



New York Influencers



Politics—like many things in New York—happens at hyper speed. The result is a bustling class of pols, political consultants and others who have an outsized role on politics in the Empire State. What follows is a list of the most influential people in New York politics.

We've based this list on discussions with the people who know New York politics – insiders and political writers. Of course, any list like this is incomplete.

With that, *C&E* is proud to present the New York Influencers of 2010.

TOP TEN Republicans

Senate Minority Leader Dean Skelos

The highest-ranked GOP elected official in New York since the party lost the majority in 2008 – its last toe-hold in state government. His future depends on whether he can win back control of the chamber this fall.

Senate Deputy Minority Leader Tom Libous

The upstate go-to guy for the Senate minority. He also heads the conference's political operation, and is under pressure to help return his colleagues to the majority. Widely viewed as a possible challenger for Skelos' leadership post.

Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb

Holds the least-powerful legislative position as head of the smallest conference. But has won praise for his straight-forward style. Passed up a congressional run to stay in Albany, could be poised to win seat in a pro-GOP election year.

State GOP Chairman Ed Cox

Best known as President Nixon's son-in-law. Beat the odds – and the GOP establishment – to win his position.

Former NYC Mayor Rudy Giuliani

Rejected party leaders' call to run statewide this fall and spends more time stumping for out-of-state candidates – perhaps thinking of another presidential run? But Giuliani can still draw a crowd and make headlines. His endorsement remains highly sought after.

Former Gov. George Pataki

Has been out of office since 2002, but is still a player. Polls found he'd be a strong

contender for the US Senate. He chose to start a national PAC to oppose "Obamacare" instead, fueling speculation he still has White House dreams.

Rep. Peter King

One of just two Republican members of the New York congressional delegation. His conservative commentary, particularly on homeland security, makes headlines. Routinely flirts with – and rejects – a statewide run. Democrats would love to get rid of him, but have so far failed. Candidates seek his counsel.

Former Rep. Rick Lazio

The congressman-turned-JPMorgan lobbyist fought hard—and unsuccessfully—to become his party's gubernatorial designee, but he still has clout in his party.

Former Rep. Tom Reynolds

The congressman-turned-lobbyist left office in 2008. His tenure as NRCC chair was marred by the Mark Foley page scandal and the GOP's loss of the majority. But as one of the party's senior statesmen, candidates still seek him out for advice.

John Faso

Stepped aside for Pataki in 1994. Came within 3 points of winning the 2002 state comptroller's race. Turned out to be right about Eliot Spitzer, by whom he was trounced in 2006. The former Assembly minority leader is now a behind-the-scenes player, but may yet dust himself off and run again. An ally of Cox, with whom he started a conservative PAC.

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TOP TEN Democrats

Attorney General Andrew Cuomo

With a double-digit lead over all rivals and a massive fundraising edge, Cuomo's ascendancy to the governor's office is more "when" than "if." He's already weighing in on policy behind the scenes and terrifying state lawmakers with his anti-Albany campaign.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver

Albany's political chess master. The longest-serving legislative leader and widely acknowledged lone "grown-up" at the Capitol. Has lived through a 2000 leadership coup, a 2008 primary challenge and Gov. Eliot "Steamroller" Spitzer.

Senate Democratic Conference Leader John Sampson

Rose to power amid a 2009 coup and has been trying to discipline his unruly conference ever since. With 32

votes needed to pass bills and just 32 members in his conference, he has a tough time getting things done. Has seen his success rate improve with time. If he can grow the majority, his power will increase.

Sen. Chuck Schumer

The third most powerful Democrat in the US Senate. Has been distracted of late by his widely speculated desire to succeed Harry Reid as majority leader. Nevertheless, is expected to easily win re-election this fall.

Joe Percoco

The man behind Andrew Cuomo, sometimes referred to as his "enforcer." He has been with the Cuomo political operation for close to two decades, first working for the former governor and then moving on to join his son. Fiercely

guards the attorney general's interests and has his back – and his ear – at all times.

Patrick Gaspard

White House political director. He may have left SEIU/1199 for Washington, D.C., but he still plays in New York politics. Has helped engineer congressional special elections, bedeviling the GOP, sought to influence the governor's race and even keeps tabs on the New York City Council.

