

Eyes on Detroit mayor's credit bill

Special to Sentinel-Voice
 Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, whose city is struggling with a projected \$230 million deficit, has charged at least \$210,000 for travel, meals, a bottle of pricey champagne and other items on his city-issued credit card over nearly three years, public records show.

The charges cover the first 33 months of Kilpatrick's four-year term that began in January 2002. The Detroit Free Press said Tuesday that it obtained the records last

month through a Michigan Freedom of Information Act request.

The purchases include 78 charges for meals over the 33 months, including a \$283 bill at Danny's Grand Sea Palace in New York in January 2002 and a \$456 bill at the Capital Grille in Washington in September 2003.

The 34-year-old former state House Democratic leader also spent more than \$600 at two upscale restaurants in January 2002 while attending a U.S. Conference

of Mayors' meeting in Washington. In March 2002, he charged a \$194 dinner, including an \$85 bottle of Moët & Chandon champagne, at an Atlanta restaurant owned by Sean "P. Diddy" Combs.

Kilpatrick spokesman Howard Hughey told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the mayor's travels and entertainment have been part of his effort to attract business to the city, which has struggled with a steep population decline since the 1950s and the resulting erosion of

the tax base.

"As indicative of any first-term mayor, he has done so to meet with several potential public and private investors," Hughey said.

Meals make up less than a tenth of the charges to the city credit card, with travel accounting for most of it, Hughey said. He said there is no city policy preventing the mayor from charging alcohol but said Kilpatrick generally has not done so.

Kilpatrick's immediate (See Kilpatrick, Page 15)



U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., left, is greeted by Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick prior to Obama's keynote address to the NAACP 50th Annual Fight for Freedom Fund Dinner in Detroit on Sunday. Kilpatrick's spending is under review.

Civil Rights Commission closes two regional offices

Special to Sentinel-Voice
 Citing mounting debt and projected budget shortfalls, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission announced Friday it will close two of its six regional offices, lay off four staff members and request free rent on its office space for one month.

The office also will offer early retirement packages and require remaining staff to take short furloughs, said Kenneth L. Marcus, the commission's staff director.

"It's an extraordinarily difficult process," Marcus said. "We will continue providing civil rights services without pause."

that the General Services Administration, which oversees its office space, give them one month of free rent.

With long-term underfunding and inadequate staffing, the problems were inevitable, said Ronald Walters, a political scientist at the University of Maryland who tracks civil rights issues.

"We've got some very serious issues on the table with respect to diversity, including affirmative action in higher education and voting rights activities," Walters said. "They need all the resources they can get to enter vigorously into those debates. By cutting back, it's going to cripple their ability to do that."

The 48-year-old commission is charged with making recommendations to the government on issues concerning equal opportunity for racial and ethnic communities, people with disabilities and other minority groups.

Once called the "conscience of the nation," it laid the groundwork for the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

But the commission's \$9 million budget has not changed in 10 years, and it expects to face a \$265,000 budget deficit this fiscal year. There are currently 64 staff members, down from 93 in 1996.

Regional offices in Denver and Kansas City, Kan., will be closed by Oct. 31, Marcus said. The state-level civil rights work that is now coordinated in those offices will be folded into the remaining regional offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., he said.

Staff members will each be required to take four or five days off without pay, and commission officials will ask

Michael Yaki, a San Francisco attorney who was recently appointed to be one of eight commissioners, said he plans to lobby members of Congress to increase the commission's budget. "Even a modest amount of money would stave off the closures," he said.

The civil rights agency has faced mounting troubles for nearly a decade. In 1997, the Government Accountability Office called it "an agency in disarray," criticizing its poor financial tracking and spotty project management and strategic planning.

In the past year, some officials with the commission have been forced out and more conservative replacements have been brought in.

Amid the turmoil, the fact-finding work at the commission's core has slowed dramatically. Last July, a report was issued on possible bias against Korean residents in Baltimore — six years after the local commission held a hearing on those issues.

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