



Or

STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
SUBPOENA AD TESTIFICANDUM
THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
GREETINGS

TO: Larry Schwartz
c/o Guy Petrillo
Petrillo Klein & Boxer LLP
655 Third Ave.
22nd Floor
New York, NY 10017

YOU ARE HEREBY COMMANDED, pursuant to Executive Law § 63(8) and New York Civil Practice Law and Rules § 2302(a), to appear and attend before the Special Deputies to the First Deputy Attorney General, on June 17, 2021 at 9:00 AM, or any agreed upon adjourned date or time, at One Liberty Plaza, 38th Floor, New York, New York 10006 to testify in connection with an investigation into allegations of and circumstances surrounding sexual harassment claims made against Governor Cuomo, or any matter that the Attorney General deems pertinent thereto.

TAKE NOTICE that the Attorney General deems the testimony commanded by this Subpoena to be relevant and material to an investigation and inquiry undertaken in the public interest.


TAKE NOTICE that the examination may be recorded by stenographic, videographic and/or audio means.




TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that Your disobedience of this Subpoena, by failing to appear and attend and testify on the date, time and place stated above or on any agreed upon adjourned date or time, **may subject You to penalties and other lawful punishment** under Executive Law § 63(8), New York Civil Practice Law and Rules § 2308 and/or other statutes.

EXHIBIT



1

WITNESS, The Honorable Letitia James, Attorney General of the State of New York,
this 11th day of June, 2021.

By: 

Joon H. Kim
Jennifer Kennedy Park
Abena Mainoo
Special Deputies to the
First Deputy Attorney General
@ag.ny.gov
ag.ny.gov
@ag.ny.gov

By: /s/ Anne L. Clark

Anne L. Clark
Yannick Grant
Special Deputies to the
First Deputy Attorney General
@ag.ny.gov
ag.ny.gov



STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

SUBPOENA DUCES TECUM
THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
GREETINGS

TO: Larry Schwartz
Executive Chamber
Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

YOU ARE HEREBY COMMANDED, under Executive Law § 63(8) and N.Y. Civil Practice Law and Rule § 2302(a), and/or other statutes, to deliver and turn over to the Special Deputies to the First Deputy Attorney General, on **the 30th day of March, 2021, at 9:30 a.m.**, or any agreed upon adjourned date or time, at One Liberty Plaza, 38th Floor, New York, New York 10006, all documents and information requested in the attached Schedule in accordance with the instructions and definitions contained therein.

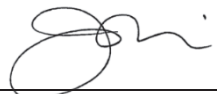
TAKE NOTICE that the Attorney General deems the documents and information commanded by this Subpoena to be relevant and material to an investigation and inquiry undertaken in the public interest.




TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that Your disobedience of this Subpoena, by failing to deliver the documents and information requested in the attached Schedule on the date, time and place stated above or on any agreed upon adjourned date or time, **may subject You to penalties and other lawful punishment** under § 2308 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rule and other statutes.

EXHIBIT



2

WITNESS, The Honorable Letitia James, Attorney General of the State of New York, this 16th day of March, 2021.

By: 

Joon H. Kim
Jennifer Kennedy Park
Abena Mainoo
Special Deputies to the
First Deputy Attorney General
@ag.ny.gov
@ag.ny.gov
@ag.ny.gov

By: /s/ Anne L. Clark

Anne L. Clark
Yannick Grant
Special Deputies to the
First Deputy Attorney General
@ag.ny.gov
@ag.ny.gov

SCHEDULE

A. General Definitions and Rules of Construction

1. “All” means each and every.
2. “Any” means any and all.
3. “And” and “or” shall be construed either disjunctively or conjunctively as necessary to bring within the scope of the Subpoena all information or Documents that might otherwise be construed to be outside of its scope.
4. “Communication” means any conversation, discussion, letter, email, text message, instant message, memorandum, meeting, note or other transmittal of information or message, whether transmitted in writing, orally, electronically or by any other means, and shall include any Document that abstracts, digests, transcribes, records or reflects any of the foregoing.
5. “Concerning” means, directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, relating to, referring to, describing, evidencing or constituting.
6. “Custodian” means any Person or Entity that, as of the date of this Subpoena, maintained, possessed, or otherwise kept or controlled such Document.
7. “Document” is used herein in the broadest sense of the term and means all records and other tangible media of expression of whatever nature however and wherever created, produced or stored (manually, mechanically, electronically or otherwise), including without limitation all versions whether draft or final, all annotated or nonconforming or other copies, electronic mail (“email”), instant messages, text messages, Blackberry or other wireless device messages, voicemail, calendars, date books, appointment books, diaries, books, papers, files, notes, confirmations, accounts statements, correspondence, memoranda, reports, records, journals, registers, analyses, code (*e.g.*, C/C++/C#, SQL, JavaScript), algorithms, code repositories (*e.g.*, GitHub), commit messages, audit logs, data or databases (*e.g.*, Oracle, postgres or other SQL or non-SQL systems), plans, manuals, policies, telegrams, faxes, telexes, wires, telephone logs, telephone messages, message slips, minutes, notes or records or transcriptions of conversations or Communications or meetings, tape recordings, videotapes, disks, and other electronic media, microfilm, microfiche, storage devices, press releases, contracts, agreements, notices and summaries. Any non-identical version of a Document constitutes a separate Document within this definition, including without limitation drafts or copies bearing any notation, edit, comment, marginalia, underscoring, highlighting, marking, commit messages, or any other alteration of any kind resulting in any difference between two or more otherwise identical Documents. In the case of Documents bearing any notation or other marking made by highlighting ink, the term Document means the original version bearing the highlighting ink, which original must be produced as opposed to any copy

thereof.

8. “Entity” means without limitation any corporation, company, limited liability company or corporation, partnership, limited partnership, association, or other firm or similar body, or any unit, division, agency, department, or similar subdivision thereof.
9. “Identify” or “Identity,” as applied to any Document means the provision in writing of information sufficiently particular to enable the Attorney General to request the Document’s production through subpoena or otherwise, including but not limited to: (a) Document type (letter, memo, etc.); (b) Document subject matter; (c) Document date; and (d) Document author(s), addressee(s) and recipient(s). In lieu of identifying a Document, the Attorney General will accept production of the Document, together with designation of the Document’s Custodian, and identification of each Person You believe to have received a copy of the Document.
10. “Identify” or “Identity,” as applied to any Entity, means the provision in writing of such Entity’s legal name, any d/b/a, former, or other names, any parent, subsidiary, officers, employees, or agents thereof, and any address(es) and any telephone number(s) thereof.
11. “Identify” or “Identity,” as applied to any natural person, means and includes the provision in writing of the natural person’s name, title(s), position(s), any aliases, place(s) of employment, telephone number(s), email address(es), mailing addresses and physical address(es).
12. “Person” means any natural person, or any Entity.
13. “Sent” or “received” as used herein means, in addition to their usual meanings, the transmittal or reception of a Document by physical, electronic or other delivery, whether by direct or indirect means.
14. “Subpoena” means this subpoena and any schedules or attachments thereto.
15. The use of the singular form of any word used herein shall include the plural and vice versa. The use of any tense of any verb includes all other tenses of the verb.

B. Particular Definitions

1. “Complainant” means Charlotte Bennett, Lindsey Boylan, Karen Hinton, Ana Liss, Anna Ruch, and any other individual who has made any Complaints known to You, any other member of the Executive Chamber, or the public. For the avoidance of doubt, to the extent additional allegations come to light following the issuance of this Subpoena, individuals who make such allegations should be included in the definition of “Complainant.”

2. “Complaint” means any and all complaints, allegations, comments, accusations, or other statements of workplace misconduct, sexual harassment, sex- or gender-based misconduct, or other behavior or comments of a sexual, abusive or otherwise inappropriate or uncomfortable nature, whether made formally or informally.
3. “County Executive” means any chief executive of New York, and all other officials, employees, personnel, and agents of the counties in the State.
4. “Executive Chamber” means the Executive Chamber of the State of New York, including but not limited to Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, and all other officers, directors, supervisors, personnel, employees, secretaries, interns, fellows, agents, contractors, consultants, representatives, and attorneys of the Executive Chamber, or any other Persons associated with or acting on behalf of the foregoing, or acting on behalf of any predecessors, successors, or affiliates of the foregoing at any point during the relevant time.
5. “Governor” means the New York State Governor Andrew M. Cuomo.
6. “Respondent,” “You,” or “Your” means Lawrence (Larry) Schwartz, either in an official or individual capacity.
7. “State” or “New York” means the State of New York.
8. “State Legislature” means the New York State Assembly, including but not limited to its members, employees, personnel, and agents.

C. Instructions

1. Preservation of Relevant Documents and Information; Spoliation. You are reminded of Your obligations under law to preserve Documents and information relevant or potentially relevant to this Subpoena from destruction or loss, and of the consequences of, and penalties available for, spoliation of evidence. No agreement, written or otherwise, purporting to modify, limit or otherwise vary the terms of this Subpoena, shall be construed in any way to narrow, qualify, eliminate or otherwise diminish Your aforementioned preservation obligations. Nor shall You act, in reliance upon any such agreement or otherwise, in any manner inconsistent with Your preservation obligations under law. No agreement purporting to modify, limit or otherwise vary Your preservation obligations under law shall be construed as in any way narrowing, qualifying, eliminating or otherwise diminishing such aforementioned preservation obligations, nor shall You act in reliance upon any such agreement, unless a Special Deputy to the First Deputy Attorney General confirms or acknowledges such agreement in writing, or makes such agreement a matter of record in open court.

2. Possession, Custody, and Control. The Subpoena calls for all responsive Documents or information in Your possession, custody or control. This includes, without limitation, Documents or information possessed or held by You on any devices, whether personally owned or supplied to you by your employer or held by Your employees, agents, representatives, or consultants or Persons from whom You could request Documents or information. If Documents or information responsive to a request in this Subpoena are in Your control, but not in Your possession or custody, You shall promptly Identify the Person with possession or custody of the Person's obligation to preserve such Documents and provide them to You for production.
3. Documents No Longer in Your Possession. If any Document requested herein was formerly in Your possession, custody or control but is no longer available, or no longer exists, You shall submit a statement in writing under oath that: (a) describes in detail the nature of such Document and its contents; (b) Identifies the Person(s) who prepared such Document and its contents; (c) Identifies all Persons who have seen or had possession of such Document; (d) specifies the date(s) on which such Document was prepared, transmitted or received; (e) specifies the date(s) on which such Document became unavailable; (f) specifies the reason why such Document is unavailable, including without limitation whether it was misplaced, lost, destroyed or transferred; and if such Document has been destroyed or transferred, the conditions of and reasons for such destruction or transfer and the Identity of the Person(s) requesting and performing such destruction or transfer; and (g) Identifies all Persons with knowledge of any portion of the contents of the Document.
4. No Documents Responsive to Subpoena Requests. If there are no Documents responsive to any particular Subpoena request, You shall so state in writing under oath in the Affidavit of Compliance attached hereto, identifying the paragraph number(s) of the Subpoena request concerned.
5. Format of Production. You shall produce Documents and information responsive to this Subpoena in the format requested by the Office of the New York State Attorney General, as set out in Attachments 1 and 2 or as otherwise agreed upon.
6. Databases. To the extent that any data responsive to the requests herein is maintained in an electronic repository of records, such as a detailed transcription report, such information should be produced by querying the database for responsive information and generating a report or a reasonably usable and exportable electronic file (for example, *.csv and/or *.xls formats) for review. If it is not possible to export data in this format, You must make the database available to the undersigned for meaningful inspection and review of the information.
7. Existing Organization of Documents to be Preserved. Regardless of whether a production is in electronic or paper format, each Document shall be produced in the same form, sequence, organization or other order or layout in which it was

maintained before production, including but not limited to production of any Document or other material indicating filing or other organization. Such production shall include without limitation any file folder, file jacket, cover or similar organizational material, as well as any folder bearing any title or legend that contains no Document. Likewise, all Documents that are physically attached to each other in Your files shall remain so attached in any production; or if such production is electronic, shall be accompanied by notation or information sufficient to indicate clearly such physical attachment.

8. Manner of Compliance – Custodians/Search Terms/Technology-Assisted Review. Prior consultation with the Special Deputies to the First Deputy Attorney General is required concerning selection of custodians for document searches (whether electronic or otherwise) or for use of search term filters, predictive coding or other forms of technology-assisted review. The Office of the Attorney General reserves the right to approve, disapprove, modify or supplement any proposed list of custodians, search terms, and/or review methodology. The selection or use of custodians, search term filters, and/or technology-assisted review in no way relieves You of Your obligation to fully respond to these requests for Documents or information.
9. Document Numbering. All Documents responsive to this Subpoena, regardless of whether produced or withheld on ground of privilege or other legal doctrine, and regardless of whether production is in electronic or paper format, shall be numbered in the lower right corner of each page of such Document, without disrupting or altering the form, sequence, organization or other order or layout in which such Documents were maintained before production. Such number shall comprise a prefix containing the producing Person's name or an abbreviation thereof, followed by a unique, sequential, identifying document control number.
10. Privilege Placeholders. For each Document withheld from production on ground of privilege or other legal doctrine, regardless of whether a production is electronic or in hard copy, You shall insert one or more placeholder page(s) in the production bearing the same document control number(s) borne by the Document withheld, in the sequential place(s) originally occupied by the Document before it was removed from the production.
11. Privilege. If You withhold or redact any Document responsive to this Subpoena on ground of any privilege or other legal doctrine, You shall submit with the Documents produced a statement in writing under oath, stating: (a) the document control number(s) of the Document withheld or redacted; (b) the type of Document; (c) the date of the Document; (d) the author(s) and recipient(s) of the Document; (e) the general subject matter of the Document; and (f) the legal ground for withholding or redacting the Document. If the legal ground for withholding or redacting the Document is attorney-client privilege, You shall indicate the name of the attorney(s) whose legal advice is sought or provided in the Document.

12. Your Production Instructions to Be Produced. You shall produce a copy of all written or otherwise recorded instructions prepared by You concerning the steps taken to respond to this Subpoena. For any unrecorded instructions given, You shall provide a written statement under oath from the Person(s) who gave such instructions that details the specific content of the instructions and any Person(s) to whom the instructions were given.
13. Cover Letter, Index, and Identifying Information. Accompanying any production(s) made pursuant to this Subpoena, You shall include a cover letter that shall at a minimum provide an index containing the following: (a) a description of the type and content of each Document produced therewith; (b) the paragraph number(s) of the Subpoena request(s) to which each such Document is responsive; (c) the Identity of the Custodian(s) of each such Document; and (d) the document control number(s) of each such Document. As further set forth in Attachment 2, information must also be included in the metadata and load files of each production concerning the identity of each Document's custodian, as well as information identifying the particular Document requests and/or information to which each document is responsive.
14. Affidavit of Compliance. A copy of the Affidavit of Compliance provided herewith shall be completed and executed by all natural persons supervising or participating in compliance with this Subpoena, and You shall submit such executed Affidavit(s) of Compliance with Your response to this Subpoena.
15. Identification of Persons Preparing Production. In a schedule attached to the Affidavit of Compliance provided herewith, You shall Identify the natural person(s) who prepared or assembled any productions or responses to this Subpoena. You shall further Identify the natural person(s) under whose personal supervision the preparation and assembly of productions and responses to this Subpoena occurred. You shall further Identify all other natural person(s) able competently to testify: (a) that such productions and responses are complete and correct to the best of such person's knowledge and belief; and (b) that any Documents produced are authentic, genuine and what they purport to be.
16. Continuing Obligation to Produce. This Subpoena imposes a continuing obligation to produce the Documents and information requested. Documents located or created, and information learned, acquired or created, at any time after Your response is due shall be promptly produced at the place specified in this Subpoena.
17. No Oral Modifications. No agreement purporting to modify, limit or otherwise vary this Subpoena shall be valid or binding, and You shall not act in reliance upon any such agreement, unless a Special Deputy to the First Deputy Attorney General confirms or acknowledges such agreement in writing, or makes such agreement a matter of record in open court.

18. Time Period. Unless otherwise specified, the time period covered by this Subpoena shall be from January 1, 2013 forward.

D. Documents to be Produced

1. Any and all Documents concerning Communications with County Executives and members of the State Legislature about Complaints concerning the Governor, including their positions or views about whether the Governor should resign.
2. Any and all Documents concerning any Complaints concerning the Governor, including investigations thereof.
3. Any and all Communications with or about a Complainant.
4. Any and all Documents concerning Communications with the media and public statements about the Complainants or Complaints concerning the Governor.
5. Any and all Documents concerning the deletion or retention of Communications related to Your work for the Governor.
6. Documents sufficient to identify Your employment history at the Executive Chamber or otherwise in service of the Governor, including but not limited to the time period of your employment, Your title(s), Your position(s), Your responsibilities, and Your direct supervisor(s).
7. A list of all Your electronic devices used for any Communication related to the Executive Chamber or the Governor, whether personally owned or supplied to you by the Executive Chamber or the State.
8. A list of all Your email addresses, phone numbers, or user IDs used for any Communication related to the Executive Chamber or the Governor.

ATTACHMENT 1

Electronic Document Production Specifications

Unless otherwise specified and agreed to by the Office of Attorney General, all responsive documents must be produced in LexisNexis® Concordance® format in accordance with the following instructions. Any questions regarding electronic document production should be directed to the Special Deputy to the First Deputy Attorney General whose email address appears on the subpoena.

1. Concordance Production Components. A Concordance production consists of the following component files, which must be produced in accordance with the specifications set forth below in Section 6.
 - a. ***Metadata Load File.*** A delimited text file that lists in columnar format the required metadata for each produced document.
 - b. ***Extracted or OCR Text Files.*** Document-level extracted text for each produced document or document-level optical character recognition (“OCR”) text where extracted text is not available.
 - c. ***Single-Page Image Files.*** Individual petrified page images of the produced documents in tagged image format (“TIF”), with page-level Bates number endorsements.
 - d. ***Opticon Load File.*** A delimited text file that lists the single-page TIF files for each produced document and defines (i) the relative location of the TIF files on the production media and (ii) each document break.
 - e. ***Native Files.*** Native format versions of non-printable or non-print friendly produced documents.
2. Production Folder Structure. The production must be organized according to the following standard folder structure:
 - data\ (contains production load files)
 - images\ (contains single-page TIF files, with subfolder organization)
 \0001, \0002, \0003...
 - native_files\ (contains native files, with subfolder organization)
 \0001, \0002, \0003...
 - text\ (contains text files, with subfolder organization)
 \0001, \0002, \0003...
2. De-Duplication. You must perform global de-duplication of stand-alone documents and email families against any prior productions pursuant to this or previously related subpoenas.

3. Paper or Scanned Documents. Documents that exist only in paper format must be scanned to single-page TIF files and OCR'd. The resulting electronic files should be pursued in Concordance format pursuant to these instructions. You must contact the Special Deputy to the First Deputy Attorney General whose email address appears on the subpoena to discuss (i) any documents that cannot be scanned, and (ii) how information for scanned documents should be represented in the metadata load file.
4. Structured Data. Before producing structured data, including but not limited to relational databases, transactional data, and xml pages, you must first speak to the Special Deputy to the First Deputy Attorney General whose email address appears on the subpoena. Structured data is data that has a defined length and format and includes, but is not limited to, relational databases, graphical databases, JSON files, or xml/html pages.
 - a. Relational Databases
 1. Database tables should be provided in CSV or other delimited machine-readable, non-proprietary format, with each table in a separate data file. The preferred delimiter is a vertical bar "|". If after speaking with the Special Deputy to the First Deputy Attorney General and it is determined that the data cannot be exported from a proprietary database, then the data can be produced in the proprietary format so long as the Office of the Attorney General is given sufficient access to that data.
 2. Each database must have an accompanying Data Dictionary.
 3. Dates and numbers must be clearly and consistently formatted and, where relevant, units of measure should be explained in the Data Dictionary.
 4. Records must contain clear, unique identifiers, and the Data Dictionary must include explanations of how the files and records relate to one another.
 5. Each data file must also have an accompanying summary file that provides total row counts for the entire dataset and total row counts.
 - b. Compression
 1. If Documents are provided in a compressed archive, only standard lossless compression methods (e.g., gzip, bzip2, and ZIP) shall be used. Media files should be provided in their original file format, with metadata preserved and no additional lossy encoding applied.

5. Media and Encryption. All documents must be produced on CD, DVD, or hard-drive media. After consultation with the Special Deputy to the First Deputy Attorney General, Documents may also be produced over a secure file transfer protocol (FTP) or a pre-approved cloud-based platform (e.g., Amazon Web Services S3 bucket). All production media must be protected with a strong, randomly generated password containing at least 16 alphanumeric characters and encrypted using Advanced Encryption Standard with 256-bit key length (AES-256). Passwords for electronic documents, files, compressed archives and encrypted media must be provided separately from the media.

6. Production File Requirements.
 - a. **Metadata Load File**
 - Required file format:
 - ASCII or UTF-8
 - Windows formatted CR + LF end of line characters, including full CR + LF on last record in file.
 - .dat file extension
 - Field delimiter: (ASCII decimal character 20)
 - Text Qualifier: þ (ASCII decimal character 254). Date and pure numeric value fields do not require qualifiers.
 - Multiple value field delimiter: ; (ASCII decimal character 59)
 - The first line of the metadata load file must list all included fields. All required fields are listed in Attachment 2.
 - Fields with no values must be represented by empty columns maintaining delimiters and qualifiers.
 - **Note:** All documents must have page-level Bates numbering (except documents produced only in native format, which must be assigned a document-level Bates number). The metadata load file must list the beginning and ending Bates numbers (BEGDOC and ENDDOC) for each document. For document families, including but not limited to emails and attachments, compound documents, and uncompressed file containers, the metadata load file must also list the Bates range of the entire document family (ATTACHRANGE), beginning with the first Bates number (BEGDOC) of the “parent” document and ending with the last Bates number (ENDDOC) assigned to the last “child” in the document family.
 - Date and Time metadata must be provided in separate columns.
 - Accepted date formats:
 - mm/dd/yyyy
 - yyyy/mm/dd
 - yyyymmdd

- Accepted time formats:
 - hh:mm:ss (if not in 24-hour format, you must indicate am/pm)
 - hh:mm:ss:mmm
- b. ***Extracted or OCR Text Files***
- You must produce individual document-level text files containing the full extracted text for each produced document.
 - When extracted text is not available (for instance, for image-only documents) you must provide individual document-level text files containing the document’s full OCR text.
 - The filename for each text file must match the document’s beginning Bates number (BEGDOC) listed in the metadata load file.
 - Text files must be divided into subfolders containing no more than 500 to 1000 files.
- c. ***Single-Page Image Files (Petrieved Page Images)***
- Where possible, all produced documents must be converted into single-page tagged image format (“TIF”) files. See Section 7.E below for instructions on producing native versions of documents you are unable to convert.
 - Image documents that exist only in non-TIF formats must be converted into TIF files. The original image format must be produced as a native file as described in Section 7.E below.
 - For documents produced only in native format, you must provide a TIF placeholder that states “Document produced only in native format.”
 - Each single-page TIF file must be endorsed with a unique Bates number.
 - The filename for each single-page TIF file must match the unique page-level Bates number (or document-level Bates number for documents produced only in native format).
 - Required image file format:
 - CCITT Group 4 compression
 - 2-Bit black and white
 - 300 dpi
 - Either .tif or .tiff file extension.
 - TIF files must be divided into subfolders containing no more than 500 to 1000 files. Where possible documents should not span multiple subfolders.
- d. ***Opticon Load File***
- Required file format:
 - ASCII
 - Windows formatted CR + LF end of line characters
 - Field delimiter: , (ASCII decimal character 44)
 - No Text Qualifier

- .opt file extension
- The comma-delimited Opticon load file must contain the following seven fields (as indicated below, values for certain fields may be left blank):
 - ALIAS or IMAGEKEY – the unique Bates number assigned to each page of the production.
 - VOLUME – this value is optional and may be left blank.
 - RELATIVE PATH – the filepath to each single-page image file on the production media.
 - DOCUMENT BREAK – defines the first page of a document. The only possible values for this field are “Y” or blank.
 - FOLDER BREAK – defines the first page of a folder. The only possible values for this field are “Y” or blank.
 - BOX BREAK – defines the first page of a box. The only possible values for this field are “Y” or blank.
 - PAGE COUNT – this value is optional and may be left blank.
- **Example:**
 ABC00001,,IMAGES\0001\ABC00001.tif,Y,,2
 ABC00002,,IMAGES\0001\ABC00002.tif,,,
 ABC00003,,IMAGES\0002\ABC00003.tif,Y,,1
 ABC00004,,IMAGES\0002\ABC00004.tif,Y,,1

e. ***Native Files***

- Non-printable or non-print friendly documents (including but not limited to spreadsheets, audio files, video files and documents for which color has significance to document fidelity) must be produced in their native format.
- The filename of each native file must match the document’s beginning Bates number (BEGDOC) in the metadata load file and retain the original file extension.
- For documents produced only in native format, you must assign a single document-level Bates number and provide an image file placeholder that states “Document produced only in native format.”
- The relative paths to all native files on the production media must be listed in the NATIVEFILE field of the metadata load file.
- Native files that are password-protected must be decrypted prior to conversion and produced in decrypted form. In cases where this cannot be achieved the document’s password must be listed in the metadata load file. The password should be placed in the COMMENTS field with the format Password: <PASSWORD>.
- You may be required to supply a software license for proprietary documents produced only in native format.

ATTACHMENT 2
Required Fields for Metadata Load File

FIELD NAME	FIELD DESCRIPTION	FIELD VALUE EXAMPLE¹
DOCID	Unique document reference (can be used for de-duplication).	ABC0001 or ###.#####.###
BEGDOC	Bates number assigned to the first page of the document.	ABC0001
ENDDOC	Bates number assigned to the last page of the document.	ABC0002
BEGATTACH	Bates number assigned to the first page of the parent document in a document family (<i>i.e.</i> , should be the same as BEGDOC of the parent document, or PARENTDOC).	ABC0001
ENDATTACH	Bates number assigned to the last page of the last child document in a family (<i>i.e.</i> , should be the same as ENDDOC of the last child document).	ABC0008
ATTACHRANGE	Bates range of entire document family.	ABC0001 - ABC0008
PARENTDOC	BEGDOC of parent document.	ABC0001
CHILDDOCS	List of BEGDOCs of all child documents, delimited by ";" when field has multiple values.	ABC0002; ABC0003; ABC0004...
DOCREQ	List of particular Requests for Documents to be Produced in the subpoena	1; 2; 3 . . .
INTERROG	List of particular Requests for Information or interrogatories in the subpoena	1; 2; 3 . . .
COMMENTS	Additional document comments, such as passwords for encrypted files.	

¹ Examples represent possible values and not required format unless the field format is specified in Attachment 1.

NATIVEFILE	Relative file path of the native file on the production media.	.\Native_File\Folder\...\BEGDOC.ext
SOURCE	For scanned paper records this should be a description of the physical location of the original paper record. For loose electronic files this should be the name of the file server or workstation where the files were gathered.	Company Name, Department Name, Location, Box Number...
CUSTODIAN	Owner of the document or file.	Firstname Lastname, Lastname, Firstname, User Name; Company Name, Department Name...
FROM	Sender of the email.	Firstname Lastname < FLastname @domain >
TO	All to: members or recipients, delimited by ";" when field has multiple values.	Firstname Lastname < FLastname @domain >; Firstname Lastname < FLastname @domain >; ...
CC	All cc: members, delimited by ";" when field has multiple values.	Firstname Lastname < FLastname @domain >; Firstname Lastname < FLastname @domain >; ...
BCC	All bcc: members, delimited by ";" when field has multiple values	Firstname Lastname < FLastname @domain >; Firstname Lastname < FLastname @domain >; ...
SUBJECT	Subject line of the email.	
DATERCVD	Date that an email was received.	mm/dd/yyyy, yyyy/mm/dd, or yyyymmdd
TIMERCVD	Time that an email was received.	hh:mm:ss AM/PM or hh:mm:ss
DATESENT	Date that an email was sent.	mm/dd/yyyy, yyyy/mm/dd, or yyyymmdd

TIMESENT	Time that an email was sent.	hh:mm:ss AM/PM or hh:mm:ss
CALBEGDATE	Date that a meeting begins.	mm/dd/yyyy, yyyy/mm/dd, or yyyymmdd
CALBEGTIME	Time that a meeting begins.	hh:mm:ss AM/PM or hh:mm:ss
CALENDDATE	Date that a meeting ends.	mm/dd/yyyy, yyyy/mm/dd, or yyyymmdd
CALENDTIME	Time that a meeting ends.	hh:mm:ss AM/PM or hh:mm:ss
CALENDAR DUR	Duration of a meeting in hours.	0.75, 1.5...
ATTACHMENTS	List of filenames of all attachments, delimited by ";" when field has multiple values.	AttachmentFileName.; AttachmentFileName.doc x; AttachmentFileName.pdf; ...
NUMATTACH	Number of attachments.	1, 2, 3, 4...
RECORDTYPE	General type of record.	IMAGE; LOOSE E- MAIL; E-MAIL; E-DOC; IMAGE ATTACHMENT; LOOSE E-MAIL ATTACHMENT; E- MAIL ATTACHMENT; E-DOC ATTACHMENT
FOLDERLOC	Original folder path of the produced document.	Drive:\Folder\...\...\
FILENAME	Original filename of the produced document.	Filename.ext
DOCEXT	Original file extension.	html, xls, pdf
DOCTYPE	Name of the program that created the produced document.	Adobe Acrobat, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Corel WordPerfect...
TITLE	Document title (if entered).	
AUTHOR	Name of the document author.	Firstname Lastname; Lastname, First Name; FLastname
REVISION	Number of revisions to a document.	18

DATECREATED	Date that a document was created.	mm/dd/yyyy, yyyy/mm/dd, or yyyymmdd
TIMECREATED	Time that a document was created.	hh:mm:ss AM/PM or hh:mm:ss
DATEMOD	Date that a document was last modified.	mm/dd/yyyy, yyyy/mm/dd, or yyyymmdd
TIMEMOD	Time that a document was last modified.	hh:mm:ss AM/PM or hh:mm:ss
FILESIZE	Original file size in bytes.	128, 512, 1024...
PGCOUNT	Number of pages per document.	1, 2, 10, 100...
IMPORTANCE	Email priority level if set.	Low, Normal, High
TIFFSTATUS	Generated by the Law Pre-discovery production tool (leave blank if inapplicable).	Y, C, E, W, N, P
DUPSTATUS	Generated by the Law Pre-discovery production tool (leave blank if inapplicable).	P
MD5HASH	MD5 hash value computed from native file (a/k/a file fingerprint).	BC1C5CA6C1945179FE E144F25F51087B
SHA1HASH	SHA1 hash value	B68F4F57223CA7DA358 4BAD7ECF111B8044F86 31
MSGINDEX	Email message ID	

AFFIDAVIT OF COMPLIANCE WITH SUBPOENA

State of _____ }
County of _____ }

I, _____, being duly sworn, state as follows:

1. I am employed by Respondent in the position of _____
_____;
2. Respondent's productions and responses to the Subpoena of the Attorney General of the State of New York, dated _____, 20_____ (the "Subpoena") were prepared and assembled under my personal supervision;
3. I made or caused to be made a diligent, complete and comprehensive search for all Documents and information requested by the Subpoena, in full accordance with the instructions and definitions set forth in the Subpoena;
4. Respondent's productions and responses to the Subpoena are complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief;
5. No Documents or information responsive to the Subpoena have been withheld from Respondent's production and response, other than responsive Documents or information withheld on the basis of a legal privilege or doctrine;
6. All responsive Documents or information withheld on the basis of a legal privilege or doctrine have been identified on a privilege log composed and produced in accordance with the instructions in the Subpoena;
7. The Documents contained in Respondent's productions and responses to the Subpoena are authentic, genuine and what they purport to be;
8. Attached is a true and accurate record of all persons who prepared and assembled any productions and responses to the Subpoena, all persons under whose personal supervision the preparation and assembly of productions and responses to the Subpoena occurred, and all persons able competently to testify: (a) that such productions and responses are complete and correct to the best of such person's knowledge and belief; and (b) that any Documents produced are authentic, genuine and what they purport to be; and

9. Attached is a true and accurate statement of those requests under the Subpoena as to which no responsive Documents were located in the course of the aforementioned search.

Signature of Affiant

Date

Printed Name of Affiant

* * *

Subscribed and sworn to before me this _____ day of _____, 20__.

_____, Notary Public

My commission expires: _____

CUOMO

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By Luis Ferré-Sadurní, J. David Goodman and Jesse McKinley

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By DAVE GOLDINER

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By Yancey Roy

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By Alfonso A. Castillo

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By Khadeeja Safdar, Deanna Paul and Jimmy Vielkind

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Brendan J. Lyons

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Rick Karlin

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Tom Precious

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by Editorial Board

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by Editorial Board

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By Advance Media NY Editorial Board

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By The Editorial Board

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By Katie Rogers

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By Noah Weiland

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By Linda Qiu

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By BRIAN NIEMIETZ

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By CHRIS SOMMERFELDT

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By TIM BALK

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By JOSEPH WILKINSON

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By MOLLY CRANE-NEWMAN

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By SHANT SHAHRIGIAN

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By CLAYTON GUSE

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By MIKE CATALINI

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By TED SHAFFREY

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By Victor Ocasio

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CUOMO

NYT: Cuomo Faces New Threat: Impeachment Inquiry Led by Democrats

By Luis Ferré-Sadurní, J. David Goodman and Jesse McKinley:
Mar 12, 2021

New York State lawmakers on Thursday opened an impeachment inquiry into Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, the surest sign yet that the governor was seeing his party turn against him amid growing scrutiny of a recent series of sexual harassment accusations.

After a three-hour emergency meeting, the State Assembly announced that it would give its judiciary committee broad jurisdiction to investigate allegations of misconduct against Mr.

Cuomo, including the sexual harassment claims and his administration's handling of virus-related deaths of nursing home patients. The decision set the stage for what could be the state's first impeachment effort in more than a century.

"The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious," the Assembly speaker, Carl E. Heastie, a Democrat, said in a statement, adding that the "impeachment investigation" will encompass interviewing witnesses, subpoenaing documents and evaluating evidence.

The announcement came on the same day that 59 Democrats in the State Legislature — about 40 percent of the party's members in the Assembly and the Senate — signed on to a statement demanding that Mr. Cuomo immediately resign in the wake of allegations from women, including current and former aides, who have accused him of harassment or inappropriate behavior.

Hours later, the police in Albany, N.Y., confirmed that they had been notified of one such accusation by the New York State Police, an incident at the Executive Mansion that was characterized as something that might have risen "to the level of a crime." The move followed the publication of an article in The Times Union of Albany on Wednesday that detailed claims leveled by an unidentified aide to the governor, who accused Mr. Cuomo of groping her at the governor's mansion, where he lives, late last year.

The rapid-fire developments underscored how Mr. Cuomo's once ironclad grip on Albany was fast weakening and left veteran lawmakers wondering aloud how he could continue to effectively govern.

"I think it's hard to be having serious conversations about moving the state in a progressive direction," said Liz Krueger, a Democratic state senator from Manhattan, "when you don't know when the next shoe is going to drop."

Mr. Heastie has signaled that he would not move forward with impeachment without a majority of his own Democratic conference, a common practice for almost all legislation in the 150-seat Assembly, where Democrats outnumber Republicans by more than two-to-one.

The convening of a special judicial committee could signal a shift in Mr. Heastie's thinking, but it could also give him more time to decide whether to proceed with impeachment. It also may give the governor some breathing room in a scandal that has overwhelmed his administration in recent weeks.

Mr. Cuomo, a third-term Democrat, has apologized for workplace remarks that he said may have hurt or offended women but has also denied ever touching anyone inappropriately and has urged New Yorkers to await the results of an inquiry by the state attorney general before passing judgment.

His office did not respond to a request for comment on Thursday.

The tumult from the governor's compounding scandals has significantly complicated negotiations over the state budget, due April 1, when the year's most important policy issues are decided.

Senate leaders have been in regular contact with leaders in the Assembly about their agenda for the next fiscal year. But the governor's voice, usually powerful, has been largely absent.

"There's a lack of leadership from the governor right now," said Senator Michael Gianaris, the deputy majority leader in the State Senate, compared with "the way there typically would be at this time."

The backlash seemed to cap Mr. Cuomo's turbulent relationship with Democrats in Albany, evidenced by his yearslong working relationship with Republicans and a group of rogue Democrats in the State Senate during his first and second terms. After a progressive wave swept Democrats into complete control of the Legislature in 2018, Mr. Cuomo banked left, signing a raft of reforms to election law, criminal justice rules and rent regulations. But the party's left wing has never truly trusted him.

His manner of governing — sometimes through heavy-handed tactics of intimidation and retaliation — has alienated potential allies at a moment of need, leaving him increasingly isolated as he navigates the most precarious moment of his tenure.

The fear he once instilled has all but receded, diminishing his perceived power as fellow Democrats scramble to determine his fate, with many now unafraid of openly undermining him.

“He no longer has the credibility to lead or to govern effectively,” said Assemblyman Jonathan G. Jacobson, a Democrat.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, a frequent Democratic foil of the governor, joined the calls for his resignation on Thursday, calling the most recent allegation “disgusting” and saying, “He can no longer serve as governor. It’s as simple as that.”

Ms. Krueger, a Democrat and chairwoman of the finance committee, said that the multiple investigations into Mr. Cuomo’s administration had made it difficult to know whom she could talk to at the governor’s office about the budget. She said, for instance, she would no longer speak to Mr. Cuomo or two of his top aides, Melissa DeRosa and Linda Lacewell, because of their involvement in obscuring the death toll in nursing homes.

“I would prefer to be dealing with the replacement governor that I think we need,” she said, referring to Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, who would succeed Mr. Cuomo if he resigned or was impeached — an extreme step, unseen in New York since 1913, and still lacking the needed support in the Assembly.

The unsettled terrain could benefit some, as the left flank of his party attempts to push through a bevy of progressive priorities he might have once resisted. Some proposals that Mr. Cuomo previously opposed — to increase taxes on the rich, for example — could gain new momentum in negotiations, according to some lobbyists and progressive activists.

Several of the legislators who signed the statement on Thursday morning calling on Mr. Cuomo to resign had not previously demanded that he step down.

All told, the statement included nearly half of the party's 43 members in the State Senate, and 40 of the 106 Democrats in the Assembly.

"In light of the governor's admission of inappropriate behavior and the findings of altered data on nursing home Covid-19 deaths," read the statement, "he has lost the confidence of the public and the State Legislature."

Some lawmakers said they thought that calling for his resignation would have no effect and that only the threat of impeachment would lead Mr. Cuomo to step aside. (Gov. Eliot L. Spitzer resigned in 2008 just as lawmakers began drafting articles for impeachment.)

"I do not believe this governor will resign unless impeachment is on the table," said Assemblyman Phillip G. Steck, a Democrat representing an area near Albany.

Mr. Heastie has stopped short of saying Mr. Cuomo should step aside, but he agreed on Thursday to call an emergency meeting for Assembly Democrats to discuss "potential paths forward" regarding Mr. Cuomo.

In the hourslong Zoom meeting, lawmakers discussed whether to commence impeachment proceedings — supported by a small but vocal number of Assembly members — or have a committee conduct an investigation into Mr. Cuomo before drafting possible articles of impeachment.

Mr. Heastie told his members he favored the latter option. Some lawmakers who supported immediately commencing impeachment proceedings against Mr. Cuomo described Mr. Heastie's proposal as a stall tactic designed to buy Mr. Cuomo more time.

As if to prove their point, Jay Jacobs, the chairman of the state Democratic Party and a staunch defender of Mr. Cuomo, released a statement before the closed-doors meeting had even concluded, saying he supported Mr. Heastie's decision.

"I agree with Speaker Heastie that now is the time for the Legislature to commence its own review of these matters as a part of its constitutional responsibilities," Mr. Jacobs said.

The meeting took place as Mr. Heastie confronted a rift in his ranks over how to reprimand the governor, with some members favoring more drastic maneuvers than others.

On Monday, for example, 23 women in the Assembly pushed back against calls for Mr. Cuomo's resignation, signing a letter in support of the investigation being overseen by Letitia James, the state attorney general. They cast it as a vote of confidence in the first Black woman to hold that position.

Democrats in the State Senate have moved more in tandem, with many calling on Mr. Cuomo to resign after the Senate majority leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, demanded his resignation on Sunday.

The new calls for the governor's resignation followed the damaging allegations from the female aide who accused Mr. Cuomo of groping her in his residence, an accusation the governor strenuously denied.

"I have never done anything like this," Mr. Cuomo said in a statement on Wednesday, in response to an article in The Times Union of Albany, which first reported the aide's claims. "The details of this report are gut-wrenching. I am not going to speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation given the ongoing review, but I am confident in the result of the attorney general's report."

A spokesman for the Albany police said that the woman's lawyer had been contacted, but no complaint had been filed, and a criminal investigation had not been launched.

Ms. James currently is overseeing an inquiry into the allegations, with investigators expected to issue a public report with their findings. The investigation will also look into accusations from at least two former Cuomo administration staffers, Lindsey Boylan and Charlotte Bennett, who have accused Mr. Cuomo of sexual harassment.

Most top national Democrats, including Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, as well as President Biden, have said they support waiting for the investigation to conclude before making a determination on Mr. Cuomo's fate.

Even so, the new allegations appeared to be shifting some state lawmakers' opinions. "I've had enough. Cuomo must be impeached," Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas, a recently elected left-wing lawmaker, wrote on Twitter late Wednesday in response to the latest allegation.

Charles D. Lavine, the chairman of the Assembly judiciary committee that will lead the investigation, said he had "an open mind, and I'm not biased in favor or against the governor."

"Investigations take on a life of their own, and there's no way to predict how long it will take," he said. "We'll be working as expeditiously as possible."

[Return to top](#)

NYT: Latest Accusation Against Cuomo Is Reported to Albany Police

**By Jesse McKinley and Luis Ferré-Sadurní:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY, N.Y. — Albany Police Department officials said on Thursday that they had been notified by the New York State Police and the governor's office about an alleged incident at the Executive Mansion involving Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and a female aide that may have risen "to the level of a crime."

Steve Smith, a spokesman for the Albany police, said that the department had not received a formal complaint from the woman, who has not been identified, but that it had reached out to a lawyer for her.

This does not mean, Mr. Smith said, that the department has opened a criminal investigation, but it has offered its services to the alleged victim, "as we would do with any other report or incident."

Albany police officials said they heard from the state police on Wednesday night after the publication of an article in The Times Union of Albany that detailed accusations leveled by an unidentified aide to the governor who accused Mr. Cuomo of groping her at the governor's mansion, where he lives, late last year.

William Duffy, a spokesman for the State Police, confirmed the contact with the Albany department, saying it was "to facilitate a contact with the executive chamber regarding the alleged incident."

Mr. Smith said that the deputy chief of police, Edward Donohue, who oversees the department's criminal investigation unit, then spoke to the governor's counsel.

The governor's acting counsel, Beth Garvey, confirmed the conversation, saying that she had initiated the call and reported the allegations, after a lawyer for the female aide told the governor's office that the aide did not want to file a report.

"As a matter of state policy, when allegations of physical contact are made, the agency informs the complainant that they should contact their local police department," Ms. Garvey said in a statement. "If they decline, the agency has an obligation to reach out themselves and inform the department of the allegation."

"In this case, the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney's information," Ms. Garvey added.

While the police department's actions are part of standard procedure, the situation underscored the potential criminal exposure Mr. Cuomo faces if the aide decided to pursue charges for unwanted touching.

The aide, who is younger than Mr. Cuomo, was summoned to the governor's private residence on the second floor to assist him with a technical issue when Mr. Cuomo reached under her blouse and began touching her, The Times Union said.

On Wednesday, the governor denied any wrongdoing.

"I have never done anything like this," Mr. Cuomo said in a statement, adding that the report was "gut-wrenching."

Mr. Cuomo, a third-term Democrat, said that he would not "speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation," citing an ongoing investigation overseen by the state attorney general, Letitia James.

"I am confident in the result of the attorney general's report," Mr. Cuomo said.

A female supervisor in the office became aware of the aide's allegation on March 3 when Mr. Cuomo, following multiple allegations of sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior, gave a televised apology in which he denied touching anyone inappropriately. The newspaper reported that the supervisor noticed the aide become emotional during the governor's address and that the aide subsequently told the supervisor about her encounter with the governor.

The aide had not filed a formal complaint with the governor's office, the newspaper reported, but the allegation was forwarded this week to Ms. James.

Return to top

WSJ: N.Y. Gov. Andrew Cuomo Will Face Impeachment Investigation by New York State Lawmakers

**By Jimmy Vielkind:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY, N. Y.—The New York State Assembly said on Thursday that it would start an impeachment investigation into Gov. Andrew Cuomo, vowing to look into allegations that he behaved inappropriately toward female aides and his administration’s handling of Covid-19 deaths in state nursing homes.

After lawmakers met privately Thursday afternoon, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, a Democrat from the Bronx, said the Democrat-dominated chamber’s judiciary committee would have authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence as members consider possible articles of impeachment.

Mr. Heastie said that “the reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious.” State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, a Democrat from Yonkers, has already called on Mr. Cuomo to resign.

Representatives for the Democratic governor didn’t respond to requests for comment on the Assembly’s latest moves.

No New York governor has been impeached in more than a century. After an inquiry, the chamber could consider articles of impeachment that, if approved, would temporarily suspend Mr. Cuomo’s authority. The governor would then be tried before members of the Democrat-controlled state Senate and judges of the state’s Court of Appeals, who could remove him from office upon a two-thirds vote.

State officials on Wednesday referred a complaint that Mr. Cuomo inappropriately touched a female aide at the Executive Mansion to the Albany Police Department.

The latest complaint, which involves a woman who still works on the governor’s Executive Chamber staff, stems from an alleged incident last year, people familiar with the matter said.

She is the fourth woman to accuse the third-term Democrat of inappropriate behavior or sexual harassment while they worked for him.

On Wednesday, a representative of the New York State Police and Beth Garvey, the governor's acting counsel, separately reached out to the Albany Police Department, state and police officials said. Ms. Garvey spoke with Deputy Chief Edward Donohue on Wednesday evening, they said.

Officer Steve Smith, a spokesman for the Albany Police Department, said that the department hadn't received a formal complaint from the woman and that there is no active investigation. Officer Smith said Albany Police had reached out to the woman's attorney to offer police services with respect to her allegation.

Ms. Garvey said Executive Chamber officials followed state policy by contacting the Albany Police Department about the allegation after they learned the woman hadn't filed her own complaint with police. "If they [alleged victims] decline, the agency has an obligation to reach out themselves and inform the department of the allegation," Ms. Garvey said.

A lawyer for the woman said she would speak through the legal process.

The woman became upset last week after watching Mr. Cuomo give a news conference addressing other allegations of inappropriate behavior toward female aides, people familiar with the matter said. The woman then told a colleague what happened, and the colleague then alerted members of Mr. Cuomo's senior staff, the people said.

Mr. Cuomo's aides referred the matter this week to independent investigators overseen by Attorney General Letitia James, the people said.

In a statement on Wednesday, Mr. Cuomo said: "As I said yesterday, I have never done anything like this. The details of this report are gut-wrenching. I am not going to speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation given the ongoing review, but I am confident in the result of the Attorney General's report."

At the Capitol Thursday morning, nearly 60 Democratic members of the New York state Legislature called for Mr. Cuomo's resignation and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said during a news conference that "he can no longer serve as governor" amid the accusations of inappropriate behavior toward female aides and a federal probe of Covid-19 deaths in nursing homes.

In the statement, the members calling for Mr. Cuomo's resignation cited the governor's alleged behavior as well as actions taken by the governor's advisers to hold back from the public a fuller accounting of the death toll in long-term-care facilities amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Advisers to the governor successfully pushed state health officials to strip a July report of data showing that more nursing-home residents had died of Covid-19 than the administration had acknowledged, The Wall Street Journal has reported.

"In light of the Governor's admission of inappropriate behavior and the findings of altered data on nursing home Covid-19 deaths he has lost the confidence of the public and the state legislature, rendering him ineffective in this time of most urgent need," the lawmakers said Thursday.

The statement was signed by 40 members of the 107-person Democratic conference that controls the 150-seat state Assembly. Assembly Minority Leader Will Barclay, a Republican from Oswego County, has already submitted a resolution to impeach Mr. Cuomo. The chamber has 43 GOP members.

Twenty-one Democratic women in the Assembly said Monday that Ms. James should be given the space to complete her investigation.

Assemblywoman Latrice Walker, a Democrat from Brooklyn, said on Wednesday night that she signed that statement because she believed everyone was entitled to due process.

“Political theater has no place in getting to the justice that everyone deserves—the accused as well as the accusers,” said Ms. Walker, who didn’t sign the statement calling on Mr. Cuomo to step down.

In a statement on Thursday, Ms. James said the Assembly’s actions “will have no bearing on our independent investigation into these allegations against Governor Cuomo. Our investigation will continue.”

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: Lower Manhattan Isn’t Right Place for Covid-19 Memorial, Residents Say

**By Irene Plagianos:
Mar 12, 2021**

Lower Manhattan’s Battery Park City has become a prime location for honoring the loss and sacrifice of great New Yorkers and people all over the world.

The small neighborhood, which sits across a highway from the 9/11 Museum, is home to a memorial for city police officers who died in service, a small park dedicated to those who perished in the Irish famine of the 1800s, and about a half-dozen other monuments to tragedy and resilience.

Now Battery Park City is under consideration as a site for a state Covid-19 memorial to commemorate essential workers during the pandemic. While residents say they support a memorial, some say the neighborhood, already overloaded with monuments, isn’t the best location for this tribute.

Last month, Manhattan’s Community Board 1, the local community advisory board, passed a resolution asking the city and the state to pursue a design competition for a Covid-19 memorial, but said that lower Manhattan—and Battery Park City, in particular—wouldn’t be the appropriate home for the memorial.

Battery Park City has more memorials a square foot than any other neighborhood in New York City, according to the board. The neighborhood also didn't bear the brunt of the virus, board members said.

"One would hope you'd site a memorial someplace that has the most relevance and meaning to a community," said Tammy Meltzer, chairwoman of the community board and a longtime resident of Battery Park City. "Every New Yorker was affected by this pandemic, but there are communities that were far greater hit."

The request from the community board comes after the Battery Park City Authority, the state authority that manages Battery Park City, discussed plans in a January board meeting about creating a memorial to essential workers in a local park, something Gov. Andrew Cuomo asked the BPCA to do, the board's chairman said.

At the BPCA board meeting in January, Chairman George Tsunis said the plan was to plant 17 trees near the water inside Battery Park City's Rockefeller Park, creating an "essential workers park." Each tree would represent a different essential worker group.

"New York state is exploring how best to honor the incredible and enduring sacrifices made by essential workers over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic," BPCA spokesman Nicholas Sbordone said in a statement. "As with past memorials, there will be an advisory panel to review design and location, with more information available soon."

The governor's office didn't return a request for comment.

New York has been one of the hardest-hit states by Covid-19. Nearly 40,000 people in the state have died from the virus, according to state figures, and the most of deaths were in New York City.

City Councilman Mark Levine, a Democrat, has introduced a bill to form a task force that would create a memorial to essential workers. Mayor Bill de Blasio has dedicated March

14—the day New York City announced its first confirmed Covid-19-related death—as Covid-19 Remembrance Day, but the city has no current plans for a memorial.

Mr. Levine agrees that Battery Park City doesn't seem to be the appropriate location for a memorial to essential workers.

“We have to have a memorial to the essential workers that we lost, but it needs to be in a community that was directly impacted,” he said, adding that essential workers and others greatly affected by the virus need to feel ownership over such a memorial, “that they feel this is their memorial.”

Battery Park City is an affluent community that runs along the Hudson River on Manhattan's southwestern tip. The neighborhood, largely built atop landfill brought over from the construction of the nearby World Trade Center in the 1970s, is on state-administered land, and is managed by the BPCA, a board of seven members who are nominated by the governor. The governor doesn't need to consult the community or the city to construct a monument—and residents say that is what has happened in recent years.

In October, Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, unveiled a large bronze statue in Battery Park City of Mother Cabrini—a Catholic nun who came to New York from Italy and founded dozens of schools, hospitals and orphanages. The governor, who has a contentious relationship with Mr. de Blasio, a Democrat, announced the construction after the mayor faced criticism for not including Mother Cabrini in the city's plans for statues dedicated to various prominent women.

The governor is also constructing a memorial to the Puerto Rican victims of Hurricane Maria in Battery Park City. Mr. Cuomo has previously said that putting the memorial on the shores of the Hudson River will show the state honors Puerto Ricans who died in the storm.

Residents in the neighborhood say these figures and tragic events should be honored by the state. But some say the memorials are being built in Battery Park City simply because the governor can place them there, not because they are the most meaningful locations for these markers.

The Hurricane Maria memorial, for example, could have special significance to a neighborhood with stronger ties to the Puerto Rican community, Ms. Meltzer said.

“You want to site a memorial in a location that’s most honoring of a community,” she said.

[Return to top](#)

AP: Resignation demands grow as police get Cuomo groping report

By MARINA VILLENEUVE:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s grip on power appeared increasingly threatened Thursday as a majority of state legislators called for his resignation, Democrats launched an impeachment investigation and police in the state capital said they stood ready to investigate a groping allegation.

The firestorm around the Democrat grew a day after the Times Union of Albany reported that an unidentified aide had claimed Cuomo reached under her shirt and fondled her at his official residence late last year.

The woman hasn’t filed a criminal complaint, but a lawyer for the governor said Thursday that the state had reported the allegation to the Albany Police Department after the woman involved declined to do so herself.

“In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney’s information,” said Beth Garvey, the governor’s acting counsel.

An Albany Police Department spokesperson, Steve Smith, didn’t immediately return a message from The Associated Press, but told The New York Times police had reached out to a representative for the woman.

The possible involvement of police comes as more lawmakers called on Cuomo to resign over alleged misconduct with women and allegations that his administration concealed how many nursing home residents died of COVID-19.

At least 121 members of the state Assembly and Senate have said publicly they believe Cuomo should quit office now, according to a tally by The Associated Press. The count includes 65 Democrats and 56 Republicans.

The top Democrat in the state Assembly, Speaker Carl Heastie, on Thursday backed a plan for its judiciary committee to launch an impeachment investigation.

The committee can interview witnesses and subpoena documents and its inquiry could be wide-ranging: from alleged sexual misconduct to COVID-19 outbreaks at nursing homes. It won't interfere with a separate inquiry of sexual harassment allegations being conducted by state Attorney General Letitia James, according to Heastie and James.

"The legislature needs to determine for itself what the facts are," a member of the committee, Assemblyman Tom Abinanti, said. "For the people who want immediate impeachment, I think we say please be patient. The process is slow. This could be the next step."

In New York, the Assembly is the legislative house that could move to impeach Cuomo, who faces multiple allegations that he made the workplace an uncomfortable place for young women with sexually suggestive remarks and behavior, including unwanted touching and a kiss. One aide claimed the governor's aides publicly smeared her after she accused him of sexual harassment.

"All of us are extremely disappointed," Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, a Democrat representing Orange and Sullivan counties, told The Associated Press. "I think there's no room in the world right now for that kind of behavior. He should have known better."

Gunther on Thursday became the ninth Assembly Democrat saying they'd vote for impeachment, alongside at least 37 Republicans.

Cuomo's support in the state Senate was especially thin. Roughly two-thirds of its members have called for the Democrat's resignation, including Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

A group of 59 Democrats, including 19 senators and 40 Assembly members said in a letter Thursday that it's time for Cuomo to go.

"In light of the governor's admission of inappropriate behavior and the findings of altered data on nursing home COVID-19 deaths he has lost the confidence of the public and the state legislature, rendering him ineffective in this time of most urgent need," the letter said. "It is time for Gov. Cuomo to resign."

Cuomo has repeatedly said he won't resign and urged the public to await the outcome of the attorney general's investigation.

Asked for comment Thursday, Cuomo's office referred reporters to previous statements in which the governor denied inappropriately touching anyone, but apologized for some comments he made to female staffers. He's said he was trying to engage in playful banter and didn't intend to make people uncomfortable.

In the newest allegation against Cuomo, the Times Union of Albany reported that the governor had summoned the aide to his Albany mansion, saying he needed help with his cellphone. After she arrived, Cuomo closed the door, reached under her shirt and fondled her, the newspaper reported.

The newspaper's reporting was based on an unidentified source with knowledge of the woman's accusation, who said she first told the story to someone on Cuomo's staff in recent days. The newspaper hadn't spoken to the woman and didn't identify her.

“I have never done anything like this,” Cuomo said through a spokesperson Wednesday evening.

According to the Times Union account, one of the woman’s supervisors told an attorney in the governor’s office about her account Monday. The report to Albany police was made Wednesday, after the newspaper had posted its story.

Federal investigators are also scrutinizing how the Cuomo administration has handled data about how many nursing home residents have died of COVID-19. The governor and his aides argued for months that it couldn’t release full figures on deaths because it had yet to verify the data.

The state Assembly has 150 members. It could convene an impeachment trial against Cuomo with a simple majority vote. The state Senate, which would join with members of the state’s top appeals court to hold an impeachment trial, has 63 members.

[Return to top](#)

AP: NY to end mandatory quarantine for US travelers on April 1

**By KAREN MATTHEWS:
Mar 12, 2021**

NEW YORK (AP) — Travelers to New York from other U.S. states will no longer be required to quarantine starting April 1, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced Thursday.

Cuomo, who has been easing coronavirus restrictions amid calls for his resignation over sexual harassment allegations, said the two-week quarantine for domestic travelers will be recommended but no longer mandated. International travelers will still be required to quarantine, he said.

The Democratic governor said in a statement that New York is “winning the footrace between the infection rate and the vaccination rate, allowing us to open new sectors of our economy and start our transition to a new normal in a post-pandemic world.”

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said city officials were not consulted about the move to end the quarantine requirement, and he questioned its wisdom.

“I believe in local control, and here’s another case where New York City was not consulted even though we’re one of the biggest cities in the world and 43% of the state’s population,” de Blasio said at a virtual coronavirus briefing. He added, “Of course I have concerns about this.”

Dr. Jay Varma, senior health adviser to the mayor, said the city is still “at a very tenuous point” despite rising vaccination levels because highly transmissible variants of the coronavirus now account for more than half of new infections.

“So we do feel really strongly that it’s important for us to be as cautious as we possibly can, and we know that one of the ways to help reduce infection is to limit the amount of travel that’s going in and out of the city,” Varma said.

According to data from Johns Hopkins University, there were about 522 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people in New York state over the past two weeks, which ranks second in the country for new cases per capita.

City and state officials have pointed to declining rates of hospitalization for COVID-19, however, as a sign of progress in emerging from the pandemic. Cuomo said the 4,735 people hospitalized statewide on Wednesday was the lowest number since Dec. 6.

Cuomo said New Yorkers “should wear masks, wash their hands and stay socially distanced to slow the spread and save lives as we work to defeat the COVID beast together.”

Return to top

NYDN: Cuomo's office notified Albany police about groping allegation, no criminal probe yet

By DENIS SLATTERY:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY — Gov. Cuomo's office notified Albany police about a staffer's claim that the governor groped her during an encounter last year at the Executive Mansion after the aide declined to file a formal report.

The detailed claim is the most serious allegation made against the embattled governor so far as six different women, the majority of them former aides, have reported Cuomo sexually harassed or acted inappropriately toward them.

Officials referred the matter to police, as required by state law, just hours after the Albany Times Union published disturbing details about the alleged incident in which the much-younger staffer claims Cuomo aggressively groped her and reached under her blouse.

Cuomo acting counsel, Beth Garvey, confirmed she reported the allegations after a lawyer for the aide told the governor's office that she did not want to file a report.

"As a matter of state policy, when allegations of physical contact are made, the agency informs the complainant that they should contact their local police department," Garvey said in a statement. "If they decline, the agency has an obligation to reach out themselves and inform the department of the allegation.

"In this case, the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney's information," Garvey added.

Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan said in a statement that Albany Police are "ready to assist any victim who seeks to come forward."

The staffer said Cuomo touched her and made flirtatious comments on multiple occasions in the past, but her bombshell allegations became known as the governor delivered a press conference last week in which he apologized for making anyone uncomfortable and said he never touched anyone “inappropriately.”

The aide became emotional watching the governor’s mea culpa and told a female supervisor about her encounters with the 63-year-old Democrat.

At least one supervisor reported the allegation to an attorney in the governor’s office Monday, the Times Union reported.

“I have never done anything like this,” Cuomo said in a statement on Wednesday. “The details of this report are gut-wrenching.”

Attorney General Letitia James’ office is overseeing an independent probe into the allegations against Cuomo. On Monday, James announced former acting Manhattan US Attorney Joon Kim and employment lawyer Anne Clark will lead the review of the governor’s workplace behavior.

The investigators launched a website Thursday to gather information about Cuomo’s conduct.

Calls for Cuomo, also under fire and facing a federal probe for his administration’s handling of nursing home COVID deaths, to resign have come from his fellow Democrats and Republicans alike.

Dozens of Democratic state legislators issued a joint statement Thursday calling on Cuomo to step down amid the ballooning scandal as Assembly members met to discuss actions lawmakers can take to probe the governor’s actions.

Mayor de Blasio called the latest claims against Cuomo “disgusting.”

“It’s deeply troubling, the specific allegation, the governor called an employee of his, someone who he had power over, called them to a private place and then sexually assaulted her is absolutely unacceptable,” he said Thursday morning. “It is disgusting to me and he can no longer serve as governor. It’s as simple as that.”

Return to top

NYDN: New York relaxing COVID quarantine rules for domestic travel starting April 1

**By SHANT SHAHRIGIAN and DENIS SLATTERY:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY — New York is easing COVID quarantine rules for travelers entering the state from elsewhere in the U.S. Travelers will longer be required to self-isolate if they’re coming from another U.S. state or territory starting April 1.

However, the Department of Health still recommends quarantine after domestic travel as an added precaution.

Mandatory quarantine remains in effect for international travelers and anyone entering the Empire State is still required to fill out a contact form and adhere to other coronavirus safety guidelines.

Gov. Cuomo has continuously relaxed COVID-related measures in recent weeks as case numbers and hospitalizations drop.

“New Yorkers have shown strength and perseverance throughout this entire pandemic, and it shows through the numbers that continue to decrease every day,” the governor said in a statement. “As we work to build our vaccination infrastructure even further and get more shots in arms, we’re making significant progress in winning the footrace between the infection rate and the vaccination rate, allowing us to open new sectors of our economy and start our transition to a new normal in a post-pandemic world.”

Critics, including Mayor de Blasio, have questioned some of the rollbacks as COVID variants continue to spread.

De Blasio, when asked about the new travel rules, said city officials were not consulted on the change before Cuomo's announcement Thursday morning.

"Of course, I have concerns about this," he said. "I think the introduction of the virus from outside has been one of the biggest and toughest X factors this whole crisis, and something we worry about very much going forward."

Dr. Jay Varma, senior health adviser to the mayor said the city and state are "still at a very tenuous point." He also noted that roughly 51% of coronavirus cases in the five boroughs were recently found to be new, more infectious strains.

"We do feel very strongly that it's important for us to be as cautious as we possibly can and we know that one of the ways to help reduce infection is to limit the amount of travel that's going in and out of the city," Varma said.

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer says 'there should be accountability' if Cuomo sex harass claims are true

By DAVE GOLDINER:
Mar 12, 2021

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer on Thursday joined other Democratic lawmakers in demanding that Gov. Cuomo be held accountable for the sexual misconduct accusations — but cautioned about jumping to conclusions.

"If (the claims) are true, then there should be accountability," Whitmer told Politico. "But until that investigation happens, I don't know that you can make a conclusion."

Whitmer, who was on President Biden's vice presidential short list, said she is a sex assault survivor herself and added "we need to take these allegations seriously."

Even as she declined to defend Cuomo, Whitmer noted that the two parties have very different standards when one of their own is accused of sexual misconduct.

She asked why Republicans refused to call out former President Donald Trump over the many allegations of inappropriate behavior.

"We just had a president who lasted all four years with numerous allegations against him, so far as rape. No one on his own side of the aisle was making observations about whether or not he should stay in office," Whitmer said.

Whitmer rose to national notoriety last year along with Cuomo as they led their hard-hit states through the worst of the COVID pandemic.

The Michigan governor became a lightning rod for sexist and right-wing attacks in October after the FBI thwarted a shocking plot to overthrow the state government and kidnap Whitmer.

Over two dozen men were charged in connection with plot. Their cases are pending in state and federal court.

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: De Blasio labels latest Cuomo allegations as 'disgusting' as more Dems call on gov. to resign

**By SHANT SHAHRIGIAN, CHRIS SOMMERFELDT and DENIS SLATTERY:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY — Dozens of Gov. Cuomo’s fellow Democrats are defecting in light of the latest allegations of sexual harassment levied against the governor and other swirling scandals.

More than 55 Democratic state legislators issued a joint statement Thursday calling on Cuomo to resign as Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said he will host a meeting later in the day to assess “potential paths forward.”

Mayor de Blasio called the latest claims against Cuomo “disgusting.”

“It’s deeply troubling, the specific allegation, the governor called an employee of his, someone who he had power over, called them to a private place and then sexually assaulted her is absolutely unacceptable,” he said Thursday morning. “It is disgusting to me and he can no longer serve as governor. It’s as simple as that.”

The lawmakers wrote that the governor “has lost the confidence of the public and the state legislature, rendering him ineffective in this time of most urgent need.

“It is time for Governor Cuomo to resign,” they added.

Pressure has mounted against the governor in recent weeks as his administration became embroiled in controversy related to nursing home COVID deaths, which has led to a federal probe, and six women came forward with allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct.

Calls increased on Wednesday following reports that an aide claims the governor groped her and reached under her blouse late last year.

The Albany Times Union reported that the woman became emotional and told a superior about the incident last week while watching Cuomo deny he ever touched anyone “inappropriately” during a televised press conference.

Five other women, including four who worked for the governor throughout his career, have publicly accused Cuomo of misconduct or inappropriate behavior.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, D-Yonkers, became the highest-ranking of the governor's fellow Democrats to call on him to leave office over the weekend.

Cuomo has remained defiant, suggesting it would be "anti-democratic" for him to step down.

"There is no way I resign," he said on Sunday.

Some Dems have refrained from saying the governor should step aside, instead urging patience as Attorney General Letitia James oversees an independent probe into the allegations against Cuomo.

Assemblywoman Patricia Fahy (D-Albany) was one of nearly two dozen Dem lawmakers who signed off on a letter released earlier this week that said calls for resignation were premature. Fahy issued a statement Thursday reversing her position and calling on the governor to step down in light of the most recent accusations.

Sen. Shelley Mayer (D-Yonkers) also said that "Wednesday's allegation of groping was, frankly, for me, the last straw."

Though he stopped just short of calling on Cuomo to resign, Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said the allegations against the governor are "nauseating" during a Thursday interview on Joe Madison's radio show.

Schumer also said he has faith in James, saying she will "turn over every stone" and not let "any outside or political interference stop her."

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: ‘Nauseating’: Schumer disturbed by Cuomo allegations, but doesn’t demand resignation

By CHRIS SOMMERFELDT:
Mar 12, 2021

Sen. Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking New Yorker in Congress, said Thursday that he got sick to his stomach upon learning of the latest sexual misconduct accusation against Gov. Cuomo — but stopped short of joining a growing chorus of lawmakers demanding the governor’s resignation.