Larry Schwartz

Secretary to Gov. David Paterson. Widely credited with turning the "accidental governor" into a force to be reckoned with during his final budget battle. His take-no-prisoners style rankles some, but he'll write his own ticket after leaving Albany.

Dean Fuleihan

Veteran top aide to Assembly Speaker Silver, whose inner circle is very small. The speaker's right-hand man in Albany.

Gov. David Paterson

The accidental governor defied expectations by turning in a strong final budget performance. His legacy will be strengthening the powers of the office he was never supposed to inherit. But yet-unresolved ethics probes could mar that significantly.

Charlie King

A longtime ally – and sometime nemesis – of Andrew Cuomo. Now serving as state Democratic party executive director at Cuomo's request and serving as the unofficial attack dog of the AG's campaign for governor.

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Republicans to Watch and Know

Mallory Factor and James Higgins

Founders of the Monday Meeting, a must-do event for candidates from both inside New York and beyond seeking to curry favor with the right. A red bastion in an increasingly blue state. (Factor now lives outside the state; E. O'Brien Murray helps run the event).

NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly

Gets high job performance marks from cynical voters in the ungovernable city. Might run for mayor in 2013.

John Catsimatidis

Once best known as a Democratic donor, the supermarket mogul switched his enrollment in preparation for a 2009 mayoral run. His plan was scuttled by Bloomberg's third term, but he remained a Republican and now donates to candidates on both sides. (His daughter, Andrea, is engaged to Cox's son, Chris).

Staten Island DA Dan Donovan

Making his first statewide run for attorney general this fall with Bloomberg firmly in his corner. Even if he loses, will have raised his name recognition for a future race.

State Comptroller hopeful Harry Wilson

Former hedge fund manager seen as the GOP's best hope at statewide victory this fall. One of just two candidates (along with Donovan) warring Republican and Conservative leaders can agree on.

Former US Attorney Michael Garcia

A former US attorney for the Southern District of NY best known for bringing the prostitution case that forced Eliot Spitzer from office. Has been mentioned as a potential statewide candidate, most likely for attorney general.

Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino

His defeat of three-term Democratic incumbent Andy Spano took New York by surprise, especially since he did

it with little assistance from the GOP establishment. Has since hewed to his message of a tax freeze and spending cuts. Is seen as a rising star.

Assemblyman Jack Quinn

Son of a popular ex-congressman. Has a strong shot at unseating a Democratic incumbent state senator in Western NY and helping the Senate Republicans with their goal of regaining the majority.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy

His switch from the Democratic Party to the GOP to run for governor at Cox's urging fell flat. But he's sticking with the Republicans and faces a re-election bid in 2011. If he survives, he could again be a future statewide contender.

Jennifer Saul

As chair of the Manhattan GOP in a Democrat-dominated city, she doesn't have much clout. But she is a national committeewoman and a big fundraiser/donor. Her father, Andrew Saul, is a Westchester millionaire and MTA board member who flirted with a congressional run in 2007.

Rob Ryan

A former Pataki administration official who is close to the state Conservative Party chairman. Worked for the Conservative/Tea Party candidate in the NY-13 congressional election that drew national attention for splitting the GOP.

Jeff Buley

A lobbyist and longtime counsel to the state GOP. The last word for many candidates on New York's arcane Election Law.

EJ McMahon

A conservative policy wonk whose advice is highly sought after by candidate. Heads the Empire Center for New York State Policy, best known for putting large amounts of public employee data on the Web.

Erie County Executive Chris Collins

Foot-in-mouth disease tanked his 2010 gubernatorial candidacy, but he's aggressive and ambitious and wields considerable clout in his corner of Western New York.

Carl Paladino

A wealthy Buffalo businessman making a long shot, self-funded bid for governor. He's trying to stir up Tea Party resentment to start an independent line. It's unlikely he'll be elected, but he'll make his impact felt – especially if he succeeds in starting a new third party.

Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano

The surprise winner of the 2009 election cycle. He ousted incumbent Tom Suozzi, a Democratic rising star, and helped sweep the Nassau County GOP back into power. Could have a future statewide.

