the river in Canada to discuss the sale of the city's portion of the Detroit-Windsor tunnel, a measure that, the mayor said, was needed to save city services and 2,000 city workers' jobs.

Windsor officials later denied ever having contacted Kilpatrick, saying instead the Detroit mayor had initiated the meeting in hopes of restarting stalled talks over the deal. Two days before the "urgent" meeting, Kilpatrick was spotted at a water park with his family on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls.

The mayor has also been charged with physically assaulting two police officers—including a sheriff's detective whose hip was fractured—who were trying to serve a subpoena, concerning the criminal case against the mayor, to one of Kilpatrick's best friends, a businessman with millions of dollars in city contracts.

On Monday, Judge Giles ruled the mayor had not violated the law when he visited his mother's home last week, although present at the location were his bodyguard and sister, both witnesses in the felony assault case brought by the sheriff's deputies.

A Detroit Fire Department paramedic supervisor also gave sworn testimony this week about his 2002 interview with a stripper who was later found dead after allegedly attending a party at the mayor's residence, the Manoogian Mansion. The supervisor said the young woman, Tamara Greene, whose face was swollen, told him the mayor's wife had exploded in anger, assaulting her and another dancer at the party.

Asked why it had taken so many years for this witness to come forward, attorney Norman Yatooma—who represents Greene's son in a federal lawsuit charging the city with obstructing an investigation into the woman's death—told the *Detroit Free Press*, "The mayor is simply less intimidating today with a tether around his ankle than he was in 2002 or 2003 when he was firing cops who disagreed with him."

In the face of numerous calls for his resignation from county officials, the Detroit City Council and others, Kilpatrick has stubbornly held on to his job, at one point saying in a radio interview he could not leave the position because he was on an "assignment from God."

He has remained in office this long not due to divine intervention but because he has enjoyed, at least until recently, the tacit support of the city's business establishment and important layers in the Democratic Party.

This week, the Detroit Renaissance corporate leadership group—which includes the city's auto, real estate development and banking bosses—and the Detroit Regional Chamber both called the mayor's jailing a "distraction" from the work of rebuilding Detroit's economy. WWJ radio reported on its web site that "Others were more explicit about how they thought the 'distraction' should be brought to an end. Several area leaders made—or renewed—calls for Kilpatrick to either resign or be removed from office. Some did so quietly, while others made

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public statements."

Compuware CEO Peter Karmanos and a coalition of other business figures reportedly met last week with Wayne County Prosecutor Kim Worthy in an effort to broker a deal that would involve Kilpatrick's resignation and his pleading guilty to several charges.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson called on Kilpatrick to resign, declaring: "It's going to be broadcast all around the world, and it's one more blow that the city of Detroit should not have to take. And, for that matter, it involves in a negative way, the image of the entire region."

Since his election in 2001, Kilpatrick, known as the "Hip Hop Mayor," has ruthlessly slashed city services, sold off public assets, cut taxes for corporations and carried out other business-friendly policies. While further worsening conditions for the city's working class population, these measures have profited a thin layer of wealthy entrepreneurs, including casino operators, real estate developers and businesses with close connections to the Kilpatrick administration.

The mayor's political rise enjoyed the support of substantial sections of the Democratic Party, which had high hopes that the young African-American, free-market proponent might become a national political figure.

Kilpatrick began his political career at the age of 26 when he succeeded his mother—now Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, the head of the Congressional Black Caucus—in the Michigan House of Representatives, going on to become the first black politician to lead the Democrats in the state legislature.

The young mayor came to national prominence when he addressed the 2000 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles and spoke again at the Democrats' 2004 Boston convention. In 2000, the Democratic Leadership Council, the right-wing, pro-business faction that came to prominence under Bill Clinton and Al Gore, referred to Kilpatrick as "one to watch," according to the web site citymayors.com. He is vice president of the National Conference of Democratic Mayors, its representative to the Democratic National Committee and also a trustee of the US Conference of Mayors.

The allegations of personal corruption and gangsterism have now made Kilpatrick a political liability; the scandal both discourages investment in Detroit and further discredits the Democratic Party, long in control of the mayor's office and other top positions in the city.

Chiefly due to the fallout from her son's scandals, Congresswoman Cheeks Kilpatrick barely survived a challenge by two underfunded competitors in a primary race last week, winning the nomination for her long-held seat by only 3.1 percentage points.

Kilpatrick's political demise has become national and even international news. Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama, whom the Detroit mayor endorsed in early June, has had to avoid any contact with Kilpatrick during public appearances in the city and state, concerned that such an association could damage him.

There are no principled differences between Kilpatrick and the Democrats seeking his ouster. If the mayor is forced out, the Democratic Party establishment will make certain he is replaced with another tried-and-true defender of America's wealthy elite.

The city council—several of whose members are targets of an FBI investigation into charges they received payoffs for their votes on a sludge contract—is set to begin a "forfeiture" hearing to remove the mayor.

Underscoring his subservience to the corporate "movers and shakers" who run Detroit, City Council President Ken Cockrel, Jr., stated, "If you're doing business in the city of Detroit, if you own assets in the City of Detroit, if your corporate headquarters or other buildings that you own and operate out of are operating in the City of Detroit, you have a voice. You have a stake in what happens in this city. And you ought to be using that voice to express your concerns about your stake in this city."

Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm, who until now has sought to avoid the dispute, has set a hearing for September 3 to review the Detroit city council's appeal to have her use her powers, under the state's constitution, to remove Kilpatrick.

The case of Kwame Kilpatrick and the miserable social conditions prevailing in Detroit expose the bankruptcy of identity politics, long employed by the Democratic Party to conceal the class character of this big business party and distract attention from the gaping social divide in America.

In the aftermath of the ghetto rebellions of the 1960s, corporate America agreed to hand over political power to various black politicians in Detroit, Newark, Los Angeles, Cleveland and other cities to encourage illusions among minority workers that their interests would be defended. Today, a corrupt layer of black Democratic politicians, which hands out lucrative contracts to "minority-owned" businesses, presides over Detroit's African-American and working class population, who increasingly face destitution.

The rise of parasites and hucksters like Kilpatrick has coincided with the decimation of the auto industry and the city's manufacturing base, and the loss of hundreds of thousands of decent-paying jobs. The Motor City's official unemployment rate—which hardly reflects the devastating social reality—is nearly 10 percent, and its official poverty rate is three times as high. Detroit recently made the *Forbes* magazine's list of America's top 10 "fastest dying cities," having only been surpassed in loss of population by those cities ravaged by Hurricane Katrina.

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