

= Byron Brown =

Byron William Brown II (born September 24 , 1958) is the 62nd and current mayor of Buffalo , New York , elected on November 8 , 2005 and is the city 's first African @-@ American mayor . He previously served Western New York as a member of the New York State Senate and Buffalo Common Council . He was the first African @-@ American politician elected to the New York State Senate to represent a district outside New York City and the first member of any minority race to represent a majority white New York State Senate district .

Brown was born and raised in Queens , New York . He rose to elective office after serving in a variety of political roles . He began his political career performing as an aide to local representatives in several legislative bodies (Buffalo Common Council , Erie County Legislature and New York State Assembly) and later getting involved in a regional political organization . After several roles as a legislative aide , he was appointed to the Erie County cabinet @-@ level Director of Equal Employment Opportunity post .

As both a New York State Senator and Buffalo Mayor , he has been closely involved in the development of the three Seneca Nation casinos that have been planned and built in Western New York since 2002 . As someone born and raised downstate who went on to become an upstate political servant , he has been active on the statewide political front . He is a close political ally of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo . He has also been active with the National Mayors Against Illegal Guns Coalition in efforts to prevent gun @-@ related crime . His plan to revitalize Buffalo by demolishing its abundant vacant buildings has drawn opposition from historic preservationists , but he has made the development of the Buffalo waterfront a priority .

= = Background = =

Brown was born on September 24 , 1958 in Queens , He was raised in Hollis , a southeastern neighborhood in New York City 's Queens borough , in a double that his family shared with his grandparents , who were immigrants from the Caribbean island of Montserrat . He grew up on 200th Street between 100th and 104th Avenues and has several relatives still in the area . As a Queens resident , he was a New York Mets and New York Knicks fan .

Brown 's father rose from a job as a stock boy to one as an executive in the garment industry . He was a Boy Scout at Hollis Presbyterian Church in Queens and was also active in the Central Queens YMCA (now called Jamaica YMCA) . In high school , Brown played the trumpet in the school band . Brown attended Public School 134 in Hollis , junior high school PS 109 , and August Martin High School . Brown and his sister Andrea were the first generation in his family to go to college .

After graduating from August Martin High School Brown attended Buffalo State College , in part due to grudging admiration for Randy Smith . He played a year of Junior Varsity basketball as a 5 @-@ foot @-@ 11 @-@ inch (1 @-@ 80 m) guard . While he had considered a potential medical career , Brown finished , in 1983 , with a dual Bachelor of Arts in political science and journalism . He subsequently completed a certificate program for senior executives in state and local government at Harvard University 's John F. Kennedy School of Government .

= = Early career = =

After college , Brown worked for Bristol @-@ Myers for a year as a regional sales representative , a job that came with a respectable salary and employee benefits such as an expense account and a company car . Brown was disappointed with his advancement potential in this position . As a result , he quit and took the New York State Troopers exam before becoming Chief of staff for Buffalo Common Council President George Arthur for two years . He then spent two years as an aide to Erie County Legislator Roger Blackwell (later Erie County Legislature Chairman) . Then , he worked for two years under Arthur Eve , the Deputy Speaker of the New York State Assembly . Subsequently , he served eight years as director of the Erie County division of the Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission under Erie County Executive Dennis Gorski . He resigned his directorship in July 1993 to run for public office .

Brown became a member of Grassroots , a political organization which was founded in 1986 by a group of block club leaders . Brown eventually served as a vice president of the organization .

Brown was recognized in the November 1989 issue of Ebony magazine as one the " 30 Leaders of the Future " with a caption that read " Byron Brown chosen for leadership skills . " The Buffalo Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1991 honored him with the Martin Luther King , Jr . Award for community service . In 1993 he was selected by Business First for its " 40 Under Forty Honor Roll " . He was awarded the Infinity Broadcasting / WBLK 2001 " Voice of Power Award " and the 2004 " Citizen of the Year " award . He also received the " Political Impact Award " from the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority in 2001 .

