

METROPOLIS

Transcript: Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Eulogy for His Father Mario Cuomo

By WSJ Staff

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New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo gave a eulogy for his father, former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, on Tuesday. *JOHN TAGGART FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Mourners gathered Tuesday to remember former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, who died last week. His son, current New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, gave a eulogy at the funeral held at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in Manhattan. Here is a complete transcript of the eulogy:

Good afternoon to all of you. First let me begin by saying to St. Ignatius Loyola, we thank them very much for their courtesy and their hospitality and this beautiful ceremony today, especially Father Alex Witt and all the co-celebrants. On behalf of the entire Cuomo family and the grandchildren, as you heard, 14 grandchildren — defied all odds. Thirteen girls. The boy was born just before Christmas to my brother

Christopher. My brother Christopher and Christina named the boy Mario because some people will do anything to earn the praise of their father. There is no jealousy on my part, however,

We want to thank Columbia Presbyterian very much for their really fantastic care of my father during these difficult months. Dr. Engel and Dr. Maurer were extraordinary. The health aides who took care of my father at home from Steve Crockett, to Dan O'Conner, to Tom, to Fran, to Sharon. Twenty four hours a day they were really magnificent and they made his life much more pleasant and also for the family. His partners at Willkie, Farr and Gallagher, Jack Nussbaum, he practiced law for 20 years after public service and he really enjoyed it. And it was a beautiful partnership.

To his team, no administration, no government works without a team. And my father really had a fantastic team. They worked twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; because that's the only way they knew how to work. Mary Trivali and Mary Porcelli, to Michael DelGuidice, and Jerry Crotty and Drew Zambelli, and Tonio Burgos and John Howard and John Maggiore, Mary Ann Crotty and my father's third son, who I sometimes think he loved the most, Joe Percoco, really did an extraordinary job and they did an extraordinary job with his funeral and we want to thank them. I want to thank President Clinton for being here and Senator Clinton here. They both meant so much to my father for so long and we are all so proud, not only that you're here, but that you're New Yorkers. Thank you it's a pleasure to be with you. President Obama set his remarks; Vice President Biden was here last night. Senator Gillibrand is here, Attorney General Eric Holder, U.S. Attorney Loretta Lynch, who soon we hope to be the U.S. Attorney General of the United States. Loretta, you make us proud, also. It's a pleasure to be with you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, who my father and I were with the other day and my father was saying that he was the first political supporter for the Mayor. And I said to my father, well actually, you were the second. I was technically the first because I introduced you to Bill, to which my father said, well you were only the HUD Secretary, I was the Governor, that doesn't count. Sometimes he could be brutally honest.

Mayor Bloomberg, who my father had tremendous respect for, Mayor Dinkins, who served with my father when the City and the State were in a very difficult time and they did an extraordinary job. To my colleagues from the State Senate, Leader Skelos, and

assembly members who came from across the state. Mayors, County Executives from all across the state. I also thank them of their indulgence in moving the State of the State a few days. It was supposed to be tomorrow and I thank them for the personal indulgence in moving the State of the State. And the literally thousands of New Yorkers who showed up yesterday to pay tribute to my father at the wake- it was an amazing outpouring of support. Thousands of people standing outside in the cold. My father hasn't been in public service in 20 years. Think about that. Twenty years. And he had gotten very quiet after public service. But people remembered and they remembered to show up 20 years later. People from all walks of life, all across the state, who he touched. And it was really an inspiration for all of us and we thank them all very much for being here.

One day when I was at HUD I was talking to my father on the phone and he had given a big speech that day and I called to asked how it went, and how he did it — did he do it from notes, did he do it on cards, did he do it off the cuff. He said it was a very important speech so he wrote it out and read every word. He went on to explain his theory, which he had explained before, that you can't possibly deliver a speech extemporaneously that is as well done as a written speech. He then invoked Winston Churchill as a proponent of the reading word for word theory of speech making.

