

Over Half of New York Assembly Calls for Cuomo's Removal From Governor's Office

A majority of state Assembly members support beginning impeachment proceedings against Gov. Andrew Cuomo if he doesn't resign over investigative findings that he sexually harassed at least 11 women, according to an Associated Press count Wednesday.

At least 82 of the body's 150 members have said publicly or told The AP that they favored initiating the process of ousting the third-term Democratic governor if he doesn't quit. A simple majority of Assembly members is needed to authorize an impeachment trial.

Cuomo has denied that he made any inappropriate sexual advances and insisted the findings didn't reflect the facts. But while political pressure grew, so did the potential for criminal charges against Cuomo, who basked in national attention last year as the blunt-but-relatable voice of fighting the coronavirus in an early U.S. hotspot, only to see his political future imperiled a year later.

District attorneys in Manhattan, suburban Westchester and Nassau counties and the state capital of Albany said they asked for investigative materials from the inquiry, overseen by Democratic state Attorney General Letitia James.

James' investigation found that Cuomo had violated civil laws against sexual harassment. Making no conclusions about whether he should be criminally charged, investigators left the door open for local prosecutors to bring cases.

"We are reviewing the deeply disturbing findings," said Joyce A. Smith, the acting district attorney in Long Island's Nassau County. She pledged her office would "thoroughly and expeditiously investigate any potential crimes" that happened there.

After James released her report Tuesday, Democrats from the statehouse to the White House called for Cuomo to go, with President Joe Biden saying the governor should resign. But he showed no signs of heeding them, saying that some episodes described in the report never happened, others were misconstrued or mischaracterized and the whole exercise was tainted.

"Politics and bias are interwoven throughout every aspect of this situation," he said in a recorded video response.

Assembly Democrats, who lead the chamber, debated virtually for hours Tuesday about whether to impeach the governor now, wait to see whether he resigns, or give the Assembly Judiciary Committee time to wrap up its wide-ranging investigation into topics from sexual misconduct to the Cuomo administration's monthslong obfuscation of the total number of nursing home residents who died from COVID-19.

At least 40 of the Assembly members who say they are ready to start impeachment proceedings are Democrats.

As New York went through a harrowing coronavirus surge in spring 2020, Cuomo's daily briefings garnered him fans around the country and an International Emmy Award. Casting himself as a tough-minded yet compassionate leader who steered the state through its biggest public health emergency in a century, the governor even wrote a book about it.

Now, that book itself is among the focuses of investigations into Cuomo, with James examining the role some of his aides played in producing it.

As complaints and investigations accumulated in recent months, Cuomo became an embattled but unabashed figure. He often still touts the state's handling of the pandemic despite now-rising infection rates amid a national surge in the more infectious delta variant.

If the Assembly votes to impeach Cuomo, the state Senate could launch an impeachment trial "in weeks," Deputy Majority Leader Mike Gianaris told The Associated Press.

Gianaris, a Democrat, said the chamber has been preparing for a potential impeachment trial for months.

"We'll be ready to go if and when the impeachment articles are sent over," he said. "It could happen very quickly."

The 150-member Assembly would need 76 votes to impeach Cuomo and send articles of impeachment to the Senate. The Assembly includes 106 Democrats, 43 Republicans and one Independent.

At least two dozen Assembly Democrats called for impeachment in public statements issued Tuesday, according to a tally compiled by The Associated Press. Some said the Assembly should vote for impeachment now, while others said the chamber should impeach Cuomo if he doesn't resign.

Assembly Republican Leader Will Barclay urged Speaker Carl Heastie, a Democrat, to convene an emergency special session to vote to impeach Cuomo.

James' investigation, conducted by two outside lawyers, painted what she called a "clear picture" of a governor who touched or made sexually inappropriate comments to a series of women, many of whom worked for him. One is a state trooper whom Cuomo successfully sought to have assigned to his security detail.

While many of the allegations against Cuomo involve verbal comments, some women have also alleged that he gave them

unwanted kisses or touches. One aide said the governor reached under her shirt and groped her breast at the governor's mansion in Albany.

The governor denied Tuesday that he ever inappropriately touched anyone, said that he never intended harm and cast doubt on the political motivations of investigators, accusers and critics.

To date, Cuomo has rebuffed calls to step down and has moved ahead with plans to run for a fourth term in 2022. {eo}

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