In a morning appearance on Joe Madison’s radio show, the Democratic Senate majority leader said the claims of harassment and unwanted touching against Cuomo are overall “deeply troubling.”

“Last night’s was nauseating,” Schumer said specifically of an accusation that emerged late Wednesday from an as-of-yet unidentified Cuomo staffer who alleges he “aggressively” groped her at the Executive Mansion in Albany last year.

Schumer, whose Senate title makes him one of New York’s most powerful politicians, said Cuomo’s six accusers “have to be listened to.”

But he did not say Cuomo should immediately step down.

Instead, the senator said New Yorkers should wait for State Attorney General Letitia James to conclude her independent investigation of the Cuomo allegations.

“I believe she will turn over every stone. I believe she will pursue every lead,” Schumer said of the AG. “She has complete subpoena power. And I also believe that she will not let any outside or political interference stop her from getting all the facts out.”

James has tapped a former Manhattan U.S. attorney and a prominent employment discrimination lawyer to lead her office's probe of Cuomo.

Cuomo has vehemently denied inappropriately touching anyone, but apologized last week for "the pain I've caused."

Schumer's unwillingness to call on Cuomo to resign sets him apart from a ballooning number of prominent local Democrats, including State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, who say it's time for the governor to go.

The governor has said he won't resign under any circumstance, prompting calls for the Legislature to impeach him.

Heastie, whose chamber is responsible for impeachment proceedings, said Thursday that he's meeting with fellow Democrats to discuss "potential paths forward" in light of Cuomo's refusal to resign.

Return to top

NYDN: N.Y. Assembly Democrats begin 'impeachment investigation' into sexual harassment claims against Gov. Cuomo

By DENIS SLATTERY:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY — Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie tasked his chamber's Judiciary Committee Thursday with starting an "impeachment investigation" to probe sexual harassment allegations and other scandals surrounding Gov. Cuomo.

The panel will have subpoena power and will not interfere with an independent investigation being overseen by Attorney General Letitia James, Heastie said.

The move comes as a growing number of the governor's fellow Democrats call for his resignation in light of disturbing claims that he groped an aide last year and other women have come forward to accuse him of sexual harassment and misconduct.

"The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious," Heastie said in a statement. "The committee will have the authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence, as is allowed by the New York State Constitution."

James said the Legislature's action will "have no bearing" on the independent investigation into Cuomo's conduct being led by former federal prosecutor Joon Kim and employment discrimination attorney Anne Clark.

Pressure to step down has mounted against the governor in recent weeks as his administration became embroiled in controversy related to nursing home COVID deaths, which has led to a federal probe, and six women came forward with allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct.

Those calls swelled following a report Wednesday that an aide claims the governor reached under her blouse and groped her while at the Executive Mansion, Cuomo's official residence, late last year.

The Albany Times Union reported that the woman became emotional and told a superior about the incident last week while watching the state's most powerful politician deny he ever touched anyone "inappropriately" during a televised press conference.

Cuomo has flatly denied the groping allegation, which could constitute a criminal offense.

"I have never done anything like this," he said in a statement Wednesday. "The details of this report are gut-wrenching."

The governor's office, meanwhile, notified Albany police about the claim, as required by law, after the aide declined to file a formal report.

While a criminal investigation has not been started, Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan said in a statement that Albany Police are "ready to assist any victim who seeks to come forward."

Over the weekend, Ana Liss, a former policy and operations aide to the governor, said Cuomo repeatedly inquired about her personal life, touched her, and on one occasion kissed her hand as she rose from her desk.

Karen Hinton, who worked with the governor when he led the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, said Cuomo once invited her to his hotel room during a work trip to California. He asked her personal questions about her marriage and hugged her repeatedly in a manner that was "too long, too tight, too intimate" when she tried to leave.

Former aide Charlotte Bennett, 25, has called Cuomo a "textbook abuser" after detailing how he asked her probing personal questions including if she was interested in older men and indicated he was comfortable with "anyone above the age of 22" during private meetings last spring, at the height of the COVID crisis.

Bennett, Liss and Hinton all came forward after former Cuomo adviser Lindsey Boylan published an essay last month accusing the 63-year-old of kissing her on the mouth without her consent during a meeting at his Manhattan office.

Another woman, Anna Ruch, 33, alleges the governor made unwanted advances toward her and planted an unsolicited kiss on her cheek at a 2019 wedding.

Boylan said Thursday that lawmakers should skip the probe and focus on impeachment.

“We have people investigating- independent counsel appointed by the AG,” she tweeted Thursday evening. “We do not need a parallel political circus because @CarlHeastie is too afraid to do the right thing. Impeach.”

Heastie, a Bronx Democrat, has faced pressure from within his own conference to take a more aggressive stand against the governor as the accusations mounted.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Yonkers) called on Cuomo to step down on Sunday while Heastie stopped just shy of calling for his resignation.

Cuomo, who has said in the past he plans to run for a fourth term next year, has remained defiant and suggested it would be “anti-democratic” for him to leave office.

Assemblyman Ron Kim (D-Queens), an outspoken Cuomo critic who recently sparred with the governor over his handling of nursing homes during the pandemic, is one of a handful of Dems who have called for impeachment.

“We can rely on others to be brave but we can only rely on ourselves to be decent,” he tweeted after Heastie announced the legislative probe. “Buying time for the Governor means you want the former more than you want the later.”

Republican lawmakers, meanwhile, introduced a resolution Monday that would begin impeachment proceedings.

But the process can’t move forward without Heastie allowing it to come to a vote. It would then take a majority vote in the 150-member Assembly to send charges to the Senate.

Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul would become acting governor as the Senate trial, which would include the seven Cuomo-appointed members of the Court of Appeals and all senators except Stewart-Cousins, plays out.

Only one New York governor has ever been impeached. Gov. William Sulzer was removed from office in 1913 over campaign finance violations.

Return to top

NYP: Relatives of people who died of COVID in nursing homes demand Cuomo's resignation

By Bernadette Hogan:
Mar 12, 2021

Family members of people who died of COVID-19 in New York's nursing homes are demanding Gov. Andrew Cuomo's immediate resignation over reports his administration withheld data about the deadly outbreaks.

At least 150 people who lost loved ones in the state's hard-hit nursing homes over the last year signed a blistering letter from advocacy group Voices for Seniors sent to the governor on Thursday, The Post has learned.

"It is clear that you put your own political reputation and personal profit above the wellbeing of our most vulnerable family members," the letter charges.

"We are calling on you to resign immediately because you have abused the office of the Governor and failed to uphold your duty to care for New Yorkers."

Led by Vivian Zayas, whose mom died in a Long Island nursing home, the group said it had been "devastated" by the state Health Department's controversial March 25 directive that sent recovering coronavirus patients back into nursing homes.

The group was then "horrified" to learn of the Cuomo administration's alleged cover-up of the total number of nursing home deaths from COVID-19.

“You refuse to take the most basic steps to protect our family members in nursing homes,” they wrote to Cuomo.

“Now, our seniors are languishing in isolation and depression, and we don’t know when we’ll get the we’ll get the dreaded call that our loved one has passed away.”

The family members noted that many of them had voted for the powerful three-term Democrat in the past, but had since “painfully learned that you have not used your position to care for families like ours.”

“We have shared in the pain of losing loved ones, and the pain of not saying good-bye to our parents and grandparents face-to-face,” they wrote.

“We urge you to take responsibility for the immense pain you have caused us and resign from the office you are no longer fit to serve.”

The scathing letter comes as Cuomo also faces calls for his resignation over allegations that he groped and sexually harassed several female aides.

More than 55 Democratic state legislators have called for the governor to resign — and the Assembly speaker appears to be laying the groundwork for beginning impeachment proceedings.

The Governor’s Office didn’t immediately return a request for comment from The Post about the letter.

[Return to top](#)

NYP: National Organization of Women turns on Cuomo, calls for resignation

By Carl Campanile:
Mar 12, 2021

Gov. Andrew Cuomo suffered another blow Thursday, as the head of the National Organization for Women-NY called on him to resign over the latest bombshell accusation that he groped a young female staffer at the executive mansion.

“He should resign,” NY-NOW president Sonia Ossorio.

“Many people were willing to let the investigation play out, but the latest allegation was a bridge too far,” Ossorio told The Post.

She was referring to a female staffer’s claim that Cuomo reached under her blouse and groped her while they were alone at the governor’s mansion. Cuomo denied the accusation.

Six women have now accused Cuomo of sexual harassment, which has triggered an independent probe overseen by state Attorney General Letitia James.

NOW’s turn against the governor comes as Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx) and Democratic-led state Assembly lay the groundwork to initiate potential impeachment proceeding against Cuomo, starting with a probe of his sex harassment accusations and COVID-19 nursing home policies.

The move followed a growing number of fellow Democratic pols calling for his resignation or impeachment.

The loss of the women’s advocacy group spells further trouble for Cuomo’s bid to hold onto office.

Ossorio endorsed Democrat Cuomo’s re-election bid to a third term early in 2018 before primary insurgent Cynthia Nixon even entered the race.

Ironically, NOW praised Cuomo's women's agenda at the time, which included a plan to combat sexual harassment by doing away with confidential settlements in government.

NOW- New York State also issued a blistering statement.

"As women, listening to these firsthand accounts is like a punch in the gut. It's all too familiar – because most of us – at one time or another – have encountered this feeling – of being diminished, of being sexualized, of being put into an uncomfortable situation by an inappropriate word or touch," Ossorio said in the statement.

"This behavior cannot be tolerated in any workplace, much less in the halls of our state Capitol by those entrusted to set the standard and the laws for all of us."

The group said the investigation must examine the full scope of alleged sexual harassment by Cuomo that occurred and how complaints were handled by administration officials.

"Women across the state – and particularly the courageous women who have come forward – deserve a full and public accounting of what happened. This will be essential to creating government workplaces where powerful elected officials don't feel entitled to objectify, proposition, or harass employees, and where the mechanisms are in place to truly hold those who don't abide by the rules accountable," the statement said..

"It is simple. Women must be able to go to work and get through the day without experiencing sexual harassment.

"Like many who have come before him, the Governor's demise will not change the culture of sexual harassment that has plagued Albany and state government for many years."

In 2017, after a string of elected officials were exposed for sexual harassment, NOW-NY launched a whistleblower hotline for state government workers to report abuses.

“We learned that sexual harassment infects the lives of far too many women, and reporting it brings risk and uncertainty,” the group said.

“It takes courage to come forward and put your name behind your story, especially against a powerful individual. What does it take to change men’s entitlement? That’s a question that will take courage for men to answer.”

[Return to top](#)

NYP: Cuomo administration is ordering homes for disabled to accept COVID patients

**By Bernadette Hogan and Tamar Lapin:
Mar 12, 2021**

It wasn’t just nursing homes.

The Cuomo administration has spent the last year quietly allowing COVID-19 patients to return to homes for the disabled — much like it did with nursing homes — and the policy remains in effect.

The state’s Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) issued a directive on April 10 barring the group homes from denying admission or re-admission to someone “based solely on a confirmed or suspected diagnosis of COVID-19.”

The order also prohibits the facilities from requiring that a hospitalized individual be tested for COVID-19 before being admitted or re-admitted.

At least 552 residents of such homes have died of the virus as of Wednesday. More than 6,900 out of the more than 34,552 who live in the facilities have been infected, the agency said.

The guidance is similar to the controversial state Health Department order issued in the early days of the pandemic that required nursing homes to accept recovering COVID-19 patients from hospitals.

The Cuomo administration has faced mounting criticism that the later-rescinded March 25 policy directive fueled outbreaks in hard-hit nursing homes. The governor has claimed that the policy followed federal guidance.

Unlike the nursing home directive, the April 10 memo to homes for people with developmental disabilities is still in effect, the OPWDD told Fox News on Monday.

State politicians have recently expressed concern about the directive.

Republican members of the state Senate Committees on Disabilities & Mental Health last month sent a letter to OPWDD Commissioner Dr. Theodore Kastner asking for updated numbers on COVID-19 deaths and infections.

“I am deeply concerned that the April 10th order from OPWDD needlessly put some of our most vulnerable citizens in harm’s way,” GOP State Sen. Mike Martucci, a ranking member of the committee, said in a Feb. 25 statement.

“Close on the heels of the deadly nursing home order from the Department of Health (DOH), this order appears both dangerous and tone deaf,” Martucci said. “Transparency has been a major failing of this administration at all levels.”

State Assemblyman Tom Abinanti, a Democrat from Tarrytown, last week sent a letter to Health Department Commissioner Howard Zucker asking for information about the OPWDD directive.

“Why is this directive still in effect and why has it not been modified?” he asked in the letter, which was obtained by The Post.

Abinanti said he hasn’t heard from anyone at the state level since he send the letter on March 4, noting, “ignoring us is typical of the Cuomo administration and makes everyone suspicious that they’re covering something up.”

“It’s discrimination against people with disabilities and exhibiting a total lack of care of those with disabilities,” he told The Post on Thursday about the directive.

An OPWDD spokeswoman said in a statement that “Residents of OPWDD group homes who were sent to the hospital for COVID-19 treatment were returned to their homes after being deemed safe to return by the hospital physician, in consultation with the residential provider.

“Group home providers were only to accept individuals if they could safely accommodate them within the group home through measures required by DOH guidance like cohorting, cleaning and social distancing,” the statement said.

Residents who couldn’t be “safely accommodated” either stayed at the hospital or “were served in one of the over 100 temporary sites established for COVID-19 recovery efforts in partnership with OPWDD provider agencies,” the statement said.

[Return to top](#)

NYP: Schumer takes swipe at Albany while touting NYC aid

**By Natalie Musumeci:
Mar 12, 2021**

Sen. Chuck Schumer took a swipe at Albany and scandal-scarred Gov. Andrew Cuomo Thursday, charging that money meant for New York City doesn't always fully make its way from upstate coffers.

The Senate majority leader and Big Apple resident made the comments during a virtual appearance at Mayor Bill de Blasio's City Hall press briefing as he touted the \$6 billion in federal stimulus aid that New York City will get through President Biden's COVID-19 relief package.

"There's money for the MTA, there's money to open our schools, and there is money for the city of New York," Schumer said.

"And with the mayor's help, guidance, and a little bit of prodding, we made sure that money doesn't come through Albany. It goes directly to the city, because when Albany gets the money, sometimes the city doesn't see all of it."

The lawmaker added, "So, here we are, and the state is getting more than enough money to deal with their problems as well, but the city of New York gets over \$6 billion."

During his appearance, Schumer also announced that New York will get a coronavirus "vaccine supercharge" with more than 100 new federally funded inoculation sites across the state.

De Blasio likewise praised Schumer, who he called a "son of Brooklyn."

"We would not have a stimulus this good, this strong, if it were not for the majority leader and what he did served the entire nation, but he always, always remembers where he comes from. He remembers Brooklyn and the whole city of New York. He remembers New York state," de Blasio said.

The mayor continued, “He was there for us when we needed it. If he was not there, this would not have happened. I want to be abundantly clear — we are celebrating the kind of stimulus we needed, and it happened because Chuck Schumer was the majority leader of the US Senate.”

Later in the press briefing, de Blasio said Cuomo “can no longer serve as governor” amid his sexual harassment and nursing home scandals.

Return to top

NYP: The Andrew Cuomo sex harass probe now has a website

**By Bernadette Hogan and Tamar Lapin:
Mar 12, 2021**

The independent investigators spearheading the probe into sexual harassment allegations against New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo have launched a fact-finding website.

High-profile attorneys Joon Kim and Anne Clark are asking anyone with information relating to the investigation to come forward.

Those with relevant information can contact the investigators at 212-225-3100 for voice messages, 518-545-0870 for texts or via email at independent.investigations@ag.ny.gov, the site says.

Kim, a former top federal prosecutor in Manhattan, and Clark, a veteran employment-discrimination lawyer, were tapped by state Attorney General Letitia James to lead the probe on Monday.

Cuomo’s acting counsel, Beth Garvey, held a conference call with a limited number of staffers on Thursday to give them options on how to file a possible complaint against the governor, a source familiar with the matter told The Post.

The options included speaking to Garvey or to a supervisor or retaining independent counsel, the source said.

Cuomo, who is now facing allegations from at least six women, last week pledged to cooperate with the probe and urged New Yorkers, “Wait for the facts before you form an opinion.”

The Albany Police Department has also been formally notified about the most recent and most serious claim to date, that Cuomo allegedly groped a female staffer at the Executive Mansion, according to sources.

More than 55 Democratic state legislators have called for the governor to resign — and the Assembly speaker appears to be laying the groundwork for beginning impeachment proceedings.

Return to top

NYP: Assembly Democrats give green light for Cuomo ‘impeachment investigation’

**By Carl Campanile, Bernadette Hogan and Bruce Golding:
Mar 12, 2021**

Democrats in the state Assembly on Thursday gave a green light for an “impeachment investigation” of Gov. Andrew Cuomo by the Judiciary Committee — the first step toward potentially removing him from office.

Speaker Carl Heastie (D-The Bronx) announced the momentous decision following an afternoon meeting of the entire Democratic Assembly conference.

Heastie said he was “authorizing the Assembly Judiciary Committee to begin an impeachment investigation, led by Chair Charles D. Lavine, to examine allegations of misconduct against Governor Cuomo.”

“The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious,” Heastie said.

“The committee will have the authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence, as is allowed by the New York State Constitution.”

Heastie also said the probe “will not interfere with the independent investigation being conducted by Attorney General [Letitia] James,” who on Monday announced the hiring of several outside lawyers, including former acting Manhattan US Attorney Joon Kim.

During the Democratic conference meeting and an earlier meeting of select Assembly Democrats, Heastie said the Judiciary Committee should examine the accusations that Cuomo groped and sexually harassed several female aides as well as his administration’s alleged cover-up of the total number of nursing home deaths from COVID-19, a source said.

Heastie also notified James of his plan ahead of time, an insider briefed on their discussion said.

“She has no problem with it,” the source added.

John Kaehny of the good-government group Reinvent Albany said that although launching a probe would pave the way for Cuomo’s potential impeachment, it also gives Heastie “more control over the process.”

“It allows him to control the clock, the questions and takes the immediate pressure off him to call for an impeachment resolution because he can hold this up for everyone: both the governor’s assistants and defenders,” Kaehny said.

Heastie’s extraordinary move followed a statement issued Thursday morning in which more than 55 Democratic members of the state Legislature called on Cuomo to resign — in the

wake of a report that alleged he put his hands under a female staffer's blouse and groped her inside Albany's Executive Mansion late last year.

Mayor Bill de Blasio also joined the growing bipartisan chorus demanding Cuomo's resignation amid the spiraling twin scandals engulfing him.

Impeaching the three-term governor would require a simple majority vote of the Assembly, which is composed of 106 Democrats, 43 Republicans and one independent.

If Cuomo were impeached, Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul would automatically become acting governor pending a trial before the state Senate and the seven members of the Court of Appeals.

Under the New York Constitution, both Hochul and Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Yonkers) would be barred from taking part in the trial.

On Sunday, Stewart-Cousins called on Cuomo to resign, reportedly after he told her the only way he would leave office was through impeachment.

Cuomo has previously said he would seek a fourth term next year, but during a news conference on Tuesday refused to say if that was still his plan.

His office hasn't responded to requests for comment since Cuomo issued a statement on Wednesday night denying the groping allegation.

[Return to top](#)

Newsday: NY Assembly launching probe that could lead to Gov. Cuomo impeachment

By Yancey Roy:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY — Taking a historic step, the State Assembly on Thursday launched an impeachment investigation of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, which could lead to just the second impeachment of a governor in state history and the first since 1913.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx) said the 107 Assembly Democrats who control the chamber decided to authorize a probe following the latest sexual harassment allegations against the third-term governor.

"The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious," Heastie said after a three-hour closed-door meeting with his Democratic colleagues. "The committee will have the authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence, as is allowed by the New York State Constitution."

Cuomo, in his 11th year in office, is facing an attorney general's investigation of sexual harassment allegations by six women against the governor, as well as a federal Department of Justice probe into how his administration handled COVID-19 in nursing homes.

The governor has denied any wrongdoing or touching anyone inappropriately. He has said there is "no way" he will resign and urged New Yorkers to wait for Attorney General Letitia James' conclusion and "then we can have a discussion about the facts."

Heastie said Assemb. Charles Lavine (D-Glen Cove), the chairman of the Assembly Judiciary Committee, will lead the investigation.

"I have the utmost faith that Assembly member Lavine and the members of the committee will conduct an expeditious, full and thorough investigation," Heastie said. He added the Assembly process won't interfere with an ongoing probe of the sexual harassment allegations overseen by James.

If the Assembly brings charges, the State Senate would hold the trial and vote to either convict or acquit the 63-year-old governor, who, less than a year ago, was gaining national acclaim for his handling of the pandemic and writing a book about leadership.

James issued a statement saying her investigation will continue "regardless" of the impeachment inquiry.

"Today's action by the New York state legislature will have no bearing on our independent investigation into these allegations against Governor Cuomo," James said. "Our investigation will continue."

Yet these aren't the only high-level investigations the embattled governor's administration is facing: The U.S. Department of Justice and FBI are investigating the administration's handling of COVID-19 and nursing homes.

The Assembly decision to launch an impeachment inquiry came less than 24 hours after the published report of the latest and most serious allegation made against Cuomo. The Times Union of Albany reported Wednesday that Cuomo fondled an unidentified staffer at the Executive Mansion. The governor, through a spokesman, denied the account, saying, "I have never done anything like this."

The newspaper reported the Cuomo administration itself reported the incident to law enforcement. The Albany Police Department reportedly acknowledged being notified but said no complaint had been filed nor had it launched any investigation as yet.

Thursday morning, 59 Democrats in the Senate and Assembly issued a letter saying Cuomo should resign. Shortly after that, Heastie announced the closed-door meeting that eventually led to the announcement of the impeachment inquiry.

Of the 15 Long Island Democratic members in the legislature, just one signed the letter: Assemb. Judy Griffin (D-Rockville Centre).

Democrats hold more than two-thirds of the seats in the Senate and Assembly, giving them control of the agenda. Republicans, many of whom have called for Cuomo's ouster, have limited influence.

If the Assembly eventually brings charges, state law says Cuomo would be prohibited immediately from exercising any of the duties of his office, according to Karl Sleight, a private attorney and former head of the state ethics commission. That is a significant difference from federal law — then-President Donald Trump was able to continue in office while impeached and was eventually acquitted by the U.S. Senate.

New York statutes dictate the lieutenant governor, Kathy Hochul of Buffalo, would have authority to exercise gubernatorial duties immediately upon any impeachment charges being filed against Cuomo, Sleight said.

The lone New York governor impeached was William Sulzer in 1913. The Democrat was brought to a State Senate trial after falling out with the powerful Tammany Hall Democrats who helped get him elected. He was convicted of "corrupt conduct" for signing false statements about campaign contributions and spending.

Jay Jacobs, the state and Nassau County Democratic chairman, issued a statement saying, "With the preponderance of these allegations I agree with Speaker Heastie that now is the time for the Legislature to commence its own review of these matters as a part of its constitutional responsibilities."

Jacobs also said he will hold a special meeting of county-level Democratic leaders to get their views and those of people outside the Albany political bubble.

"I understand some people want him to resign and I understand their views. But there's no unanimity here," Jacobs said in an interview. "I want to talk to county chairs. I want to know what they are hearing ... I don't want the party to get divided over this."

The speed of the turn of events was startling.

Four days earlier, Heastie, while questioning Cuomo's effectiveness in office, stopped short of calling for his resignation. Heastie's view signaled to legislators and political observers the Assembly wanted to wait for the attorney general to complete her investigation.

Heastie's view at the time stood in contrast to his counterpart, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Yonkers), who had said Cuomo "must resign." She cited not only the harassment allegations but also a federal investigation into the Cuomo administration's handling of COVID-19 in nursing homes. Stewart-Cousins said: "We need to govern without daily distraction."

The letter from the nearly five dozen Democratic state legislators echoed that sentiment.

"In the meantime, the governor needs to put the people of New York first," the group said. "We have a lieutenant governor who can step in and lead for the remainder of the term, and this is what is best for New Yorkers in this critical time. It is time for Governor Cuomo to resign."

Return to top

Newsday: Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone unveils police reform plan

**By Michael O'Keeffe and Rachelle Blidner:
Mar 12, 2021**

Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone on Thursday unveiled what he called a sweeping police reform plan that seeks to change the department's culture through more civilian oversight, expanded community policing and the widespread use of body cameras.

Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart and Bellone aides introduced the Suffolk County Police Reform and Reinvention Task Force Draft Report, which would also overhaul how police respond to 911 calls about mental health crises, to the County Legislature Thursday night.

The proposal, more than 1,000 pages long, also calls for enhanced civilian oversight of county police through use of Suffolk's Human Rights Commission to review allegations of undue force and bias by officers.

"Suffolk County has developed an historic policing plan that serves as a model for how to produce real reform, enhance transparency and accountability, and foster community trust," Bellone said. "This plan is a reflection of the input that was received — a blueprint for lasting change — and will serve as a road map to build upon the progress we have already made."

Hart, speaking at Thursday's legislative session, pledged a shift in the department's culture.

Her testimony came a week after she and Bellone announced that two Suffolk police officers had been suspended without pay for allegedly assaulting an auto-theft suspect.

Hart said the department will stop focusing on arrests and crime statistics when evaluating performance.

"Officers are doing what we ask them to do each day. We need to look at what we're asking them to do," Hart said.

The commissioner added that the department is working with social services agencies to address calls dealing with mental health crises and will train 911 operators to identify situations when mental health professionals should be called.

In June, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo ordered local governments to reform and modernize their law enforcement agencies.

Cuomo issued his order several weeks after George Floyd's death while in the custody of Minneapolis officers kindled months of nationwide protests over police killings

Cuomo's order requires municipalities to evaluate policies for use of force, crowd management, anti-bias training and responses to civilian complaints. The plans must be approved by local legislators and submitted to the state by April 1.

Governments that do not comply risk the loss of state funds.

Suffolk's draft report was created with input from members of a task force Bellone created in September. The task force examined police procedures and conducted a series of virtual public-outreach meetings.

Nassau County Executive Laura Curran released a 395-page police reform proposal in February with detailed plans for diversifying police ranks, boosting outreach to minority communities, improving collection of racial data from traffic stops and creating a body camera program.

The draft drew criticism from community and civil rights activists who said Curran hadn't consulted with them adequately before introducing it.

Those activists released a 310-page proposal called "The People's Plan" that urged county lawmakers to consider more aggressive reforms.

On Thursday, some of those same activists praised Suffolk County officials for valuing their input.

"While the process is ongoing and the draft is a working document, Suffolk County led the way by honoring the Executive Order's charge of collaboration, respecting the diversity of opinions, and valuing each member of the task force's unique perspectives," said Tracey Edwards, Long Island NAACP regional director, who served on policing task forces in Nassau and Suffolk.

But Terryl Dozier, of community organization Long Island Network for Change, said the plan did not adequately address how to hold officers accountable for their conduct.

"Nothing is more fundamental to what we believe than that no one is above the law, and nothing is more detrimental to the profession of policing than the idea that police should police themselves," Dozier said.

Some of the proposals in the plan, such as body cameras, will require approval from Suffolk County's police unions.

Suffolk police equipped the department's 10-member drunken driving enforcement team with body cameras in 2017 to provide juries with video proof of impaired driving.

But overall, the police department has not embraced widespread use of bodycams.

Deputy Suffolk County Executive Jon Kaiman, one of the report's co-facilitators, told lawmakers Thursday he believed Suffolk and its unions will reach a resolution on body cameras and other issues.

Suffolk Police Benevolent Association President Noel DiGerolamo, who helped draft the report, praised officials and community members for working collaboratively and expressed his support for the plan.

"The fact that such a diverse group came together with all our preconceptions to formulate one plan in which we are comfortable is a testament to how professional and receptive the task force was conducted," DiGerolamo said.

The proposal also calls for beefed-up oversight and review of traffic-stop data, including creation of a traffic-stop dashboard accessible to the public, in order to minimize bias against Black and Hispanic motorists.

A Newsday review of police data in October found that Suffolk police stopped Black drivers four times more often than white drivers, and Hispanic drivers twice as often. The John F. Finn Institute for Public Safety confirmed that Black and Hispanic drivers were overrepresented in traffic stops, officials said.

The police reform report also calls for increased communication and relations between community members and police through creation of precinct-level advisory boards, park walks and talks and improvements to the county's language access program.

Return to top

Newsday: LIRR union files for federal mediation to resolve contract impasse

By Alfonso A. Castillo:
Mar 12, 2021

The union representing 500 LIRR train operators has filed for federal mediation, signaling a contract impasse that, unless resolved, could eventually trigger a work stoppage.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen on March 2 applied to the National Mediation Board for assistance in negotiating a new contract with the LIRR. In a statement, the union said, despite its "good faith efforts" to reach a fair deal, the LIRR's tactics during contract talks have been "unacceptable."

The last time the LIRR and its unions sought mediation, in 2014, the railroad was taken to the brink of a strike — even after intervention from the White House. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo finally brokered a new deal, three days before a planned union strike that threatened to cripple the region's transportation network.

Kevin Sexton, general chairman of the engineers' union, said the decision to seek mediation this time was spurred by a comment by Robert Foran, chief financial officer of the

Metropolitan Transportation Authority — the LIRR's parent organization — who suggested last month that some union workers may have to forego future raises, and even give back raises already promised. The remarks came as the MTA wrestled with a financial crisis brought on by the pandemic.

"That's an outrage, quite frankly," said Sexton, who acknowledged that mediation could last for years. "We're here to keep the system moving. Nobody wants a work stoppage. That's the last thing that we would want to do. It's not good for the members. It's not good for the riding public."

Following President Joe Biden's signing of a coronavirus stimulus package Thursday that provides another \$6.5 billion in funding to the MTA, chairman Patrick Foye said the authority will be "able to implement all previously negotiated general wage increases as scheduled and move ahead with contract negotiations."

Sexton on Wednesday joined fellow LIRR union leader Anthony Simon and Nassau County Executive Laura Curran at a news conference at the Mineola train station. It was held to celebrate the railroad's decision to restore service following widespread complaints of crowding on trains since Monday, when a reduced schedule aimed at budget savings took effect.

The LIRR has said it will go back to its previous schedule on March 29

"I know that it's difficult. I know that it's a heavy lift. But I'm asking respectfully if the MTA and the Long Island Rail Road could just take a look at that schedule and see if it could be sped up a little bit," Curran said.

Donovan said, ahead of the restoration, the LIRR is rescheduling construction work and adjusting crews' work schedules. He said the LIRR has already made several service adjustments to address crowding, and will continue to do so.

"Our customers will continue to be priority one," he said.

Simon said the unions are willing to "work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week" to speed up the service restoration, and urged LIRR managers to do the same.

"The railroad has to get the management out of their homes and bring them in. And we will work with them," Simon said.

Return to top

WSJ: Gov. Andrew Cuomo Aides Called Former Staffers to Discredit Accuser

**By Khadeeja Safdar, Deanna Paul and Jimmy Vielkind:
Mar 12, 2021**

In the days after New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo was first accused of sexual harassment by a former aide, the governor's office called at least six former employees either to find out if they had heard from the accuser or to glean information about her in conversations that some said they saw as attempts to intimidate them.

Some of the people who received the calls said they hadn't heard from the administration in months before getting the call about the accuser. One said a caller encouraged them to give reporters any information discrediting the accuser, Lindsey Boylan, who worked as an economic adviser for the Cuomo administration between 2015 and 2018.

The calls were made by current administration officials and former aides who are still close to the governor's office, according to several recipients. The outreach came at the behest of Melissa DeRosa, the governor's top aide, according to people familiar with the effort.

"I felt intimidated, and I felt bewildered," said Ana Liss, a former aide to the governor who received one of the calls.

Ms. Liss, who earlier this month accused Mr. Cuomo of inappropriate behavior, said that Rich Azzopardi, a senior adviser to Mr. Cuomo, phoned her on Dec. 21. The call came eight days after Ms. Boylan said in a post on Twitter that the governor sexually harassed her.

Ms. Liss hadn't worked for the governor in more than five years and couldn't remember the last time the administration had been in touch, she said.

She said Mr. Azzopardi reminded her on the call of how much she had accomplished during her time working for the governor and asked her if she had received a message from Ms. Boylan. She told him she hadn't and said the conversation ended on a friendly note.

Mr. Azzopardi said in a statement: "After Ms. Boylan's tweets in December, she, and her lawyers and members of the press began reaching out to former members of the Chamber, many of whom never worked with her. Those former members of the Chamber called to let various staff people know and convey that they were upset by the outreach. As a result, we proactively reached out to some former colleagues to check in and make sure they had a heads up."

Mr. Azzopardi said the calls weren't coordinated by Ms. DeRosa. "There was no directed effort—this outreach happened organically when everyone's phone started to blow up." He added that they didn't intimidate anyone.

In Twitter posts after this story was published, Ms. Boylan said she didn't reach out to anyone in December and didn't have a lawyer at the time.

Three former employees from his time as governor and one current aide to Mr. Cuomo have accused the governor of inappropriate behavior or sexual harassment in the workplace, prompting calls from Republicans and high-ranking state Democrats for him to resign.

Democrats who dominate the state Assembly have launched an impeachment investigation that will look at the allegations as well as how the Cuomo administration handled Covid-19 in nursing homes. State Attorney General Letitia James is now overseeing an investigation into the accusations made by the former aides and how Mr. Cuomo's office handled the complaints.

Mr. Cuomo has denied touching anyone inappropriately and has apologized for any behavior that might have been misinterpreted. He has also called for New Yorkers to withhold judgment until Ms. James's investigation is complete.

Ms. Boylan has said Mr. Cuomo tried to kiss her on the lips in his office and, during a 2017 flight on his plane, suggested they play strip poker.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Cuomo has denied Ms. Boylan's allegations.

Another former aide, Charlotte Bennett, said Mr. Cuomo asked about her sex life and whether she had relationships with older men. Ms. Liss has said he asked her if she had a boyfriend, touched her on her lower back at a reception and once kissed her hand when she rose from her desk. A fourth woman this week accused the governor of touching her inappropriately during an encounter at the Executive Mansion last year.

In a statement on Wednesday, Mr. Cuomo said: "As I said yesterday, I have never done anything like this. The details of this report are gut-wrenching. I am not going to speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation given the ongoing review, but I am confident in the result of the Attorney General's report."

The governor, in previous statements, has encouraged women to come forward and said his office would cooperate with Ms. James's inquiry.

But Mr. Cuomo and his aides have gone after accusers and rivals in the past, according to court documents and former staffers.

In October 2000, Mr. Cuomo, when he was the secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, was accused of sex discrimination and harassment in an internal memo filed by Susan Gaffney, a former HUD inspector general. She accused Mr. Cuomo and other HUD officials of intimidation and harassment after she launched a congressionally requested audit into some of the work Mr. Cuomo had overseen.

Ms. Gaffney testified to Congress in 1998 that Mr. Cuomo's aides attempted to smear her, including publicizing an anonymous letter that Mr. Cuomo had allegedly received saying she was targeting minorities.

At one point, Mr. Cuomo assured her that he had nothing to do with the actions by key aides, she said. "I suggested that, if his key aides were acting without his approval, he should fire them; the Secretary did not respond," she said in the 1998 testimony, adding that tactics used by Mr. Cuomo and his aides were "dirty tricks" to force her to resign.

Ms. Gaffney couldn't be reached.

After Ms. Boylan tweeted her account in December, she said in a Feb. 24 Medium post that media outlets received "parts of a supposed confidential personnel file" from her time with the administration. Ms. Boylan said in the post that she had never seen the file and that it was an effort to smear her.

In response to Ms. Boylan's claim about her personnel record, Beth Garvey, the acting counsel to the governor, said: "With certain limited exceptions, as a general matter, it is within a government entity's discretion to share redacted employment records, including in instances when members of the media ask for such public information and when it is for the purpose of correcting inaccurate or misleading statements."

Ms. Boylan also said in the Medium post that "the Governor's loyalists called around town, asking about me."

One recipient of a call said the caller asked in December if Ms. Boylan had been in touch with the recipient, and what the recipient thought of her claims.

Another recipient of a call said that a caller, a current official in the Cuomo administration, asked if reporters had been contacted about Ms. Boylan and wanted to confirm the nature of

the recipient's experience with Ms. Boylan. "The subtext was clear: I was being asked to dish dirt on her," the recipient said.

Return to top

Newsday: From LI school leaders, a cautious assessment of \$1.9T relief package

**By John Hildebrand:
Mar 12, 2021**

Long Island school leaders say they have good reason to be cautious in assessing the impact on their districts of President Joe Biden's financial rescue package — a plan representing a historic windfall for many schools nationwide.

One question that remains is exactly how federal money for schools will be distributed in Nassau and Suffolk counties, local leaders point out. Another question is whether New York State and its school districts will be able to pick up the slack two or three years down the line, when relief money runs out.

Overall, the \$1.9 trillion rescue plan, which the president signed Thursday, provides nearly \$122 billion for K-12 schooling nationwide, with nearly \$9 billion set aside for New York State schools. The funding is widely described as the biggest single federal investment in public education in history.

"It sounds great," said Lorna Lewis, superintendent of Malverne schools and a past president of the New York State Council of School Superintendents. "But we don't know how that will impact us until we see the actual dollars. Those dollars are going to dry up, and then we're left with a deficit that we can't easily fill."

Clues to how federal funding could be divided up statewide appeared in Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's proposed budget, which was released Jan. 19. The plan included a tentative school-aid increase of more than 7% for the 2021-22 fiscal year.

A closer look at the details revealed, however, that the Island's districts would get increases averaging just over 1%, and that 50 districts on Long Island would see cuts. Meanwhile, New

York City schools would get an increase of more than 13%, Rochester more than 12%, and Buffalo more than 10%.

Why the disparities? Cuomo's plan relied heavily on a \$3.8 billion infusion of federal money from an earlier relief package. And under federal rules, that money was to be concentrated on impoverished schoolchildren, most of whom live in urban neighborhoods.

Now, with the signing of Biden's latest plan, more federal money is being added to New York State's revenues. And once again, the bulk of federal school funding will be distributed according to the formula focused on high-poverty urban districts.

Just how much money will be available for Nassau-Suffolk schools and those in other suburban regions may not be known until April 1, when Cuomo and state legislators work out final aid allotments for 2021-22.

As for the question of what happens when federal funding runs out: Local school administrators interviewed in recent weeks have frequently voiced anxiety over the issue, typically described as "falling off a fiscal cliff."

It's happened before.

In 2011, districts across the Island lost more than \$110 million in aid money, after federal support dried up in the wake of the Great Recession. Consequently, those systems announced layoffs of more than 2,000 employees, including 1,200 teachers.

With that in mind, school representatives say it's time for the state and districts to find ways of setting money aside to prepare for potential lean years ahead. The Biden plan provides some flexibility in this area by allowing the spending of relief funds to be extended through the 2023-24 school year.

"There's a tremendous amount of cash involved here," said Bob Dillon, superintendent of the regional Nassau BOCES school system. "If you're going to adopt good financial planning, you need to expand reserves."

One proposal aimed at accomplishing this has been put forward by the New York State Council of School Superintendents, an advocacy group based in Albany. The plan would double the amount of unrestricted reserves, commonly known as "rainy day funds," that districts can bank for the future.

That would raise the reserves limit from the current equivalent of 4% of district revenues to 8%. Under the council's proposal, authority for expanded reserves would expire after five years.

Council representatives note that the Chicago-based Government Finance Officers Association, a research group, recommends that government agencies keep on hand unrestricted reserves equaling 16% to 17% of operating revenues.

Spreading out the use of federal funds, rather than spending them all in one year, makes financial sense, said Robert Lowry, deputy director for the council.

"The faster the money is used up, the steeper the cliff," he said.

[Return to top](#)

Newsday: Cuomo: New York ending domestic travel quarantine requirement in April

**By Bart Jones and Newsday Staff:
Mar 12, 2021**

People traveling from other states or U.S. territories into New York no longer will be required to quarantine, starting April 1, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said Thursday, though New York City's mayor immediately criticized the move.

The loosening of travel restrictions came as the number of COVID-19 cases in New York is steadily declining or stabilizing, and more people are getting vaccines. International travelers will still be under the mandate, aimed at curtailing spread of the coronavirus.

"This is great news, but it is not an all-clear for New Yorkers to let their guard down," Cuomo said in a statement.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said he disagreed with the action.

"I believe in local control and here's another case where New York City was not consulted even though we're one of the biggest cities in the world and 43% of the state's population," de Blasio said at his daily press briefing.

Cuomo said that as "as we work to build our vaccination infrastructure even further and get more shots in arms, we're making significant progress in winning the footrace between the infection rate and the vaccination rate, allowing us to open new sectors of our economy and start our transition to a new normal in a post-pandemic world."

While it will not be mandatory for travelers from other states to quarantine, officials are still recommending it as a precaution, Cuomo said.

Last week, Cuomo said domestic travelers to New York who had been vaccinated would no longer be required to quarantine or test out within 90 days of their full vaccination, though international travelers would still be expected do so, following guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The new guidelines do not appear to impose a vaccination requirement.

Regardless of quarantine status, anyone exposed to COVID-19 or returning from travel must follow certain state mandates, such as monitoring daily symptoms for 14 days.

Schumer: Feds sending vaccine 'supercharge'

The federal government is sending a "vaccine supercharge" to New York, funding the operation of more than 100 sites to administer shots for COVID-19 across the state, Sen. Chuck Schumer's office said.

A list of 35 initial vaccination hubs issued Thursday included locations throughout New York City and upstate New York, part of what Schumer's office is calling a massive expansion of federally funded sites that will operate at community health centers.

"More access and more shots means a quicker recovery, and that's what we want," Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in a statement.

Federal officials from the Department of Health and Human Services said participating health centers will hear soon from the Health Resources and Services Administration with tentative dates to start their local vaccination efforts.

Peter Grisafi, president of Damian Family Care Centers, which includes one center in Ronkonkoma and 12 in New York City, said he had not yet heard from the government how many vaccines his organization will receive.

But he called Schumer's announcement "welcome" news.

He said his group of federally qualified health centers has received about 3,000 doses since Dec. 21, but none in the last six weeks. The organization works with people undergoing substance abuse treatment or those in recovery.

New York has also been increasing efforts to step up vaccinations through mass vaccination sites, pop-ups in underserved communities, and expansion of eligibility requirements. This week, the state lowered the age threshold from 65 to 60 for people who qualify for the

vaccine, and a state official confirmed Wednesday that more appointment slots had been added at state-run sites.

Nursing homes still face strict visiting rules

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has revised nursing home visitation guidelines that specify that, in most cases, guests can visit residents inside a facility whether they, or residents, have been vaccinated.

The new guidelines, however, don't eliminate the major sticking point that has kept most Long Island nursing homes from allowing visitors. Nursing homes must be free of COVID-19 cases affecting either employees or residents for 14 days to qualify for visits. The federal guidance indicates that outbreak testing would be discontinued after no new positives are found among staff or residents within that period.

The stringent requirements have frustrated nursing home operators and some medical professionals.

"If the loved one has been vaccinated, the family member has also been vaccinated, the county level is in the green and the screening process occurs, we should give consideration to allowing that visit," said Ken Knutsen, administrator at Huntington Hills Center for Health and Rehabilitation in Melville.

Dr. David Siskind, medical director at Northwell's Stern Family Center for Rehabilitation in Manhasset, added "it would be nice if we could use our clinical judgment instead of there being such hard and fast rules."

The New York State Department of Health said in a Thursday statement it "is reviewing the new CMS guidance" on visitation: "Since last summer we have taken a measured approach to help nursing homes safely implement visitation, and the Department looks forward to continuing this effort."

Lowest virus positivity since Nov. 21

Cuomo said more than 6 million total vaccine doses have been administered throughout the state. More than 20% of New Yorkers have received a first dose, and 10.4% are fully vaccinated.

The level of positivity in testing for COVID-19 continued to decline slightly or remain stable throughout the state and on Long Island, according to state data released Thursday.

The daily positivity level statewide from 243,153 test results from Wednesday was 2.77%, the lowest level since Nov. 21.

The seven-day average was 3.11% statewide, 4.21% on Long Island and 3.86% in New York City.

The number of new confirmed cases of COVID-19 was 579 in Nassau, 565 in Suffolk and 3,548 in New York City.

Statewide, 80 people died Wednesday of causes related to the virus, including three in Nassau and nine in Suffolk.

Fourteen new temporary vaccination "pop-up" sites aimed at reaching vulnerable communities were opening this week throughout the state, Cuomo said.

The sites are expected to vaccinate more than 4,000 people during the week.

Locally the sites include the Glen Cove YMCA, which was to vaccinate people on Thursday between 8 a.m. and noon, and the First Baptist Church of Riverhead, which is to inoculate people Friday between 8 a.m. and noon.

The sites will be reestablished in three weeks to administer second doses of the vaccine.

Nassau hospital gave shots to veterans

Nassau County Executive Laura Curran on Thursday announced a partnership between Nassau University Medical Center and the county's Veterans Services Agency to give the COVID-19 vaccine to those who served in the armed forces and their family members.

"Protecting our veterans from this deadly disease is the least we can do to thank them — to those who valiantly protected our freedoms here in America," Curran said.

More than 300 veterans were inoculated at the county's only public hospital Thursday in East Meadow. About 50,000 veterans live in Nassau.

Veterans will still need to be part of one of the state's eligibility groups and any of their family members seeking a vaccine at the site would too, Curran said. The move is aimed to bring greater vaccine access to the county's veterans, some of whom are unable to travel to the Northport VA Medical Center.

To date, NUMC has distributed more than 25,000 total doses, including 15,000 first doses.

Islip schools returning to in-person classes

Islip is in the process of returning students to in-person instruction five days a week at its middle and high schools where the hybrid model of learning will be phased out, according to a presentation on the district website.

"Students will have the option to come back every day," read the notice. Students in grades 6-12 are being phased back into the classroom by grade level throughout the month.

In addition, district officials reported that "Though the practice of maintaining 6 feet of social distance within all instructional spaces will not be possible during this transition, we are committed to ensuring that, when possible, we will continue to enforce 6 feet of social distance and implement additional health and safety barriers in certain instructional and noninstructional spaces."

The district will continue contact tracing and quarantines as applicable and masks and temperature checks will be enforced.

Return to top

Journal News: New York Assembly launches impeachment investigation of Gov. Andrew Cuomo

Joseph Spector:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY — The state Assembly announced late Thursday it will launch an impeachment investigation into alleged wrongdoing by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a potential precursor to a vote to remove the beleaguered governor from office.

The move comes amid intense pressure by Democrats and Republicans for Cuomo to resign over sexual harassment allegations made by at least six women, mainly former aides, and criticism over the state's purposeful undercounting of COVID-19 nursing home deaths.

But the investigation also buys Cuomo more time: He has been trying to fend off efforts by some lawmakers to immediately hold an impeachment vote to remove him from the office he's held since 2011.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, D-Bronx, said the Assembly Judiciary Committee will undertake the investigation into "allegations of misconduct against Governor Cuomo."

A Heastie spokesman said the investigation can look into allegations against Cuomo on any issue.

"The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious," Heastie said in a statement. "The committee will have the authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence, as is allowed by the New York State Constitution."

The investigation comes as Attorney General Letitia James is already investigating the sexual harassment allegations against Cuomo and has hired two outside attorneys to handle the investigation.

Heastie contended: "This inquiry will not interfere with the independent investigation being conducted by Attorney General James."

And James said in a statement: "Today's action by the New York state Legislature will have no bearing on our independent investigation into these allegations against Governor Cuomo. Our investigation will continue."

Cuomo has vowed he would not resign amid allegations that he either made sexually suggestive comments to women in his office or, in the latest case, aggressively groped a female aide at the governor's mansion last year — a situation that Thursday was referred to Albany police.

He has denied many of the claims, said he never touched anyone inappropriately and apologized if he ever made anyone uncomfortable, saying he can be playful and try to be friends with his colleagues. He has asked for lawmakers to withhold judgment until James' investigation is complete.

"You don't know any facts, right?" Cuomo said Tuesday. "You know allegations. You don't know facts. Let's operate on facts."

Republicans knocked the Assembly's decision to have its own investigation.

"This reeks of a political maneuver designed by Speaker Heastie to buy time and exploit the Governor's weakness during the heat of budget negotiations" for the fiscal year that starts April 1, said state GOP chairman Nick Langworthy.

"If I've said it once, I've said it a hundred times: we already have ample evidence that proves Andrew Cuomo is unfit to serve and anything short of a full impeachment is a complicit move to keep him as Governor."

Earlier in the day, 59 Democrats in the Legislature signed a letter calling on Cuomo to resign.

But unless Heastie were to choose to partner with Republicans to oust Cuomo, Democrats at this point appear to lack the votes to impeach him. Some Democrats have supported waiting until James' investigation is finished to decide Cuomo's fate.

An impeachment would start with a majority vote in the Assembly, where Democrats hold more than 100 of the 150 seats. If Cuomo were to be impeached, Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul would become acting governor while he awaits impeachment trial.

A trial would be held jointly by the Senate and Court of Appeals. A two-thirds majority vote would be required to convict Cuomo and remove him from office.

[Return to top](#)

Journal News: 59 state lawmakers call for Cuomo to resign as Assembly launches probe

Joseph Spector:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY – Pressure for Gov. Andrew Cuomo to resign was building Thursday after a letter signed by 59 Democratic state lawmakers called for him to step down and Assembly Speaker

Carl Heastie said the chamber would conduct its own investigation into the embattled governor's future.

Cuomo was under a new round of criticism after a sixth accuser Wednesday was revealed to have been sexually harassed by the Democratic governor.

The latest case was considered perhaps the most damning: The unnamed aide told her superiors that Cuomo groped her and tried to put his hand under her blouse at the governor's mansion, according to the Times Union of Albany. That would counter Cuomo's contention that he never touched anyone inappropriately.

On Thursday morning, the 59 Democratic lawmakers -- 40 Assembly members and 19 senators -- urged Cuomo to leave the office he's held since 2011.

"The Governor needs to put the people of New York first," the joint statement read. "We have a Lieutenant Governor who can step in and lead for the remainder of the term, and this is what is best for New Yorkers in this critical time.

"It is time for Governor Cuomo to resign."

Cuomo has defiantly said he would not resign, saying he was elected by the people not politicians. He has denied touching anyone inappropriately or that he knew he made any women uncomfortable at the time.

He has urged lawmakers to wait until Attorney General Letitia James completes her investigation of the allegations.

Some lawmakers have agreed to wait to pass judgment on Cuomo until the investigation is complete.

But others said Cuomo has become too large a distraction amid the state's effort to fight the COVID pandemic and reach a budget deal by April 1.

Plus, the number of new allegations against Cuomo has put lawmakers in a position where they said they need to respond more quickly.

"Wednesday's allegation of groping was, frankly, for me, the last straw," Sen. Shelley Mayer, D-Yonkers, said in a statement Thursday.

She added, "I do not see how the State of New York can be led during this crisis by this Governor."

If Cuomo continues to refuse to resign, he could face impeachment in the Legislature, and Heastie said Thursday the Assembly Judiciary Committee would first investigate before any action.

"The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious," Heastie said Thursday evening. "The committee will have the authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence, as is allowed by the New York State Constitution."

An impeachment would start with a majority vote in the state Assembly, where Democrats hold more than 100 of the 150 seats and Republicans would certainly be on board with impeachment. If Cuomo were to be impeached, Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul would become acting governor while he awaits impeachment trial.

But it is uncertain whether Heastie would break from Assembly tradition: Democrats only vote on bills when they do not need Republican votes to pass; that means 76 Democratic votes are required.

So with 40 Democratic members in the Assembly calling on Cuomo to resign, Heastie would either need to partner with Republicans to oust Cuomo or get more Democrats on board.

And Cuomo's wait-for-the-investigation position has gotten support from more than dozen Assembly members, including Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes, of Buffalo, who is the second in command.

If the Assembly were to successfully vote to impeach Cuomo, a trial would then be held jointly by the Senate and Court of Appeals. A two-thirds majority vote would be required to convict Cuomo and remove him from office.

So that means 46 votes would be required, which would need to be a mix of Democrats and Republicans. Democrats control 42 of the 63 seats in the Senate.

For his part, Cuomo has said allegations alone should not be the reason he should leave. He denied the latest claims, calling the description "gut wrenching."

"You don't know any facts, right?" Cuomo said Tuesday, before the details of the sixth woman's claim became public. "You know allegations. You don't know facts. Let's operate on facts."

[Return to top](#)

Journal News: New York to end COVID travel quarantine requirement beginning April 1

Jon Campbell:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY – New York will end its mandatory quarantine policy for domestic travelers entering the state beginning next month, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced Thursday.

Since June, Cuomo's administration has required out-of-state travelers or those returning home to quarantine for two weeks upon arrival in New York, with a shorter isolation period required in recent months for those who test negative for COVID-19.

With virus rates dropping throughout the country, New York will now abandon the mandatory quarantine requirement altogether for those traveling domestically, though the state Department of Health will still recommend it as a precaution.

The change takes effect April 1.

"This is great news, but it is not an all-clear for New Yorkers to let their guard down," Cuomo said in a statement.

Earlier this month, Cuomo announced those who are asymptomatic have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 will no longer have to quarantine when traveling to or returning to New York within the first 90 days of their second dose.

Once the new policy kicks in April 1, travelers will still be required to monitor symptoms for 14 days upon arrival in New York and will be instructed to self-isolate if any symptoms occur.

The quarantine requirement will remain in effect for those traveling internationally, according to Cuomo's office.

All travelers will still be required to fill out a contact-tracing form with their contact information and address upon returning to New York. Failure to fill out a form before leaving a New York airport can result in a \$10,000 fine, according to the state.

[Return to top](#)

Journal News: Andrew Cuomo's office refers groping allegation to Albany Police

Jon Campbell:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY – Gov. Andrew Cuomo's office on Wednesday notified the Albany Police Department of an allegation that the Democratic governor aggressively groped a staff member who had been summoned to his official residence, according to a state attorney.

Beth Garvey, acting counsel for the governor's office, issued a statement Thursday confirming the state informed local police of the incident as a matter of obligation under state policy.

News of the referral comes a day after the Times Union of Albany first reported details about the incident, which is alleged to have occurred at the Executive Mansion late last year.

An unnamed staff member, who has not publicly identified herself or filed an official complaint, claims Cuomo reached under her blouse and groped her after asking her to come to the mansion to help with an issue with his phone, the newspaper reported.

In her statement, Garvey said state agencies are obligated to inform anyone making an allegation of physical contact that they "should contact their local police department."

If they decline, the state then "has an obligation to reach out themselves and inform the department of the allegation."

The woman at the center of the latest Cuomo allegation declined to make a report herself, so the state contacted Albany Police, Garvey said.

"In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney's information," she said in a statement.

Cuomo's office's contact with the Albany Police was first reported by The New York Times.

At least 6 women accuse Cuomo of misconduct

The unnamed aide is at least the sixth woman to accuse Cuomo of inappropriate behavior in some form. Her complaint opens the governor up to potential criminal liability, though as of late Wednesday, Albany Police had not received a complaint directly from her.

Cuomo denied the claim in a statement Wednesday night, calling the alleged conduct "gut-wrenching" while saying he has never engaged in anything like it.

"As I said (Tuesday), I have never done anything like this," Cuomo said in his statement. "The details of this report are gut-wrenching. I am not going to speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation given the ongoing review, but I am confident in the result of the Attorney General's report."

Steve Smith, spokesperson for the Albany Police Department, could not immediately be reached for comment Thursday afternoon.

A State Police spokesman confirmed the agency made the connection between the Albany Police and the governor's office.

"The State Police reached out to the Albany Police (Wednesday) to facilitate a contact with the executive chamber regarding the alleged incident," said the spokesman, Beau Duffy.

Cuomo already facing civil investigation

Cuomo is already facing an investigation of his alleged sexual harassment and misconduct led by state Attorney General Letitia James' office. But that investigation is civil in nature under state law.

Albany County District Attorney David Soares would have prosecutorial jurisdiction over the incident, though he would first need a referral or a probable cause report filed to open a criminal investigation. Such investigations are rarely launched without a report from the victim.

Cecilia Walsh, a spokesperson for Soares, declined comment Wednesday night.

In an 11 p.m. statement Wednesday, Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan pledged the police department's cooperation.

"At this time no criminal complaint involving this matter has been filed by the victim with the Albany Police Department, but Chief (Eric) Hawkins assured me this evening that APD stands ready to assist any victim who seeks to come forward," Sheehan said.

Return to top

TU: Assembly begins impeachment investigation into Cuomo

Edward McKinley:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY — Dozens of state lawmakers added their names to the list of those calling for the resignation of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo in the 24 hours after a Times Union report published on Wednesday evening revealed that a current staffer of Cuomo's had alleged the governor called her to the Executive Mansion and groped her in a sexually aggressive manner.

The renewed calls for the governor to resign or step down pushed Assembly Democrats to move forward with an official impeachment investigation, which will be run by the Judiciary Committee.

"The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious," Speaker Carl Heastie said in a statement. "The committee will have the authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence, as is allowed by the New York State Constitution." He said it would be "an expeditious, full and thorough investigation."

The majority conference made the decision in a Thursday-afternoon meeting; a source who participated told the Times Union that the inquiry is not expected to be limited to just the sexual harassment claims, but also the administration's handling of COVID-19 in nursing homes and the alleged cover-up of data of fatality data.

Attorney General Letitia James, whose office is overseeing an investigation into the harassment claims, issued a statement Thursday evening saying that the Assembly's decision "will have no bearing on our independent investigation into these allegations against Gov. Cuomo."

There were more than 40 Democratic Assembly members calling for resignation by Thursday evening. Local Assembly members John McDonald of Cohoes and Patricia Fahy of Albany issued statements suggesting that Cuomo should step aside temporarily in light of the multiple scandals engulfing his administration.

Impeachment can't move forward in the Assembly without the speaker allowing it to come to a vote; it would need just a majority to pass, at which point Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul would become acting governor. If the current number of Democratic Assembly members calling for Cuomo to step aside temporarily or resign translate to impeachment votes and are added to the 43 Republican votes, there would be enough to impeach.

Timeline of allegations made against Andrew Cuomo

March 9: Female aide claims governor touched her inappropriately; complaint reported to AG

March 7: Cuomo defies calls to step down after former press aide Karen Hinton accuses him of misconduct

March 6: Another ex-aide, Ana Liss, calls Cuomo's office conduct inappropriate

March 1: Anna Ruch accuses Cuomo of unwanted advance at wedding: 'Can I kiss you?'

Feb. 27: Cuomo accused of sexual harassment by second former aide, Charlotte Bennett

Feb. 24: Ex-Cuomo staffer Lindsay Boylan says governor asked her to play strip poker, harassed her

After impeachment, the action would move to the other legislative chamber, where governor's fate would be decided by the 63-member state Senate plus the seven judges on the state Court of Appeals — all of whom were appointed by Cuomo. A two-thirds vote (47) of that gathering would be needed to formally remove Cuomo.

After the new details emerged Wednesday, statements came from Democratic state senators including Michelle Hinchey, John Mannion, Shelley Mayer, Andrew Gounardes, Toby Stavisky and Brian Kavanagh. A total of 22 state senators had called for Cuomo to resign by Thursday evening.

The entire GOP Senate conference put out a signed statement Thursday endorsing Cuomo's resignation or impeachment and removal. That means there were as of Thursday evening 42 calls for resignation among those potential jurors, which presumably would translate into votes for removal. That means that removal would require some combination of five Democratic senators or members of the Court of Appeals to join.

Return to top

TU: Referring Cuomo's sexual assault allegation to Albany police 'highly unusual'

Brendan J. Lyons:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY — Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan said the decision by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's acting counsel to refer a sexual assault allegation against the governor to the city's police department was "highly unusual" and would normally be a matter handled by the State Police.

"This was highly unusual. No one can recall the Albany Police Department being contacted with a complaint of this type that happened on state property," Sheehan told the Times Union on Thursday. "Typically, those cases are referred to the State Police. We do have parallel jurisdiction but ... in my years in office I don't know of any sexual assault claim that has been referred to the Albany Police Department out of the state complex or the governor's mansion."

Cuomo's counsel reported the incident to Albany police on Wednesday night — just hours after the Times Union published new details of a female aide's account of what she described as sexually aggressive groping by the governor after she was called to the Executive Mansion late last year.

The referral, made by Cuomo's office as required by state law, was confirmed by the police department's spokesman and first reported by the New York Times.

Sheehan said that before Beth Garvey, the governor's acting counsel, had contacted Albany police the department had been notified by State Police at the Capitol that Garvey would be calling them.

Officials with the governor's office and the State Police did not immediately respond to questions about why the State Police did not field the complaint, or whether that agency had recused itself from the matter. The Times Union first reported this week that the woman's allegation against Cuomo could potentially lead to a charge of misdemeanor sexual assault.

"When the police chief notified me of this notification that the police department received, I was very firm in communicating that while I understood that the department had been made aware of a potential criminal allegation, (and) that because this woman was represented, that the detectives or the police department should only contact her attorney, not her directly," Sheehan said.

The woman's attorney informed the city that they are not interested in pursuing a criminal complaint at this time.

The lawyer "has made it clear that she wants the attorney general's office to have the authority to investigate this, along with the other allegations, and I am very respectful of that decision," Sheehan said.

A spokesman for the city police force said that the referral did not mean an investigation had begun, but that the police would offer services to the alleged victim.

"As a matter of state policy, when allegations of physical contact are made, the agency informs the complainant that they should contact their local police department," Garvey said in a statement. "If they decline, the agency has an obligation to reach out themselves and inform the department of the allegation."

"In this case, the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney's information," Garvey said.

On March 1, the governor's office issued a referral letter empowering state Attorney General Letitia James to commence an investigation of earlier allegations that the governor had sexually harassed at least two female staff members, including Boylan. That referral does not authorize the attorney general to conduct a criminal investigation or to subpoena witnesses before a grand jury.

It's unclear, given the latest alleged victim's accusations, whether the governor's office will expand its referral to give James' office jurisdiction to handle any criminal components of the harassment and sexual assault allegations. In essence, Cuomo would be authorizing the attorney general to investigate him for any potential crime.

Sheehan, an attorney who previously conducted sexual harassment investigations for a publicly traded company, said it is unusual for a victim of sexual harassment to pursue a criminal case against their alleged abuser.

"In my experience, I've never seen a complaint that resulted in criminal charges," the mayor said. "In virtually every instance the women who are subjected to sexual harassment want the harassment to stop and they want to pursue their claims civilly. Often they want to pursue it as confidentially as possible.

"I think it's really important to recognize that every time you make a victim tell her story, you're re-victimizing her," Sheehan said.

The governor's administration has taken criticism for its failure to refer a complaint from Charlotte Bennett, another Cuomo aide who has made allegations against him, to the Governor's Office of Employee Relations, as required by his own 2018 executive order.

The Times Union reported Wednesday evening that the latest female aide to tell her story has alleged Cuomo aggressively groped her in a sexually charged manner after she had been called to the Executive Mansion under the apparent pretext of having her assist the governor with a minor technical issue involving his mobile phone. They were alone in Cuomo's private residence on the second floor when he closed the door and allegedly reached under her blouse and began to fondle her, according to the source.

The allegations by the female aide, who is the sixth woman to accuse Cuomo of inappropriate behavior, were first reported Tuesday by the Times Union. The additional details describe the most egregious behavior attributed to the governor to date.

The person briefed on the case, who is not authorized to comment publicly, said the woman — who is much younger than Cuomo — told the governor to stop. Her broader allegations include that he frequently engaged in flirtatious behavior with her, and that it was not the only time that he had touched her.

The woman's story was revealed within the governor's Executive Chamber on March 3, as staff members watched his first news conference in the week since Lindsey Boylan published an online essay detailing her own allegations against Cuomo. In the news conference, the governor denied ever touching any women "inappropriately."

Hearing those remarks, the female aide became emotional. At least one female supervisor came to her assistance and asked why she was upset. The female aide subsequently told the supervisor about what she said had been inappropriate encounters with Cuomo, the source said.

In response to the Times Union's questions about the allegations, Cuomo on Wednesday evening issued a statement to the newspaper: "As I said yesterday, I have never done anything like this. The details of this report are gut-wrenching. I am not going to speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation given the ongoing review, but I am confident in the result of the attorney general's report."

State Attorney General Letitia James' office is overseeing an investigation of the multiple harassment allegations against Cuomo.

Return to top

TU: New York loses lawsuit to further dredge PCBs from Hudson River

Rick Karlin:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY — The state has lost a court battle to reverse a ruling by the Environmental Protection Agency that General Electric Co.'s dredging project to remove PCBs from the Hudson River was satisfactorily completed.

"This lawsuit comes too late and (is) based on improper theories," Northern Federal District Court Judge David Hurd concluded Wednesday in dismissing the state's suit against the federal agency and GE.

Hurd, however, noted that General Electric could still be on the hook for more dredging, as the state could essentially restart the process that led to the company's \$1.7 billion dredging project, which ran from 2006 to 2015.

GE and the EPA in 2006 entered into a consent decree in which the government agreed not to sue GE if the company adequately removed PCBs, which were released from its electric capacitor factories in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls between 1947 and 1977.

Polychlorinated biphenyl, or PCB, was a manmade compound used as an electronic insulator as well as other applications due to its heat resistance. But concerns over the toxicity of PCBs led to a ban in 1979.

GE dumped an estimated 1.3 million pounds of PCBs in the Hudson over the years. Amid growing efforts to clean up the river, GE agreed to dredge the 40 miles between Fort Edward and Troy as part of the 2006 EPA agreement.

They took out about 310,000 pounds of PCB-laden sediment from the river bed, or about 72 percent of what was believed to be there.

In 2015 GE finished dredging and in 2019 the EPA issued a certificate of completion, saying that GE's dredging task was completed.

The company also had dismantled a dewatering facility in Fort Edward, which at the time riled activists who believed that more work was still needed. They believed the scope of dredging was too limited and suggested that dredging should also take place below Troy, where there is a dam.

And shortly after the certificate was issued the state sued the EPA, contending that the job wasn't done.

"New York is taking action to demand a full and complete remediation," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said at the time.

Lawyers for New York argued that the EPA's granting of a certificate of completion had been made in an arbitrary and capricious manner and in a way that exceeded the EPA's authority. The state also argued that the cleanup failed to achieve the highest of five levels of protectiveness, meaning it guarded against present and future problems.

But Hurd said the federal laws governing protectiveness don't demand that highest level. There are other levels of protection, such as doing remediation without a clear idea of what the future would bring.

Hurd, though, also stressed that should conditions change, the government could still induce GE to perform more cleanups. "The consent decree is clear that GE's obligations for the cleanup remain undisturbed. And in the event that the government determines that the river was not adequately cleaned by GE's efforts, the language of that consent decree leaves a clear opening for the government to come after the company with the full force of the law to see the job done," wrote Hurd.

The DEC says it is considering their options, including a possible appeal of the decision.

"DEC remains committed to ensuring that a comprehensive cleanup and full restoration of the Hudson River is completed as expeditiously as possible and that the polluters are held responsible," the agency said in a prepared statement.

"We are disappointed in the court's decision and are evaluating our next steps," added Hayley Carlock, a lawyer for Scenic Hudson. The group wasn't a party to the suit but it filed a friend of the court brief supporting the state. Carlock also noted that the EPA is considering whether to look at possible remediation needs on the lower Hudson River, below Troy.

