Top New York Democrats call for resignation of Governor Cuomo in #MeToo witch-hunt

Josh Varlin
8 March 2021

The crisis-ridden atmosphere surrounding New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has deepened in recent days, with top Democrats at the state level abandoning him after new accusations of sexual misconduct were publicized over the weekend. Cuomo has so far defied calls for his resignation and cited his winning majority votes in three separate gubernatorial elections as reason to stay on.

Despite the furious media campaign, spearheaded by the *New York Times* and joined by the *Washington Post* and more traditionally right-wing outlets like the *Wall Street Journal*, there is a distinct lack of substance in the allegations brought forward so far—and the campaign becomes less rather than more believable as women come forward to complain that Cuomo once kissed their hand or was guilty of a minor impropriety more than 20 years ago.

The two top Democrats in the bicameral State Legislature have directly or indirectly called on Cuomo to resign. Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said: "We need to govern without daily distraction. For the good of the state, Governor Cuomo must resign." Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie did not go as far, but did issue a statement that "it is time for the Governor to seriously consider whether he can effectively meet the needs of the people of New York."

They join US Representative Kathleen Rice, the first and so far only member of New York's congressional delegation to call on Cuomo to resign, as well as a growing number of state lawmakers.

Cuomo has refused to resign, reportedly telling Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins on March 7 that he would need to be impeached to be removed from office. Later that day, he said at a news conference that it would be "anti-democratic" to be forced out of office. "They don't override the people's will, they don't get to override the elections," he said.

Significantly, the six state legislators (two senators and four assembly members) affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have issued a statement declaring, "In light of the recent accounts of sexual harassment against Governor Cuomo … [i]mpeachment proceedings are the appropriate avenue for us to pursue as legislators to hold the Governor accountable for his many abuses of power and remove him from office."

The statement, signed by State Senator Julia Salazar, State Senator Jabari Brisport, Assembly Member Zohran Mamdani and other "socialists in office," focused on the unproven sexual harassment allegations, although it does include a mention of the far more significant scandal, involving the transfer of COVID-19 patients from hospitals to nursing homes, and its cover-up.

The DSA, a pseudo-left faction of the Democratic Party, thus finds itself aligned with Republicans in supporting the impeachment of a thrice-elected governor on the basis of allegations of inappropriate comments and the like. No criminal sexual behavior has been alleged, and the latest allegations, even by the standards of #MeToo witch-hunts, are absurdly trivial.

On March 6, two more former aides accused Cuomo of inappropriate behavior. Karen Hinton, who had been a press aide to Cuomo while he was the secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development under President Bill Clinton, said that he gave her a hug that went on for too long in a hotel room 21 years ago.

Ana Liss, who worked for Cuomo from 2013 to 2015, said that Cuomo touched her lower back at an event in 2014 while posing for a photo. (The *Wall Street Journal* published a photo of that "incriminating" photo, which Liss keeps, framed.) Cuomo allegedly also asked her about her dating life and kissed her hand once.

These allegations add nothing to the three previous accusations. In late February and the first days of March, Lindsey Boylan, a former aide and current candidate for Manhattan borough president; Charlotte Bennett, a former

© World Socialist Web Site

aide; and Anna Ruch, a Biden campaign worker, accused Cuomo of inappropriate comments or advances.

Cuomo has specifically denied inappropriately touching anyone—and Hinton's claim has been strongly denied by a Cuomo spokesman who called her "a known antagonist of the governor's" due to her time working for New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio—but he has semi-apologized for his comments that made women uncomfortable.

Now 63, Cuomo was married to Kerry Kennedy, daughter of Robert F. Kennedy, for 15 years. The marriage ended in divorce in 2005. They have three children, all now adults.

That Cuomo was an abrasive and vicious boss, even by the standards of American capitalism, has been widely reported. It would be preposterous to claim that the sexually provocative remarks and conduct alleged, even if true, rise to the level of a criminal offense.

The investigation, particularly by the *Times*, seems out of all proportion, and it is spreading, with the *Washington Post* writing that it "reached out to more than 150 former and current Cuomo staffers" and mostly got stories about the governor's temper.

With all Republicans and about a dozen Democrats indicating their support for impeachment or resignation, there are still not enough lawmakers—for now—to impeach, must less convict, Cuomo.

The *New York Daily News* reported that "a group of 23 Democrats serving in the chamber, all women, released a statement saying they believe Attorney General Letitia James' investigation of the sexual harassment allegations against Cuomo should be allowed to play out," which may take months.

An investigation commissioned by Attorney General James—independent from the governor's office, but sparked by the whipped-up sex scandal—has only just named its lead lawyers.

The media coverage of the concocted sex scandal has largely drowned out the real scandal of the Cuomo administration, which is the 15,000 dead nursing home residents killed by a preventable disease while Cuomo delayed lockdowns and seeded the nursing homes with sick residents, then worked to cover up their deaths and give the nursing homes legal immunity.

There was only one Democrat calling for Cuomo's impeachment over the nursing home scandal, and the Republican effort was mainly for show, since the Republicans hardly want a real exposure of how capitalist politicians paved the way for mass death in the COVID-19 crisis. In the meantime, more evidence has been coming to light, albeit without the blaring headlines of the sex charges.

On March 4, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* reported that top Cuomo aides significantly rewrote a July 2020 Department of Health (DOH) report on deaths of nursing home residents in the state to exclude out-of-facility deaths and thereby lower the death toll by approximately a third.

This means that the cover-up of nursing home deaths preceded the letter from the Trump administration requesting information on the state's nursing home deaths, which had been cited by Secretary to the Governor Melissa DeRosa as the reason for stonewalling the state legislature for months.

In a move that began in response to the nursing homes scandal and accelerated with the sex scandal, the state legislature voted Friday to revoke Cuomo's pandemic-related emergency powers early. Cuomo said he would sign the bill into law rather than vetoing it, an indication of his weakened political position.

It is not yet clear to what end (or ends) the sex scandal is being whipped up by the *Times* and the media more broadly, along with significant sections of the Democratic Party. The relatively slow pace of school and business reopening in New York may well be a factor.

The ruling class often uses the cover of a sex scandal to sort out its internal differences without involving the population or revealing more substantive criminality, as a thoroughgoing investigation of the nursing homes scandal may yet do. Workers must oppose Cuomo not with scandal-mongering, but with the methods of class struggle.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site