

CUOMO COOKED HIS OWN GOOSE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the trials and tribulations of Gov. Andrew Cuomo:

Gov. Cuomo is finished, and everyone knows it. The investigative reports on the nursing home scandal, along with a probe of accusations of sexual harassment, will detail his deadly decisions and his sexual misconduct. If he were prudent, he would resign. But his unrelenting arrogance will not allow him to do so.

Regarding the latter charges, it is now clear that Cuomo's campaign for a new law on sexual harassment in the workplace backfired. Indeed, he cooked his own goose.

Cuomo started 2019 bragging how New York will enact legislation on sexual harassment that will be the strongest in the nation. In mid-February, when the first public hearings were held, he said, "I am very proud that New York is the most aggressive state in the country on women's rights. Anything I can do on sexual harassment we will do."

One month later, after championing what he said was the gold standard on sexual harassment legislation, Cuomo was asked by Karen DeWitt, a reporter for NPR, about a recent high-ranking official in his administration who had to resign amid a sexual harassment probe. That set Cuomo off.

According to one news story, "Cuomo got extremely testy." Another report said he "scolded" DeWitt. Her crime? She asked what he was going to do different about this problem in his state government. "When you say it's state government," the governor said, "you do a disservice to women, with all due respect, even though you are a woman. It's not government; it's society."

In June, state lawmakers passed the new law. Cuomo was

delighted that the bar was set very low. "We will make it easier for claims to be brought forward and send a strong message that when it comes to sexual harassment in the workplace, time is up." The New York Times weighed in, saying, "The legislation eliminates the state's 'severe or pervasive' standard for proving harassment, which advocates said had allowed judges to dismiss claims of inappropriate comments or even groping as insufficiently hostile."

Cuomo signed the legislation in August. When it went into effect in October, he said something that came back to haunt him. "The ongoing culture of sexual harassment in the workplace is unacceptable and has held employees back for far too long. This critical measure finally ends the absurd legal standard for victims to prove sexual harassment in the workplace and makes it easier for those who have been subjected to this disgusting behavior to bring claims forward."

As it turns out, five women have accused Cuomo of sexual harassment, and one of them, Lindsey Boylan, specifically accused him of creating "a culture within his own administration where sexual harassment and bullying is so pervasive that it is not only condoned but expected." Isn't that what Cuomo explicitly said was "unacceptable"?

Cuomo said at a press conference on March 3rd, "I never touched anyone inappropriately. I never touched anyone inappropriately."

This is contradicted by four of his accusers. Boylan says Cuomo kissed her on the lips without her consent and touched her lower back, arms and legs. Anna Ruch (unlike the others she did not work for Cuomo) said he put his hands on her lower back and cheeks and asked to kiss her. Karen Hinton said that after he embraced her, she tried to pull away, but he pulled her back. Ana Liss says he touched her lower back and kissed her hand, calling her "sweetheart."

Only Charlotte Bennett has not accused Cuomo of “inappropriate touching.” However, she said he asked her about her sex life, and whether she ever slept with older men, making her feel uncomfortable. “I thought he was trying to sleep with me,” Bennett told Norah O’Donnell in a CBS interview. As the New York Times noted about Cuomo’s new law, offenses include “inappropriate comments.”

Now it can be argued that some of these offenses are more infractions than they are serious cases of sexual misconduct. However, when he was giving the green light to lawyers wanting to pursue old cases of alleged clergy sexual abuse, Cuomo knew that many of the accusations involved “inappropriate touching.” So why should we give him a break now?

No one is saying Cuomo is guilty of doing what President Bill Clinton did with Monica Lewinsky. But according to his own relaxed standard of what constitutes sexual harassment in the workplace, he is guilty as sin.

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