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Opinion

## Cuomo is toast | Opinion

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By Star-Ledger Guest Columnist

Gov. Andrew Cuomo apologizes after sexual harassment al...



**By Carl Golden**

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is toast.

Any hope of winning a fourth term next year has vanished and finishing his current term is in jeopardy. Leading national and state Democrats have joined an ever-lengthening queue to throw him under the bus. And he is under investigation by the state Attorney General Letitia James whose aggressive, take-no-prisoners style bodes ill, indeed, for him.

His fall from grace began with the stunning revelation that his administration had deliberately lowballed the number of deaths of nursing home residents who died from COVID-19 out of fear the data would be used against him by political opponents.

In addressing the onset of the pandemic, Cuomo directed nursing homes to help free up

hospital beds by taking COVID-19 patients into their facilities, which lead to a soaring caseload among both patients and staff.

While he basked in the glow of media praise for his handling of the pandemic, fatalities mounted. It was only after an attorney general's finding that the administration's tally of deaths was about 40% lower than the accurate count that the administration fessed up to cooking the books to minimize the impact.

In the midst of efforts to control the damage from what appeared to most to be a coverup, two former staffers in the governor's office publicly accused Cuomo of sexual harassment and were soon joined by a third private citizen who told a similar tale.

Calls for his resignation quickly followed. Individuals who nursed grudges for ill-treatment inflicted by Cuomo or who suffered under his aggressive and bullying management style seized the opportunity to exact some level of payback.

As the storm clouds gathered and darkened, Cuomo apologized, admitted to personal embarrassment and insisted his actions were never intended to make anyone feel uncomfortable or upset.

His hugs and kisses, he said, were simply his way of greeting people. He meant no offense nor should anything more nefarious be read into it.

It was, he said, customary for his governor father to act in the same fashion.

He rejected demands for his resignation, pledged to cooperate fully with the attorney general's inquiry and urged New Yorkers to await the outcome of that inquiry before passing judgment on him.

While he admitted that behaviors and sensitivities had changed over the years, it is difficult to accept that he was unaware of those changes, given the intense media focus on the MeToo movement and the prominent persons caught up in it.

Cuomo came to political maturity during a time when putting an arm around a woman, kissing her cheek and even administering a pat on the fanny were considered normal and customary in both government and campaign settings.

Commenting aloud on a woman's appearance and discussing her physical bearing was as commonplace as chatting about the weather.

There was little or no thought given to the discomfort, distress and pain it caused and — if it did occur to someone — was shrugged off as the way of life in the workplace.

It was, and unfortunately still is, a culture in which such behavior is tolerated, excused and laughed off. Too often, the female subjected to such treatment is blamed for over-sensitivity and of being incapable of understanding that in a high pressure environment like political

and of being incapable of understanding that in a high-pressure environment like political campaigns or government, tempers fray and erupt in streams of inappropriate personal attacks.

Thankfully, the environment is changing, awareness raised and sensitivity heightened. Zero tolerance is the goal, along with swift punishment for anyone guilty of misconduct of any sort — verbal or physical.

Cuomo confronts an extremely difficult 20 months remaining in his term.

There still has been no credible explanation for the deliberate undercount of nursing home deaths due to COVID-19 and the political explanation — avoiding a damaging partisan blowback — is apt to stick to his everlasting detriment and shame.

Should there be additional instances of his inappropriate behavior toward women, the pressure will intensify on him to step down and spare the Democratic Party the daily deluge of increasingly damaging media accounts. There will come a point at which public contrition and apologies no longer suffice.

Even if there are no further developments, Cuomo's viability as a candidate for a fourth term in the governor's office has vanished. His future is dim and his legacy forever tarnished.

He is toast.

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