Erie County GOP Chairman Nick Langworthy

Just 29, Langworthy only recently took control of the party, but has already made his presence felt by supporting his hometown candidate, Paladino, at the party's convention and refusing to cut a deal to back a mainstream gubernatorial hopeful.

NYC Minority Leader Jimmy Oddo

An outspoken yet pragmatic politician who knows how to leverage small bloc of five swing votes to his best advantage when possible. Is expected to run for Staten Island borough president in 2013.

Jake Menges

A longtime Giuliani operative, dating back to the former mayor's City Hall days and on through the presidential campaign. Still in Giuliani's orbit, but also works on behalf of other clients.

NYC Councilman Eric Ulrich

Elected at the age of 24 in a special election, becoming the youngest Council member. His district is Democrat-

dominated. Courted by Senate Republicans to run this fall, but declined. Seen as a likely state-level contender some time down the road.

Warren County DA Kate Hogan

Was wooed by state party leaders to enter the attorney general's race this fall. Eventually decided against it, but is seen as a rising star.

Monroe County Executive

Maggie Brooks

Mentioned as a possible lieutenant governor running mate for both Lazio and Cuomo (the latter was a far-fetched float), she's seen as an up-and-comer.

Bill O'Reilly

A savvy PR specialist with longstanding Conservative ties. Widely respected among reporters as a tough but fair flack. Worked on Astorino's successful county executive campaign. Now working on Wilson's state comptroller campaign.

Roger Stone

The self-professed "dirty trickster" with the Nixon tattoo is a master spinmeister. Always good for a stunt (he's running the so-called "Manhattan Madam" for governor), it's sometimes hard to separate his truth from fiction. But he's never boring.

Mike Avella

Former Senate GOP staffer. Now a lobbyist. Able to bridge the gap between Democrats and Republicans. Worked on the historic gay marriage vote, which failed with the entire Republican conference voting "no."

Brendan Quinn

A former state GOP executive director under powerhouse ex-Chairman Bill Powers. Handles mostly upstate candidates, but also has connections at the RNC.

Suffolk County GOP Chairman

John Jay LaValle

Took on a statewide profile as Levy's main surrogate during the county executive's short-lived run for governor. Wins for losing with Levy, since the highest-ranked local official in his county is now a Republican.

Former Rep. Vito Fossella

Forced to retire early due to twin drunk-driving/out-of-wedlock child scandals, the ex-Staten Island congressman has been speculated to be eyeing a comeback ever since. So far, nothing has come from his multiple flirtations, but he's now talked of as a possible 2013 Staten Island borough president contender.

Former Senate Majority Leader

Joe Bruno

A charismatic powerhouse in his heyday. Retired in the face of an FBI investigation into his outside business interests and was found guilty on two counts of federal corruption charges. But the US Supreme Court ruling on the "honest services" statute under which he was convicted could yet exonerate him, clearing his name and his legacy.

John McArdle

A career Senate GOP spokesman who has lasted through three leadership changes. Even Democrats begrudgingly admire his prowess at spin.

Lawrence Kadish

National GOP committeeman and big behind-the-scenes donor to the state party.

Diana Taylor

Best known as Bloomberg's live-in "companion," has a profile in her own right. Served as Pataki's state Banking superintendent. Her name was floated as a possible US Senate candidate against Democrat Gillibrand. She recently admitted she was very interested in running, but her relationship with the mayor prevented it. Might yet seek elected office.

Dave Catalfamo

The last Pataki communications director. Still handles the former governor's press and also has an Albany-based lobbying/consulting firm that works for other GOP clients.

Paul Singer

Founder of the hedge fund Elliott Associates. A major GOP donor and big backer of Giuliani's 2008 presidential campaign.

Rob Cole

A former Pataki aide, Cole's Shawmut Group worked for Sen. Scott Brown's successful campaign in Massachusetts. Has long-standing ties to ex-Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney. Is now working for several NY candidates, including congressional hopeful George Demos.

Christina Comer

An up-and-coming Saratoga-based fundraiser who worked on Astornio's campaign and is now raising money for Wilson, among others.

Arthur Finkelstein

A very behind-the-scenes consultant rarely (if ever) seen in public, he served as Pataki's political mastermind. His power has waned and he lives in Massachusetts. But he is advising candidates in New York, including Lazio.

