

**timesunion**

http://www.timesunion.com/7day-state/article/Summer-of-hell-brings-political-heat-for-Cuomo-11728088.php

## 'Summer of hell' brings political heat for Cuomo

Amid transit woes, progressive agitation, potential primary challengers emerge as GOP keeps up pressure



IMAGE 1 OF 4

[Buy Photo](#)

Gov. Andrew Cuomo holds a press conference to talk about New York spending money on the new Schenectady train station along with other infrastructure plans at Proctors Theater on Tuesday, July 11, 2017 in ... [more](#)

ALBANY — A "summer of hell" has turned into a season of political heat for Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

The two-term Democrat is weathering nightmarish transit problems in New York City as some Democrats are showing signs of unrest. Stephanie Miner, the Syracuse mayor whose relationship **fell out of favor** with the governor, and Terry Gipson, a one-term state senator from the Hudson Valley, have been floated as potential September 2018 primary challengers to Cuomo.

At the same time, the state Democratic Committee, for which Cuomo is the standard-bearer, **has been compelled to condemn** Democrats in the Senate who have formed a power-sharing coalition with Republicans, an arrangement that progressives **have faulted Cuomo** for not breaking up.

The question, though, is whether a Democrat, known or unknown, has the acumen to challenge a deft political tactician of the same political stripe who boasts a **nearly \$26 million war chest**.

Cuomo faced a primary in 2014, when Democrat Zephyr Teachout garnered 33 percent of the vote **in a loss** to the governor. In the process, she became a progressive emblem, catapulting her into an ultimately **unsuccessful run** against U.S. Rep. John Faso, R-Kinderhook, last year.

Like Teachout, Miner and Gipson are two Democrats with little to lose.

Miner may be interested in higher office, in part, because she is term-limited as Syracuse mayor. She has been mentioned in some circles as **a potential challenger** to U.S. Rep. John Katko, R-Onondaga County. **She told the Daily News** this week that she has also been approached about running for state Senate.

"I think there is a reason you're hearing so many people pretty openly discussing (a primary)," Miner told the newspaper. "The governor has some explaining to do or some answers to give."

Gipson, who is 1-for-3 in Senate campaigns, floated his own name as a potential gubernatorial challenger recently and has been critical of the state's Democratic establishment.

"I always find it surprising that so many of the things that you would expect a Democratic leader to do seem to be difficult to do in a state that is primarily Democrats," Gipson said of Cuomo earlier this week on WCNY's "The Capitol Pressroom."

For example, Gipson knocked Cuomo for what he sees as a lack of leadership on voting

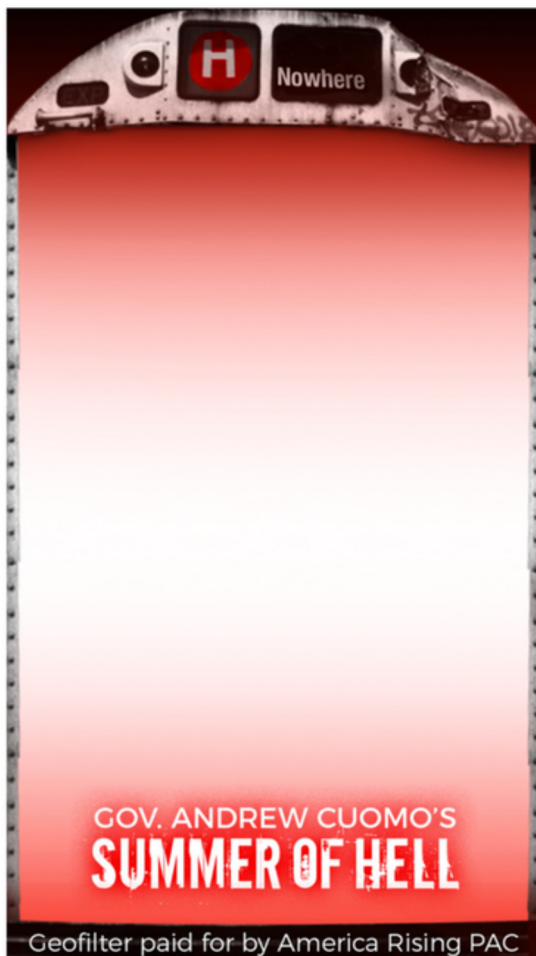
reforms that would make it easier for people to cast ballots. Though the governor has taken steps like **expanding access** to voter registration forms, his proposals to enact automatic registration and early voting that have passed the Democratically controlled Assembly haven't gained traction in the Republican-led Senate.

Cuomo thus far has shrugged off the primary chatter.

"We'll see what happens politically next year," he said at an event in Hudson Tuesday.

At the same time, the transit woes in the New York metro area have become **a rallying point** for political organizations on both sides of the aisle.

On Wednesday, America Rising — a pro-Republican super PAC that's **gearing for** a possible 2020 presidential run by Cuomo — began a new campaign to shellack the governor for the "summer of hell." The group released **an online video cut of news reports** about transit headaches and, in a novel modern political move, invested in producing a Snapchat geo-filter knocking the governor that smartphone app users can use at Manhattan's Penn Station.



**America Rising PAC**  
@AmericaRising

Follow

Traveling through Penn Station this evening? Make sure to check out our [#SummerofHell](#) Snapchat filter. More at [SummerofHell.org](#)

4:08 PM - Aug 2, 2017

2 4

"When Governor Cuomo coined the term 'summer of hell' to describe transit commuters summer experience, he had no way of knowing it would soon apply to his political career as well," America Rising Executive Director Alexandra Smith wrote in a public memo released Wednesday. "Few other events have done more harm to Gov. Cuomo's political standing than this summer's massive tristate transit crisis."

Recent public polling [has linked a dip](#) in Cuomo's approval ratings to the downstate transit crisis.

Cuomo isn't taking the criticism without some push back, though.

"America Rising is a conservative fringe group whose attacks may work in the Beltway but have been tried and failed in New York," Cuomo spokesman James Allen said in a statement, heralding Cuomo's accomplishments that include a minimum-wage increase and paid family leave. "If some Beltway hacks want to waste their special-interest money to be on the other side of overwhelming support, that's on them."

The dull roar of constant critiques of Cuomo isn't unusual for a seven-year incumbent seeking another four years in the executive chamber.

"There's something called ... the accumulation of disaffected minorities effect," said Gerald Benjamin, a longtime political scientist and director of the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz. "Over time, the longer you're in, the more and more groups get mad at you until they add up to a pretty large, noisy aggregation. They're not aligned with each other, but they're in net terms big."

The negative buzz isn't likely to die down. Political observers are bracing for what impact **the upcoming corruption trials** related to the Buffalo Billion and other upstate economic development initiatives will have. One of Cuomo's former top aides is among the defendants.

Still, it's rare in the modern era that an incumbent governor is denied his party's nomination, and Democrats still enjoy **a significant enrollment advantage** statewide over Republicans, making challenges from the left and right difficult.

"I don't think he's in trouble," Benjamin said. "I don't see a compelling opponent unifying a range of disaffected groups to make a real challenge emerging as of yet."

*mhamilton@timesunion.com • 518-454-5449 • @matt\_hamilton10*

© 2017 Hearst Communications, Inc.

**H E A R S T**