GE issued a statement saying "We will review the decision in detail. We are pleased that environmental conditions in the Hudson River continue to improve. GE will continue to meet its commitments to EPA and New York State on Hudson River-related projects."

[Return to top](#)

Newsday: Groups to get \$5.7M in federal funds to provide addiction services on Long Island

**By Lisa L. Colangelo:
Mar 12, 2021**

A coalition of groups that provides addiction services on Long Island will receive about \$5.7 million in federal funding, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo announced Wednesday.

The monies are part of a larger \$50.7 million package through the state Office of Addiction Services and Supports for networks across the state to administer prevention, treatment and recovery programs. The funds come through the federal government's State Opioid Response Grant.

Providers have said the need for addiction and mental health services is especially important due to the challenges people are facing because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is vital that we ensure that all New Yorkers, in all regions of the state, have access to lifesaving addiction services," OASAS Commissioner Arlene Gonzalez-Sanchez said in a statement. "With this funding we are able to build on our work with our community-based provider network to strengthen these collaborations and reach more people in need."

The recipient, The Long Island Network, includes organizations in both Nassau and Suffolk counties.

"We are all working together under this grant and it is going to help tremendously," said Karen Boorshtein, president and CEO of the Family Service League, a nonprofit based in Huntington and a member of the network. "Each of the organizations will be able to increase services to people who are struggling with addiction — prevention, treatment and recovery — islandwide."

"This is really going to expand and enhance the work we have all been doing," she said.

CN Guidance and Counseling Services, a nonprofit based in Hicksville, which is also a member of the network, will be able to expand its hours and vital programs, said CEO Jeffrey Friedman.

"We have seen overdoses increase during the pandemic," Friedman said. "People are struggling to stay away from substances during this very stressful time. Our phones have been ringing off the hook from people reaching out for treatment."

The organization also uses a mobile recovery van as part of its outreach efforts.

"We're out in high-needs communities where we know people are suffering and where they can really use the help," he said.

Return to top

Buffalo News: Assembly opens impeachment investigation of Cuomo

**Tom Precious:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY – On the heels of a new allegation against Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and a referral of the claim to Albany police, Assembly Democrats Thursday evening authorized the start of an investigation to determine if the Democratic governor should be impeached.

After a virtual meeting with his colleagues, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said the chamber's judiciary committee will launch a probe of Cuomo into "misconduct" allegations lodged against the embattled three-term governor.

Heastie said the investigation will not interfere with one already started and overseen by Attorney General Letitia James. While it could take weeks to conclude, during which time lawmakers and Cuomo are set to negotiate a new, \$200 billion state budget, Heastie promised a thorough and expeditious process.

"The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious," Heastie, a Bronx Democrat, said in a written statement.

The investigation will be led by Assembly Judiciary Chairman Charles Lavine, a Long Island Democrat and well-respected lawyer.

James on Thursday said the Assembly's action will have no bearing on the work her office is overseeing. "Our investigation will continue," she said.

Pressure to step aside

Meanwhile, some lawmakers from Cuomo's own party are starting to press a new route for the governor, who has said there is "no way" he would resign: temporarily step aside and let Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul act in his capacity.

The state constitution would permit Cuomo to step aside as an alternative to his outright resignation or impeachment, a legal route that does not appear to have the votes among Democrats.

The idea of Cuomo stepping aside – at least until an investigation overseen by James is completed in May – gathered steam in private talks among lawmakers Wednesday.

Assemblyman John McDonald, an Albany County Democrat, tweeted Wednesday that "it is in the best interest of our state" that Cuomo step aside and let Hochul serve as governor until the James report is issued "or any other potential inquiries reach a conclusion or a removal determination under the law is made."

"These are serious allegations and the people of the state of New York need steady leadership without distraction," McDonald wrote.

Albany police informed

The lawmaker's comments came after the Albany Times Union reported that an unidentified Cuomo staffer has accused the Democratic governor of groping a woman at the Executive Mansion a few blocks from the state Capitol.

The newspaper, quoting an unnamed source, said the woman late last year was called to the governor's mansion to help him with a cellphone matter. When there, Cuomo closed the door to a room and reached under her blouse and fondled her, the paper reported.

Cuomo denied the incident occurred, but his office said that it had followed state policy and reported the allegation to the Albany Police Department. A criminal probe has not been started, but the police agency did reach out to the woman's lawyer to offer its services, if she wants them, to the woman.

Beth Garvey, the acting counsel in Cuomo's office, said in a statement that state policy dictates that allegations about physical contact are handled by telling the accuser to reach out to police.

"If they decline, the agency has an obligation to reach out themselves and inform the (police) department of the allegation. In this case, the person is represented by counsel, and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney's information," Garvey said.

The woman is the sixth case to emerge in which Cuomo has been accused of sexual harassment. But this accusation, as described in the Times Union account, could rise to the level of criminal sexual wrongdoing.

Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan, a Democrat, issued a statement late Wednesday saying that no criminal complaint has been filed by the woman in the latest accusation against Cuomo. But she said Albany Police Chief Eric Hawkins has assured her that his department “stands ready to assist any victim who seeks to come forward.”

Succession questions raised

The question of succession has been raised as the scandal enveloping Cuomo has spread. If a governor dies or resigns from office, the lieutenant governor “shall become” the governor.

But the lieutenant governor “shall act as governor” in several other instances: if a governor is impeached, is out of state, “or otherwise unable to discharge the powers and duties of the office of governor.” The lieutenant governor’s time as acting governor ends when “the inability shall cease or until the term of the governor shall expire.”

After the latest account of a woman making complaints about Cuomo’s words and actions toward her, the number of lawmakers calling for him to resign began rising again Wednesday. Lawmakers are also upset about Cuomo’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in nursing homes, including undercounting of how many residents of the facilities died last year from the virus.

“In light of these allegations, coupled with the deliberate mishandling and withholding of information, I believe it is in the best interest of the people of New York for the governor to resign,” freshman Sen. Michelle Hinchey, a Hudson Valley Democrat, said in a statement Wednesday.

In the Assembly, where Democrats also hold a supermajority, freshman Jessica Gonzales-Rojas, a Queens Democrat, tweeted Wednesday: “I’ve had enough. Cuomo must be impeached.”

Thursday, Assemblywoman Patricia Fahy, an Albany Democrat, joined the Cuomo step-aside push. She previously was among 21 female Democratic Assembly members to say James' investigation should be permitted to run its course before Cuomo's fate is decided.

But with the most recent allegation involving Cuomo and one of his female staffers at the governor's mansion, Fahey on Thursday said he should temporarily step aside "and let our well-respected" lieutenant governor serve as acting governor until the attorney general's investigation is underway.

Assembly Democrats huddled on the Cuomo scandals in private Thursday to discuss all the options, including possible impeachment.

Meanwhile, Jay Jacobs, the state Democratic Party chairman and a Cuomo ally, said he respects the calls by Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, a Westchester County Democrat, and a "large" number of Democratic lawmakers. He said that "out of respect for our broader party leadership," he will be calling a meeting of county Democratic leaders to get their perspectives on the scandals.

Cuomo's office listed the governor as being in Albany Thursday with no public schedule yet. Hochul, meanwhile, had a busy day on her schedule with five appearances – all of them virtual – to groups including women builders and a teachers union.

Return to top

Utica OD: Rome council promises police reform 'will always be a work in progress'

Edward Harris:
Mar 12, 2021

Rome's Common Council passed the city's police reform proposal unanimously Wednesday night, but promised residents information could always be added to the document.

"April 1 was the governor's deadline, not the city of Rome's deadline," said Fifth Ward Councilor Frank Anderson.

In June, Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order — along with a package of police reforms — that requires local governments and police forces to enact their own reforms by April 1, 2021, to continue to receive state funding.

The order requires the groups to come up with plans to address use of force, crowd management, community policing and bias awareness training. It also includes de-escalation training and practices, community-based outreach and a citizen complaint disposition procedure.

Per Cuomo's order, the reform plan was offered for public comment and then was presented to the Rome Common Council on Wednesday night. A certification of the law or resolution will be transmitted to the New York State director of the Division of Budget.

A few city residents spoke out against the Rome Police Department reform plan during the public hearing in late February during a specially held Common Council meeting, with some stating the proposal did not go far enough.

Many of those same speakers — and a host of representatives from the Rome NAACP branch — spoke during the public comment portion of Wednesday's meeting and highlighted many of the same issues from February.

Residents spoke in February about a need for mental health help, recruitment and a belief that the reforms did not go far enough to include those who feel disenfranchised.

Rome NAACP President Jacqueline Nelson and city resident Robert Angelicola — who spoke during Wednesday's public portion of the meeting — also submitted letters that were put into the record.

The city of Rome's Community Advisory Committee published the 100-page draft proposal in early February. Its recommended actions include introducing body-worn cameras, further

work on crisis intervention and increasing diversity in recruitment — specifically among Spanish-speaking individuals.

“In no way is the work done,” said Third Ward Councilor Kimberly Rogers. “It will always be a work in progress.”

Return to top

Press Republican: Sales-tax revenue ahead of estimates

BY CARA CHAPMAN:
Mar 12, 2021

PLATTSBURGH — As of the end of February, sales-tax revenues for Clinton County were about \$550,000 ahead of projections for the year, though close to \$300,000 less than 2020 figures.

“It’s a decrease of 7.15 percent — that’s not surprising to me,” Clinton County Treasurer Kimberly Davis said, noting that some people are still out of work and/or are not spending as much as they did at this time last year.

“We started out 2020 with a bang. We were in really good shape.”

LOOKING FOR BUMP

With passage of the 2021 Clinton County Budget, county legislators adopted an 8.5 percent reduction in sales tax projections compared to 2020. That was attributed to the ongoing pandemic, a lack of clarity regarding when restrictions on nonessential travel across the U.S.-Canada border would be lifted and state mandates that would further reduce revenue.

For the end of February, the county had budgeted for \$3.3 million in sales-tax revenue. Davis said that figure came to about \$3.8 million.

“I would say, unless something catastrophic happens, I don’t think we’re going to go backwards,” she continued, “especially with stimulus checks coming, certainly we’ll be looking for a bump.”

Davis was referencing direct payments allocated through the American Rescue Plan, passed by both Houses of Congress this week, that is set to be signed into law by President Joe Biden this Friday.

She added that other components of the legislation, such as continuation of additional unemployment benefits, as well as any potential moratorium extensions on foreclosures and the border’s eventual reopening could also contribute to sales-tax revenue increases.

And as more people get vaccines, they will feel more comfortable going to restaurants and other businesses, Davis predicted.

FORECLOSURES

During last week’s Clinton County Finance Committee meeting, Davis discussed foreclosures with legislators, encouraging them to reach out to constituents and people they knew whose properties were on the list she provided.

Currently, 185 properties are headed to foreclosure, which breaks down to 126 residences — that also includes seasonal homes —, seven commercial properties and 52 vacant properties.

Of the total, 62 are left over from last year, and 13 are in long-term contracts with the county that will not be foreclosed on so long as owners continue to make payments, Davis said.

Taking out the 75 leftover and contract properties, the number of parcels is above average compared to a typical year but the pandemic does not appear to have caused a spike, the treasurer said.

MORATORIUM EXTENDED

A statewide moratorium on evictions and foreclosures that began with an executive order signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo in March 2020 was extended through May 1, 2021, by legislation he signed into law in December, giving people more time to pay.

“But the unintended consequences are that if the people headed to this year’s foreclosure don’t pay by April 30, by law we have to add on 2021 taxes which, unfortunately if you’re having a hard enough time paying 2019 and 2020 taxes, it’ll be an even harder time,” Davis explained.

“Unfortunately there is nothing we are able to do. We have no discretion to change that.”

Davis’ office planned to send out letters Wednesday to those whose properties are at risk of foreclosure to notify them about this information.

“We are doing everything we can to make sure people are aware,” she said.

NEVER WANT TO FORECLOSE

The county does budget for revenue from a foreclosure auction each year, usually about \$300,000, though the county planned for \$375,000 this year due to the properties left over from last year.

Though it is a revenue source, Davis considers foreclosures the worst part of her job.

“I never want to foreclose on anyone,” she said. Her message for people who already find themselves falling behind on 2020 or 2021 taxes is to address that as early as possible.

“We do have long-term installment agreement options.”

If the state chooses to extend the moratorium again, Davis said, it is possible this year’s foreclosures would be rolled into next year’s.

But if that does not happen, her office will file a petition for foreclosure at the beginning of May. A judge’s signing of the order weeks later would start the redemption period of 45 calendar, not business, days.

“If taxes are not paid by the 45th day, then the county forecloses,” Davis said.

GAMING COMPACT

At the Finance Committee meeting, Davis also brought up how the county had not received any Native American Gaming Compact revenue — which comes from scheduled payments made by the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe to the state — since the third quarter of 2019.

Davis shared with legislators that her office was only just recently informed that the Tribe had advised the Governor’s Office on March 18, 2020, that they would not be making scheduled payments. The Tribe had cited how casino gaming revenue is a primary source of tribal government operations funding, and said that payments would be reconciled once the health crisis had passed.

Davis told The Press-Republican that, in 2018, the county received more than \$537,000 from that revenue source. The county budgeted for receipt of \$350,000 in 2021.

Payments still had yet to come in as of Thursday, the treasurer confirmed.

County Administrator Michael Zurlo noted at the meeting that this was the type of revenue loss shortfall that could be covered by direct federal aid.

Return to top

Watertown Daily Times: New York Assembly starts impeachment probe into Cuomo

**By KATE LISA:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY — The Assembly Judiciary Committee will begin an impeachment investigation against Gov. Andrew Cuomo after city police contacted executive officials over a new accusation that the governor sexually assaulted an unnamed aide.

A current female aide alleges Cuomo aggressively groped her in the Governor's Mansion last year after she was summoned to the residence to help fix a technical error with the governor's cell phone, according to a Wednesday report in the Albany Times Union.

The staff member, whose identity was not disclosed, claims she and the governor were alone in Cuomo's private residence on the second floor when he closed the door and allegedly reached under her blouse and began to fondle her.

As a result, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, D-Bronx, announced Thursday evening that after meeting with the Assembly Majority Conference earlier in the day, he authorized the Assembly Judiciary Committee to begin an impeachment investigation to examine allegations of misconduct against Cuomo. The committee will be led by Chair Charles D. Lavine.

“The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious,” the Assembly speaker said.

The committee will have the authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence.

“I have the utmost faith that Assemblymember Lavine and the members of the committee will conduct an expeditious, full and thorough investigation,” he added.

“While I welcome the decision to launch an impeachment investigation to look into alleged misconduct by Gov. Cuomo, the Assembly Committee on Judiciary must proceed with urgency,” Assembly Minority Leader William Barclay, R-Pulaski, said in a prepared statement Thursday evening. “Republicans have called for impeachment investigations for weeks. Now that Democrats have finally recognized the need, the committee’s work must move expeditiously and it must provide a deadline, details and the defined process the investigation will take.

“Andrew Cuomo no longer has the trust and credibility to serve as governor of this state,” he added. “An impeachment investigation is a significant step. But, Assembly Democrats must acknowledge that time is of the essence and that time has run out on Andrew Cuomo.”

Democrats in the Assembly Majority Conference on Thursday met for several hours to evaluate Cuomo’s ability to lead amid state Attorney General Letitia James’ independent investigation into the claims and the U.S. Justice Department’s separate probe into Cuomo’s administration’s underreporting of COVID-19 deaths in New York nursing homes.

The Assembly committee’s inquiry will not interfere with the AG’s independent investigation.

The AG’s office confirmed the state Legislature’s separate probe will not impede her work.

Beth Garvey, the governor's acting counsel, reported the allegations to area police, she said in a statement Thursday.

"As a matter of state policy when allegations of physical contact are made, the agency informs the complainant that they should contact their local police department," according to Garvey. "If they decline, the agency has an obligation to reach out themselves and inform the department of the allegation.

"In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney's information," she added.

The current aide is the sixth woman who has raised accusations of sexual harassment or inappropriate behavior against Cuomo over the past several weeks.

"The state police reached out to the Albany police yesterday (Wednesday) to facilitate a contact with the Executive Chamber regarding the alleged incident," state police spokesman Trooper Beau Duffy said Thursday. "I believe the chamber asked us to facilitate a contact with the Albany Police Department to provide the details."

"In light of the allegations concerning the governor over the last several weeks, I will be meeting with members in conference today (Thursday) on potential paths forward," Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, D-Bronx, said in a prepared statement Thursday.

James appointed two attorneys Monday in her independent investigation into the claims.

The number of Democrats calling for Cuomo's resignation has continued to grow as more women have come forward with allegations against the governor.

More than 40 Democratic members of the Assembly and 19 lawmakers in the Senate Majority Conference released a joint statement Thursday morning calling for the governor to step down.

“As legislators and as New Yorkers we all must decide what is best for the future of New York state,” the lawmakers said Thursday. “The budget, the fight against COVID-19 and restarting the economy all demand clear and trustworthy leadership. In light of the governor’s admission of inappropriate behavior and the findings of altered data on nursing home COVID-19 deaths, he has lost the confidence of the public and the state Legislature, rendering him ineffective in this time of most urgent need.

“We are fully confident in the attorney general’s ability to investigate this matter thoroughly, and know that no change in state executive leadership will impede or affect her office’s important work,” they added. “In the meantime, the governor needs to put the people of New York first. ... It is time for Gov. Cuomo to resign.”

The governor stepping down will not impede the attorney general’s full investigation or report of the facts.

Assembly Republicans submitted an impeachment resolution Monday. It was introduced, but lawmakers have not advanced the document nor assigned it to committees.

The 150-member state Assembly has 107 Democratic and 43 Republican members.

The resolution, passed by a simple 76-vote majority, would force the governor to resign. If passed, the Assembly speaker would draw up articles of impeachment and deliver them to the state Senate, which would hold a trial to convict the governor.

Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, would take over leading the state after articles of impeachment are delivered, which would force Cuomo to step aside.

Lawmakers have enough votes to impeach Cuomo, with 40 Democrats in favor of the governor's resignation, according to Thursday's joint statement, and 43 Republicans willing to vote for impeachment.

Democratic lawmakers will not likely bring an impeachment resolution to the floor for a vote without 76 members of the majority ready to vote in favor, Assembly Republican representatives said Thursday.

Cuomo has held three public press events since women started publicly accusing him of sexual misconduct late last month, and at two of them, the governor refused to resign.

The Assembly Minority Conference has circulated a resolution to form an impeachment commission over the last two weeks to create a bipartisan panel of eight members, with two appointees from each legislative leader.

"These things take time," an Assembly GOP spokesperson said. "This is now in the hands of the Democrats. It's a longer process, but there's also intent — they're not going to hit the gas pedal for our bills."

New York's 39th governor, William Sulzer, is the only leader in the state's history to be removed from office. He was impeached, convicted of perjury and removed from office in October 1913.

"There's no precedent here," the Assembly spokesperson said. "The playbook is more than 105 years old."

Other Democrats continue to plead for the AG's investigation before Cuomo is removed from office.

“The allegations of these women are serious,” U.S. Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., said about the claims against Cuomo on SiriusXM’s “The Joe Madison Show” on Thursday morning. “They’re deeply troubling.

“Last night’s was nauseating,” he added, saying he believes the AG “will not let any outside or political interference stop her from getting all the facts out.”

New York State Democratic Committee Chairman Jay Jacobs said the most recent allegation reported Wednesday night makes it imperative to wait for the attorney general’s thorough investigation.

“I have full confidence in (the AG’s) ability to conduct that investigation expeditiously with the full attention and resources necessary to produce a determinative report as soon as possible,” Jacobs said. “With the preponderance of these allegations, I agree with Speaker Heastie that now is the time for the Legislature to commence its own review of these matters as a part of its Constitutional responsibilities.”

Jacobs will convene a meeting of Democratic leaders throughout the state’s 62 counties to hear differing perspectives on the controversy, causing a party divide.

In addition to Wednesday’s allegation against Cuomo, Lindsey Boylan, former Empire State Development chief and Cuomo’s special adviser, first accused the governor of sexual harassment on Twitter in December, but was the first woman to come forward with a detailed account in late February.

Boylan, who is running for Manhattan borough president, accused the governor of a nonconsensual kiss in his Manhattan office, and unwanted touching of her lower back, arms and legs.

The New York Times was the first to report the accounts of 25-year-old Charlotte Bennett, who worked as Cuomo’s executive assistant and health policy adviser last spring, and a

March 1 report detailing 33-year-old Anna Ruch's incident after meeting the governor at a Manhattan wedding in 2019.

The Wall Street Journal reported Saturday that Cuomo's former aide Ana Liss claims the governor kissed her hand and asked personal questions while working in his administration.

Karen Hinton, a former aide from when Cuomo was secretary of Housing and Urban Development under former President Bill Clinton, recalled receiving an uncomfortable hug from Cuomo when they met in a hotel room in 2000. Hinton's account was reported Saturday in The Washington Post.

Return to top

Auburn Citizen: Cayuga County's state senators agree: Cuomo should resign as NY governor

Robert Harding:
Mar 12, 2021

The three state senators representing Cayuga County have reached the conclusion that Gov. Andrew Cuomo should resign amid multiple allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct.

State Sens. Pam Helming, John Mannion and Peter Oberacker said late Wednesday or Thursday that Cuomo should step down. Their statements follow an Albany Times Union story detailing the latest allegations against the governor.

According to the Times Union, a woman employed as an aide to Cuomo is accusing him of reaching under her blouse and groping her at the Executive Mansion late last year. The aide said that the governor requested her assistance with his phone, which is why she went to the mansion.

It is the sixth allegation of sexual harassment or misconduct against Cuomo, most of which involve either current or former aides. The governor has denied the accusations.

But with the increasing number of allegations, state lawmakers believe Cuomo can no longer serve as governor. Helming, R-Canandaigua, and Oberacker, R-Schenevus, joined other Senate Republicans in issuing a joint statement calling for Cuomo's resignation.

In her own statement, Helming said Cuomo has "shattered the public's trust."

"The governor and his administration intentionally misled the public on the number of nursing home residents who died from COVID," she continued. "The governor faces multiple serious allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct. It is important that these federal and state investigations proceed and the reports be made public."

Oberacker thinks Cuomo should resign. If he doesn't step down, he supports beginning impeachment proceedings that could result in the governor's removal from office.

"The next time Andrew Cuomo holds one of his press conference performances, to issue more disrespectful, blanket denials, he should be on his own without the New York State seal in front of him," Oberacker said. "Our state, and the women who have come forward, should not be disgraced any further."

Cuomo is also facing pressure from within his own party. Mannion, D-Geddes, is among the Democratic state senators calling on the governor to resign.

Mannion, like his Republican colleagues, also criticized Cuomo's handling of COVID-19 in nursing homes. The administration has faced criticism for an advisory that allowed COVID-positive patients to be sent to nursing homes and withholding the true number of nursing home residents who died of COVID-19.

Regarding the sexual harassment allegations against Cuomo, Mannion said the women who came forward "established a credible pattern of abhorrent and possibly criminal behavior" by the governor.

"These issues rise above the level of partisan politics or ideological fights — maintaining the public's trust in government requires those of us in elected office to hold ourselves to a higher standard of conduct," Mannion said. "The governor has clearly failed to meet that standard."

Cayuga County's state assemblymen agree that Cuomo should resign. Assemblyman John Lemondes, a LaFayette Republican, said the conduct is a distraction for the state Legislature during the budget process. If the governor doesn't resign, he said the Assembly must impeach him.

Assemblyman Brian Manktelow hopes impeachment proceedings won't be necessary.

"If any of this stuff is true, he does need to resign," Manktelow, R-Lyons, said.

[Return to top](#)

Auburn Citizen: COVID-19 vaccine 'assembly line': Cayuga County's clinics find home at Fingerlakes Mall

Robert Harding:
Mar 12, 2021

AURELIUS — John Thomas compared his experience at the Cayuga County Health Department's COVID-19 vaccination clinic to an assembly line.

"It's really quick and easy ... They just put you right through," said Thomas, an Auburn resident.

The department held its second clinic at the Fingerlakes Mall Event Center, a 35,000-square-foot space that is the former home of Steve and Barry's and other stores. Parking is available at the rear of the mall, where there is a direct entrance to the center.

Once inside the center, individuals who are getting vaccinated go from table to table to verify their appointment information, get a temperature check, provide their health insurance information, complete health screening forms and finalize their registration.

After completing those steps, they wait in line for their shots. There are six stations staffed by nurses from the health department and other agencies, such as the Office for the Aging. The nurses administer the inoculations, then the vaccinated individual advances to the final stage: The observation area. Auburn Fire Department personnel staff that section of the room to provide assistance if someone experiences side effects.

The health department has moved its clinics around to different locations after beginning to administer vaccinations at Cayuga-Onondaga BOCES in January. Because school resumed, BOCES was no longer an option, at least for weekday clinics. The department needed to find a new permanent home for the clinics.

Rene Patterson, general manager of Fingerlakes Mall, said he contacted the department and offered space in the mall.

"We're quite happy we get to help," he said. "(The vaccine) helps us get out of the pandemic much quicker."

The health department's first clinic at the mall's Event Center was on Friday, March 5. On Thursday, second doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine were administered to hundreds of local residents, many of whom attended a clinic at Port Byron Central School District to get their first doses.

Since the mall is a new location, the health department is always looking for ways to improve traffic flow through the clinic. Deanna Ryan, a senior public health educator at the Cayuga County Health Department, said they will time how long it takes for people to enter the center, get their shots and go to the observation area.

If the process slows or there is a bottleneck, Ryan said they will reevaluate their plans.

"We've learned to be agile and fix things so that it enhances the experience," she added.

For now, the clinics aren't being advertised. The health department asked local governments — the city of Auburn, towns and villages — to maintain waiting lists for the vaccine. Eligible residents will be contacted for an appointment.

The department is working with employers to schedule appointments for eligible workers. At the clinic Thursday, there were several employees from local grocery stores who received their second dose of the vaccine. Ryan said that was an example of communicating with the businesses to set up vaccinations for eligible employees.

There was good news for local health departments this week. Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that counties can vaccinate anyone who is eligible. Until recently, the departments were directed to vaccinate certain groups.

But the county won't open its clinics until there is an increased supply of vaccines. Last week, the health department received 500 doses of the Moderna vaccine, its largest allotment since it was shipped 2,000 doses for its first week of clinics in January. This week, there were 300 doses sent to the county.

[Return to top](#)

Politico NY: Cuomo's counsel refers most recent complaint to Albany police

**By MARIE J. FRENCH:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY, N.Y. — Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration has referred an accusation that he groped a female aide to the Albany Police Department, but the next steps are unclear, and the woman did not want to report the incident to police.

The New York Times first reported on the administration's move. The aide said that Cuomo touched her inappropriately while the two were alone in a room in the state's Executive Mansion.

“As a matter of state policy when allegations of physical contact are made, the agency informs the complainant that they should contact their local police department. If they decline, the agency has an obligation to reach out themselves and inform the department of the allegation,” said Cuomo's special counsel Beth Garvey in a statement. “In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney’s information.”

A spokesperson for the Albany Police Department did not respond to multiple requests for comment. He told the New York Times that the incident "may have risen to the level of a crime" but that no criminal investigation has been opened.

State Attorney General Tish James has appointed two lawyers to oversee an investigation into Cuomo's conduct, including any additional allegations of harassment. The attorneys launched a website to gather information on Thursday.

The unnamed female aide says Cuomo summoned her to the state's Executive Mansion for assistance with his cellphone and then reached under her blouse, according to the Times Union, which first reported the allegation.

The aide is the fourth current or former aide to the governor to accuse him of harassment or inappropriate conduct.

Lindsey Boylan, a former aide, says the governor kissed her while they were alone in his New York City office. She detailed her experience of that and degrading comments by Cuomo in a Medium post several weeks ago.

Charlotte Bennett, who worked as an executive assistant to Cuomo, said the governor asked her about her sexual relationships and if she was open to sex with older men when she worked

for him. Ana Liss, who was an Empire State Fellow, told the Wall Street Journal the governor had made inappropriate comments.

Two other women — Anna Ruch, who first met Cuomo at a wedding, and Karen Hinton, a former aide to Cuomo during his time at HUD — have also accused him of inappropriate behavior.

[Return to top](#)

Politico NY: Cuomo’s collapsing legislative support, by the numbers

BY BILL MAHONEY:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY, N.Y. — Gov. Andrew Cuomo is continuing to lose support from fellow Democrats in the state Legislature.

Sixty-five of the Legislature's 150 Democrats have called for him to resign or have requested an impeachment trial as of Thursday evening.

In the Assembly, which would launch any impeachment proceedings, 43 of the chamber's 107 Democrats have said that they want Cuomo gone, with seven stating that they would be willing to pursue an impeachment trial if he doesn't resign. Most of the other 64 have either said nothing or said they want to wait for investigations to finish. A few have issued statements that come close to calling for Cuomo's resignation, such as suggesting that he consider temporarily stepping aside.

Those 43 Democrats, coupled with the Assembly's 43 Republicans, total 86 members. Impeaching Cuomo would require 76 votes in favor.

In the state Senate, 22 of the chamber's 43 Democrats have called for Cuomo to go, with three of them explicitly saying they'd support an impeachment trial. Each of the 20 Republicans supports his removal, bringing the total to 42.

Should the Assembly impeach the governor, there would be a trial in the Senate. The court would consist of 62 of the 63 senators (Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, second in the line of succession and one of the 42 resignation supporters, would sit it out) and the seven justices of the Court of Appeals. If all of these members were present, then 46 votes would be needed to remove the governor from office.

Opposition to the governor has ticked up following each new allegation. But there are still some notable differences between the members who are calling for resignation or impeachment and those who aren't.

By region: Many of Cuomo's strongest allies in the Legislature have historically been the relatively moderate Democrats from Westchester County or Long Island. And so far, legislators from these suburban areas are standing by him: Only five of 25 Democrats from the areas — or 20 percent — have called on him to resign.

By comparison, 43 of 89 — or 48 percent — of New York City Democrats have made similar demands. Upstate, the numbers are 17 of 36 — or 47 percent.

By ethnic background: Cuomo's support remains stronger among minority Democrats than among white ones. A total of 39 of the 83 white members — or 47 percent — have said he's got to go. Among Black, Latino, or Asian members, 26 of 67 — or 39 percent — have supported his departure.

By gender: Women are evenly split: 32 of the 64 female Democrats have called for Cuomo's departure.

By comparison, 33 of 86 — or 38 percent — of the male Democratic legislators have made similar demands.

By tenure: The starkest divisions come with seniority. Of the 51 Democrats who are freshmen or sophomores, 32 — or 63 percent — have called for Cuomo's tenure to come to an end. Of

the 99 who have been in Albany for more than a couple of years, only 33, or 33 percent, have said the same.

Only one of the 14 Democrats who came into office before Mario Cuomo left office at the end of 1994 have called for his son to go.

Return to top

Politico NY: New York lawmakers launch Cuomo impeachment investigation

**By ANNA GRONEWOLD and SHANNON YOUNG:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY, N.Y. — Democrats in the New York Legislature delivered a severe blow to Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Thursday, emerging from a lengthy private meeting with a promise to launch their own investigation into the governor’s behavior — the first step toward impeachment.

Speaker Carl Heastie, addressing Democratic Assembly colleagues in the roughly five-hour meeting, laid out the “potential paths forward” to removing the increasingly embattled governor from office, according to four lawmakers in attendance. Two described the meeting as tense.

By the time the closed-door debate officially wrapped around 5 p.m., a decision had been made: The Assembly would authorize the chamber’s Judiciary Committee to look into the allegations against Cuomo, arming the committee with subpoena power and likely the aid of outside legal counsel.

A statement from Heastie following the meeting announced he was authorizing the committee — led by Assemblymember Charles Lavine of Nassau County — “to examine allegations of misconduct against Governor Cuomo.”

“The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious,” Heastie said. “The committee will have the authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence, as is allowed by the New York State Constitution. I have the utmost faith that

Assemblymember Lavine and the members of the committee will conduct an expeditious, full and thorough investigation.”

Heastie said the chamber’s investigation would run concurrent — and would not interfere with — an independent probe Attorney General Tish James has launched into Cuomo, who has faced growing calls for his resignation amid allegations of sexual harassment, inappropriate workplace behavior and a cover-up of Covid-19 nursing home deaths. Cuomo's administration also referred the latest accusation to the Albany Police Department.

“Today’s action by the New York state legislature will have no bearing on our independent investigation into these allegations against Governor Cuomo,” James said in a statement Thursday evening. “Our investigation will continue.”

The Assembly’s action came one day after the Times Union detailed allegations that Cuomo fondled an aide under her blouse late last year when they were alone in the governor’s private residence. The unnamed aide told colleagues she was summoned to the Executive Mansion, which is a short walk from the governor's office in the state Capitol, to help him with an issue on his cell phone, the newspaper reported.

Cuomo has denied that he ever "inappropriately touched" anyone and specifically denied the latest accusation in a statement on Wednesday.

The new allegation, marking the sixth claim of sexual harassment or inappropriate behavior by the governor, spurred more than 50 Democratic lawmakers to issue a joint letter on Thursday morning calling on Cuomo to resign.

A majority of Assemblymembers have now voiced support for ending Cuomo’s tenure. A total of 36 Democrats had called for the governor to resign and seven for him to be impeached ahead of Thursday’s conference meeting. Those 43 members, coupled with the chamber’s 43 Republicans, adds up to 86 — 10 more than would be required to impeach the governor.

But calling for the governor's resignation is not the same as supporting the politically disruptive process of impeachment, and it's unlikely the Assembly would move ahead with impeachment unless at least 54 Democrats, a majority, support doing so.

Democrats present in the Assembly conference meeting Thursday said that the discussion revolved more around the process and the speed at which they'd act than whether the allegations were true. One described the consensus to move toward impeachment as "overwhelming."

A few, however, worried the discussion was mostly for show. Midway through the conference, State Democratic Committee Chair Jay Jacobs, who has been Cuomo's staunchest defender in recent weeks, released a statement characterizing the latest allegation as "serious and disturbing" and agreed with the Assembly's move — which hadn't been announced yet — to launch an investigation of its own.

"With the preponderance of these allegations I agree with Speaker Heastie that now is the time for the Legislature to commence its own review of these matters as a part of its Constitutional responsibilities," he said.

Jacobs said he will convene a special meeting of county chairs to gauge their perceptions.

Some of Cuomo's harsher critics were pushing for a quicker process. One Democrat said about a dozen members had pushed for immediate action in drafting articles of impeachment. Otherwise, another of that group said, Cuomo can continue to operate under the same playbook he's been following: Urging the public and politicians to wait on the results of an investigation.

"We just spent hours debating what the next steps should be and for [Jacobs] to put that out makes me wonder whether this is a staged effort to give Cuomo more time," one legislator said.

Another of that pro-impeachment cohort said they were disappointed the process will go more slowly than they wanted, but regardless, felt the probe could serve as a signal for Cuomo to take matters into his own hands and resign: “It is due process. It is an investigation and a trial. And it also takes the governor out of the equation from having influence over the processes.”

And while Cuomo has rejected calls to resign, some hope the new investigation — and support for impeachment — could push the governor to reconsider.

“It would be much a smoother operation if [Cuomo] just exited stage left,” one Democrat said.

State GOP Chair Nick Langworthy said in a statement Thursday that Republican “calls for a subpoena-driven investigation into Cuomo’s deadly nursing home coverup have been resisted by the Democrat-controlled legislature.”

“This reeks of a political maneuver designed by Speaker Heastie to buy time and exploit the Governor’s weakness during the heat of budget negotiations,” Langworthy said.

Return to top

Politico NY: De Blasio: Cuomo 'can no longer serve as governor'

By DAVID GIAMBUSSO:
Mar 12, 2021

NEW YORK — Mayor Bill de Blasio on Thursday joined the call for Gov. Andrew Cuomo to step down in light of the most recent allegations against the embattled governor.

A sixth woman emerged this week accusing Cuomo of sexual misconduct. According to a report in the Times Union, the woman, a staffer whose identity has not been made public, said Cuomo last year called her to the Executive Mansion, and once she was there he reached under her blouse and fondled her.

"The specific allegation that the governor called an employee of his, someone who he had power over, called her to a private place and then sexually assaulted her is absolutely unacceptable. It is disgusting to me," de Blasio told reporters Thursday during a press conference at City Hall. "He can no longer serve as governor. It's as simple as that."

It marks the first time that de Blasio has called for Cuomo to resign over the multiple scandals that have emerged in recent weeks. The governor is also facing accusations of covering up the amount of nursing home deaths in New York.

Cuomo has denied the latest allegations.

"I have never done anything like this," he said in a statement Wednesday night. "The details of this report are gut-wrenching. I am not going to speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation given the ongoing review, but I am confident in the result of the attorney general's report."

[Return to top](#)

Politico NY: New York Democrats meet to discuss Cuomo's future as dozens call for resignation

**By MICHELLE BOCANEGRA, SHANNON YOUNG and BILL MAHONEY:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY, N.Y. — Democrats with the power to impeach New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo plan to meet privately on Thursday to discuss "potential paths forward" after the emergence of serious new allegations led to a surge in calls for the governor to leave office.

More than 50 Democrats in the state Legislature issued a joint letter on Thursday calling on Cuomo to resign after the Times Union, an Albany newspaper, reported that an unnamed aide had recently accused Cuomo of groping her at the state's Executive Mansion, where the governor lives.

Cuomo is accused of inappropriate behavior by six women and is also embroiled in scandal over claims his administration hid the number of deaths tied to Covid-19 outbreaks in nursing homes.

“In light of the Governor’s admission of inappropriate behavior and the findings of altered data on nursing home COVID-19 deaths he has lost the confidence of the public and the state legislature, rendering him ineffective in this time of most urgent need,” the Democratic lawmakers wrote in their letter. “We have a Lieutenant Governor who can step in and lead for the remainder of the term, and this is what is best for New Yorkers in this critical time. It is time for Governor Cuomo to resign.”

A majority of the members in the state Assembly — the chamber that would launch any potential impeachment of the governor — now support an end to Cuomo’s tenure. A total of 36 Democrats have now called for the governor to resign and seven for him to be impeached. Those 43 members, coupled with the chamber’s 43 Republicans, adds up to 86 — 10 more than would be required to impeach the governor.

Calling for the governor’s resignation is not the same as supporting the politically disruptive process of impeachment. And it’s unlikely the Assembly would move ahead with impeachment unless at least 54 Democrats, a majority, support doing so.

But Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said his Democratic conference will discuss what to do about Cuomo in a private meeting on Thursday. Options could include impeachment, at least one source said.

“In light of the allegations concerning the Governor over the last several weeks, I will be meeting with members in conference today on potential paths forward,” Heastie said in a Thursday morning statement.

The Times Union on Wednesday night detailed allegations that Cuomo fondled an aide under her blouse late last year when they were alone in the governor’s private residence. They followed an initial report from the day prior that the aide had told a supervisor she had been touched without her consent.

The aide told colleagues she was summoned to the Executive Mansion, which is a short walk from the governor's office in the state Capitol, to help him with an issue on his cell phone, the newspaper reported. The allegation is under investigation by state Attorney General Tish James.

The latest allegation marked the fourth claim of harassment or inappropriate behavior to be raised by an employee of the governor. Two other women — Anna Ruch, who first met Cuomo at a wedding, and Karen Hinton, a former aide to Cuomo during his time at HUD — have also accused him of inappropriate behavior.

Cuomo has denied that he ever "inappropriately touched" anyone and specifically denied the newest accusation in a statement on Wednesday.

"As I said yesterday, I have never done anything like this. The details of this report are gut-wrenching," Cuomo said. "I am not going to speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation given the ongoing review, but I am confident in the result of the Attorney General's report."

The governor has repeatedly said that he will not resign and has encouraged the public to withhold judgment until James completes her investigation of the allegation.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, a frequent critic who would play no role in Cuomo's removal, on Thursday also joined calls for Cuomo to resign.

"The specific allegation that the governor called an employee of his, someone who he had power over, called her to a private place and then sexually assaulted her is absolutely unacceptable. It is disgusting to me," de Blasio told reporters Thursday during a press conference at City Hall. "He can no longer serve as governor. It's as simple as that."

[Return to top](#)

Politico NY: Schumer: 100 new federal vaccine sites to open in New York

By ERIN DURKIN:
Mar 12, 2021

More than 100 new federally supported coronavirus vaccine sites will open in New York state, Sen. Chuck Schumer announced Thursday.

Schumer, at a joint press conference with Mayor Bill de Blasio, said the new sites at existing community health centers will be paid for as part of \$32 billion in federal vaccine funding included in the pandemic relief bill passed in December.

The vaccine doses sent to the health centers will be provided directly by the federal government, in addition to the regular weekly allotment sent to New York state.

“There are going to be many more vaccines available much more quickly,” Schumer said Thursday.

“The people of New York have had a tough, tough year amid the pandemic, but the light at the end of the tunnel has always been centered on access to a free vaccine for all New Yorkers, and the good news is: lots of New Yorkers want a vaccine,” the Democratic Senate majority leader said. “Now, the better news is: more vaccines and better access to vaccine sites are on the way via a supercharge effort.”

The vaccine distribution push so far has been marred by racial disparities, with Black and Latino New Yorkers getting the shot at rates far below their share of the population — even though they have died at the highest rates from Covid-19.

The community health centers targeted under the program are largely located in lower-income areas and Black and Latino neighborhoods. One in nine New Yorkers get health care at such a center, of whom 89 percent are low income and 71 percent are people of color.

The exact locations of the sites and how many vaccine doses they will get have yet to be determined. There are 35 parent organizations that run 210 sites in the state that will be eligible. It's also unclear how many will be in New York City.

"This will get more and more vaccine where we want it most, in terms of addressing those disparities," de Blasio said.

In New York City, 2,574,854 shots have been administered so far.

De Blasio said supply is still lacking to get up to his goal of vaccinating half a million people each week.

"I want us to get our fair share, which we're still not getting, and the state is still interfering with that," he said.

The mayor also criticized Gov. Andrew Cuomo's announcement that quarantine requirements will be lifted for travelers entering New York.

"New York City was not consulted," he said. "Of course I have concerns about this. I think the introduction of the virus from outside has been one of the biggest and toughest X factors in this whole crisis, and something we worry about very much going forward."

More than half of Covid-19 cases in the city are now tied to more contagious strains of the virus, one first found in New York and one from the U.K.

On Thursday, the city reported 3,108 new coronavirus cases, and 6.35 percent of tests were positive. Hospitals admitted 202 new patients.

[Return to top](#)

Politico: New York's only impeachment: When accusations of corruption 'shocked' Tammany Hall

BY TERRY GOLWAY:
Mar 12, 2021

What seemed like so much overheated political speculation in Albany just a week ago has now become entirely feasible — the prospect that New York's Democratic-controlled state Legislature will impeach and remove three-term Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat.

That possibility had once been regarded as absurd: Republicans mentioned impeachment almost every day, but in Albany they have all the clout of a footman in Buckingham Palace. And while some Democrats said they were in favor, their numbers were in the high single digits, allowing the governor's rough-hewn allies to signal their reply with just the one digit.

That calculus, however, seemed on the verge of changing as the week drew to a close in Albany. Sixty-five of the Legislature's 150 Democrats have called on the governor to either resign or be impeached. Most prefer resignation to outright impeachment, but with developments changing almost daily, that may change.

So the stage may be set for the first impeachment of a New York governor since 1913, during the height of the Progressive Era in Albany.

The governor in question was William Sulzer, who, among his other talents, could direct a missile of tobacco juice into a spittoon from a distance of several feet. He displayed this remarkable skill during meetings with lobbyists and legislators, to the chagrin of good-government advocate Frances Perkins, who would one day become the nation's first cabinet secretary.

Sulzer, it is important to note, was a Tammany Hall man, so you probably know where this is going. (Spoiler alert: You're wrong.) He won election to the state Assembly in 1889 with Tammany's support, and served as speaker for a year (1893) during which the chamber was especially active. He was savvy enough to deflect any credit, saying that all good things were "dictated by that great statesman, Richard Croker." Croker was the boss of Tammany Hall — but he soon decided it might be better to live outside the jurisdiction of the United States, so

he returned to his native Ireland, where he raised thoroughbreds, married a Native American woman 40 years his junior, and lived in a castle until his death in 1922.

Sulzer, who was elected to Congress in 1894, continued to prosper under Tammany's next boss, Charles Francis Murphy, who operated a saloon on the corner of 2nd Avenue and 20th Street in Manhattan's old Gashouse District. But there was nothing gassy about Charlie Murphy — so quiet and careful was he that newspaper reporters once criticized him for not joining in the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner" at some patriotic event. Murphy's spokesperson explained that the boss was simply hedging his bets.

Sulzer was elected governor in 1912 with the support of Murphy's Tammany machine. "Mister Murphy," as he was known affectionately to all — including, it is thought, his wife — had every reason to believe that Sulzer would be receptive to Tammany's occasional requests for a favor here and there. Murphy had a special interest in highway contracts — his "brothers" owned a trucking company — but more than anything else, he was determined to make sure that a bill allowing for open party primaries met the same fate that would one day make Tammany Judge Joseph Force Crater a household name.

He was not counting on Sulzer suddenly discovering his virtuous side. Like a precinct captain for Caligula proclaiming the benefits of chastity, Sulzer announced a state investigation into the awarding of highway contracts and his support for a direct primary system explicitly designed to neuter the influence of people like Murphy over nominations.

The boss tried to dissuade Sulzer from proceeding, even offering a compromise that would have made it easier for independent candidates to get on the ballot. He would have none of it. He denounced Murphy in a speech indicating that he had spent the night before flipping through a Sparks Notes version of Shakespeare: "Shall it go forth from one end of the country to the other that Mr. Murphy doth feed upon something, forsooth, that he has grown so great that he has more power, that he has more influence, than all the other ten millions of people in the state of New York?"

As scholars seemed to agree that use of the word "forsooth" was not considered an impeachable offense, Murphy had no choice to bide his time. Sulzer then introduced a direct primary bill, referred to the Republican leader of the state Senate as "an old fossil of the Paleozoic age" and predicted his bill would pass with flying colors. If it didn't, he said, "I don't know anything about politics."

Well, he was right about the last part.

The Paleozoic Republican joined with Murphy in crushing Sulzer's bill, and Murphy then summoned the services of a certain state senator named James Frawley, perhaps best known for dispatching two allies of a political opponent — both of them described in the press as “husky motormen“ — to a local hospital after their facial features collided with the senator's fists. Murphy instructed Frawley to form a committee to look into various state departments to make sure that everything was on the up and up. Because you never know what you might find.

The Frawley committee went about its business in the summer of 1913 and discovered that Sulzer had received more money in campaign contributions than he reported. He funneled the unreported money into a private account, which he used to place a few bets on Wall Street.

Tammany's leader and his allies who controlled the Legislature were shocked to discover that a politician who had been a loyal member of the organization for decades was playing fast and loose with campaign contributions. The Assembly gathered in Albany in August, every legislator's favorite time of year to be cooped up in the state Capitol, to consider eight articles of impeachment in a session that extended well past midnight. Finally, at around 5 a.m., the clerk began to call the roll, though the highly dramatic ritual did not unfold as planned. Speaker Al Smith slammed down his gavel in disgust.

“A number of members, I take it, are asleep in their chairs,” he rasped in his Lower East Side accent. “Members will please answer when their names are called.”

They snapped to attention, and voted in favor of impeachment 79 to 45.

With Sulzer impeached, the Legislature determined that Lt. Gov. Martin Glynn should serve as acting governor while the Senate considered his fate. Sulzer, however, declared the proceedings illegal and announced that he was indeed the governor and Glynn a mere pretender, sort of like the Catholic Church's Great Schism except with less-fabulous

wardrobes. The New York press was filled with sensational stories about the state's dueling governors.

After a few weeks, in late September, a High Court of Impeachment found Sulzer guilty on three of the Assembly's counts, and in a separate vote, removed him from office. He finally surrendered to the inevitable but remained defiant on his way out of Albany.

He assailed the "looters and grafters" who did him in, saying they were "stealing the taxpayers' money," which, he noted slyly, he never did.

Sulzer would wind up returning to Albany, winning an Assembly seat later in 1913, but it was a short comeback. He soon faded into obscurity.

The men in charge of the impeachment proceedings, however, managed to make something of themselves. Smith, the Assembly speaker, went on to become one of New York's greatest governors and was the Democratic Party's nominee for president in 1928.

And the president of the state Senate was Robert Wagner, who would later earn promotion to the U.S. Senate and would craft the New Deal's most-significant social legislation in the 1930s. His portrait hangs in the Senate's Reception Room, the chamber's hall of fame.

As for Charlie Murphy, who empowered both Smith and Wagner, he died in 1924 and was buried out of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan. Sixty thousand people showed up to watch his casket disappear into a waiting hearse on Fifth Avenue.

[Return to top](#)

WaPo: Cuomo accusations split Democrats between wanting an investigation or a resignation

**By Michael Scherer:
Mar 12, 2021**

As sexual harassment accusations grew last week against New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, nearly two dozen women elected to the state legislature began drafting a joint statement of concern — not because of the allegations, but because they worried about growing calls for his immediate resignation without a full investigation.

“As an African American woman, tons of my people have been incarcerated without having due process. There should be due process,” said Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes (D), who organized the statement independent of the governor’s own aggressive damage control efforts.

The worry, she said, was not just that Cuomo, 63, could be railroaded. It was also for his accusers. “They deserve more than just a newspaper article,” she said. “They deserve to be heard.”

That call for patience has spread far beyond Albany and into the nation’s political leadership, vying with demands for his resignation by other lawmakers and political leaders. Cuomo has been accused of workplace harassment, improper touching or both by five women, including four who worked for him. An allegation by a sixth employee was referred by the governor’s office to local police for investigation on Wednesday.

Democratic leaders in Washington, from Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to the White House, also have put out statements withholding judgment and calling for an organized fact finding. Many women’s groups and survivor organizations, even ones that have also called for Cuomo’s resignation, have joined the chorus of leaders who are focused on a full investigation by the New York attorney general that gets to the bottom of what Cuomo is alleged to have done.

The new approach is a marked departure from the quick demands that previously greeted high-profile men accused of wrongdoing. Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was fired from his company three days after actresses accused him of sexual misconduct in 2017. Weeks later, the head of Amazon Studios, Roy Price, resigned days after a producer accused him of propositioning her.

By the time the burgeoning calls for accountability made it to Washington, the pattern seemed to have solidified. Pelosi sought the resignation of Rep. Ruben Kihuen (D-Nev.) later that year, a day after he was accused of propositioning and touching the leg of a fundraiser on his campaign. (He did not resign, but he did not seek reelection.)

Second thoughts among some Democrats about the resignation of Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.), and subsequent allegations, including claims made about Joe Biden's behavior and accusations against Supreme Court Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh, have prompted an evolution in thinking about how to confront such incidents.

In Albany, the legislative response among Democrats has been split. Contrary to the statement by Peoples-Stokes, a separate letter released Thursday by 40 Democratic members of the state assembly called on Cuomo to resign. The state's Senate majority leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, has also called for Cuomo to step down. Late Thursday, Assembly Democrats announced an investigation into Cuomo's actions, a potential first step toward impeachment.

Still, other Democrats and survivor advocates now privately describe a far more complicated set of factors that help them determine whether to call for resignation, including the nature of the allegations, the potential for an authoritative investigation and patterns described by multiple accusers. In the case of Cuomo, for most elected Democrats at the moment, those factors have bought the governor some time.

"I think we have seen it be a disservice to survivors who have spoken up when there has been too little investigation," said Ally Coll, co-founder of the Purple Campaign, an effort to end workplace sexual harassment. "We are seeing a logical leveling out in the process here being more formalized, and from my position as an employee advocate and policymaker, that is a good thing."

Cuomo's home state senators, who played pivotal roles in calling for Kavanaugh to withdraw his nomination and Franken to resign, have been much more cautious this time, arguing that New York Attorney General Letitia James is positioned to do a prompt and thorough investigation. Gillibrand had been the first senator to call for Franken's departure, which Schumer later encouraged, and both called on Kavanaugh to withdraw after raising concerns that the FBI would not be able to do a full investigation into the allegations against him.

But some of the accusations in both cases have since been called into doubt, including claims against Kavanaugh pushed by Michael Avenatti, who was later convicted of extortion in an unrelated case. The specifics of the first allegation against Franken were later challenged by a New Yorker investigation. No formal investigations were launched in either case, as a Senate ethics probe was short-circuited by Franken's departure and Republicans resisted expanding an investigation of Kavanaugh to include all of his accusers.

Gillibrand, who has also argued in recent years that former president Bill Clinton should have resigned over his affair with a White House intern in the 1990s, said in a recent podcast interview that the #MeToo movement was always anchored in the idea accusers need to be taken seriously, not in the idea of snap justice.

"No one is in favor of letting only one side tell their truth. That has never been a part of 'Me Too,' " Gillibrand said. "You were just saying 'believe them' so you will investigate."

A spokesperson for Gillibrand did not make her available for further comment.

Even Cuomo's most prominent accuser, former aide Charlotte Bennett, 25, argued in a CBS News interview that Cuomo's resignation should be conditioned on the investigation finding that he had done what she claimed. She has accused the governor of asking about her sex life, suggesting that he would date someone her age and, in a subsequent meeting, asking if she had found him a girlfriend.

"In the aftermath of Al Franken, there was a lot of regret that people jumped to the conclusion that he had to step down," said Debra Katz, Bennett's attorney. "Not every allegation of sexual harassment should be treated the same way. They should be treated seriously and they should be run to ground."

The shift in emphasis has been underscored by women's and survivor groups who wrote a letter last week to the New York attorney general laying out a series of features that her investigation should include, like protections for the accusers, a lack of political interference and using civil litigation standards, instead of criminal ones, to assess responsibility. The group has argued that the standard for finding wrongdoing should be a "preponderance of evidence," not the criminal standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt."

“In New York, there is a system in place to have an investigation that is nonpartisan and independent and transparent and fair. That is to be celebrated,” said Fatima Goss Graves, the president of the National Women’s Law Center, which is one of the groups that signed the letter. “The fact that they have put something in place to treat very serious allegations with the seriousness it deserves really matters.”

Cuomo himself has shifted his views. Now, he insists that he will not resign, saying it would be “anti-democratic” and that he will be exonerated by James’s investigation. Yet in 2018 he promptly called for the resignation of then-New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman after the New Yorker published a story in which four women accused Schneiderman of physical violence in their relationships. Schneiderman defended himself by saying the violence had been a part of “role-playing and other consensual sexual activity” and denied assaulting anyone.

That explanation did not convince the governor, who sought Schneiderman’s resignation even as he requested the beginning of a formal investigation against him.

“My opinion is that, given the damning pattern of facts and corroboration laid out in the article, I do not believe it is possible for Eric Schneiderman to continue to serve as Attorney General, and for the good of the office, he should resign,” Cuomo said in a statement at the time.

Six months after the New Yorker article, New York prosecutors announced that the allegations against Schneiderman were credible but that “legal impediments, including statutes of limitations, preclude criminal prosecution.”

Cuomo was asked Tuesday by a reporter how he could reconcile his immediate calls for Schneiderman to resign with his pleas that he be allowed a full investigation. He said the difference was the severity of the claims.

“There are obviously allegations and then there are allegations, and there is a spectrum of allegations,” Cuomo said. “There are capital crimes, and there is physical violence.”

Cuomo has denied any inappropriate touching of women, and said that he never realized at the time that his banter with employees caused them harm.

Five women, including four who had worked for Cuomo, have accused him of improper touching or inappropriate conversations at work. The claims include a forced kiss, a discussion of strip poker and inviting a work colleague to his hotel room, while suggesting she sneak by his security guard.

A sixth accuser, who has not been named publicly, has alleged that he fondled her under her blouse at the executive mansion and that she told him to stop, according to the Albany Times Union. Cuomo has denied the account, which The Post has not independently confirmed, and his office has referred the matter to police and the attorney general's office for further investigation.

Accusations like that one could shift the calculations of many of the advocates and leaders now focused on investigations, especially if more allegations are forthcoming. Even the flood of calls for Franken's resignation did not happen until nearly a month after the first claim against him, as more women came forward alleging that he had touched them inappropriately.

At this point, however, advocates are hopeful that the Cuomo case will be remembered as one in which his accusers were heard and the truth of their accusations was fully vetted.

"I think we are evolving and evolving quickly as a country about how to respond to these issues but the truth is we haven't had a national consensus," said Terri Poore, the policy director for the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence. "So a fair process is a good direction to take in response."

[Return to top](#)

CBS News: Cuomo to face impeachment inquiry from state lawmakers over misconduct allegations

By JERICKA DUNCAN:
Mar 12, 2021

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo faced growing pressure to resign on Thursday, as the state's assembly speaker authorized an impeachment investigation into the allegations of misconduct he's facing. New York State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said he authorized the Assembly Judiciary Committee to begin the investigation, which he said will have the power to interview witnesses and subpoena documents.

The New York attorney general's office confirmed Thursday night that the assembly's investigation would not impact their own independent investigation into the sexual misconduct claims against Cuomo.

The investigation comes as more than 55 lawmakers said in a letter Thursday that they want the governor out.

"The budget, the fight against COVID-19, and restarting the economy all depend on clear and trustworthy leadership," the letter said. "In light of the governor's admission of inappropriate behavior and the findings of altered data on nursing home COVID-19 deaths he has lost the confidence of the public and the state legislature, rendering him ineffective in this time of most urgent need."

Mayor Bill de Blasio has also called on Cuomo to resign. "It is disgusting to me, and he can no longer serve as governor," the mayor said Thursday.

Cuomo said last week that he would not resign, but his office pledged to cooperate with the attorney general's investigation.

The calls for resignation comes as Cuomo is facing a new allegation of sexual misconduct reported by The Times Union of Albany. The reporting is based on an anonymous source who the Times Union said has "direct knowledge" of another woman's claim.

The source told the Times Union that after watching Cuomo hold a press conference on another allegation of sexual misconduct, a female aide to Cuomo became upset and told a supervisor that the governor groped her. The aide reportedly claimed Cuomo summoned her to the executive mansion to help him with a technical issue involving his mobile phone, before reaching under her blouse and fondling her.

The aide, who has not been identified, has not filed a report, according to The New York Times.

Cuomo denied the allegations, writing in a statement that "I have never done anything like this." Cuomo called the details "gut-wrenching."

"I am not going to speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation given the ongoing review, but I am confident in the result of the attorney general's report," the governor said.

Albany police said Thursday that they were notified of the allegations by the New York State Police and the governor's office, according to the Times. Police officials said the alleged conduct may have risen "to the level of a crime," but said that does not mean the department has opened a criminal investigation, the Times reported.

Cuomo's acting counsel confirmed to CBS News that the allegation had been referred to police.

"As a matter of state policy when allegations of physical contact are made, the agency informs the complainant that they should contact their local police department. If they decline, the agency has an obligation to reach out themselves and inform the department of the allegation," the attorney said.

"In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney's information," she added.

The Times Union report is one of many claims of sexual harassment leveled against the governor in recent weeks. Last week, another former Cuomo aide detailed her own sexual harassment allegations against Cuomo in an exclusive interview with Norah O'Donnell.

Charlotte Bennett alleged that Cuomo asked her inappropriate questions about her sex life, including whether she would consider dating an older man. Cuomo said he "never made advances" towards Bennett, but has apologized for some of the comments he has made throughout his tenure.

"I never knew at the time that I was making anyone feel uncomfortable," Cuomo said. "I never, ever meant to offend anyone or hurt anyone or cause anyone pain. I feel terrible that these people felt uncomfortable, felt hurt, felt pain from the interactions, and I'm embarrassed by it, and I feel bad from it."

Return to top

Fox News: Lindsey Boylan speaks out, says Cuomo accusers facing online attacks

By Brie Stimson:
Mar 12, 2021

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's first accuser recently spoke out against the online "hate" and "misogyny" she claims she and others have faced since leveling sexual harassment claims against the governor.

"Please understand, I am ok and I will be ok," the former Cuomo aide wrote on Twitter earlier this week. "But these online trolls are being seen by other survivors. Not all survivors have the privilege of a platform I do. Not all survivors have the support system I do. The hate of survivors and misogyny needs to stop."

One commenter in Boylan's anti-hate post accused her of being a "fame groupie" while another mocked her using the word "survivor."

Boylan -- a candidate for borough president of Manhattan in New York City -- and the other women who have come forward to accuse the governor of sexual harassment and inappropriate touching are reportedly being trolled online with sexist comments, with some social media users accusing them of lying or being political opportunists.

Some trolls have also blamed the accusers for being harassed, according to the Journal News in New York state's Lower Hudson Valley.

The governor has been accused of sexual harassment by at least six women, including an unidentified aide who claimed Cuomo groped her underneath her blouse without consent while she was at the governor's mansion last year.

In late February, Boylan alleged Cuomo had frequently made inappropriate comments to her, suggestively joking once that they should play strip poker.

She said he also kissed her on the mouth once without consent, adding in the more than three years she worked for him, he "would go out of his way to touch me on my lower back, arms and legs."

Boylan has taken the brunt of the allegations, according to the Journal News. The former Cuomo aide has been called a liar, a manipulator and a harasser herself while being questioned the about timing of her claims as well as insinuations she is trying to "smear" the governor.

'I am not deterred'

Fellow accuser Charlotte Bennet, a former aide who said Cuomo asked her intimate questions about her love life, said, "In coming forward I fully expected to be attacked by those who reflexively question the honesty or motivation of those who report sexual harassment. I am not deterred by these voices."

She said instead she focused on the "overwhelming love and support I have received from friends and strangers alike."

Bennett, 25, said she felt the governor, who is nearly 40 years her senior, was "trying to sleep with me."

Even Cuomo himself has spoken out against the harassment.

"My message to anyone doing that is, you have misjudged what matters to me and my administration and you should stop now – period," he said in a statement late last month after he said his office had heard "anecdotally that some people have reached out to Ms. Bennett to express displeasure about her coming forward."

Victim blaming is common when harassment allegations surface and has become especially prevalent in the current sharp police divide and vitriolic climate of social media. It also discourages other harassment victims from speaking out, experts say, according to the Journal News.

"What we know is that (victim-blaming) ... is incredibly silencing, not only for those individuals who have come forward to report their experiences of sexual harassment and assault, but for everyone who is listening, watching, observing how they're being treated – and seeing the vitriol and victim-blaming comments that they are being targeted with," Laura Palumbo of the National Sexual Violence Resource Center told the Journal News.

'Laughable' Trump theory

One bizarre online conspiracy, the Journal News reported, is that the women made false claims of harassment to remove Cuomo from office so former President Trump won't have to face financial inquiries in the state. But any questionable Trump dealings in the state would be investigated by the state Attorney General's office, not the governor.

"It's tantamount to QAnon (conspiracies)," Cuomo accuser Ana Liss said in an interview with WROC-TV in Rochester. "Like to think that I would be contacted by Donald Trump's people and be paid off? It's laughable, and that's a distraction."

More than 70% of accusers face some sort of retaliation, including being fired, according to a study from the National Women's Law Center, the Journal News reported.

It should be noted, however, that many people online have been supportive of the women and their claims.

Cuomo is facing calls to resign, an independent investigation of the claims lead by New York Attorney General Letitia James and an impeachment inquiry lead by Democrats in the state legislature.

Cuomo has apologized for making the women feel "uncomfortable" but has denied any inappropriate touching.

[Return to top](#)

CNN: Pressure ratchets up on Cuomo after New York Assembly speaker OKs impeachment investigation

**By Lauren del Valle and Veronica Stracqualursi:
Mar 12, 2021**

(CNN)New York Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo faced mounting political pressure on Thursday after the speaker of the state Assembly authorized the judiciary committee to begin an impeachment investigation and dozens of Democratic New York state lawmakers called for Cuomo to resign.

For Cuomo, who is under fire in the wake of sexual harassment allegations and his handling of nursing home deaths, the developments amount to the most serious sign yet that his support within his own party is quickly eroding after a decade of dominating the state's political scene.

State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie made the decision after meeting with the Assembly Majority Conference, a meeting he announced earlier Thursday.

The committee led by Democratic Assemblyman Charles Lavine is authorized to subpoena documents, interview witnesses and evaluate evidence, the statement says.

"The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious," Heastie said.

Heastie said he has the "outmost faith" that Lavine and the committee will conduct an "expeditious" investigation.

CNN has reached out to the offices of Cuomo, Lavine and Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul for comment.

In a statement, New York Attorney General Letitia James said the Assembly's action will have "no bearing" on her investigation.

Calls for Cuomo to resign

Earlier Thursday, more than 50 Democratic lawmakers called for Cuomo's resignation, arguing that he has "lost the confidence of the public" and is "ineffective in this time of most urgent need."

"In light of the Governor's admission of inappropriate behavior and the findings of altered data on nursing home COVID-19 deaths he has lost the confidence of the public and the state legislature, rendering him ineffective in this time of most urgent need," the group of 59 Democrats serving in New York state Senate and Assembly wrote in a letter released Thursday.

The letter amounts to the largest show of public pressure the New York Democratic governor has faced from his own party to step down. Jay Jacobs, the New York State Democratic chairman, called for the allegations to be investigated by the legislature. He acknowledged the calls by some Democrats for Cuomo to resign but declined to do so himself, instead saying he would call a meeting of county chairs to hear their views.

In their letter, the lawmakers acknowledge that James's independent civil inquiry into the governor's behavior should continue, but that they can no longer wait for its completion.

"In the meantime, the Governor needs to put the people of New York first. We have a Lieutenant Governor who can step in and lead for the remainder of the term, and this is what is best for New Yorkers in this critical time," they argue.

"It is time for Governor Cuomo to resign," they add.

Cuomo on Sunday said he would not resign and has repeatedly denied inappropriately touching anyone.

The letter's signatories include 19 state senators and 40 members of the state Assembly, including Democratic Assemblyman Ron Kim who alleged last month that Cuomo threatened him and his career.

They add to the top Democrat in the state Senate, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, who on Sunday had said "for the good of the state Governor Cuomo must resign."

Last week, a handful of Democratic state lawmakers and US Democratic Rep. Kathleen Rice of New York demanded that Cuomo leave office in the wake of the mounting allegations. Since then, as two more women have come forward, the list of New York Democrats calling for his ouster has been growing.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio also said Thursday that Cuomo "just can't serve as governor anymore."

Democrats serving at the national level have been much more muted in their responses, with White House press secretary Jen Psaki this week saying "all women should be heard" but declining to condemn Cuomo over the allegations and referring to the ongoing investigation.

Heastie on Sunday had called the allegations against Cuomo "deeply disturbing" in a tweet, adding, "I think it is time for the Governor to seriously consider whether he can effectively meet the needs of the people of New York."

Multiple controversies

Cuomo's administration underreported the number of Covid deaths among New York's long-term care patients, according to a state attorney general report, and then delayed sharing potentially damaging information with state lawmakers.

Until late January, long-term care residents who died of Covid-19 were classified that way only if they passed away inside of a facility. Those who died after being transferred out or to a hospital were not included in that specific figure. The overall number of Covid deaths in New York remained the same, but the practice led to a dramatic misrepresentation of the actual toll in New York's long-term care facilities.

Cuomo and his administration defended their decision, arguing that with both the Justice Department and New York state lawmakers asking questions, the federal inquiry became their priority. The governor has denied any suggestion of wrongdoing.

Amid the criticism over his handling of nursing home deaths, Cuomo also faces accusations from multiple women of sexual harassment or inappropriate behavior.

