

Cuomo announces resignation in effort to head off likely impeachment after devastating report on his conduct

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New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo (D) announced his resignation Tuesday in an effort to head off a looming impeachment effort in the state Assembly, a precipitous fall triggered by a state investigation that found he sexually harassed 11 women and oversaw an unlawful attempt to exact retribution against one of his accusers.

“Wasting energy on distractions is the last thing that state government should be doing,” Cuomo said in a video address. “And I cannot be the cause of that.”

“Given the circumstances, the best way I can help now is to step aside and let government get back to governing,” he added.

He said his resignation will be effective in 14 days. Cuomo will be replaced by [Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul](#) (D), who will be New York’s first female governor and will serve out the rest of the term through the next election in November 2022.

“I am prepared to lead,” she said in [a statement](#), calling Cuomo’s resignation “the right thing to do and in the best interest of New Yorkers.”

Cuomo’s decision to step down represents a crushing defeat for the three-term governor, ending his nearly 11-year domination of state government that was known for its liberal policy victories and a hard-knuckle style of politics marked by bullying, intimidation and retribution.

The governor had remained defiant through months of escalating controversy over his behavior. He repeatedly denied improperly touching women — even as accusations multiplied — and dismissed the harassment claims as a misinterpretation of his affectionate political style and attempts to build office camaraderie.

“In my mind, I’ve never crossed the line with anyone, but I didn’t realize the extent to which the line has been redrawn,” Cuomo said Tuesday in a long defense of his actions that precipitated the announcement. “There are generational and cultural shifts that I just didn’t fully appreciate, and I should have no excuses.”

He announced his resignation shortly after his attorney, Rita Glavin, delivered a lengthy attack on a report commissioned by the state attorney general that was released last week.

“The report got key facts wrong, it omitted key evidence, and it failed to include witnesses who did not support the narrative that it was clear this investigation was going to weave from day one,” Glavin said during a virtual news conference, calling the events since the report’s release a “pile-on.”

Cuomo’s standing collapsed quickly after Attorney General Letitia James released the results of her investigation on Aug. 3. Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie (D), a longtime ally, announced that the governor had “lost the confidence of the Assembly Democratic majority,” adding that Cuomo “can no longer remain in office.” State Senate Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D) also called for Cuomo’s resignation.

By the time Cuomo decided to leave office, he was politically isolated — having lost the support of President Biden, the state’s two Democratic senators, most of the New York congressional delegation and the bulk of the state Assembly.

Public polls taken this month found that most New Yorkers — including fellow Democrats — wanted Cuomo to resign. A Quinnipiac University poll found that 70 percent of registered voters said he should step down, including 57 percent of Democrats. The poll found that 54 percent thought Cuomo sexually harassed multiple women, and 55 percent said he should be charged with a crime.

“I think the governor did the right thing,” Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) said on Capitol Hill after Cuomo’s announcement. “And I just want to commend the brave and courageous women who came forward. That was not an easy thing to do.”

The governor’s resignation may not end the Assembly’s impeachment investigation — multiple members of the Judiciary Committee said Tuesday that there is ongoing debate about whether to move forward with the process. Even after stepping down, Cuomo could still be banned from ever seeking state office again if he is impeached by the Assembly and then convicted in a trial before the state Senate.

The legislative investigation has been looking at issues beyond the alleged sexual harassment, including Cuomo's handling of the coronavirus pandemic in nursing homes, claims that he gave preferential virus testing to friends and family members, and reports that he used state resources to write a book. On Monday, Judiciary Committee Chairman Charles D. Lavine did not rule out the possibility of continuing with the impeachment inquiry if Cuomo resigned.

Assemblyman Keith Brown (R), who sits on the judiciary committee, said Tuesday that he was upset by Cuomo's decision to keep attacking the attorney general's sexual harassment investigation before announcing his resignation.

"I think it was disgraceful to go and discredit each of these women who bravely came forward to make accusatory statements about a very powerful sitting governor," Brown said. "It took a lot to have them do that, and then to have his private attorney discredit them — it's all theater."

Assemblyman Phil Steck (D) said it was too early to say whether the judiciary committee will move forward with its investigation when it meets on Monday.

"There are a number of factors to consider," Steck said. "It's important to send a clear message on what are abuses of power, but continuing the investigation is very costly."

Cuomo had been ensconced in the Albany governor's mansion for days, refusing entreaties from allies to resign as he assessed how he could survive politically. His efforts to defend his conduct were deemed ineffective even by some of his staunchest allies.

He still faces criminal investigations into his conduct by prosecutors in several counties, including New York, as well as an ongoing federal investigation by the U.S. attorney in Brooklyn into the administration's handling of nursing homes during the pandemic. The New York attorney general is separately probing whether the administration misused public resources when it provided Cuomo relatives and other well-connected New Yorkers with preferential virus testing and when aides helped him write a book last year that netted him more than \$5 million.

Hochul, a low-profile figure who started her career as an aide to Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) and later served in Congress representing a western portion of the state, spent part of Tuesday calling around to reintroduce herself to influential political figures. The 2022 campaign for governor is expected to set in motion a competitive Democratic primary fight.

"She wanted me to know that she wanted to come to National Action Network," the Rev. Al Sharpton said in an interview Tuesday afternoon, referring to his civil rights group. "I want to find common ground. We talked about some of the problems she'll face in the Black community."

