



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 12, 2021

Cuomo Aide Admits Withholding Nursing-home Death Counts to Avoid Federal Prosecution

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's top aide privately admitted Wednesday that the Cuomo administration deliberately withheld information on COVID-19 deaths in the state's nursing homes to protect itself from federal prosecution.

In a video conference call with state Democratic leaders, an audio recording of which was leaked to the [New York Post](#), Secretary to the Governor Melissa DeRosa said the administration had refused to honor an August request from state legislators for a count of nursing-home deaths related to the virus because "right around the same time, [then-President Donald Trump] turns this into a giant political football."



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"He starts tweeting that we killed everyone in nursing homes," DeRosa said. "He starts going after [New Jersey Governor Phil] Murphy, starts going after [California Governor Gavin] Newsom, starts going after [Michigan Governor] Gretchen Whitmer."

On top of all that, she recalled, Trump "directs the Department of Justice to do an investigation into us."

"And basically, we froze" because of fear that whatever information they released, whether to the Justice Department or to state lawmakers, "was going to be used against us," she explained.

"So we do apologize," she said. "I do understand the position that you were put in. I know that it is not fair. It was not our intention to put you in that political position with the Republicans."

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State and federal officials, news outlets, and private entities sought information on New York's nursing-home deaths for months after Cuomo issued an order in March forcing such facilities to accept COVID-19 patients and then took [other actions](#) clearly designed to cover up the fatal results of that order.

In late January, however, New York Attorney General Letitia James released a report finding that the actual COVID-19 death count in nursing homes was over [50 percent higher](#) than the official tally of 8,711. As of Wednesday, Health Commissioner Howard Zucker put the total number of nursing-home residents killed by the virus at 13,297, a count that increases to 15,049 when assisted-living and adult-care facilities are included.

On Friday, the [Associated Press](#) reported that 9,056 recovering COVID-19 patients were discharged from hospitals into nursing homes in New York while Cuomo's order, which he rescinded amid a public outcry in May, was in effect — a number "more than 40% higher than what the state health department previously released."



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Now that the truth has finally come out, has Cuomo, author of *American Crisis: Leadership Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic*, apologized to the grieving families of those who died from the virus in nursing homes or even shown any shame for hiding the truth? No, he has not. He has dismissed critics as being motivated strictly by politics, and the sole apology he has thus far offered — and only indirectly — was to his fellow Democrats for putting them in political jeopardy.

That was too little, too late even for some Democrats.

“I don’t have enough time today to explain all the reasons why I don’t give that [apology] any credit at all,” Assembly Health Committee Chairman Richard Gottfried said on the conference call.

“You’re only sorry that you all got caught,” [tweeted](#) state Senator Alessandra Biaggi. “Because of your decisions, thousands of people died who did not have to die.”

Meanwhile, “nearly every top Republican in the state pounced on the Post’s report, subjecting Cuomo to a barrage of criticism arguably unparalleled at any point during his decade in office,” wrote [Politico](#).

“For over six months, day after day, in briefing after briefing, Governor Cuomo stood before New Yorkers and lied about his directive that contributed to the deaths of thousands of seniors,” said Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro. “In the coming days he will cynically try to convince us that it was for our own good — that it was someone else’s fault. This is another lie. What is true, is Andrew Cuomo has proved himself unworthy of our trust, and unfit for public office.”

Other Republicans demanded Cuomo’s resignation, while still others called for state and federal investigations into the matter.

As for Cuomo, a statement from spokesman Rich Azzopardi to the *Post* said the governor withheld information from state legislators because of a “politically motivated” attack by the Trump administration. Some things never change.



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