

New Roads mayor agrees to resign, pleads no contest over misuse of credit cards and gets probation

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New Roads Mayor Robert Myer, right, leaves the Iberville Parish Courthouse with one of his attorneys, Steven Moore, left, after entering a “no contest plea” to one count of malfeasance in office, Thursday, October 19, 2017, in Plaquemine, La.

Advocate staff photo by HILLARY SCHEINUK

New Roads Mayor Robert Myer has promised to resign from office and never seek it again as part of a plea deal he reached with district prosecutors Thursday over allegations he misused city-issue credit cards and used his position to coerce city employees into actions for his personal gain.

The embattled mayor will submit his letter of resignation at 9 a.m. Friday and must repay the city any outstanding money he owes for personal charges he made with the credit cards and pay additional court costs and legal fees that will be determined at his Jan. 9 sentencing date.

Myer entered a no contest plea to one count of malfeasance in office as part of deal, which was hashed out Thursday evening in Plaquemine.

He was set to go trial Jan. 16 after being indicted last year on nine counts of malfeasance in office and a count of abuse of office.

A no-contest plea has the same effect as a guilty plea in criminal court but would not be an admission of guilt in civil court. Myer will avoid a year in jail and be placed on probation instead.

He would not comment to reporters Thursday evening as he left the courthouse. His attorney, Steven Moore, spoke on his behalf, describing the court proceedings as an "emotional time" for Myer.

"Robert wanted it to end this way," Moore said. "The plea agreement was made in order for Robert and the city of New Roads to move on. He's only had the best interest at heart for New Roads."

Moore has previously called the case against Myer a conspiracy led by the mayor's political adversaries.

This marks the second time the city's top official is leaving office under a cloud of scandal.

Myer's predecessor, Tommy Nelson, was convicted in 2011 of racketeering, wire fraud, lying to investigators and the use of telephones in aid of racketeering. He was sentenced in 2012 to 10 years in federal prison.

Myer submits his resignation in the third year of his second term as mayor.

He was accused of using a city-issued credit card for personal transactions and conspiring with Cherie Rockforte-Laviolette, the city's former chief financial officer, whom he allegedly allowed to make more than \$9,000 in personal charges on city cards between Jan. 1, 2011, through Dec. 31, 2014, in exchange for sexual favors during that time.

State investigators alleged the mayor also charged \$165,777 on the city's various credit card accounts between Jan. 1, 2011, through Oct. 1, 2014 — of which, more than \$11,000 they believe was for personal items. He wrote personal checks totaling \$9,527 to the city in what investigators think were reimbursements for personal expenses.

An investigative report from the state's Inspector General Office later revealed that Rockforte-Laviolette told state investigators that Myer ordered her and the town's police chief to delete and

alter information on credit card statements after the city received a public record's request to review them.

Assistant District Attorney Tony Clayton said Thursday that Myer will have to repay the city approximately \$1,800 in remaining personal charges, as part of the plea deal.

As for Rockforte-Laviolette, Clayton said prosecutors have no intention of pursuing a case against her.

"I think that lady went through some humiliating stuff and I believe he exercised the means and control over her as the mayor," Clayton said outside the courthouse Thursday.

"This is closure. Now the city can put this behind them," Clayton said about Myer's plea deal. "The city of New Roads, for some inexplicable reason, passed an ordinance that allowed their elected officials to use their public credit card for private goods. That's against state law."

Myer previously said the city discontinued personal use of city credit cards in 2013 after learning it was a violation of state law.

But case files later revealed that at the Nov. 3, 2014 City Council meeting, he implemented a credit card policy allowing personal use of city-issued credit cards as long as the city receives reimbursement.

Prior to his indictment, Myer was lauded by many for turning the city around in a positive direction following Nelson's imprisonment.

Myer was credited for the healthy surge in economic development after the July 2013 opening of a \$1.6 million business corridor that attracted new businesses into the city.

Myer, in his ambitious infrastructure plan, also had the city revamp a 12-acre site near the Oil Mill property into a multi-use facility and community park. He also has implemented smaller-scale beautification projects throughout the city to make New Roads a more attractive setting for festivals and other events he has spearheaded during his tenure.

When asked about his client's next step, Moore had a very optimistic outlook for Myer.

"Robert is a very smart and caring man who's going to be very successful in whatever he endeavors," Moore said. "Robert is going to be great."

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