In 1992 , Brown was a delegate to the 1992 Democratic National Convention from the New York 's 33rd congressional district . He was originally pledged to Bob Kerrey , but switched to Bill Clinton after Kerrey bowed out of the 1992 Democratic Primary campaign on March 5 , 1992 . In 1993 , Brown was invited to attend Bill Clinton 's Inauguration .

= = Early elective experience = =

In his first attempt at public office in 1993 , Brown ran for the third district of the Erie County Legislature against incumbent William Robinson and George " Butch " Holt , who had Eve 's endorsement . Robinson earned the Democratic Party endorsement in June 1993 , with the help of Holt who voted for Robinson instead of himself . In June , Brown was notified that he must resign his Erie County cabinet @-@ level post in order to run for public office and he did so in July . Holt won the Democratic nomination with a 267 @-@ vote 40 ? 37 % margin over Brown in the September 14 , 1993 primary election .

Brown won the September 1995 Democratic primary for the Masten District Buffalo Common Council seat . He then took time out from campaigning to attend the October 16 , 1995 Million Man March . Brown ousted 18 @-@ year veteran councilmember , David Collins , to win his seat on the Buffalo Common Council . He beat Collins by a 5 @,@ 391 ? 1 @,@ 670 (76 ? 24 %) margin in the November 7 , 1995 general election . In his 1997 re @-@ election campaign , he won the September 9 Democratic primary handily , and he was unopposed in the November 4 general election . In his 1999 re @-@ election campaign , he again won the Democratic primary easily on September 14 , and he won the November 2 general election . Beginning in January 2000 , Brown served as part of the first ever African @-@ American majority in the history of the Buffalo Common Council .

In 1996 , The Buffalo News described Brown as " Buffalo 's Julian Bond " . While on the council , the future state senator and mayor was called " bright , creative and hardworking " in a 1999 Buffalo News survey .

= = State Senate = =

In 2000 , he competed for the Democratic nomination for the New York State Senate 57th District against incumbent Al Coppola and Samuel A. Herbert . Coppola was endorsed by Buffalo Mayor Anthony Masiello . Brown won the September 2000 primary by a wide 18 % margin . However , Coppola remained on the ballot in the general election on the Conservative Party of New York , Working Families Party and Green Party lines . The Republican Party nominee was the politically inexperienced Harrison R. Woolworth . Although Brown began the race without organized political support , he earned endorsements from many veteran non @-@ Western New York politicians such as H. Carl McCall , Andrew Cuomo , and Hillary Rodham Clinton .

When he was sworn into the State Senate on January 1 , 2001 , Byron Brown became New York 's first African @-@ American State Senator elected outside of New York City . He also became the first minority member of the New York State Senate to represent a majority white district .

During Brown 's tenure in the New York State Senate his Democratic Party was in the minority . He

was part of the majority that backed New York Governor George Pataki 's 2001 plan to build up to three Western New York casinos on Seneca Indian land . The legislation was controversial because it granted slot machine rights to casino operators for the first time in New York State . Both of the previous casinos used video gambling machines with debit cards . Brown supported the casinos as a way to support the local economy . When the casino was completed in 2003 , he was on the seven @-@ member commission that was to apportion the state 's agreed 18 % share of the slot machine revenue , amounting to approximately \$ 40 million .

By spring of 2003 , Brown was a rising star in the declining years of the " Harlem Clubhouse " , a loose political fraternity of David Dinkins , Charles Rangel , Basil Paterson , Percy Sutton and sometimes H. Carl McCall that had dominated state politics while forging the careers of its members for much of the late 20th century . He was envisioned as a front @-@ runner for the 2006 Democratic nomination as Lieutenant Governor of New York or as Buffalo 's first black mayor . By 2004 it seemed clear that he was eyeing the mayor 's office . In the 2004 New York State Senate elections , Republican nominee Al Coppola opposed Brown for the redistricted 60th District and garnered only 23 % of the vote .

