

New York Times stokes sex scandal targeting New York Governor Cuomo

Josh Varlin
3 March 2021

A growing crisis surrounds New York Governor Andrew Cuomo over allegations of sexual harassment made by three women, two of whom are former aides. The *New York Times*, which has spearheaded the recent use of misconduct claims to force out prominent politicians, artists and others, has played a central role here too, soliciting one of the complainant's allegations.

The knives are clearly out for Cuomo in certain circles, although to what precise ends are not yet apparent. Behind the screen of this sex scandal, as is often the case in the US, political scores and conflicts are being fought out. Cuomo has undoubtedly alienated a great many people in the Democratic Party and beyond. The real issues are being concealed from the public, and the inevitable outcome of such a sordid affair will be a further shift to the right in official politics.

It may be the case that the media's concoction of this controversy is aimed at least in part at distracting attention from the very real and genuinely criminal scandal arising from Cuomo's deadly policy during the coronavirus pandemic and his conduct in regard to nursing homes in particular. The governor is responsible for unconscionable delays in lockdown measures, reckless reopening policies that have allowed for a second surge (with a third on the way) and turning nursing homes for the elderly and group care homes for the disabled into veritable killing fields, while shielding the industry from lawsuits.

The *Times* and the media generally, however, are choosing to focus popular attention on the lurid details about alleged sexual misconduct.

Cuomo was in the midst of the controversy about the state's nursing home deaths when Lindsey Boylan, a former Cuomo aide and current candidate for the borough presidency of Manhattan, published an account on February 24 of alleged sexual harassment from 2016 through 2018. According to Boylan, Cuomo gave her an unsolicited kiss, invited her to play strip poker and made inappropriate comments.

In December, Boylan made a vague claim that Cuomo acted inappropriately toward her, but she only provided specifics for the first time last week.

After another former Cuomo aide, Charlotte Bennett, retweeted Boylan with the comment, "For those wondering what it's like to work for the Cuomo admin, read @LindseyBoylan's story," the *Times* solicited Bennett's accusations too, which it published in lengthy detail on February 27.

Bennett, for her part, alleged that Cuomo (who is divorced)

asked a series of supposedly inappropriate questions about her love life and revealed details about his own, including that he was lonely. She viewed the comments "as clear overtures to a sexual relationship," in the words of the *Times*. After raising these comments with Cuomo's chief of staff, she was transferred to another job in the state government, apparently with her approval. She also spoke with a special counsel to the governor but decided to "let this go and move on," at least until contacted by the *Times*.

On March 1, the *Times* published yet another allegation of sexual misconduct against Cuomo, this time from Anna Ruch, a veteran of the Obama administration and Biden campaign, who said that Cuomo touched her back, grabbed her cheeks and asked to kiss her at a September 2019 wedding reception. He then allegedly kissed her cheek. A photo taken by one of Ruch's friends and published by the *Times* appears to corroborate at least that Cuomo grabbed her cheeks.

The various allegations, little more than "micro-aggressions," have metastasized into a widening crisis for Cuomo. He denied Boylan's claims, and members of Cuomo's staff, who would have been around when he allegedly asked her to play strip poker, denied that the incident took place.

After Bennett spoke to the *Times*, however, Cuomo issued a semi-apology, stating that he "never intended to offend anyone or cause any harm" but admitted that he could be "playful" in a way that was open to misinterpretation. "I acknowledge some of the things I have said have been misinterpreted as an unwanted flirtation," his statement continued. "To the extent that anyone felt that way, I am truly sorry about that."

He has continued to claim, "I never inappropriately touched anybody, and I never propositioned anybody, and I never intended to make anyone feel uncomfortable, but these are allegations that New Yorkers deserve answers to."

Cuomo initially asked former federal Judge Barbara Jones to investigate the allegations, but this became untenable because Jones used to work with a former Cuomo aide. He then asked Attorney General Letitia James and State Court of Appeals Chief Judge Janet DiFiore, a Cuomo appointee, to appoint an investigator.

James, whose report on nursing home deaths touched off the crisis, demanded that Cuomo officially refer the matter to her office so she could appoint an independent investigator with subpoena powers, which has since occurred. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the administration has retained defense lawyer

Elkan Abramowitz, who defended Harvey Weinstein, to defend Cuomo and his closest aides in both the nursing home scandal and the sexual harassment allegations.

