

# Corruption convictions turn up the heat on Andrew Cuomo

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ALBANY — Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo spent years touting the “Buffalo Billion” and other high-tech economic-development projects as evidence he was working to improve the state’s economy.

Now, political opponents are seeking to use criminal convictions stemming from the same signature initiatives in their campaigns to oust him from office.

After less-than-promised job growth and a series of federal corruption convictions, Democratic primary opponent Cynthia Nixon and Republican gubernatorial candidate Marc Molinaro issued a flurry of attacks and campaign videos blaming Cuomo for the mess.



Seeking to wound Cuomo — who wasn’t accused of wrongdoing in any of the trials — the rival candidates said he was either asleep on the job or turned a blind eye to corrupt activities.

“This is the governor who has repeatedly said there can be no tolerance for corruption, and yet he has tolerated [it] at the highest levels of his own

administration,” Nixon, an actress and education activist, said outside the federal courthouse in Manhattan Friday. She also released a video that said Cuomo should ask the state attorney general to probe other projects involved in the Buffalo Billion.

On Thursday, Alain Kaloyeros, a key player in Cuomo’s high-tech building plans, was convicted in a bid-rigging scheme along with three upstate developers.

Molinaro said in a statement: “All corruption arrows point directly at Andrew Cuomo, and New Yorkers see it clearly. There’s no possibility that Mr. Cuomo, who’s infamous for micromanaging in the extreme, didn’t know that bids worth upward of a billion dollars were being rigged to benefit his donors.”

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Even Democratic attorney general candidate Zephyr Teachout seized on the convictions. Teachout said her previous attacks on the Buffalo Billion and Albany corruption in general distinguished her from rivals Leecia Eve and Tish James.

The federal jury concluded Kaloyeros, the former president of the State University of New York Polytechnic Institute, conspired with others to steer contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the developers — who also happened to be campaign donors to Cuomo.

Even before the verdicts came in, some of the projects had produced lower-than-expected job numbers. A solar power plant in Buffalo has produced a fraction of the 3,000 promised jobs. Another, a “film hub” in Syracuse, was shuttered and sold to the local county government for \$1.

The once highly touted projects now stand as a “poster child” for corruption and disappointment, said Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb (R-Canandaigua).

Cuomo sought to distance himself from any of the decision-making and instead place blame on Kaloyeros — whom he had once called an “economic guru” — and SUNY: “I didn’t hire Dr. Kaloyeros. He was there. He had done highly impactful work.”

Cuomo said he was unaware of the dishonest maneuverings of state officials and argued, “before you get to me, there’s 57 levels” of oversight.

“I don’t know what I could have done differently at the time,” Cuomo said. “This is the university system . . . SUNY was primarily responsible for supervising those entities.”

Asked if he bore some responsibility for the scandal, the governor said only in the sense that everyone on state payroll somehow is his responsibility. “Can you stop people from doing venial things?” he asked. “No. Can you stop people from doing criminal things? No.”

Newsday and other news outlets have reported that the [bidding process](#) the administration used for the solar plant in particular was unusual. It involved use of a SUNY-affiliated but private nonprofit that was subject to little oversight to speed the contracting process.

This was the second major corruption conviction tied to the Cuomo administration this year. In March, Joseph Percoco, Cuomo's former top aide and ex-campaign manager, was convicted in a conspiracy scheme involving a Hudson Valley power plant.

Combined, the verdicts in the Kaloyeros and Percoco trials are a problem for Cuomo in an election year when he is facing rivals on the left and right, said Gerald Benjamin, a political scientist at SUNY New Paltz.

“Obviously, it is a black eye for the governor although he wasn't personally implicated,” Benjamin said. “These were people close to him. They had his praise. Their efforts were central to his plans for the upstate economy. The issue now will be to what degree the New York electorate thinks this is just ‘business as usual.’”

*With John Riley*