= = Mayoral election = =

In February 2005 , Brown announced his candidacy for Mayor of Buffalo . On April 29 , 2005 three @-@ term Democratic Mayor Anthony Masiello announced he would not seek a fourth four @-@ year term . Masiello had run on both major party lines for his final two terms and had twice endorsed Republican Governor George Pataki . During his tenure , the city population and industrial tax base had decreased . Six candidates , including Brown , entered the race to replace him , with Brown accumulating many endorsements and the backing of organized labor .

New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer described helping Brown win the Mayoral race as his " biggest campaign priority " in the last month and a half before Primary Day . Buffalo , which had an 8 : 1 Democrat to Republican ratio and a 38 % black population , was 75 % contained in Brown 's State Senate district . Brown carried 59 % of the vote in the September 13 , 2005 Democratic primary , and faced Kevin Helfer , a former City Council colleague , in the general election . Brown was the sixth African @-@ American to win the Democratic Mayor Primary since the 1960s , but all before him had failed to win the general election , even though the city had not elected a Republican since 1961 . His Republican opponent , Helfer , beat him in the Conservative Party Primary as a write @-@ in candidate , although Brown had been endorsed by that party . Brown raised more than five times as much money as Helfer , however , and defeated him 64 % to 27 % in the general election .

= = Mayoral service = =

= = = Economic development = = =

Brown was sworn in on December 31 , 2005 at the Buffalo Convention Center . During his first day in office he toured the Buffalo Waterfront to show his commitment to its development . Before the end of the year , restoration on the original point where the Erie Canal met the Great Lakes was underway . Brown presented his plans for the development during subsequent tours by top state leaders , including future New York State Governors Eliot Spitzer and David Paterson . Erie Canal Harbor eventually opened on July 2 , 2008 .

In early 2006 , the Seneca Nation filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission to build the third of the three Western New York casinos that had been legislated in 2002 . In 2007 , Brown was not sure he was in favor of the third casino , which seemed to cater to local residents instead of luring tourist revenues . Tom Golisano , founder of Paychex , former owner of the Buffalo Sabres National Hockey League franchise and three @-@ time candidate for New York State Governor , suggested that the Buffalo economy would not benefit from a business designed to transfer money

from local citizens to the Seneca Gaming Corporation . Brown withheld support while awaiting clarification of the target consumer for the third casino . In October 2006 , the Seneca Nation and Brown came to terms on the final sale of a two @-@ block stretch of city road that runs amid the 9 @-@ acre (36 @,@ 000 m2) construction site . As part of the sale the nation agreed to both marketing terms (regarding marketing beyond the local region) , and hiring preferences for city residents . However , in January 2007 , a federal judge ruled that the granting of permission to run the third casino by the National Indian Gaming Commission was improper . Seneca Nation received federal approval for their casino on July 2 , 2007 and opened the following day .

= = = Crime and poverty = = =

Brown was one of the original 15 mayors from United States cities such as Washington , Dallas , Philadelphia , Seattle and Milwaukee who convened at a meeting hosted by Michael Bloomberg and Thomas Menino at Gracie Mansion to confirm their support for more serious attacks on the use of illegal firearms . Bloomberg and Philip A. Amicone , Yonkers Mayor , were the only Republicans . The mayors all signed a six @-@ point " statement of principles " focused on punishing gun possession " to the maximum extent of the law " , prosecuting dealers who knowingly sell guns to criminals through so @-@ called straw purchasers , opposing two United States House of Representatives bills to restrict cities ' access to gun @-@ tracing data , endorsing technologies to detect illegal guns , and coordinating strategies and outreach to other cities in hopes of reconvening with at least 50 mayors by year end . A little over a year later the Mayors Against Illegal Guns Coalition co @-@ chaired by Bloomberg and Menino included 225 bi @-@ partisan municipal leaders in pursuit of legal , political and media strategies to stem gun crime and had a stated goal of " making the public safer by getting illegal guns off the streets " . Brown noted that he learned several techniques that became useful in Buffalo in reducing the homicide rate 21 % from the coalition and talks with specific mayors . Rising homicides had been a disappointment in his first year as mayor .

