



## Life In Brief

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**Current Title:** Governor

**Political Party:** Democratic Party

**Born:** December 6, 1957

**Birthplace:** Queens, NY

**Religion:** Catholic

**Ethnicity:** White/Caucasian

**Marital Status:** Single

**Education:**

- Fordham University (NY), BA, 1979
- Albany Law School of Union University (NY), JD, 1982

**Family:**

3 children (twins, 3 from previous marriage)

**Work History:**

- Of Counsel, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson, NYC
- Assistant District Attorney, Manhattan
- Assistant Secretary of Community Planning and Development, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1993-1996
- Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1996-2001

## Quick Summary

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The progeny of a famous New York Governor currently in his third term in the same role; pragmatic fighter who served as Housing and Urban Development Secretary and NY's AG

- Political muscle who helped his father become governor upon graduating law school in 1982
- Political face of the powerful Cuomo family
- Founded HELP, a national model for sheltering and transitioning the homeless to social programs; instituted similar policies as chair of NYC's homelessness commission
- Known for reforming HUD's image and driving efficiency under Clinton
- Cracked down on corruption and fraud as AG, though criticized as Governor for association with politicians convicted of bribery
- Skilled maneuvering led to landmark initiatives on gun control, social issues, and infrastructure that engendered easy reelections
- Key figure in the early COVID-19 crisis in 2020, instituting lockdowns early; As New York has diminished its caseload, Cuomo has become a major critic of the administration's response
- Cuomo condemned violence during protests following the murder of George Floyd, and criticized NYC officials in their handling of the protests

## Approach and Motivations

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**Savvy unifier seeking to bolster his prestige by constructing transactional relationships**

- Builds his reputation through compromise and incrementalism; incorporates ideas of upstate GOP while appeasing downstate progressives
- Reunified his party by ending the Independent Democratic Conference in 2018, a group he had supported that upheld GOP Senate control

**Lone wolf who grasps the value of a low profile**

- Echoes tenets embraced by his father Mario; rarely spends time away from New York and



brushes off presidential aspirations, believing these actions would make it tougher to govern

- Notorious for his media reticence, preferring to write op-eds and minimize public interactions

- Created a provision for judges and others to bar gun sales to anyone deemed an immediate risk

**Taxes: *Promotes tax policies that attract business and help the middle class***

- Cut taxes for the middle class and enacted a 2% property tax during his first term while turning a \$10B deficit into a \$6B surplus
- Launched the “New York Open for Business” PR initiative to show the state’s friendliness to enterprise through measures like reduced taxes
- Supported tax incentives for Amazon’s HQ2
- Wary that raising taxes on NY’s wealthy could backfire, leading to relocation and lost revenue

## Policy Position and Areas of Focus

**Makes considerable liberal strides on important issues in his state, notably on housing and guns**

**Housing: *Proponent of government programs that help the homeless and less privileged access affordable living***

- Adopted policies as HUD Secretary that made it easier for poorer Americans to obtain loans for home ownership; helped increase loans from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac by forbidding the creation of reporting requirements for them
- Created new rental assistance subsidies and cracked down on housing discrimination
- At HELP, pushed initiatives that moved away from temporary shelters to focus on specialized social service programs like education, job training, drug treatment and other assistance
- Created an independent monitor in 2018 to address repairs to NYC’s public housing

**Gun Control: *Proponent of safety measures that toughen production and purchase restrictions***

- In 2000, negotiated with Smith & Wesson to require them to change company practices to keep guns away from children and criminals
- Pushed through legislation in the wake of the Newtown shooting that narrowed the definition of assault rifles and banned large magazines

## Core Communities

**Old ties to political dynasties and more recent ties to New York’s progressive labor movement**

**Dynamic Democrats: *Intricate links to important political power players of the liberal northeast***

- Cuomo Family: Son and colleague of Mario Cuomo, renowned New York Governor, son of activist Mathilda Cuomo, and brother to CNN anchorman Chris
- Clinton Family: Asked by Bill Clinton to serve on his transition team and in his cabinet; named the former President as a top mentor, and vigorously campaigned for Hillary Clinton
- Marriage to Kerry Kennedy, daughter of RFK, ended in animosity between the families
- Sturdy alliances with high-ranking Democrat friends Joe Biden and Rep. Hakeem Jefferies

**Important New Yorkers: *Ties to powerful voices***



- Strained working relationship with political foe NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio
- Robert Duffy, Cuomo’s first lieutenant governor runs the powerful Rochester Business Alliance
- Richard Sirota: wealthy investor who served as his campaign treasurer and longtime friend
- Appointed longtime staffer Benjamin Lawsky to a new financial services regulator position in an effort to outwit his rival, AG Eric Schneiderman
- Presided over old friend Billy Joel’s wedding

**Workers Organizations: Major allies include influential unions and worker groups**

- Deep support from SEIU since his time as Attorney General; heavy collaboration during the fight to raise New York’s minimum wage
- Endorsed by the Working Families Party in every election; commended by the AFL-CIO for taking executive action to protect union workers
- Receives campaign financing from diverse trade unions including hotel and motel workers, court reporters, carpenters, and Teamsters