The firestorm, which has consumed New York politics over the past two weeks, began on February 24, when former aide Lindsey Boylan alleged in a Medium post that Cuomo kissed her on the lips against her will in 2018 after a brief, one-on-one meeting in his New York City office.

Last week, Cuomo offered an apology to the women and said he never knew he "was making anyone feel uncomfortable" and denied touching anyone inappropriately. He rejected calls for his resignation.

Return to top

CNBC: New York Democrats start to discuss running for governor as Cuomo resists calls to resign

Brian Schwartz:
Mar 12, 2021

Several New York Democrats are considering running for governor as Andrew Cuomo comes under mounting pressure from within his own party to resign after several women accused him of sexual harassment.

New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli and Rep. Tom Suozzi, D-N.Y., among others, have been engaging with supporters and party leaders to discuss potentially running for governor in 2022, according to people familiar with the matter.

Their representatives did not deny such conversations were taking place.

A spokesperson for Cuomo did not return a request for comment.

Several party donors, meanwhile, are starting to look to New York Lieutenant Gov. Kathy Hochul as a potential strong contender for a 2022 bid for reelection if Cuomo is forced out of Albany, according to others briefed on the matter.

These conversations come as Cuomo's political future hangs in the balance. Nearly 60 New York state Democratic lawmakers have called for Cuomo's resignation, after an aide to the governor reportedly accused him of groping her, the latest in a series of sexual harassment allegations.

Cuomo faces growing calls for his resignation

A longtime Democratic fundraiser told CNBC that he and members of his extensive network are planning to reach out to Hochul next week "just to touch base" in the wake of the latest Cuomo allegations. These types of conversations between donors and politicians are sometimes used to start a relationship before the financiers move ahead to support them.

People who are aware of these discussions declined to be named in order to speak freely about ongoing deliberations. Nobody has moved ahead with forming a campaign. Cuomo has previously said he plans to run for a fourth term next year.

While New York Mayor Bill de Blasio has publicly not ruled out running for governor, his spokesman Bill Neidhardt told CNBC that he hasn't been privately discussing the possible move with allies. De Blasio, a longtime adversary of Cuomo's, has also called for the governor's resignation.

"He has not been discussing the idea. A lot of reporters do seem to be having fun talking about it, and I think that's great," Neidhardt said.

However, supporters of the mayor told CNBC that de Blasio has discussed the idea of running.

When asked whether de Blasio not ruling out a run during a recent press conference was the first time he ever discussed running for governor, Neidhardt responded: "He said he's focused on the pandemic and economic recovery in front of him. Very important stuff."

Cuomo has denied the latest allegation and has apologized for his past behavior, although he has stopped short of resigning. New York state Attorney General Letitia James has organized an independent investigation into the claims against Cuomo.

There is a separate federal investigation into Cuomo's handling of data related to Covid-19 nursing home deaths.

Numerous Cuomo financiers have decided to pause and reevaluate their support for the governor amidst the allegations.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, another Democrat, in a statement Thursday said: "In light of allegations concerning the Governor over the last several weeks, I will be meeting with members in conference today on potential paths forward."

An advisor to Suozzi, the congressman, notably did not deny that the New York congressman was having conversations about a possible run for governor in a statement to CNBC.

"Congressman Suozzi has confidence in the AG and DOJ investigations that are looking into the serious and disturbing allegations against Governor Cuomo," said Kim Devlin, a senior Suozzi advisor.

"The Congressman is a leader in fighting for state and local aid and has worked with his NY colleagues, as well as other officials, to make sure it was included in the American Rescue Plan," Devlin said. "He continues to be laser focused on building support for the repeal of the unfair cap on the SALT deduction that has decimated homeowners in his district and throughout New York."

A representative for DiNapoli also didn't deny that the New York state comptroller was privately deliberating a run for governor.

“He is focused on his job and has no further comment,” Jennifer Freeman, a spokeswoman for DiNapoli, told CNBC.

The latest shift against Cuomo from members of his own party comes as public polling suggests that he has seen a drop in job approval and many voters believe he should not run for a second term.

A Quinnipiac survey taken before the latest reported allegation shows that Cuomo has a split 45% to 46% job approval rating. Quinnipiac says his new approvals mark a nearly 30-point drop in Cuomo’s job approval compared to nearly a year ago. Democrats approve 65% to 27% while Republicans disapprove 82% to 13%.

About 59% of those surveyed believe Cuomo should not run for reelection in 2022. About 74% of Democrats say he should not resign.

[Return to top](#)

Fox News: Rachel Maddow breaks silence on Cuomo, warns MSNBC viewers his scandals are 'developing by the second'

**By Joseph A. Wulfsohn:
Mar 12, 2021**

MSNBC star Rachel Maddow addressed the growing scandals plaguing Democratic New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo for the first time since his political woes began six weeks ago.

While her primetime colleagues Chris Hayes and Lawrence O'Donnell similarly waited weeks before finally acknowledging the controversies surrounding the embattled governor, Maddow shocked her viewers Thursday night with an "impeachment inquiry" graphic that loomed over an image of Cuomo.

After taking an audibly deep breath, Maddow began detailing the "dramatic turn" that took place amid the "rising scandals," laying out the sexual misconduct allegations that have surfaced in recent weeks and how an impeachment investigation is being launched by

Democratic lawmakers that is set to look into the alleged coverup of nursing home deaths by the governor's administration.

"Now, impeachment at the state level works basically the same way that it does at the federal level," Maddow explained to viewers. "If the Assembly were ultimately to vote to impeach Governor Cuomo, the next step is he would then be tried in the state Senate. Well, as of tonight, roughly two-thirds of the senators in the New York state Senate have already called on Governor Cuomo to step down, including the Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins."

Unlike her CNN rivals, Maddow did mention Cuomo's sixth accuser, a former aide who according to the Albany Times-Union newspaper said the governor groped her late last year at the Executive Mansion. Cuomo denies her claims but called them "gut-wrenching."

MSNBC's most-watched host concluded the segment by offering a warning to her viewers that Cuomo's troubles were far from over.

"This story is developing by the second. Some of these latest developments, quite dramatic. Watch this space," Maddow said.

Prior to "The Rachel Maddow Show," MSNBC offered minimal coverage of the groping allegation on Thursday, giving it only brief coverage in the network's 5 a.m. and 4 p.m. timeslots.

On Wednesday night, O'Donnell alluded to the Times-Union report about the sixth accuser that broke just hours before his show during an interview with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., though the "Last Word" host did refrain from mentioning the groping claim to the senator.

[Return to top](#)

WHAM: Impeachment investigation against Gov. Cuomo authorized by Assembly speaker

**by Natalie Kucko & WHAM Staff:
Mar 12, 2021**

Albany, N.Y. – State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie says an impeachment investigation will begin following mounting allegations against Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

In a statement Thursday night, Heastie said he's authorized the Assembly Judiciary Commission to begin an impeachment investigation.

The committee will be able to subpoena documents, examine evidence and interview witnesses.

"The reports and accusations concerning the governor are serious," Heastie said in a statement. "...I have the utmost faith that Assemblyman (Charles) Lavine and the members of the committee will conduct an expeditious, full and thorough investigation."

Heastie says this investigation will not interfere with an independent investigation being conducted by the State Attorney General's Office.

All this comes after multiple accusers have levied allegations of sexual harassment against the governor in recent weeks. In a Times Union report, a sixth accuser alleged the governor reached under her blouse and groped her.

Cuomo has denied the allegations against him and says he has no plans of stepping down.

More than 120 lawmakers now say the governor should resign. Members of the Senate Republican Conference say if the governor doesn't resign, the next step is impeachment. Democrats calling for his resignation say Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul is capable of stepping in and serving the remainder of his term.

Many lawmakers saw Cuomo has "lost the confidence of the public and the state legislature, rendering him ineffective," in what they're calling, "a time of most urgent need".

Assemblyman Harry Bronson is one of them.

"I think he should resign. I think it is time for the governor to put the interests of the families of New York ahead of his self-interest," he said.

State Assemblyman Demond Meeks and State Sen. Jeremy Cooney are among local Democratic legislators who did not sign for the governor's resignation Thursday.

13WHAM has reached out to their offices and is waiting to hear back.

Return to top

Hudson Valley Post: If Impeached Cuomo's Replacement Would Make New York History

BOBBY Welber:
Mar 12, 2021

An impeachment investigation into Gov. Cuomo is officially underway. If Cuomo leaves office he would have a historic replacement.

On Thursday, New York State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie announced the start of an impeachment investigation into Governor Cuomo.

"After meeting with the Assembly Majority Conference today, I am authorizing the Assembly Judiciary Committee to begin an impeachment investigation, led by Chair Charles D. Lavine, to examine allegations of misconduct against Governor Cuomo," Heastie stated.

The impeachment probe is expected to including growing claims of sexual harassment made against Cuomo and the handling of nursing homes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The reports of accusations concerning the governor are serious. The committee will have the authority to interview witnesses, subpoena documents and evaluate evidence, as is allowed by the New York State Constitution. I have the utmost faith that Assemblymember Lavine and the members of the committee will conduct an expeditious, full and thorough investigation," Heastie added. "This inquiry will not interfere with the independent investigation being conducted by Attorney General James."

For all the news that the Hudson Valley is sharing make sure to follow Hudson Valley Post on Facebook, download the Hudson Valley Post Mobile App and sign up for the Hudson Valley Post Newsletter.

Six women now accuse Cuomo of sexual harassment. A growing number of New York lawmakers want Cuomo to resign or be impeached. 121 members of the state Assembly and Senate believe Cuomo should resign while 42 of 63 state senators want Cuomo to step down, according to NBC.

Gov. Cuomo continues to deny the allegations.

"I have never done anything like this," Cuomo said in a statement after details of his sixth accuser were released. "The details of this report are gut-wrenching. I am not going to speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation given the ongoing review, but I am confident in the result of the attorney general's report."

If Cuomo resigns or is impeached Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul would take over as acting governor. If that happens, Hochul would become the first female governor in New York State history.

[Return to top](#)

News 12 The Bronx: Cuomo under fire for harassment allegations and nursing home deaths

**By News 12 Staff:
Mar 12, 2021**

State lawmakers are launching an impeachment investigation into both harassment allegations against Gov. Andrew Cuomo and his handling of COVID-19 nursing home deaths.

Many of the 213-member Legislature are demanding Cuomo resign - something he's been refusing to do.

Right now, six women are claiming the governor acted or touched them inappropriately, including one aide who alleges that he groped her.

Cuomo denies the allegations. His office referred the claims to Albany police yesterday.

Cuomo is also being targeted for the way he handled nursing homes during the height of the pandemic.

Questions remain about whether he manipulated or withheld data from the federal government and the state about COVID-19 nursing home fatalities.

One of the lawmakers leading this investigation is Rockland Assemblyman Ken Zebrowski (D - 96th District) "This is the Legislature's formal, constitutional authority to deal with allegations against the governor," says Zebrowski.

State Attorney General Letitia James is overseeing the independent sexual harassment investigation into the governor. She says the Assembly probe will not affect her own findings.

[Return to top](#)

EDITORIAL

WaPo: Opinion: An online assault on a female journalist in the Philippines is a worldwide warning

by Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021

MARIA RESSA has been issued 10 arrest warrants in two years and detained twice in six weeks by Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's government. She already faces up to seven years in jail for a conviction on trumped-up "cyber-libel" charges. Yet the state-led effort has relied on more than a corrupt legal system to succeed: An onslaught of online harassment against the award-winning journalist is appalling in its own right — and a devious strategy from a regime determined to destroy its most prominent critic.

A report by the International Center for Journalists analyzes almost 400,000 tweets and more than 57,000 Facebook posts and comments directed at Ms. Ressa. These consist in an alarming proportion of attacks against her professional credibility and personal character. For every positive comment on her Facebook page, there are 14 vilifying her. The verbal assaults — most prominently featuring the terms "idiot," "shut up" and "presstitute" alongside other sexist, homophobic and racist salvos — began after her news website Rappler published her investigation into the government's social media disinformation machine. The same machine promptly turned against her. Later spikes in aggression coincided with new articles or statements by Ms. Ressa.

The relationship between the online persecution and the offline prosecution has been "symbiotic." The pro-government accounts seeded the narrative that Ms. Ressa was a criminal years before authorities actually charged her with anything; the government then used the ubiquity of this lie to turn it into reality. Some abuse appears to have been orchestrated from on high, and other abuse has been organic. But even this organic abuse is the result of the bandwagon effect achieved by a troll army that marched in whenever ordered. There's real danger for Ms. Ressa beyond the courtroom: Female journalists have been murdered after threats overtook platforms; daily, Ms. Ressa is told she should be killed or "publicly raped to death."

This story not only exposes a horrifying campaign against an individual who has devoted her career to informing the public and holding an aspiring autocrat to account, but it also lays bare broader trends that platforms have a duty to fight — and that countries devoted to preserving democracy online and off must work against. Ms. Ressa is not alone in the Philippines: Sen. Leila de Lima, for instance, this month entered her fifth year in jail for spurious drug charges.

Ms. Ressa also is not alone in the rest of the world, where women who work courageously as reporters, activists and more are routinely tormented on social media. That this torment can also become a tool of a cowardly and tyrannical state is only more alarming.

Return to top

WaPo: Opinion: The national debt is high and growing. Congress's infrastructure bill must keep that in mind.

**by Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

THERE ARE two assertions we can confidently make about the level of federal debt the United States can sustain. First, it is higher than many commentators — ourselves included — commonly supposed until recently. Second, it is not infinite. Congress needs to take both of those points into account, as it considers what to do now that President Biden's \$1.9 trillion covid relief package has passed — with a proposal for another \$2 trillion or more in infrastructure spending on the way.

The right answer is not to pivot to deficit reduction immediately. We had reservations about the size of the newly approved bill; the \$350 billion allocated to state, local and tribal governments and U.S. territories, in particular, seems excessive given their strong recent tax revenue recovery. Nevertheless, there is a case for borrowing to meet a crisis as great as the one the pandemic imposed on public health and the U.S. economy. Though the recent rise in interest rates is a reminder that the market's appetite for government bonds can still operate as a constraint, those costs remain modest by historical standards. The uptick is mostly an indication that the economy is strengthening — thanks in no small part to previous support from both Congress and the Federal Reserve.

As Mr. Biden and the Democratic Congress move to infrastructure, however, they should plan to offset some or all of the cost, through higher revenues, reduced spending on lower-priority items or a mix of the two. The latest Congressional Budget Office projections show the federal debt on course for exponential growth after this decade, reaching twice the size of the economy by 2051 — whereafter it continues to rise. This estimate does not include the covid bill, which had not yet passed when the CBO produced its report on March 4.

Debt that large and uncontrolled would be both unprecedented in U.S. history, and, the CBO notes, risky: "Debt that is high and rising as a percentage of GDP boosts federal and private borrowing costs, slows the growth of economic output, and increases interest payments

abroad. A growing debt burden could increase the risk of a fiscal crisis and higher inflation as well as undermine confidence in the U.S. dollar, making it more costly to finance public and private activity in international markets.”

To pay for the next big spending bill would hardly qualify as austerity at a time when the government is on course to borrow more than 10 percent of gross domestic product in the current fiscal year and another 5 percent in the 12 months beginning Oct. 1. Rather, it would constitute a prudent hedge against the long-range risks of excessive debt, in part by reassuring financial markets that the U.S. government does not intend to meet all of its additional needs without exercising its power to tax. Paying for new spending would keep Mr. Biden’s own campaign promises, which included a number of proposals to raise more money through rolling back some of the tax cuts his predecessor, President Donald Trump, showered on wealthy individuals and corporations. Mr. Biden has already showed himself to be more decent than Mr. Trump; now he can set a better example of responsibility.

[Return to top](#)

WaPo: Opinion: All of the coronavirus vaccines can save lives. Take whichever you can get.

by Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021

AT THIS critical juncture in the pandemic, it makes no sense to go shopping for vaccines as one might for shoes or breakfast cereal. The United States is fortunate to have a choice between the pair of two-dose mRNA vaccines by Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech, already given to tens of millions of people, and the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine now being rolled out. All of them can save lives. Take whichever you can get.

At a time like this, when the virus variants are threatening a new surge of infections, the overriding goal must be to get as many people vaccinated as possible. The big picture is that all three vaccines have been shown to be safe and efficacious in large clinical trials, and all three are believed to largely prevent hospitalizations and deaths from the virus. That’s a winning ticket for many people who might otherwise be stricken and face a lonely demise on a ventilator in a hospital ward.

All three vaccines are attempting the same biological conjuring trick: to instruct the body to generate spiky proteins like those on the coronavirus so the immune system will recognize and go after them when an infection occurs. The mRNA vaccines use a new technology to

transmit the instructions by a bit of genetic material — messenger RNA — encased in a lipid, or fat. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine uses a traditional approach, ferrying the instructions on a deactivated bit of harmless cold virus. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine does not have the freezer requirements of the others, and the one-shot dose may be more convenient — and accessible — for many people.

The outcomes of Phase III clinical trials differed, but it would be wrong to base a decision on whether to get vaccinated just on these variations. The Food and Drug Administration adopted a standard that a vaccine must show greater than 50 percent efficacy for emergency-use authorization. For the first vaccines, that was measured against symptomatic illness because that was the fastest way to get a handle on results. A different endpoint, such as asymptomatic illness, hospitalization or death, might have delayed the clinical trials when time was of the essence. The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines scored 94.1 and 95 percent efficacy, respectively, against symptomatic illness after the second dose. This has been compared by some with the Johnson & Johnson trials in the United States, which showed efficacy of 72 percent. However, there were important variations in the trials, and they really should not be matched head-to-head. The mRNA vaccines were tested earlier, and the Johnson & Johnson later, when variants had started to appear. The Johnson & Johnson trial endpoint was also somewhat different, including protection against severe illness.

Many questions about how well the vaccines work will only be answered with time, such as whether they can successfully block transmission of the virus or tackle the stealthy asymptomatic infections. But the bottom line is that any one of these three vaccines is a lifesaver worth grabbing when it is available.

Return to top

Auburn Citizen: Hits & Misses: Assisting entrepreneurs, suspect slams into house, CCC sports return

**The Citizen Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

HIT: To the potential for launching new businesses in downtown Auburn.

The Auburn Downtown Business Improvement District is in the planning stages of a business incubator program that would give entrepreneurs a chance to test the waters with no long-term commitments. The plan is to offer downtown business space at a discounted rate to allow people to operate for one year without making the big investments normally required to

open up shop. Possibilities include shared spaces, financial support and other resources to help start-ups succeed.

MISS: To a situation that went from bad to worse in Auburn last weekend.

The Auburn Police Department said that as officers were responding to Chapman Avenue for a report of possible child abuse, a male fled the residence in an SUV and refused to stop for the APD or the Cayuga County Sheriff's Office when they tried to pull him over. The driver later crashed into a home on West Genesee Street Road and got away on foot. Police know the identity of the driver and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

HIT: To a return of spring sports for Cayuga Community College.

The college said this week that baseball, softball and men's soccer players are ready to hit the practice fields for upcoming games scheduled at Falcon Park in Auburn. Baseball and softball will start later this month and soccer in early April. Softball will kick off with a doubleheader at SUNY Adirondack on March 27, and the first men's soccer game is scheduled for April 9 at Monroe Community College. Spectators will not be allowed at contests at Falcon Park, and athletes and coaches will have rapid-result COVID-19 screenings before games.

[Return to top](#)

Post Standard: Sheriff Conway, stand up and face questions on teen's shooting by police (Editorial)

**By Advance Media NY Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

Onondaga County Sheriff Eugene Conway has been elected twice to that office. He needs to answer to the public more than every four years. Now would be a good time.

Conway's department was part of a law enforcement contingent responding March 4 to a call from a Jamesville family about their teenage son's mental health crisis. The incident ended with 17-year-old Judson Albahm dead of multiple gunshots, after officers said the teen pointed what looked like a gun at them. It turned out to be an air gun.

It took two days for authorities to release the boy's identity and four days to release the names of the four officers who fired the shots. Police have released few details about what happened.

Conway claims he is restricted from commenting on an ongoing investigation. That's baloney. Police agencies talk all the time about a homicide, a drug bust or an "officer-involved shooting," to use their quaint euphemism. For example, Syracuse Police Chief Kenton Buckner has spoken publicly about police shootings within a day or two. Buckner often won't say much, but he stands up in public and takes questions. It's part of the job as the head of a law enforcement agency. It's part of Conway's job, too, whether he likes it or not.

There are plenty of questions swirling around this shooting. Conway knows some or all of the answers.

Three police agencies — state police, the sheriff's office and DeWitt police — responded to the call. Who was in charge? Were they aware of the 911 dispatcher's warning that Judson had an air gun and previously had threatened suicide by cop? If not, why not? Did police consult the mobile mental health crisis team on the scene? What happened in the hour between the time Judson fled his home in a car and his fatal shooting in the woods? Did police try to de-escalate the situation? Why didn't they simply wait him out? What provoked officers to shoot?

A 17-year-old boy was shot dead. The public deserves to know why. Clamming up makes it look like the police have something to hide. That may be unfair to the four officers who fired the shots.

Eventually, we hope to get answers from New York Attorney General Letitia James. The AG asserted her prerogative to take over the investigation of police shootings when there is a "significant question" of whether the victim was armed.

In the meantime, a boy's life is over, a family aches, the officers who fired the shots are traumatized, and the public is in the dark about why it had to turn out this way.

[Return to top](#)

Watertown Daily Times: Editorial — A good start: Lawmakers trim executive power Cuomo has held for a year

**Watertown Daily Times:
Mar 12, 2021**

It's understandable that Republican legislators in Albany aren't thrilled about a bill to scale back Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's ability to unilaterally issue directives during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Last year, the state Legislature gave Cuomo sweeping authority to sign executive orders mandating safety measures to deal with the health care crisis. Lawmakers retained some control on this process by allowing themselves to rescind any of his measures with simple majorities in the state Assembly and Senate.

But seeing that both chambers are dominated by Democrats, this never occurred. Cuomo was permitted to run the state government the way he wanted. He was even authorized to amend the state budget as he saw fit as time went on.

One-person rule is never a good idea, and Republicans have long advocated that Cuomo's power be curtailed. We have on several occasions joined them in arguing that very point on this page.

But the governor has recently found himself embroiled in controversies pertaining to how his administration withheld data concerning the true number of nursing home residents who died of COVID-19 as well as accusations of sexual harassment. Democrats finally reached the tipping point last week and decided enough was enough.

The Legislature passed a bill March 5 to curb the emergency powers it granted Cuomo nearly a year before. And not wanting to anger lawmakers any further, Cuomo dutifully signed it into law Sunday.

“The measure revokes Cuomo’s authority to issue new directives. Cuomo has issued 96 executive directives since the start of the pandemic, and about 60 remain in effect,” the Watertown Daily Times reported in a story published March 5, adding that the governor may not issue any more executive orders concerning the pandemic. “The measure authorizes the governor to extend or modify directives in effect to respond to the ongoing pandemic but requires a five-day notice to the state Legislature and local elected officials before changes take effect. ... Under Friday’s measure, the Legislature can vote to terminate a state disaster emergency by concurrent resolution and a simple majority vote.”

State Sen. Patricia A. Ritchie, R-Oswegatchie, summed up the sentiments of her Republican colleagues in a news release issued March 5:

“To be clear, legislation advanced today that’s being painted as a revocation of the governor’s emergency powers does nothing to change the current dynamic in Albany. In fact, it actually makes things worse by removing the original April 30 expiration date on the governor’s unchecked authority. The executive orders from the past year — everything from how many people can be in your home to onerous regulations on businesses — are still in place and our state remains under one-person rule. I understand the need to have guidelines protecting public health during an unprecedented global health crisis. However, as the pandemic continues, the Legislature needs to be part of making the decisions that govern our daily lives. If the majority was serious about returning our state to a system of checks and balances, they wouldn’t have negotiated this backroom deal with the governor, who in recent days has been the focus of very serious, troubling allegations. Simply put, legislation advanced today was nothing but a hollow political gesture that unfortunately, continues to prevent the Legislature from doing its job.”

Ritchie is correct that not much will change under this law. But it prohibits Cuomo from issuing any new executive orders, and that’s a good start.

We agree that lawmakers must reassert their authority over vital matters in Albany, and we’d like to see more done to ensure they’ll once again take up their crucial role. This law will make some inroads toward this goal, however, which makes it a step in the right direction.

Now let’s push legislators to lace up their shoes and keep walking.

[Return to top](#)

Buffalo News: The Editorial Board: Improving broadband is a key to making Biden relief bill pay dividends in WNY

**News Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

Winston Churchill was quoted as saying: “If you put two economists in a room, you get two opinions, unless one of them is Lord Keynes, in which case you get three opinions.”

President Biden signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Act into law on Thursday. There is no shortage of opinions among economists about what the package’s long-term effects will be. Will it drive up the national debt to unsustainable levels? Cause inflation? Will people getting stimulus checks spend the money or park it in savings? Practitioners of “the dismal science” all have different answers.

We share some of the reservations, but the money – greater in scope than the New Deal – has the potential to transform this region for the better. A Buffalo News report calculated the program will pump \$1.15 billion into the Buffalo Niagara economy. In other words, a new “Buffalo billion.”

Unlike the New York State development program with that name, the Biden rescue plan puts the biggest chunk of money directly into consumers’ hands. When those at the lower end of the economic rung receive money they tend to spend it, meaning it goes directly to stimulating our economy.

The federal plan goes far beyond checks to individuals, of course. The News reported this week that the bill will bring \$775.41 million to counties, cities and towns in our region, including \$350.05 million for the City of Buffalo, \$178.18 million for Erie County and \$59.48 million for the City of Niagara Falls. School districts will also receive millions.

The local aid comes with certain parameters. In addition to rebuilding aging sewer lines or water systems, the bill supports significant investment in broadband technology. That’s a need that doesn’t always receive the attention of infrastructure issues like decaying roads or water lines, but in Buffalo Niagara it represents a bridge to a brighter future.

Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo, spoke to The News this week about the importance of bringing 5G – the fifth-generation mobile network – to underserved parts of Buffalo.

A person living in Orchard Park might have fast 5G now, Higgins said, “but if you live in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood, your life is very different.”

Between the aid coming to the city and the millions headed to the Buffalo Public Schools, Higgins wants to be part of an aggressive effort to build out the region’s broadband capacity. The congressman is eager to work with County Executive Mark Poloncarz, Mayor Byron W. Brown and other community leaders, including M&T Bank Chairman and CEO René Jones.

M&T is creating a technology hub in Seneca One tower, where it hopes to attract other tenants to the Doug Jemal property. Jones knows that expanded broadband in Western New York neighborhoods would aid with workforce development and finding a new talent pipeline.

Once the holes in local budgets are filled and individuals given a reprieve from some of their financial worries, our broadband infrastructure stands as one of the best ways to invest in changing lives and extending the reach of Buffalo’s renaissance.

Critics of Biden’s relief package argue that it will send money to people who don’t need it, money that the government must borrow. While the pandemic put a crushing blow on many businesses in our region – particularly hotels, sports and cultural attractions, restaurants and bars, casinos and tourism-related businesses – there were plenty of Americans who did fine economically in the past year. Many white-collar workers were able to do their jobs remotely and save money on commuting and other expenses.

Individuals whose adjusted gross income is \$75,000 or below, and married couples making \$150,000 or below, are eligible for the full \$1,400 benefit – \$2,800 for couples. Those figures are a reasonable way to prime the economic pump for when enough Covid vaccinations are delivered to have most of society up and running.

The federal supplement to state unemployment benefits remains at \$300, but was extended by 25 weeks, to Sept. 6. Cushioning the blow for the unemployed is not only humane, it is also money that is generally injected right into the local economy through spending.

The American Rescue Plan achieves the new president's goal of "going big" to help America recover from the Covid recession. It also challenges local policymakers to stretch their imaginations on how to get the maximum returns on billion-dollar investments.

Return to top

Newsday: LIRR sked needs quicker revamp

**By The Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

The complaints from riders, and the disturbing photos of masked commuters in crowded train cars, came immediately after the Long Island Rail Road's reduced schedule started Monday morning. It was potentially harmful for customers and workers. And for those watching from the sidelines, the riders the LIRR must lure back on its trains in the coming weeks and months, it had to be unnerving.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority quickly went into damage control and reversed itself. The MTA promised to revert to the previous pandemic schedule on March 29, while immediately adding more trains or cars as necessary.

While it's understandable that the MTA can't make the full change overnight, given planned track work and workforce schedules, the authority must try to get back to its former schedule more quickly. A March 29 goal isn't as "aggressive" as LIRR president Phillip Eng suggested. Union head Anthony Simon promised he will "do whatever it takes" regarding staffing to restore service quickly. Management should do the same.

But the situation also highlights how the MTA is going to have to be nimble as riders start returning. Eng has instituted a new tracking system that allows LIRR officials and riders to know how crowded each train car is. That's a useful tool, but management also should ride the

trains themselves, and listen to the workers who know ridership patterns. Then, the railroad must be able to make changes to meet the needs.

Such flexibility may be difficult for an enormous bureaucracy like the MTA, but it's critical to the region's comeback. MTA Chief Executive Pat Foye notes that early in the pandemic, the MTA was able to reduce service quickly and has "innovated throughout." Those efforts must continue, as ramping up likely is more difficult. Whenever possible, the region's largest employers should work with the MTA, so the authority knows when large swaths of employees are returning. And the LIRR will have to continue to partner with the unions, so workers can change shifts or staff newly-added trains. The approaching return of 24/7 subway service also is important, as many Long Island commuters use the subways, too.

Also crucial: the MTA's continued effort to vaccinate its workers both for their safety and that of its commuters. Nearly 15,000 MTA employees have received the vaccine, but that's out of a workforce of 70,000. Adding a site for LIRR workers at Jamaica station, which the MTA says is in the works, would help.

Perception here is key. So far, data indicate that traveling by public transit is safe, and Foye says mask compliance has been "north of 95%." But making sure trains remain uncrowded, and quickly dealing with any problems that emerge, will help to convince those who haven't returned to the rails that they can come back without fear.

The region's economy won't bounce back without a healthy, safe and robust public transit system. The MTA's management and workforce must be ready.

Return to top

TU: Editorial: Wrong direction on guns

**Times Union Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

THE ISSUE:

A New York representative tries an end run around this state's gun laws in Congress.

THE STAKES:

If anything, lawmakers should be doing more to prevent gun violence.

On Dec. 14, 2012, a young man armed with a semi-automatic rifle slew 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. Within a month, New York enacted what's known as the SAFE Act, a series of measures intended to help stem such gun violence in this state.

Eight years later, Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-Schuylerville, seems to think enough time has passed that the memory of that horrific shooting, and so many more in America before and after that, has sufficiently faded to afford her an opportunity to try to undo the SAFE Act through an act of Congress. Or perhaps this is just a symbolic, if cynical, performance to raise money to fund her future political ambitions.

Sorry, Ms. Stefanik, enough time hasn't passed. Not for the parents of the children killed in their classrooms, and not for the many New Yorkers whose hearts still break at the very mention of Sandy Hook.

And because no, Ms. Stefanik, there is never a good day to roll back intelligent gun controls that allow responsible people to keep and bear arms while ensuring, as best we can, that those who shouldn't have a gun don't. There is never a good day to encourage the proliferation of military-style weapons of mass murder in our society.

In fact, Tuesday, March 9, the very day Ms. Stefanik announced her so-called "Second Amendment Guarantee Act" (whose acronym, SAGA, conspicuously echoes Donald Trump's MAGA slogan), marked the anniversary of two mass shootings in this country. On March 9, 2018, a man entered a veterans home in Yountville, Calif., and shot to death three staff

members, killing, too, the unborn child of one of the victims. On March 9, 2016, in Wilksburg, Penn., two gunmen fired on a backyard party, killing five adults and, once again, an unborn child.

There are, fortunately, people who think more responsibly about guns than how many political points they can score trying to turn back the clock on smart gun control. This week, the House of Representatives passed a bill to finally close the “gun show loophole” through which people can acquire weapons in private sales without a federal background check. If the bill becomes law, all gun sales would have to go through a federally licensed firearms dealer.

Ms. Stefanik, like nearly all but eight of her Republican colleagues, voted against that bill. She rejected a straightforward step, one supported by a wide majority of Americans including most gun owners, in the same week that a 12-year-old in Troy was shot at home by someone who fired a gun from the street. The same week, too, that authorities broke up an operation in Philadelphia that was allegedly selling untraceable “ghost guns” — guns assembled from nearly complete kits that remain legal federally and in many states.

As least on the gun show loophole, a Congress mindful of the tens of thousands of lives lost to gun violence is finally moving to bring some sanity to U.S. gun laws. Ms. Stefanik, sadly and cynically, is going in the exact opposite direction.

Return to top

NYP: The science is compelling: Open schools NOW!

**By Post Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

Strong evidence that schools should be open during the pandemic has been building since last summer, but a report to be presented to Congress on Friday may be the most powerful yet.

The paper — commissioned by the COVID Collaborative, the Walton Family Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute and other nonprofits — looked at the findings of more than 120 studies of the risks and benefits of shutting down schools.

Its unmitigated conclusion: “Closing schools should be a last resort and done only after all other community mitigation measures have been deployed.” Indeed, it stressed the “extreme urgency” to reopen schools “as quickly and safely as possible.”

That is not a political recommendation; it’s what the science demands. Because the harm done to kids from closing schools, the paper suggests, is far worse than any harm from keeping them open.

Specifically, it noted that:

Studies show that attending school doesn’t boost the risk to kids, particularly if health protocols are followed.

“Evidence points to schools mirroring the transmission rates of their communities. Schools themselves do not appear to drive community transmission.”

Protective measures such as mask-wearing, physical distancing and improving ventilation “add layers of protection that can mitigate risks for students and school staff.”

“A growing body of research suggests children face greater health risks due to missed health screenings, food insecurity and mental health challenges.”

“Severe learning loss for many children, particularly children of color, will lead to lower educational attainment and lower future earnings.”

These are convincing reasons to open every single school in the nation ASAP, barring some overwhelming, specific local factors. Indeed, the report calls on “state and local leaders” to make in-person learning their “default.”

In particular, Catholic schools in cities like Chicago have shown that full-time reopening is perfectly safe, even as teachers-union power kept public schools there totally shuttered for months longer.

Mayor Bill de Blasio said Wednesday he's "re-evaluating" rules for school-by-school closures. Instead, he should basically be junking them entirely and ordering all the hundreds of city schools still closed, in whole or in part, open.

Hundreds of thousands of city kids are stuck at home, trying to learn remotely and at risk of other grave harm. Listen to the science, and open up wide.

Return to top

NYP: This speech won't get you off the milk cartons, President Biden

**By Post Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

President Biden is finally set to give his first "primetime" speech — but it won't make the milk cartons with his face on them go away.

Having passed on earlier opportunities for a national address (unlike all other modern presidents), Biden has opted to use the one-year anniversary of the pandemic (as declared by the World Health Organization) to . . . sell his huge spending bill.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki says Biden will talk a lot about the sacrifices and suffering of the last year, and "moving the country toward getting back to normal." He clearly means to pretend his \$1.9 trillion blowout is key to that effort, even though most of the cash won't actually go out the door for years.

Using his first speech to try to convince the American people that this bloated monstrosity is a win for them, rather than for Democratic special interests and ideologues, is pretty high-handed. And to pretend it's all about beating COVID is obscene.

In short, he's going to look like the frontman for his party's deepest partisans, who are actually calling the shots.

How engaged is Biden in any policy questions? The only way to put those doubts to rest is by holding regular press conferences, or at least his first. President Donald Trump held his first solo press conference 27 days after taking office; President Barack Obama, 20 days into the job. Biden's blowing past Day 51 as he makes this speech.

Americans need reason to believe their president is truly in charge, but the White House is dismayingly uninterested in offering any.

Return to top

NYP: Biden broke the border and other commentary

**By Post Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

From the right: Biden Broke the Border

At Issues & Insights, the editors detail how President Biden created the humanitarian crisis on the southern US border: He canceled “construction of the border wall,” “jettisoned President Donald Trump’s successful ‘remain in Mexico’ policy” and “suspended Trump’s requirement that asylum seekers” seek asylum in other countries they traverse first. He removed border agents’ “ability to immediately remove illegals” to prevent the spread of COVID and “issued new rules that cripple the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency’s ability to arrest and deport illegals.” Biden has “also proposed the most sweeping amnesty for illegals in history.” The issue isn’t how Biden will deal with the illegal-migrant surge, but “whether anyone will force Biden to take responsibility for causing it in the first place.”

Pandemic journal: Biden’s Wuhan-Lab Tightrope

President Biden is “walking a tightrope” with China on the coronavirus’ origin, reports Josh Rogin at Politico — declining “to endorse or dispute” Team Trump’s January allegations that Chinese researchers had COVID-like symptoms as early as autumn 2019 and Chinese scientists were working on secret projects with China’s military. In a “little-noticed” July study, Chinese researchers, including some linked to the Academy of Military Medical Science, noted that they’d created mice susceptible to the COVID-19 virus — which suggests they’d been “conducting coronavirus experiments” well before the outbreak and never

disclosed it. Officials now believe “there was a lot of risky coronavirus research going on in Chinese labs that the rest of the world was simply not aware of.”

Washington watch: Biden’s \$1.9 Trillion Oops

Democrats claim “the urgency of getting help” to Americans harmed by the pandemic and lockdowns led them to pass President Biden’s \$1.9 trillion relief bill without Republican support, observes National Journal’s Charlie Cook. But Democrats brushed aside GOP offers to pass stand-alone measures on “core provisions,” insisting instead on a massive bill with much spending not “directly and immediately tied” to the pandemic. By pushing it through “on such an acrimonious basis,” Biden may have poisoned “the well ahead of future votes” and “crippled his ability to do grand bargains.” It’s a “serious error of judgment” that “may plague this administration for a good while.”

Conservative: Ultra-Rich ‘Victims’

President Biden, Jussie Smollett, Sen. Cory Booker are all members of the “progressive imaginarium,” snarks Victor David Hanson at American Greatness, where powerful people are supposedly oppressed by an irredeemably racist/classist West. And Prince Harry and Meghan Markle took their membership to the next level: “The royal couple’s new \$15 million home is not far from Oprah’s \$90 million estate,” yet in a recent interview with her, “the two detailed all the racial slights they suffered from the apparently inveterate racist British royal family.” Why does the upper crust like the imaginarium so much? Because “the professional classes and the rich are in a dilemma of needing to damn the inequity and nastiness of Western consumer capitalism, which they themselves have mastered.” That is, “because the West is a self-critical, affluent, tolerant and leisurely place, the number of the victimized has grown to far outnumber the vanishing pool of victimizers.”

Culture critic: Amazon’s Un-American Book Ban

Amazon dominates the US book-selling industry, accounting for nearly 80 percent of all e-book sales, note the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette’s editors. So when it “disappears” a title, as it recently did with gender-skeptical “When Harry Became Sally,” that book “all but vanishes from the marketplace of ideas.” The firm clearly should “wield its power with caution,” yet

Amazon’s new guidelines warn that it will ban content “we determine is hate speech” — “vagueness” that is just “a smoke screen.” Amazon “has a right to remove anything it wants from its site.” But “canceling a book is akin to a digital book burning: Instead of a match, it’s a delete key.” In short, “it’s difficult to portray Amazon’s move as anything other than dangerously un-American.”

[Return to top](#)

NYP: Get set for NYC vote-count chaos

**By Post Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

If you thought the vote-counting in the 2020 presidential election was a mess, just wait for this summer’s New York City primaries.

The city has adopted “ranked-choice voting,” or RCV, an idea beloved of certain reformers that massively complicates the tallying process by having voters mark their second, third and so on choices, then redistributing ballots from low-performing candidates to those that did better, potentially in multiple rounds of counting, until a “true” winner emerges.

The first test was the Feb. 23 special election for the Queens council seat formerly held by Donovan Richards, now borough president — and the Board of Elections now hopes to start the counting next Tuesday, a full three weeks after ballots were cast.

Voters OK’d RCV in 2019, but no city leader bothered to consider how it would interact with various other voting reforms (early voting, expanded mail-in voting, “ballot curing”) or how the notoriously incompetent Board of Elections would manage it all.

For starters, the BOE says it now can’t tally votes until the five borough offices receive all ballots, including absentee and military. Plus, under a 2020 state law, the affidavit portion of absentee ballots can be cured of seven specific errors; the voter must return the cured ballot to the BOE within seven business days of receiving notice of the errors. That can add up to another 10 days to determining the tally in a tight race.

And, as Gothamist notes, the state Board of Elections must approve new software to aid in counting these complex ballots. Without it, the CD 31 race will have to be counted by hand, which will likely take more weeks, with multiple rounds of counting.

Even if the software is OK'd soon, forget about knowing the winner of many Democratic primaries until weeks after Primary Day. And bet that countless candidates will be screaming about the illegitimacy of it all.

If the BOE isn't positive it can work out the kinks, lawmakers should suspend implementing RCV and leave the city with the familiar process of a runoff vote. Otherwise, half the politicians in town are going to start sounding like former President Donald Trump.

Return to top

NYP: Team Biden stands up for rank racial discrimination

**By Post Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

It's appalling that the Biden White House has bought so deeply into the radical "anti-racism" agenda that it intervened to protect propaganda programs for schools that literally divide children and teachers by race before lecturing them on things like "white privilege."

In the final weeks of the Trump presidency, the Education Department's Office of Civil Rights issued a finding that separating students and staff by race, skin color or ethnicity into "affinity groups" is illegal discrimination.

But the new Biden team kicked that report into limbo on Inauguration Day, not even waiting for its new education secretary to win Senate confirmation. Preserving the radical programs, usually conducted by overpaid private consultants, was that high a priority.

The OCR finding was in response to a complaint about Chicago's Evanston-Skokie school district, which instructed teachers to consider a student's race when taking disciplinary measures, separated staff into "white and non-white" groups for a training program and held a "Colorism Privilege Walk" where students separated themselves by skin color.

As OCR's enforcement director, Carol Ashley, noted, ham-handedly segregating students reduces them "to a set of racial stereotypes." Indeed, it fits with such rightly condemned ideas as "separate but equal" and Apartheid.

Yet the Bidenites rescinded it, supposedly as part of its moves to promote "equity."

Beware: This lunacy is likely to run hog-wild in New York City schools. We've already seen a principal distribute handouts to parents encouraging them to examine their "whiteness" on an eight-point scale ranging from "White Supremacist" in the red zone to "White Abolitionist" in the green.

Only ideologues and con artists who cater to them actually buy this junk. It's appalling to see a new president preserving it.

Return to top

NYDN: A lousy tipper: Mayor de Blasio's taxi medallion fund can't hurt, but it won't solve the problem

**By DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL BOARD:
Mar 12, 2021**

There's nothing wrong with Mayor de Blasio using \$65 million of the \$6 billion in COVID money from Congress for a new Taxi Medallion Owner Relief Fund, but it's hard to see if the no-interest loans he's offering will help cabbies with crushing debt survive the evaporation of their farebox income, first to Uber and Lyft and then to the pandemic.

The loans these owner-operators took out years ago to buy medallions, then valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars, can't be paid back as there aren't enough fares. The daily average fares were approaching a half million before Uber and Lyft drove into New York. The total yellow fares were halved by the time COVID arrived a year ago, smothering everything.

The problem was not predatory lending, but loss of business. The 13,587 medallions are worth more than the 1937 original license fee of \$10, but a lot less than the peak of a half million bucks or more. A majority of the yellows are mothballed, with only about 5,000 on the streets as there's just no business. Midtown office towers are empty. The airports are all but deserted. Tourists are nonexistent. Hotels, theaters and restaurants are shuttered. And no one wants a ride.

Potentially, several thousand medallion owners could use the money de Blasio is setting aside to ease their monthly nut (up to \$20,000 for a down payment to refinance and a maximum of \$9,000 to cover monthly payments). But they'll still need to be earning enough to break even, and that's a giant if. This is no bailout and de Blasio isn't coming to the rescue, just like state Attorney General Tish James couldn't make a lawsuit against the city and the Taxi and Limousine Commission.

Without a bailout, another way to save the yellows is giving them an edge in prime Manhattan fares, meaning disadvantage Uber and Lyft. Again, more problems.

At least if the hacks who try de Blasio's modest plan don't pay back his loans, that's quite okay.

Return to top

NYDN: The Cuomo probes: Find the facts, all of them

**By DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL BOARD:
Mar 12, 2021**

Joon Kim, a former Manhattan U.S. attorney, and employment lawyer Anne Clark are now special deputies to the first deputy attorney general charged with investigating allegations of sexual harassment against Gov. Cuomo. They have a website, agindependentinvestigation.com, listing email, voice and text contacts for anyone to provide relevant information. Their written findings will be made public, as they must be.

The Assembly Judiciary Committee, under Chair Charles Lavine, is also commencing a possible impeachment proceeding, promising not to interfere with the special deputies. That is a fair and reasonable step, as the described behavior, if substantiated, is incompatible with holding a position of public trust.

Meanwhile, the press is continuing to publish details on the incidents that have rocked the standing of the country's longest serving governor and could topple him. All are disturbing, but the most troubling is from the Albany Times-Union about Cuomo using a ruse to summon a younger, female subordinate to the private living quarters of the executive mansion and then placing his hands under her blouse.

Cuomo denies it occurred, but unlike most of the earlier alleged complaints, there is simply no plausible, charitable interpretation or explanation for such behavior. No universe exists in which it's acceptable for the 63-year-old governor, the most powerful man in the state, to fondle a young staff member. It wouldn't matter if this were the only accusation — it's a charge of a degree so severe that, if proved, would suggest the governor lacks the character and judgement to continue leading this state.

As the calls for Cuomo's immediate resignation grow, the investigation is gearing up, an investigation that should continue and decide his fate.

Cuomo's stature, developed over the last year of COVID leading New York through the worst of the worst, created a reservoir of good will for him among the public, in New York and beyond. For the moment, that support sustains him, while we await both the quiet probes and any new public charges that arise.

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: Stick to COVID relief: What the American Rescue Plan does, and doesn't do

**By DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL BOARD:
Mar 12, 2021**

The American Rescue Plan, now law from President Biden's pen, is first, last and only a COVID relief bill, as it should be, coming on the one-year anniversary of the pandemic's declaration. It is not a transformation of the country's priorities, as some advocates on the left claim, and a second coming of the Great Society.

Appropriately, the \$1.9 trillion in financial assistance to suffering Americans, pushed through without any Republican assistance, is meant to be targeted and temporary, starting with \$1,400 direct payments to individuals going out immediately (check your bank account for direct deposits). The \$300 in extra weekly unemployment compensation is for six months.

The jump in the child tax credit from \$2,000 to \$3,000 (and \$3,600 for the littlest kids) is a one-timer. The increase in the earned income tax credit is just for 2021. Then it all goes back the way it was. So much for those who project that these measures will make a big dent in child and family poverty. The extra money going out is all temporary.

What could have been the most significant and far-reaching provision, a higher federal minimum wage, isn't there. And that wasn't due to Republican opposition, but because some Senate Democrats had qualms. The minimum should rise, although more than doubling to \$15 an hour by 2025 seems to be too high, too quickly.

We didn't study every line in the 628 pages that Senate Republican made the clerks read out loud, but we can't find much in there that is permanent, just as COVID isn't permanent. There's money for vaccines and testing. There's funding for better ventilation for schools and reducing class sizes. There's support for transit agencies and local and state governments.

The argument goes that the enhanced child tax credit and earned income tax credit will be popular and could be made permanent. Sure, but remember that the \$600 weekly strings-free Pandemic Unemployment Assistance was popular too, but it's long gone.

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: Confiscation in Paradise

**By The Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

With \$350 billion in aid coming from Washington, what's on the agenda in Democratic statehouses? Hawaii's Legislature, the bluest in all 50 states, is bidding to pass the highest state tax rate in the land.

The state Senate voted Tuesday to raise the top income-tax rate to 16% from 11%. This would leap above the 13.3% California takes from its highest earners, or the 12.7% that New York City dwellers pay. Oh, and Hawaii's top rate would kick in at a mere \$200,000 of income. It would also slam many small business owners who pay taxes at the individual rate. As if they haven't suffered enough during the Covid lockdowns.

The bill would also raise Hawaii's capital-gains tax to 11% from 7.25%, a blow that will fall heavily on the state's retirees. The top rate on corporations and real-estate investment trusts would rise to 9.6% from 6.4%. Legislators are shaking every conch shell in a mad grab for new revenue.

Hawaii, which depends heavily on tourism, has been hit harder than most states by Covid-19. State revenue came in about \$2.3 billion short of last year's revenue target.

But Hawaii legislators know President Biden will soon sign a \$1.9 trillion spending bill that includes a state bailout. Some \$6.1 billion will go to the Aloha State. Hawaii's new tax increases would supposedly last through 2027, taking far more out of the economy than needed to make up for a sluggish 2020. But "temporary" tax hikes almost always become permanent as politicians rush to spend the new revenue and refuse to cut spending when the higher tax rates are set to expire.

Hawaii's unemployment rate was 10.3% in December, the worst nationwide. It has the nation's highest cost of living, and from 2010-2020 only New York and Illinois saw greater shares of residents flee. If the Hawaii Legislature's goal is to shrink the state population, its new tax grab might do it.

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: Here Come Climate Reparations

**By The Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

Believe it or not, some Western Democrats are starting to push back against the Biden Administration's climate assault on their constituents.

“We write to follow up on President Biden’s Executive Order 14008 addressing the climate crisis,” New Mexico Democratic Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan wrote last week to White House climate czar Gina McCarthy. That’s Mr. Biden’s order in January suspending new oil and gas leases on federal lands.

Although a short-term leasing “pause is fully appropriate in the new Biden administration, an extended and indefinite suspension would have significant impacts on our workforce and state funding for education,” the Senators explain, noting that oil and gas generate over \$3 billion annually in revenue for their state and 40% of its budget.

The Democratic Senators urged the Biden Administration to resume leasing and, in a separate letter to Interior Acting Secretary Scott de la Vega, for career officials to be allowed to continue approving routine permits. They also asked that “states like New Mexico receive robust federal assistance in the ongoing transition to a zero-carbon economy.”

Enter Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, who inserted a provision into the new \$1.9 trillion spending bill that creates a \$2 billion fund for communities in which there has been “a negative revenue impact due to implementation” of federal policies. First do active economic and social harm, then dole out taxpayer cash to soothe the pain.

“The purpose of my new program is to help stabilize the budgets and economies of counties that have historically hosted extractive industry on private or public lands and where downturns in those extractive industries, caused by government action, affected the county economically and budgetarily,” he explained in a statement.

Mr. Wyden’s fund won’t go very far if the Biden Administration tries to banish fossil fuels with regulation. That’s why Democrats plan to pass another \$2 trillion climate public works bill. Some severance package.

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: Lessons of the Long Covid Year

**By The Editorial Board:
Mar 12, 2021**

When a SARS-like virus was reported spreading in Wuhan in late 2019, most Americans never imagined their own government would soon close schools, churches and businesses, order people to stay home, and spend more than \$5 trillion to offset the damage. Yet a year later, here we are.

The anniversary is a moment to consider what the pandemic has wrought and how well the U.S. has responded. Healthcare workers have been courageous, drug companies ingenious, and average Americans resilient. The political class and health experts? Not so much.

Start with China and the World Health Organization, which is supposed to patrol for global health threats. China lied and the WHO played along. After censoring doctors, Beijing denied there was evidence of human-to-human transmission until shortly before it locked down Hubei province with 60 million people. Many Chinese had already left the country for Lunar New Year.

The delay cost the world vital weeks in preparing for the virus, yet the WHO praised China for its transparency. We now know the virus by late January was spreading undetected in the U.S. and Europe. China's ability to manipulate the WHO shows how the free world has put too much faith in multilateral institutions with authoritarian governments as members.

President Biden and Democrats blame Donald Trump for 530,000 American deaths, though any Administration would have been tested. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention botched development of a Covid test, and the Food and Drug Administration was slow to authorize private alternatives. The U.S. was caught with a shortage of protective equipment and ventilators, though it mobilized fast on both.

U.S. deaths adjusted for population are comparable to Western Europe's. Asian countries also experienced surges, though fewer deaths because of healthier populations. Island nations Australia and New Zealand closed their borders. Mr. Trump too often downplayed the virus, and his compulsion to make himself the center of the Covid story is a major reason he lost the Presidency. But most politicians and public-health officials also minimized the virus early on because they didn't want to cause panic.

Mr. Trump's biggest mistake was putting too much faith in health experts and their lockdown models. As hospitals in northern Italy burst with patients, epidemiologists predicted U.S. hospitals would soon be overwhelmed. On March 16, Mr. Trump ordered a 15-day national lockdown to "slow the spread," which he later extended through April.

Lockdowns were understandable a year ago in the Northeast given how little was known about Covid. But as we warned at the time ("Rethinking the Virus Shutdown," March 20), "no society can safeguard public health for long at the cost of its overall economic health." As state shutdowns continued, they compounded the virus damage.

The tragedy is how poorly we've adapted as we've learned more about the risks. Studies from Europe showed nearly half of deaths were occurring in nursing homes, and children rarely transmitted the illness or became severely ill. Treatments improved as doctors learned more, but government prescriptions didn't change. As Philippe Lemoine argues nearby, the accumulating evidence is that lockdowns don't reduce the virus spread in the long run.

Lockdowns nonetheless became an ideological battle. The media became lockdown cheerleaders as they sought to take down Mr. Trump, with tragic results for lost businesses, lost livelihoods and health damage in late diagnoses, untreated conditions and mental illness that will compound for years.

Children have lost a year of learning, which many will never make up. The lockdown recession hurt low-income workers the most, while affluent Americans could work from home. While it's impossible to quantify the social harm, last summer's riots and the deepening political discord didn't happen in a vacuum.

There was an alternative. Tens of thousands of doctors signed the Great Barrington Declaration, which recommended that government minimize deaths and economic harm by protecting the vulnerable while letting most Americans return to normal life. Individuals and businesses could adjust to the virus and socially distance as they saw fit. The media and progressive elites dismissed these voices and refused to drop their lockdown dogmatism.

The Covid pandemic has seen the greatest loss of American liberty outside wartime. Politicians closed houses of worship without regard for the First Amendment. They ordered

arbitrary shutdowns that favored some businesses but punished others. Politicians and governments have used the pandemic to justify an enormous expansion of state power. Government had to act in March to avoid economic catastrophe from the lockdowns it ordered. But the politicians keep amassing power even as vaccines are rolling out.

Government spending and deficits have reached heights unseen since World War II as a share of the economy, and taxes are likely to follow. The Federal Reserve has become a de facto arm of the Treasury to finance deficits, with unknown future consequences.

The pandemic is now easing thanks largely to the ingenuity of American drug and biotech companies. The Trump Administration's Operation Warp Speed made the inspired decision last year to invest \$20 billion developing six vaccine candidates. This is the best decision government made. Vaccines typically take a decade to develop, but years of private investment and innovation have paid off in advanced technologies that have cut the time to a year.

The pandemic has been a testament to American grit and resilience—but an undeserved windfall for government. We will be paying for the lockdown excesses for generations.

[Return to top](#)

OTHER NYS

NYT: He Was Caught Jaywalking. He Was Almost Deported for It.

**By Annie Correal and Ed Shanahan:
Mar 12, 2021**

Javier Castillo Maradiaga was on his way to a family birthday party in the Bronx in December 2019 when the police arrested him for jaywalking.

So began a 15-month odyssey during which he was locked up and flown between detention centers around the United States after New York City authorities failed to honor a law meant to keep undocumented immigrants from routinely falling into federal immigration authorities' hands.

It was not until Wednesday, after city officials had admitted their blunder and joined activists, federal lawmakers and Mr. Castillo's lawyers to push for his release, that he was freed from a New Jersey detention center on a federal judge's order.

The unusual case highlights the tensions at play in recent years between a wide-ranging crackdown on undocumented immigrants by federal authorities and efforts in some jurisdictions to shield such residents with so-called sanctuary policies, which prevent state and local law enforcement agencies from collaborating with federal immigration authorities.

It also shows how little it can take for such efforts to fall short.

Mr. Castillo, 27, moved to New York from Honduras as a child to reunite with his mother. He received temporary relief from deportation under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, which began in 2012, a year after he graduated from high school; he and two siblings became legal U.S. residents.

But his status lapsed, and, fearing deportation after President Donald J. Trump was elected and the DACA program's future became cloudy, he did not reapply. That made him an undocumented immigrant when the police stopped him.

After being brought to the local precinct, Mr. Castillo was taken to a courthouse, officials said. The next day, the city's Department of Correction transferred him to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, contrary to a city policy banning such transfers in most cases.

New York law enforcement officials are not supposed to turn people over to ICE or hold them on the federal agency's behalf, even when ICE has made a so-called detainer request. There are exceptions for those who have been convicted of violent or serious crimes or who have been identified as possibly matching people listed in a terrorist-screening database.

In the 12 months starting in July 2019, city records show, the Correction Department turned 20 people over to ICE. Of those, Mr. Castillo was the only one who had not been convicted of a violent or serious crime. He was also the only person known to have been transferred to ICE under such circumstances since the city's sanctuary policy took effect in 2015, officials said.

"Mr. Maradiaga's transfer to ICE was an egregious mistake and a clear violation of local law," a spokeswoman for Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a statement, adding that officials had taken "immediate measures to ensure accountability for this misconduct, including officer discipline and clear procedural changes in how cases are reviewed. This will not happen again."

The New Yorker reported on the city's mistake last month.

An internal Correction Department inquiry found that the mistaken transfer was the fault of a single employee, who was suspended and then transferred to a different unit, officials said. Other steps were also taken to guard against similar foul-ups in the future, officials said.

In a letter to the Justice Department last month, the city's corporation counsel, James E. Johnson, noted that the "operational error" that had resulted in Mr. Castillo's detention had "been addressed," and he argued for Mr. Castillo's release.

By then, Mr. Castillo had been in ICE custody for more than a year, mainly at a jail in New Jersey, where he was held for the duration of the pandemic. The jaywalking charges had been dismissed, and a lawyer hired by the family was continuing to pursue his immigration case.

With a new administration taking office in January, his fate became intertwined with its policies. Despite a 100-day moratorium on deportations ordered by President Biden, Mr. Castillo was sent to Louisiana in January, where, relatives said, he believed he was on the verge of being deported.

ICE subsequently returned him to New York, but he was soon sent back to Louisiana after a federal judge in Texas temporarily blocked Mr. Biden's moratorium.

At a Feb. 6 rally in Manhattan, Mr. Castillo's mother, Alma Maradiaga, recounted getting frantic calls from her son as he was flown around the country amid the changing policies, despite the ongoing threat of the coronavirus.

She said he told her that he was scheduled to be flown out to Honduras and that she should arrange to have someone meet him there — only to learn later that he was not leaving.

“Back and forth,” Ms. Maradiaga, who works at a Manhattan hospital, said of ICE's shifting positions. Mr. Castillo, she said, described it as: ““They're sending me; they're not.””

“They bullied my son every minute,” she said of ICE.

Beginning in January, with Mr. Castillo's deportation appearing imminent, several Democratic members of New York's congressional delegation, including Representative Ritchie Torres, urged ICE to release him. They noted that he could reapply for DACA if he were released but that ICE policy prohibited him from doing so while he was in custody.

ICE declined to release him, but his lawyers obtained a 30-day reprieve from deportation. That gave them time to seek legal remedies that might allow him to stay in the country. The federal judge's order means those efforts can proceed.

“I'm grateful for the release of Javier, but the threat of deportation, separate and apart from the act itself, is traumatic,” Mr. Torres said in a phone interview Wednesday evening. “I find it senseless. It is nightmarish. It is Kafkaesque.”

On Wednesday, an ICE spokesman acknowledged that Mr. Castillo had been released based on the court order. Mr. Castillo was eligible for deportation because he had entered the United States unlawfully as a child in 2002 and had failed to comply with a voluntary departure order two years later, the spokesman said.

Mr. Castillo's lawyers' motions to reopen his immigration case had twice been denied by an immigration judge, the ICE spokesman said. The Board of Immigration Appeals is now considering a motion to reopen the case, the spokesman said.

On Wednesday, after her brother had been released from detention, Mr. Castillo's sister, Dariela Moncada Maradiaga, hailed the judge's order. But, in remarks streamed over Instagram, she noted that millions of other undocumented immigrants were still detained or otherwise in legal limbo.

"Javier is out," Ms. Moncada said, briefly turning the camera toward her brother and saying that they both planned to speak at a rally this weekend in Brooklyn. "But we still have to worry about those other 11 million."

Return to top

WSJ: Biden Tells States to Make All Adults Eligible for Covid-19 Vaccine by May 1

**By Andrew Restuccia and Sabrina Siddiqui:
Mar 12, 2021**

WASHINGTON—President Biden pressed states to widen Covid-19 vaccine eligibility to all U.S. adults by May 1, calling for an all-hands effort to defeat the coronavirus to set the stage for small gatherings during Independence Day weekend.

"If we do this together, by July the Fourth, there's a good chance you, your families and friends will be able to get together in your backyard or in your neighborhood and have a cookout or a barbecue and celebrate Independence Day," Mr. Biden said during a Thursday night prime-time address from the White House, his first as president.

The president spoke on the same day that he signed into law a \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief package, one year after much of the U.S. economy ground to a halt, as the virus spread. In a 23-minute speech, Mr. Biden said the U.S. was operating on a war footing and urged the weary public to maintain vigilance against the virus. He also reflected on the toll that the pandemic has taken on millions of Americans.

“While it was different for everyone, we all lost something—a collective suffering, a collective sacrifice, a year filled with the loss of life and the loss of living,” Mr. Biden said. At one point, he held up a piece of paper he regularly carries with him that lists the current pandemic death toll.

At times, Mr. Biden struck an optimistic tone—touting the administration’s progress in its early stages—but he also reminded Americans that a return to normalcy would require caution and an adherence to public-health guidelines. Whether Americans will be able to gather in small groups by early July will depend on how successful the vaccination effort is, the president emphasized. “I will not relent until we beat this virus, but I need you, the American people,” Mr. Biden said. “There is hope and light and better days ahead, if we all do our part.”

The federal government, which coles out vaccines to states, has largely let them determine how to prioritize people for shots. An HHS spokesperson said the administration has “full authority” to direct that vaccines supplied to states by the federal government be distributed in accordance with its guidance.

Mr. Biden has said the U.S. will have enough supply for all American adults by the end of May. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will continue issuing guidance explaining what individuals should and shouldn’t do after they are vaccinated, Mr. Biden said.

In addition, the Biden administration said it would work to double the number of pharmacies participating in the federal vaccination program; more than double the number of federally-run mass vaccination centers; deliver vaccines to an additional 700 community health centers; deploy 4,000 more active-duty troops to assist vaccination efforts; and expand the types of professionals who can administer vaccines to include dentists, veterinarians, medical students and others.

The administration will also create a new website and a call center to help the public find vaccination sites with available supply and provide technical support to states to improve their own websites through which most people have been scheduling appointments.

Mr. Biden condemned what he said were “vicious hate crimes” against Asian Americans during the pandemic. “They’re forced to live in fear for their lives just walking down streets in America,” he said. “It’s wrong, it’s un-American, and it must stop.”

The \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill that Mr. Biden signed Thursday will provide direct payments to many Americans, extend enhanced jobless aid and disburse funds for vaccine-distribution efforts, marking his first major legislative victory as president.

That legislation includes roughly \$130 billion to help reopen schools, which has emerged as a hot-button issue for Mr. Biden. The administration said the Education Department will begin distributing those funds this month to help schools implement mitigation measures recommended by the CDC to reduce risk of infections. HHS will also dedicate \$650 million toward expanding testing for teachers, staff and students in K-8 schools.

The bill also includes \$1.75 billion to expand genomic sequencing, which the administration said will help detect and deter new variants.

Thursday’s speech kicked off an administration-wide effort to promote the measure to the public, which will include speeches around the country by the president and his top aides. Mr. Biden is scheduled to travel to Pennsylvania and Georgia next week to discuss the coronavirus package, the White House said. Vice President Kamala Harris will travel to Nevada and Colorado, and she will join the president in Georgia.

The White House will host a ceremonial gathering with congressional leaders on Friday to celebrate the signing of the bill, according to aides.

The relief package offers \$1,400 payments to many Americans, an extension of a \$300 weekly jobless-aid supplement and a one-year expansion of the child tax credit that will provide periodic payments for many households. It also disburses money to schools, vaccine distribution efforts, and state and local governments; provides support to struggling multiemployer pensions; and makes the biggest changes to the Affordable Care Act since its passage in 2010, among other measures.

The first direct payments authorized under the relief package will be deposited into bank accounts as soon as this weekend, with additional payments rolling out in the coming weeks, White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters.

After a year of living under social distancing rules, many Americans are chafing at restrictions on their activities. Some states, such as Texas, have begun allowing businesses to reopen at full capacity and dropping mask mandates against the advice of public health officials. As vaccine supplies increase, the country is grappling with the task of distributing the shots quickly and fairly.

Health officials predict that life may slowly start to return to normal, as larger portions of the population get vaccinated, but pandemic-related restrictions are likely to remain in place for some time. The CDC said this week that vaccinated people can gather in small groups with others who have received their shots. But it recommended that those who have been immunized continue to wear masks in public and refrain from travel.

Mr. Biden's speech came one year after then-President Donald Trump delivered his own address on the coronavirus, describing what the nation faced as "just a temporary moment of time that we will overcome as a nation and as a world."

Mr. Trump announced in the speech that his administration would impose restrictions on travel from Europe into the U.S., and he promised small business loans and financial assistance to those hardest hit by the pandemic. That same day, the World Health Organization declared that the outbreak was a pandemic, and the State Department advised U.S. citizens against all travel abroad.

The NBA also abruptly suspended its 2019-20 season after a player tested positive for the virus, and Dr. Anthony Fauci testified at a congressional hearing that large gatherings should be canceled across the country. He warned: "The bottom line: It is going to get worse."

Since taking office, Mr. Biden and his team have worked to increase the U.S. supply of vaccines. He reached deals with Pfizer Inc. and Moderna Inc. to provide a total 600 million doses of their two-shot vaccines, enough supply to vaccinate the eligible U.S. population.

On Wednesday, Mr. Biden directed his administration to secure an additional 100 million doses of Johnson & Johnson's Covid-19 vaccine, a move that would double the company's previous commitment to the U.S. Biden administration officials said they hope to secure excess vaccine supply in case additional doses are needed for booster shots or to vaccinate children. The vaccines aren't approved for those under 16 years old.

In his first 50 days in office, the president has made a point to publicly mourn the death toll from the virus. As of Thursday, more than 530,000 people have died in the U.S. as a result of the virus, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. The U.S. has reported more than 29 million Covid-19 cases.

Although U.S. hospitalizations have fallen, new variants are spreading across the country.

The coronavirus relief bill signing was initially scheduled for Friday, but the legislation was delivered to the White House faster than aides expected.

Republicans called the aid package bloated and said it included Democratic priorities that weren't related to the pandemic. The legislation didn't receive any Republican support in Congress.

Mr. Biden and his aides believe the Obama administration didn't do enough to sell the benefits of the 2009 stimulus law. They are planning to make speeches, conduct local media interviews and put in place a digital strategy to make sure the public understands the Covid-19 measure.

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: Bepple NFT Fetches Record-Breaking \$69 Million in Christie's Sale

**By Kelly Crow and Caitlin Ostroff:
Mar 12, 2021**

Cryptocurrency and blue-chip art collided Thursday when a self-taught artist named Mike Winkelmann, who goes by the professional name of Beeple, sold a digital image online at Christie's for \$69.3 million. That's more than anyone has ever bid for artwork by Frida Kahlo, Salvador Dalí or Paul Gauguin—and it makes Beeple the third most-expensive living artist after Jeff Koons and David Hockney.