In Albany, lawmakers breathed a sigh of relief at the prospect of working with the new governor.

"I have high hopes for her, especially at a time when we are torn apart by the end of the Cuomo administration," said Assemblyman Thomas J. Abinanti (D), adding: "We need a peacemaker. . . . I am hopeful she will be. That will be her biggest challenge, to bring everybody together."

Cuomo, a political survivor who spent more than three decades in public life, was ultimately felled by an independent report commissioned by James, a fellow Democrat, whose explosive findings detailed how Cuomo allegedly harassed women inside and outside his office with unwanted touching and inappropriate comments. The 165-page report — based on interviews with 179 individuals, including Cuomo and his top aides — concluded that there was evidence to substantiate claims against him by 11 women.

Joon Kim, the former acting U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York appointed by James to help lead the investigation, said when the report was released that some women “suffered through unwanted touching and grabbing of their most intimate body parts.”

“The executive chamber’s workplace culture was rife with bullying, fear and intimidation on one hand while normalizing frequent flirtations and gender-based comments by the governor on the other,” Kim added.

The report included details of an alleged incident in November, when Cuomo embraced his executive assistant, Brittany Commisso, and reached under her blouse to grab her breast. Commisso went public with her story this week after filing a criminal complaint with the Albany County sheriff’s office. The governor has continued to deny the incident.

The attorney general’s investigation also revealed allegations that Cuomo harassed a female state trooper who was hired on to the governor’s detail after they had a brief exchange, even though she had not yet served the three years required for the post.

The governor touched the trooper inappropriately on several occasions, running his finger down her spine when he was standing behind her on an elevator in his New York City office, according to the report. In another episode, Cuomo allegedly ran his hand across the trooper’s stomach as she held the door for him at an event on Long Island.

Cuomo addressed her claims for the first time Tuesday, arguing that he had recruited her in an effort to diversify his mostly male protective detail. He said he did not remember touching her stomach, but he also did not deny doing so, explaining that he often touched state troopers in nonsexual ways when they held doors for him.

“I didn’t do it consciously with the female trooper. I did not mean any sexual connotation. I did not mean any intimacy by it. I just wasn’t thinking,” Cuomo said. “It was a mistake, plain and simple. I have no other words to explain it. I want to personally apologize to her and her family.”

The governor also allegedly grabbed the buttocks of an employee of a state office, made sexually suggestive comments to a young female assistant, inappropriately touched other women not employed by the state, and kissed another state employee without consent in his office.

In addition, investigators found that Cuomo made numerous suggestive sexual comments that constituted “unlawful sexual harassment.”

These included telling the female state trooper that his requirement for a girlfriend was someone who “can handle pain,” telling one assistant it was “about time you showed some leg,” suggesting a buttock tattoo to an aide, and calling two executive assistants “mingle mamas” while asking one of them whether she would be willing to cheat on her partner.

And the investigators found that Melissa DeRosa, Cuomo’s top aide, worked with other advisers to discredit one of his accusers, Lindsey Boylan — releasing her personnel file to reporters and circulating a draft of a letter impugning her credibility. DeRosa resigned from Cuomo’s staff on Sunday.

The attorney general’s office found that the campaign against Boylan, which included the circulation of the letter, amounted to “unlawful retaliation.”

“My clients feel both vindicated and relieved that Cuomo will no longer be in a position of power over anyone,” attorney Mariann Wang, who represented two Cuomo accusers, said in a statement after the governor’s announcement.

Cuomo’s announcement marked a dramatic fall for a politician who had attracted widespread acclaim last year for his handling of the pandemic in New York. He won a special Emmy award for his daily televised briefings and published a self-adulatory book about his leadership during the crisis. He was eyeing a fourth term that would surpass his father, Mario Cuomo, who served three terms as New York governor.

But for all his public popularity, he was known for governing through fear, screaming and threatening lawmakers and aides alike, and regularly attacking other politicians, such as New York Mayor Bill de Blasio. Cuomo’s allies said his ruthless style allowed him to accomplish political goals, such as passing same-sex marriage and other liberal agenda items.

But he made few true allies, and many New York politicians felt schadenfreude at watching his troubles. Cuomo was viewed skeptically by many liberals in the city, but he was usually able to overcome any opposition from groups such as the Working Families Party.

After working on his father’s campaigns, the younger Cuomo served in the Department Housing and Urban Development under President Bill Clinton.

He first ran for New York governor in 2002, only to see his hopes dashed before the primary by a critical comment about then-Gov. George E. Pataki. He made a comeback in 2006, when he was elected New York attorney general, clearing the way for his 2010 election as governor.

His third term in office was set to conclude in 2022, and he was widely expected to seek a fourth, with no clear Democratic rival.

Divorced from Kerry Kennedy, daughter of Robert F. Kennedy, Cuomo has three adult daughters.

He addressed his daughters at the end of his remarks Tuesday.

“I want them to know from the bottom of my heart that I never did and I never would intentionally disrespect a woman or treat any woman differently than I would want them treated, and that is the God’s honest truth,” he said. “Your dad made mistakes, and he apologized and he learned from it. And that is what life is all about.”

Gup reported from Albany. Seung Min Kim and Scott Clement contributed to this report.