**Political History**

- Campaign Manager, Mario Cuomo for NY Governor Campaign, 1982
- Policy Advisor, Office of Governor Mario Cuomo
- Founder, Housing Enterprise for the Less Privileged (HELP), 1986
- Director, NYC Homeless Commission, 1991
- Member, Clinton Transition Team, 1993
- Candidate, NY State Governor, 2002
- Attorney General, NY State, 2006-2010

**Relevant Financial Information**

**Notable high dollar contributions from New York lawyers and workers union groups**

**Biggest Industry Donors (Career)**

- Real Estate, \$19.2M
- Securities & Investment, \$10.7M
- Lawyers & Lobbyists, \$10,4M
- General Trade Unions, \$5.4M
- Insurance, \$2.5M
- General Contractors, \$2.4M
- TV & Movie Production/Distribution, \$2.2M

**Biggest Corporate Donors (Career)**

- Altice (Bethpage, NY), \$552,900
- Kassawitz et al (NY, NY), \$255,000
- Access Industries (NY, NY), \$245,400
- Brown & Weintraub (NY, NY), \$236,165
- RFR Realty (NY, NY), \$223,572

**Biggest Individual Donors (Career)**

- Ira Doron Riklis, President of Sutherland Capital Management and C.O.P.S, \$242,800
- George Sommers, Attorney, \$200,040
- Andrew Davidoff, General Partner at Emmes and Co., \$199,300
- Vincent Tese, former Executive Chairman of Bond Street Holdings, \$195,600
- Matilda Cuomo, former First Lady of New York and founder of Mentoring USA, \$195,400

**Political Donations**

- Cornelius Tallon, \$500, 2002

**Miscellaneous**





- In 2010, he became the first governor ever to release a full unredacted financial disclosure statement
- Earned more than one million a year as a real estate adviser to Andrew Farkas in 2004 and 2005
- Other influential benefactors include hedge fund manager Paul Tudor Jones, tech entrepreneur Tim Gill, and billionaire Ken Langone who ran “Republicans for Cuomo”

- Social Media Habits: Writes tweets in short, pithy format; frequently uploads speaking videos on YouTube under NYGovCuomo

**Speaking: *Rousing speaker at public events and universities***

- Favorite Subjects: Education, fracking, climate change, subways, abortion, housing, natural disasters
- Preferred Audience: Public policy institutes like the Harvard Kennedy School; New York colleges like Syracuse; political events like the Democratic National Convention; organizations he is a member of like the Democratic Governors Association

## Publications, Media and Speaking

**Adept orator who prefers to make statements and issue publications rather than converse with media**

**Publications: *Prolific op-ed writer has also penned two books***

- Preferred Outlets: New York Times, New York Daily News, CNN, BuzzFeed, The Washington Post, Newsday
- Favorite Subjects: COVID-19, gun control, prisons, Democratic Party, vaping, sexual assault, LGBTQ issues, taxes, Amazon, minimum wage, elections
- Books: *All Things Possible: Setbacks and Success in Politics and Life (2014)* *Crossroads: The Future of American Politics (2003)*

**Media: *Shies away from speaking with media both on television and in interviews***

- Preferred Outlets: National cable news like CNN, NBC, and CBS; widely-read magazines like The Atlantic; New York radio stations like WYNC
- Favorite Subjects: Taxes, President Trump, Cuomo family, elections, NRA, infrastructure, COVID-19

## Professional Affiliations

- Founder, Housing Enterprise for the Less Privileged (HELP), 1986-1990
- Chair, New York City Homeless Commission, 1990-1993

## Awards

- "Innovations in American Government Award" from the Ford Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University on three different occasions

## Family and Personal Background

**Early love for and involvement in public service; from prominent family with deep ties to state**

- Born in Queens and grew up the second of five children in a middle-class neighborhood of Hollis
- Fascinated by political issues from a young age and was largely credited with helping his father



win a come-from-behind victory for the governorship

- Continued to advise Mario Cuomo on policy, working for \$1 a year
- His father, who he mentions in nearly every speech, died on the night of his second inauguration in 2015
- Wrote a book centered on political unity and worked in real estate for billionaire tycoon Andrew Farkas
- Frequently jabs with his brother Chris, whom he has called his “best friend,” on air about who is mom’s favorite and curfews
- Often noted as a presidential aspirant but usually pivots to talking about his current role
- Lives alone in his Albany mansion and is frequently seen walking his dog “Captain”
- Dated author and chef Sandra Lee from 2005 to 2019, whom some referred to as the “de facto First Lady of New York”

Cuomo and his supporters after he had recently established the panel to investigate corruption

- The New York Times found that Cuomo’s aides, led by Lawrence Schwartz, pressured the commission and “deeply compromised the panel’s work” with politically motivated interference
- Later, Joe Percoco, a top Cuomo aide since his days at HUD and family friend, was convicted on bribery charges in 2016 along with Alain Kaloyeros
- Subsequently, Cuomo has been scrutinized by liberal critics and NY Mag as perceiving himself to be above the democratic process

## Hobbies

- Avid car and motorcycle enthusiast; fixed automobiles from an early age and rides his motorcycle during public events
- Often seen driving his Pontiac GTO with the license plate number “1”

## Criticisms and Controversies

### Criticized for proximity to ethics violations

### Ethics investigation and conviction of close associates

- Sought to thwart a 2014 independent panel investigation – the Moreland Commission – involving alleged campaign finance violations by