It's also the most expensive digital asset to ever sell with an accompanying digital certificate of authenticity known as a non-fungible token, or NFT, according to NonFungible.com.

The sale could prove a watershed moment for crypto asset markets as well as an art world suddenly obsessed with NFTs, even as many top collectors and dealers admit they are still figuring out what the digital trademarks do.

NFTs incorporate technology similar to bitcoin, the decade-old digital currency, albeit with a key difference: Whereas one bitcoin is exchangeable with another bitcoin, each NFT serves as a singularly unique marker for the digital asset it tags. NFTs are also being used by tech giants like Twitter founder Jack Dorsey, who recently turned his very first tweet into an NFT, and the NBA. A trading-card like video NFT of LeBron James dunking a basketball recently sold for over \$200,000.

The winner of Beeple's 2021 piece, "Everydays: The First 5,000 Days," will receive the image along with its unique token, which will be sent to the winner's address—the unique identifier for a cryptocurrency account. This token will convey ownership from the artist to its new owner.

This same token will be recorded on a digital ledger known as a blockchain that will store details about the work's creation along with its new owner (not yet divulged) and any future owners should it get resold. In the same way an artist's signature and ownership history helps authenticate a painting, the NFT on this \$69.3 million image will ensure it remains certified in perpetuity. Copies of the same image uploaded elsewhere will not.

The Wisconsin-born artist, whose name Beeple nods to an 1980s yeti-like monster toy, said he was clueless about NFTs until last fall when he was tipped to the format's popularity among cryptocurrency investors. He doesn't have ties to a traditional gallery. "People describe it as falling down a rabbit hole," he said in an interview before the sale, "and that is quite accurate."

His piece, which elicited 353 bids over the course of the 15-day auction, depicts an amalgam of political cartoons and lush, videogame-like scenes that the 39-year-old artist created over slightly more than 13 years, completing one new work each day. Christie's said the resulting mashup will remain intact; its owner will be able to zoom in to see the 5,000 individual artworks that make up the collage—from endearing early portraits of Beeple's uncle to post-apocalyptic fantasies of cyborgs and a lactating Michael Jackson—but the works can't be broken up and sold individually.

Christie's expert Noah Davis said NFT art is still so new that the house didn't put an estimate on the work, the artist's first top-tier auction appearance. Mr. Davis was introduced to the artist after Beeple sold a small group of his NFT artworks online for \$3.5 million three months ago on a platform called Nifty Gateway. Beeple followed up last month by selling another tokenized artwork online for \$6.6 million. Christie's said it decided to accept cryptocurrency for the first time with this sale, but it's unclear yet if the winner paid that way or with cash.

The sale could "push traditional artists to think about how they could do interesting things with their work in a digital way," the artist said, "and I think it's going to push digital artists like myself to think of how they can come into the physical realm."

Certainly his arrival on the art scene—and the NFT art phenomenon overall—is churning up the kind of feverish ebullience, and brewing backlash, that's largely been absent from the art scene amid the pandemic. Now, it's all anybody in art circles can talk about, on the Clubhouse app and beyond. The artist moderated his own "closing party" chat on the app the morning of the sale, and one of the members of his panel was Jehan Chu, longtime collector and co-founder of a cryptocurrency venture-capital firm. During the forum, Mr. Chu said, "I think there was a malaise in the art world, but now everyone is excited again--and it's because of this."

Minutes later in the chat, when the artist was informed that bidding had surpassed \$20 million, he laughed and said, “I feel super lucky. I didn’t see this coming.”

Others needed more persuading. “It’s a pure hype play,” Steven Sacks, founder and director of the New York gallery, bitforms, said a few days before the Beeple sale. Mr. Sacks said he shows digital artists who have been experimenting with new media since the 1960s, and while some of them have sold room-filling installations for over \$1 million, the more common price level hovers under \$100,000, he said. Last week, former Christie’s auctioneer Loïc Gouzer posted an image on Instagram of an Amy Sillman painting he offered for sale on his Fair Warning app, reminding people that was “created in the physical world” and tagging it #notnft.

Mike Steib, chief executive of the art marketplace Artsy, said the novelty of NFTs could be fueling much of the frenzy. Beeple had a reputation as a popular digital artist ahead of this sale, with nearly 2 million Instagram followers. “Will collectors still be this excited when the houses are offering up the 520th edition of the 27th most-popular NFT artist?” Mr. Steib said.

Kathleen Breitman, co-founder of the cryptocurrency Tezos, said private equity funds with deep investments in cryptocurrency are also likely behind the NFT art rush, as are individual investors with “ether to burn,” referring to the bitcoin alternative. If NFT art is to evolve, the space will need to draw in established artists with curatorial followings and galleries, many of whom remain wary of joining the fray.

Mr. Sacks, the dealer, said he’s open to rethinking the NFT phenomenon, especially if his artists see creative potential in it. Two of his artists, Refik Anadol and Jonathan Monaghan, recently created tokenized works of their own to upload and sell. Mr. Anadol quickly sold 300 editions of a work, at \$1,000 apiece. (His small video sculptures in the gallery typically sell in editions of five for \$35,000 each)

What’s more, a man who lost his bid for one of Mr. Monaghan’s surreal portraits on an NFT art platform wound up stopping by the gallery last week—in person. “That’s what we want,” the dealer said.

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: U.S. Stock Futures Dragged Lower by Tech Shares

The Wall Street Journal:
Mar 12, 2021

U.S. stock futures declined on Friday, led by technology shares, suggesting the recent uptick in demand for growth stocks was petering out at the end of the week.

Futures on the technology-heavy Nasdaq-100 dropped 1.3%. S&P 500 futures slipped 0.4% and futures tied to the Dow Jones Industrial Average traded flat. Changes in futures don't necessarily predict movements after the opening bell.

Europe stocks fell Friday after a four-session winning streak. The Stoxx Europe 600 was down 0.5% in morning trade. Communication services and information technology sectors drove the losses while the financial and real-estate sectors rose.

Barclays jumped 3% for a two-day run of gains and Groupe Bruxelles Lambert added 2.1%.

The U.K.'s FTSE 100 shed 0.2%. Other stock indexes in Europe also mostly slipped as France's CAC 40 declined 0.2%, the U.K.'s FTSE 250 lost 0.4% and Germany's DAX fell 0.6%.

The Swiss franc, the euro and the British pound were down 0.4%, 0.1% and 0.2% respectively against the U.S. dollar.

In commodities, Brent crude was down 0.3% to \$69.39 a barrel. Gold also fell 1% to \$1,705.30 a troy ounce.

The German 10-year bund yield rose to minus 0.311% and 10-year U.K. government debt known as gilts yields were up to 0.784%. 10-year U.S. Treasury yields gained to 1.585% from 1.525% on Thursday. Yields and prices move in opposite directions.

Indexes in Asia were mixed as Japan's Nikkei 225 index climbed 1.7% and China's benchmark Shanghai Composite rose 0.5% after falling as much as 0.6% earlier, whereas Hong Kong's Hang Seng was down 0.9% after gaining 0.6% during the session.

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: Amazon Won't Sell Books Framing LGBTQ+ Identities as Mental Illnesses

By Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg:
Mar 12, 2021

Amazon. AMZN 1.83% com Inc. said it recently removed a three-year-old book about transgender issues from its platforms because it decided not to sell books that frame transgender and other sexual identities as mental illnesses.

The company explained its decision in a letter Thursday to Republican Sens. Marco Rubio of Florida, Mike Lee of Utah, Mike Braun of Indiana and Josh Hawley of Missouri, which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. The senators had written last month to Chief Executive Jeff Bezos requesting an explanation of why "When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment" was no longer available on Amazon nor on its Kindle and Audible platforms.

"As to your specific question about When Harry Became Sally, we have chosen not to sell books that frame LGBTQ+ identity as a mental illness," Amazon said in the letter, which was signed by Brian Huseman, Amazon's vice president of public policy, referring to sexual identities that include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, among others.

"When Harry Became Sally," written by the conservative scholar Ryan T. Anderson, was published in February 2018. The book focuses on a variety of issues including gender identity.

"Everyone agrees that gender dysphoria is a serious condition that causes great suffering," said Mr. Anderson and Roger Kimball, the publisher of Encounter Books, the New York-

based nonprofit that published the book, in a statement Thursday in response to Amazon's letter.

"There is a debate, however, which Amazon is seeking to shut down, about how best to treat patients who experience gender dysphoria," they added, calling their book "an important contribution" to that conversation. "Amazon is using its massive power to distort the marketplace of ideas and is deceiving its own customers in the process," they said.

Amazon's decision comes as the nation's largest tech platforms are under increased scrutiny regarding the decisions they make over which content is acceptable. The senators, in their letter dated Feb. 24, characterized Amazon's decision to remove the book as a signal "to conservative Americans that their views are not welcome on its platforms."

The four senators couldn't be reached for comment late Thursday afternoon.

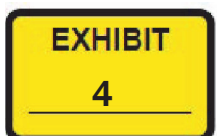
The senators in their letter had also asked Mr. Bezos whether Amazon had changed its content guidelines since 2018. In Thursday's response, the company said it had indeed changed its guidelines since that year, without providing further details.

Amazon said it provides its customers "with access to a variety of viewpoints, including books that some customers may find objectionable."

"That said, we reserve the right not to sell certain content," Amazon's Mr. Huseman wrote. "All retailers make decisions about what selection they choose to offer, as do we."

Amazon is the country's dominant book retailer, accounting for 53% of all books sold in the U.S. and 80% of all ebooks, according to recent 30-day sales data from Codex Group LLC, a book audience research firm. Removing a title from Amazon's platform can have a significant impact on its performance.

[Return to top](#)



NYT: The U.S. Is Sitting on Tens of Millions of Vaccine Doses the World Needs

**By Noah Weiland and Rebecca Robbins:
Mar 12, 2021**

WASHINGTON — Tens of millions of doses of the coronavirus vaccine made by the British-Swedish company AstraZeneca are sitting idly in American manufacturing facilities, awaiting results from its U.S. clinical trial while countries that have authorized its use beg for access.

The fate of those doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine is the subject of an intense debate among White House and federal health officials, with some arguing the administration should let them go abroad where they are desperately needed while others are not ready to relinquish them, according to senior administration officials.

AstraZeneca is involved in those conversations.

“We understand other governments may have reached out to the U.S. government about donation of AstraZeneca doses, and we've asked the U.S. government to give thoughtful consideration to these requests,” said Gonzalo Viña, a spokesman for AstraZeneca.

About 30 million doses are currently bottled at AstraZeneca's facility in West Chester, Ohio, which handles “fill-finish,” the final phase of the manufacturing process during which the vaccine is placed in vials, one official with knowledge of the stockpile said.

Emergent BioSolutions, a company in Maryland that AstraZeneca has contracted to manufacture its vaccine in the United States, has also produced enough vaccine in Baltimore for tens of millions more doses once it is filled into vials and packaged, the official said.

But although AstraZeneca's vaccine is already authorized in more than 70 countries, according to a company spokesman, its U.S. clinical trial has not yet reported results, and the company has not applied to the Food and Drug Administration for emergency use authorization. AstraZeneca has asked the Biden administration to let it loan American doses to the European Union, where it has fallen short of its original supply commitments and where the vaccination campaign has stumbled badly.

The administration, for now, has denied the request, one official said.

Some federal officials have pushed the White House to make a decision in the next few weeks. Officials have discussed sending doses to Brazil, which has been hard hit by a worsening coronavirus crisis, or the European Union or Britain.

“If those donation actions were to proceed, we would seek guidance from the U.S. government on replacement of doses for use in the U.S.,” Mr. Viña said.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

The administration’s hesitation is at least partly related to uncertainties with vaccine supply before a benchmark of late May laid down by President Biden when he promised enough vaccine doses to cover every adult in the United States. Vaccine production is notoriously complex and delicate, and problems like mold growth can interrupt a plant’s progress.

Last May, the Trump administration pledged up to \$1.2 billion to AstraZeneca to finance the development and manufacturing of its vaccine, which it developed with the University of Oxford, and to supply the United States with 300 million doses if it proved effective. Federal officials and public health experts last year viewed the vaccine, which is less expensive and easier to store for long periods than some other vaccines, as most likely to be among the first to receive authorization.

That never happened, in part because of a pattern of communication blunders by AstraZeneca that weakened the company’s relationship with American regulators and slowed the vaccine’s development. Last fall, AstraZeneca’s trial in the United States — the same one that will soon report results — was grounded for nearly seven weeks because the company was slow to provide the F.D.A. with evidence that the vaccine had not caused serious neurological side effects in two volunteers.

The company is now grappling with another safety scare. Acting out of precaution, health authorities in Denmark, Norway and Iceland suspended use of the AstraZeneca's vaccine on Thursday after several reports across the continent of severe blood clots.

European official and the company said there was not evidence of any causal link. In the vast majority of cases, the emergence of such medical conditions has nothing to do with the vaccine. Some percentage of people are expected to fall ill by chance after getting vaccinated, as would happen in any group of people.

AstraZeneca has also run into other problems as its vaccine has rolled out. The shortfall in supply has fueled tensions with European officials. Some people in Germany and other countries have balked at taking the vaccine, for fear it is second-class because of its lower overall efficacy in clinical trials compared with the vaccine from Pfizer. South Africa last month halted its plans to introduce the vaccine after a small clinical trial found that the vaccine did not appear to be protective against mild to moderate illness caused by a concerning coronavirus variant first seen there.

In the United States, the Biden administration's moves to order more supply of the three vaccines authorized by the F.D.A. has further sidelined AstraZeneca's candidate. The United States may only briefly, or never, need the AstraZeneca doses if they are cleared for emergency use.

"If we have a surplus, we're going to share it with the rest of the world," Mr. Biden told reporters on Wednesday, speaking generally about the U.S. vaccine supply. "We're going to start off making sure Americans are taken care of first."

Johnson & Johnson, which has authorization for its vaccine in the United States but fell behind on its production targets in both the United States and Europe, recently asked the United States to loan 10 million doses to the European Union, but the Biden administration also denied that request, according to American and European officials.

The European Union has come under fierce criticism for "vaccine nationalism" and protectionism, which intensified last week when Italy blocked a small shipment of doses to Australia, stepping up a tug of war over badly needed shots. Still, the European Union

exported 34 million doses of coronavirus vaccines in recent weeks to dozens of countries, even as it faced shortages at home.

As frustrations simmer, some European officials are blaming the United States. The European Council president, Charles Michel, said the United States, along with Britain, “have imposed an outright ban on the export of vaccines or vaccine components produced on their territory.” Asked on Thursday about the American supply of the AstraZeneca vaccine, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, told reporters that vaccine manufacturers were free to export their products made in the United States while also fulfilling the terms of their contracts with the government.

But because AstraZeneca’s vaccine was produced with help from the Defense Production Act, Mr. Biden has to approve shipments of doses overseas. Such a move could have huge negative political repercussions as long as Americans are still clamoring for shots.

AstraZeneca is also likely to want liability protection for doses shipped overseas, like it would have in the United States if the vaccine is cleared.

Meantime, regulators in the United States have been waiting for new AstraZeneca data, expected in the next few weeks, from a Phase 3 trial that enrolled 32,000 participants mostly in the United States. AstraZeneca is not likely to report results from an early look at its data, as other vaccine makers have done. It will instead wait for more statistically meaningful results after trial participants have been monitored longer for side effects and more people in the vaccine and placebo groups may have gotten sick, federal officials said. Experts believe the vaccine is unlikely to carry a higher efficacy rate than the shot made by Johnson & Johnson, which uses a similar technology and requires only one dose.

The potential for those results means that AstraZeneca’s vaccine might not have an obvious advantage in the United States over the vaccines currently authorized. Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine is easy to distribute and protects against severe disease and hospitalizations. The two-dose vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, which use a different technology, have efficacy rates around 95 percent.

Federal officials have also emphasized in the discussions that AstraZeneca's vaccine should not be stored indefinitely in Ohio or Maryland, since it, like all vaccines, has a limited shelf life. The vaccine can be kept at refrigerator temperatures for six months, and some countries are giving the two doses spaced up to three months apart — raising the risk that the doses could go bad if they sit too long.

Mr. Biden is taking steps to ramp up vaccine production, and the administration may have more than a billion doses available by the end of this year, with most ready by summer. That is far more than are necessary to vaccinate the roughly 260 million adults in the United States or even the entire population, once children and adolescents become eligible for shots. Most recently, the administration has focused on Johnson & Johnson's one-shot vaccine, brokering a deal to have the pharmaceutical giant Merck manufacture and bottle the shot and announcing plans to secure 100 million additional doses.

Before the Merck deal was announced, administration officials discussed whether Johnson & Johnson should take over AstraZeneca's manufacturing space in Baltimore, which the company shares with Johnson & Johnson. The process of stopping the production of vaccines takes weeks. And because AstraZeneca has a contract with Emergent, the Maryland manufacturer, White House intervention would be difficult. The idea was dropped once the Merck partnership was sealed.

The administration says it is increasing the supply to eventually vaccinate children and possibly to make booster doses or to guard against emerging variants that may be able to escape the protection conferred by some vaccines. But privately, two senior administration officials said that by helping Johnson & Johnson scale up with the Merck deal, the White House is laying the groundwork for the company to eventually make its vaccine available overseas.

[Return to top](#)

NYT: L.A.P.D. Severely Mishandled George Floyd Protests, Report Finds

**By Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, John Eligon and Will Wright:
Mar 12, 2021**

The Los Angeles Police Department severely mishandled protests last summer in the wake of George Floyd's death, illegally detaining protesters, issuing conflicting orders to its rank-and-file officers and striking people who had committed no crimes with rubber bullets, bean bags and batons, according to a scathing report released on Thursday.

An ill-prepared department quickly allowed the situation to spiral out of control when some protesters got violent, failing to rein in much of the most destructive behavior while arresting thousands of protesters for minor offenses, according to the 101-page report commissioned by the City Council.

The report was also highly critical of the department's leadership, saying that high-ranking officers sometimes made chaotic scenes even worse by shifting strategies without communicating clearly. In many cases, officers used "antiquated tactics" that failed to calm the more violent demonstrators, some of whom the report said deliberately threw things at officers from behind a line of peaceful protesters.

The review is the latest to find serious fault with a police department's response to the wave of protests that swept the country in the wake of Mr. Floyd's death in Minneapolis on May 25.

From New York to Chicago to Dallas, investigations in the past several months have found that police departments nationwide botched their handling of the protests. In city after city, officers, under faulty supervision, ignored protocols and used excessive force on demonstrators. Mass arrests swept up people who were not breaking any laws. And aggressive responses caused gatherings to quickly descend into chaos.

In New York, one highly critical report last year found that the Police Department, the nation's largest force, badly mishandled the mass demonstrations, in part by sending untrained officers into marches.

"The response really was a failure on many levels," Margaret Garnett, the commissioner for the New York City Department of Investigation, said at the time.

In Chicago, an inspector general's report found that officers had failed to wear body cameras as required and underreported how many times they used their batons to strike protesters. Dallas police officers were found to have fired pepper balls at peaceful marchers. And in Philadelphia, a report condemned an unprepared police response in which officers fueled

unrest in some predominantly Black areas with excessive force against demonstrators, while allowing white men armed with bats and pipes to confront protesters in other parts of town.

In Los Angeles, undercover officers blended into the protests but then had no way to report criminal behavior directly to supervisors. Sometimes they had to be rescued from the devolving crowd, the report said, adding that the department's intelligence operations have become less effective as positions in that field were cut in favor of patrol units.

And although officers arrested thousands of people during the protests in late May, there was no clear plan for how to detain and process them, according to the report. Some protesters were injured so severely by "less lethal" munitions — like rubber bullets and pepper balls — that they had to get surgery.

The Los Angeles Police Department said in a statement that its chief, Michel Moore, had "taken responsibility for activities over the summer," and that the department had provided crowd control training to its officers after the summer unrest.

"The opportunity to learn from our mistakes, to grow, and become better servants to our community is something that has been embraced and we look forward to leaning into the challenges and being better," the statement said.

RJ Dawson, who took part in the protests in Los Angeles as part of an activist group, said he had little hope that the report would lead to significant changes.

"I find that these reports tell us what we already know," he said. "When you're out here, you see the civil rights violations."

The review, one of three investigations into the department's response to the demonstrations, was completed by a panel of former police commanders and led by Gerald Chaleff, who has served on police oversight panels in Los Angeles dating back to the city's 1992 riots after four officers were acquitted in the beating of Rodney King.

“There was a lack of preparation, a lack of planning,” Mr. Chaleff said of the Los Angeles Police Department in an interview, adding that it “could have minimized” the destruction caused by a small group of people who vandalized the city during last year’s protests.

He said that most demonstrators were peaceful, but that “there were some people there to create chaos and cause problems”

In interviews, several commanders admitted to the authors of the report that they lacked experience in managing peaceful protests and said they did not receive enough training to maintain order.

Training in crowd control, which became mandatory after the police responded violently in 2007 to demonstrations over immigrant rights, had not occurred for several years leading up to 2020, according to the report. There are “still a few high-level personnel” with expertise in handling large demonstrations, but the report said the Police Department should prioritize the training going forward, as officers retire and are assigned elsewhere.

Officers interviewed for the report said they thought that “good relationships” with residents would keep the demonstrations peaceful, as they had in the recent past, but that their confidence resulted in them failing to plan.

The department formed lines of officers standing shoulder to shoulder to block off a street or keep the protesters from going a certain way. But this technique proved ineffective. As violence erupted, the lines did nothing to help control the crowd.

Across the country, reports have consistently shown similar failures.

In New York, more than 2,000 people were arrested during the city’s first week of demonstrations and enforcement during the height of the protests was overly aggressive and disproportionately affected people of color, according to the highly critical report, which was

issued by the state's attorney general, Letitia James. Her office received more than 1,300 complaints of police misconduct stemming from those first weeks of protest in New York City, she said.

In Portland, Ore., Justice Department lawyers wrote last month that the city's police department was out of compliance with a 2014 settlement agreement that focused in part on how officers used force. The Justice Department wrote in court that during protests last year, the Portland Police Bureau used force more than 6,000 times in six months, at times deviating from policy.

In Seattle, the city's Office of Inspector General has been working on a review of last year's protests, saying there were more than 120 separate protest events and more than 19,000 complaints about how they were handled.

In Chicago, the city's inspector general report found that the Police Department's senior leadership had failed the public and rank-and-file officers in its handling of intense protests. As in Los Angeles, the department failed to properly process mass arrests, the report said, overcharging some people and undercharging others. Officers obscured their badge numbers and name plates, and many did not wear body cameras, making it difficult to hold officers accountable for misconduct.

All this happened as the public's own footage of questionable tactics by Chicago officers circulated widely, the report said. The city and the Police Department, the report said, may have been set "back significantly in their long-running, deeply challenged effort to foster trust with members of the community"

The Dallas Police Department also came under close scrutiny for how it handled protests. A Dallas Morning News report found that the police had improperly fired pepper balls at protesters. A federal judge had issued a temporary restraining order preventing officers from using chemical agents, flash-bang grenades and other less-lethal weapons against protesters. The police chief at the time ended up resigning, though she said it was for reasons other than the criticism of the protest response.

Mr. Chaleff, who once served as the Los Angeles Police Department's special assistant for constitutional policing under former Chief William J. Bratton, who later led the New York Police Department, noted that Thursday's report was primarily concerned with the institutional response, not with any particular incident of police misconduct, a sign that the police had "allowed less violence" than in the past.

"I think there's been progress," he said. "But you have to be prepared for what's coming, and you have to have the elected and appointed leadership that understands what is required and creates a culture for the kinds of responses that are necessary."

Return to top

NYT: Derek Chauvin will now face a third-degree murder charge.

**By Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs:
Mar 12, 2021**

The judge overseeing the trial of Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis police officer charged with killing George Floyd, has allowed prosecutors to add an additional charge of third-degree murder against Mr. Chauvin, who is already facing a more serious count of second-degree murder.

The decision on Thursday most likely ended a sequence of legal wrangling and cleared the way for the trial to move forward. Jury selection is well underway, with six of 12 jurors already seated, and opening arguments are scheduled to begin on March 29.

The jurors will now have an additional murder charge on which they could convict, even if they decide the evidence does not support second-degree murder.

Third-degree murder was the first charge Mr. Chauvin faced last year when he was fired by the Minneapolis Police Department and arrested after Mr. Floyd's death on May 25, and prosecutors had sought to reinstate it.

Within days of Mr. Chauvin's arrest, he agreed to plead guilty to third-degree murder, The New York Times reported last month, but William P. Barr, then the U.S. attorney general,

stepped in to reject the agreement, which had also included an assurance that Mr. Chauvin would not face federal civil rights charges.

Judge Peter A. Cahill, who is overseeing the trial, later dismissed that charge, but he upheld the more severe charge of second-degree murder. If convicted of second-degree murder, Mr. Chauvin would likely face about 11 to 15 years in prison, though the maximum penalty is up to 40 years. The maximum penalty for the added third-degree murder charge is 25 years in prison. Mr. Chauvin also faces a lesser charge of second-degree manslaughter.

The Minnesota Court of Appeals last week ordered Mr. Cahill to reconsider whether to add the third-degree murder charge, which has historically been understood to apply to defendants who commit an act that endangers multiple people. But the appeals court broadened the scope of the law in a decision this year and said the charge could be used in cases where only one person was in danger — as it was in the conviction of a Minneapolis police officer, Mohamed Noor, for a fatal shooting.

Judge Cahill said in February that he was not bound by that new interpretation because it could still be reviewed by a higher court, but the appeals court disagreed with his analysis. Judge Cahill granted the prosecutors' motion to add the charge after brief arguments on Thursday morning from Eric J. Nelson, who is Mr. Chauvin's lawyer, and Neal Katyal, a former acting solicitor general who is helping prosecutors in the case.

Two lawyers for the Floyd family welcomed the decision in a statement.

“The trial is very painful and the family needs closure,” the lawyers, Ben Crump and Antonio Romanucci, said. “We're pleased that all judicial avenues are being explored and that the trial will move forward.”

And Keith Ellison, the Minnesota attorney general whose office is prosecuting the case, said the charge “reflects the gravity of the allegations.”

Mr. Chauvin, 44, has been free on bail since October and has been present in court since the trial moved ahead this week, wearing a suit and mask and taking notes on a yellow legal pad as his lawyer and prosecutors interview prospective jurors. So far, the six selected jurors include three white men, one Black man, one Hispanic man and a biracial woman, Judge Cahill said in court on Thursday.

[Return to top](#)

NYT: Biden Tells Nation There Is Hope After a Devastating Year

By Katie Rogers:
Mar 12, 2021

WASHINGTON — Seeking to comfort Americans bound together by a year of suffering but also by “hope and the possibilities,” President Biden made a case to the nation Thursday night that it could soon put the worst of the pandemic behind it and promised that all adults would be eligible for the vaccine by May 1.

During a 24-minute speech from the East Room, Mr. Biden laced his somber script with references to Hemingway and personal ruminations on loss as he reflected on a “collective suffering, a collective sacrifice, a year filled with the loss of life, and the loss of living, for all of us.”

Speaking on the anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring a pandemic and the moment at which the virus began tightening its grip, the president offered a turning point of sorts after one of the darkest years in recent history, one that would lead to more than half a million deaths in the country, the loss of millions of jobs and disruptions to nearly every aspect of society and politics.

With the stimulus bill about to give the economy a kick, the pace of vaccinations increasing and death rates down, Mr. Biden said Americans were on track to return to a semblance of normal life by July 4 as long as they took the chance to get vaccinated and did not prematurely abandon mask wearing, social distancing and other measures to contain the virus.

In putting a date, however cautiously, on the calendar, Mr. Biden also offered something intangible: hope for a summer with barbecues, family gatherings and hugs for grandparents.

“July 4th with your loved ones is the goal,” he said.

Mr. Biden did not mention his predecessor, Donald J. Trump, but his address drew sharp contrasts to him, repeatedly citing the need to tell the American people the truth, appealing for unity, celebrating the accomplishments of science and calling for continued vigilance against a virus that he said could still come roaring back.

“Just as we were emerging from a dark winter into a hopeful spring and summer is not the time to not stick with the rules,” Mr. Biden said. “This is not the time to let up.”

Mr. Biden set out concrete steps to build on the progress so far, starting with a requirement that states act by May 1 to make all adults eligible to be vaccinated. The administration had already announced last week that it would have enough doses to begin inoculating every adult by the end of May. Mr. Biden said that Americans should expect to get in line for a vaccine by May 1, but not to expect to have been vaccinated.

He said the federal government would also create a website that would allow Americans to search for available vaccines, make the vaccine available at more pharmacies, double the number of mass vaccination sites and certify more people — including dentists, paramedics, veterinarians and physician assistants — to deliver shots into arms.

“I’m using every power I have as president of the United States to put us on a war footing to get the job done,” Mr. Biden said. And after reminding Americans that the initial spread of the virus last year was met with “silence” and “denials,” the president stressed that a government stepping in to help its hardest-hit citizens was a powerful positive force.

“We need to remember the government isn’t some foreign force in a distant capital,” Mr. Biden said. “It’s us, all of us.”

The speech, which advisers said the president had line-edited for the better part of a week, followed Mr. Biden's signing of the stimulus package, the American Rescue Plan, into law, setting off a huge disbursement of federal funds to individuals, states and struggling businesses through legislation that also amounted to a down payment on an expansive Democratic agenda.

Among its many other provisions, the plan provides some \$130 billion to assist in reopening schools.

"This historic legislation is about rebuilding the backbone of this country," Mr. Biden said to reporters who had gathered in the Oval Office, "and giving people in this nation, working people, the middle-class folks, people who built the country, a fighting chance."

Mr. Biden signed the landmark legislation and scheduled his speech a year to the day after Mr. Trump declared from the Oval Office, in an early indication of what became a catastrophically misguided pattern of denying the reality of what faced the United States and the world, that a "low risk" coronavirus pandemic would amount to nothing more than "a temporary moment in time."

Hoping to build political support for the rest of his agenda, including a large infrastructure program and an expansion of health care, Mr. Biden now intends to begin a campaign to sell the benefits of the stimulus legislation to voters.

One of the most easily digestible parts of the plan will take effect in days. Direct payments of up to \$1,400 per individual are scheduled to hit the bank accounts of Americans as early as this weekend, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said. Expanded federal unemployment benefits will be extended.

The legislation provides the largest federal infusion of aid to the poor in generations, substantially expands the child tax credit and increases subsidies for health insurance. Restaurants will get financial help and state governments will get an infusion of aid.

This week, about halfway through Mr. Biden's first 100 days, the new administration has celebrated not just the passage of the stimulus plan but also progress in filling out the president's cabinet. On Wednesday alone, the Senate confirmed three of his picks: Merrick B. Garland as attorney general, Marcia L. Fudge as secretary of housing and urban development and Michael Regan as the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

But, just as the vote had been, the reaction to the relief bill in Washington was split along party lines, even though it is widely popular in national polling. Nancy Pelosi, the House speaker, hailed the package as "the most consequential legislation many of us will ever vote for," and chastised Republicans who, she said, "vote no and take the dough."

Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the minority leader, dismissed the relief package as "far-left legislation that was passed after the tide had already turned."

The president and his advisers said that the urgency of getting direct payments into the hands of low- and middle-income Americans, reopening schools and lifting children out of poverty was worth the cost, financially and also politically. Mr. Biden, whose early message of political unity was quickly overtaken by a need to "go big" on the stimulus plan with only Democratic votes, has been determined to lay out a more hopeful vision, and reframe the virus as an opportunity to come back stronger.

There are significant challenges. The country remains deeply divided, politically and culturally. In his speech Mr. Biden condemned a spate of anti-Asian American violence as "un-American" scapegoating over the cause of the virus.

A substantial number of people remain hesitant about getting vaccinated even as supplies grow, and the administration is directing federal funds to campaigns to convince skeptical Americans that the shots are safe.

"I know they're safe," Mr. Biden said in his address. "We need everyone to get vaccinated."

Mr. Biden and his advisers say they know it is not enough to help the nation emerge from the pandemic and are planning to use the stimulus legislation and the positive trends in containing the virus to build support for further initiatives.

On Thursday, the White House underscored the importance of the plan by delivering the bill to Mr. Biden's desk ahead of schedule and summoning journalists to the Oval Office at the last minute to witness the signing. A celebration of the bill with congressional leaders was still scheduled for Friday. Ms. Psaki told reporters that the celebration would be "bicameral" but not "bipartisan."

The White House's decision to go out and sell the stimulus package after its passage reflects a lesson from the early months of the Obama administration. In 2009, fighting to help the economy recover from a crippling financial crisis, President Barack Obama never succeeded in building durable popular support for a similar stimulus bill and allowed Republicans to define it on their terms, fueling a partisan backlash and the rise of the Tea Party movement.

This time, Mr. Biden and some of his most high-profile administration members, including Vice President Kamala Harris and Jill Biden, the first lady, will crisscross the country to sell the plan to bipartisan audiences, betting that Republican support for pandemic aid exists in individual districts, even if politicians in Washington have refused to cooperate. Mr. Biden will visit Pennsylvania and Georgia next week.

But even as his advisers publicly hailed the passage of the stimulus plan, Mr. Biden made it clear that he also wanted to use his speech to reflect on how many lives had been upended, or lost, and show the nation that he understood what that loss meant.

"Finding light in the darkness is a very American thing to do," he said. "In fact it may be the most American thing we do, and that's what we've done."

[Return to top](#)

NYT: The Lessons of One of the Worst Years in American Life

**By David E. Sanger:
Mar 12, 2021**

WASHINGTON — The 365 days between the United States' panicked retreat from offices and schools and President Biden's speech on Thursday night, celebrating the prospect of a pandemic's end, may prove to be one of the most consequential years in American history.

People learned about national vulnerabilities most had never considered, and about depths of resilience they never imagined needing except in wartime. Even the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, for all their horror and the two decades of war they ushered in, did not change day-to-day life in every city and town in the United States quite the way the coronavirus did.

One president lost his job in large part for mishandling a crisis whose magnitude he first denied. His successor knows his legacy depends on bringing the catastrophe to a swift conclusion.

The halting response demonstrated both the worst of American governing and then, from Operation Warp Speed's 10-month sprint to vaccines to the frantic pace of inoculations in recent days, the very best. The economic earthquake as cities and towns shuttered so altered politics that Congress did something that would have been unimaginable a year ago this week. Lawmakers spent \$5 trillion to dig the nation out of the economic hole created by the virus and, almost as a political aftershock, enacted an expansion of the social safety net larger than any seen since the creation of Medicare nearly 60 years ago.

No country can go through this kind of trauma without being forever changed. There were indelible moments. In the spring came the racial reckoning brought on by the death of George Floyd after a police officer in Minneapolis knelt on his neck for more than eight minutes. On Jan. 6 came the mob attack on the Capitol that led many to wonder whether American democracy was still capable of self-correction.

But Mr. Biden's message on Thursday centered on the theme that the country did finally come together in a common cause — vaccines as the road to normalcy — and from that could spring a glimmer of unity, as a still-divided nation seeks solace in millions of tiny jobs in the arm. In his speech, Mr. Biden held out two distinct dates of hope: May 1, when all adults in the United States will be eligible to receive a vaccine, and July 4, when modest Independence Day celebrations might resemble life a little like it once was.

Jill Lepore, a Harvard historian whose book “These Truths” tracks the changing dynamics of technology and society in America since its discovery, wondered if Americans were unconsciously considering the new year as starting in late March, as it did in Britain and its colonies until the calendar changed in 1752. “Or maybe it begins the day you get your vaccine,” she said. “Or the day enough of us get a vaccine.”

For Mr. Biden, the question is when he will be able to pivot from what he has called the “rescue” phase of the pandemic to the “recovery” phase after the pandemic. In his speech on Thursday, the president made it clear that the rescue was still underway.

His goal, his chief of staff, Ron Klain, said in an interview, is “laying up the next steps in this rescue and what, now that we’ve got this bill passed, are we really going to do in the coming months to get back toward a more normal way of life in this country.”

All of Mr. Biden’s instincts tell him that declaring a move to recovery too soon carries dangers. It would signal that states could follow the example of Texas, eliminating mask mandates, opening restaurants and bars too quickly, and making themselves vulnerable to a resurgence — what Mr. Biden called “Neanderthal thinking.”

He said as much in the speech, arguing, “This is not the time to let up.”

“We need everyone to get vaccinated,” he said, an unspoken recognition that soon there may be more supply than willing takers. “Keep wearing a mask,” because “beating this virus and getting back to normal depends on national unity.”

Though Mr. Biden made no mention of it, his top cabinet members have emphasized that even eliminating the virus at home is not enough. As his secretary of state, Antony J. Blinken, said last month, “Unless and until everyone in the world is vaccinated, then no one is really fully safe, because if the virus is out there and continuing to proliferate, it’s also going to be mutating.”

“And if it’s mutating,” he added, “it’s also going to come back and bite people everywhere.”

But the subtext of Mr. Biden's message on Thursday evening, was that for the first time, people can begin to imagine a post-Covid world. After a year behind closed doors, the government can start to think about managing the virus to the point where it does not drive every policy decision, and families can find a way to go to dinner, or visit grandparents, without wondering whether it is a life-or-death decision.

All of which raises the question of what will be permanently changed and what, when the history of this national trauma is written, will prove recoverable. And what will the country have learned?

The past provides a mixed guide. There were too few lessons gleaned from the 1918 pandemic, an event that most history books overlooked, and that many Americans first heard about in any detail a century later, when it returned to afflict the nation in a different form. But in 1918, as in 2020, the president's instinct was to play down its severity, invoking the odd logic that Americans would be dispirited by the truth even as their family and friends succumbed around them.

President Donald J. Trump has never been a student of history (although his grandfather Frederick Trump died of the flu in 1918), and he told the journalist Bob Woodward that "I wanted to always play it down. I still like playing it down," because "I don't want to create a panic."

No one will know how many thousands of lives that cost as Mr. Trump ridiculed mask-wearing and did so little to promote the vaccine in the last days of his administration when it moved from laboratory to market in record time. "Denials for days, weeks, then months," Mr. Biden said Thursday night, without ever mentioning his predecessor by name. "That led to more deaths, more infections, more stress and more loneliness."

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, whom Mr. Biden deliberately made his top medical adviser, also referred to those unnecessary deaths on Thursday when he said on NBC that a year ago this week, "it would have shocked me completely" to know that more than half a million Americans would die of the disease. But he noted that the country paid a horrific price for its political divisions.

“Even simple common-sense health measures took on a political connotation,” he said. “It wasn’t a pure public health approach. It was very much influenced by the divisiveness we have in this country.”

When Mr. Trump and Melania Trump, his wife, received the vaccine in January, they did not make it public. It was left to Mr. Biden and members of his administration to be inoculated on live television as an encouragement to those Americans fearful of the vaccine.

The second big lesson may be that when properly organized, the same government that mobilized for World War II and landed men on the moon can in fact save lives on a mass scale. To the Biden administration, that meant taking the vaccines developed in record time and devising a vital distribution system.

Operation Warp Speed “was very important work, and I don’t mean to minimize it,” Mr. Klain said. “But there was no plan for how we were going to get this vaccine into the arms of tens, and ultimately hundreds, of millions of Americans.”

When the history of this strange moment is written, Mr. Biden will almost certainly be credited for getting a quarter of the adult population vaccinated with at least one shot, and 10 percent fully vaccinated, in his first 50 days. After years in which government was denigrated as more of an impediment to national greatness than a vehicle of progress, when conspiracy theories about a pernicious “deep state” still abound, he made the case on Thursday night that a simple show of government competence was itself a turning point.

“What we don’t know is whether that translates into encouraging people into public service, or at least trusting that the government can get something done right,” said Richard N. Haass, a longtime diplomat and now the president of the Council on Foreign Relations. “After 9/11, we rose to the task of fighting global terrorism. After Covid-19, we rose to a different task.”

“It remains to be seen,” he said, “whether we can now also use the moment to lessen the effects of domestic division.”

[Return to top](#)

NYT: F.A.Q. on Stimulus, Unemployment and Tax Rebates

**By Ron Lieber and Tara Siegel Bernard:
Mar 12, 2021**

President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan on Thursday, enacting a nearly \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package with benefits including another round of stimulus payments, an extension of unemployment benefits and generous tax breaks to low- and moderate-income people.

STIMULUS CHECKS

How big are the stimulus payments, and who is eligible?

The stimulus payments will be \$1,400 for most recipients. Those who are eligible will also receive an identical payment for each of their children.

To qualify for the full \$1,400, a single person must have an adjusted gross income of \$75,000 or below. For heads of household, adjusted gross income must be \$112,500 or below, and for married couples filing jointly that number has to be \$150,000 or below.

To be eligible for a payment, a person must have a Social Security number.

Is there a partial payment for higher earners?

Yes. But payments phase out quickly as adjusted gross income rises.

For single filers, the checks decrease to zero at \$80,000. For heads of household, the cutoff is \$120,000. And for joint filers, the checks stop at \$160,000.

Payments for children decrease in the same way.

Do college students count as eligible dependents?

College students whom qualifying taxpayers claim as dependents are eligible. (They weren't for past payments.) The payment goes to the parent taxpayer, not the child.

Do older relatives who live with us count as eligible dependents?

Good news here, too. If claimed as dependents, these relatives are also eligible this time. The payment goes to the qualifying taxpayer, not the dependent adult.

Which year of income determines eligibility?

The most recent year on record at the Internal Revenue Service. If you've already filed your taxes this year, it would be 2020. If not, it would be 2019.

What if I receive a stimulus payment based on my 2019 tax return, but the income reported on the 2020 return that I haven't filed yet will be too high to qualify?

You will not have to return the money.

What if I am newly eligible for a stimulus payment based on my 2020 income, but I haven't filed my 2020 return?

You could try to file it quickly, in hopes of receiving your payment faster. But there's no guarantee your return will be processed quickly enough, and haste can lead to errors.

And you don't have to rush: The law includes a provision for the Treasury Department to make supplemental payments by September. If you don't get one then, you can claim the \$1,400 when you file your 2021 taxes.

If I have a baby anytime in 2021 and meet the income qualifications, will I get a \$1,400 payment for the child, too?

Any baby born in 2021 (or before) is eligible.

When will my payment arrive?

Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said the first payments should be sent out by direct deposit as early as this weekend.

As before, you should be able to track the status of your payment via the I.R.S.'s Get My Payment tool. Be aware that the volume of users sometimes overwhelms the site.

What should I do if I still haven't gotten a payment from a past round of stimulus?

If you were in fact eligible to receive it, you can try to recover it through the so-called Recovery Rebate Credit when filing your 2020 return. Make your claim on Line 30 of Form 1040 or 1040-SR.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

How does the stimulus package affect unemployment payments?

If you're already receiving unemployment benefits, payments will generally be extended for another 25 weeks, until Sept. 6. The weekly supplemental benefit, which is provided on top of your regular benefit, will remain \$300 but run through Sept. 6.

Although unemployment benefits are taxable, the new law made the first \$10,200 of benefits tax-free for people with incomes of less than \$150,000. This applies to 2020 only.

If I already filed my 2020 taxes, how do I claim that new tax break?

It's not yet clear, but you may have to file an amended return, according to a Senate aide. The Internal Revenue Service has not issued formal guidance yet. (But here's hoping they figure out a way to make it happen automatically.)

How do the benefit extensions work?

The extended payments will continue to be delivered through different federal programs, largely based on the type of work you did and for whom.

Benefits through the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, which covers the self-employed, gig workers, part-timers and others who are typically ineligible for regular unemployment benefits, will be available for a total of 79 weeks, up from 50, and run through Sept. 6.

And benefits through the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program, which essentially extends benefits for people who exhaust their regular state benefits, will be available for a total of 53 weeks, up from 24, also lasting through Sept. 6.

What happens to the supplemental payments?

If you qualify for any benefits, you will also receive the full \$300 supplemental payment for weeks ending after March 14 and through Sept. 6. Known as F.P.U.C., it's called the federal pandemic unemployment compensation.

The stimulus package also extends an extra \$100 weekly payment, called the mixed-earner supplement, through Sept. 6. This payment helps people who have a mix of income from both self-employment and wages paid by other employers, because they are often stuck with a lower state-issued benefit based on their (lower) wages.

The legislation also clarifies that the \$300 federal supplement will not be counted when calculating eligibility for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. The mixed earner supplement, however, will be counted.

Will payments be uninterrupted?

Experts said there may be a gap for beneficiaries in many states because it usually takes a couple of weeks for agencies to program any benefit extensions.

HEALTH INSURANCE

What does the relief package do about health insurance?

Buying insurance through the program known as COBRA becomes a lot cheaper, but only temporarily.

COBRA, for the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, generally lets someone who loses a job buy coverage via the former employer. But it's expensive: Under normal circumstances, a person may have to pay at least 102 percent of the cost of the premium.

But under the relief legislation the government would pay the entire COBRA premium from April 1 through Sept. 30 for people who have lost a job or had their hours cut.

A person who qualified for new, employer-based health insurance someplace else before Sept. 30 loses their eligibility for the no-cost coverage. And someone who left a job voluntarily is not eligible, either.

Will the cost of health insurance I buy through an exchange be affected?

The legislation lowers the cost of health insurance in many instances for people who bought their own coverage via a government exchange. And the premiums for those plans will cost no more than 8.5 percent of your modified adjusted gross income.

These changes will last through the end of 2022 and do not require people to re-enroll to access the lower prices.

How do I sign up for health insurance?

If you don't already have health insurance but would want it if the price was right, an open enrollment period is already in effect through May 15. You can also switch plans to try to lower the price you're paying already or get more generous coverage. The Kaiser Family Foundation maintains a calculator that estimates your premiums based on your income and any available government subsidies.

Are there any changes to health care flexible spending accounts?

None this time, though there were some in the last stimulus bill.

TAXES

What is changing about the child and dependent care tax credit?

This credit, which helps working families offset the cost of care for children under 13 and other dependents, will be significantly expanded for a single year. More people are eligible, and many recipients will get a bigger break.

The legislation also makes the credit fully refundable, which means you can collect the money as a refund even if your tax bill is zero.

"That will be helpful to people at the lower end" of the income scale, said Mark Luscombe, principal federal tax analyst at Wolters Kluwer Tax & Accounting.

How much is the credit worth?

For this year only, the stimulus legislation makes the credit worth up to \$4,000 for one qualifying individual or \$8,000 for two or more. The credit will be calculated by taking up to 50 percent of the value of eligible expenses, up to certain limits, depending on your income. (The more you earn, the lower the percentage you can claim.)

Usually, the credit is generally worth between 20 and 35 percent of eligible expenses with a maximum value of \$2,100 for two or more qualifying individuals.

The stimulus package also significantly increases the income level at which the credit begins to be reduced. In past years, that started at an adjusted gross income of \$15,000, but for this year the full value of the credit will be available to households making up to \$125,000.

Previously, the credit was not further reduced below 20 percent, regardless of income, Mr. Luscombe said. But for this year, the legislation will begin to reduce the credit below 20 percent for households with income of more than \$400,000.

What about dependent care flexible spending accounts?

The stimulus package makes one big change. For 2021 only, you can set aside \$10,500 in a dependent care account instead of the normal \$5,000. But employers have to allow the change: You can't adjust the withholdings from your paycheck yourself if your employer declines to provide the option.

How does this change the child tax credit?

The credit is more generous for 2021, particularly for low- and middle-income people.

Usually, the credit is worth up to \$2,000 per eligible child. This year, it will increase to as much as \$3,000 per child (\$3,600 for ages 5 and under). The age limit for qualifying children also rises to 17, from 16.

Does it change how the credit works?

Here's where it gets interesting: You could receive some of the credit as an advance on your 2021 taxes. (You can also opt out of advance payments if you wish.)

The legislation makes the credit fully refundable, which means you can receive money from it as a tax refund even if your tax bill is reduced to zero. And half of that money can be advanced to households over the next six months (based on their 2020 tax information, or 2019 if that was unavailable). It's not clear how frequently payments would be made — perhaps monthly — but they should begin in July.

The changes are effective for 2021 only, though at least some Democrats would like to make it permanent.

Who is eligible?

Married couples who have modified adjusted gross income up to \$150,000 (or heads of household up to \$112,500 and single filers up to \$75,000) receive the full value of the new benefit.

But after that, the extra amount above the original \$2,000 credit — either \$1,000 or \$1,600 per child — is reduced by \$50 for every \$1,000 in modified adjusted gross income that exceeds those levels. (For joint filers with one child age 6 to 17, the extra amount will be phased out at about \$170,000.)

At that point, the tax credit levels out at \$2,000, and is subject to the usual income limits: It begins to phase out when married filers have adjusted gross income of \$400,000 (\$200,000 for singles).

How do the advance payments work?

The advance payments would total up to half the value of the credit the household is eligible to receive. (The other half would be claimed on its 2021 return.) But exactly how often the payments would be sent out depends on what the Treasury Department decides is feasible.

Here's how it might work for a couple earning \$150,000 or less: With two children, ages 7 and 9, they would be eligible for a \$6,000 credit (\$3,000 per child). If the payments were made monthly, the family would receive \$500 per month starting in July and lasting through the end of the year. The remaining \$3,000 would be claimed in 2021 on their tax return.

Could I end up having to pay any of it back?

Conceivably, yes.

A taxpayer may receive too much money from the advance payments in certain situations, such as a change in income or filing status, or if they no longer claim a child as a dependent. (Single parents may run into this situation if the other parent claims the child as a dependent in some tax years.)

This could cause you to owe money at tax time or reduce your refund.

But the legislation mitigates the danger in a couple of ways. First, only half of the credit is paid in advance. And the law also says that if the wrong amount was paid because of changes in the number of qualifying children, up to \$2,000 per child would not need to be paid back by taxpayers who fall below certain income thresholds: \$40,000 for a single taxpayer, \$50,000 for a head of household, and \$60,000 for joint filers. People whose income is above those thresholds may receive partial protection, which phases out as they earn more, tax experts said.

The stimulus package requires the establishment of an online portal to allow taxpayers to opt out of receiving advance payments and update information about their income, marital status and number of qualifying children.

What is happening with the earned-income tax credit?

For 2021 only, the stimulus package will increase for childless households the size of the earned-income tax credit, which helps those at the lower end of the income scale, and make more taxpayers eligible.

The maximum credit amount for childless people increases to \$1,502, from \$543.

The age range is also broader: People without children will be able to claim the credit beginning at age 19 instead of 25, with the exception of certain full-time students. The upper age limit, 65, will be eliminated.

How are separated spouses be affected?

Married but separated people can be treated as not married for the purpose of the credit if they don't file a joint tax return.

This applies only if the taxpayer lived with a qualifying child for more than half of the taxable year and didn't have the same principal home as the spouse at least six months of the year. A separation decree or agreement would also suffice, as long as the individual didn't live with the spouse by the end of the taxable year.

This change will be permanent.

Are there any other changes?

For the purposes of calculating the credit in the 2021 tax year, taxpayers could choose to use their 2019 income if it was higher than 2021, according to a Senate aide.

People who otherwise would be eligible but whose children do not have Social Security numbers will be permitted to claim the version of the credit available to childless households. This change is permanent.

Taxpayers won't be disqualified for the credit in 2021 until they have investment income of \$10,000, up from \$3,650. This change will be permanent, with the \$10,000 threshold indexed to inflation.

HOUSING

What kind of housing help is coming?

The stimulus package provides billions of dollars in rental and utility assistance to people who are struggling and in danger of being evicted from their homes.

Nearly \$22 billion will go toward emergency rental assistance. The vast majority of it replenishes the so-called Coronavirus Relief Fund, created by the CARES Act and distributed through state, local and tribal governments, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. That's on top of the \$25 billion in assistance provided by the relief package passed in December.

To receive financial assistance — which could be used for rent, utilities and other housing expenses — households have to meet several conditions. Household income cannot exceed 80 percent of the area median income, at least one household member must be at risk of homelessness or housing instability, and individuals have to qualify for unemployment benefits or have experienced financial hardship (directly or indirectly) because of the pandemic.

Lower-income families that have been unemployed for three months or more will be given priority for assistance.

Is there anything for homeowners?

The legislation provides nearly \$10 billion to help homeowners struggling with mortgage payments, utility bills and other housing costs.

Roughly \$100 million will be dedicated to housing counseling, which will help both homeowners and renters remain in their homes.

How about homeless people?

About \$5 billion will be allocated to help the homeless, including the conversion of properties like motels into shelters.

Another \$5 billion will be used for emergency housing vouchers to help several groups of people — from the homeless to people at risk of homelessness, including survivors of domestic violence — find stable housing.

STUDENT LOANS

What student loan changes are included in the stimulus package?

There is a big one for people who already have debt.

You wouldn't have to pay income taxes on forgiven debt if you qualify for loan forgiveness or cancellation — for example, if you've been in an income-driven repayment plan for the requisite number of years, if your school defrauded you or if Congress or the president wipes away \$10,000 of debt for large numbers of people.

This will be the case for debt forgiven between Jan. 1, 2021, and the end of 2025.

Are paid sick and family leave provisions being extended?

The legislation extends through September tax breaks to employers who voluntarily provide their workers with paid sick and family leave if they need to take time off because of the virus. But it does not mandate that employers provide the leave — that requirement expired on Dec. 31, and was not renewed in the legislative package signed at the end of last year.

Under the new stimulus package, self-employed people will also continue to receive leave-related tax breaks through September.

The paid leave provisions also cover time taken to receive a Covid-19 vaccine, or to recover from any illness or condition related to the immunization.

[Return to top](#)

NYT: Looking to rapidly boost the U.S. economy, Biden highlights ‘massive effort to reopen our schools safely.’

By Jim Tankersley:
Mar 12, 2021

Just hours after he signed a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief bill into law, President Biden said the package would help to reopen schools and defeat the virus more quickly.

Mr. Biden, in a prime-time address, noted that the measure provides \$130 billion for schools, an amount that he said will “accelerate a massive effort to reopen our schools safely.”

“The only way to get our lives back, to get our economy back on track, is to beat the virus,” he said, nodding to the reality that many people cannot return to work or seek new employment until their children are back in school.

Mr. Biden gave a quick pitch for several other provisions in the stimulus package, including checks to individuals, nutritional assistance to families struggling to put food on the table and expanded tax credits that researchers say will halve child poverty for the year. He said that the package would “create millions of jobs.”

“If it fails at any point I will acknowledge that it failed,” Mr. Biden said. “But it will not.”

Economic forecasters expect an almost immediate boost to the U.S. economy from the stimulus law, the American Rescue Plan, which includes several provisions meant to put money in the hands of low- and middle-income segments of the population quickly. That includes direct payments of \$1,400 per individual that White House officials say will start showing up in bank accounts this weekend. It also extends unemployment benefits for millions of jobless workers through September, including an additional \$300 per week from the federal government.

Economists expect those provisions, among others in the bill, to power an acceleration in consumer spending at a moment when parts of the economy badly damaged by the pandemic, like the hospitality, aviation and tourism industries, are beginning to show new signs of life thanks to ever broader vaccine deployment.

With the bill signed into law, cash will “begin to flow very quickly,” Ian Shepherdson, chief economist for Pantheon Macroeconomics, wrote in a research note on Thursday. He also expects municipal and state governments to quickly begin rehiring some of the 1.3 million workers they laid off in the depths of the crisis, reassured by the law’s designation of \$350 billion in aid to cities and states, though that money will not be disbursed as quickly as individual aid.

“This will come at the same time as private businesses are rehiring people in customer-facing jobs as the reopening continues in the leisure, recreation, and travel sectors, so we’re expecting payroll growth to accelerate dramatically over the next few months,” he wrote.

Mr. Shepherdson now predicts that U.S. economic growth will hit 7 percent for 2021, which would be the nation’s fastest annual pace since the early 1980s. Many other forecasters have revised up their growth predictions in light of the bill’s passage, even if they are not all as bullish as Mr. Shepherdson.

The international Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development predicted this week that the Biden plan would help the U.S. economy grow at a 6.5 percent rate this year. Some economists worry that the growth boost could be too strong, stoking runaway inflation, though there is no indication yet in economic data that a sustained price spike across the economy is imminent. Inflation has on average been running below the Fed’s 2 percent target for several years.

The timing of the rescue plan could strengthen Mr. Biden’s ability to claim credit for an economic rebound, though even before he took office, forecasters were projecting a return to growth, albeit less vigorous. Job growth accelerated in February, Mr. Biden’s first full month in office. In another sign that the economy is healing, the Labor Department reported on Thursday that about 50,000 fewer workers filed first-time claims for state unemployment benefits than last week.

Mr. Biden and his aides plan to aggressively make the case that his relief package is responsible for any rapid economic improvement. At the signing on Thursday afternoon, Mr. Biden got started.

“This historic legislation is about rebuilding the backbone of this country and giving people in this nation — working people and middle-class folks, the people who built the country — a fighting chance,” the president said. “That’s what the essence of it is.”

Return to top

NYT: Biden condemns ‘vicious’ hate crimes against Asian-Americans.

**By Madeleine Ngo:
Mar 12, 2021**

President Biden on Thursday evening condemned “vicious” hate crimes against Asian-Americans, who he said have been “attacked, harassed, blamed and scapegoated” during the coronavirus pandemic.

“They’re forced to live in fear for their lives just walking down streets in America,” Mr. Biden said during a prime-time address at the White House, marking a year since the coronavirus was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. “It’s wrong. It’s un-American, and it must stop.”

Asian-Americans have grappled with anxiety and fear as violence against them spiked during the pandemic. Activists and elected officials say the attacks were fueled early on in part by the rhetoric of former President Donald J. Trump, who frequently referred to the coronavirus as the “Chinese virus” because it originated in Wuhan, China. Mr. Trump has also blamed the Chinese government for the pandemic, saying Beijing failed to keep the virus from spreading beyond China’s borders.

Over the past year, researchers and activist groups have tallied thousands of racist incidents against Asian-Americans. Earlier this year, an 84-year-old man from Thailand was violently slammed to the ground during an attack in San Francisco, and he later died. The killing, which his family described as racially motivated, spurred a campaign to raise awareness of his death and the recent attacks against Asian-Americans.

In New York, the number of hate crimes involving Asian-American victims reported to the New York Police Department jumped to 28 in 2020, up from just three the previous year.

Return to top

NYT: How can you get a vaccine? Biden expands ways to find the shots and the army of people to administer them.

**By Noah Weiland:
Mar 12, 2021**

President Biden on Thursday dramatically expanded the ways Americans can get vaccinated and the pool of people who can administer shots, moves enabled in part by new funding in the American Rescue Plan. The changes, he pledged in a prime-time address to the nation, would mean “no more searching day and night for an appointment for you and your loved ones.”

Here’s a look at what the Biden administration is doing to offer more access.

Centralizing how you can find a vaccine.

By May 1, when Mr. Biden directed that states should have opened up eligibility for every adult in the United States, the federal government will debut a vaccine finder website that guides people to sites near them offering shots.

By the same date, the administration will launch a call center with a 1-800 number to assist those who might not have internet access in finding a vaccine.

For states that sponsor vaccine appointment websites, the administration will assign staff in technical support jobs to help improve the sites’ performance.

Opening more vaccination sites

In the next six weeks, the administration will send vaccines to up to 700 more community health centers that typically serve lower-income patients, bringing the total number of those sites serving as vaccination centers to 950.

More than 20,000 pharmacies will now administer the shots as part of the federal government's pharmacy vaccine program, double the number that have so far participated.

The administration is more than doubling the number of federally run mass vaccination sites, settings that the White House said would now be able to administer hundreds of thousands of shots a day under the aegis of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the military and other agencies. At least 4,000 more active duty troops are to be deployed to help the effort.

Expanding the number of people who can administer vaccines

Beginning Friday, a dramatically larger pool of people trained in injections will be eligible to give Covid-19 shots, including dentists, medical students, midwives, optometrists, paramedics, podiatrists and veterinarians.

The Department of Health and Human Services is creating a website for people interested in volunteering to give shots that will help determine if they are eligible to do so.

[Return to top](#)

NYT: Here's a fact-check of Biden's first prime-time White House address.

**By Linda Qiu:
Mar 12, 2021**

President Biden, in a prime-time address on Thursday night, exaggerated elements of the coronavirus pandemic along with his, and his predecessor's, response to it. Here's a fact-check.

WHAT MR. BIDEN SAID

“A year ago we were hit with a virus that was met with silence and spread unchecked, denials for days, weeks, then months.”

This is exaggerated. It is true that President Donald J. Trump downplayed the severity of the coronavirus pandemic for months. But he was not exactly silent and did not fail to respond completely. One year ago, on March 12, 2020, Mr. Trump delivered an address from the Oval Office acknowledging the threat and announced new travel restrictions on much of Europe.

WHAT MR. BIDEN SAID

“As of now, total deaths in America, 527,726. That’s more deaths than in World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War and 9/11 combined.”

This is exaggerated. According to estimates from the Department of Veterans Affairs, a total of 392,393 died in combat in those three wars. Combined with the 2,977 people who died in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, that figure would be indeed smaller than the coronavirus death toll Mr. Biden cited. It would also be lower than the 529,000 death figure tracked by The New York Times. But factoring in deaths that occurred in service but outside of combat, the toll from the three wars (more than 610,000) would be higher than the current total number of virus-related deaths Mr. Biden cited.

WHAT MR. BIDEN SAID

“Two months ago this country didn’t have nearly enough vaccine supply to vaccinate all or anywhere near all of the American public. But soon we will.”

This is misleading. By the end of last year, the Trump administration had ordered at least 800 million vaccine doses that were expected for delivery by July 31, 2021, the Government Accountability Office reported. That included vaccines undergoing clinical trials as well as those not yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration. According to Kaiser Health News, that would have been enough to vaccinate 200 million people with authorized vaccines, and more than enough for 400 million once all the vaccines were cleared for use.

The current U.S. population is roughly 330 million. And, contrary to Mr. Biden’s suggestions, both administrations deserve credit for the current state of the vaccine supply.

WHAT MR. BIDEN SAID

“When I took office 50 days ago, only 8 percent of Americans after months, only 8 percent of those over the age of 65 had gotten their first vaccination. Today, that number is 65 percent.”

This is misleading. When Mr. Biden took office on Jan. 20, the vaccination effort had just begun, after the F.D.A. authorized Pfizer’s Covid-19 vaccine for emergency use in mid-December.

Moreover, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people between ages 65 and 74 receive the vaccine only after it has been administered to health care workers, residents of long-term care facilities, frontline essential workers and people over the age of 75.

It’s also worth noting that about 62.4 percent of people over 65 have received one vaccine dose, but just 32.2 percent are fully vaccinated, according to the C.D.C.

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: Tucker Carlson shamed by military brass for mocking ‘feminine’ U.S. troops

**By BRIAN NIEMIETZ:
Mar 12, 2021**

Fox News host Tucker Carlson found himself under attack by U.S. military bigwigs following comments he made on his right-wing cable program calling China’s military “more masculine” than that of the U.S.

Speaking about President Biden's Monday nomination to make two four-star female generals to lead a combatant command, which has only happened once before, the prime-time pundit went on a rant about women who serve their country.

"So, we've got new hairstyles and maternity flight suits. Pregnant women are going to fight our wars. It's a mockery of the U.S. military," Carlson said.

Biden's announcement had touched on body armor design fitted for women as well as uniforms for troops who are pregnant.

"While China's military becomes more masculine, as it's assembled the world's largest navy, our military, as Joe Biden says, needs to become more feminine — whatever feminine means anymore since men and women no longer exist," Carlson quipped. "This is a mockery of the U.S. military and its core mission, which is winning wars."

The defense of women in the military came fast, furious and straight from the top. That included a statement from the U.S. Department of Defense.

"What we absolutely won't do is take personnel advice from a talk show host or the Chinese military," said the statement, quoting Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby.

Kirby had earlier stated diversity in the military makes U.S. armed forces bigger and better and suggested people who take issue with inclusion "feel like they have something to prove, that's on them."

Carlson responded on Twitter as though he were the victim and promised a rebuttal on his Thursday night program.

“This afternoon, the Department of Defense issued a press release attacking this show: ‘Press secretary smites Fox Host.’ Like we’re a hostile foreign power. Remarkable,” he tweeted, along with programming details.

Kirby added that his “revulsion” is shared by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Also joining the allied attack on Carlson’s comments was Sgt. Scott Stalker of U.S. Space Command, who said he doesn’t have cable news at home or at work and doesn’t watch “Drama TV,” but felt a need to stand-up for his nation’s military.

“I’ll remind everyone that his opinion, which he has right to, is based off of actually zero days of service in the armed forces,” he said.

Stalker offered that in his own opinion, based on 28 years of military experience, Carlson is wrong.

“We value our families in the military,” he said. “Let’s remember those opinions are made by an individual who has never served a day in his life.”

Undersecretary of the Army Patrick Murphy joined the fight offering his perspective based on 30 years of service.

“There is no difference, women serve in every type of Army unit, they show up every day to protect and defend the Nation,” he tweeted alongside a photo of a woman in uniform posted by the U.S. Army.

“I am an American soldier,” that photo caption reads. “I am a Warrior and a member of a team.”

Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston — tweeting at Carlson directly — called his sexist statements “divisive” and said they don’t reflect the values of the U.S. military.

“Women lead our most lethal units with character,” he wrote. “They will dominate ANY future battlefield we’re called to fight on.”

Four-star Gen. Paul E. Funk called female service members “beacons of freedom (who) prove Carlson wrong through determination and dedication.”

He said “We are fortunate they serve with us.”

A Twitter user who describes herself as a “Floundering officer in a dual military couple currently stationed in the NCR. Mom to 2!” fired off a string of witty tweets Thursday, but said “The perfect tweet” belonged to veteran and journalist J.D. Simkins, who paid tribute to a female combat hero who won the Silver Star.

“I’ll never forget the day in 2005 when Tucker Carlson took control of a firefight near Baghdad, directing his team’s MK19s toward the ambush before dismounting and killing 3 enemies at close range with his M4,” he wrote. “Oh wait, that was 23 y/o Silver Star recipient Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester.”

Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, a helicopter pilot who lost her legs in the Iraq War, took a shot at Carlson’s words and his moves.

“F*ck Tucker Carlson. While he was practicing his two-step, America’s female warriors were hunting down Al Qaeda and proving the strength of America’s women,” Duckworth tweeted. “Happy belated International Women’s Day to everyone but Tucker, who even I can dance better than.”

One man identifying himself as a career military officer tweeted at Gen. Funk that it was time to turn the channel on Carlson and his colleagues.

“Sir — Fox News clearly is not aligned with our Army Values — why do we allow it to play in DFACs all over!?” he asked. “Want to make an impact — restrict that channel — that’ll catch Carlson’s eye!”

Spokeswoman for the Service Women’s Action Network Martina Chesonis told Military Times on Thursday she was glad to see military brass address Carlson’s comments in force.

“Seeing senior military leaders address Tucker Carlson’s comments on pregnancy in the military so quickly and so directly is really validating, honestly,” Chesonis said.

If passed through the U.S. Senate, Air Force Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost and Army Lt. Gen. Laura Richardson would march into history as combat commanders.

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: Biden orders states to make all adults eligible for COVID vaccinations by May

**By CHRIS SOMMERFELDT:
Mar 12, 2021**

President Biden directed states on Thursday night to make all adults eligible for coronavirus vaccinations by May, vowing that his administration is so far ahead of schedule on producing shots that Americans could return to something that resembles normal by Independence Day.

