



## 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 Summary:

- 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
- Of Counsel, Wilkie, Farr and Gallagher
- Attorney General, NY State, 2006-2010
- Governor of NY, 2011-present

## 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

## **Policy Position and Areas of Focus**

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**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
- 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

## **Core Communities**

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**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”
- 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

## Contact Information

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## 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

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