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Written by **R. Cort Kirkwood** on September 24, 2021

CNN's "Fredo" Cuomo Confesses to Sexual Harassment. Victim Wants Public Repentance

Chris Cuomo (AP Images)

After CNN talker Chris "Fredo" Cuomo threatened to beat the tar out of a bar patron, CNN did nothing.

After Cuomo, stricken with the China virus, threatened a cyclist on Long Island, who had called him out for violating Governor Andrew Cuomo's quarantine order, CNN did nothing.

After he joined "stragegy calls" about his brother's crashing political career due to sexual harassment allegations, CNN did nothing.

Now, maybe it will. Or maybe it won't.

Cuomo's former boss, Shelley Ross, writing in the *New York Times*, accused the 51-year-old leftist of sexual harassment. He made her an offer she was happy to refuse. But firing the angry, out-of-control star isn't the answer.

> In Opinion
>
> "Now that I think of it … I am ashamed," read the subject line of a 2005 email Chris Cuomo "wrote me, one hour after he sexually harassed me," Shelley Ross, a TV journalist, writes. She would "like to see him journalistically repent." https://t.co/dRFh6671PD
>
> — The New York Times (@nytimes) September 24, 2021

"I'm Ashamed"

"This year, as he escaped accountability for advising former Gov. Andrew Cuomo during his sexual harassment scandal, two moments crystallized for me how Mr. Cuomo performs," Ross wrote.

First, when Cuomo announced that he wouldn't cover his brother, he said he had "always cared very deeply" about sexual harassment and "profoundly so." Then Cuomo appeared in the Hamptons in a T-shirt that said "Truth." Thus, Ross's allegation:

> "Now that I think of it … I am ashamed," read the subject line of a 2005 email Mr. Cuomo wrote me, one hour after he sexually harassed me at a going-away party for an ABC colleague. At the time, I was the executive producer of an ABC entertainment special, but I was Mr. Cuomo's executive producer at "Primetime Live" just before that. I was at the party with my husband, who sat behind me on an ottoman sipping his Diet Coke as I spoke with work friends. When Mr. Cuomo entered the Upper West Side bar, he walked toward me and greeted me with a strong bear hug while lowering one hand to firmly grab and squeeze the cheek of my buttock.

> "I can do this now that you're no longer my boss," he said to me with a kind of cocky arrogance. "No you can't," I said, pushing him off me at the chest while stepping back, revealing my husband, who had seen the entire episode at close range. We quickly left.
>
> Soon after, I received the email from Mr. Cuomo about being "ashamed." He should have been. But my question today is the same as it was then: Was he ashamed of what he did, or was he embarrassed because my husband saw it? (He apologized first in his email to my "very good and noble husband" and then to me for "even putting you in such a position.") Mr. Cuomo may say this is a sincere apology. I've always seen it as an attempt to provide himself with legal and moral coverage to evade accountability.

Understandably, Ross wonders just how "deeply" and "profoundly" Cuomo cared about sexual harassment.

When Charlotte Bennett accused Andrew Cuomo of harassment, Fredo's name appeared in an email thread with other advisers:

> Mr. Cuomo urged his brother to take a defiant position early in the scandal and not resign. We all know that Mr. Cuomo was being consulted by his brother; what has never come to light, and what Mr. Cuomo has not been held to account for, is the full scope of the advice he gave his brother and whether his advice and his role in helping shape the defense of a sitting governor (one who was being investigated by Mr. Cuomo's own network) were in keeping with CNN's standards and values. (In May, Mr. Cuomo apologized for taking part in strategy calls with the governor and his staff, calling it "a mistake." CNN called those conversations "inappropriate.")

The fallout from Andrew Cuomo's scandal included the resignation of the leadership board of the #MeToo movement's Time's Up. Its chairwoman had tried to discredit one of the governor's accusers, Lindsay Boylan.

> Roberta Kaplan, the chairwoman of Time's Up, resigned from the organization after facing criticism for her ties to Gov. Andrew Cuomo and her involvement in an effort to discredit a woman who accused him of sexual harassment.https://t.co/1IZEofv01P
>
> — The New York Times (@nytimes) August 9, 2021

The fallout did not cause Cuomo to resign after trespassing his profession's ethical canons.

"I never thought that Mr. Cuomo's behavior was sexual in nature," Ross continued. "Whether he understood it at the time or not, his form of sexual harassment was a hostile act meant to diminish and belittle his female former boss in front of the staff."

Pretty bad stuff.

Yet Ross doesn't want Cuomo fired. Unlike the rest of us, "I hope he stays at CNN forever if he chooses," she wrote. Ross wants public penance and self-flagellation:

> I would, however, like to see him journalistically repent: agree on air to study the impact of sexism, harassment and gender bias in the workplace, including his own, and then report on

> it. He could host a series of live town hall meetings, with documentary footage, produced by women with expert consultants. Call it "The Continuing Education of Chris Cuomo" and make this a watershed moment instead of another stain on the career of one more powerful male news anchor.

What's Next For Fredo

For his part, Cuomo confessed. "Our interaction was not sexual in nature," he said. "It happened 16 years ago in a public setting when she was a top executive at ABC. I apologized to her then, and I meant it."

Maybe he did.

But the question is what CNN will do. It didn't fire him for threatening people with bodily harm. It didn't fire him for moonlighting as his brother's political consultant. And it won't likely fire him for what could be considered a sex assault.

After all, the victim of Cuomo's unwelcome squeeze of her gluteus maximus gave the network a pass. CNN can keep him "forever."

In the end, it doesn't much matter what CNN does.

Fredo's reputation sleeps with the fishes.

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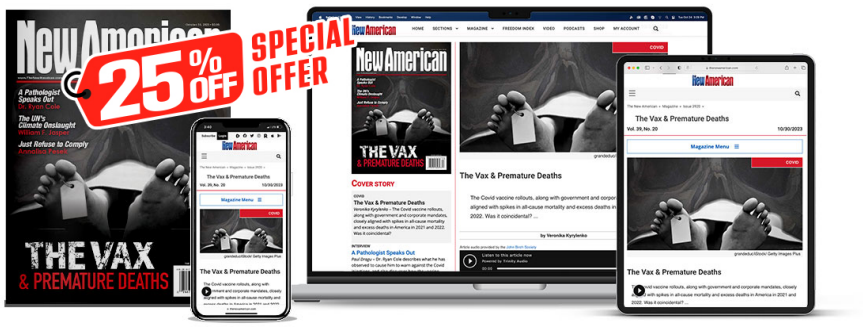

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