Biden set the monumental timeline as part of his first presidential primetime speech, which coincided with the one-year anniversary of coronavirus-related shutdowns in the U.S.

“All adult Americans will be eligible to get a vaccine no later than May 1,” Biden said at the White House. “That’s much earlier than expected.”

But the president cautioned that there's still a long road ahead and a bevy of logistical challenges in getting shots into every American's arm.

"Let me be clear: That doesn't mean everyone's going to have that shot immediately, but it means you'll be able to get in line beginning May 1," he said.

With the caveat that "conditions can change," Biden said that in turn puts the country on track to get most adults, regardless of age, vaccinated by July 4, meaning some celebration could be in order for the quintessential American holiday.

"By July the 4th, there's a good chance, you, your family and friends will be able to get together in your backyard or your neighborhood and have a cookout and a barbecue and celebrate Independence Day," he said.

"That doesn't mean large events with lots of people together, but it does mean small groups will be able to get together after this long hard year that will make this Independence Day something truly special, where we not only mark our independence as a nation, but we begin to mark our independence from this virus."

Biden's green light for adult vaccinations received praise from Mayor de Blasio.

"The mayor has been calling for the freedom to vaccinate and he just gave it to us. A major moment for our recovery," de Blasio spokesman Bill Neidhardt said.

To get the job done, Biden said his administration will use cash provided by Congress in the newly-adopted \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan to increase vaccine access by delivering shots directly to an additional 700 health centers serving underserved communities across the country.

The administration will also double the number of federally run vaccination sites, which includes thousands of participating pharmacies, to further expand access, Biden said.

An additional 4,000 active-duty U.S. soldiers will be deployed nationwide to support the effort, bringing the total number of troops involved in the effort to 6,000, according to a fact-sheet provided by the White House.

“It’s truly a national effort. Just like we saw during World War II,” Biden said.

By May 1, the administration will also launch a website and a phone hotline to provide guidance on how to best find a vaccination site, Biden said.

The fact sheet says the administration will pay particular attention to helping teachers get vaccinated, as the government funnels billions of dollars into reopening schools.

Again crediting the relief package signed into law earlier Thursday, Biden said the administration will put \$1.7 billion to use in researching emerging mutations of COVID-19 to mitigate the spread of such variants.

He also pleaded with Americans to continue to adhere by face-mask and social-distancing guidelines.

“We can’t let our guard down,” Biden said. “This fight is far from over.”

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: Four Rikers Island staffers suspended without pay after accidental release of murder suspect

By CHELSIA ROSE MARCIUS and STEPHEN REX BROWN:
Mar 12, 2021

The blame game over the accidental release of a Rikers Island murder suspect is heating up following the suspension of four jail staffers without pay, including an assistant deputy warden.

The city's correction union bosses are pointing fingers at Brooklyn Criminal Court workers after Christopher Buggs, 26, was released early Tuesday due to a clerical error. He was listed as eligible for release on "time served" on a still-pending charge of second-degree murder for a 2018 shooting at a Brooklyn deli.

The manhunt for Buggs, considered armed and dangerous, continued Thursday but he remained on the loose.

Assistant Deputy Warden Kevin Roulston, the tour commander in charge of operations at the Otis Bantum Correctional Center on Rikers Island the night of the stunning screwup, was suspended for seven days.

When a Daily News reporter asked Roulston at his home in Laurelton, Queens, on Thursday whether he believed the agency was trying to blame him for the erroneous release, he said, "Yeah they are trying to — but you know I can't talk to you."

"You know I can't say anything to you, I'm an employee," he added.

Capt. Abraham Palermo was suspended for two weeks. Correction Officers Tanya McCoy and Tamia St. Hilaire were both suspended for 15 days.

Joe Russo, the president of the union representing assistant deputy and deputy wardens, says a court staff clerical error is to blame.

Correction Officers' Benevolent Association President Benny Boscio Jr. called for the immediate termination of Warden Sherma Dunbar, who runs Otis Bantum Correctional Center.

"There's quick rush to judgment on my members but where is the accountability for her?" Boscio told the Daily News on Thursday. "We're constantly scapegoated in these equations ... Where's the due process?"

Dunbar was moved from warden of Manhattan Detention Complex to warden of Rikers Island's George R. Verino Center in January 2020 before being transferred to Otis Bantum Correctional Center after a correction officer was stabbed in the hand in October during a jail gang fight.

In January, an inmate at Otis Bantum Correctional Center who was found with a sheet around his neck also died under her watch, according to an internal Correction Department incident report obtained by The News.

"She's the commanding officer in all of these equations ... she should be fired," Boscio said.

Buggs served 30 days on the contempt charge after twice telling a Brooklyn Supreme Court judge on his murder case to "Suck my d---." The outburst came when the judge declined to allow him out on bail on the murder charge.

Once the 30-day sentence was up, jail staff apparently misread his records and sprung Buggs from Rikers Island, where he was supposed to be held without bail until the murder trial began.

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: The day the lights went dark on Broadway and COVID's devastating impact on theater

By TIM BALK:
Mar 12, 2021

Ben Crawford, the phantom in Broadway's "Phantom of the Opera," stepped off the stage midway through the first act on the afternoon of March 12, 2020, and headed toward the dressing room.

He had just made his first entrance, singing "Stranger Than You Dreamt It" to a crowd of more than 1,000 at the Majestic Theatre, when the show's stage manager delivered the news.

Broadway, the beating heart of Midtown, would close its 41 playhouses at 5 p.m. due to COVID-19.

"Phantom" would be The Great White Way's last performance for at least a month.

Crawford and the rest of the cast soldiered on, while the rest of New York watched life screech to a stop.

Across town, Daniel J. Watts was sitting in his Harlem apartment, "halfway in a huff" in his words, after deciding that the mushrooming health crisis felt too risky and that he would not show up for his starring role as Ike in "Tina: The Tina Turner Musical" that night.

After the NBA suspended its season the previous night, Watts had stocked up at a Midtown grocery store and prepared to lock down. When the word came that the Theater District would close, he could exhale.

At a DMV in New Jersey, Diana Diaz, the head usher for the Ambassador Theatre, received a call from another usher who delivered the news. Diaz was getting a license to make flights to visit her children in Florida easier.

But in the year since, she said, her only travel has been to her second job as an administrative assistant in Manhattan.

On 44th St., “Phantom” wrapped up its show. Crawford emptied out two fridges in his dressing room — one flush with coconut water, the other filled with craft beer — handed out brews, and hopped into a Lyft. The driver was sympathetic.

“I think he thought I lost my job because I was bringing so much stuff into the car,” Crawford said.

He hadn’t. But the day the lights flickered out on Broadway cast a long shadow on the theater industry.

Workers have been left to find new sources of income, at least four productions have been permanently sunk by the virus and the theater community has reeled. Broadway has lost an estimated \$35 million in gross revenue each week.

At the one-year anniversary of the fateful day, with the pandemic raging but in retreat, hopes for the industry’s return have crept up on the horizon, perhaps as soon as late summer or early fall. The storm seems, at long last, to be lifting.

But theater workers looking back to a year ago said they didn’t have a clue how long the shutdown would last.

“None of us in our wildest dreams imagined that we’d still be here a year later,” said Kathryn Gallagher, who stars as Bella in “Jagged Little Pill.”

Though virtually every corner of the entertainment world froze in the terrible spring of 2020, Broadway’s surrender struck a blow at the heart of the New York ethos.

Broadway's signature slogan — “the show must go on” — attests to its formidable resilience. Midtown's prestigious playhouses did not close for the 1918 flu pandemic, and they roared back just two days after the Sept. 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center.

Weekslong strikes brought Broadway to its knees in 1975 and 2007, but no pause in history compared to the month-long freeze announced on March 12, 2020.

In the days before the closure, as the new virus cast its grisly spell on Europe, performers had made small adjustments.

Sanitizer cropped up at theaters. Stage-door handshakes and autograph signings stopped. Actors scrapped ritual pre-show hugs.

On March 11, news broke that a positive coronavirus test had come back for an usher who had worked at two productions in previews: a revival of “Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” at the Booth Theatre and the pop musical “Six” at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre. Theater companies were on edge.

The next morning, the cast of “Sing Street,” a punk musical set in 1980s Dublin, gathered at the Lyceum Theatre and discussed hygiene precautions ahead of the show's first preview, scheduled for later that month.

Brenock O'Connor, a British actor preparing for his Broadway debut, stepped onto the historic theater's stage for the first time ever as the production began tech rehearsals.

“We sung one song, and I looked at my phone, and I think ‘Moulin Rouge!’ had shut down,” O'Connor, 20, said. “We sang another song, and ‘Mrs. Doubtfire’ had shut. And we were like: ‘OK, this is going one way.’”

Four blocks uptown, Charlotte St. Martin, the president of the Broadway League, was meeting with 63 people — producers, general managers and theater owners among them — representing every show on The Great White Way at the time. She was also consulting with the governor’s office in Albany.

In mid-afternoon, the governor’s office confirmed that it wanted Broadway to shutter. Sixteen shows were scheduled to open in the next two months as the Tony Awards approached.

“It was very sad, very scary, heartbreaking,” St. Martin said. “You know the impact of how many people are going to be out of work. Not just that work directly for Broadway, but that service Broadway — the cleaners of the costumes, the costume designers themselves, and then the restaurant and hotel workers that are in the area.”

It was a particularly heartrending moment for “Six,” which was set to open the night the curtain fell on Broadway. Government and theater leaders faced a dramatic decision with scant information about the mysterious ailment, said Kevin McCollum, one of the show’s producers.

McCollum, a powerful force in theater for more than a quarter-century, produced the hit “Rent,” which burst back onto the stage after 9/11. “The rest of the country had energy to get to New York,” he said.

This was different.

In 2020, the city stood alone. Streets emptied as cases multiplied, the virus derailing life in America’s most densely populated metropolis.

Broadway, mostly squeezed into a 13-block radius, is a uniquely tight-knit community, and its performers share crowded quarters. The Theater District was always destined to close, and its dazzling shows are predicted to be among the last elements of city life to return after the coronavirus crisis.

Still, for O'Connor, watching New York shut down last March was a shock. He woke up the morning after the shutdown to an eerily quiet Midtown Manhattan.

"As an English kid, I thought New York stops for nothing," he said. "Seeing it like that really hit home that we were about to live through an apocalypse movie."

Broadway, scarred by the pandemic, has repeatedly extended its shutdown. But in the year Broadway went dark, theater never vanished completely. Working remotely, actors have cobbled together reams of virtual performances.

The cast of "Sing Street" filmed a streaming, shortened version of the musical. Andrew Lloyd Webber, the giant of musical theater who composed the music to "Phantom," held social media singalongs from isolation.

And since the start of the shutdown, Broadway buffs Seth Rudetsky and James Wesley have hosted titans of the stage on their daily music-infused streaming talk show, "Stars In the House," raising more than \$700,000 for the Actors Fund, a nonprofit that supports theater workers.

Also keeping the magic alive: the rollout of streaming performances, such as the summer release of "Hamilton," and a flood of holiday fare headlined by a special solo recording of "A Christmas Carol" that starred Jefferson Mays and was filmed at the United Palace in Washington Heights.

Meanwhile, the stars and staffs of Broadway's shows have taken a range of tacks to keep busy.

Gallagher, the "Jagged Little Pill" star, learned to sew cloth masks, started gardening and released a pair of music albums.

Dede Ayite, a Ghanaian-born costume designer who tailored shows such as “A Soldier’s Play” and “Slave Play,” became a plant mom, too.

She said she moved from Harlem to Flatbush and took a “step back,” going for long walks, revisiting her past art, and imagining how she’ll modify her work when theater returns.

“We need theater. We need the arts,” Ayite said. “We’re resilient people. So people have been making do, and they’ve been trying their best to survive and stay sane.”

She said she hopes the long, deep breath Broadway has taken triggers changes in the industry, including improvements in accessibility and opportunity.

In the spring, after brutal police killings of Black Americans prompted a national reckoning over racism, the star-studded coalitions Black Theatre United and We See You, White American Theater emerged to fight racism in the theater. The groups are part of an effort to address continued failures of racial representation in the arts.

Watts, who signed a prominent letter from We See You, White American Theater along with Ayite, said Broadway has “had to face certain things.” But, he added, “We won’t know what has changed truly until we actually get back in the space.”

As painful as the past year has proved, it has perhaps opened a door to a more inclusive Broadway. Certainly, it has showcased that even without in-person performance, the arts can march on.

On March 12, 2020, playwrights Irene Sankoff and David Hein were due for a celebration. The day marked the three-year anniversary of the Broadway opening of the Canadian couple’s hit “Come From Away,” and the company’s cast performed on “Good Morning America” that morning.

The writers, whose show had productions running around the globe, had set up clocks in their New York office set to the five different time zones of each company.

But beginning with the closure of Broadway, the pair watched the productions halt in Toronto, Melbourne and London. A U.S. tour stopped in Texas, too. “It was like dominoes,” Sankoff said.

Days after Broadway closed, the pair packed up and headed to Canada, ditching their residence on the Upper West Side after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called on the country’s diaspora to return home.

The composers took the clocks with them. But they didn’t have reason to stick them on the wall for months.

This winter, they put one timekeeper up. “Come From Away” returned, at long last, to the stage in Australia, where it is summer and where the virus has largely been tamed since September.

With a little luck, and a wealth of vaccinations, more clocks could start popping up on the wall sometime soon. And a year stranger than anyone could have envisioned might finally fade away.

“It’s going to be so exciting,” Gallagher said. “I just keep dreaming of that first curtain call, and that first step on stage.”

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: Georgetown Law professor trashes Black students on Zoom call, gets fired

By JOSEPH WILKINSON:
Mar 12, 2021

A Georgetown Law professor is now a former Georgetown Law professor after she said of students' grades, "a lot of my lower ones are Blacks. Happens almost every semester."

Sandra Sellers was fired Thursday, one day after a recording of a Zoom call was shared on Twitter. Professor David Batson, on the other end of the call, was placed on leave.

"I hate to say this. I end up having this angst every semester that a lot of my lower ones are Blacks. Happens almost every semester," Sellers told Batson. "You get some really good ones, but there are also usually some that are just plain at the bottom. It drives me crazy."

Batson nodded along in the video, which was shared by Georgetown Law student Hassan Ahmad, who told the Washington Post that the recording was from after a Feb. 21 class and was discovered Monday.

Ahmad also shared a second clip, apparently from later in the conversation, in which Batson responds.

"What drives me crazy is how that plays out, and whether that is my own perceptions playing in here, my own unconscious biases playing out," he told Sellers.

Josie Duffy Rice, president of criminal justice news outlet The Appeal and Harvard Law graduate, said she was shaken by the video.

"I was one of four black people in my 80-person law school section. By the end of first semester we were down to three," Rice wrote in a tweet. "All year I was terrified of speaking up and asking questions, because I knew one misstep would perpetuate the idea that we weren't REALLY good enough to be there."

Georgetown Law Dean Bill Treanor called the professors' conversation "reprehensible" in a statement announcing Sellers' firing and Batson's leave. He also said Sellers offered to resign.

Sellers apologized in a statement the Post, saying she wished she could take back her words, but "Regardless of my intent, I have done irreparable harm and I am truly sorry for this."

Treanor said Batson would be investigated by the school's Office of Diversity, Equity and Affirmative Action. He also said students in the class would now be graded without input from either professor.

In a statement, the Black Law Students Association demanded Sellers' termination, an apology from Batson for his inaction and for Georgetown to hire more Black professors.

"These racist statements reveal not only Sellers' beliefs about Black students in her classes, but also how her racist thoughts have translated to racist actions," the group said. "Professor Sellers' bias has impacted the grades of Black students in her classes historically, in her own words."

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: EXCLUSIVE: Cramped holding cells in NYC courthouses omitted from COVID-19 ventilation upgrade; 'They're like pens that animals are held in'

**By MOLLY CRANE-NEWMAN:
Mar 12, 2021**

Cramped holding cells in New York City's courthouses were left out of the picture when COVID-19 led the city to equip court buildings with state-of-the-art ventilation systems, the Daily News has learned.

As the pandemic runs through its final months, the court buildings' 500 prisoner holding cells look no different than before — they're still poorly ventilated, even though during the past year they were still heavily used.

“They’re like pens that animals are held in, in farms. They’re usually packed full of people,” said Emma Goodman, a lawyer who works with prisoners.

“Most of them, if you were really social distancing properly, could maybe hold two — at the most, four — people,” said Goodman.

She says her clients fear for their lives. “We’ve gotten reports from people that are scared they’re going to die, and rightfully so,” Goodman said.

The Department of Citywide Administrative Services, which maintains and operates court buildings, upgraded air filtration systems in all the city’s courtrooms in September.

The agency admits the holding cell vents were not fixed.

“Setting aside holding cells, DCAS has ensured that all criminal courthouses have ventilation systems” that exceed the level recommended by leading medical organizations, agency commissioner Lisette Camilo wrote on Feb. 18 in a letter to the Legal Aid Society shared with the Daily News.

Holding cells at Manhattan Criminal Court, most of Brooklyn Criminal Court, almost all of the Queens Criminal, Family and Civil courthouses, and some of the courthouses on Staten Island were found to have a low level of filtration in October, according to a DCAS evaluation survey shared with The News.

Nick Benson, DCAS’ spokesman, said the agency evaluated all court building mechanical systems and made upgrades “where feasible.” He said the agency doesn’t oversee structural adjustments to jail cells for security reasons.

If the ventilation systems in the cells are a problem, Benson said, it's up to the NYPD, the city Department of Correction and the state Office of Court Administration to "adjust accordingly."

Tina Luongo, attorney-in-charge of the Legal Aid Society, said DCAS ignored its responsibilities in ignoring the ventilation upgrades in holding cell areas — and shouldn't put the onus of dealing with the issue on other agencies.

"We do not accept that DCAS has no role to play in taking steps to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 simply because other agencies are involved," Luongo said in a written response to the agency's handling of the matter.

Conditions in the holding cells are not a court responsibility, said Office of Court Administration spokesman Lucian Chalfen.

"The buildings aren't ours," Chalfen said. "We occupy the courtroom, which is why we do what we do in the courtrooms. The holding cells, our court officers don't work the holding cells. Coming in, it's the police department, and then going out, it goes to corrections."

NYPD spokesman Sgt. Edward Riley did not specifically address courts' holding cells but said the department has tested portable air filtration units for use in smaller areas like precincts and conference rooms. He added it's "exploring whether grant funding may be available to purchase additional units for use where needed throughout the city."

Police acknowledge the poor conditions in courthouse holding cells are horrid.

During a hearing last June in a lawsuit charging the NYPD with violating New York state's 24-hour arrest-to-arraignment requirement, NYPD Assistant Deputy Commissioner Janine Gilbert described cells that hold 150 people, but have only one toilet and no beds.

Some cells had running water, but none had hand sanitizer, Gilbert said.

Infected prisoners in holding cells aren't just a safety risk to their fellow detainees or jail and court staff. After their time in the crowded cells and courtroom appearances, many are released.

And defendants will join everyone else in the courtroom when in-person criminal and civil trials resume on March 22.

"It's just a bunch of finger pointing and nobody doing what is really very simple, serious updates to air filters that they've already done in dozens of courthouses throughout the city in public areas," said Goodman.

"I think it tells us what we already know, which is that the lives of people that are charged with crimes are not valued. It is playing out in a very stark and very visible way in the courthouses as well as in the jails and prisons around the state."

Return to top

NYDN: NYC mayoral candidate Maya Wiley proposes cash-saving 'regulatory holiday' for small biz

**By SHANT SHAHRIGIAN:
Mar 12, 2021**

The city would create a year-long "regulatory holiday" for small businesses aimed at saving them \$100 million in fees, under a new plan from mayoral candidate Maya Wiley.

As part of her platform for struggling mom-and-pops, she'd waive the city's tax on liquor licenses, along with fees from the Health and Consumer Affairs departments. Wiley would also provide relief for water and sewer fees. Those measures would last for all of 2022.

The candidate, a former top legal aide to Mayor de Blasio, would also make sure health inspections are scheduled in advance, instead of coming unannounced, but would boost the number of inspections.

“For too long, New York City small businesses have been struggling to get by and this plan not only will give them the relief they need, but will help put them on a pathway to recovery,” Wiley said in a Thursday statement.

As many as a third of the city’s small businesses may close by the end of the pandemic, the pro-business Partnership for New York City predicted last year. More than half a million jobs were lost in 2020.

Along with providing various forms of relief to small businesses, Wiley proposed a \$30 million program to send grants to shops in the city’s hardest-hit communities. She said she’d tap federal funding for the effort. Her proposals also include co-ops aimed at promoting local ownership.

“We know what small businesses need — affordable rents, to be freed from fines and for red tape to be cut, and this plan does just that,” Wiley stated.

On rent, she called for commercial rent stabilization, though she did not immediately provide details. Efforts to limit how much landlords can raise rent on commercial tenants have stalled in the City Council for years.

Jobs and small businesses have emerged as a key theme among the large group of mayoral candidates ahead of the June 22 Democratic primary. Entrepreneur Andrew Yang wants to appoint a “small business czar,” while Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams proposed sales tax exemptions for small businesses every Tuesday, among other steps.

[Return to top](#)

NYDN: MTA backs off plan to freeze NYC transit worker wages and raises due in May

By CLAYTON GUSE:
Mar 12, 2021

Planned pay raises for MTA workers will arrive on schedule after all thanks to the COVID-19 stimulus bill signed by President Biden on Thursday.

The bill will send \$6.5 billion to the cash-strapped transit agency — which MTA honchos say is enough to call off a “permanent wage freeze” that was to remain in effect until 2024 and restore a 2.5% pay raise due in May that had been negotiated with Transport Workers Union Local 100 in a contract approved last year.

“Now that Congress — under the leadership of Senate Majority Leader [Chuck] Schumer, Speaker [Nancy] Pelosi and the bipartisan New York delegation — has approved an additional \$6.5 billion in federal aid to the MTA, we are able to implement all previously negotiated general wage increases as scheduled and move ahead with contract negotiations,” MTA Chairman Patrick Foye said in a statement.

Foye called transit workers “heroes,” but also said future labor negotiations must safeguard “the MTA’s long-term financial health.”

With the passing of the bill, the MTA has been allocated roughly \$14.5 billion in pandemic relief from Congress since last year — enough to prevent draconian service cuts and thousands of layoffs.

Foye has called for a total of \$16 billion in pandemic relief, which includes \$1 billion to pay for what he considers delays by the feds in approving the city’s congestion pricing program that will toll cars driving south of 61st St. in Manhattan and send the revenues to the MTA.

The plan to renege on the raises — including the 2.5% bump due in may and an increase of 2.75% in 2022 for some 35,000 Local 100 members — caused outrage from union leaders. TWU International President John Samuelsen last month called MTA leaders “hypocritical gobshites,” an Irish slang word for a person with a mouth full of excrement.

Local 100 President Tony Utano said Thursday the MTA would have had the “fight of their lives on their hands” if the wage freeze held up.

“We now urge them to quickly settle contracts with the other labor organizations representing MTA employees who have gone years without a wage increase,” Utano said.

MTA employees working under expired contracts include thousands of bus operators represented by Amalgamated Transit Union and electrical and IT workers represented by Transportation Communications Union.

Return to top

AP: NY suit against EPA over GE’s Hudson River cleanup dismissed

**The Associated Press:
Mar 12, 2021**

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — A federal judge on Thursday dismissed a lawsuit from New York state against the federal Environmental Protection Agency over its 2019 decision that General Electric had completed a Hudson River dredging remediation project.

The Times Union of Albany reported U.S. District Court Judge David Hurd said the state’s suit came too late in the process and was “based on improper theories.”

The EPA in April 2019 had issued a certificate of completion to Boston-based GE in connection to a project to remove polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, from the river sediment.

PCBs, used as coolants and lubricants in electrical equipment, were banned in 1977, but prior to that GE factories had discharged more than 1 million pounds (450,000 kilograms) of them into the river.

New York officials and environmentalists condemned the EPA's decision, saying contaminant levels were still too high and that the agency should have withheld the certificate and asked for more dredging.

The state filed its lawsuit in August of that year. In a statement, the state Department of Environmental Conservation said it was considering a possible appeal of the decision.

GE issued a statement saying the decision was being reviewed and that it would "continue to meet its commitments to EPA and New York State on Hudson River-related projects."

Return to top

AP: Suit: Race a factor in death of Black man killed by trooper

**By MIKE CATALINI:
Mar 12, 2021**

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — The family of a Black New York state man who was fatally shot by a New Jersey state trooper last year filed a lawsuit against the state in federal court on Thursday, alleging race was a factor in the death on the Garden State Parkway.

Maurice Gordon Jr. was shot six times by a trooper, according to video released last year by the state attorney general's office, which is investigating the violence. The suit was brought by Gordon's mother, Racquel Barrett, and father, Maurice Gordon Sr., in U.S. District Court in Camden.

The suit names the state of New Jersey, Attorney General Gurbir Grewal, State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan, and the trooper who shot Gordon as defendants. The family is seeking \$50 million in damages, plus punitive damages.

"It is the hope that through discovery as a result of this lawsuit, the family will finally get answers to the questions about Junior's final moments when Sergeant Wetzel shot him six times, and the actions of responders on the scene," the family's attorney, William Wagstaff III said.

The attorney general's office, which represents the state and typically officials in such lawsuits, declined to comment on Thursday.

Among the charges brought in the suit are that officials failed to protect Gordon, a Black man, and other Black people, despite a history of troopers disproportionately subjecting people of color to violence.

Gordon died last May two days before George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis. Floyd's death after a white Minneapolis officer held him down with his knee on Floyd's neck touched off global protests about race.

Gordon's family's attorney has said race played a role in his death and that he'd be alive if he were white.

Gordon, 28, of Poughkeepsie, New York, died after the May 23 encounter a trooper in Bass River, New Jersey, 24 miles (39 kilometers) north of Atlantic City.

About a dozen audio and video recordings from the traffic stop show a New Jersey state trooper firing his handgun six times, killing Gordon after struggling with him on the side of the Garden State Parkway.

The trooper was identified as Sgt. Randall Wetzel by the attorney general's office. A message seeking comment on behalf of Wetzel was left with the labor union representing state troopers who are noncommissioned officers.

The case involving the trooper and Gordon must go before a grand jury under a 2019 law aimed at holding law enforcement accountable.

Peter Aseltine, a spokesperson for the attorney general's criminal division, said in an email that the case has yet to be presented to a grand jury. He said COVID-19 restrictions currently prevent grand juries from sitting.

Return to top

AP: Vermont's Peter Hall, US court of appeals judge, dies at 72

By WILSON RING:
Mar 12, 2021

Judge Peter Hall, the Vermont judge on the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York, died Thursday at the Rutland Regional Medical Center. He was 72.

Hall's judicial assistant Rose Rizzico, who confirmed his death, said he had been suffering from cancer.

Hall was appointed to the seat on the New York appeals court, which hears cases from New York, Connecticut and Vermont, in 2004 by former President George W. Bush.

Chief Judge Debra Ann Livingston said that, during his years on the court, Hall distinguished himself as a thoughtful and humane jurist who was generous and considerate with his colleagues.

"Judge Hall was committed to public service and taught us all by his example," Livingston said in a statement. "He was a kind and very dear friend. This is a sad day for the judges of the Court of Appeals."

Hall announced last week that he was taking senior status, the term used for a judge deciding to take a reduced workload.

His last public appearance came last month, when he traveled to Montpelier to swear in Vermont Lt. Gov. Molly Gray, who had clerked for him in 2014 and 2015.

“He has worked tirelessly and with great humility and integrity, on the bench in New York and in his Chambers in Rutland, Vermont to offer his voice, Vermont’s voice, in the Court’s pursuit of justice,” Gray said in a statement when Hall took senior status.

Vermont U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy said Hall was a good friend.

“Vermont and the country are richer for his many years of service,” Leahy said in a statement.

Hall was born in Connecticut in 1948 and moved to Vermont at age 11. A tribute to Hall from the appeals court said that Hall’s great-great-grandfather served as governor of Vermont and he always considered himself a native Vermonter.

Hall graduated from Cornell Law in 1977 and went on to serve as a law clerk to Vermont’s late U.S. District Court Judge Albert Coffrin. He also served as Vermont’s U.S. attorney.

After he joined the appeals court, Hall said he enjoyed spending one week a month in New York and then working the rest of the time in Vermont.

“He loved being in New York with the judges,” said Rizzico.

Hall is survived by his wife Maria Dunton, five children and five grandchildren.

[Return to top](#)

AP: Sept. 11 tribute to once again include live reading of names

**The Associated Press:
Mar 12, 2021**

NEW YORK (AP) — A year after a disagreement over coronavirus protocols spawned competing Sept. 11 ceremonies in New York, the 20th anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attacks will be marked with the traditional reading of victims' names at the World Trade Center's memorial plaza, officials announced Thursday.

Commemorations will also again include the Tribute in Light, the art installation consisting of two beams of light evoking the twin towers destroyed in the attack.

“In a few months' time, 20 years will have passed since our nation was attacked on September 11,” Mike Bloomberg, the board chairman of the Sept. 11 Memorial and Museum and former mayor, said in a statement. “We suffered a great tragedy that day and for the weeks and months that followed. We mourned the victims of the attacks and promised to never forget.”

In an effort to comply with coronavirus protocols banning large gatherings, museum officials announced last year that a recording of the nearly 3,000 victims' names would be played over speakers at the memorial plaza in lower Manhattan instead of family members gathering to read the names.

The Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation, a group founded by the family of a firefighter who died at the trade center site, responded by inviting family members to read the names at an alternative ceremony nearby.

“We feel as if that's something that needs to be done, so we are taking on that responsibility,” said Frank Siller, who created the foundation to honor his brother's memory.

The announcement that family members will be back reading the names at the official ceremony this year was made six months before the event.

“In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing challenges facing our nation and the global community, the resilience, compassion and hope demonstrated two decades ago in

the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks offer invaluable lessons now,” museum CEO Alice M. Greenwald said.

“During this 20th anniversary year, it is our privilege to share these lessons with a new generation, teach them about the ongoing repercussions of the 9/11 attacks and inspire them with the idea that, even in the darkest of times, we can come together, support one another and find the strength to renew and rebuild,” Greenwald said.

Return to top

AP: Emperor’s mosaic displayed in Italy after stint as NYC table

**By PAOLO SANTALUCIA and NICOLE WINFIELD:
Mar 12, 2021**

NEMI, Italy (AP) — A looted mosaic that once decorated a ship of the Roman Emperor Caligula and ended up as a coffee table in New York City finally returned home Thursday, as details emerged about the lucky break in the investigation that got it there.

Officials unveiled the mosaic at the Museum of Roman Ships, which was built in the 1930s specifically to house the treasures of two huge ceremonial ships Caligula commissioned in around AD 40. The ships eventually sank and were excavated from the depths of Lake Nemi, in the Alban hills south of Rome, starting in the late 1890s.

The mosaic, a 1.5 square-meter geometric print in rich green, reddish-purple and white stone, was part of an inlaid floor on one of the ships, which were designed and decorated essentially as floating palazzi in a testament to Caligula’s greatness.

It’s unclear when the mosaic passed into private hands or under what circumstances. But eventually it was purchased by a New York antiquities dealer and her Italian journalist husband, who shipped it back to New York and made a coffee table out of it for their Park Avenue apartment.

And there it sat, relatively undisturbed, until Oct. 23, 2013. That night, at the Bulgari jewelry store on Manhattan’s 5th Avenue, marble and stones expert Dario Del Bufalo was giving a

lecture and book signing for his new book "Porphyry," on the rare reddish-purple stone preferred by the Roman emperors, that was attended by New York's cultural elite.

As he was signing books, Del Bufalo said he overheard two women who were leafing through his book exclaim "This is Helen's mosaic! This is Helen's mosaic!" after seeing a photograph of the work.

"I didn't understand," Del Bufalo said Thursday as the mosaic was put on display at the Nemi museum. "There were a lot of art experts and I asked 'Who is Helen?' And they told me she is a woman who has a house on Park Avenue and this same mosaic."

Helen was Helen Fioratti, the antiquities dealer, and soon she would be caught up in the investigation by the Manhattan District Attorney's office, the Italian culture ministry and carabinieri art squad, all of which were hunting down antiquities that had been looted from Italy and ended up in private collections and top U.S. museums.

The Manhattan DA's office in October 2017 announced it had seized the mosaic and turned it back over to Italian consular authorities, who repatriated it to Italy. It has been on temporary exhibition since then in Italy but on Thursday was returned to the Nemi museum, with the other artifacts from Caligula's ships.

Fioratti told The Associated Press at the time of the seizure that she had bought the mosaic in good faith more than 40 years earlier while she was living in Italy and had been told it belonged to the aristocratic Barberini family. She was never prosecuted, and decided not to contest the seizure because she believed it would cost too much and take too long.

"It was an innocent purchase," she said then, adding that the sale had been brokered by an Italian art historian known for his work recovering art stolen by the Nazis. "We were very happy with it. We loved it. We had it for years and years, and people always complimented us on it."

Del Bufalo said the district attorney's office eventually asked him to authenticate the mosaic. He said he immediately recognized the round porphyry pieces used, as well as the restoration of a vertical crack.

"When they showed me the photos of the mosaic belonging to this woman who was living in New York, I told them; 'Yes, it is exactly that same one,'" he said.

Del Bufalo suggested the mosaic might never been exhibited in the museum, which was turned into a bomb shelter during World War II and then was damaged by fire. Unlike other relics, he noted, the mosaic shows no evidence of fire damage, suggesting it had either been spirited out before or during the war, or had never been there and had been in private hands since it was excavated.

Nemi Mayor Alberto Bertucci said the city was proud to be welcoming the mosaic back home.

"The mosaic testifies how important and luxurious these imperial ships were," he said at the unveiling Thursday. "These ships were like buildings: They were not supposed to sail and they confirm the greatness of this emperor who wanted to show the greatness of his rule of the Roman empire through these ships."

Return to top

AP: 'Silver lining': Hospitals keep practices born in COVID rush

**By TED SHAFFREY:
Mar 12, 2021**

SYOSSET, N.Y. (AP) — As coronavirus surged in New York last year, officials at the state's largest hospital system realized their old way of transferring patients to relieve stress on swamped emergency rooms just wasn't going to cut it.

Instead of time-consuming phone calls and emails, Northwell Health created a quicker, more efficient "crowd-sourcing" method using an online spreadsheet to match patients in need of a transfer with hospitals having available beds.

Now, Northwell Health, which operates 23 hospitals and 700 outpatient clinics in the New York City region, has made that system — born in the midst of a crisis — a permanent part of its operations.

Jacqueline Moran, the director of Northwell's Centralized Transfer Center, said the hospital can dial up its approach to move patients in response to emergencies, for example in the case a facility must be evacuated because of a fire or a flood.

“Thanks to COVID, the silver lining is now we know how to move this seamlessly from a high incident to a low incident on a daily basis,” Moran said.

Last March, two Northwell hospitals in the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak, Long Island Jewish Valley Stream and Long Island Jewish Forest Hills, were overwhelmed with patients.

Northwell Health operates its own ambulances and emergency call center, so they moved dozens of patients each day into other parts of the health network that were not overloaded with coronavirus patients.

Over three days last spring, the hospital system said it increased transfers between its facilities by 15-20% using the surge decompression model.

Anticipating the second wave in the fall, the hospital chain codified its reimagined transfer system by creating new software for overloaded hospitals to “decompress” by sending patients to facilities that had extra beds.

“The best model is to be proactive. Let's move five to 10 patients a day and prevent it from getting to the point where we have to move 30 or 40 patients,” said Jonathan Berkowitz, Medical Director for EMS and Transfer for Northwell Health.

“So we built a whole new model. We actually built software specifically for this just to help us do this, to make sure that we can match patients in a kind of a much more precise surgical manner and move those patients and prevent having to get to a point where we have to move 40 to 50 patients a day,” Berkowitz said.

Return to top

NYP: White House says stimulus cash deposits will come ‘early as this weekend’

**By Laura Italiano:
Mar 12, 2021**

Stimulus money will begin to pour into Americans’ bank accounts on Saturday and Sunday, the White House said Thursday.

“People can expect to start seeing direct deposits hit their bank accounts as early as this weekend,” press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters.

President Biden signed the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill on Thursday, ahead of his 8 p.m. television address to the nation.

The relief package includes direct-aid checks of \$1,400 for adults earning up to \$75,000 annually and couples clearing up to \$150,000 per year.

It also extends a \$300 weekly unemployment supplement through Sept. 6, and gives all but the wealthiest parents a new annual tax credit of \$3,000-\$3,600 per child, up from the current \$2,000 per child.

The package, formally the American Rescue Plan Act, passed with only Democratic support in Congress.

Return to top

Newsday: Biden to tell states to make all adults vaccine eligible by May 1

**By Laura Figueroa Hernandez:
Mar 12, 2021**

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden, in his first prime time White House address, announced he will direct states to open COVID-19 vaccines to all adults by May 1, asserting that a year after a global pandemic was declared, the United States is on track to return to a "more normal" state by July 4.

Biden, in a nearly 25-minute speech Thursday night, laid out his immediate goals for moving the country past the pandemic, vowing to double the number of federal vaccination centers and launch a federal vaccination website and hotline — all with the aim of vaccinating more Americans and reopening a nation that has dealt with shutdowns, social distancing and a sputtering economy for nearly a year. By Independence Day it will be safe for most Americans to gather in small groups, the president said.

"The fight is far from over," Biden said from the White House East Room. "We still have a lot of work to do. But together, unified, we can defeat this pandemic and we can all celebrate a more normal Fourth of July with families and friends."

Hours earlier at the White House, he signed into law a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package which was approved in a party-line vote by the Democratic-controlled U.S. House and Senate. Administration officials said \$1,400 checks for eligible Americans would start to be disbursed by this weekend, and the president cast the cash infusion as a step to "rebuilding the backbone of this country."

Biden's speech coincided with the midpoint of his first 100 days in office and also came a year to the day that the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic.

On March 11, 2020, hours after the declaration and with the markets in disarray, President Donald Trump delivered an Oval Office address announcing the suspension of travel from Europe while asserting that for the "vast majority of Americans, the risk is very, very low."

As of Thursday evening, more than 530,423 Americans have died of COVID-19 and the United States continues to lead the world in infections, with more than 29.2 million confirmed cases since the onset of the pandemic.

Biden, without naming his predecessor, took aim at Trump's response to the pandemic. As cases emerged in the United States, Trump initially dismissed the virus as a "hoax" and insisted it would "go away like things go away."

"A year ago, we were hit with a virus that was met with silence and spread unchecked," Biden said. "Denials for days, weeks, and months that led to more deaths, more infections, more stress and more loneliness."

Biden spoke of the emotional toll the pandemic has taken on Americans.

"We all lost something — a collective suffering, a collective sacrifice, a year filled with the loss of life," Biden said. "But in the loss, we saw how much there was to gain. An appreciation, respect and gratitude. ... Finding light in the darkness is a very American thing to do."

Biden also denounced a rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans, saying, "It's wrong. It's un-American, and it must stop."

The president detailed his plans to further ramp up the national vaccination effort, announcing the deployment of more than 4,000 active duty troops to federal vaccination sites and an expansion to the pool of medical professionals eligible to administer vaccines to include dentists, optometrists, paramedics, medical students and others.

Senior administration officials said Thursday that the Biden administration will launch a federal vaccination website by May 1 that will display the locations of nearby vaccination sites that have openings. The administration will also launch a toll-free number by May 1 to help Americans arrange a vaccine appointment.

Biden announced last week that the United States will have enough vaccine supply to vaccinate every American adult by the end of May, as production of three federally approved vaccines by Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson continues to increase.

While some Republican-led states, including Texas and Mississippi, have started to lift federal coronavirus restrictions, and have balked at adhering to some of the federal guidelines for vaccine distribution, a senior administration official, speaking to reporters before Biden's speech, said the president had the authority to direct state governors to open the vaccination eligibility by May 1.

"The president does have the authority via [the Department of Health and Human Services] to direct the states, no later than May 1, to open up eligibility to all Americans," the official said.

New York on Tuesday expanded the eligibility pool to include all adults 60 years and older, and announced that "public-facing essential workers" working in government, for nonprofits and in building maintenance will be eligible starting March 17.

Biden raised the prospect of small gatherings being safe in time for the Fourth of July, but emphasized "that doesn't mean large events, with lots of people together." He called on Americans to do their "part" by adhering to social distancing requirements and getting vaccinated in the coming months.

"After this long hard year, that will make this Independence Day something truly special where we not only mark our independence as a nation, we begin to mark our independence from this virus," Biden said. "But to get there we can't let our guard down."

[Return to top](#)

Journal News: When will the federal stimulus checks arrive in NY? Schumer details timeframe

Joseph Spector:
Mar 12, 2021

ALBANY - Expect those stimulus checks by the end of the month.

That was the latest estimate Thursday by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer on when New Yorker and the rest of the nation can get the \$1,400 per person checks for those income eligible.

"Soon — very soon — the most sweeping federal recovery effort in recent history will get underway," Schumer said on the Senate floor Thursday.

"Direct checks will be delivered to American families from coast to coast, roughly 85% of all households. The American people can expect those \$1,400 checks for each person in the family to be delivered by the end of March."

The IRS has estimated the first direct deposits may start hitting bank accounts the week of March 22, and paper checks may be sent out the week of March 29, which would be in line with the schedule of the prior relief checks.

The American Rescue Plan Act is expected to benefit more than 9 million New Yorkers with \$1,400 stimulus checks for individuals earning \$75,000 and \$2,800 for couples earning up to \$150,000.

There is also an additional \$1,400 per dependent.

The money phases out at income of \$80,000 for individuals and \$160,000 for families.

The IRS will use the income levels on either the 2020 or 2019 tax filings to determine eligibility, depending on when taxpayers submitted their taxes.

President Joe Biden signed the bill Thursday afternoon, saying this "historic legislation is about rebuilding the backbone of this country and giving people of this nation – working people, middle class folks, people that built the country – a fighting chance." id

The law also make the first \$10,200 of unemployment benefits non-taxable for households with incomes under \$150,000.

Democrats also agreed in the bill to extend the \$300 weekly unemployment benefit through September, on top of the state's up to \$504 a week payments for those out of work.

The unemployment benefits are critical for some New Yorkers: Over the past year, New York has paid more than \$56 billion in unemployment benefits to 3.8 million New Yorkers.

New York would get roughly \$4 billion to support more vaccines, testing and healthcare services.

The money is already being designated: Schumer announced community health centers in New York will get federally funded COVID-19 vaccines sent directly to them to vaccinate people in the the communities they serve.

The benefits include:

Giving most Americans earning up to \$75,000 a \$1,400 check.

Extending a \$300 weekly federal boost to unemployment benefits through August.

Sending \$350 billion to state and local governments whose revenue has declined because of COVID-19's impact on the economy.

Allocating \$130 billion to help fully reopen schools and colleges.

Allotting \$30 billion to help renters and landlords weather economic losses.

Devoting \$50 billion for small-business assistance.

Dedicating \$160 billion for vaccine development, distribution and related needs.

Expanding the child tax credit up to \$3,600 per child.

Expanding premium subsidies for people who buy health insurance on their own instead of getting it from an employer or a government program like Medicare or Medicaid.

Return to top

Poughkeepsie Journal: Montefiore expansion into Hudson Valley reinforced racial disparities, NY nurses claim

Tiffany Cusaac-Smith and David Robinson:
Mar 12, 2021

MOUNT VERNON – A year later, Tracy McCook still remembers when New York emerged as the global epicenter for the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

At the time, government officials desperately searched for hospital beds and ventilators as the uptick in cases led to overcrowding of medical facilities. To help fill the demand, spaces such as the Westchester County Center, and even the Javits Center in New York City, were transformed into makeshift hospitals.

But amid the upheaval to find hospital beds, McCook and other nurses at Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital in Westchester County wondered why there were unused beds at the facility.

“We didn't understand what was going on,” she said. “Why are we sending patients to (Montefiore) in the Bronx to other hospitals when we have the capacity at our hospital?”

Officials with New York State Nurse Association, a labor union representing nurses at Mount Vernon and New Rochelle hospitals, asserted around 100 beds were not utilized at Mount Vernon Hospital during the pandemic.

They called it part of a pattern of Montefiore undermining services in order to justify its push to close Mount Vernon Hospital and replace it with an outpatient ambulatory care facility.

Montefiore disputed that figure, however, saying that it had a total of 60 beds available at Montefiore Mount Vernon at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic.

To union officials and community leaders, the episode was just one of many Montefiore decisions in its expansion to the Hudson Valley that has reinforced racial disparities in the region.

The Hudson Valley expansion of Montefiore, one of the largest health systems in New York state and the country, is also part of an industry-wide trend of large hospital networks acquiring and merging with smaller community hospitals.

To buttress their argument on Montefiore's expansion in the region, the union released a report Friday that cites longer emergency room wait times at Mount Vernon Hospital than White Plains Hospital. It also points to more spending at the White Plains Hospital and worse health outcomes at Mount Vernon Hospital.

Mount Vernon Hospital is lodged in a community that is around 65% Black and around 16% Latino. White Plains Hospital is in a city that is around 60% white, 11% Black and 30% Latino.

The report comes after Montefiore announced plans to close Mount Vernon Hospital in a largely Black community and replace it with an ambulatory facility, drawing the ire of hospital staff, residents, legislators and community leaders who said that it would not be sufficient for the densely populated city of more than 60,000. The health system eventually put those plans on the shelf.

The debate has also unfolded as the union and health system have clashed over contract negotiations and legislation seeking to mandate nurse staffing ratios at hospitals statewide. The tensions culminated in December with unionized nurse strikes at New Rochelle Hospital and Albany Medical Center in December.

“Montefiore is not adequately resourcing all its facilities in order to meet the healthcare needs of the communities it enters,” the report read, adding: “Montefiore’s choices — from where it invests money to renovate and expand, to how it staffs hospitals on a daily basis — remind us that it will take focused interventions to address the systemic racism and subsequent healthcare disparities in New York’s healthcare system.”

While the New York State Nurses Association, or NYSNA, asserted Montefiore’s takeover of hospitals in Mount Vernon and New Rochelle reinforced racial disparities in health care, Montefiore in a statement to USA TODAY Network New York disputed many claims in the nurses’ union report on the issue.

“As we observe the anniversary of our first COVID patient, NYSNA’s leadership has taken this occasion to lie about our core values and deflect attention away from their misguided tactics and questionable financial practices,” Montefiore officials stated, adding the union’s “false and misleading claims do a shameful disservice to the mission-driven commitment of our nurses and our entire community.”

Community grows impatient

Meanwhile, some community members and officials have grown weary of Montefiore’s handling of the Mount Vernon Hospital after Montefiore acquired it and New Rochelle Hospital, formerly Sound Shore Medical Center, in a bankruptcy court deal for \$60 million in 2013.

After plans were announced to close Mount Vernon Hospital, protests and community forums erupted to try to keep the hospital in the city. Community organizations, advocates, faith leaders and others came together to form the Save and Transform Mount Vernon Coalition, which hosted several events with its namesake goal.

Pastor Stephen Pogue of the Greater Centennial A.M.E. Zion Church in Mount Vernon said he became involved after several of his churchgoers expressed concerns about the state of the hospital. Pogue said he soon came to feel that Montefiore was putting profit over the health of Mount Vernon residents.

"It is to me institutional racism, that this community cannot have a full-service, operating hospital in the height of COVID-19," he said. "And then when you close services and reduce services and eliminate services, and then say, 'Well, the people in the community don't use the hospital.'"

They don't use the hospital, he said, because there are not enough services at the hospital that people need.

He later added: "It's really sad, and the cries for help in this community, so far has gone unanswered."

Mount Vernon Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard said at the time that Montefiore's actions are an abandonment of residents of Mount Vernon, which suffers from disproportionate rates of illnesses such as asthma, hypertension and diabetes.

"Mount Vernon needs and deserves comprehensive medical care," she said. "This is an issue of racial, economic, and health and justice, that is happening in the city of Mount Vernon, at the hands of Montefiore."

Waiting for health care

The nurses' union report asserted institutional differences between Montefiore's hospitals in White Plains and Mount Vernon were connected to longer emergency department wait times and worse outcomes for patients in Mount Vernon.

While Mount Vernon and New Rochelle hospitals are much smaller-volume emergency departments than White Plains Hospital, the waits in the emergency departments are much longer according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services timely and effective care database, the union's report stated.

At Mount Vernon Hospital it will take 7 hours and 11 minutes to be admitted and 9 hours and 56 minutes to get into a patient room through the emergency department, with slightly lower

wait times at New Rochelle Hospital. At White Plains Hospital, the wait is a third shorter, taking 5 hours and 10 minutes to be admitted and 7 hours and 9 minutes to get into a patient room, the report noted.

Montefiore officials noted the federal data in the report is two years old and based on a metric that has since been retired by federal regulators. "It is not only outdated, but it is also misleading as it fails to take into account a number of variables like occupancy rates and average length of stay," Montefiore officials said.

But emergency department wait times are closely connected to nurse staffing ratios, the report read.

In 2012 and 2013, the number of full-time registered nurses ranged between 90 and 96 at Mount Vernon Hospital. The hospital went from nearly 100 registered nurses in October of 2019 to around 65 a year later.

McCook, the Mount Vernon nurse, and others believe this is evidence that Montefiore is going to resume plans that do not include a full-service hospital for the city.

"We honestly feel that once this COVID reaches a point where — whether it's herd immunity, or mass vaccinations, that they are going to proceed with whatever plan they have in place," she said.

"We do not believe that there is any plan to restore this hospital to full services," she noted.

Aid for hospitals

As a result of the pandemic's economic fallout, many hospitals in New York received a share of \$9.2 billion in federal aid for the industry, which was part of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act approved last March.

The New York State Nurses Association also raised questions in its report about how much of that federal aid went to Montefiore's hospitals in Westchester County.

While Montefiore's hospitals in Mount Vernon and New Rochelle received \$21 million and \$47 million, respectively, its White Plains Hospital received more than \$87 million, the nurses' union report noted.

"White Plains was essentially rewarded for having higher paying, privately insured patients and lower death rates than Mount Vernon," the report stated, asserting Montefiore should have chosen to redistribute more federal aid to address health inequity in Mount Vernon.

Further, the union asserted the federal aid resulted in a revenue boost for Montefiore Health System, citing third quarter financial statements for 2020.

"Montefiore has claimed poverty when community and labor leaders have demanded greater investment in its Mount Vernon and New Rochelle facilities, while at the same time moving forward on construction expenditures in White Plains," the union report stated, referring to a \$272 million expansion project at White Plains Hospital.

But Montefiore officials disputed that the health system unjustly distributed federal aid, citing how the funding was based on metrics set forth by the federal government. Further, the aid fell short of covering COVID-related losses, Montefiore officials added in a statement, noting Mount Vernon Hospital and White Plains Hospital recouped 84% and 69% of their respective losses.

The nurses' union also questioned details of a \$65 million state grant awarded to Montefiore in 2019 to construct a comprehensive outpatient facility and new emergency department to replace Mount Vernon Hospital.

Its report asserted Montefiore has received \$33 million of the grant so far, but "the only changes to services at Mount Vernon (Hospital) has been to eliminate services and close critical departments," such as the intensive care unit.

Montefiore officials disputed the union's numbers, asserting the health system has received \$24 million to pay down debt at Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital in accordance with the grant terms.

"Those are the only funds received to date due to lack of support for the overall project at Sanford Boulevard," Montefiore officials said in a statement, adding the project is currently on hold.

The intensive care unit operations were suspended at Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital due to a decline in ICU patient census and changes in medical staffing, the health system stated but didn't provide further detail.

Where do they go from here?

McCook and a group of nurses have vowed to stay with Mount Vernon Hospital to the end because they are there for the patients. "We are patient advocates and we know this is a community in need," she said.

But she and the union want some assurances such as better staffing the facility and a clear acknowledgment that there will be a full-service hospital.

The union report also called on state officials to investigate questions about Montefiore's funding decisions at member hospitals and urged state regulators to impose a moratorium on further Montefiore expansions in the Hudson Valley, including a merger with St. John's Riverside Hospital in Yonkers, amid the review.

"Give us the things that we need to serve this community," McCook said. "This community needs to be served the same way hospitals serve their patients in other communities."

Return to top

Newsday: Study: Multifamily housing projects barely increase student enrollment

By Robert Brodsky:
Mar 12, 2021

Multifamily housing developments built across Long Island during the past decade are not causing significant enrollment increases in area school districts, with revenue generated from the projects exceeding the cost of additional students the districts must educate, according to a study released Thursday.

The report, commissioned by the Long Island Regional Planning Council, examined seven multifamily communities — two in Mineola and one each in Farmingdale, Garden City, Yaphank, Huntington and Patchogue — all with at least 150 units that were built within a mile of mass transit since 2012.

The analysis found that while the Mineola, Longwood and Uniondale school districts saw increases in student enrollment over the past decade, the residential projects accounted for less than 20% of that gain in school-age children.

The Farmingdale, Huntington and Patchogue-Medford school districts saw net declines in enrollment from 2010 through 2019, despite new residential projects in those communities, the report found.

Todd Poole, president of 4ward Planning Inc, the study's author, says the analysis debunks a common myth among NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) opponents to new residential projects — that new housing will overwhelm school districts with new students.

"These numbers demonstrate that the increase in enrollment in these districts were not driven by the number of kids coming from these residential projects," Poole said during Thursday's Regional Planning Council meeting. "It is important to understand that in many cases ... when there is pushback on the development of multifamily residential projects, often times it's because those in opposition believe that the residential projects will dramatically increase the number of public school-age kids."

Opposition to developments listed in the report, including the 303-unit Avalon at Huntington and the 291-unit New Village at Patchogue — along with those not studied in Wyandanch, Hauppauge and Long Beach — have focused on concerns about parking or an influx of new students.

The report also found the new development projects generated a financial benefit to the school district.

For example, Avalon at Huntington added 56 students to local schools — the most of any development studied — costing the school district \$8,160 per student or a total of \$456,942, the report found. But the real estate tax revenue or direct payments generated by the project was \$849,485, for a net surplus to the district of \$392,543, Poole said.

The Mineola School District, which saw just 22 new students from the One Third Avenue and Allure Mineola developments, saw the biggest benefit — a total of \$737,456 in the 2020-21 school year — while the smallest impact was in Patchogue-Medford district, which generated \$54,920 from the New Village development.

"In the case of revenue versus school costs, these projects are more than paying for themselves," Poole said.

The report also examined another frequent criticism of new residential communities: that they will create a parking crunch in downtown districts.

The study found multifamily communities provide enough on-site parking that they don't exacerbate parking demands in commercial areas while many residents, often millennials or empty nesters, frequently forgo driving and rely on public transportation.

John Cameron, chairman of the planning council, says the study is critical for growing Long Island's scarce supply of rental housing.

"It's debunking a myth that's been out there for many, many years," Cameron said. "It's critical that we get this information out there."

Jeff Kraut, the council's treasurer and an executive vice president for strategy and analytics at Northwell Health, said, "It's so critical to replace fear-based or uninformed comments with fact-based comments that drives smart growth."

Return to top

WSJ: Grab Is in Talks to Go Public Through a SPAC Merger

By Maureen Farrell:
Mar 12, 2021

Grab Holdings Inc. is in talks to go public through a merger with a SPAC that could value the Southeast Asian ride-hailing startup at as much as \$40 billion, making it by far the largest such deal on record.

The Singapore company is discussing a deal with a special-purpose acquisition company affiliated with Altimeter Capital Management LP that would value it at between \$35 billion and \$40 billion, according to people familiar with the matter. (Altimeter has two SPACS; it couldn't be learned which one is in talks with Grab.)

As part of the deal, Grab would raise between \$3 billion and \$4 billion in a so-called PIPE, a funding round that typically accompanies a SPAC merger, the people said. That amount could still change as Grab and Altimeter will start meeting with mutual funds and other potential investors soon, some of the people said.

The parties could announce the deal in the next few weeks, though the talks could still fall apart and Grab could revert to an earlier plan to stage a traditional initial public offering on a U.S. exchange this year.

Should they move forward with a SPAC deal, it would be the high-water mark in a recent explosion of such transactions, in which an empty shell raises money in an IPO with plans to

later find one or more companies to merge with. In some cases, the SPAC ends up with only a small sliver of the newly public target.

The vehicles have caught fire in the last couple of years, with everyone from former baseball player Alex Rodriguez to ex-House Speaker Paul Ryan getting in on the action. They have helped break a bottleneck between the private and public markets as companies that were reluctant to go public line up to combine with SPACs, which offer in many cases a speedier route to a listing without costs and disclosure limitations that accompany traditional IPOs.

The biggest SPAC deal to date is United Wholesale Mortgage's roughly \$16 billion combination with Gores Holdings IV Inc., announced in September. The biggest one so far this year is electric-vehicle company Lucid Motors Inc.'s agreement last month to merge with Michael Klein's Churchill Capital Corp. IV, a deal valued at nearly \$12 billion, according to Dealogic.

So far this year, a record \$70 billion-plus has been raised for SPACs, which account for more than 70% of all public stock sales, according to Dealogic. A slew of companies are in talks for a SPAC merger or already have agreed to one, including office-sharing firm WeWork, online photo-book maker Shutterfly Inc. and online lender Social Finance Inc.

In addition to ride-hailing, Grab, which traces its roots back to 2011, delivers restaurant, grocery and other items and provides digital financial services to merchants.

Its backers include SoftBank Group Corp. , Uber Technologies Inc. and Toyota Motor Corp. It was last publicly valued at around \$15 billion in an October 2019 fundraising round, according to PitchBook.

Its valuation is on the rise as public investors pile into other ride-hailing and food-delivery companies. Uber's shares have jumped sharply in the past several months, while DoorDash Inc. went public in December at a valuation far in excess of where it had raised money privately. The restaurant-delivery company now has a market capitalization of nearly \$47 billion.

Altimeter's SPACs—Altimeter Growth Corp. and Altimeter Growth Corp. 2—raised \$450 million and \$400 million in October and January IPOs, respectively. Altimeter Capital, of Menlo Park, Calif., has around \$16 billion under management and primarily invests in technology companies.

The firm has racked up a string of successful investments and was one of the main participants in a January round of funding Roblox Corp. raised ahead of its IPO at \$45 a share. In its debut Wednesday, shares of the videogame platform traded more than 50% above that level and continued rising Thursday.

SoftBank, which invested through its Vision Fund, is also poised to win big on Grab, just as another of its bets proves to be a gigantic winner: The Japanese technology-investing giant has now made roughly \$25 billion on paper on its \$2.7 billion investment in South Korean e-commerce company Coupang Inc., which soared 41% in its trading debut Thursday.

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: J&J's Single-Dose Covid-19 Vaccine Approved by EU Drug Regulator

**By Laurence Norman:
Mar 12, 2021**

BRUSSELS—The European Union expanded its list of approved Covid-19 vaccines to four options, but the addition of Johnson & Johnson's single-shot vaccine Thursday appears unlikely soon to accelerate Europe's lagging rollout.

The European Medicines Agency said that the J&J vaccine is safe and effective against Covid-19, and hours later EU authorities formally authorized its use. Distribution is set to begin in the second quarter.

The EMA's decision to recommend authorization of the J&J vaccine follows U.S. approval late last month.

The J&J vaccine has the potential to significantly bolster vaccination drives over time. It can be kept in refrigerators instead of freezers, making it easier to store and distribute than some

vaccines already approved, and recipients need only one dose rather than the two administered for other vaccines, often many weeks apart.

Trials found J&J's vaccine had a high impact in preventing serious illness but was 67% effective overall when moderate cases were included. Side effects were usually mild or moderate, the EMA said.

In a statement, J&J said the data also showed 85% efficacy in preventing cases of serious disease.

"We remain confident that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine will prove a critical tool for fighting this pandemic," said Paul Stoffels, the company's chief scientific officer.

Despite the approval, questions persist about how quickly J&J will start delivering vaccines on a large scale, following manufacturing problems in the U.S. This week, EU officials said they were hopeful the company would meet its second-quarter EU distribution target of 55 million doses and that they would get a fuller picture after the EMA's approval decision.

The EU vaccination campaign has been hampered by late signing of contracts, delivery problems and difficulties distributing the vaccines in some member states. For now, the vaccination rate in the EU is well below those in the U.S. and U.K.

In France, Germany and Italy, less than 8% of people have received their first dose, according to Wednesday's daily data from the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

With Covid-19 deaths high even in countries like Germany, which performed well during the first wave of coronavirus, much of Europe has been in lockdown for months, hitting the region's already troubled economy and drawing protests in some countries. On Wednesday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that her country faces three tough months ahead.

J&J has agreed to provide the EU with 200 million doses this year, and the EU has the option of buying another 200 million. The company said last week it was confident it would meet its full-year target.

On Wednesday, President Biden said J&J had agreed to provide the U.S. an additional 100 million doses in the second half of this year, on top of the 100 million it was already due to deliver. To overcome manufacturing difficulties, the White House helped negotiate an agreement between J&J and longtime competitor Merck & Co., in which Merck will help produce J&J's vaccine.

The EU and the U.S. started talks this week on ensuring that they don't block vital vaccine ingredients from export to each other. An executive order Mr. Biden issued last month had raised concerns in Europe that some vaccine materials, potentially including J&J doses intended for the EU, could be blocked from U.S. export.

The White House on Wednesday sought to dispel those concerns.

"The Biden administration's top priority is saving lives and ending the pandemic. The U.S. has not imposed a ban on the export of vaccines or their inputs," an administration expert on exports said. "All vaccine manufacturers in the U.S. are free to export their products while also fulfilling the terms of their contracts with the U.S. government."

Unlike the U.S. and the U.K., the EU has exported over 34 million vaccine doses to 31 countries outside the bloc since late January, but the slow rollout within Europe prompted the EU to permit its members to ban some exports. Last week, that happened for the first time, when Italy blocked the delivery of AstraZeneca doses to Australia.

On Thursday, the EU said it would extend until the end of June the mechanism that allows member states to ban export vaccines.

The EU signed contracts with J&J in October, one of six vaccine agreements the bloc has signed so far. To date, four of the vaccines have been approved, from J&J, AstraZeneca PLC, Pfizer Inc. and Moderna Inc.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, has seen delivery of vaccines roughly double each month since January and is expecting around 50 million this month, officials say. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said this week she expects the EU to receive 100 million vaccines a month in the second quarter, keeping the bloc on target for its goal of vaccinating 70% of the adult population by the end of the summer.

Doubts remain about these figures, as the EU continues to face trouble locking in promised vaccines.

AstraZeneca is set to supply only half the original expectation of 80 million vaccines to the EU in the first quarter, and there are intense discussions between the company and the European Commission over how much of its 180 million second-quarter target AstraZeneca will meet.

J&J's shot wasn't as effective in studies as Covid-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna.

Health authorities in the U.S. said the vaccine showed preliminary signs, according to J&J, of curbing spread of the virus among people who don't show symptoms. They have been a significant source of transmission.

Europe was hit early on in the pandemic and as of March 4, official data showed more than 547,000 people killed by the disease and more than 22 million sickened in EU countries and their fellow members of the broader European Economic Area.

The deadlier and more contagious British variant of the coronavirus has spread broadly across the continent in recent weeks, leading to stubbornly high levels of infection, hospitalizations and deaths in many countries.

[Return to top](#)

Newsday: Long Island lost more jobs than estimated in 2020

By Victor Ocasio:
Mar 12, 2021

Long Island lost more jobs over 2020 than originally estimated, according to revised state data released Thursday.

Over the 12 months from January 2020 to December of last year, the Island lost 139,200 jobs — about 13,000, or 10%, more than initial monthly jobs data had shown, the state Labor Department said Thursday.

The higher loss of jobs locally was presented as part of a revision of jobs data conducted annually by the state.

For the year, the Island had 1.21 million jobs, after revisions, according to Labor Department data, down from 1.35 million jobs in 2019.

Still, the economy has recovered a large chunk of jobs lost between the start of 2020 and April of last year. In total, the state saw a net loss of more than 1 million jobs in 2020, a decline of 10.3%. New York finished the year with nearly 8.8 million jobs, according to revised data.

"We are in a better position than we were at the worst point of the pandemic," said Shital Patel, labor market analyst in the department's Hicksville office. "As with the rest of the nation, we're not fully out of the woods yet."

While the job situation across the state remains bad, says Gregory DeFreitas, senior labor economics professor at Hofstra University, he agrees that the Island has made noteworthy progress in recovering jobs lost early in the pandemic.

"Since then, we've been slowly increasing the number of jobs," he said. "We're still down ... but we've cut in half the job losses that we were experiencing in that plunge in April."

While many Long Islanders continue to look for work, some were lucky to find new positions earlier on in the pandemic.

After losing his job in December of 2019, Scott Ross, 63, of Holbrook, struggled to find a new position.

"I was looking to do temp work," Ross said of his job search in early 2020.

After applying for many places, he was approached by Lowe's out of the blue, he said.

"In June Lowe's came to me. They found my resume on Indeed," Ross said. "They offered me a position as a cashier at \$15 an hour."

What started as a part-time seasonal position became a full-time offer in September, along with a bump in pay, Ross said.

"Lowes gives their part-time and full-time employees pandemic bonuses."

In addition to the annual revised data, the state also released job creation numbers for January, which showed a month-to-month loss of 37,800, smaller than the average loss of 52,000 jobs for the month.

Job losses from December into January are typical, Patel said, as many businesses – especially retailers – let go of seasonal hires following the holiday shopping season.

Employment was down in all nine private sectors in January, according to the state, with leisure and hospitality leading the losses.

The hospitality sector was down 32,400 jobs in January from a year before, and down 6,100 jobs from December.

Mark Irgang, president of the Long Island Hospitality Association said that hospitality business has faced unprecedented job losses from entry level workers all the way up to corporate executives.

"There's a lot of pain," Irgang said. "I think it's been probably one of if not the most difficult years that I've experienced in my 35-year career."

Despite the heavy losses, though, he said he's hopeful that the vaccine rollout, combined with the warmer weather and consumers' pent-up demand for travel and leisure activities will greatly aid hospitality this summer.

"Slowly but surely, I think we're seeing a light at the end of the tunnel," he said. "Still, the tunnel may be long."

[Return to top](#)

NYP: COVID-19 exposed a critical gap in the globe's oxygen supply

**By Gabrielle Fonrouge:
Mar 12, 2021**

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a critical gap in the world's oxygen supply that's leading to a million preventable deaths a year, health leaders said Thursday during a panel hosted by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Clinton Health Access Initiative.

The philanthropic groups, which together are finalists for a \$100 million MacArthur Foundation grant for oxygen relief efforts in Africa, hosted Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and two African health care leaders to discuss the problem.

“No one, no matter where they live or what their incomes, should die from lack of oxygen. A condition we can diagnose easily, treat affordably, and prevent globally,” former President Bill Clinton, who moderated the discussion, said.

“If you live in a wealthy country, having too little oxygen in your blood is a problem doctors have the tools and training to treat. In other parts of the world, it can still be a death sentence, so we have quite a health equity crisis on our hands now aggravated obviously by COVID.”

Citing statistics from the World Health Organization, Fauci said up to 500,000 newborn deaths each year are due to a lack of available medical oxygen and 40% of adult and pediatric pneumonia deaths could be prevented with better access to O₂.

“We are dealing with an extraordinary problem that needs to be addressed,” Fauci said.

“I’ve been doing this for now 40 years and the thought of oxygen shortage never really crossed my mind until all of a sudden it hit me right in the face when we were seeing shortages right here in the United States and only then did I go back and take a look at what was going on in some of the low and middle income countries.”