Brown 's first @-@ year review as a mayor was mixed . He was praised for his overhaul of city hall , his follow through on projects and systems , and his influence on statewide redistribution , but he was dogged by crime issues and his efforts for the planned casino . His agenda , hiring and discipline were respected , but rising homicides , continuing decay and evolving bureaucracy were troubling . In addition to public perceptions , Brown had a good working relationship with the Buffalo Common Council .

As mayor of Buffalo , he presided over emergency relief from blizzards such as the mid @-@ October 2006 two @-@ foot snow storm . The storm more than doubled the previous record for single @-@ day October snowfall . Despite the fact that about 200 @,@ 000 city residents were without electricity , the city saw no spike in criminal activity , according to Brown .

Buffalo is second only to St. Louis among cities nationwide in terms of percentage of vacant properties per capita . Therefore , in fall 2007 , Brown committed to a \$ 100 million five @-@ year plan to demolish 5 @,@ 000 houses , which is about half of the city 's total of vacant houses . However , since Buffalo has the second highest residential poverty rate (to Detroit) homes continue to be abandoned . The program may benefit the city because abandoned house costs it an approximate average of \$ 20 @,@ 060 over five years in lost taxes , debris removal , inspections , and policing . Also , 41 % of all fires in Buffalo are in vacant buildings , and more than 90 % of all arson cases involved abandoned houses . Subsequently , during the first ever " State of Upstate Address " , New York Governor Spitzer suggested committing \$ 100 million in state funds to build or rehabilitate 10 @,@ 000 homes and apartments . The mayor 's initial demolition plans met with resistance from preservationists and he had to negotiate with the National Trust for Historic Preservation , which got him attention from coast to coast .

In 2008 , Brown convinced Buffalo to use a real @-@ time wireless video surveillance system . The city installed 56 Avrio Rapid Deployment Surveillance Solution PoleCams . The system was the result of a request by Brown that the city evaluate surveillance cameras in other cities . By January 2009 State of the City Address , Brown reported that crime had fallen 12 % and homicide by 50 %

since he had taken office .

= = = Public relations = = =

On June 13 , 2008 , upon the death of NBC News Washington Bureau Chief and Meet the Press moderator Tim Russert , who was a proud Buffalo native , Brown ordered that all flags on city property be lowered to half @-@ staff in order to honor Russert 's memory . Brown called Russert one of Buffalo 's finest ambassadors , and his decision to lower the flags in honor of Russert , a civilian who never held elected office , was an unusual gesture that was described as breathtaking on Hardball with Chris Matthews by Tom Brokaw . He was joined by several other officials in recognizing Russert . Chief among those was United States President George W. Bush who signed a bill that named a stretch of U.S. Route 20A that passes in front of Ralph Wilson Stadium (home stadium of the Buffalo Bills) Timothy J. Russert Highway .

In a public relations controversy , Brown got caught in a fight against the movement to replace traditional lawns with front yard gardens . His office had issued an edict that a resident remove her landscape renovations . However , an e @-@ mail campaign in defense of the resident caused the mayor to rethink his stance .

= = = Reelection = = =

On September 15 , 2009 , Brown won the Democratic Primary for a second term by a nearly two to one margin over City councilmember Michael P. Kearns . Brown had amassed an early lead amongst voters until several scandals involving former basketball star Leonard Stokes , including the questionable government support of his failed " One Sunset " restaurant and a perceived undue influence in mitigating Stokes 's arrest for possessing a stolen handicapped parking permit , cut away most of his lead . There were no Republican , third @-@ party or independent candidates , so Brown ran unopposed and won the general election .

