

Stephanie Miner: Only insiders worry about her being a spoiler

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Stephanie Miner with Gov. Andrew Cuomo | Mike Groll/AP/REX/Shutterstock

The former Democratic mayor of Syracuse is running against Cuomo as an independent.

Stephanie Miner, the former Democratic mayor of Syracuse, said Monday that [she's running](#) for governor on an independent line, criticizing the “outrageous corruption” under Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

Miner's late entry into the race seems to complicate the picture for all involved, especially Cuomo, who may now have a seasoned, liberal politician competing for left-leaning votes in November.

The actress and activist Cynthia Nixon has run an energetic campaign in the Democratic primary against Cuomo. But, despite earning the progressive-aligned Working Families Party ballot line, Nixon [is not expected](#) to stay on the ballot for the November 6 general election if she loses the primary, lest she play the role of spoiler and inadvertently help Republican Marc Molinaro, the Dutchess County executive, win.

But as an independent candidate, Miner will not be competing in the September 13 primary, and is focusing entirely on the general election in November.

In a phone interview with City & State on Monday, Miner said she was not concerned about being a spoiler who could help the conservative Molinaro get elected.

“I think that’s what people who are vested in insiders worry about and think about. What I worry about and think about is the [million people](#) who left New York in the past eight years who have left because of a lack of opportunity,” she said.

But history is not on her side. Third party candidates rarely, if ever, win elections, and have often been blamed for swinging elections to the other side of the ideological spectrum by splitting votes on their side – just look at Ralph Nader in 2000. Gerald Benjamin, a political scientist with SUNY New Paltz said Miner may play that role. “The whole question is what happens in a multi-candidate race where the Democratic constituency is divided? It’s a serious question,” he said.

But Benjamin said Miner has a path to win over voters on the right as well as the left.

“She doesn’t have to win a primary,” he said. “She can construct an argument that’s unconstrained by the typical party parameters.”

The Cuomo campaign did not respond to a request for comment. The Molinaro campaign, undoubtedly delighted by this development, [tweeted out a statement](#) welcoming Miner to the race and criticizing Cuomo. Lauren Hitt, a spokeswoman for Nixon’s campaign, emailed City & State a statement saying that Miner’s campaign “shows the extent of New York’s disgust with Andrew Cuomo’s corrupt boys club.” In what is surely an effort to imply that Nixon is still the only true progressive in the race, she wished the “moderate” Miner good luck in creating a new party line.

Miner said she plans to create a new ballot line branded under the [Serve America Movement](#), or SAM. The group was created after the 2016 presidential election as a “third way,” hoping to garner votes from political independents. Though Miner [served as co-chair](#) of the state Democratic Party from 2012 to 2014, she’s trying to rebrand as a non-partisan.

“I have seen that the system is geared towards rewarding people who are interested in transactions and campaign contributions, not solving problems,” she said. “That mindset is both in the Republican Party and in the Democratic Party.”

Miner [stepped down](#) from her position in the state Democratic party in 2014 amid some [public squabbling](#) with Cuomo, and she hasn’t been afraid [to criticize him](#) since, but Miner said her bid wasn’t inspired by animosity towards the governor.

“I think you’d be hard-pressed to find a public utterance that I have said that has been a personal statement against the governor. This is about his policies,” she said. “And it’s about more than just the governor, it’s about both party establishments.”

Miner gave as an example the Democratic-led state Assembly’s apparent lack of interest in passing the so-called [“database of deals” legislation](#) that is meant to increase oversight over state economic development spending.

“A system that chooses to elevate partisanship over people, turn a blind eye to corruption to keep vested interests in power, is something that I don’t want to be a part of, and I’m going to stand against,” Miner said.

Miner likely would not be the only third-party candidate [in the race](#). Howie Hawkins, who is also from Syracuse, [is running again](#) on the Green Party line after earning about 5 percent of the vote in 2014. And Larry Sharpe is running as a Libertarian.

Miner is a longshot against the relatively popular and extremely well-funded Cuomo. But she already has one prominent backer in Bill Samuels, a liberal donor and chairman of the public policy group EffectiveNY. “I’m enthused about her as a candidate. She would be, unlike Cynthia Nixon, a very qualified governor,” Samuels said. “She’s a proven winner as a Democrat.”

Samuels said that Miner would pull votes from both sides of the aisle and that he isn’t worried about her siphoning away liberal voters in the general. “I’m not saying she’s the favorite. I’m saying don’t underestimate her. And don’t put her down because she may be a spoiler,” he said. “Let’s see how it goes the next couple months.”

Other progressive groups are watching and waiting as well. The New York Progressive Action Network [endorsed Nixon](#) in the Democratic primary in April, but NYPAN co-chair Traci Strickland told City & State that she’s appreciative of Miner’s “presence and her voice,” and that Miner has spoken to the group a number of times. But the group is focused on supporting Nixon in the primary, and she couldn’t speak to the general election yet. “There’s so many moving pieces to this,” Strickland said.