Dr. John Nkengasong, the Director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control, said a lack of medical oxygen has been an enormous problem plaguing the African Union and has led to a slew of preventable deaths simply because the O₂ can’t be delivered in time.

“Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were just 68 oxygen generating plants on the continent of Africa, a continent of 55 member states with 1.2 billion people,” Nkengasong explained, adding the number of plants have increased 40% amid the pandemic.

“Though the increase is promising, challenges continue ... including the ability to maintain those oxygen plants across the continent and provide continuous and predictable financing to support them.”

Joy Phumaphi, the former Botswana Minister of Health and co-Chair of the United Nations Secretary General’s Independent Accountability Panel for Women, Children, and Adolescent Health, said the issue goes beyond just a lack of oxygen.

“One of the biggest challenges as well is misdiagnosis or failure to actually diagnose patients who have low blood oxygen. It is estimated that 80% of the patients with low blood oxygen are not actually diagnosed with low blood oxygen primarily because of lack of access to a simple way of testing blood oxygen, whereas we do know that there are pulse oximeters, which are very, very simple tools,” Phumaphi explained.

“You also need to train your health professionals on how to diagnose and equip them with the pulse oximeters.”

The Murdoch Children’s Research Institute and the Clinton Health Access Initiative are attempting to bring those pulse oximeters to five African countries that account for nearly a third of hypoxemia cases globally and make high-quality medical oxygen available in hospitals in those locales.

In pilot projects already underway, the proportion of hypoxemic children receiving oxygen doubled in 74 Nigerian and Ethiopian hospitals, according to the groups’ proposal.

“In Southwest Nigeria, access to pulse oximetry and oxygen therapy cut the risk of death in half for children admitted to hospital with pneumonia,” their proposal reads.

The panelists said the problem, which won't take an enormous undertaking to fix, will continue until there's a dedicated commitment to addressing it in the form of policy changes, infrastructure development and funding.

[Return to top](#)

NYP: Biden delivers prime-time address to mark pandemic anniversary, encourages 'national unity,' continued vigilance

**By Tamar Lapin and Steven Nelson:
Mar 12, 2021**

President Biden on Thursday used his first primetime address to set a goal for Americans to be able to gather in small groups by the Fourth of July and for all adults to be eligible for vaccine sign-ups by May 1. But Biden outlined a darker alternative if things don't go so well.

The speech encouraged the public to take COVID-19 vaccine shots and wear masks — warning that if they fail to do so, the country could go back into lockdown.

“Even if we devote every resource we have, beating this virus and getting back to normal depends on national unity. National unity isn't just how politics and politicians vote in Washington or what the loudest voices say on cable or online,” Biden said.

“Unity is what we do together as fellow Americans because if we don't stay vigilant and the conditions change, we may have to reinstate restrictions to get back on track. Please, we don't want to do that again. We've made so much progress. This is not the time to let up.”

He added: “Just as we were emerging from a dark winter into a hopeful spring and summer, it is not the time to not stick with the rules.”

The reforms to vaccine distribution and the looming end to strict social distancing measures were touted with more assuredness.

“I’m announcing that I will direct all states, tribes and territories to make all adults — people 18 and over — eligible to be vaccinated no later than May 1,” Biden said. “Let me be clear, that doesn’t mean everyone’s going to have that shot immediately. But it means you’ll be able to get in line beginning May 1.”

Biden said, repeating a timeframe that he’s outlined for two weeks, “we will have enough vaccine supply for all adults in America by the end of May. That’s months ahead of schedule.”

The president said that if all goes according to plan, July 4 could see near-normal American festivities.

“By July the Fourth there’s a good chance you, your families and friends will be able to get together in your backyard or in your neighborhood and have a cookout or a barbecue and celebrate Independence Day,” Biden said.

“That doesn’t mean large events with lots of people together, but it does mean small groups will be able to get together. After this long hard year, it will make this Independence Day something truly special, where we not only mark our independence as a nation, but we begin to mark our independence from this virus.”

Biden claimed credit for the US progress toward ending the pandemic and without mentioning him by name, attacked his predecessor, former President Donald Trump.

“We lost faith in whether our government and our democracy can deliver on really hard things for the American people,” Biden said.

“I have as president of the United States put us on a war footing to get the job done. Sounds like hyperbole, but I mean it, a war footing. Thank God we’re making some real progress now.”

Trump implicitly slammed Biden in a Wednesday statement for claiming credit for vaccine distribution, noting that billions in federal funds were infused into research and development under his watch.

Trump said, “if I wasn’t President, you wouldn’t be getting that beautiful ‘shot’ for 5 years, at best, and probably wouldn’t be getting it at all.”

Biden’s more than 20-minute speech marked the one-year anniversary of widespread coronavirus lockdowns across the US, and came hours after he signed the \$1.9 trillion pandemic stimulus bill that Democrats rammed through Congress this week in party-line votes.

The massive bill gives \$1,400 stimulus checks to most Americans, extends a \$300 weekly unemployment supplement through Sept. 3 and awards \$350 billion to state and local governments.

The president said the bill “means a typical family of four earning about \$110,000 will get checks for \$5,600 deposited if they have direct deposit.”

Biden also eulogized the loss of life and lifestyle in his address

“A year ago, we were hit with a virus that was met with silence and spread unchecked. Denials for days, weeks and months. That led to more deaths, more infections, more stress and more loneliness. Photos and videos from 2019 feel like they were taken in another era,” Biden said.

“You lost your job, you closed your business, facing eviction, homelessness, hunger. A loss of control, maybe worst of all, a loss of hope.”

Students, he said “haven’t seen their friends” because their schools closed.

In his address, Biden said that the “fight is far from over,” striking a familiar tone on the pandemic, again urging the need of sacrifice and patience to defeat the virus that has infected nearly 30 million Americans and killed more than 525,000.

Ahead of the speech, the White House announced initiatives that went unmentioned in Biden’s address but that will seek to hasten the end of the pandemic.

Among the new initiatives is the deployment of an additional 4,000 US troops to support coronavirus vaccination efforts, from the 2,000 already deployed around the country.

The administration also plans to double the number of pharmacies participating in the federal vaccination program and expand mobile operations to vaccinate people in communities that have been hard-hit by the virus, the White House said.

The Biden administration will on Friday also dramatically expand the pool of professionals who can administer COVID-19 shots.

“Tomorrow, the Administration will expand the pool of qualified professionals able to administer shots to include: Dentists, advanced and intermediate Emergency Medical Technicians, Midwives, Optometrists, Paramedics, Physician Assistants, Podiatrists, Respiratory Therapists, and Veterinarians, as well as medical students, nursing students, and other healthcare students in the previously listed professions,” the White House said ahead of the speech.

Return to top

NYP: 1 in 5 Americans say they lost a loved one to COVID-19, poll finds

**By Elizabeth Elizalde:
Mar 12, 2021**

About 1 in 5 Americans say they lost a loved one to COVID-19, according to a new poll, as Thursday marked the one-year anniversary of the pandemic.

The poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about 3 in 10 Americans are still worried about themselves or a family member being infected with the contagious bug.

The survey also shows that the virus devastated communities of color the most.

About 30 percent of African Americans, and Hispanics say they know a family member or close friend who died from the coronavirus, compared to 15 percent of white people, according to the AP-NORC poll.

When it comes to getting the COVID-19 vaccine, young adults, people without college degrees, and Republicans say they don't plan on doing so, the survey says.

For communities of color, getting vaccinated has also become a struggle.

Sixteen percent of Black Americans and 15 percent of Hispanics say they've received at least one shot, compared to 26 percent of white people, data shows.

The new numbers come as the world mourned their loved ones on the one-year anniversary since the spread of the virus was declared a global pandemic.

President Biden eulogized the victims of the virus during his Thursday night address to the nation.

“A year ago, we were hit with a virus that was met with silence and spread unchecked. Denials for days, weeks and months. That led to more deaths, more infections, more stress and more loneliness. Photos and videos from 2019 feel like they were taken in another era,” Biden said.

“You lost your job, you closed your business, facing eviction, homelessness, hunger. A loss of control, maybe worst of all, a loss of hope.”

Biden also announced that all adults will be eligible to sign up for the vaccine by May 1.

Return to top

NYP: Psaki: Biden ‘honoring and valuing’ Indians by saying they are ‘taking over’ US

**By Steven Nelson:
Mar 12, 2021**

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki on Thursday said that President Biden meant no offense when he said last week that Indian Americans are “taking over the country,” and that he was actually “honoring and valuing” their contributions.

Psaki was asked at her daily press briefing by journalist Lalit Jha of the Press Trust of India if she could “clarify” Biden’s remark after criticism.

“The president was just recognizing and honoring and valuing — or this was his intention — the incredible contribution of Indian Americans to science, he was speaking to an Indian American woman who is, of course, a scientist and an important part of the NASA team. And he also was, of course, recognizing the incredible contribution of his own vice president,” Psaki said.

“And he just believes — that was a reflection of his belief that Indian Americans make a great contribution to the fabric of society, whether it’s science or education or the government. And that was what he was trying to convey.”

Biden made his eyebrow-raising remark during a webcast with Swati Mohan, NASA's guidance and controls operations lead for the Mars Perseverance rover landing.

"It's amazing. Indian-descent Americans are taking over the country — you, my vice president, my speechwriter," Biden said.

Biden has previously drawn criticism for awkward remarks about racial minorities, including comments about Indian Americans.

He said in 2006, while a senator: "In Delaware, the largest growth of population is Indian Americans, moving from India. You cannot go to a 7-11 or a Dunkin' Donuts unless you have a slight Indian accent. I'm not joking."

Vice President Kamala Harris' mother was born in Chennai, India, Her father was born in Jamaica.

Return to top

NYP: Novavax shot 96% effective against COVID-19 in trial

By Laura Italiano:
Mar 12, 2021

The COVID-19 vaccine from Novavax was found to be 96 percent effective against the original strain of the coronavirus in new a UK trial, the company announced Thursday.

The shot from the Maryland-based company was also 86 percent effective against the more contagious variant first discovered in the UK and now spreading across the US and in New York City.

In a smaller South Africa trial, the Novavax vaccine was only around 55 percent effective in preventing disease when tested against volunteers primarily exposed to the new variant first identified there.

But in both the UK and South Africa trials, the shot was 100 percent effective in preventing serious illness and death.

The company will use the findings to seek authorization for the vaccine's use in various countries. It was not immediately clear if it will seek FDA authorization based on the UK findings, or if it will wait for the completion of an ongoing US test.

The latest findings are in line with interim results announced in January, when the Novavax jab was also found to be 96 percent effective against the original coronavirus and around 86 percent effective against the UK variant.

Currently, there are three vaccines authorized for use in the U.S., from Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson.

Return to top

NYP: Kentucky Senate passes bill criminalizing protesters who 'insult' police

By Kenneth Garger:
Mar 12, 2021

Kentucky's state Senate passed a bill on Thursday that would make it a crime to "taunt" a police officer.

The bill's sponsor, Republican state Sen. Danny Carroll, a retired cop, said he filed the proposal in response to frequent protests in Louisville last summer.

Some of the demonstrations, which were sparked by the police shooting death of Breonna Taylor, turned violent.

The bill passed the Kentucky's Republican-dominated Senate 22-11.

It will now be debated by the House, which is also controlled by Republicans.

Under the legislation, anyone who “accosts, insults, taunts, or challenges a law enforcement officer with offensive or derisive words, or by gestures or other physical contact, that would have a direct tendency to provoke a violent response” would be guilty of a misdemeanor and face up to 90 days in jail and fines.

Some Republican senators who voted against the bill expressed concerns that parts of it would violate First Amendment rights and burden the judicial system.

Democratic lawmakers warned that the proposal could be used to unfairly target peaceful protesters.

[Return to top](#)

Buffalo News: Schumer: Influx of Covid-19 vaccines on way to federal Community Health Centers in NY

Harold McNeil:
Mar 12, 2021

A huge influx of Covid-19 vaccines from the federal government is on the way to New York's Community Health Centers, Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer announced Thursday.

Schumer said a lot of New Yorkers are clamoring for the vaccine.

“Now, the better news is: more vaccines and better access to vaccine sites are on the way via a supercharged effort that will utilize New York’s Community Health Centers as federally-funded vaccine sites to get more shots into more arms,” Schumer said in a statement.

“More access and more shots means a quicker recovery, and that’s what we want,” he added.

Locally, Community Health Center Of Buffalo, 34 Benwood Ave., which is federally-funded and organized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, will administer the vaccine. It is part of an effort to expand the vaccine program and increase its availability and access in underserved and minority communities where access has been a major challenge.

[Return to top](#)

Post Standard: John Katko, Claudia Tenney vote against expanding background checks for gun sales

By Mark Weiner:
Mar 12, 2021

Washington – Central New York’s two members of Congress voted Thursday against House bills that would tighten federal laws for gun sales, giving more scrutiny to those who purchase firearms.

Reps. John Katko, R-Camillus, and Claudia Tenney, R-New Hartford, voted with the majority of Republicans in opposition to two gun bills, arguing they would do little to keep guns out of the hands of violent criminals.

Both bills passed the Democratic-controlled House along party lines, with fewer than 10 Republicans breaking ranks on either measure.

Senate Majority Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., promised Thursday he would bring the legislation to a vote in the Senate as soon as possible.

The effort is part of a renewed push by Democrats to pass tougher gun laws at a time when the party controls both chambers of Congress and the White House.

The bills would require background checks on all gun sales and transfers, while expanding the time period for authorities to finish the checks from three days to 10 days.

The first bill, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act, passed by a vote of 227-203. The legislation would expand the requirement for background checks to include firearms sold at gun shows, online and in private sales. Eight Republicans voted for the bill with 219 Democrats.

Katko said in a statement after the votes that the legislation was “overly broad” and “has the potential to criminalize routine firearm transfers between law-abiding Americans and is unlikely to deter gun violence or crime.”

Tenney said the new regulations would be burdensome, weaken the constitutional right of Americans to bear arms, and negatively impact law-abiding gun owners.

“These bills are poorly written and could open the door for sportsmen and hunters to be treated the same as violent criminals,” Tenney said in a statement.

“A sportsman could potentially face charges for simply storing a gun with a fellow hunter while a farmer could similarly run afoul by simply lending a firearm to a fellow farmer,” she said. “These progressive gun bills are out of touch with rural America and treat honest gun owners like criminals.”

The bill approved Thursday would provide exceptions, allowing temporary trades and sharing of firearms at shooting ranges or on hunting trips.

The second bill, the Enhanced Background Checks Act, passed by a vote of 219-210 with the support of only two Republicans

The bill, extending the review period for background checks from three days to 10 days, was originally introduced in response to the 2015 mass shooting at a church in Charleston, S.C., in which nine Black people were killed during a Bible study session.

The killer, a white supremacist with a criminal arrest record, was able to legally buy a gun under existing federal law that allows gun sales to go through without a completed background check if three business days have passed.

Return to top

Press Republican: Health Depts. to use J&J vaccine for homebound

BY CARA CHAPMAN :
Mar 12, 2021

PLATTSBURGH — As the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine makes its way to the North Country, local health departments plan to first use it to immunize homebound residents.

Clinton County Health Department Senior Public Health Educator Molly Flynn said her agency is part of a two-phase proposal developed at the North Country vaccine hub to utilize the one-shot regimen, which received emergency use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration last month, for this purpose.

"It is currently being piloted in Phase 1 by local health departments who have homecare agencies," Flynn added.

RECEIVED DOSES

Essex County Health Department submitted a proposal to the state requesting 100 doses of the Johnson & Johnson, also known as the Janssen, vaccine, which were received, Program

Coordinator Andrea Whitmarsh said. The agency plans to continue to request more allocations each week.

Whitmarsh noted ECHD has a Certified Home Health Agency under its umbrella, putting it in a unique position that "allows us to more readily identify homebound residents and their eligible caregivers/household members and utilize our existing nursing staff to administer vaccine to this more vulnerable population."

Sarah Granquist, a public health educator at Franklin County Public Health, said her agency has requested and received 200 doses.

"We will focus on the homebound and also open up some doses to other eligible categories."

RURAL AREAS

Flynn said one benefit in utilizing the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is that it will be easier to transport than the Moderna doses, which are what CCHD currently uses.

Moderna and Pfizer's vaccines require cold chain storage. By contrast, the Johnson and Johnson injection can be stored for up to three months in a regular refrigerator.

"It is likely we may try to utilize any (Johnson & Johnson) for (points of distribution) in outlying areas" of the county, Flynn said.

CCHD Director of Public Health John Kanoza indicated this during the county legislature's Wednesday meeting.

In addition to discussions with HCR Home Care to distribute the Johnson & Johnson shot to 200 homebound clientele, Kanoza noted bringing batches of the doses to volunteer fire departments and emergency services buildings in rural areas like Keeseville, Saranac, Ellenburg and Champlain.

"If we've got to haul out, and get outside of our working area here in the City and Town of Plattsburgh, it's best if we do it with Johnson & Johnson," he said.

Flynn anticipates that Moderna will constitute the majority of CCHD's allocation for the foreseeable future.

"As more vaccine is available, we will be prepared to administer whatever type of vaccine we are given."

SAFETY, EFFICACY

Among those seeking vaccination, the consensus seems to be that any opportunity to be vaccinated is better than waiting, Whitmarsh said, noting that some prefer the Johnson & Johnson candidate for its one-shot regimen.

"We realize there are individuals who crave more information and data about vaccine performance before they make a decision, and we are working hard to address these needs and communicate vaccine information to those that might be hesitant or concerned."

Whitmarsh said the Johnson & Johnson vaccine does well with the most important benchmark: keeping people from getting hospitalized and dying.

"It's about 85 percent effective against severe to critical forms of the disease, which is comparable to both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines," she continued.

"While it is about 66 percent protective against moderate disease, it's important to note that this vaccine was trialed in Latin America and South Africa, regions where variants of SARS-CoV-2 are circulating, and it proved to be similarly effective against those variants as well."

Flynn likewise spoke to both the safety and efficacy of all three vaccine candidates had been demonstrated.

"No matter which type of vaccine you receive, the important piece is getting the vaccine," she said.

"We suggest everyone schedule their vaccination as soon as they become eligible, whether that be through CCHD, at the New York State site on the base or at a pharmacy or health care center."

Return to top

Watertown Daily Times: Ogdensburg seeks to shift management, operations of treatment plants to DANC

By SYDNEY SCHAEFER:
Mar 12, 2021

OGDENSBURG — In line with its plan to share and consolidate services as a cost-saving measure, the city is looking to do just that with the Development Authority of the North Country.

City Manager Stephen P. Jellie is looking to negotiate with DANC to create what he calls an intermunicipal agreement for management and operational support of the city's water treatment plant and wastewater treatment plant. Mr. Jellie sent a letter to DANC Executive Director Carl E. Farone Jr. requesting the development authority provide a written response to the city's request to explore the potential agreement.

“It is my sincere belief that a partnership between our entities will significantly reduce costs for services, create efficiencies in work effort and remove redundancy,” the letter from Mr. Jellie dated March 1 reads.

Laurie A. Marr, director of communications and public affairs for DANC, confirmed Thursday that the development authority received the request from Mr. Jellie and will review it at its March 25 Board of Directors meeting.

“(DANC) works with municipal partners across the region and provides a variety of services if requested,” Mr. Farone said in an email statement Thursday. “The Board of Directors will review this request and determine how it wants to proceed.”

DANC, according to Mr. Jellie, currently provides the city with a host of services, including the management and administration of the wastewater treatment plant and support services for the water treatment plant. Mr. Jellie said it “simply makes sense” for the city to determine if “total services” can be provided by DANC in a more economical manner.

Mr. Jellie also provided Mr. Farone with a three-page statement of work, which, in addition to management and operational support of the treatment plants, asked DANC to support the city with GIS hosting — geographic information system — as well as engineering support and studies.

Next year, the city will begin repaying a \$39 million bond currently in place to finance the upgrades and improvement to its wastewater treatment plant. The city will pay \$1.4 million per year for 30 years, according to Mr. Jellie.

“When added to the existing annual expenses of operating the WWTP, the rates for sewer service could increase significantly on all users,” Mr. Jellie said in an email Wednesday. “Therefore we must explore every opportunity to reduce operating costs.”

In recent weeks, the city has ramped up its efforts to share services with other governmental agencies. In addition to DANC, the city is looking to share a number of services with St. Lawrence County.

Mr. Jellie's multi-pronged shared services plan with St. Lawrence County was met with criticism recently as one prong of the plan called for the consolidation of city police and the county sheriff's office, an idea that drew much backlash.

On Sept. 9, 2019, City Council unanimously voted during its meeting to award a construction contract to Jett Industries Inc. of Colliersville, Otsego County, for the \$35.9 million Wastewater Treatment Plant Capital Improvement Project.

Jett Industries bid \$41.2 million for the project, beating out a \$41.5 million bid from Perras Excavating of Massena and a \$46 million bid from D.A. Collins Construction of Wilton.

In addition, the city may be facing a similar capital improvement project for its water treatment plant that could cost about \$30 million, according to Mr. Jellie.

"DANC continues to build capacity and capability in the areas of water and wastewater management, and they currently serve many north country communities in this regard," Mr. Jellie said. "Ogdensburg looks forward to their continued partnership and the potential to expand it."

[Return to top](#)

Watertown Daily Times: Watertown using state grant to help improve traffic along Public Square

**By CRAIG FOX:
Mar 12, 2021**

WATERTOWN — For years, motorists have complained about how long it takes to get from one end of Public Square to the other, getting stuck at a traffic light seemingly forever and maneuvering through a series of traffic signals.

Well, the city and a traffic expert have been working on a wireless system that would coordinate traffic signals in and around Public Square to get traffic go through the area more efficiently.

Three years ago, the city obtained a \$1 million grant from the state Department of Transportation the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program to reduce vehicular emissions in Public Square.

On Thursday, City Engineer Michael Delaney and Timothy Faulkner, senior transportation manager for Fisher Associates, the consultant designing the system, gave an update of the Public Square Traffic Signal Optimization project to members of Advantage Watertown, a group of community and business leaders who meet monthly to discuss city and downtown issues.

Using software, the wireless system will be connected through antennas that will be placed on top of traffic signals. The system will coordinate with each traffic signal to make vehicles move more smoothly through Public Square, Mr. Faulkner said. New signals also will be installed.

“The goal of the project is to reduce congestion are Public Square,” he said. “We have to prove that it can reduce emissions around Public Square.”

About 12 intersections on Massey, Arsenal, Washington, Franklin, State and Mill streets will be tied into the system. The idea is move traffic more efficiently from east to west, west to east, north to south and south to north as it enters Public Square.

Using an “A” to “F” grading system, a traffic study, conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, gave grades to intersections, with the letter “D” as acceptable. None of intersections received a failing grade, Mr. Faulkner said.

Engineers determined that peak vehicular traffic in Public Square occurs from 11 to 1 p.m., 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m.

During the past 15 to 20 years, the state and city have looked at how to improve traffic get through Public Square. When a total reconstruction of Public Square was completed about a dozen years ago, the goal was to get traffic through the square more quickly.

In recent years, the focus — as the result of the city participating in the Complete Streets philosophy of looking all users of city streets — has been on making the square more safe for pedestrians.

Advantage Watertown board member Joseph Wessner, president of Watertown Downtown Business Association, wanted to know how the traffic system would help that issue, with Mr. Faulkner saying that the coordinated system will help make it safer because traffic signals will be more efficient.

The city has taken some steps to try to prevent pedestrian accidents in front of the Jefferson County Court Complex on Arsenal Street by reducing the number of crosswalks, Mr. Delaney said.

He thinks the wireless system also will help with trouble spots downtown, like an intersection at Arsenal and Arcade streets where the CitiBus transfer station is located.

“We’re moving in the right direction,” he said, stressing the pedestrian safety is a major concern and that some tweaking will happen after it’s implemented.

Board member Brian Ashley asked about the longtime goal of rerouting truck traffic out of the square to make it safer for pedestrians. Board member Geoffrey T. Urda pointed out there’s another study tackling that issue that should be completed by the end of the year.

The consultant will continue to work with city and the DOT on the project's design over the coming months.

Return to top

Auburn Citizen: Auburn council gets update on new minority and women-owned business program

Kelly Rocheleau:
Mar 12, 2021

The Auburn City Council received updates on some of the city's economic development initiatives funded through the Community Development Block Grant program.

The updates were presented at a remote meeting via video conference Thursday, and it was livestreamed on the city's website.

The city has received the block grant funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for decades. One part of Auburn's 2021-22 block grant action plan, which was presented in January, is a new microenterprise grant program. A series of educational sessions are a part of the process. Originally, the plan was for three businesses to receive a \$5,000 grant.

Meg Goloub, business development specialist with the Cayuga Economic Development Agency, said during a presentation on the program Thursday night that the program "targets low to moderate income and also had requirements for minority and women-owned business." A microenterprise has five people or less, including the owner/operator, she said, adding that entrepreneurs and start-ups were focused on for the program.

There were 15 applicants, and six were chosen to participate. Goloub said after the meeting that there were more applicants than expected.

"We received six very viable candidates, and we did not want to neglect any of them to have the opportunity," Goloub said.

Because of that, six participants were accepted instead of three. The payout per applicant is currently unknown, she said, since it depends on how many of the six complete the program. The applicants were informed when they applied that the grant would be up to \$5,000, she added. Currently, \$15,000 has been allocated toward the program.

Goloub said at the presentation the participants have already done a couple of the program's educational sessions. Goloub's presentation on the program, which is available on the city's website, said one of the sessions was on starting a business plan and the other was on business types and tax implications. Upcoming sessions include insurance, risk and fraud, social media and financial literacy. The grants are set to be awarded on April 13, Goloub said.

Jenny Haines, the city's director of planning and development, also gave a recap on the economic development initiatives the city has done through block grant funds.

[Return to top](#)

SI Advance: Latest COVID tally: 7 more deaths; 200+ new cases; 3rd day of decline in hospitalizations

**By Frank Donnelly:
Mar 12, 2021**

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — The coronavirus (COVID-19) is believed to have claimed the lives of seven more borough residents, as 210 more cases of the disease were reported here over the past 24 hours, city Health Department data shows.

At the same time, coronavirus hospitalizations on Staten Island declined for the third day in a row.

As of 1 p.m. Thursday, 1,623 borough residents are believed to have died from complications related to the coronavirus, according to the most recent data available.

The fatalities include 1,417 Staten Islanders with confirmed COVID-19 cases, up seven from Wednesday.

In addition, 206 fatalities were in the “probable” category, which has stayed the same since Friday.

A death is classified as “probable” if the decedent was a city resident who had no known positive laboratory test for the coronavirus, but the death certificate lists “COVID-19” or an equivalent as a cause of death.

According to city Health Department data, the vast majority of confirmed coronavirus deaths in the five boroughs occurred in individuals with underlying medical issues.

Those conditions can include lung disease, asthma, heart disease, a weakened immune system, obesity, diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease and cancer.

Also, as of Thursday afternoon, 50,674 confirmed cases of the disease have been recorded in the borough since the beginning of the pandemic a year ago.

That figure had been 50,464 on Wednesday.

A Health Department source has said all data is preliminary, subject to change and can reflect lags in collection.

Meanwhile, Staten Island’s coronavirus hospitalization count dipped by five.

As of Thursday afternoon, 166 coronavirus patients were being treated in the borough's two hospital systems. There had been 171 patients on Wednesday, 173 on Tuesday, 179 on Monday and 172 on Sunday.

Hospitalizations had most recently peaked over seven weeks ago on Jan. 18, at 302 patients, before dipping to a low of 154 on Feb. 27.

Staten Island University Hospital (SIUH) was treating 130 patients on Thursday, said Christian Preston, a spokesman.

That figure was down four from 24 hours earlier.

Richmond University Medical Center was caring for 36 patients, a drop of one from Wednesday, Alex Lutz, a spokesman, said.

Across the five boroughs, 643,501 confirmed coronavirus cases have been recorded as of Thursday afternoon.

That tally represents a spike of 2,680 from Wednesday's total of 640,821.

Citywide, the suspected coronavirus death count has surpassed 30,000.

The fatalities consist of 25,024 individuals who were confirmed coronavirus cases.

There were 5,044 others whose deaths were deemed as "probable" COVID-19 cases, making a total of 30,068 suspected fatalities.

With respect to testing, the data shows 10,642 of every 100,000 Staten Islanders checked — or over 1 in 10 — have received positive results for the coronavirus, according to 2018 Census data projections and the Health Department’s Thursday afternoon tally.

Staten Island’s infection rate is the highest, per capita, among the five boroughs.

Officials, however, stress that the examinations do not necessarily reflect the full spread of the virus.

The Bronx’s infection rate is second highest.

In that borough, 8,947 residents per 100,000 have tested positive. The Bronx has had 128,128 confirmed cases.

Queens has the third-highest rate of confirmed coronavirus cases in the city with 8,233 residents per 100,000 testing positive. There have been 187,624 cases in that borough, the second-most populous.

Brooklyn, the borough with the largest population, has the fourth-lowest rate of infection per 100,000 residents – 7,251.

However, Brooklyn’s 187,291 cases are the second most among the five boroughs, behind Queens.

Manhattan has the lowest infection rate in the city with 5,510 per 100,000 residents testing positive of those who were examined.

There have been 89,737 positive cases in Manhattan, the data said.

[Return to top](#)

Politico NY: MTA backs off implementing wage freeze for Transport Workers Union

BY DANIELLE MUOIO:
Mar 12, 2021

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority will no longer implement a wage freeze for the local Transport Workers Union, now that it will receive \$6.5 billion from the federal government.

The news, first reported by POLITICO, is a major win for the local union that represents 30,000 workers — the majority of the MTA’s workforce. Union leaders had decried the prospect of future wage freezes, alluding that a work slowdown could be on the horizon if the MTA moved forward with it.

But it’s still unclear whether workers represented by three other local unions can expect the same. The MTA hasn’t completely taken the prospect of wage freezes for other unions off the drawing board, but has promised to resume collective bargaining.

“We are [now] able to implement all previously negotiated general wage increases as scheduled and move ahead with contract negotiations,” MTA Chair Pat Foye said in a statement. “Our hardworking employees have been the heroes moving heroes throughout the pandemic and we will continue to negotiate in good faith with our labor partners to find a path forward that recognizes their dedication and safeguards the MTA’s long-term financial health.”

Details: Under the agreement struck with the MTA, union members represented by TWU Local 100 will get a 2.5 percent wage increase in May. That amount had been agreed to under a previous contract negotiation, but transit leaders had threatened not to move forward with it if the MTA’s fiscal situation did not improve.

The prospect drew recrimination from top union officials. At a February board meeting, TWU President John Samuelsen told MTA officials they were “really engaging in a serious

management error here to expect this workforce is going to keep producing the way it does while you shaft us and withhold a raise.”

“I don’t want to be a sore winner,” Samuelsen said Thursday in a phone interview. “The billions of dollars that come into the MTA is in large part because of the TWU in Washington D.C. and our other partners in organized labor and it really would have been absurd for them to withhold that raise.”

Smaller unions such as ATU 1056, 1179 and 1181 have been pushing for a new contract that would entitle workers to the same wage increase structure as TWU, but the MTA had until recently refused to come to the bargaining table during the height of its fiscal crisis.

“They have the money and have a workforce that performs with exceptional bravery during Covid-19 and they need to settle these contracts and begin with there are some units in the MTA that are two contracts behind now and they need to begin with those,” Samuelsen said of his fellow unions.

Key context: The news suggests the MTA is beginning to emerge from the fiscal catastrophe brought by the pandemic.

With the latest stimulus package, the authority will have received roughly \$14.5 billion from the federal government in direct aid. It also borrowed upwards of \$2.9 billion from the federal reserve. The influx of cash has allowed the MTA to avoid service cuts, layoffs and now wage freezes for many of its employees.

What’s next: Ridership is still a fraction of pre-pandemic levels, with commuter rails seeing the slowest rebound in riders. A projection prepared by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company that shows ridership may still be down as much as 20 percent in 2024.

With such steep declines, MTA officials are considering cutting service to make up the difference. Though the transit agency recently reversed a decision to reduce service on the Long Island Rail Road after it led to overcrowding on trains.

“The thought here is we might need to rightsize our service at some point in time and it’s a question of when do we want to start doing that,” the MTA's CFO Bob Foran said in February.

Return to top

Politico NY: Elizabeth Warren endorses Lander for comptroller

BY JONATHAN CUSTODIO:
Mar 12, 2021

City Council Member Brad Lander won the endorsement of U.S. senator and former presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren in his bid for city comptroller Thursday.

“In the City Council, he’s been an innovative policymaker and a hard worker on behalf of New Yorkers,” Warren said in a prepared statement. “As Comptroller, Brad will help lead a bold recovery to bring New York City out of this crisis stronger and fairer than before.”

Context: The endorsement helps shore up Lander's progressive bona fides and comes two days after Council Speaker Corey Johnson announced his entry into the race.

Serving as the city’s chief financial officer, the city comptroller manages about \$240 billion across the city’s five pension funds and oversees audits of city agencies.

With about \$3.5 million in his campaign war chest, Lander has raised the most money in the race so far, thanks to the city’s 8-to-1 public-matching funds program. However, with about \$600,000 potentially eligible for public-matching funds raised from his defunct mayoral run, Johnson could surpass him in matching distributions this month. Lander has also secured endorsements from the Working Families Party and Reps. Jamaal Bowman and Jerry Nadler.

“I am deeply honored to receive her endorsement for New York City Comptroller,” Lander said. “I will work as hard as I possibly can to live up to her example to take on entrenched

inequality, hold corporations accountable, make government work better, and build a flourishing economy that works for all of us.”

Johnson has notched the support of the influential Hotel Trades Council. Assemblymember David Weprin won the backing of the Queens county party. State Sen. Brian Benjamin won the backing of the Bronx Democratic Party along with Rep. Adriano Espaillat in February. Both he and nonprofit founder Zach Iscol — who also can transfer funds from a defunct mayoral run — have about \$2 million each to spend so far.

What’s next: As the race gains steam, major endorsements from labor unions and political coalitions, several borough Democratic parties, and other top elected officials remain up for grabs. State Sen. Kevin Parker and former CNBC contributor Michelle Caruso-Cabrera, who challenged Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in the 2020 primary, are among the other Democrats vying for the nomination in June.

[Return to top](#)

Politico NY: Mayoral candidates call for reforms to community preference

BY JANAKI CHADHA:
Mar 12, 2021

Multiple mayoral candidates said Thursday night they’d look to reform the city’s longstanding “community preference” policy, which is often blamed for perpetuating racial segregation in housing, even as the current administration fights a lawsuit to preserve it.

Details: The policy reserves half of the apartments deemed affordable in a given development for people already living in the surrounding community district, which opponents argue discourages more mixed neighborhoods.

Mayoral contenders participating in a housing forum hosted by the NYU Furman Center, the New York Housing Conference and Spectrum's NY1, were asked how they would address racial segregation in housing and if they'd change the community preference policy.

Eric Adams, one of the frontrunners in the race, said he would look at eliminating the policy in affluent areas and allow more housing construction in wealthier neighborhoods — something several candidates have said they support (though most have not identified specific neighborhoods).

Kathryn Garcia and Ray McGuire agreed the policy perpetuates segregation, but didn't offer as specific measures to replace it.

“I think the data clearly shows that it is contributing to segregation and therefore really needs to be fundamentally changed,” Garcia said.

Other candidates did not weigh in on the policy directly.

On public housing: Candidates were asked for their position on the latest plan to address problems at the struggling New York City Housing Authority. The proposal entails transferring ownership to a new public benefit corporation, leveraging a steadier stream of federal rental vouchers to finance the housing authority's considerable capital needs.

They gave mixed responses, and the only one to offer clear support was Garcia, who served a brief stint as chair of the authority under Mayor Bill de Blasio. She said relying on the traditional federal funding method has been a losing proposition for decades.

“We have tried going to the federal government since the Carter administration and we’ve always come up empty, that is not a plan that we are likely to see any success in,” Garcia said. Adams agreed, saying, “we better have a plan B.”

Shaun Donovan, who served as President Obama's HUD secretary, as well as housing czar under Mayor Mike Bloomberg, said he too supports elements of the new NYCHA plan as well as committing more city capital dollars.

Others argued the new plan hasn't had enough tenant input and said they would push the federal government to fill more of the agency's \$40 billion capital needs backlog.

"I do not agree with Kathryn on giving up on the federal government, this is federally formed and created housing," said Maya Wiley, citing legislation pushed by members of Congress, including Rep. Nydia Velázquez, who recently endorsed her. "I'm not going to stop fighting for that."

Andrew Yang, who is leading in the polls, at one point knocked Adams, who has been in second place, on a proposal to connect NYCHA residents to attorneys to help understand potential changes at their developments.

"I just believe it's really unfair that we're asking NYCHA residents to navigate the complexities of understanding all of these initiatives," said Adams. "So I immediately will allow them to interview and receive an attorney that they choose, not a city attorney but a private attorney, to help them navigate these complex decisions."

Yang argued instead that tenants should control the NYCHA board.

"There's a massive trust deficit with NYCHA residents, they just don't feel like they're in control of their own environments and the simplest and most straightforward way to remedy that is to make NYCHA residents the majority of the board of NYCHA itself," Yang said. "I totally disagree with Eric, that they need someone to explain it, they know what's right for themselves."

[Return to top](#)

Politico NY: Report: Employees slow to return to Manhattan offices

BY JANAKI CHADHA:
Mar 12, 2021

The vast majority of Manhattan office workers still haven't returned to their desks and less than half are expected to return by September, according to a new survey from the Partnership for New York City.

Details: The business consortium surveyed major employers between February 24 and March 8, finding just 10 percent of office employees had returned as of early March — unchanged from October, when the partnership released a similar survey.

In October, employers said they expected 48 percent of employees to return by July; now, 45 percent are expected to return by September, the survey said. And 56 percent of office employees will continue working remotely at least part-time, employers said. The vast majority of employers also said they expect a decline in business travel.

“The major takeaway is that Covid will definitely change the utilization of office space,” said Kathy Wylde, president and CEO of the Partnership. “Remote work will be routine at least part of the time, and business travel will be substantially reduced, which of course dramatically affects New York City’s travel and tourism sector, hotels, restaurants, that have relied on very lucrative business travel activity.”

“We really thought that office activity would spring back much faster,” she added. “As it seemed we were emerging from the pandemic last June, we thought Labor Day was kind of the target for people coming back.”

Large companies have returned to offices at a slower pace than smaller ones. At companies with fewer than 500 employees, 20 percent have returned to the office. For those with more than 1,000 employees, just 8 percent have returned.

More than half of employees working at real estate firms have returned to the office, far higher than other sectors.

A little less than a quarter of employers said they ultimately plan to require employees work from the office full-time; 66 percent said they would do a mix of in-office and remote work, while 9 percent said they wouldn’t require workers to come back, according to the survey.

What's next: The survey results highlight the fog of uncertainty surrounding the future of Manhattan office space.

"There's a big question mark after fall of 2021," Wylde said.

She said the findings should caution state lawmakers against things like raising personal income taxes on the wealthy.

"Particularly in negotiations of the state budget, legislators cannot take for granted that all these high paid professional jobs are coming back to Manhattan," she said. "People may be working anywhere and ultimately that has an impact on our tax rolls and on the recovery of small business. ...If a critical mass of employees are no longer living and working in the city, there's obviously a threat that their employers will follow."

[Return to top](#)

NYT: In Nevada, Unemployed Workers Wait for Aid That Will Still Not Be Enough

By Jennifer Medina:

Mar 12, 2021

LAS VEGAS — Bobby Hernandez plans to spend his stimulus check on medication to manage his diabetes. Wilma Estrella will use hers to pay the electricity bill. Lizbeth Ramos intends to catch up on the rent, though the money will not be enough to cover all that she owes.

They are hardly alone: No state's work force has been battered as badly by the coronavirus pandemic as Nevada's, and people are especially struggling in Las Vegas, a boom-and-bust city where tourist dollars and lavish tips have given way to shuttered hotels and weed-strewn parking lots.

It is hard to remember the level of optimism and exuberance that prevailed here a year ago, as presidential hopefuls traipsed through the state for the Democratic caucuses. The economy had roared back from the Great Recession, and it could seem that growth was limitless.

Today, the grim desperation is softened only by the hope that vaccinations will bring tourists eager to celebrate and spend. Though most casinos have reopened, they have a small fraction of the tourists they once did. Many restaurants have shuttered their doors for good, and those that are open are at limited capacity.

As a result, a year into the pandemic, Las Vegas has the highest unemployment rate among large cities, with more than 10 percent out of work, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and over the last year the work force in Nevada has lost more income than in any other state.

For many, the only thing that cushioned the blow was the federal stimulus checks. Now more money is on the way: The \$1.9 trillion relief bill that President Biden signed Thursday would direct about \$4 billion to the state. Vice President Kamala Harris plans to visit the city Monday, part of the administration's effort to rally public support for the measure.

But for those scraping to get by, the promise of another stimulus payment has not relieved the anxiety of knowing that, no matter how much it helps, it will almost certainly fall short.

"I feel pretty scared every day, right now, whenever I think about my bills," Ms. Ramos, a 32-year-old waitress, said as she loaded bags from a food pantry into her trunk on a recent afternoon. "Basically every morning I wake up thinking about where my help is going to come from — is it here? Is it the government? I don't really know who is looking out for people like me."

Because the economy relies so heavily on tourism and the service industry, Nevada — and Las Vegas particularly — is one of the most economically vulnerable parts of the country. The coronavirus pushed the state to an economic cliff even more dramatic than the recession did a decade ago.

Last year, the Democratic-controlled Legislature slashed some \$1.2 billion from the state budget, stopping construction projects and cutting funding to the health budget. In April,

Nevada registered unemployment of 29.5 percent, higher than in any state in any month since the Bureau of Labor Statistics started tracking state unemployment rates in 1976. .

The downturn has many Nevadans scrambling to keep up. Roughly one million Nevada residents, some 45 percent of adults in the state, have fallen behind on basic household expenses, according to an analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal research group.

One of them is MaryAnn Bautista, a single mother of five. She said she could still remember the shock she felt a year ago, when managers at the hotel where she worked told her she was being laid off. She could not hold back tears as she finished her shift at the buffet there. When a couple of customers asked if they could help, she could only shake her head.

In the last year, she has received help from her adult children, food banks and a program run by her union to help her cover one month's rent. She receives unemployment as well.

But what Ms. Bautista wants most is the job she held for more than 17 years, which she will lose permanently unless she is called in for a shift in the next week. (Under the union contract, she is entitled to the same job and seniority if she is called back to work within a year — after that, the claim to the job evaporates.)

“I struggle so much, I lie awake in bed calculating what I can pay this time, what can wait a little longer?” she said.

Ms. Bautista is particularly pained by the fact that her teenage daughter has begun working as much as 40 hours a week at a local amusement park to try to help pay the bills. “There’s no way out of this until I have a job,” she said. “That’s what I think every time I break down.”

Even as infection rates decline, there are signs that the economy could sour again — nearly 100,000 fewer residents in the state had jobs last month compared to February of last year. Employment is even worse for low-wage workers, dropping some 23 percent among residents

who earn less than \$27,000 a year, according to the Center for American Progress. Claims for unemployment insurance are more than triple what they were in 2019, the study found.

And it is unclear whether the glittery city will ever return to its prepandemic heyday. After the longtime casino magnate Sheldon Adelson died in January, his company sold off both of its Las Vegas properties, saying it would concentrate on its businesses in Asia.

“We’re in a world of hurt here in terms of Las Vegas,” Rob Goldstein, the president and chief executive of the company, Las Vegas Sands, said in July. “I’ve never felt more gloomy than I do today about what’s happening in Las Vegas.”

A little more than a year ago, the ballroom at the Culinary Academy of Las Vegas played host to presidential candidates, there to talk with leaders from the most powerful labor union in the state and one of the most politically powerful in the country. Today, the ballroom is covered with onion skins and dried beans, as dozens of workers pack boxes brimming with food for out-of-work union members. Roughly half of all members are still without a job — an improvement from last spring, when more than 90 percent of them did not have work.

“We never ever have had something like this before,” said Geoconda Argüello-Kline, the head of the union, Culinary Workers Local 226. “We have more need than ever and we have to realize this is an emergency. The Democrats always say they are for working people, so we elect them, and now we expect them to find more ways to help in this crisis.”

Late last year, Guadalupe Rodriguez left the home she had rented for more than a decade and moved into a ranch-style home with one of her co-workers from the Strat hotel. Both were laid off last March. Along with another roommate, they are cobbling together enough money to pay the mortgage and household bills. But she finds it hard not to grow angry at the government.

“I have not asked for much my entire life, but now we need the help,” Ms. Rodriguez said.

She could not receive any of the stimulus money last year, she said, because she was married at the time to an undocumented immigrant. This time around, she will receive a check, but in her mind it has been spent before it even arrives. “It feels like they do these things, they get attention, but the money won’t stay,” she said. “We will be hurting again tomorrow.”

The short bursts of cash from stimulus checks create a cyclical living experience, as the relief of being able to make some payments or buy food gives way to the anxiety of bills to come.

“Stimulus money shortens the line for food from a food pantry and when it evaporates, the lines get longer again,” said Larry Scott, the chief operating officer for Three Square Food Bank, the largest in Southern Nevada. “We’re going to have a protracted, long, long recovery here. What the politicians should be concentrating on is more than a short-term solution. Rather than a lot of money at a short time, we should have more money over a longer period of time.”

The pain is also disproportionately hurting those who can least afford it, sending families who were already teetering close to poverty to the streets; families living in tents now inhabit the freeway underpasses throughout the region.

Ms. Bautista, the single mother of five, knows she is one of the lucky ones. She signed up for and received unemployment checks within weeks, while some of her former co-workers were caught up in the system for months.

Typically, she has just enough to cover the roughly \$2,000 she has to pay for rent, car insurance and medical bills. She has managed to send a few checks to her mother in the Philippines, as she has done for the last two decades.

“I came here to work, and I devoted my life to this community,” she said, as tears streaked her cheeks. “This is our life that we have, and we cannot always rely on handouts.”

Ms. Bautista said she would spend her stimulus money stocking up on food and helping her children out with their bills. “We appreciate the help,” she said of the government aid. “Don’t get me wrong. We do appreciate that, but we cannot rely on it. We want job assurance.”

“If I have my job, I’m not going to be scared, because I know I can deal with all of this,” she added. “I’m going to have money to pay for my bills.”

Return to top

NYT: The Fight Is On to Define the Pandemic Aid Bill

By Carl Hulse:
Mar 12, 2021

WASHINGTON — Congressional Republicans and Democrats finally agree on something: The pandemic rescue bill President Biden signed into law on Thursday is the largest expansion of government support programs in more than 50 years. Where they differ is on whether that is good or bad.

Trying to undermine the widely popular \$1.9 trillion legislation, Republicans are denouncing the bill as “the most progressive domestic legislation in a generation.” They call it a spending spree that amounts to “a massive expansion of the entitlement system,” funds a longstanding “list of liberal priorities” and was muscled through on a party-line vote by Democrats unwilling to lower its price tag in drawn-out negotiations with Republicans. Democrats proudly own every word of that description.

“If you are a Democrat charged with that, you’d better prove yourself guilty,” said Senator Bob Casey, Democrat of Pennsylvania.

The question for Republicans is whether they can get away with excoriating a bill that will deliver tangible benefits in the form of cash, tax credits, help paying child care and health care expenses, and much more to millions of Americans who have struggled for a full year with financial devastation and uncertainty.

Democrats say that Republicans will have a very hard time doing so, if they even try. Democrats are unreservedly embracing the scope and cost of the plan they call transformative, bolstered by polls that show it is supported by a substantial majority of Americans, including Republican voters.

“I hope they all go home and tell those people they represent: ‘You really don’t need that \$1,400. You haven’t suffered because of this pandemic. You haven’t had to care for a relative, a child who’s not been able to go to school,’” said Representative John Yarmuth, Democrat of Kentucky and the chairman of the Budget Committee. He predicted that Republicans would eventually “show up at every ribbon cutting, for every project that’s funded out of this bill, and they’re going to pump up their chest and take credit for all of these great benefits that are coming to their citizens.”

“Vote no and take the dough,” Speaker Nancy Pelosi cracked.

Republicans said that was not their plan, particularly after Senator Roger Wicker, Republican of Mississippi, was ridiculed this week for denouncing and voting against the bill, only to take to Twitter once it passed and applaud the inclusion of \$28 billion for restaurateurs. That was just a few days after he had criticized the bill as packed with “unnecessary spending that will overheat the economy at a time when infections are dropping nationwide.”

Republicans are aware their comments on the measure will be watched carefully for evidence of hypocrisy. Party officials said they doubted others would follow Mr. Wicker’s lead — though it is a time-honored congressional tradition to try to win accolades for federal spending the public likes while complaining about the overall cost.

Privately, some top Republicans said they believed their pushback against the bill had been weak and too heavily focused on process, allowing Democrats to gain the upper hand with their celebration of the extensive help they are providing.

With the congressional debate done, the rush is now on by both parties to define the bill that is likely to be a main point of contention in next year’s midterm elections, as Democrats seek to retain their thin majorities in the House and the Senate against a Republican onslaught.

Hours after Mr. Biden signed the bill on Thursday, Ms. Pelosi issued a news release titled “Republican Lawmakers May Not Want to Check Their Local News,” packed with headlines from Republican congressional districts around the country hailing the measure’s passage and its benefits for each community.

The Republicans’ approach is to label the measure wasteful, unnecessary and packed with goodies for political allies of the Democrats. They argue that it is aimed at providing bailouts for fiscally strapped states and cities run by Democrats, paid for with taxes from their own red-state constituents, although the measure makes funding available to all states.

“My hardworking Iowans shouldn’t be paying to balance the budgets of states that have not been able to manage theirs, when Iowa does a tremendous job of taking care of our finances,” said Senator Joni Ernst, Republican of Iowa.

Republicans are also trying to grab credit of their own for any economic rebound that may materialize, arguing that it was their party’s earlier efforts when they controlled the Senate and the White House that have delivered vaccines, brought the economy to the brink of a comeback and gotten the pandemic under control.

“We’re on our way out of this,” Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the minority leader, declared on Wednesday. “We are about to have a boom. And if we do have a boom, it will have absolutely nothing to do with this \$1.9 trillion.”

Other Republicans say they are convinced that once they finish airing out elements of the bill they intend to paint in the worst possible light — prepare to hear plenty about benefits for those in prison and undocumented immigrants — the public will turn against both the package and the party that delivered it.

“There is a race for branding,” said Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, the top Republican on the Budget Committee. “There are some policy choices in that bill unrelated to Covid that I think are going to be problematic for our Democratic colleagues in the states that matter.”

He and other Republicans freely concede that certain parts of the measure, including the \$1,400 in payments to millions of Americans to help with their costs from the pandemic, will be warmly received, providing a kind of “sugar high,” in the colorful words of Mr. Graham.

“I mean it’s certainly good politics to say, ‘Hey, we are going to hand you a check for \$1,400,’” said Representative Tom Rice, Republican of South Carolina, who led the floor debate for his party as the House gave the measure final approval on Wednesday and offered the sweeping description of the bill that Democrats happily embrace. “What they don’t talk about is what this bill costs.”

With Donald J. Trump gone from the White House and Democrats now in charge of the House and the Senate, Republicans have resurrected their warnings about soaring federal deficits and the debt being piled on future generations while also sounding the alarm about inflation.

“You are going to see gas prices going up, interest rates going up, mortgage rates going up, car loans going up, prices at the grocery store going up,” said Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming, the chamber’s No. 3 Republican. “People are going to be bothered.”

Democrats argue that Republicans sound a little desperate in their efforts to stoke public opinion against the measure. Republicans succeeded in the 2010 midterm elections by accusing Democrats of wasteful spending through a stimulus and Wall Street bailout after an economic crisis. But Democrats believe those complaints have less salience today, particularly since the pandemic is more on the order of a natural disaster, not a crisis created by profit-seeking bankers.

They contend that the public appreciates and supports what they are doing, and is willing to spend what it takes to put down the pandemic and return life to the normal that Americans crave. Republicans will regret their stance, they say.

“This bill is historic in magnitude, and so is the disconnect between Republicans and reality — both the political reality and the economic background,” said Senator Richard Blumenthal,

Democrat of Connecticut. “‘It is too big; it is too much.’ That’s their story and they are sticking to it. But people know that it is better to overshoot when you are in this kind of thing.”

“The more people learn,” he added, “the more they like.”

Return to top

NYT: Which Families Will Receive the Most Money From the Stimulus Bill?

By Alicia Parlapiano and Josh Katz:
Mar 12, 2021

The Covid-19 relief legislation signed by President Biden on Thursday includes a larger increase in direct aid to families than in any other pandemic relief bills passed so far — an average of \$6,660 for households with children, according to an analysis by the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center.

For 500,000 poor families with two or more children, roughly \$10,000 in aid will more than double their annual income. By some estimates, the bill could cut child poverty in half this year.

The bill accomplishes this in primarily two ways: a significant increase in stimulus payments per child, and a larger child tax credit that will benefit the lowest-income families in particular.

The coming stimulus checks are larger for adults than in the first two rounds — \$1,400 per adult, compared with \$1,200 per adult in a bill passed in March 2020 and \$600 per adult in December. The same income thresholds apply for receiving the full amount: \$75,000 for singles, \$112,500 for heads of households and \$150,000 for married couples, though the check amounts phase out much faster for earners above those levels.

The biggest increase is for children and other dependents. In the first two rounds, taxpayers received \$500 and then \$600 for each dependent child. This round includes \$1,400 for each dependent child and adult dependent, which includes college students.

And unlike in previous rounds of stimulus, the child tax credit has been increased. It is now worth \$3,600 per child under 5 and \$3,000 per older child, from \$2,000 per child. Low-income families will benefit the most, because they will now be eligible for the full amount, even if their tax liability is very low.

Previously, parents could deduct the \$2,000-per-child credit from their tax liability. If they did not pay that much in taxes, they could be eligible to receive up to \$1,400 as a refundable credit. Now, all parents will receive the full amount, with half of the value of the credit issued in advance beginning in July.

Income thresholds for the full child tax credit are the same as for the stimulus payments. The credits fully phase out for unmarried taxpayers earning \$240,000 or more, and for married couples earning \$440,000.

Return to top

NYT: Need Health Insurance? A Guide to New Options Under the Stimulus.

By Margot Sanger-Katz:
Mar 12, 2021

The stimulus package signed by President Biden on Thursday provides new options for Americans who need health insurance — and new resources to help lower costs for those who are already insured.

Few of these changes apply to Americans who get insurance at work or through Medicare. But if you buy your own insurance, have been uninsured, or have recently lost job-based coverage because of a layoff, the bill introduces new programs and new funding to help you get and stay covered. The new programs are temporary — none last longer than two years.

The array of programs can be complicated and tough to navigate, and some will take a little time to update. Here is some guidance.

I need insurance, and I am collecting unemployment insurance benefits.

The stimulus bill provides substantial, short-term subsidies to buy coverage on the Obamacare marketplaces. Regardless of your income, if you collect unemployment insurance at any time this year, you will qualify for a free silver plan with special bonus coverage that will lower your deductible and co-payments.

It may take a little time for Healthcare.gov or your state exchange website to update. But if you sign up for a silver plan now, you will be able to get these benefits for the rest of the year. You may need to pay a higher premium at first while the system is adjusting, but you will eventually be eligible for a refund.

If you used to get insurance at work, you may also qualify for up to six months of free COBRA coverage, meaning you have a choice about which kind of free insurance you want.

I just lost my job-based coverage, but I'd really like to keep it.

Under federal law, you can stay enrolled in your workplace coverage for up to 18 months after losing your job-based insurance. Normally, you would need to pay the full price of this insurance, which can be expensive. But under the new stimulus bill, you can qualify for up to six months of free COBRA coverage, if you lost your coverage in the last year. You can also qualify for the free COBRA if you still have your job but your hours have been cut and you lost your insurance as a result.

After Sept. 30, though, you will need to pay to keep the COBRA plan, or you will need to switch to a different option.

I currently buy Obamacare insurance.

The legislation introduces additional subsidies meant to lower the amount most people pay for insurance purchased on Affordable Care Act marketplaces. These extra subsidies will be retroactive to Jan. 1. The details of how you will get this new discount are still unclear: Your premium amount may reset automatically to a lower price, or you may need to go back to Healthcare.gov or your state marketplace to request the discount once the new system is set up. In the District of Columbia, one of the first places to announce a policy, prices will adjust

automatically in April. Regardless, once those policies are completed, there will be a way to get a refund for any overpayments you make.

To get an approximate sense of how much your premiums will decrease, these maps may be helpful. To know your new premium more precisely, try the Kaiser Family Foundation's online calculator, available [here](#).

The stimulus package funds these extra subsidies for two years. Any extension after 2022 will require new legislation.

If you already have Obamacare coverage, but you have received unemployment insurance any time this year, you now qualify for additional assistance. You should go back to the marketplace to make sure you are signed up for that extra benefit once it is set up.

I didn't buy health insurance this year, but I want coverage now.

Normally, you can buy insurance only during a six-week period each fall. But the Biden administration established a special enrollment period that runs through mid-May, and most state marketplaces have done the same. This means you can go to [Healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov) and sign up for insurance now.

Because of the stimulus bill, the tax credits that help you buy insurance will be higher than ever before — enough to pay for a free silver plan for someone with an annual income of around \$19,000, or to lower premiums by as much as \$1,000 a month for someone earning around \$60,000 in an expensive market. If you go to [Healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov) today, you won't see those new prices, but you will still qualify. If you want coverage right away, you will eventually qualify for a refund if you pay too much at first.

The changes in premiums affect nearly everyone, but are particularly valuable for two groups. If you have a low income, subsidies will cover enough to give you a free silver plan with extra benefits that lower your co-payments and deductibles. And if you earn more than 400 percent of the federal poverty level — about \$51,000 for a single person or \$105,000 for a family of four — for the first time you will qualify for help buying insurance.

These changes were devised to make insurance more affordable for people who have found premiums out of reach. To get a sense of what you will need to pay, the Kaiser calculator may be helpful while the government sites update.

I need insurance, but my income is very low.

In most — but not all — states, simply having a low income can qualify you for Medicaid coverage. Medicaid generally charges no premiums and has very low co-payments for doctor visits or prescriptions. In the states shown below, you can qualify by having an income that is lower than around \$1,400 monthly for a single person or \$2,950 for a family of four.

Missouri and Oklahoma are in the process of expanding Medicaid, so people there may also become eligible later this year. The stimulus bill provides a financial incentive for other states to expand their programs, too. So far, it is unclear whether any of them will take advantage of the offer.

In the states that haven't expanded, you may also qualify for Medicaid if you are poor and fall into some other category, such as being the parent of a young child. If you think you could qualify for Medicaid, it is worth applying to find out.

Eligibility for Medicaid will endure even after stimulus provisions expire.

I bought a short-term plan, a health-sharing ministry plan, or my own insurance outside of Healthcare.gov.

The changes under the stimulus bill make it worth considering a switch in insurance type.

Many Americans with higher incomes bought their insurance outside the state marketplaces because they didn't qualify for subsidies. The new legislation changes that: Higher-income people can now get financial help buying insurance, but only if they sign up for a marketplace plan.

Obamacare plans cover a broader array of benefits than short-term plans or health-sharing ministries do, and they can't deny your claims based on a pre-existing condition.

Whether switching is a good decision for you depends on how much you'll save in premiums and how much you've already paid in deductibles. But switching will pay off for enough people that "they should absolutely come in and just see what the prices are," said Sabrina Corlette, a co-director at the Center on Health Insurance Reforms at Georgetown University. Ms. Corlette notes that this is especially true for older people; new subsidies could cut their cost of insurance by more than half.

[Return to top](#)

NYT: 'Fraught With Issues': Faulty Software Snarls Vaccine Sign-Ups

**By Kellen Browning:
Mar 12, 2021**

When coronavirus vaccines first became available, state health officials in Virginia turned to software recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to schedule appointments. But people complained that the software, called VAMS, was too confusing for older adults to use.

So the state switched to another system, PrepMod — but that had problems, too. Links sent to seniors for their appointments were reusable and found their way to Facebook, leading to one vaccination event in Richmond with dozens of overbookings. Some of those people threatened health care workers when they were turned away.

"It was a nightmare scenario," said Ruth Morrison, the policy director for the Richmond and Henrico County health district. "People showing up confused, irate, thinking they had an appointment."

State and local health departments around the country continue to face delays dispensing shots, in part because flaws remain in the appointment software tools like those used in Richmond. The problems threaten to slow the vaccine rollout even as supplies and distribution are picking up quickly across the country.

Large software systems have often been problematic for companies and governments. HealthCare.gov, a site released after the Affordable Care Act, crashed early on. But the issues with the vaccine sites have an added sense of urgency because health officials are trying to vaccinate as many people as possible, as fast as possible.

On Thursday, President Biden said that his administration would send out technical teams to help states improve their websites. He also said the federal government would open a website by May 1 that would allow Americans to find out where the vaccine is available.

Many state officials have switched software providers, only to see little or no improvement. In California, tech mishaps have allowed ineligible people to snatch up appointments. Massachusetts residents have been stymied by crashing websites. Some North Carolina residents are eschewing online sign-ups entirely, instead engaging in a vaccine free-for-all.

PrepMod is being used by 28 states and localities, after many states shunned the \$44 million VAMS tool built by Deloitte. Salesforce and Microsoft have developed vaccine software, too, with their customers being similarly frustrated. Smaller tech companies have pitched their own scheduling tools as well.

“It’s like a patchwork quilt,” said Ms. Morrison, who decided after the failed PrepMod trial that her county would try something else. “Some of these systems have strengths, but they all have weaknesses, too.”

Other health officials have defended the appointment systems, and the developers behind the software said the complaints about their products were overblown.

Tiffany Tate, PrepMod’s creator and the executive director of the Maryland Partnership for Prevention, said criticisms of her system largely stemmed from health providers’ lack of knowledge about how to use it, or from the constantly shifting needs of states.

“The pandemic’s evolving, and we’ve got to be able to keep up with it,” she said. “We just have to be a very flexible platform.”

Deloitte, whose software is used by nine states, said VAMS was originally intended for smaller groups at early stages of states’ vaccine rollouts, so the company was “responding quickly to meet their changing needs” and was updating the system to handle a greater load.

Health experts say multiple factors complicated the software rollout. In some cases, developers condensed work that would normally take years into weeks, leading to glitches. In addition, the varied approaches to determining eligibility in the dozens of localities using the software have made it difficult to develop a one-size-fits-all approach.

Some states use more than half a dozen appointment scheduling systems, from tools used by federal, state and local agencies to the software employed by private hospitals and pharmacies to rudimentary solutions like SignUpGenius. Some sites do not support appointment scheduling at all, but allow people to browse databases to find available vaccines or get on wait lists. Often, the systems cannot communicate with one another.

“You’re basically building and testing data systems on the fly as millions of people are trying to find vaccines,” said Claire Hannan, the executive director of the Association of Immunization Managers, which advocates for state health departments.

Microsoft, which has sold vaccine software to several states and Washington, D.C., has frustrated New Jersey with its system, and in late February, after days of website crashes in the nation’s capital, the company admitted it had “fallen short.”

Microsoft said in a statement that it was “focused on helping governments manage their Covid-19 vaccination programs as quickly, safely and efficiently as possible.”

PrepMod’s woes have led to delays in vaccine rollouts in places like Washington State and Pennsylvania. When the vaccine appointment website in Massachusetts went down for several hours after a surge in demand, PrepMod took responsibility and apologized.

Andrew Therriault, a Boston data scientist, said he was “astounded” by the extent of PrepMod’s shortcomings. One problem he found was that the system did not reserve an appointment slot as people filled out their information, so they could be booted out at any time if someone else beat them to that particular slot.

“I try to imagine somebody doing this who’s not so tech savvy — that basically means they have no opportunity to compete,” Mr. Therriault said.

Some of the sign-up software has also caused major headaches by not allowing for unique registration links that expire after a single use.

The reusable links have stymied vaccination efforts in places like California, where health departments are using both PrepMod and a Salesforce-powered system, MyTurn.

In some cases, health officials aiming to reach Black and Latino communities that had low vaccination rates issued MyTurn appointment codes to those groups that ended up being shared widely, including among more affluent, white communities. Because the codes did not expire after a single use, those people were able to use them to get vaccinated before it was their turn.

Ms. Tate of PrepMod said health care workers and others who were improperly sharing the links were at fault.

“That’s not a problem with our system. That’s a problem with people who should be responsible,” she said. The company, she said, has added an option for unique links.

Salesforce declined to comment, but Darrel Ng, a California health department spokesman, said MyTurn had also added unique links.

UC San Diego Health, which is operating a drive-through mass vaccination site, is using its existing software rather than MyTurn because the two systems are incompatible, said Dr. Christopher Longhurst, UC San Diego Health's chief information officer. Otherwise, those arriving for a second dose scheduled in the hospital system would have to be separated from people scheduled in MyTurn, he said.

"We would have to run out all of our second doses in some lanes while using new software in other lanes," he said. It "would be incredibly inefficient."

This week, the MyTurn system offered more appointments than it was supposed to at a vaccination site in San Diego run by Scripps Health, forcing the site to close for several days because it ran out of doses.

"The MyTurn system is fraught with issues," Dr. Ghazala Sharieff, Scripps's chief medical officer, said. "These challenges are adding another layer of unnecessary stress to our team."

Health officials said the reliance on outside companies' imperfect tools underscored the need to invest in technology for public health departments, many of which still use paper and fax machines to keep records.

State registries that keep track of residents' vaccination histories — known as immunization information systems — could have been adapted to schedule appointments, said Mary Beth Kurilo, a senior director at the American Immunization Registry Association. But the federal government never asked them to, she said, and they would have needed more money and time to prepare.

Some regions have elected to avoid technology entirely.

In Johnston County, N.C., southeast of Raleigh, the Health Department decided it would have been too much of a strain on the staff to manage appointments online, so shots are first come first served.

The policy has been efficient, said Lu Hickey, the Health Department's spokeswoman, but it means the county — which also does not require in-person identification — does not know whether people are being vaccinated in the proper order and has to rely on the honor system.

In Richmond, Ms. Morrison said officials were searching for solutions and even thinking about trying VAMS again.

“We’re cobbling it together at the local level through a lot of manual effort and workarounds we’ve put in place to put Band-Aids on,” she said.

Return to top

NYT: Covid-19 Live Updates: U.S. Keeps Vaccine Stockpile as Other Countries Struggle

**The New York Times:
Mar 12, 2021**

A stockpile of vaccine sits idle in the U.S., and Europe asked to tap into it.

The AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine has been authorized for use in more than 70 countries, but the United States is not yet one of them. And as American officials wait for results from the company's U.S. trial and then emergency clearance, tens of millions of doses sit idly in American manufacturing facilities — even as other countries beg for access.

The doses' fate is the subject of an intense debate among White House and federal health officials, with some arguing that the administration should let them go abroad where they are desperately needed, while others are not ready to relinquish them.

AstraZeneca, a British-Swedish company, is involved in those conversations.

In a speech to the nation on Thursday, President Biden said the government had made major gains in securing vaccines for the United States. By the end of May, he said, there will be enough for all adults in the country, and by May 1 every adult will be eligible for one.

But other countries are grappling with serious supply issues, and a shortfall in the supply of the AstraZeneca vaccine has fueled tensions with European officials.

AstraZeneca has asked the Biden administration to let it send the American doses to the European Union. The administration, for now, has denied the request, one official said.

