

Cuomo Takes Charge

by David King

Monday, January 03, 2011 12:00 AM - Last Updated Monday, June 03, 2013 02:42 PM



Office of Gov. Andrew Cuomo Andrew Cuomo taking the oath of office to become New York's governor.

Eliot Spitzer's [inauguration](#) four years ago was an event driven by hope. Crowds of onlookers stood on the capitol lawn to watch the Sheriff of Wall Street take his oath and then deliver the reform he promised: "Day One Everything Changes." James Taylor performed; there was a sense of jubilation, and for many voters it felt like Albany's time had come.

Four years ago Albany was regarded as a cesspool of ineptitude, corruption and privilege. Four years later, after Spitzer's resignation, the improprieties and missteps surrounding his successor, Gov. David Paterson, turmoil in the State Senate, and a slew of lawmakers caught up in investigations and scandal, voters hold Albany in even lower esteem. The state faces a \$9 billion dollar deficit and escalating financial woes, and its government seems unable to even begin to cope with it.

In this climate, Andrew Cuomo was inaugurated in a [small gathering](#) of about 170 people in the "War Room" of the capitol, away from throngs of people, away from union members holding

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signs protesting proposed cuts, and without much of the reviled legislature in attendance. The magic of the Spitzer inauguration wasn't there; certainly that was in part because Cuomo did not want it. But if he did, he probably would not have gotten it. Albany, as Cuomo acknowledged in his inaugural address, is now both the punch line and the joke, and many New Yorkers, even those who voted for Cuomo, doubt how much one man can change that.

Opening the Door

As he did during his four years as attorney general and his campaign for governor, Cuomo kept the environment at the inauguration well controlled and sent messages as much through what he didn't say as through what he did. He did, however, deliver a speech that was impassioned and emotional.

"It is a time for deeds, not words, and results, not rhetoric. It is time for a bold agenda and immediate action. There is no more waiting for tomorrow, and there are no more baby steps, my friends," he said, seemingly warning the legislature that he would not stand for more half measures on fixing the state budget or on ethics reform.

And Cuomo did take action: His first cut as governor was not to the budget but to a red ribbon signaling that the second floor, which houses the governor's offices (once known as "[Fort Pataki](#)"), would now be open to the public. And he ordered the concrete barricades -- the ones erected in the wake of 9/11 -- removed from the front of the capitol.

Cuomo told a story about walking in the capitol behind a mother and her young daughter. The daughter remarked how beautiful the capitol is and wondered why there weren't more people walking in the hallways. Cuomo seized on the girl's musings.

"To get into this capitol is like running an obstacle course, and it shouldn't be," Cuomo said. "People refer to the capitol as a fort or as a bunker, and it is anything but. This is a beautiful monument to democracy, this building. This is the people's meeting place, and they should be invited in. And today, my friends, we will reopen the capitol, literally and figuratively."

Details To Come

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Cuomo also made promises during his inaugural address and in conversations with reporters afterward. He vowed there will be no new taxes and said that he will unveil an "emergency financial reinvention plan" during his state of the state address on Wednesday. During the campaign Cuomo did not divulge how he would address the state's looming deficit, other than to say he would not raise taxes. He has provided few, if any, details about what he would cut and did not offer any more specifics on Saturday. But that seems likely to change Wednesday.

In his speech Saturday, Cuomo said that he wants to pass a property tax cap during this legislative session. He also spoke of consolidating both state and local governments to reduce waste. Previously, he has talked a lot about cutting the state's Medicaid system, so that may be in play in his fiscal plan as well. He could outline specific service and programs reductions -- something almost certain to attract howls of protest.

Cuomo has also taken the state of the state address out of the the Assembly chamber. It became tradition to deliver the speech there in 1923 when Gov. Alfred E. Smith decided he would give his speech rather than just write a letter to legislators. Smith spent years in the Assembly and wanted to keep the legislature on his side. Cuomo decided to hold his state of the state in a convention center to make it more accessible to the public. The administration is holding a lottery for members of public to win the chance to see Cuomo the deliver the speech in person. Some see it as a blatant slap at the legislature -- an attempt to distance himself from them and send a message. But publicly most legislators back the idea.

In his inauguration speech. Cuomo outlined some of his priorities.

"We have a very specific mandate for change that the people want. And our expectation is that the politicians and the elected officials of people are now going to do what the people voted for and what the people need. It starts with jobs, jobs, jobs, getting the economy running once again, getting the economy running all across this great state," said Cuomo.

"Number two is going to be cleaning up Albany and restoring trust. ... Any relationship is only as good as the level of trust, and we have lost the trust. And we are not going to get it back until we clean up Albany and there's real transparency and real disclosure and real accountability and real ethics enforcement. That's what the people have voted for and that's what the people deserve."

Cuomo issued an executive order mandating his staffers undergo ethics training.

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Cuomo said the issues have been clear for years its just been the will and discipline that has been missing.

"We know what needs to be done. We have known, in truth, what needs to be done for many, many years. What we have to do this time is we actually have to do it, we actually have to deliver for the people of the State of New York."

Can He Deliver?

A number of legislators and advocates are very optimistic about Cuomo's chances for accomplishing the goals he has laid out. They say Cuomo has matured from the brash, self-obsessed, back-room dealer he was when he worked for his father and even during his first [run for governor in 2002](#) . They say he is goal oriented and has gained discipline from his time as attorney general. Further, they note, he has been around Albany a long time and has learned from watching the successes and failures of his predecessors: his father Mario, George Pataki, Spitzer and Paterson. Being governor , they say, is what he has been waiting and planning for for years.

Other legislators, however, are not convinced. Quietly and privately, they say that Cuomo has himself more in mind than his party. That his entreaties across the aisles to the Republican majority in the may improve relations in the senate where Republicans recently retook the majority but may further complicate relationships with the Democratic controlled Assembly. Tensions between Cuomo and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver have been [speculated about](#) for months as it is expected that Silver will stand against a lot of Cuomo's budget cuts.

Further, skeptics say, say Cuomo's demand that the courts settle legal disputes over contested senate races before he took office and his conservative leanings have hurt Democrats and were only done to further his political aspirations. They worry that Cuomo has his sights set on national politics.

And then there are the state workers in Albany who fear that their unions have been snowed by Cuomo; they expect there will be many more cuts to state and education jobs under the new governor. Some unions [refrained from endorsing Cuomo](#) because he has made it clear that he wants concessions; others endorsed him and hope a good relationship with the governor will keep them from getting the worst of it.

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Spitzer famously vowed to go it alone, to be a steamroller while Cuomo acknowledged in his inaugural address that he needs the legislature as a partner and that he may even be asking them to give up some of their power.

"To the state legislators I say, I reach out to you to form a new partnership, because in truth the partnership between the executive and the legislature has not been working well for years, and that must change.

I respect the electoral responsibility of the legislature, I respect the constitutional independence of the legislature, but I also know that success will require a different approach. We must accomplish more, faster, smarter, and better, than we have in decades. We have no more time to dally.

"To my Republican colleagues I say, I will not govern in a partisan way and my administration will not be a partisan administration. I was not a partisan attorney general, I did not run a partisan campaign. I don't believe the Democrats or the Republicans alone created the problems we face today and I don't believe the Democrats or Republicans alone will be able solve the problems we face today. I believe we are going to have to do it and do it together."