

Ex-Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner to run for governor

By Michael Gormley

ALBANY — Former Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner, who was a frequent critic of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, said she will take on Cuomo as an independent “citizen of New York.”

Miner, a Democrat who began her career with former Gov. Mario Cuomo and worked closely with Hillary Clinton in her 2016 presidential campaign, said she won’t run as a Democrat or Republican in November.

“I think you have to change the system from the outside,” Miner told Newsday. “I tried to be an agent of change from the inside . . . but I can’t be involved in a system that chooses corruption and partisanship rather than integrity and problem solving.”

She announced her bid in The New York Times, saying her campaign will be a “rebuke of Andrew Cuomo’s policies and a rebuke of where we are as a state.”

She will run on the line of the Serve America Movement, a new independent political group. The group was created from dissatisfaction with the 2016 presidential elections. SAM said it seeks to back candidates in 2018 to secure enough votes to land automatic ballot lines in the 2020 national elections. Its’ directors include former staffers of Republican President George W. Bush as well as from Wall Street firms and major universities.

Miner was term limited from running for a third term as mayor of Syracuse. Her supporters have included Senate Deputy Majority Leader John DeFrancisco, a conservative Republican from Syracuse who had considered a run for governor this year.

Miner was the city’s first woman mayor and had been Cuomo’s appointed chairwoman of the state Democratic Committee. But she rose to statewide attention in 2013, near the peak of Cuomo’s popularity and political power, when she criticized in a New York Times opinion piece a Cuomo pension “smoothing” plan which she said would ultimately hurt municipalities and property taxpayers.

Cuomo faces a challenge in September’s Democratic primary by liberal activist Cynthia Nixon. A Siena Research Institute poll released last week showed Cuomo with a comfortable lead so far.

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Republican nominee Marc Molinaro said he welcomes Miner's candidacy, which could draw Democratic and independent votes from Cuomo, who also has a comfortable lead over Molinaro at this point.

"Mayor Stephanie Miner has been an outspoken critic of Andrew Cuomo's reckless administration of this state, and I welcome her into the governor's race," Molinaro said Monday.

Molinaro noted that Miner, Nixon and he are focusing their campaigns on Albany corruption during Cuomo's eight years, although the governor hasn't been accused of wrongdoing. This year alone, former aides were convicted in a bid-rigging trial involving one of Cuomo's biggest economic development projects and developers who were major Cuomo campaign contributors. A separate corruption trial involving a Buffalo economic development project begins this week in Manhattan.

Miner has a strong background to run, but the effort while significant may not be able to overcome Cuomo's support network that includes the state Democratic Committee he heads and his campaign fund of more than \$30 million, said Gerald Benjamin, distinguished professor of political science at the State University of New York at New Paltz.

"Great, experienced powerful talented person," Benjamin said, calling her a "courageous upstate voice." However, she should have entered the race soon, when she could have pre-empted Nixon's run, rather than fragmenting the anti-Cuomo vote.

Miner's bid shows "signs of upheaval in New York state politics," Benjamin said.

Billionaire Thomas Golisano of Rochester ran the last well-funded independent campaign for governor. He ran unsuccessfully for governor on a minor party line from 1994 to 2002, losing to Republican Gov. George Pataki.

Spokeswomen for Cuomo's and Nixon's campaigns declined to comment.

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News, views and commentary on Long Island, state and national politics.