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Wisconsin's Calumet County DA faces removal

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Enlarge By Wm. Glasheen, AP

Ken Kratz announces on Sept. 17 that he will step down from his position as Calumet County district attorney in Chilton, Wis.

By Ben Jones, USA TODAY

CHILTON, Wis. — There are places here where finding good cellphone reception can be difficult. But that apparently didn't stop Calumet County District Attorney Ken Kratz from sending racy text messages to an abuse victim he was supposed to be protecting.

According to the state Department of Justice, Kratz has acknowledged sending 30 text messages in three days last year to Stephanie Van Groll, who was working with Kratz's office while he was prosecuting her ex-boyfriend in a domestic abuse case.

He faces removal from office by Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle in a process scheduled to begin today in the same Calumet County Courthouse courtroom where Kratz is usually prosecuting cases.

Since the Van Groll case came to light, at least four other women have accused Kratz of similar inappropriate conduct.

In the messages to Van Groll, Kratz asked whether the woman was "the kind of girl that likes secret contact with an older married elected DA" and called her a "tall, young, hot nymph."

Van Groll, who was 25 at the time, went to authorities after receiving the messages. Kratz turned over the text messages but was cleared earlier this year by the state's Office of Lawyer Regulation. That agency, which disciplines attorneys, did not make its findings public and is under fire for not taking action. A letter it sent to Van Groll on March 5 said: "Although District Attorney Kratz's communication with you was inappropriate, it did not appear to involve possible professional misconduct."

INVESTIGATION: State reopens 'sexting DA' case WIS. GOV.: Troubled by 'sexting' DA

Two victims' advocacy groups — the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault last week called on regulators to explain why they failed to discipline Kratz, in a letter sent to the Office of Lawyer Regulation.

In the past week, three other women have emerged with tales of Kratz's alleged inappropriate behavior.

- Oklahoma City University law student Maria Ruskiewicz, 31, says Kratz sent her text messages implying he wanted to have a sexual relationship in 2008 after she received his support for a pardon for a 1997 drug conviction.
- An unnamed woman sent a letter to Doyle alleging that she went on a date with Kratz after meeting him on dating site Match.com. She said Kratz shared confidential details of a murder case and invited her to an autopsy, provided she wear high heels. She declined. In the letter, released by Doyle's office, she said she told Kratz not to contact her anymore.
- Calumet County Assistant District Attorney Jeff Froehlich said he received a complaint from a fourth woman with similar allegations to the others. He declined to comment further but said the complaint was forwarded to state law enforcement officials, who also declined comment.

Kratz has refused to resign. He entered an in-patient therapy program and, through his attorney, indicated he intends to stay on the job. His attorney, Robert Craanen, said that he plans to argue that Kratz has had a long and successful career, did not commit a crime and was cleared of misconduct.

The allegations have drawn outrage from the public and from domestic abuse and crime victim advocates. The state's District Attorneys Association said in a letter to Kratz, "Your behavior involving a crime victim was repugnant and cannot be countenanced." It said if Kratz did not resign, it would ask the governor to consider removing him from office.

On Wednesday, Doyle took initial steps in that direction, appointing Bob Jambois, former Kenosha County district attorney, to oversee removal proceedings. Kratz will have an opportunity to respond to the allegations at a public hearing. Michael Fox, the attorney for Van Groll, says his client has also promised to cooperate. Ruskiewicz, who received the pardon she sought last month, also said this week she would be willing to testify.

Kratz, a Republican, became Calumet County's district attorney in 1992. He is not up for re-election until

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November 2012. He also served 11 years as the chairman of the Wisconsin Crime Victims Rights Board, which has the power to sanction judges, police officers and prosecutors who mistreat victims. He resigned from that post under pressure from state officials last December.

Contributing: Jim Collar, The Post Crescent; The Associated Press

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wgarfinkel (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 9/30/2010 8:05:14 PM

Let's make sure that due process doesn't get in the way of the lynching.

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signedoff51 (51 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 9/27/2010 5:41:57 AM

Firing him is a no brainer!...I didn't know one needed therapy for being a pig?

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Puzo (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 9/27/2010 4:02:05 AM

Say what? Partisan politics? LMAO... Yeah right! Try 4 women coming forward to report his misconduct. Even Kratz has admitted his guilt. Nah, this is just a case of the dude thinking with the small head vs the one on his shoulders!

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Spuds (47 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 4h 45m ago
He did not get disciplined because he's a republican, no surprise there. What a piece of s*it.

This isn't about politics. The governor is a Democrat, and the Attorney General of Wisconsin, a Republican, also wants him gone. Gov. Doyle might appoint a Democrat to replace him, but the voters of Calumet County would likely vote a Republican into the office in 2012.

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