Dan Senior

Best known as former chief spokesman for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq (and husband of former CNN personality Campbell Brown). Was wooed by GOP and Conservative leaders to challenge to Sen. Gillibrand. Took a pass, but party leaders remain interested.

Tony Carbonetti

A veteran Giuliani operative who also worked for the former mayor in the private sector. Left Giuliani Partners in the spring of 2009 to work as a strategic adviser to Home Depot co-founder and former NYSE Director Ken Langone, who is a big GOP donor (and old Spitzer nemesis).

Kevin Fullington

A former aide to NYC Council Minority Leader Oddo and a longtime GOP operative. Is now managing Lazio's campaign for governor.

Tom Basile

Named executive director of the Empire State GOP by Cox. Worked for Bush-Cheney 2000 and served as Press Secretary for Trent Lott. Founded Empire Solutions Consulting.

Democrats to Watch and Know

Former Gov. Eliot Spitzer

Now better known for the prostitution scandal that forced him from office than his crusading days as the “White Knight” of Wall Street. But Spitzer still makes headlines. Has never denied the desire to return to elected office. His new gig as a primetime host for CNN could be either a comeback vehicle or alternate career.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand

Weak in the polls, but intervention by the Obama administration and Schumer has scared off significant primary challengers. Facing weak GOP opponents, she’s poised to sail to victory in her first statewide bid for the seat she inherited from Hillary Clinton thanks to Gov. Paterson.

Bill and Hillary Clinton

Their profile is more national, particularly given her post as US secretary of state, but they do call Westchester home base and continue to make headlines in New York. She can’t endorse candidates or help them raise campaign cash but he can, and does, often acting as her surrogate.

The Rev. Al Sharpton

His focus has become increasingly national, but he’s still the point person in New York on anything to do with African-American issues. His National Action Network headquarters in Harlem is a must-do stop for any candidate wooing the black vote.

Jennifer Cunningham

Longtime behind the scenes advisor to Andrew Cuomo. A savvy political operative, left her job as SEIU/1199 political director and is now a powerhouse lobbyist.

Paul Francis

After a successful career in the private sector (Priceline.com and Ann Taylor), he advised Eliot Spitzer on policy and served in Spitzer’s short-lived administration as Budget Director and director of state operations. Stayed on for several months under Paterson. Now advising Cuomo.

Melvin Lowe

Senate Democratic Conference Leader John Sampson’s longtime political advisor. He is a veteran operative on the New York political scene, but keeps a very low profile.

Dennis Mehiel

A wealthy Westchester businessman, Democratic donor and lieutenant governor candidate in 2002. Ran with then-state Comptroller H. Carl McCall, who was challenged in a primary by Cuomo (he quit one week before the election).

Bill Samuels

A Democratic donor and activist who dropped a lieutenant governor bid this fall to focus on establishing a political action committee to elect more progressives to the Senate and oust Senate Majority Leader Pedro Espada Jr.

Former NYC Mayor Ed Koch

His last hurrah (as he puts it) is a PAC, New York Uprising, through which he is calling on all candidates to sign a pledge promising to support nonpartisan independent redistricting, ethics and budget reform.

Hank Sheinkopf

A veteran Democratic consultant and go-to source for political reporters.

June O’Neill

Former state Democratic chairwoman who is now chair of the party’s executive committee. Her upstate ties are deep, making her a key ally for statewide candidates. She has ties to the Cuomos, having worked for the former governor.

Frank Hoare

Former state Democratic Party executive director, now a consultant with deep ties to the rank-and-file of the party – particularly its county chairs.

Jerry Goldfeder

Election lawyer; Was counsel to AG Cuomo. Author of treatise, “Goldfeder’s Modern Election Law.”

Steve Pigeon

He’s under investigation by the feds and works for scandal-scarred Senate Majority Leader Pedro Espada Jr., the man Democrats love to hate. But Pigeon remains an influential figure in Western New York, in part because of his connection to billionaire Tom Golisano.

Manhattan DA Cy Vance Jr.

