



# Fidel Castro resigns as Cuba's president

Anita Snow

HAVANA — An ailing, 81-year-old Fidel Castro resigned as Cuba's president Tuesday after nearly a half-century in power, saying he will not accept a new term when parliament meets Sunday.

The end of Castro's rule — the longest in the world for a head of government — frees his 76-year-old brother Raul to implement reforms he has hinted at since taking over as acting president when Fidel Castro fell ill in July 2006. President Bush said he hopes the resignation signals the beginning of a democratic transition.

"My wishes have always been to discharge my duties to my last breath," Castro wrote in a letter published Tuesday in the online edition of the Communist Party daily Granma. But, he wrote, "it would be a betrayal to my conscience to accept a responsibility requiring more mobility and dedication than I am physically able to offer."

In the pre-dawn hours, most Cubans were unaware of Castro's message. Havana's streets were quiet, and there was no movement at sev-

eral party-run neighborhood watch groups in Old Havana. It wasn't until 5 a.m., several hours after Castro's message was posted on the Internet, that official radio began reading the missive to early risers.

Castro temporarily ceded his powers to his brother on July 31, 2006, when he announced that he had undergone intestinal surgery. Since then, the elder Castro has not been seen in public, appearing only sporadically in official photographs and videotapes and publishing dense essays about mostly international themes as his younger brother has consolidated his rule.

There had been widespread speculation about whether Castro would continue as president when the new National Assembly meets Sunday to pick the country's top leadership. Castro has been Cuba's unchallenged leader since 1959 — monarchs excepted, he was the world's longest ruling head of state.

Castro said Cuban officials had wanted him **Castro**, continued to page 21

*"My wishes have always been to discharge my duties to my last breath ... [but] it would be a betrayal to my conscience to accept a responsibility requiring more mobility and dedication than I am physically able to offer."*

— Fidel Castro



Cuban President Fidel Castro addresses a crowd of tens of thousands gathered in Bayamo, in the Granma Province, for the anniversary of the attack on the Moncada barracks in this Wednesday, July 26, 2006, file photo. Amid failing health, the 81-year-old Castro resigned his presidency Tuesday. (AP photo/Javier Galeano)

# School, volunteers aid victims of Blue Hill blaze

Kyle de Beausset

Lisa Grace Wigfall was a scared kid, just 7 years old when her childhood Dorchester home was engulfed in flames. When she thinks back, she can scarcely recall the details of the incident on Bunswick Street — just the fire, and the fear.

"All I remember was my big brother

just snatching me off the bed and running down the steps," she said.

Though her memories of the event itself are blurry, she clearly remembers the assistance her family received after the fire and how deeply it impacted her.

"Without the help my mother had from her family and friends, I'm sure that my mother couldn't have made

it," Wigfall said.

Decades later, that memory inspired Wigfall — now a teacher at the William Monroe Trotter Elementary School in Grove Hall — to start a fund for the victims of a fire that blazed through a Mattapan triple-decker last November.

Sixteen people, including six children, were injured on Nov. 12 after an electrical short in the first floor of a Blue Hill Avenue home quickly escalated into a three-alarm fire. Several published reports estimated damages to the gutted building at \$500,000.

With the support of the Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL)

After School Program at the Trotter School, Wigfall established the Mattapan Fire Victims Fund, raising hundreds of dollars for the affected families.

"I just wanted to do something positive in my community," Wigfall said, the jubilant voices of students staying after school reverberated through the halls of the Trotter School.

"You always here about the wrongs ... you never hear about the positive things. There are good people here at the [school]," she said softly.

Wigfall is a tutor at the BELL After School Program, which aims to "dramatically increase the academic

achievements, self-esteem and life opportunities of children living in low-income, urban communities," according to the BELL Web site.

Administrators, teachers, students and parents have supported Wigfall's fundraising efforts.

"Each BELL after school site participates in a community service project," Nampeera Kayondo, the BELL site manager at the Trotter School, explained in an e-mail. "The Trotter School program decided to focus its efforts on the Mattapan fire victims from October to March."

The first person to donate to the **Fire**, continued to page 15



A respected activist, longtime member of the Cambridge School Committee and seasoned city councilor, E. Denise Simmons brings a wealth of experience to her job as the newly elected mayor of Cambridge. (Ernt Images photo)

# Cambridge's new Madame Mayor

Brian Wright O'Connor

CAMBRIDGE — It's public comment time in the Sullivan Chamber at Cambridge City Hall, and newly elected Mayor E. Denise Simmons is making sure everyone gets a turn at the microphone.

Sitting in a high-backed chair with the city seal carved into the oak, she listens impassively as speaker after speaker comes forward to share observations on everything from the history of sewage overflow in the Miller's River to proposals teaching drunks to drive.

Every petitioner from the People's Republic gets the mayor's undivided

attention — for three minutes. Then the gavel comes down.

In the high-ceilinged council hall, the right of the citizenry to address their elected representatives is a cherished tradition, but not an open invitation to filibuster. Simmons' quiet manner in maintaining the proper balance is in keeping with a career that has opened doors with persistence rather than thunderbolts.

Becoming the nation's first openly gay African American woman mayor may have raised expectations of window-rattling change, but the simple fact is that Simmons, after years of grassroots activism and service on both the Cambridge School

Committee and the City Council, is not looking for headlines — she just wants to get the job done.

"Becoming the mayor really brings it all together," she says during an interview in the mayoral suite adjacent to the council chambers. "I'm going back to the school committee and will have the opportunity to address so many of the issues that got me involved in public service in the first place."

Chosen as mayor last month for a two-year term by her colleagues on the nine-member city council — all elected at large under the unusual system of proportional representation — Simmons serves as chairman of the seven-member Cambridge School Committee, as well as the city's figurehead leader. Her selection as mayor preserved a black presence on the school board after the defeat of incumbent School Com-

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