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Spitzer Resigns, Citing Personal Failings
By MICHAEL M. GRYNBAUM

Gov. Eliot Spitzer, whose rise to political power as a fierce enforcer of ethics in public life was undone by revelations of his own involvement with prostitutes, resigned on Wednesday, becoming the first New York governor to leave office amid scandal in nearly a century.

The resignation will be effective on Monday, and Lt. Gov. David A. Paterson will be sworn in to replace him.

In an appearance that lasted 140 seconds at his Midtown Manhattan office, the governor — with his wife, Silda Wall Spitzer, at his side — offered an apology to his family and to the public and said he would devote himself to serving “the common good.”

“From those to whom much is given, much is expected,” Mr. Spitzer said. “I have been given much: the love of my family, the faith and trust of the people of New York and the chance to lead this state. I am deeply sorry that I did not live up to what was expected of me.”

“Over the course of my public life, I have insisted — I believe correctly — that people regardless of their position or power take responsibility for their conduct,” he said. “I can and will ask no less of myself. For this reason, I am resigning from the office of governor.”

Mr. Spitzer, 48, spoke in a somber but steady voice, his usual barking tone softened by contrition. He took no questions. His wife, in a dark suit and brightly colored scarf, looked off to the side of the podium, occasionally glancing up to reveal deep circles beneath her eyes.

Immediately after the remarks, Mr. Paterson offered sympathy to the governor and his family in a written statement. “It is now time for Albany to get back to work as the people of this state expect from us,” he said.

The sudden and stunning end to Mr. Spitzer’s political career came less than 48 hours after it emerged that he had been a client of a high-end prostitution ring, caught on a federal wiretap that had been prompted by his own efforts to quietly make payments to the agency, Emperors Club VIP.

Mr. Spitzer issued a brief apology on Monday after the news was first reported on the Web site of The New York Times, then he disappeared from public view. The governor, an unabashed fan of the spotlight, spent Tuesday in seclusion in his Fifth Avenue apartment overlooking Central Park, engaged in what associates described as an agonizing day of deliberations with his wife, lawyers, and a handful of close friends.

It remained unclear on Wednesday what legal implications, if any, Mr. Spitzer will face from his involvement with the ring. His lawyer, Michele Hirschman, reached out to federal prosecutors this week to strike a deal in hopes of avoiding charges. But the United States attorney investigating the case issued a statement shortly after the resignation saying that his office does not have any arrangement with the governor.

In Albany, where state government has stood still since the scandal broke, lawmakers sent words of support to Mr. Paterson and offered a few final requiems for the departing governor.

Joseph L. Bruno, the Republican leader of the state Senate who once labeled Mr. Spitzer “a spoiled brat,” shunned the fiery rhetoric he often used to refer to his chief political foe.

“I’m going to leave it to the governor and his family to sort out how they deal with present circumstances and the future,” Mr. Bruno said at an unusually restrained morning news conference. “And frankly, I have them in my prayers.”

In the State Assembly, which convened just after 1 p.m., a chaplain read from Psalm 51, a Bible passage in which King David, after committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of a friend, pleads with God to “cleanse me from my sin.”

The chaplain then added: “Bring healing to the Spitzer family.”

Fallout from Mr. Spitzer’s resignation also reached the presidential campaign. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton will lose the governor’s support as a Democratic superdelegate, a post he must now relinquish. “I’m deeply saddened by this turn of events and my thoughts are with Governor Spitzer’s family during this painful time,” Mrs. Clinton said in a statement released by her campaign.

Mr. Spitzer becomes the first New York governor to resign from office since 1973, when Nelson A. Rockefeller stepped down to devote himself to a policy group, and the first to be forced out since William Sulzer was impeached in 1913 over a campaign contribution fraud.

“I look at my time as governor with a sense of what might have been,” Mr. Spitzer said in announcing his resignation. “But I also know that as a public servant I, and the remarkable people with whom I worked, have accomplished a great deal. There is much more to be done, and I cannot allow my private failings to disrupt the people’s work.”

It was such work that Mr. Spitzer chose to devote his life to, in a career whose ascent was as dizzying as its precipitous fall.

The brainy scion of a wealthy New York real estate baron, Mr. Spitzer graduated from Princeton University and Harvard Law School before rising to fame as an avenging state attorney general, hunting down Wall Street malefactors with an evangelical fervor. Everywhere he found “betrayals of the public trust” that were “shocking” and “criminal.”

A landslide victory handed him the governor’s seat in 2006, and he built a vast electoral mandate for changing the often-corrupt ways of the New York State House.

Reformers relished the thought of a young bull with a national reputation stampeding around the calcified halls of Albany. When he was sworn in as governor just 14 months ago, the guests attending the private ceremony cheered: “Go get ‘em, Eliot!”

Mr. Spitzer did nothing at half-speed. “Listen, I’m a steamroller,” he told a State Assembly leader in his first days as governor, adding a vulgar flourish. But his path through public life has at times resembled a

blindfolded dash along the political I-beam, and he sometimes failed to recognize that his own footsteps could fall into ethically dodgy territory.

In 1994, he denied — and later acknowledged — secretly borrowing millions of dollars from his father to finance his failed first campaign for attorney general. Four years later he won the election, but his Republican opponent, Dennis C. Vacco, argued that Mr. Spitzer violated the law by failing to file proper disclosures about a campaign loan.

As attorney general, his ambition, intelligence and energy were palpable, and he took full advantage of the demise of a gilded, stock-fed decade to expose corruption at many of Wall Street's most prestigious firms.

But he stumbled badly after ascending to the governor's office, where his shiv-in-the-kidney style, so effective in facing down skittish bankers, met its match in the viscous political world of Albany. He relied — too often, said some — on his tough-talking crew from the attorney general's office, and tended to speak loudly when he might better have listened.

Time and again, Mr. Spitzer began as the hunter and finished as the hunted. The Republican leader of the State Senate, Joseph L. Bruno, a wily, white-haired 78-year-old former Army boxer, tossed job after job at the governor, 30 years his junior. An attempt to reveal Mr. Bruno's misuse of a state helicopter badly backfired, upending Mr. Spitzer's agenda of reform and grinding Albany's business to a halt.

"Straight talk," Mr. Spitzer told a reporter last fall, "is perhaps something that comes too naturally to me."

It was a statement both modest and boastful, perhaps a hint of the internal contradictions that manifested themselves, this week, in the worst way.

On Wednesday, Mr. Spitzer ended his speech by pledging to return to public service outside the political realm, following a period of atonement with his family.

A proud man humbled, he made a final nod to the enduring American belief in the possibility of redemption: "As human beings our greatest glory consists not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

Reporting contributed by Sewell Chan, Michael Powell, Mike McIntire, Carla Baranauckas, Danny Hakim, Anahad O'Connor and Jeremy W. Peters.