= = Political dealings = =

Brown and Erie County Democratic Party chairman Leonard Lenihan were at odds over various political positions after Lenihan played a major role in Brown 's election to the office of mayor . Brown supported Andrew Cuomo for New York Attorney General in the 2006 general election , David Paterson for Lieutenant Governor of New York in the 2006 general election and Antoine Thompson for 60th District New York Senator in a special election on February 28 , 2006 . Lenihan disagreed with each of these choices . Thompson had run Brown 's last common council campaign , and Brown was upset that he did not get to select his successor in the 60th District . Many supporters considered boycotting the special election due to a perceived racial slight against an African American who seemed to be wrongfully shutout of the process . Lenihan pointed out that neither of the previous state senators turned mayor , Anthony Masiello and James D. Griffin , was granted the right to pick their successor , and he noted that Thompson had not been timely in entering the special election process . The Erie and Niagara County Democratic committees bypassed Thompson as their nominee in favor of Marc Coppola despite Brown 's backing in the February special election . Thompson subsequently decided to run for the New York Senate seat in the November general election .

The week before the 2006 New York State Democratic Convention , Brown was described as a political confidant of Democratic New York Attorney General candidate Andrew Cuomo . He seconded Cuomo 's nomination at the convention on May 30 , 2006 . Throughout the campaign Brown was described as a close political advisor to Cuomo . He was noted as (along with Charles Rangel) one of the important black political leaders that Cuomo courted on his road to victory .

During the 2008 United States presidential election , like most of the New York State Democratic establishment , Brown was a supporter of Hillary Rodham Clinton , the United States Senator from New York . This marked a break from his earlier political organization , Grassroots , which supported

Barack Obama from the outset . He even ran to be a delegate for Clinton at the 2008 Democratic National Convention . In July 2008 , Golisano announced that he would attempt to create change in Albany by spending \$ 5 million on targeted campaigns . During the New York state September primary elections for state office , The New York Times alleged that Brown was aiding Golisano 's attempt to unseat Sam Hoyt in the New York State Assembly .

As Hillary Clinton resigned her United States Senate seat on January 21 , 2009 to assume a position in the United States Cabinet under United States President Barack Obama , New York Governor David Paterson was required to appoint a temporary replacement until a special election in 2010 for the balance of her term . Some thought that the New York State Governor would appoint a minority senator such as Brown , Gregory W. Meeks , H. Carl McCall , William C. Thompson , Jr . , José E. Serrano or Nydia M. Velázquez . However , Andrew Cuomo was the front @-@ runner for the seat and the next most likely candidates were Velázquez , Steve Israel , Nita Lowey and Meeks . Prominent women who were mentioned include Carolyn B. Maloney and Caroline Kennedy . The New York Times 's Danny Hakim noted that Cuomo , Paterson and Brown were the three names most often mentioned prior to Paterson 's ascension to the governor 's office . Although these three were the favorites , Brown was considered an unknown outside of Western New York . Nonetheless , Brown 's name was mentioned before Kennedy 's and Cuomo 's in a New York Times article paragraph about Paterson 's final nomination decision thoughts . In fact , in at least one article in The New York Times on the subject , Brown was mentioned and Cuomo wasn 't . When Paterson announced he had selected Blue Dog Democrat Kirsten Gillibrand , Brown was one of the few contenders to attend the event .

With Cuomo likely to be running for governor in the 2010 New York gubernatorial election , Brown was mentioned in early 2010 as a possible Lieutenant Governor of New York candidate by numerous sources , including multiple journalists from The New York Times . Meanwhile , in early 2010 , newly transplanted New Yorker Harold Ford , Jr. considered challenging New York 's Junior United States Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand in the 2010 United States Senate special election in New York and met with Brown as part of his statewide political travels .