Elected in 2009 to succeed Robert Morgenthau with the legendary DA’s blessing; the first change in that office in more than five decades. The jury’s out on how he’ll fare. Continued his predecessor’s war with Bloomberg – a powerful, and potentially dangerous, opponent.

Rochester Mayor Bob Duffy

Catapulted from relative obscurity (from a statewide perspective) when Cuomo tapped him to run for lieutenant governor this fall. Now poised to be the No. 2 top Democrat in New York – a position that has risen in importance since Spitzer’s fall from grace.

Patricia Lynch

A former top aide to Speaker Silver, has since left the public payroll to become a top-flight lobbyist. Her star is tied tightly to the speaker. Her firm was subpoenaed in Cuomo’s pension fund investigation, but no charges have been brought. Cuomo’s rise could hurt her.

Roberto Ramirez

A must-hire lobbyist and consultant for candidates seeking to curry favor with the all-important Latino community. His firm came up in Cuomo’s pension fund probe, but no charges have been brought.

NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn

The first woman and first openly gay individual to serve in her post. A close – perhaps too close – Bloomberg ally who helped push through a term limits extension so he could run in 2009, shelving her own mayoral aspirations in the process. Could be a 2013 NYC mayoral contender, but is dogged by a

“slush fund” scandal.

NYC Comptroller John Liu

The first Asian-American to hold citywide office. He won in 2009 by putting together a “rainbow” coalition of African American, Latino and Asian supporters. Was almost immediately deemed a possible 2013 mayoral candidate, but first needs to perform in his current job.

NYC Public Advocate Bill de Blasio

A Cuomo family ally who is also close to Hillary Clinton. Has strong ties to progressive labor and is viewed as a potential 2013 candidate for mayor – assuming his office isn’t abolished by the Charter Revision Commission.

Rep. Anthony Weiner

Took a pass on a runoff after the 2005 mayoral primary in the name of Democratic unity. Backed off a re-match against Bloomberg in 2009 after the mayor engineered a term limits extension. Became a left-leaning advocate during the health care reform debate. Seen as a 2013 mayoral contender, but recent marriage to Hillary Clinton aide Huma Abedin could change his focus to family.

Former NYC Comptroller Bill Thompson Jr.

Came within 4.6 percentage points of toppling Bloomberg in 2009 despite being vastly outspent and grossly underestimated. Was courted to run statewide in 2010, but declared he’d try again for mayor in 2013. Bloomberg won’t be on the ticket. But the Democratic field will be crowded. Can he stay relevant in the private sector?

Rep. Steve Israel

A strong fundraiser from the swing region of Long Island. Took a pass on a primary challenge to Sen. Gillibrand at Obama’s request. Now chairs the DCCC’s recruiting committee.

Sen. Eric Adams

A trusted member of Senate leader Sampson’s inner circle. Mentioned as a possible future conference leader or 2013 mayoral contender.

Assemblyman Keith Wright

Recently took over as Manhattan Democratic chairman. An outspoken supporter of Gov. Paterson during height of calls for his resignation in the wake of scandal.

Assemblyman Carl Heastie

After a hostile takeover and prolonged legal battle, he successfully took control as Bronx Democratic chairman. Trying to maintain unity in the fractious borough is like herding cats, but he’s trying.

Brooklyn Democratic Chairman Vito Lopez

An irascible and hard-driving party leader and assemblyman. He took over in the wake of a corruption scandal. He has many detractors and reform-minded opponents, but candidates travel from far and wide to kiss his ring.

BerlinRosen

A consulting firm headed by former state Senate staffers, Valerie Berline and Jonathan Rosen, and favored by “progressive” Democratic candidates and causes. Has seen some big recent wins, including the Assembly speaker’s sweep of 68 percent of the vote in the 2008 primary – his first serious challenge in more than two decades.

Kevin Sheekey

Traded the public Bloomberg payroll for the private Bloomberg payroll (at the mayor’s media company, Bloomberg LP). Remains very much involved in the mayor’s political orbit, just now operating even more behind the scenes.

Kevin Finnegan

Took over for Cunningham as SEIU/1199 political director. A powerful operative who prefers working behind the scenes – often with the Working Families Party. A California transplant who got his start on Harvey Milk’s bid to become the first openly gay elected official in the US in 1977.

