

Calls mount for investigation of Governor Cuomo in New York nursing homes scandal

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The scandal engulfing New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has continued to develop since the release of New York Attorney General Letitia James' report that the state government had undercounted nursing home deaths from COVID-19 by 50 percent and the admission by a top Cuomo aide that requests from state lawmakers for information were not fulfilled for months on end because of fears that the information "was going to be used against us" by the Trump administration.

The FBI and the Department of Justice have begun a preliminary investigation to see if there was criminal wrongdoing in the misrepresentation of nursing home deaths, according to NBC. Since the revelation on February 11 that the legislature was denied information under the Trump administration, legislators, most prominently Assemblyman Ron Kim, have claimed that Cuomo has politically threatened them if they refuse to recant their criticism of Cuomo's handling of the pandemic.

Over 15,000 New York nursing home residents have died from COVID-19, a third of whom were not counted in prior state Department of Health data. A factor which likely contributed to these deaths was that, from March to May of 2020, nursing homes and group homes for the developmentally or intellectually disabled were required to accept residents despite "a confirmed or suspected diagnosis of COVID-19," and that testing was not required.

After this came to light thanks to Attorney General James' report, Secretary to the Governor Melissa DeRosa told state Democrats that the state "froze" in providing information to them after the federal government initiated an investigation last year. Since then, Kim and other Democrats have criticized Cuomo, calling for his investigation or even impeachment, and

have made moves to removing his emergency powers.

Kim has said that Cuomo called him and warned him: "You have not seen my wrath. I have been biting my tongue for months." According to Kim, Cuomo was yelling and at one point threatened, "You will be destroyed." Cuomo's office has denied that he used specific threatening language.

Three state legislators anonymously relayed to CNN that "they were aware of outreach from the governor in which he clearly suggested or explicitly threatened political retaliation" if they did not stand by him, according to the news channel. Like Kim, they apparently were asked to either retract critical remarks against Cuomo or issue statements in his defense, with multiple legislators reportedly receiving draft language from Cuomo aides.

Cuomo decided to spend time during a coronavirus news conference attacking Kim, who has over the past few years begun to portray himself as on the "progressive" wing of the Democratic Party, saying he has had a "long and hostile relationship" with the assemblyman.

Kim has become Cuomo's most prominent critic since the alleged threats, writing opinion pieces for the *New York Post* and the *Guardian* and agreeing to interviews with *Jacobin*, *Business Insider* and others, where he has called for Cuomo to be investigated for mishandling the pandemic in nursing homes.

Fox News and other right-wing media have focused intensely on the scandal surrounding Cuomo, and right-wing senators have grabbed on as well, with Ted Cruz, Tom Cotton, Lindsey Graham, Josh Hawley and other Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee issuing a statement asking its Democratic chairman, Richard Durbin, to convene hearings into the issue.

None of these reactionaries have demanded an

investigation into the Trump administration's handling of the pandemic, which involved then-President Donald Trump downplaying the pandemic for months even though he knew the seriousness of the disease. Nor have they focused attention on the role of Republican governors, like Ron DeSantis in Florida, who have barred even the establishment of statewide mask mandates.

Significantly, most of the attention has been on the state government's cover-up of the death toll in nursing homes, not on the deaths themselves, or on Cuomo's sponsoring legislation that immunized nursing home owners—mostly big corporate chains—from legal liability for the deaths. This is revealing, because in terms of actual deaths, New York state is only one of many where nursing homes became virtual death traps for the elderly.

Cuomo's critics, both "left" and "right," have generally avoided this issue, because it shows all too clearly the bipartisan character of the "herd immunity" policy adopted by corporate politicians of both parties, who have allowed COVID-19 to kill more than half a million people in the United States.

US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America, issued a statement calling for a "full investigation" and for "our state's return to co-equal governance," a reference to the state legislature's efforts to revoke Cuomo's emergency powers early. Ocasio-Cortez, however, has not used her Twitter account, which has a significant following, to comment on the nursing homes crisis (or even to circulate her statement).

Cuomo faces reelection next year, and faced a primary challenger in 2018 that secured a third of the vote. It is possible that sections of the Democratic Party could try to dump Cuomo before the general election, given the widespread perception of Cuomo's "falling star," after the efforts by liberals and the mainstream press in 2020 to promote him as an effective spokesman on coronavirus in contrast to Trump.

On Monday, the *New York Times* —the main Democratic Party mouthpiece—published a lengthy article headlined, "Uprising Grows Over Cuomo's Bullying and 'Brutalist Political Theater'" which detailed longstanding allegations of "the governor's aggressive and sometimes unsettling behavior," many

anonymous.

If Cuomo is guilty of bullying and even threatening political rivals, that crime pales by comparison to what he has done to the people of New York state, where 1.6 million have fallen victim to coronavirus and nearly 48,000 have died. The *Times*' report and the media focus on Cuomo's individual wrongdoing is aimed at creating the conditions for replacing Cuomo with another big business politician, Democrat or Republican.

This would neither fundamentally alter the notoriously corrupt politics of New York state nor the sacrifice of lives to corporate profit. What is needed is for the working class to intervene independently with a socialist program to bring the pandemic under control and hold all of the social murderers accountable.



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