= = Allegations of corruption = =

The Buffalo News reported that Brown may have interfered with a police investigation in 2007 . The allegations stem from an incident in which it is alleged Brown ordered police to free a possible friend of the mayor , Leonard Stokes , who had been arrested for possessing a stolen handicapped parking tag . The Buffalo News also reported another scandal involving Stokes and Brown , involving a \$ 160 @,@ 000 loan given to Stokes from the City of Buffalo , to open a restaurant in Buffalo . Further controversy arose when it was discovered that Michelle Baron , Vice President of the city backed corporation which gave Stokes , who had no previous experience operating a restaurant , the loan , was involved in securing the loan with a faulty business plan . Evidence also points to Brown green lighting the loan .

In June 2009 , Commissioner Tanya Perrin @-@ Johnson wrote a series of e @-@ mails that were sent to about 20 employees in her department directing them to work on the mayor 's re @-@ election campaign . The Office of Special Counsel began an investigation to determine whether the e @-@ mails represented a violation of the federal Hatch Act , which , among other things , prohibits employees involved in federally funded programs from using their authority to influence political campaigns . As a result of the probe , in 2010 the Common Council decided to delay her reappointment as commissioner until the investigation concluded . She had been serving in an interim capacity . In April 2011 , Perrin @-@ Johnson resigned her position .

A March 2010 Buffalo News article outlined Brown 's political relationship with Reverend Richard Stenhouse . The article details the over \$ 5 million Stenhouse received to develop affordable housing on Buffalo 's East Side . The article goes on to suggest much of the money was wasted due to incompetence and inexperience . Stenhouse is the pastor for one of Buffalo 's largest congregations , Bethel AME Church , and an ally of Brown .

= = Personal = =

Byron Brown is married to the former Michelle Austin and they have a son , Byron III , who is referred to as Byron , Jr. by some accounts . Brown III enjoys basketball and has attended high @-@ level youth basketball camps . He played for City Honors School . On the national level , he was an unheralded point guard in the 2008 high school graduating class , and he went on to attend Queen City Prep in Charlotte , North Carolina .

The Brown family attends St. John Baptist Church . While mayor , Brown has performed at least one wedding ceremony at the church . Byron Brown is a chapter president of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity , a past President of the Buffalo State College Alumni Association Board , and at the time of his mayoral inauguration he sat on the Board of the Boy Scout Council of Western New York and the Community Action Organization of Erie County . Brown collects tropical fish and maintains an aquarium in his Buffalo Mayor 's office . His parents divorced and at the beginning of his mayoral tenure , his mother was living in Buffalo . He also is a member of the Erie County Democratic Committee . He was a delegate to the 1992 , 2000 and 2004 Democratic National Conventions .

On Saturday February 24 , 2007 at about 6 : 55 a.m. , Brown 's Chevrolet Equinox was stolen from an on @-@ street parking location by someone with key access and crashed into three parked vehicles before being abandoned a few blocks from the family home . Brown had driven his son to play in a basketball tournament in Jamestown , New York on Friday February 23 . They returned home at approximately 10 : 30 p.m. from the tournament . In interviews at the end of March 2007 , Brown claimed that all members of his family with known key access had alibis . At the time Brown III possessed a learner 's permit . Canisius College security cameras recorded parts of the accident , including the driver leaving the scene of multiple accidents . In April a second video recording with more fluid movement was revealed in contrast to the original recording of 36 frames per minute . In a news conference Brown announced that Byron Brown III took the senior Brown 's car without permission and drove about the area near his house and Canisius College campus . Brown III admitted to the damage and was charged with driving without a driver 's license and leaving the scenes of multiple accidents . Brown III was scheduled to appear on April 16 , 2007 in Buffalo City Court on the charges . He pleaded guilty to unlicensed driving and leaving the scene of an accident . In 2010 , his son was charged with petit larceny for leaving a store with goods that were not paid for . Byron Jr. was spared a criminal conviction when a judge granted him a delayed dismissal on shoplifting charges , as recommended by prosecutors . Buffalo City Judge David M. Manz warned him and Xavier Jemison that they have to complete a four @-@ hour shoplifting class and stay out of trouble for the next six months . He granted each an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal , meaning their petit larceny charges will be dismissed if they comply with his orders .

= = Election history = =