The company's Covid-19 vaccine has meanwhile hit some headwinds this week after health authorities in three European countries suspended its use because of concerns that it might increase the risk of blood clots. The countries — Denmark, Iceland and Norway — emphasized that they were taking action as a precaution and that there was no evidence of any causal link.

Denmark acted after a 60-year-old woman who received a shot died after developing a blood clot. Several other European countries had stopped using doses from the same vaccine batch after some reports of severe blood clots, and European drug regulators are investigating.

Public health experts expect medical conditions to turn up by chance in some people after receiving any vaccine. In the vast majority of cases, such illnesses have nothing to do with the shots. Most other countries where the AstraZeneca vaccine has been given to many millions of people have not reported similar red flags.

The Biden administration's hesitation in letting go of the vaccine doses is at least partly related to uncertainties with supply before a benchmark of late May laid down by the president. Vaccine production is notoriously complex and delicate, and problems like mold growth can interrupt a plant's progress.

The administration's moves to order more supply of the three vaccines authorized by the F.D.A. has further sidelined AstraZeneca's candidate. The United States may only briefly, or never, need the AstraZeneca doses.

— Noah Weiland and Rebecca Robbins

In Hungary, a Chinese vaccine maker charges twice what Pfizer does in the E.U.

Hungary has agreed to pay about \$36 a dose for Covid-19 vaccines made by Sinopharm, a Chinese state-owned vaccine maker, according to contracts made public by a senior Hungarian official on Thursday. That appears to make the Sinopharm shot among the most expensive in the world.

Hungary has agreed to buy five million doses of the Sinopharm vaccine, priced at 30 euros (\$36) each, according to contracts that Prime Minister Viktor Orban's chief of staff, Gergely Gulyas, uploaded to his Facebook page. That price far surpasses what the European Union has agreed to pay for vaccines from Western manufacturers.

The European Union has said it would pay €15.50 per dose for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, according to Reuters, which cited an internal E.U. document. For AstraZeneca, it agreed to pay \$2.15 per dose, according to Belgium's budget secretary.

The contracts that Mr. Gulyas published also show that Hungary, which has recorded nearly half a million cases and more than 16,000 deaths, has agreed to pay \$9.95 per dose for the Russian Sputnik-V vaccine.

Hungary was one of the few European countries that signed a deal with Sinopharm, which promoted itself to developing countries at a time when many richer nations were hoarding doses by Western drugmakers like Pfizer and Moderna. A major selling point was Sinopharm's immense manufacturing capacity; it has said it can make up to three billion doses by the end of this year.

The Sinopharm price is extraordinary in part because the company, unlike the Western vaccine makers, has not published detailed data from Phase 3 trials.

Sinopharm is mass-producing two vaccines. It says that the first, made in conjunction with the Beijing Institute of Biological Products, has an efficacy rate of 79 percent, and that the second, made with the Wuhan Institute of Biological Products, is 72.5 percent effective.

Adam Liptak contributed reporting.

— Sui-Lee Wee

‘This vaccine means hope’: Former U.S. presidents join together for an ad campaign.

Four former U.S. presidents and their first ladies appear in a new public service campaign with one single plea to Americans: Get vaccinated.

The ads feature former Presidents Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, getting vaccine jabs. Their wives — Rosalynn Carter, Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush and Michelle Obama — also appear.

The ads urge all Americans to get their shots when the opportunity arrives.

“This vaccine means hope,” Mr. Obama says. “It will protect you and those you love from this dangerous and deadly disease.”

“In order to get rid of this pandemic it’s important for our fellow citizens to get vaccinated,” says Mr. Bush.

They spoke of the longing so many feel to get back to normal.

“I want to be able to go back to work and to move around,” says Mr. Clinton.

“To visit with Michelle’s mom,” says Mr. Obama. “To hug her, and see her on her birthday.”

Mr. Bush says he is “really looking forward to going to opening day in Texas Ranger Stadium with a full stadium.”

Mr. Carter says, “I’m getting vaccinated because we want this pandemic to end as soon as possible.”

The only ex-presidential couple not in the ad campaign is Donald and Melania Trump.

Mr. and Mrs. Trump quietly received their vaccines in January before leaving the White House. Later that month, Mr. Trump appeared at the CPAC political conference in Orlando, Fla., where he encouraged people to go get vaccinated.

Mr. Trump’s private approach came as a number of his supporters have expressed resistance to the vaccine. Many other prominent figures have tried setting an example by getting the shot in public.

The two ads are part of a broad promotional effort to combat Covid-19 vaccine skepticism that launched in February, backed by the nonprofit advertising group Ad Council and a coalition of experts known as the Covid Collaborative. Public service announcements will appear in English and Spanish on television, social media and other platforms.

More than 300 companies, community groups and public figures contributed to the \$52 million push, as did the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“We urge you to get vaccinated when it’s available to you,” says Mr. Obama.

“So roll up your sleeve and do your part,” says Mr. Bush.

“This is our shot,” says Mr. Clinton.

“Now it’s up to you,” concludes Mr. Carter.

— Remy Tumin

[Return to top](#)

NYT: Vaccines Are Here. So Is Reckless Behavior.

By Ginia Bellafante:
Mar 12, 2021

One year ago this week, we began to go to war with our hands. We were told to keep them away from our faces — keep them from people and banisters and elevator buttons and other destinations toward which they were naturally inclined. When they failed to obey, they were scrubbed and sanitized to the bone.

For all the uncertainty and terror that greeted the arrival of the coronavirus, there was a certain clarity to the early protocols. If you were lucky enough, you stayed home; you worked and cooked and worked and cooked and spent hours online looking for disinfectant wipes that didn’t cost as much as a dishwasher.

After so much tragedy, we now find ourselves mercifully closer to the point of normalcy. By the end of this week, more than 2.4 million doses of the Covid vaccines will have been administered in New York City, once the global epicenter of the pandemic. On March 19, restaurants in the city will be allowed to increase their indoor dining capacity to 50 percent while Connecticut is opening up restaurants in full.

People are making plans — for visiting friends they haven't seen in a year or longer, for dinners of 10 or 15 or 20, for camp and travel. Recently a local physician sent a vaccinated patient home with a written prescription that read: "You are allowed to hug your granddaughter."

There are so many reasons to feel hopeful and yet so many reasons to still hold firmly to anxiety. This period in the aftermath of lockdown and before a complete reversion to ordinary routines is rife with its own confusion and conflicts. "It is clear from walking around the city that people are giving in and relaxing rules, probably because of progression in vaccinations and because people are experiencing extreme fatigue," Emanuela Taioli, the director of Translational Epidemiology at Mount Sinai, told me.

"The reality is that the positivity rates in the city are not going down. They are at a plateau and staying there. This has been true for the last two weeks. This means that we have to keep going with the precautions until we are all vaccinated and that may take another couple of months or more."

Who wants to hear this? Probably no one. And yet it is crucial we stand to attention given how confounding some public-health messaging can be. This week, for example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that fully vaccinated people could gather with other fully vaccinated people indoors, without masks or distancing. What seems, on the face of it, like good news fills some retail workers with a sense of dread, because it signals a new, looser world, where enforcing masks in public spaces will prove only more challenging.

The current contradictions have especially troubled Nasim Almontaser, a student at Brooklyn College who works 25 hours a week at a bodega his Yemini immigrant family owns in the Brighton Beach section of Brooklyn. Early on customers generally wore masks; then the rigor faded, he told me. At some point, people began throwing groceries on the floor when they were told to cover up. Once a guy smashed a beer bottle on the counter in protest. Now Mr.

Almuntaser is left pushing back against people who feel perfectly entitled to shop without masks.

“I get older people and younger people who tell me ‘I’m vaccinated,’ but I don’t know if they really are. The city needs to come up with a way to differentiate who has really been vaccinated and who hasn’t,” he said. “People are taking away that now you don’t have to mask. Now they’re going to say, ‘Well, the C.D.C. said I could do it this way.’” The problem of course, beyond the prospect of outright lying, is that there is still a risk of transmitting the virus after vaccination.

In Texas, where Gov. Greg Abbott recently lifted a mask mandate, a bar called Shenanigans and Confetti’s Beach Club, in the town of Huntsville, advertised a “Masks Off” party for this past Tuesday night with “100 percent capacity.” After pushback, the owners announced that they would allow only 75 percent capacity for the next several weeks, despite the fact that the governor had reopened the state as if the pandemic were now part of a long-ago history.

In regard to the vaccination itself, the public-health community has not made tremendous progress persuading those who are resisting it that inoculation is actually safe. Even at the purely logistical level, the flow of information continues to fall short. A survey Dr. Taioli recently conducted of 3,700 patients who survived Covid last year revealed that some believe you need a prescription to get a vaccine. The vaccine, she maintains, needs to be brought directly into communities where skepticism is prevalent — to libraries and other places where common social interactions take place. “It’s intimidating to go to the Javits Center, frankly,” Dr. Taioli said. “It’s all with good intention, but the National Guard is there.”

At a news briefing on Wednesday, Mayor Bill de Blasio said that the biggest barrier to getting more people vaccinated is supply. The city needs 150,000 to 200,000 more doses per week than it is getting via manufacturers and the federal government. Just one day earlier, the journal Science reported that the United States, by contracting with multiple pharmaceutical companies, out of precaution, essentially overordered. Given that they all seem to offer effective protection, it is estimated that the country will have 200 million excess doses by July. This whiplash notion of scarcity and abundance has led many people to rationalize going ahead and getting the vaccine even if they don’t technically meet eligibility requirements. Either as a matter of carelessness or design, the system operates with little effort to confirm qualifying health conditions.

While it may seem morally reprehensible to the average rules-abiding person that a wealthy Brooklynite will travel to a poorer neighborhood to get vaccinated — claiming asthma or A.D.H.D. as a developmental disability, for example — epidemiologists turn out to be not in the castigation business when it comes to immunization. The point is to get as many people jabbed as possible. Line cutting is hardly something to be celebrated. But as Dr. Taioli put it, “Vaccination reluctance is worse.”

There is a quiet etiquette emerging now that involves holding your tongue when you come upon a young friend or colleague posting her vaccination shot on Instagram even though she would seem to fit no criteria for eligibility. You don’t ask her how she got it; you just keep scrolling.

How will we look at this precarious time a year from now? How will we regard the choices we make to jump-start regular life or to wait our turn to hit the piñata? Will we judge or stay quiet? It will depend on the outcome, the worst one being that the powerful go on living just the way they always have, and the vulnerable become even more so.

[Return to top](#)

NYT: How the Pandemic Has Changed Your Taxes

**By Tara Siegel Bernard and Ron Lieber:
Mar 12, 2021**

The pandemic year of 2020 was a doozy. Besides affecting the health, jobs, home lives and psyches of millions of Americans, the pandemic may also have consequences for your tax bill.

Three giant legislative packages extended different types of coronavirus-related relief, including two rounds of stimulus checks, expanded unemployment benefits and a series of tax breaks. The latest, a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package signed into law on Thursday, will provide many people with yet another check.

Not surprisingly, taxpayers are confused: Can I qualify for a larger stimulus check? Would it be, um, wrong to pay myself the unspent money in my dependent care spending account because I did all of the caregiving while also working? (It feels right, but you probably know the legal answer to that one already.)

We highlighted some of the most significant changes below and tried to answer questions that are most likely to arise.

Are my unemployment benefits taxable?

Mostly. Unemployment insurance is generally subject to federal as well as state income tax, though there are exceptions (Nine states don't impose their own income taxes, and another six exempt unemployment payments from taxation, according to the Tax Foundation). But you won't owe so-called payroll taxes, which pay for Social Security and Medicare.

The new relief bill will make the first \$10,200 of benefits tax-free if your income is less than \$150,000. This applies to 2020 only. (If you've already filed your taxes, watch for Internal Revenue Service guidance.)

Unlike paychecks from an employer, taxes for unemployment aren't automatically withheld. Recipients must opt in — and even when they do, federal taxes are withheld only at a flat rate of 10 percent of benefits. While the new tax break will provide a cushion, some people could still owe the I.R.S. or certain states money.

“We have lots of folks owing a little to federal or getting a small refund,” said Russell Garofalo, founder of the tax firm Brass Taxes, based in Brooklyn, “and who are owing \$2,000 or more to New York and New York City.”

If states like New York don't follow the federal changes, he added, taxpayers will owe money to states that tax unemployment.

Unemployment recipients should receive Form 1099-G, illustrating how much unemployment income they received and any taxes withheld, which should be used to fill out your tax return.

I didn't collect unemployment income but I received a form that says I did.

You may be a victim of unemployment fraud, which was rampant last year. Reach out to your state agency and ask it to correct the 1099-G form, showing you didn't collect anything, the Internal Revenue Service says. (Others may learn they were victims only after they file their taxes — because scam artists had the forms addressed to someplace other than their home.)

What about stimulus payments? Will they be taxed?

Nope. The so-called economic impact payments are not treated as income. In fact, they're technically an advance on a tax credit, known as the Recovery Rebate Credit.

The payments could indirectly affect what you pay in state income taxes in a handful of states, where federal tax is deductible against state taxable income, as our colleague Ann Carrns wrote.

What should I do if I'm missing a stimulus payment or part of one?

You can recover it through the so-called Recovery Rebate Credit when filing your 2020 return. It can be found on line 30 of Form 1040 or 1040-SR.

The first round of checks was issued beginning in April (generally \$1,200 for qualifying adults, \$500 for children) and distribution of the second batch (\$600 for adults and children) began in late December. The third is still to come.

For those first two rounds of payments, individuals with adjusted gross income of up to \$75,000 (\$112,500 for individuals filing as "head of ," typically single parents) and married couples filing jointly with income up to \$150,000 qualified for the full payment. People with higher incomes got smaller payments or nothing if their income exceeded certain caps (the second payment disappears when income reaches \$198,000 for a family of four, for example).

You'll need to know how much you've already received to claim the credit; If you don't have the notices detailing the amounts (Notice 1444 for the first stimulus payment and 1444-B, for the second), you can find the information by setting up an individual online account. (Spouses filing jointly will have separate accounts).

The quickest way to receive the credit is by filing a tax return electronically and having the money direct deposited, even if you don't need to file otherwise. If you earn \$72,000 or less, you can do it free through the I.R.S. Free File program.

Could I be eligible for a larger check?

It's possible, particularly if your financial situation or status changed last year.

The recovery credit on the 2020 return is based on an individual's 2020 tax year information, while the second stimulus payment was based on the 2019 tax year. (For the first stimulus check, the I.R.S. said, a 2018 return may have been used if the 2019 one was not filed or processed.) So if your income dropped in 2020, and you didn't receive the full amount, you could potentially receive more.

The same goes for changes in life circumstances. If you had a child in 2020, for example, you may be eligible for more money, or maybe you're no longer a dependent on your parents' tax return (and were in 2019), which may make you eligible.

Can families of mixed immigration status now qualify for stimulus checks?

Undocumented immigrants without Social Security numbers are ineligible for payments — and the CARES Act, the \$2 trillion relief package signed into law in late March, also prevented most spouses and children from receiving checks as well, even if they were U.S. citizens.

The December relief bill changed that, at least in part. Now, married couples filing joint returns may be eligible to recover payments for a spouse who has a valid Social Security number, the I.R.S. said. Each child with a Social Security number is also eligible for payments.

To determine if you qualify, use the Recovery Rebate Credit Worksheet or tax preparation software.

A third relief check will be coming. How will my 2020 tax return affect my payment?

The latest relief package includes another stimulus payment of up to \$1,400. The I.R.S. will calculate payments based on your most recent tax return.

Millions of people saw their income plunge in 2020, so filing as soon as possible would ensure that they maximize the amount received. But if your income rose in 2020, you may not want to rush.

“To the extent that income in 2020 was higher than 2019, they may want to ‘slow-walk’ filing their 2020 income tax returns,” said Jeffrey Levine, chief planning officer at Buckingham Wealth Partners. “Filing soon may result in not getting a stimulus payment that might otherwise be received if the lower 2019 income figure is used.”

I worked from home this year. Can I take the home office deduction?

Probably not, unless you’re self-employed, an independent contractor or a gig worker. The tax law overhaul of late 2019 eliminated the home office deduction for employees from 2018 through 2025. “Employees who receive a paycheck or a W-2 exclusively from an employer are not eligible for the deduction, even if they are currently working from home,” the I.R.S. said.

Am I required to take my required minimum distributions from my retirement accounts?

Nope. People with certain tax-advantaged retirement plans, including individual retirement accounts and 401(k) or 403(b) plans, generally need to withdraw a prescribed amount each year, known as a required minimum distribution, once they hit a certain age (72 if your 70th birthday was July 1, 2019 or later; 70½ for everyone else.)

But the CARES Act waived those rules for 2020 — so if you didn’t need the money, you could leave it be. The same goes for beneficiaries with inherited accounts.

If you withdrew money in 2020 — but then returned it to a tax-advantaged account by Aug. 31, as permitted by temporary rules — report it as a rollover.

I had to withdraw money from my retirement account. What are the current rules for that?

More than two million people have pulled money from retirement accounts during the pandemic. During more normal times, withdrawing money from a tax-deferred savings account before age 59½ would set off a 10 percent penalty on top of any income taxes.

But under the temporary rules of the CARES Act, people with needs related to the coronavirus were permitted to withdraw up to \$100,000 from any combination of tax-deferred plans, including 401(k), 403(b), and traditional individual retirement accounts — without penalty. The distribution had to be taken by Dec. 30.

For tax purposes, the amount withdrawn is generally included in your income in equal amounts over three years, though you can opt to pay the entire bill this year.

Alternatively, you can return the money within three years and recover any tax paid by amending your returns. For example, if you took a distribution of \$20,000 in 2020 and decided to repay the entire amount in 2022, you would need to file an amended federal tax return for 2020 and possibly 2021 to collect a refund according to Randy Heidmann, a senior specialized consultant at Wolters Kluwer, an information services firm.

But if you return it all by the time you file, there will be no tax consequences.

All returned money — whether a portion or all of the distribution — is treated as a rollover but reported as a repayment on IRS Form 8915-E. (Form 1099-R will detail the amount of your distribution.)

Am I eligible for tax relief if I've endured wildfires or other disasters?

Yes. Legislation enacted at the end of 2020 provides relief for people who suffered economic losses because of a “qualified disaster,” as long as their main home was in a “qualified disaster area,” according to Wolters Kluwer.

Individuals can withdraw up to \$100,000 from tax-advantaged retirement accounts — without paying an additional 10 percent penalty if they’re under 59½ — for incidents from Dec. 28, 2019, through Dec. 27, 2020. The deadline to withdraw the money is June 24, 2021.

The payback rules are generally the same as for coronavirus-related distributions and are reported on Form 8915-E.

Victims of certain winter storms — in Texas and Oklahoma — will have until June 15 to file their returns.

I’m self-employed and had to take time off because of the pandemic. Am I eligible for any relief?

Yes. There are two new tax credits — for sick leave and family leave taken starting April 1 — that can reduce your tax burden or provide a refund. They’re calculated with the new Form 7202.

Both credits have been extended into this year. Leave taken between Jan. 1, 2021, and Sept. 30, 2021 should be claimed on your 2021 tax form next tax season. Last year’s leave belongs on your 2020 return.

The credit for sick leave, which can be used for up to 10 working days, can be claimed by self-employed people who contracted Covid-19 or experienced symptoms and sought a diagnosis. It can also be used for days when you were ordered to stay at home by the local, state or federal government or if a health care provider suggested that you do so.

To calculate this credit, determine your average daily income. Take your net earnings (earnings after expenses, for 2020 or 2019) and divide by 260. Then multiply the number of sick days by that figure or \$511, whichever is less.

A smaller sick-leave credit is available if you're unable to work because you're taking care of someone else for certain coronavirus-related reasons. This covers 67 percent of daily earnings, up to \$200 a day.

How does the family leave credit work?

Self-employed people can take paid caregiving leave if their child's school is closed or their usual child care provider is unavailable because of the outbreak. This works similarly to the smaller sick leave credit — 67 percent of average daily earnings (for either 2020 or 2019), up to \$200 a day. But the caregiving leave can be taken for 50 days.

Is there now more flexibility with dependent and health care flexible spending accounts?

Maybe. Your employer needs to make the changes that are possible because of the pandemic.

Employers may allow people to carry over unused balances from 2020 into 2021. The same is true for leftover money at the end of the 2021 plan year.

Employers may also allow people to sign up for an account in the middle of the year or change the amount they originally elected to put in. If your plan has a grace period beyond the usual 12 months, it can extend it — but it can't extend that period and also let you carry over balances from one plan year to the next.

HealthEquity, the benefits administrator formerly known as WageWorks, has an F.A.Q. on the changes. It estimates that its customers' employees could lose out on more than \$500 million if employers don't carry out these provisions.

The CARES Act also made menstrual products eligible for health care flexible spending and health savings account reimbursement. This change is permanent.

My employer helped repay my student loans. What happens to my taxes?

Congress eliminated any income tax consequences for up to \$5,250 that an employer repaid for a qualifying student loan in 2020. This could be money paid directly to a lender or loan servicer or given to an employee for this purpose. This applied only to payments that an employer made after March 27, 2020, and it was available only to people repaying debt for their own education — not, say, that of their child.

Can I still deduct student loan interest?

You can, but you may not have as much to deduct as last year.

Borrowers can generally deduct up to \$2,500 in interest on qualified student loans, subject to certain income limits, even when they don't itemize deductions. But starting March 13, the government paused payments and waived interest on most federal student loans.

Interest accrued on other eligible loans, including federal loans not owned by the government and those made by private institutions, can be deducted as usual.

Have rules changed on charitable giving?

Yes. This year, you can deduct up to \$300 for charitable contributions, even if you use the standard deduction. Previously, only people who itemized could claim these deductions. Donations must be made in cash (for these purposes, this includes check, credit card or debit card), and can't include securities, household items or other property. For 2021, the deduction limit will double to \$600 for joint filers.

Rules for itemizers became more generous as well. The limit on charitable donations has been suspended, so individuals can contribute up to 100 percent of their adjusted gross income, up from 60 percent. But these donations must be made to public charities in cash; the old rules apply to contributions made to donor-advised funds, for example.

Both provisions are available through 2021.

Are there changes for child tax credits?

Yes. Taxpayers have a new option this year: They can use their 2019 income instead of 2020, if it's higher and will generally result in a larger credit. The provision is called the additional child tax credit.

In past years, the child tax credit could reduce your tax bill, dollar for dollar, by up to to \$2,000 a child — but if the credit exceeded your tax liability, you wouldn't get any money back in a refund. That's where the additional child tax credit comes in: It lets you collect up to \$1,400 a child as a refund, even if you don't owe any tax.

But eligible taxpayers must generally have at least \$2,500 in earned income (unemployment income doesn't count) to claim the refundable portion, which is limited to 15 percent of earnings above \$2,500.

The new relief law makes that credit more generous for 2021, particularly for low- and middle-income people.

Has the earned-income tax credit changed?

Yes. It still helps people at the lower end of the pay scale. But taxpayers can use their 2019 income for this credit, if it was higher (and more advantageous for receiving the tax credit).

The way it works is that as your earnings rise, so does the credit, but only until you hit an income ceiling. Only earned income factors into that calculation, so people who were unemployed for large parts of 2020 wouldn't receive as large a credit as they might have had when they were working. Being allowed to "look back" to your 2019 earnings can increase your credit.

“It’s important to note that this look-back rule isn’t automatic,” said Jo Willetts, director of tax resources at Jackson Hewitt, a tax preparation service. If you’re using the same tax software as last year, it will probably have your 2019 information on file to make the comparison. If not, have your 2019 tax return handy — so you can feed your earnings into the software, or to a new tax preparer — to determine which year is more beneficial.

The new legislation increases the size of the credit, broadens eligibility for childless people in 2021 and makes other changes.

What’s new for teachers?

Masks and hand sanitizer can be written off, even if you don’t itemize.

Under the old rules, elementary and high school educators could typically deduct up to \$250 in unreimbursed expenses for school-related books and supplies or costs related to professional development. Now, they can also deduct expenses incurred after March 12, 2020, for personal protective equipment and other supplies to help prevent the spread of coronavirus in class. But the total amount hasn’t increased.

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: Stock Futures Pull Back After Record-Setting Rally

**By Anna Hirtenstein:
Mar 12, 2021**

U.S. stock futures pulled back Friday, led lower by the technology sector, signaling that the major indexes will retreat a day after notching fresh records.

Futures tied to the S&P 500 fell 0.6%, pointing to a decline after the opening bell. The broad-market index climbed to a record on Thursday. Contracts linked to the Dow Jones Industrial Average were relatively flat. The blue-chips index had also closed at an all-time high.

Stocks have broadly rallied this week following a rebound in technology shares and growing appetite for sectors like banking and energy that may benefit from the economy rebounding.

On Friday, money managers again pulled funds from government bonds as their appetite for the safest assets waned. That sent yields ticking up and sapped demand for richly valued tech shares.

Prospects for the economy have brightened with President Biden signing the \$1.9 trillion fiscal stimulus package on Thursday. He also said every adult in the U.S. will be able to get a vaccine by May 1. The moves are expected to accelerate the reopening and spur growth.

“Markets will take a break after all the news we had yesterday,” said Sophie Chardon, a cross-asset strategist at Lombard Odier. “This all points to the fact that we are in a recovery, especially given all the substantial policy support both on the fiscal and monetary fronts.”

The Nasdaq-100 index ended Thursday up over 3% for the period, following three weeks of declines. Futures tied to the tech-heavy index dropped 1.7% on Friday, suggesting that the sector may give up some of those gains.

“We haven’t been advocating for a major move out of growth stocks,” said David Stubbs, global head of investment strategy at J.P. Morgan Private Bank. “We’ve seen the permanent adoption of many digital technologies, from this shift from the real world to the digital world. I don’t think that shift will reverse.”

His company is also buying financial and industrial stocks, expecting them to benefit from the recovery because they are economically-sensitive sectors.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note rose to 1.609%, from 1.525% on Thursday.

“The bigger picture is, vaccines are going to create a sustainable reopening. That is what the market is reacting to,” Mr. Stubbs said. “You’re seeing a rapid reassessment of the macro environment.”

Ahead of the market open, T-Mobile rose 4% after it said it plans to spend up to \$60 billion on share buybacks.

Megacap tech stocks including Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet and Amazon.com also declined premarket. Tesla shed 4%.

Fresh data on U.S. consumer sentiment will be out at 10 a.m. ET. The University of Michigan's preliminary reading for March is expected to show an uptick in confidence amid the vaccination rollout and job gains.

Bitcoin climbed to a record high, topping \$58,700 in overnight trading. It has since pulled back about 3% to around \$57,000.

Overseas, the pan-continental Stoxx Europe 600 slipped 0.5%.

Among European equities, Burberry rose over 5% after the luxury goods maker said it expects its revenue and a measure of profit to be above analysts' expectations for the 2021 fiscal year.

In Asia, most major benchmarks closed higher. The Shanghai Composite Index added 0.5% and Japan's Nikkei 225 rose 1.7%. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index dropped 2.2%.

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: Value Investors Finally Have Reason to Celebrate—for Now

**By Karen Langley:
Mar 12, 2021**

Value stocks are beating growth stocks by the widest margin in two decades, the latest sign that investors expect the next year to bring a powerful economic rebound.

As the rollout of Covid-19 vaccines quickens and the economy bounces back from last year's shutdowns, portfolio managers are snapping up cyclical stocks—banks, energy companies and others whose fortunes are closely linked to economic growth. Those shares often fit the description of value stocks, which trade at low multiples of their book value, or net worth.

The shift in bets marks a reversal of a trend that has held essentially since the financial crisis, in which growth stocks outpaced value stocks. That reflected in part the rise of big tech companies such as Apple Inc. and Amazon.com Inc. AMZN 1.83% and in part the softness of the U.S. economy. This year, the Russell 1000 Value Index is up 10% and the Russell 1000 Growth Index has edged up 0.4%.

That gap is the largest lead for value stocks at this time of year since 2001, according to Dow Jones Market Data, when the bursting of the tech bubble led to a resurgence in value shares. At this point last year, during the coronavirus-induced downturn, growth stocks held a wide lead.

Of course, this isn't the first time investors have heralded a bounceback in value investing—only to see the trade quickly reverse. Value stocks have lagged behind shares of fast-growing companies throughout much of the past decade: From the end of 2010 to the end of 2020, the value index doubled, while the growth index quadrupled.

Among the stocks recently leading the way for the value index are banking heavyweights JPMorgan Chase JPM -0.52% & Co. and Bank of America Corp. BAC -0.35% as well as oil giants Exxon Mobil Corp. XOM -0.74% and Chevron Corp. CVX -0.16%. With rising bond yields and oil prices pointing to expectations for broader economic growth, JPMorgan and Bank of America are up more than 20% for the year, while Chevron has climbed 32% and Exxon has soared 49%. All four stocks declined in 2020.

“People are starting to see, OK, we're going to open up,” said Daniel Genter, chief executive and chief investment officer at RNC Genter Capital Management. “There's a light at the end of the tunnel, and it's not a train coming the other way.”

Late last year his firm, which manages about \$5 billion, trimmed positions in big tech stocks and reinvested the money in energy, financial and healthcare companies, he said.

The rally in bank stocks has been fueled in part by a climb in government bond yields. Higher rates allow banks to charge more on loans, boosting their profits. Energy shares have had help from the rallying price of oil, with Brent crude, the international benchmark, rising 34% in 2021.

Many analysts say the value trade has room to run. Even with the recent catch-up, the Russell 1000 Growth Index is well ahead of its value counterpart over the past 12 months, having risen 53% compared with a 39% gain by the value index.

For much of last year, investors prized growth stocks, many which stood to benefit when the pandemic forced people to work and shop from home. Influential members of the Russell 1000 Growth Index include Apple, Amazon and Tesla Inc. TSLA 4.72% All posted outsize returns in 2020?but have lost ground this year.

“I think it’s going to be very difficult for the aggressive growth stocks to outperform,” said Lamar Villere, portfolio manager at investment firm Villere & Co. “The expectations that are baked into their valuations are still incredibly high.”

The performance gap between value and growth has grown this year even as a stretch of volatile trading sends tech shares plunging some days and rebounding on others. The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite jumped 2.5% Thursday but still trails the broader-based S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average in 2021.

Part of the appeal of value shares is their lower price tags, especially after last year’s tech rally. At the end of February, the Russell 1000 Value Index traded at 21.89 times the past 12 months’ earnings, according to FTSE Russell. For the Russell 1000 Growth Index, that figure was 37.22.

Among the signs the economy is gaining steam: February brought the best monthly job growth since last fall as restaurants and other hospitality businesses added jobs. And the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development recently upgraded its outlook for the U.S. economy, which it now expects to expand by 6.5% in 2021.

And President Biden on Thursday signed a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus-aid bill, which includes \$1,400 checks for many Americans and an extension of a \$300 weekly jobless-aid supplement.

The earnings picture looks bright in several corners of the value realm as well. Profits for the industrial, materials and financial sectors are expected to surge in 2021, rising 89%, 37% and 22%, respectively, from a year earlier, according to FactSet. Tech-sector earnings, meanwhile, are forecast to grow 18%.

“There’s pent-up demand driving accelerating earnings growth, especially among these value stocks that were hurt last year,” said Jimmy Chang, chief investment officer at Rockefeller Global Family Office. “At the same time we still have more fiscal stimulus coming into the system, so that will further turbocharge their growth.”

[Return to top](#)

WSJ: Covid-19 Vaccine Access: How Rural Transit Agencies Are Helping Get the Shots in Arms

By Scott Calvert:
Mar 12, 2021

PORT TREVORTON, Pa.—On a recent overcast morning, Lou Ann Share waited for the bus in the kitchen of her family’s yellow-sided house as her daughter made waffles for her 8-year-old twins.

Ms. Share, a 66-year-old retired florist, had secured a Covid-19 vaccination appointment at a hospital 30 minutes from her home in this rural community in central Pennsylvania. But she couldn’t drive herself because of chronic pain from an accident 25 years ago, and nobody else in the family could take her.

“If it wasn’t for Rabbit, I wouldn’t be able to do this,” she said, referring to Rabbitransit, a local transportation agency that is giving free rides to vaccination sites across 11 counties.

For Ms. Share and others like her, rural transit agencies are providing more than rides. They are the crucial link to long-awaited protection from the deadly coronavirus. Across the U.S., the agencies have been adapting since the start of the pandemic a year ago. When ridership fell sharply, some of the services pivoted to delivering groceries and prescription drugs. Since the vaccine rollout began, a growing number have started offering free rides, changing bus routes, hosting vaccination sites or organizing clinics on wheels to take vaccines to people.

In West Texas, more than 700 people have been vaccinated at a clinic inside Spartan Rural Public Transit's new facility in the city of Levelland. In Washington state, Twin Transit teamed up with Lewis County, the United Way and Bird's Eye Medical to run mobile clinics at fairgrounds, schools, fire stations and senior centers that have led to more than 2,400 vaccinations. Twin Transit ferries medical staff and equipment to clinics when needed and takes vaccine recipients to the sites in vans.

An infusion of federal aid is helping agencies cope with the pandemic's various impacts. Congress approved \$2.7 billion for rural transit in two prior Covid relief bills and added \$317 million in the recent \$1.9 trillion stimulus package.

Since launching its free vaccination ride program in mid-February, Rabbit has taken more than 230 people to vaccination appointments, Executive Director Richard Farr said. Some don't have a car, or can't drive because of age or disability; others can't turn to family because of job schedules, he said. The agency is using federal Cares Act funds along with existing state subsidies to cover the cost.

"We have to reach herd immunity, and the only way is if everybody has an opportunity to get the vaccine," Mr. Farr said.

Just over 19% of Pennsylvania residents have received at least one dose of coronavirus vaccine, slightly above the nationwide figure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In largely rural Snyder County, where Ms. Share lives, that figure is 15.3%, state data show.

Mobility is a perpetual challenge in the region, said Kendra Aucker, president and chief executive of 132-bed Evangelical Community Hospital in Lewisburg, where Ms. Share

booked her vaccination slot. Nearly a quarter of residents in Snyder County struggle with transportation, a 2017 Greater Susquehanna Valley United Way report found.

Many people are carpooling to hospitals for their shots, Ms. Aucker said; others rely on Rabbit. "If you don't have anybody to help you, it's the only way to get a vaccine," she said.

Transit agencies in some parts of the U.S. are waiting for vaccine supplies to increase before stepping up efforts to get people to sites, said Scott Bogren, executive director of the nonprofit Community Transportation Association of America.

Ms. Share is a Rabbit regular, paying reduced fares for trips to pain-management appointments. She was seriously hurt in a car crash in 1995, after being rear-ended while driving home from her job as a floral designer. She injured an eye and needed plates, screws and rods in her neck. She said she is often in pain and doesn't trust herself to drive farther than nearby Hilsher's General Store.

"I used to be this independent person. Raised kids on my own, worked two jobs. Then one car accident takes it all away," she said. "Without Rabbit I would be really stuck."

On the morning of her appointment, Ms. Share bantered with her daughter, Lindsey Corbin, as the 8-year-olds began their virtual school day and the family's two burly dogs, Max and Fizey, lumbered around the kitchen.

"You're excited, right?" Ms. Corbin said.

"Yes, I am," Ms. Share said. "So I can start being safe."

Ms. Share said at first she wasn't sure she wanted a shot given the vaccines' rapid development. "But I stuck with the science and Dr. Fauci," she said, referring to Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious-diseases expert. Her 86-year-old mother, Betty Ann

Hackett, has had both doses, and Ms. Corbin, whose immune system was ravaged by cancer treatment and who seldom drives because of a seizure disorder, received her first.

Now it was Ms. Share's turn. When the door to the empty minibus opened, she greeted driver John Bolig and settled into a seat by the door for the drive north to Lewisburg.

"Away we go," Mr. Bolig said, heading down Silver Creek Road to the four-lane highway that runs along the broad Susquehanna River. He and Ms. Share chatted about a local university and news that Hobby Lobby plans to open a store nearby.

After her arrival at Evangelical, hospital staff members briskly guided Ms. Share through registration. Minutes later, she was rolling up the sleeve of her sweater for nurse Jackie Mast.

"That's it," Ms. Mast said after injecting the vaccine developed by Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE.

"Oh my gosh, nothing. You're wonderful," Ms. Share said with a laugh.

"It's like my two-thousandth shot," the nurse replied.

After the 15-minute observation period, Ms. Share had to linger another hour in the airy lobby before the bus pulled up to take her back home, where the family's pigs, chickens and ducks would need tending. She said she didn't mind the wait.

"I feel relieved," she said.

Return to top

WSJ: Companies Still Working on Libor Changeover

**By Julia-Ambra Verlaine, Mark Maurer and Anna Hirtenstein:
Mar 12, 2021**

Regulators are pressuring Wall Street to do away with the London interbank offered rate by year-end. Companies are still making the switch.

Chief financial officers at major U.S. companies such as Motorola Solutions Inc. and Ralph Lauren Corp. said they are working on issues including choosing between alternatives to the troubled borrowing benchmark, used for decades to help set rates on corporate debt, and discussing the timing and financial implications.

Jason Winkler, Motorola's finance chief, said the communications-equipment provider plans to use the replacement preferred by the Federal Reserve—the Secured Overnight Financing Rate, or SOFR. But without any immediate financial arrangements in need of adjustment, the company was still gauging when to transition to the new rate.

“We’re working through it like many other companies and evaluating our choices,” Mr. Winkler said.

Libor is a key reference rate for corporate borrowing, underpinning trillions of dollars in financial contracts ranging from loans to interest-rate swaps. But financial firms and regulators world-wide are scheduled to abandon the rate at the end of this year after it fell into disrepute a decade ago following a manipulation scandal.

The Fed warned banks Tuesday that they could face regulatory consequences if robust plans aren't in place to move away from the benchmark before Dec. 31. That is when it expires for some shorter-dated dollar rates.

The U.K. regulator in charge of overseeing Libor, the Financial Conduct Authority, said March 5 that Libor would cease for sterling, the euro, Swiss franc and yen at the end of the year, building on its mandate that market participants transition to other benchmark rates. The remaining dollar rates will end after June 30, 2023.

The use of Libor is still strong in the futures and options markets, data from CME Group showed. Daily trading volume reached the highest level for Eurodollar futures, which use Libor as a benchmark, since 2014 on Feb. 25 at 10.7 million contracts and averaged three million daily for the month. By comparison, average daily volume for SOFR futures in February was 122,872 contracts.

“Examiners should consider issuing supervisory findings and other supervisory actions if a firm is not ready to stop issuing Libor-based contracts by December 31, 2021,” said Michael Gibson, a director in the division of supervision and regulation at the Fed.

CFOs said they have been examining contracts linked to Libor and are discussing replacement options with lenders who bankroll them to fund operations or other expenses. Many corporations’ credit lines and loans have interest rates based off Libor. If they don’t change over, or otherwise prepare, legal fallbacks in their contracts could raise their debt payments.

Banks have put resources and cash into programs to transition to SOFR, which is based on the cost of transactions in the market where financial companies borrow cash overnight using U.S. government debt as collateral. That was developed by a committee of major banks, insurers and asset managers that has joined the Fed in rallying users of Libor to adopt SOFR.

One factor they cite: its resilience during the coronavirus pandemic, when swings in the bond market forced Fed intervention. The SOFR rate, which is published by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, has in recent months stayed within a range close to zero.

SOFR-linked debt has picked up over the past year as more companies use the rate. Debt tied to the new rate totaled over \$900 billion through February, up from \$64.9 billion the same time last year, according to data from the CME Group and Bloomberg. Housing-finance firms Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac boosted the benchmark’s reputation as the preferred rate last year when they said they would stop accepting adjustable-rate mortgages tied to Libor in favor of mortgages tied to SOFR.

Alternatives to SOFR include Ameribor, a rate set on the American Financial Exchange, where banks lend to each other through mutual lines of credit. Launched by Richard Sandor,

who helped create futures markets in the 1970s, the rate is favored by some small and medium-size banks because it is sensitive to their funding costs.

Jane Nielsen, Ralph Lauren's CFO, said the New York-based fashion retailer has a credit line pegged to Libor that it plans to keep in place in the event of future liquidity needs. The company has held preliminary discussions with its consortium of banks about selecting the right benchmark, she said.

"We're waiting for some of the dust to settle before we focus on what the benchmark will be," Ms. Nielsen said.

One of the biggest hurdles holding up the transition: so-called tough legacy contracts. These include floating-rate notes that require holders to agree on a new reference rate. Reaching such agreements can be hard, according to lawyers at companies advising banks and companies.

To minimize the disruption, regulators have tried to make the new benchmark rate as similar to Libor as possible. This was done by adding a premium to bring it closer to Libor's level, known as a fallback. Lawyers are working to update contracts to take into account the change.

The U.S. is running behind the U.K. and Europe, where investment firms and companies have been faster to transition to alternative rates. Smaller markets and clearer guidance from regulators prompted more investors to make the switch and resulted in higher trading activity in markets linked to the new benchmarks, analysts said.

Since 2019, floating-rate covered-bond issuances and securitizations have largely used the Sterling Overnight Index Average, or Sonia, instead of Libor, according to S&P Global.

John Wraith, head of U.K. rate strategy at UBS, said about half the transactions he is aware of have been benchmarking Sonia, a U.K. alternative reference rate.

“People are quoting swaps in the U.K. using Sonia,” said Mr. Wraith. “This will now accelerate.”

Return to top

NYDN: Reading of 9/11 victims’ names will return for 20th anniversary of World Trade Center attack

**By LEONARD GREENE:
Mar 12, 2021**

Families of 9/11 victims will once again read their names out loud to commemorate this year’s 20th anniversary of the World Trade Center attack, a year after the COVID pandemic divided people over how to remember the fallen, organizers said.

With coronavirus restrictions easing and more people getting vaccinated, groups putting together the ceremony said they are more comfortable with an event that allows families to gather at the memorial site in lower Manhattan and read names into the quiet air.

In 2020, the name-reading portion of the program was cancelled to keep participants from gathering in small crowds. The decision outraged some victims’ relatives, as well as police and fire unions who pointed out that construction sites around the city had been deemed safe to reopen months earlier.

Another group, the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation, even held an alternative ceremony several blocks away and allowed victims’ relatives to read names while social distancing.

But this year will be different.

“In a few months’ time, 20 years will have passed since our nation was attacked on September 11,” former Mayor Mike Bloomberg, the board chairman of the Sept. 11 Memorial and Museum, said in a statement.

“We suffered a great tragedy that day and for the weeks and months that followed. We mourned the victims of the attacks and promised to never forget.”

Organizers said reading the 3,000 names out loud during the ceremony instead of having them prerecorded will be a comfort to the still-grieving families.

“In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing challenges facing our nation and the global community, the resilience, compassion and hope demonstrated two decades ago in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks offer invaluable lessons now,” museum CEO Alice M. Greenwald said.

“During this 20th anniversary year, it is our privilege to share these lessons with a new generation, teach them about the ongoing repercussions of the 9/11 attacks and inspire them with the idea that, even in the darkest of times, we can come together, support one another and find the strength to renew and rebuild.”

Return to top

NYP: Six jurors now seated for Derek Chauvin trial over death of George Floyd

By Jorge Fitz-Gibbon:
Mar 12, 2021

Lawyers are struggling to find impartial jurors in the murder trial of ex-Minneapolis cop Derek Chauvin — who allegedly killed George Floyd by kneeling on his neck in May 2020.

One more juror was seated on Thursday — only the sixth person since jury selection began Tuesday — but others said they could not be impartial.

One prospective juror called the scene of Floyd’s death “holy ground” and another said she couldn’t “unsee” viral video of the incident.

“I’ve seen the video, so I can’t unsee it,” the woman, identified as prospective juror 37, told Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill.

“Are you willing,” Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson asked, “or are you able to set what you know about this case now aside and judge this case based upon the evidence in court?”

“Like I mentioned before, there’s video surveillance, so I can’t unsee the video,” she said. “So I’m not able to set that part aside... It’s still going to be traumatizing to me”.

Prospective juror 41 express similar concerns.

“I have formed an opinion,” she told the judge. “I think it would be hard to get rid of that opinion, and I’m really not sure if I could.”

Another prospective juror, a music teacher, said he could approach the case “with a clean slate” — but conceded that he had gone to the scene of Floyd’s death and prayed with his wife, calling the site “holy ground” on social media.

So far three white men, a black man, a Hispanic man, and a woman of mixed race have been seated in the case, but Nelson has used 7 of the 15 challenges he is allowed.

Prosecutors have used 4 of the 9 that they are allotted.

Other prospective jurors have been dismissed by Cahill, and 18 others were dismissed without even being questioned, in many cases over answers they gave on a 16-page jury questionnaire that was sent to them in December.

In one instance on Thursday, prosecutors questioned Nelson's decision to challenge a prospective juror, noting, in part, that the man is Hispanic.

"The prospective juror identifies as Hispanic," Steve Schleicher, an attorney working with the state attorney general on the case.

"We believe that the prospective juror stated an unequivocal ability to follow the law, follow the court's instructions, presume innocence, and did not express any views that were outside of what other seated jurors have expressed," Schleicher said.

"I don't find that this was race-based," Cahill answered. "This juror was very torn, you could tell... It was difficult for him to get beyond the videotape because he likened it, unlike any other potential juror, to a World War II occupation."

The video of the incident shows Chauvin, then a cop, with his knee pressed against the back of Floyd's neck while he was handcuffed for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill at a Minneapolis convenience store.

Floyd's death sparked global outrage and led to massive protests, rioting, and looting in the Minnesota city and elsewhere.

Three other former officers — J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane, and Tou Thao — are scheduled to stand trial separately on charges of aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter.

[Return to top](#)

Newsday: LI towns spent millions to clean up February snowstorms

By Newsday Staff:
Mar 12, 2021

Long Island highway and public works departments plowed through millions of dollars last month while fighting a succession of snowstorms that threatened to leave pothole-like gaps in municipal budgets.

While only one town reported exceeding its allotted spending to plow roads and spread ice melt, some officials said they spent more in February alone than they had in the past several years.

"We really got one big storm and several back-to-back-to-back," said Brookhaven Highway Superintendent Dan Losquadro, whose department spent \$4.6 million, more than the previous two years combined. "We had a couple of long-duration storms, which cost you a lot of money because you have to have not only your municipal employees but your hired people in for a long time."

The fiscal saving grace, highway chiefs said, was that last month's fierce storms followed several years of relatively mild winters that had allowed them to stockpile salt and sand and move unspent cash into reserve funds — softening the hit on their 2021 budgets.

Newsday requested snow spending figures from all 13 Long Island towns. Some did not respond or did not provide figures.

Among those that did, officials reported spending more than half the funds set aside this year to battle the elements, or depleting their snow budgets entirely:

Huntington surpassed its \$2.5 million snow budget, Highway Superintendent Kevin Orelli said. He did not provide a specific figure.

Hempstead budgeted \$1.2 million and has spent a bit less than \$1 million, Supervisor Don Clavin said.

Brookhaven spent 92% of its \$5 million budget.

Babylon expended \$1,059,277, or 62% of its \$1.7 million budget.

Oyster Bay has spent \$1.5 million, or 78% of its \$1,933,262 budget, spokeswoman Marta Kane said.

Smithtown has spent \$926,554, leaving about \$217,000 in its \$1,144,208 snow budget.

Islip did not provide figures, but Supervisor Angie Carpenter said this year "has been the costliest winter in three years."

Southold Supervisor Scott Russell said the town anticipates higher than normal snow costs, but officials did not provide figures.

After an uneventful January, February announced its arrival with a storm that lasted three days and left up to 18 inches of white stuff in some places. Many town crews started working on a Sunday night and were still cleaning up the mess days later, officials said.

Spending spikes stemmed from a variety of factors, principally overtime for town crews working through the night for up to five days before, during and after the storm, officials said. Many towns also hired outside vendors — including landscapers, construction contractors and private citizens with plows on their pickups — to move mountains of snow.

More than the amount of snow, the length of several February storms drove up costs, officials said.

"The duration of the storms is what killed us," Orelli said.

Budgeting for snow is an inexact science, officials said. Public works and highway officials base their budget requests on past winters and forecasts for the upcoming season.

Actual snowfall depends on storm tracks and temperatures that fluctuate wildly from one year to the next, making expenditures hard to predict.

"We've had far worse winters, but the past two winters were among the more mild ones that we've had in recent years," Losquadro said. "There are years when you don't put a plow blade down and there are winters when you can get 40 or 50 inches of snow."

When it comes to budgets, "you kind of play the averages," he said. "You don't want to put in too much, but you don't want to put in too little, either."

Long Island crews used up so much of their salt and sand stockpiles last month that most have scrambled to beef up supplies, ordering tens of thousands of tons from a Staten Island salt dealer.

The silver lining, officials said, is that they should now have more than enough salt to get through whatever awaits them in the next storm — whenever that is.

"Who knows what may happen in December," Losquadro said. "You have to account for that, as well."

[Return to top](#)

Newsday: LI Asians say they fear for their safety after attacks nationwide

By Dandan Zou:
Mar 12, 2021

Attacks in recent weeks against Asians on the West Coast and in New York City have put Long Islanders like Kathy Wong on edge and more on guard.

The New Hyde Park mother of three watched in horror the recent footage of an Asian woman being shoved to the ground outside a bakery in Queens.

"I saw her starting to back up. The fear was already there before she was pushed," Wong recalled of seeing the video in February on the evening news. "When he pushed her with such force [to] the ground, I automatically thought of my own mother. I automatically thought of my daughter."

Violent assaults nationwide in the past two months have intensified fears among some Asian Americans on the Island. Some grew so concerned over the safety of vulnerable elders that they are advising them to avoid public transportation and are limiting their own trips outdoors, and have kept their children at home to learn remotely on top of worries of COVID-19 risks.

Suffolk County police said they are investigating two reports of hate incidents with Asian victims but reported no cases of violent assaults targeting Asians. In one case, police said an Asian employee of a liquor store in Brentwood received "a threatening phone call based on his race/ethnicity" last April. In another, anti-Asian graffiti was painted on the rear door of a Selden business in September. Both are under investigation.

Nassau police said they received no reports of anti-Asian hate crimes in the past year but handled a bias incident last June in Jericho where one woman used an expletive before calling the other woman "Chinese," to which the victim, who is Asian, responded that her ethnicity was not Chinese.

Violent attacks increase

Nationwide, reports of violent attacks against Asians have surged this year.

An 84-year-old Thai man died after he was thrown to the pavement in San Francisco in January. A 91-year-old man was injured after being shoved in Oakland's Chinatown. In Manhattan, a man came up behind a 36-year-old Asian man walking on a street in Chinatown and stabbed him in the torso, leaving the victim hospitalized in critical condition. The woman whose assault in Flushing so frightened Wong was treated with stitches for a gash on her forehead. Earlier this week, a 75-year-old Asian man was robbed during a stroll in Oakland that left him seriously injured. From 2019 to 2020, the NYPD reported a jump from three to 28 hate crime incidents involving Asians.

Kevin Sun, co-president of the Great Neck Chinese Association, said he has heard a handful of first-person accounts where drivers in passing cars hurled racial slurs at Asians walking on the street with their groceries.

The recent attacks prompted Vivian Luk, of Albertson, to tell her mother to avoid taking the Long Island Rail Road to travel to Flushing for a doctor's appointment last month. Her mother ended up taking a cab.

"It feels like it's stripping away our freedom. ... It angers me, obviously. It worries me even more," said Luk, 41, who emigrated from Hong Kong to the United States when she was a child. "I feel like we can't freely walk around. I feel like I'm going to be a target."

Luk is not alone in worrying about staying safe on public transportation. Shaorui Li, chair of the Asian American Association of Greater Stony Brook, remembered reading about Asian women being attacked on subway trains and at train platforms.

"It triggers fear," said Li, of Setauket. "Some of my friends commute to the city. Their family members became scared [of] what could happen at subway stations."

Some advocates and experts have tied the rise in anti-Asian crime during the pandemic to the economic downturn, geopolitical tensions and the rhetoric of politicians like former President Donald Trump, who repeatedly called COVID-19 a "Chinese virus."

"We've seen racism during times of war, pandemic and economic downturn. Last year, we saw all three," said Russell Jeung, a professor at San Francisco State University and co-founder of STOP AAPI HATE, a national database that collects self-reported hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

"We had the worst recession since the Great Depression. And we had the U.S.-China Cold War," Jeung said. "Then again President Trump's rhetoric inflamed hatred and gave people the license to push and shove others."

Since March, Jeung's group has documented more than 3,000 complaints, including 12 cases of verbal harassment, shunning and being barred from establishments on Long Island as of mid-February.

"There's widespread worry over safety," said Weiwei Zhang, of Mt. Sinai, a board member of the Suffolk County Asian American Advisory Board, in Mandarin. "As far as I'm aware of, there are no attacks on individuals here in Suffolk. But people are becoming more careful about when and where they go."

Farrah Mozawalla, executive director of Nassau County's Office of Asian American Affairs, said her office has received reports of about half a dozen anti-Asian harassment incidents since last March, including a Filipino woman being told to go back to her country in a Costco in Nassau County.

"With these anti-Asian sentiments ... people are apprehensive," Mozawalla said. "They feel uncomfortable. They feel like they don't belong. We want to make sure that they know they are part of the county."

A "Stand Up to Hate" rally is scheduled for 11 a.m. Sunday outside the Nassau County Legislative Building in Mineola.

Painful memories

For those who have endured the sting of racism and marginalization, the wave of anti-Asian discrimination has evoked painful memories and opened new wounds.

When Wong was about 8, she said her family heard a loud bang on the door one night at their house in Bayside, Queens. When her parents opened the door, the family saw newspapers lit on fire in front of their doorstep. It wasn't until they put the fire out that they realized that the newspapers were wrapped around feces.

"That was such a difficult thing to experience as a child because you realize there are people that don't like you just for the way you look," said Wong, who is in her 40s.

Growing up, she said people used racial slurs toward her and made assumptions about the language she spoke — even though English is her first language — that Wong said sent her a clear message.

"Being born here and just looking different ... and then being berated for that made it clear that I did not belong," she said.

Last week, Lucy Wu, 42, of Manhasset, said she was sprayed by windshield wiper fluid during an unprovoked encounter as a man drove away from the parking lot of a Manhasset grocery store. No words were exchanged between them, and Wong said she did not report it to police.

"There was mist all over my face," she said. "It was unpleasant, and it ruined [my] day."

A couple of weeks ago, she said someone dropped a bag of dog feces at her driveway. She wondered if what happened was merely coincidental.

"Maybe to some people, it's hard to see those moments as racially charged aggressive moves," Wu said. "It sucks that we even have to think that we're overthinking. By definition, we shouldn't have to even have that frame of mind and ask if it's safe to be outdoors."

That fear is part of the reason Wu said she opted for remote learning for her three children. Wu said she and other Asian parents are worried about COVID-19 exposures as well as their children being subject to discrimination.

"We feel scared that we are going to be blamed," said Wu, a Chinese American. "This is why we keep our kids at home."

Psychological effect

Researchers said experiences like microaggressions, harassment, experiences of threats or even anticipation of being mistreated can lead to racial trauma.

"It's the sum total of our experiences of this kind of harm that has a psychological, compounding effect," said Doris Chang, an associate professor at New York University.

Chang said the feelings of vulnerability and not being safe in one's environment create a psychological experience of anxiety, which could trigger a hypervigilant response.

When Luk is out with her children, she said she is always scanning her environment.

"I constantly have to watch our backs," the mother of three said.

As Luk coached her children on math problems during remote learning last week, she wondered out loud what the future holds for them.

"What kind of world will my kids grow up in?" she said. "They are innocent souls — unless something happens to them."

Return to top

March 3, 2021 11:43 p.m.

Dear Provider,

Your reporting indicates you have more than 250 doses of vaccine on hand that you received more than seven days ago. As we have communicated to you many times, Executive Order 202.88 requires you to administer all vaccine to eligible populations within seven days of receipt of such doses. As we have not received notification that you could not administer doses in such period, and you have a significant number of doses on hand, you are hereby notified that you must administer all doses to eligible persons within 72 hours of receipt of this communication.

Failure to do so will subject you to civil penalties up to \$100,000 per day, pursuant to Executive Order 202.88 and section 12 of the public health law, as well as elimination of any future vaccine allocation. You are also reminded that any reporting to the New York State Vaccine Tracker is submitted under penalty of law, and must be truthful.

If you have any questions regarding this notice and the reporting information that the State has used to send this notice, please contact [REDACTED]@health.ny.gov. The 72-hour timeframe will continue to run during such time.

Your failure to administer doses in a timely fashion is not acceptable and frustrates the purpose of New York's Vaccine program. Public health and safety require rapid deployment of this life-saving vaccine to eligible populations, and New York cannot afford to leave vaccine on the shelves of providers who cannot meet the requirements of the vaccine program.

Regards,

Larry Schwartz

"This message may contain confidential, sensitive and/or proprietary information and is intended for the person/entity to whom it was originally addressed. Any use by others is strictly prohibited."

March 5, 2021

Dear Provider,

On Wednesday evening, you received a letter from me regarding vaccine administration. The letter was sent to you in error. I deeply apologize for this miscommunication and any confusion or distress it may have caused. The State's enrolled providers have been a vital partner in the Vaccine Program, and we are grateful for your partnership and continued efforts to assist in administration of this life-saving measure.

Thank you for efficiently administering your vaccine allocation to eligible populations. We look forward to an increase in supply from the federal government that will allow New York to continue our safe reopening.

Regards,

Larry Schwartz



March 4, 2021

Dear Larry Schwartz:

On behalf of the New York State Association of County Health Officials, we write to share several concerns from our members regarding operational aspects of the vaccine distribution program.

Yesterday, 17 local health departments received letters indicating that state data showed that they had not administered sufficient numbers of older allocations of vaccine; they were given 72 hours to administer this vaccine, accused of not supporting public health efforts, and threatened with significant penalties. At no point prior to this letter were any of these localities contacted about these doses, and in fact, the time period referenced coincides with the dates where there were significant shipping issues out to the localities due to weather issues in other parts of the country. The letter further provided no documentation to support the state's assessment that the LHD was in arrears on doses administered and we have heard from many of the recipients that the data cited in the letter does not reflect their own records. Finally, the 72-hour requirement to use these doses or face fines gives no consideration to the operational and temporal realities in meeting that deadline in the midst of standing up already scheduled clinics.

This communication was not at all reflective of a partnership approach to working with the on the ground public health workforce who have proven, over and over, their dedication and expertise in responding to the pandemic, and in particular, their ability to get vaccines administered. Our members have worked tirelessly, and in good faith and with full effort in responding to the weekly, and sometimes daily changing landscape of the state vaccine distribution process. We are particularly concerned that this communication appears to have gone mainly to the largest LHDs who stood up monumental and ongoing vaccine clinics to reach their assigned priority populations and who also represent a significant portion of the state's total doses administered.

One specific concern regarding the vaccine tracker data that we have heard from members is that there is no way to correct their data or review each day's submission to ensure that there are no data entry errors. We request that the state implement a daily confirmation of doses reported back to each LHD, along with instructions on how they can correct data submissions, both in real time and retroactively.

Another significant challenge for LHDs is the continued directives requiring LHDs to vaccinate only specific populations. The epidemiological data clearly shows who is at highest risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19, and that is individuals over 65 years of age, and particularly people of color in those populations. The current prioritization strategy results in situations such as one shared recently, where an LHD was able to vaccinate a young, healthy teacher, but was forced to turn away their elderly parent who came with them to the clinic in the hopes of receiving a vaccine. The current executive orders, with their threat of significant fines, forces local public health professionals to enforce these state-mandated decisions which go against both the scientific evidence and their own professional ethics. It further creates barriers to assuring health equity is at the forefront of vaccine administration

efforts. With the significant increase in the availability of vaccine, we are formally requesting that local health departments, like the state-run clinics, be allowed to administer vaccine to any eligible individual from all priority groups.

Our members also request reconsideration of the administrative barriers/workload related to redistribution of vaccine at the local level. We recognize and support the need to track who has the vaccine and to assure that vaccine administered is properly reported by the provider at the endpoint of distribution; however, we believe there are ways to reduce the burdensome process now in place. We recommend that LHDs be allowed to submit just one initial request for redistribution of vaccine to providers who they intend to regularly redistribute vaccine. Once the state has approved the first request, going forward LHDs could provide to the state a weekly list of the number of doses redistributed to each of these pre-approved redistribution provider sites. Full paperwork would then only need to be completed for that first request, and then for redistribution to new providers, or for one-time redistribution requests.

Additionally, with the ongoing increase in availability of vaccine raises a number of operational issues. Some LHDs have reported that this week they have received significant doses beyond their requested amounts. Because vaccine clinic planning is based on the requested amounts, this places LHDs in the position of either having to redirect staff resources away from vaccine administration to identify and redistribute these unanticipated doses to other providers, or risk non-compliance with the state mandated deadlines. LHDs need to receive the doses requested and advance communication should be made with them to see if they are able to accept and administer additional doses, or the state should use its regional hub to redistribute any unanticipated increase in doses. Moving forward, shipments of additional doses should, at the option of the local health department, start going directly to other enrolled community providers, rather than requiring redistribution at the local level.

We close with a request to consider the impact communications such as the ones sent yesterday have on employee and provider morale. The dedication of our local public health workforce in responding to the pandemic, and in particular, their work in contributing to the success of the state's vaccine roll-out should be acknowledged and supported. This letter went not only to local health commissioners/public health directors, but also to members of their staff, in at least one instance, only to their staff. As we pass the one year point in pandemic response, the need to be mindful of employee morale is critical if local health departments are to retain their staff and volunteers at their current level of commitment to response. The local public health workforce has, and continues, to make great personal sacrifices to protect our communities.

Several of our members have further heard from other providers who received similar communications who now indicate they may stop administering vaccine due to this threat of penalties. At a time when local governments and community providers are all working to respond to the pandemic - and also suffering from its economic impacts - punitive approaches such as this threaten to erode, not strengthen, our collective response.

We very much appreciate your ongoing commitment to providing opportunities for communications with local health departments as the vaccine roll-out progresses. Our members respectfully ask that these communications continue to be in the spirit of partnership as we address the administrative barriers outlined in this letter and future challenges. We are all working towards the same goal – ending this pandemic to save lives.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Public Health Director, Cattaraugus County Department of Health

President, New York State Association of County Health Officials

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Executive Director, New York State Association of County Health Officials

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Executive Director, New York State Association of Counties

CC:

Dr. Howard Zucker, Commissioner of Health, NYSDOH

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

To: [REDACTED]@gibsondunn.com]

From: Larry Schwartz[/O=NYEC/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=123F5A45B7574A1F823FDD850500D2A-COVID LS]

Sent: Sun 2/28/2021 5:51:10 PM Eastern Standard Time

Subject: Fwd: STATEMENT FROM GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

Interesting. Admitting something?

Begin forwarded message:

From: Press Office <Press.Office@exec.ny.gov>
Date: February 28, 2021 at 5:34:07 PM EST
To: Press Office <Press.Office@exec.ny.gov>
Subject: STATEMENT FROM GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO



For Immediate Release: 2/28/2021

GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

STATEMENT FROM GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

"Questions have been raised about some of my past interactions with people in the office.

"I never intended to offend anyone or cause any harm. I spend most of my life at work and colleagues are often also personal friends.

"At work sometimes I think I am being playful and make jokes that I think are funny. I do, on occasion, tease people in what I think is a good natured way. I do it in public and in private. You have seen me do it at briefings hundreds of times. I have teased people about their personal lives, their relationships, about getting married or not getting married. I mean no offense and only attempt to add some levity and banter to what is a very serious business.

"I now understand that my interactions may have been insensitive or too personal and that some of my comments, given my position, made others feel in ways I never intended. I acknowledge some of the things I have said have been misinterpreted as an unwanted flirtation. To the extent anyone felt that way, I am truly sorry about that.

"To be clear I never inappropriately touched anybody and I never propositioned anybody and I never intended to make anyone feel uncomfortable, but these are allegations that New Yorkers deserve answers to.

"That's why I have asked for an outside, independent review that looks at these allegations.

"Separately, my office has heard anecdotally that some people have reached out to Ms. Bennett to express displeasure about her coming forward. My message to anyone doing that is you have misjudged what matters to me and my administration and you should stop now - period."

###

Additional news available at www.governor.ny.gov
New York State | Executive Chamber | press.office@exec.ny.gov | 518.474.8418

[UNSUBSCRIBE](#)

EXHIBIT

7

To: [REDACTED]@asagovtaffairs.com]

From: Larry Schwartz[O=NYEC/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=128F5A45B7574A1F823FDD850500D2A-COVID LS]

Sent: Sun 2/28/2021 5:50:16 PM Eastern Standard Time

Subject: Fwd: STATEMENT FROM GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

Admitting he said/did it?

Begin forwarded message:

From: Press Office <Press.Office@exec.ny.gov>

Date: February 28, 2021 at 5:34:07 PM EST

To: Press Office <Press.Office@exec.ny.gov>

Subject: STATEMENT FROM GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO



For Immediate Release: 2/28/2021

GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

STATEMENT FROM GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

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EXHIBIT

8

DECLARATION OF COMPLIANCE WITH SUBPOENA

State of New York :
County of New York :

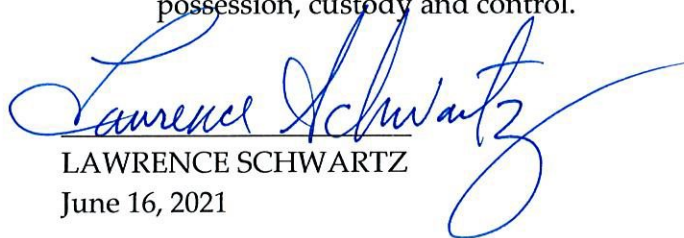
I, Lawrence Schwartz, hereby affirm under penalties of perjury as follows:

1. In March 2020, I volunteered to assist the Office of the Governor of the State of New York ("Governor's Office") in the State's Covid19 response including efforts to secure medical supplies, address the shortage of ventilators, manage issues of hospital surge capacity, establish a contact-tracing program, and related matters. In or around December 2020 through late April 2021, I again volunteered, this time to assist the State with vaccine distribution planning and distribution. In each case, I worked from the Executive Chamber of the Governor's Office;
2. My document production in response to the Subpoena of the Attorney General of the State of New York ("Office"), dated March 16, 2021 (the "Subpoena"), was prepared by me and my legal counsel, Petrillo Klein & Boxer LLP, under my personal supervision;
3. In connection with my production, I performed a diligent search for all documents and information requested by the Subpoena, in full accordance with the instructions and definitions set forth in the Subpoena, of hard copy and electronic communications and documents ("materials") within my possession, custody and control – *i.e.*, **not** including materials within the possession, custody and control of the New York State Government;
4. The documents and materials I located in response to the above consisted of a resume and a text communication responsive to the Subpoena, which were produced;
5. To the best of my knowledge and belief, and subject to my lack of control over materials maintained by New York State, my production is complete and correct;
6. No documents or information responsive to the Subpoena have been withheld from Respondent's production and response, except that my counsel has referred the Office to legal counsel to the Governor for any and all privileged document-hold notices issued by counsel's office that fall within the scope of the Subpoena;
7. The Documents (a resume and a text) contained in my production to the document requests in the Subpoena are authentic, genuine and what they purport to be; and



DECLARATION OF COMPLIANCE WITH SUBPOENA (cont'd)

8. I did not ask others to assist in my search for and production of Documents within my possession, custody and control.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lawrence Schwartz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

LAWRENCE SCHWARTZ

June 16, 2021