

N.Y. / REGION

Cuomo Promotes Chief of Staff, Melissa DeRosa, to Be His Secretary

By LISA W. FODERARO APRIL 17, 2017

As part of a major reorganization of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's second-term administration, Melissa DeRosa, his chief of staff, was appointed on Monday as secretary to the governor, to serve as Mr. Cuomo's top aide.

An Albany veteran, Ms. DeRosa, 34, is the youngest person to hold the position, and the first woman. She succeeds William J. Mulrow, a former top executive at the Blackstone Group, who will become chairman of the 2018 re-election campaign of Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat.

The promotion of Ms. DeRosa, a tough loyalist credited with steering some of Mr. Cuomo's biggest legislative victories, also resurrects a thicket of questions about her familial ties to industries with business before the state government.

Her father, Giorgio DeRosa, is one of the most powerful lobbyists in New York in his capacity as a partner at Bolton-St. Johns in Albany. His many clients bring him in direct contact with state officials and lawmakers. Her brother Joseph DeRosa is also a member of the firm's lobbying team.

And Ms. DeRosa's husband, Matthew Wing, is a top executive at Uber in Manhattan, where he oversees public relations for the northeastern United States. In the \$153 billion state budget that was enacted this month, Uber and other ride-hailing services won permission to expand upstate.

When Ms. DeRosa was appointed chief of staff from director of communications

in December 2015, the governor's office said that she would not involve herself in discussions about issues that her relatives had a stake in. On Monday, Mr. Cuomo's office repeated that assurance.

Dani Lever, a spokeswoman for the governor, said Ms. DeRosa "has been and remains recused from any issue involving her father, brother and husband."

As a lobbyist, Giorgio DeRosa has worked on a number of procurement projects, according to Bolton-St. Johns's website. They include a state prescription drug program, which the firm valued at \$1 billion per year, and a mental health contract, valued at \$120 million a year. The company also said Mr. DeRosa obtained money for a soccer stadium in Rochester and led efforts to deregulate the cellular phone industry.

Ms. DeRosa began working in politics at a young age. At 16, she served as an intern for the political director of the New York State A.F.L.-C.I.O. After graduating from Cornell with bachelor's and master's degrees, Ms. DeRosa did political campaign work and public relations before leading President Barack Obama's national political action organization in New York State.

From there, she went to work in 2011 for the state attorney general, Eric T. Schneiderman, as deputy chief of staff and acting chief of staff. Neal Kwatra, who served as Mr. Schneiderman's chief of staff and now runs a political consulting firm, called Ms. DeRosa a "quadruple threat."

"Most people have their lanes, but she does policy, strategy, messaging and organizing," he said. "You don't work as hard as someone like her if you don't care about what you are doing and who you are impacting."

Ms. DeRosa then entered Mr. Cuomo's inner circle, first as communications director and then as strategic adviser before becoming his chief of staff. She has since emerged as perhaps his closest adviser.

Gerald Benjamin, a professor of political science at the State University of New York at New Paltz, said he did not believe that Ms. DeRosa's family connections should thwart her rise in state politics. "The secretary to the governor is a

mega-administrative job,” he said. “It’s to make the government work. My broad view is that a person should not be barred in their career as a consequence of their relationships with others.”

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