Prominent Democrats have weighed in. New York State Senator Alessandra Biaggi tweeted: “As a New Yorker, a legislator, Chair of the Senate Ethics and Internal Governance Committee, and a survivor of sexual abuse, I am calling for Governor Cuomo to resign,” followed by a statement calling for a “truly independent investigation,” which, she makes clear, should follow Cuomo’s resignation. The elementary principle that any penalties—such as being forced out of office—should follow an investigation, rather than precede it, is left by the wayside.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who has long squabbled with Cuomo, has said that the governor should resign if the allegations are true.

Representative Kathleen Rice has become the first congressional Democrat from New York to call for Cuomo’s resignation, tweeting early on March 2: “The time has come. The Governor must resign.”

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki have backed an independent investigation and have indicated their sympathy for the complainants, although, at least on Monday, had not gone as far as Biaggi. Pelosi, somewhat unusually in these circumstances, gave lip service to democratic rights, saying, “The independent investigation must have due process and respect for everyone involved.”

In addition to soliciting the second accusation and “scooping” the third, the *New York Times* has also enlisted its opinion columnists in the effort. Michelle Goldberg published a column on Monday bemoaning “the diminishing power of MeToo,” essentially expressing her disappointment that the Democratic Party has not completely turned against Cuomo. “So eventually, Cuomo’s fate will tell us whether there’s still power in the #MeToo movement,” she declares.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is not in a position to determine what occurred between Cuomo and the complainants. At this stage, the alleged behavior seems trivial in nature, although if it occurred, it was inappropriate.

As noted, the current sordid scandal erupted under conditions in which Cuomo was already in crisis. His administration had forced nursing homes to admit residents who were or could be positive with COVID-19 during the spring 2020 surge. He followed this up by granting those very same nursing homes legal immunity from pandemic-related injuries and deaths through a provision buried in the 2020 budget.

Then the state Department of Health obscured a third of the deaths of nursing home residents by not including deaths that occurred outside of the homes. The governor’s office stonewalled the State Legislature for months on the subject out of fear that its answers to legislators’ questions would be “used against us.”

Cuomo responded to the crisis surrounding nursing homes, which sparked bipartisan calls for an investigation, by allegedly threatening to “destroy” critics, only worsening his position and accelerating the drive to revoke Cuomo’s emergency powers, which may happen as soon as Friday.

The effect of the prurient coverage of allegations of sexual

harassment has been to divert attention from the deaths of 15,000 nursing home residents, Cuomo’s cover-up of the scope of the catastrophe and the homicidal actions of the ruling class as whole.

Another element in the dissatisfaction with the governor reflected in the sex scandal may be the fact that New York has been somewhat slower than other states to reopen schools and nonessential businesses. While the reopening, particularly of New York City’s public schools, has been reckless, Wall Street may well be getting impatient. The *Financial Times* and CNBC gave voice to wealthy layers venting their frustration with Cuomo for finding himself engulfed in these crises and for not quashing more forcefully talk of taxing the rich by “progressive” Democrats in the State Legislature.

Several high-profile fundraisers for Cuomo told CNBC that they are “in a wait-and-see mode,” in the words of one. On the other hand, Bernard Schwartz, a businessman and investor who has donated \$70,000 to Cuomo just in the past two years, said, “Unless he comes forward and faces it [the sex scandal] completely and openly and honestly, he doesn’t deserve a fourth term, even though I like him immensely.”

If Cuomo is forced out in the coming days, there would be a precedent for this in New York politics: the forced resignation of Governor Eliot Spitzer in 2008 amid a sex scandal instigated by George W. Bush’s Department of Justice. Even more recent is the forced resignation of Senator Al Franken in 2018 at the height of the #MeToo campaign.

The ruling elite, principally its Democratic faction through the *New York Times*, may well be seeking to revive the #MeToo campaign with this scandal, after a hiatus during the 2020 election, when Joe Biden faced allegations of his own (which were handled quite differently by the *Times* and the media as a whole).

The powers that be resort to these methods to settle their internal affairs without involving the population, suppress democratic consciousness and set reactionary precedents to be used against rising social opposition. The working class must deal with figures such as Cuomo, but with its own methods.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)