Bradley Tusk

An operative whose resume includes a stint with ex-Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich. He’s been called Mayor Bloomberg’s “secret weapon,” but is a Democrat despite his work helping New York’s richest man win a controversial third term. Still seen as doing Bloomberg’s bidding, but also branching out with his own clients.

Micah Lasher

A Democratic wunderkind, is Bloomberg’s top lobbyist in Albany and not yet 28 years old. Co-founded prominent consulting firm, KnickerbockerSKD, and harbors political ambitions of his own –

perhaps NYC Council in 2013.

Howard Wolfson

Best known as Hillary Clinton’s communications director, jumped the Democratic ship after her failed presidential bid to work on Bloomberg’s campaign for a third term. Now a Bloomberg deputy mayor. Is married to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s chief of staff, Terri McCullough.

Neal Kwatra

Political director for the New York Hotel Motel Trades Council. A slick and aggressive young operative, he’s widely credited for turning the small union into a power player at both the city and state levels.

Josh Isay

Former Schumer aide, co-founded KnickerbockerSKD with Lasher. The consulting firm or choice for Schumer, Bloomberg and a host of other Democratic pols.

Gigi Georges

Managing director at the Glover Park Group. Worked for Bill Clinton and served as State Director for Hillary Clinton.

Jef Pollock and Jeffrey Plaut

Founding Partners of Global Strategy Group, the firm took a pounding when its premier candidate, Eliot Spitzer, fell from grace and later was forced to settle with Cuomo as part of his pay-to-play pension fund probe. But Pollock and Plaut remain widely sought after by pollsters and advisors both in New York and nationally.

RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum

His union isn’t the largest, but what he lacks in organizational size he makes up for in mouth. He has taken on the Bloomberg administration, called on Paterson to resign to clear the way for Cuomo and taken the Obama White House to task for failing to support Thompson for mayor in 2009.

UFT President Michael Mulgrew

Took over as head of the powerful NYC teachers union when his predecessor, Randi Weingarten, went national (to head the AFT) in the summer of 2009. She’s a tough act to follow, but he has won high marks, managing to broker some deals with the Bloomberg administration while

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MISCELLANEOUS

Mayor Bloomberg.

The Democrat-turned-Republican-turned independent billionaire has dropped a record-breaking \$263 million of his own money to win – and keep – his office. His wealth has made him powerful, both in New York, where candidates seek his nod and fundraising help, and outside it. He has launched national crusades against illegal guns and in favor of immigration reform. His hard-won third term will make or break him. He passed up a White House run in 2008, will he take the plunge in 2012?

State Conservative Party Chairman Mike Long

Third parties have extra clout in New York because it's one of the few states with fusion voting. Long is the longest-serving state party chair. He has seen enrollment wane, but has managed to hold onto power, focusing the GOP to back his preferred candidate for governor, Lazio.

State Independence Party Chairman Frank MacKay

An unabashed Bloomberg supporter (even worked on his never-realized 2008 presidential run) has moved the party past its founder, Tom Golisano, and now backs major party candidates like Cuomo. Is being bedeviled by a Manhattan DA investigation that involves a GOP operative and a big Bloomberg contribution.

Working Families Party

(Dan Cantor, executive director; Bob Master, co-chair; Bill Lipton, political director). This labor-backed party was a major force to be reckoned with, but a US attorney probe has taken the wind out of its sails. Cuomo is playing hardball, and the party won't likely survive if he doesn't accept its line this fall.



Steve Spinola

President of the powerful Real Estate Board of New York for more than two decades, has made it a goal to undermine the WFP, aligning himself with the Independence Party to do so. He even switched his own enrollment from the Democratic Party to become a large-I independent.

Former Sen. Alfonse D'Amato

His kingmaker days are behind him. But this lawmaker-turned-lobbyist, who once famously paid \$500,000 to make a single phone call, still has power. These days, he helps both fellow Republicans and Democrats. He's raising cash for Andrew Cuomo and has ties to Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, through he endorsed Bruce Blakeman to challenge her.

Cathy Blaney

A nationally recognized fundraiser who works mostly for Republicans, though she did raise money for Cuomo. Has also done work for Democrat-turned-Republican-turned-independent Mayor Bloomberg and the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation.

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