

Paterson drops out of 2010 race

'I am being realistic about politics'

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ALBANY -- Bowing to political pressure and hammered by a widening scandal involving a top aide, Gov. David Paterson has suspended his campaign for governor.

"I am being realistic about politics," Paterson said in a news conference from his New York City office. "It hasn't been the latest distraction, it's been an accumulation of obstacles that have obfuscated me from bringing my message to the public.

"Therefore, there are times in politics when you have to know not to strive for service, but to step back. And that moment has come for me," he said.

Paterson offered a full-throated defense of his performance since taking office in March 2008, ticking off his attempt to address the fiscal crisis earlier than most other state leaders, assisting minority- and women-owned business, creating Tier V pension package and ending the Rockefeller drug laws.

The governor has faced a wave of pressure since a scandal involving one of his closest aides, David Johnson, accelerated on Thursday.

Paterson suspended Johnson and initiated a probe of his own administration after the New York Times reported that the governor and a State Police officer assigned to his security detail contacted a woman who was pursuing domestic violence charges against Johnson. The woman subsequently dropped the charges.

"In the last few days, it has become increasingly clear to me that I cannot run for office and try to manage the state's business at the same time," he said.

"In addition, I am looking forward to a full investigation of actions taken by myself and my administration. But I give you this personal oath: I have never abused my office -- not now, not ever -- and I believe that when the facts are revealed the truth will prevail."

On Thursday, Paterson met with senior party officials including Democratic State Chairman Jay Jacobs, and said he was "open" to suspending a campaign he formally kicked off last weekend.

Several prominent Democrats -- including two Congressional Representatives and at least three county Democratic leaders -- publicly have called for the governor to suspend his campaign.

There was relief among some officials to the news of Paterson's decision, which began breaking Friday morning.

"I think it's entirely appropriate," said Sen. Neil Breslin, D-Bethlehem. "And his course of action should be that if any of the allegations against him are true, that he should resign."

Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb, R-Canandaigua, said the move is "the right thing to do."

"I and many other legislators in both houses, from both parties, have serious concerns about the allegations and how they have made it nearly impossible for the people's business to move forward," Kolb said in a statement. "We are fast approaching our state's April 1 fiscal deadline when the budget is due. We need to get back to business and work toward passing an on-time, fiscally responsible budget. New York State cannot afford any more of these distractions."

A probe into the circumstances surrounding Johnson is being conducted by Attorney General Andrew Cuomo -- who now becomes the presumptive gubernatorial favorite among Democrats. Recent polls give Cuomo a wide margin of victory in hypothetical matchups against the likely Republican nominee, former Congressman Rick Lazio.

"Andrew Cuomo's done just a terrific job as attorney general," Breslin said. "He'd be a terrific standard-bearer."