

Hospitals gave Gov. Andrew Cuomo a campaign booster shot

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*It's bad enough that Gov. Cuomo presided over the needless COVID-19 deaths of thousands of **vulnerable people in New York nursing homes**.*

*It's bad enough that **he wrote a shameful book** praising himself for his pandemic response and now is doing a victory lap of self-congratulation in the worst-hit state in the nation.*

*It's bad enough that he is mounting a pre-election **scare campaign on COVID vaccines** to stir up anti-vax sentiment for political purposes.*

But now we discover that Cuomo got campaign funds from the hospital organizations that lobbied for his lethal policy for the elderly and which then bought TV ads whitewashing his culpability.

An exclusive audit of campaign donations to Cuomo by OpenTheBooks.com shows disturbing links with industry bodies which demanded the disastrous order forcing nursing homes to admit COVID-infected patients hospitals didn't want.

Overall, the audit shows a "systematic pay-to-play culture in Albany," says Adam Andrzejewski, CEO of OpenTheBooks.com, a nonprofit which has compiled a comprehensive database of US public sector expenditures.

The pattern of patronage in New York state amounts to "a legalized money-laundering scheme aimed at monetizing incumbent political power."

Cuomo has received \$6.2 million since 2014 from 347 companies who then made \$7 billion from state contracts.

“Did the governor operate in his own political interest or the public interest?” asks Andrzejewski, who provided his data exclusively to The Post.

“Soliciting state vendors for campaign cash is highly unethical because each instance where a state vendor gave a campaign donation and received a state contract is a potential conflict of interest.”

Most disturbing is \$1 million in donations from the Greater New York Hospital Association to the governor’s re-election campaign in 2018, plus other generous in-kind support.

The association and the health-care workers union, 1199 SEIU, also spent \$5.9 million lobbying in Albany in 2018.

A few days before the 2018 election, Cuomo approved a multibillion-dollar Medicaid rate hike for hospitals and nursing homes, which the association had lobbied for, and which allowed them to settle a pay dispute with the union.

Then, in February 2020, Cuomo appointed association board member and Northwell Health CEO Michael Dowling and union President Dennis Rivera to co-chair the Medicaid Redesign Team.

Dowling donated \$5,000 to Cuomo six weeks before the appointment, while the union gave \$15,000.

Northwell Health received \$10 million in state payments in 2019, reports Andrzejewski.

When the pandemic hit in March, the association successfully lobbied the Cuomo administration to transfer COVID-positive patients to nursing homes to relieve pressure on hospitals.

Despite warnings from doctors that the move represented “a clear and present danger” to other nursing home residents, Cuomo issued his directive March 25, while federally provided beds in the Javits Center and USNS Comfort hospital ship mainly lay empty.

As we now know, the directive was a death sentence for an estimated 15,000 nursing home residents.

With the move proving to be a legal and public-relations nightmare, the association again struck gold when it lobbied for a budget provision limiting the ability of COVID-19 victims to file malpractice suits against hospitals and nursing homes.

Well satisfied with its investment in the governor, the association then spent millions on TV advertising that praised Cuomo’s management of the pandemic. You could call the ads a quid pro Cuomo.

Cuomo's senior adviser, Rich Azzopardi, told OpenTheBooks.com that agency contracting is done at arm's length from the governor, "on the merits, by career civil servants and procurement professionals, with no input or influence from the Executive Chamber, and generally through a competitive bidding process."

But the pattern of political patronage for campaign cash which Andrzejewski has uncovered in the hospital sector is repeated elsewhere across New York.

The Big Four accounting firms, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG and PriceWaterhouseCooper, gave Cuomo \$360,000 in campaign donations between 2014 and 2019 and reaped \$260 million in state contract payments.

The real-estate and construction industries similarly are generous. For example, Scott Rechler, owner of RXR Realty, his wife, children and affiliated businesses gave \$540,000 to Cuomo's campaign between 2011 and 2020.

Rechler's brother, Todd, gave \$90,000. Andrzejewski found four real-estate leases owned by RXR Realty-affiliated companies and signed by two state agencies that are worth \$41 million.

Three big banks, Citibank, Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase, splashed \$196,100 in campaign cash on Cuomo, while reaping millions of dollars in state contracts.

Ten law firms pulled in \$10.4 million in state payments after donating \$440,000 to Cuomo since 2014.

Five major cable and telephone companies took \$233.9 million in state payments after donating \$610,000 since 2014.

As you can see, it's a cozy arrangement which benefits Cuomo. But it will only add to the growing unease New Yorkers have with their sky-high taxes, shoddy services and self-interested politicians.

Don't let 'em scare you to death

Get ready for the mother of all scare campaigns from Democrats and their media allies the next two weeks. They'll tell you the coronavirus is on the rampage and it's all President Trump's fault.

*But, before we fall for the **fearmongering of Joe Biden's "dark winter,"** it's worth noting that the CDC says **flu numbers are down 95 percent.** Have masks stopped it, or are flu symptoms being conflated with COVID-19?*

Secondly, the University of Washington model used to forecast impending doom has been getting it drastically wrong since March.

Finally, the mortality rate for COVID-19 patients is plummeting as better treatments appear. One study of 5,000 patients in the NYU Langone Health system, to be published in the Journal of Hospital Medicine, finds death rates between March and August dropped 18 percentage points, even for the elderly.

Be not afraid. Be sensible.

Media's Burisma myth

Among the most stubborn myths around the Burisma scandal is that Ukraine's top prosecutor, Viktor Shokin, was not investigating the corrupt energy company at the time Joe Biden threatened to withhold \$1 billion in aid unless he was fired.

The Washington Post repeated the false claim last week.

But contemporaneous news sources from Ukraine show that Shokin was aggressively pursuing Burisma in 2016, while it was paying the then-vice president's wayward son, Hunter Biden, more than \$80,000 a month to sit on its board.

On Feb. 4, 2016, Interfax-Ukraine reported that Prosecutor-General Shokin had seized property belonging to Hunter's boss, Burisma owner Mykola Zlochevsky, including four large houses, two plots of land and "a Rolls-Royce Phantom car." The National Radio Co. of Ukraine reported the same.

Eight days later, Joe Biden phoned Ukraine's president, Petro Poroshenko. Four days after the call, Shokin was fired, although it took another month for the Ukrainian parliament to ratify his ousting.