Now you must understand the rules of engagement in debate with Mario Cuomo. Invoking an historical figure as a source — in this context — was more of a metaphor than a literal interpretation. It really meant Winston Churchill could have said, or should have said, or would have said, that reading was best. But my father's invoking the gravitas of Churchill meant that he was truly serious about this point.

I explained that I was uncomfortable reading a speech word for word because I needed to see the audience's reaction and adjust accordingly. He summarily dismissed my point and he said that was all unnecessary. And he said who cares about what the audience wants to hear. It's not about what they want to hear, it's about what you need to say.

And that, my friends, was the essence of Mario Cuomo.

He was not interested in pleasing the audience: not in a speech, not in life. He believed what he believed and the reaction of the audience or the powers that be, or the popularity of his belief was irrelevant to him.



Gov. Andrew Cuomo and his father, former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo. ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mario Cuomo was at peace with who he was and how he saw the world. This gave him a great strength and made him anything but a typical politician.

But then again, he wasn't really a politician at all. Mario Cuomo's politics were more a personal belief system than a traditional theory. It was who he was. Not what he did. In his early life, my father was never interested in politics in his early life. In general, he disrespected politicians and the political system. He never studied politics or joined a political club. He never campaigned for anyone and his early life, until his late 30s, was all about becoming a lawyer and practicing law. Once in practice he became quickly bored with the typical corporate practice. My father was a humanist. He had strong feelings of right and wrong based on his religion, philosophy and life experiences. He was very concerned with how people were treated and that was the arena that drew him in. The bridge from law to politics arrived for him when he took on the representation of the homeowners in Corona, Queens, whose homes were being condemned by the City to build a ball field. They were poor, working families and they couldn't possibly fight City Hall. They were poor, working family ethnics, who literally had no ability to fight City Hall. He took on their cause to right the injustice that he saw. Central to understanding Mario Cuomo is that Mario Cuomo was from Queens.

Mario Cuomo was from Queens. For those not from New York — Queens is an outer borough, like Brooklyn, the Bronx, Staten Island. Interestingly, there is no borough referred to as the "inner borough," only outer boroughs: and that's probably the point. There are insiders and outsiders, and one defines the other. There are those from the

other side of the tracks, there are those from the other side of town. An outer borough is where the working families lived: the tradesmen, the civil servants, the poor. Mario Cuomo was the son of Italian immigrants who were part of the unwashed masses, who came with great dreams but also came with great needs. Who struggled but ultimately succeeded due to the support they received in this great state of New York.

Mario Cuomo's birthmark from the outer borough was deep and he wore it with pride. He had a natural connection with the outsider looking in, the person fighting for inclusion, the underdog, the minority, the disenfranchised, the poor. He was always the son of an immigrant. He was always an outsider and that was his edge.

His early days in politics were not awe-inspiring. He had an early aborted run for mayor in 1973. In 1974 he lost the Democratic Primary to Mary Anne Krupsak. He ran for mayor in 1977, losing to Ed Koch, in a truly fractious encounter. In 1987 he was elected Lieutenant Governor to Governor Carey. In that election, I was the campaign manager. But we had no opponents. But it was a win nonetheless.

While it is different now, the job of Lieutenant Governor, was not all that taxing. Governor David Paterson said it best when describing his role as Lieutenant Governor. David said he would wake up, call the governor and if the governor answered the phone, he would hang up and go back to sleep.

My father was living in the Hotel Wellington in Albany at the time and I started law school there and we were roommates. The typical schedule was my father was in Albany Monday, Monday night, Tuesday, Tuesday night and they would leave on Wednesday during session months. Our third roommate was Fabian Palomino. Fabian Palomino was my father's lifelong, dear friend who he clerked in the Court of Appeals with. Fabian was from mixed origins. He called himself a Heinz 57, part Italian, part Native American, part African-American, part anything else. He was truly a unique and powerful man and we would have dinner together on the nights that they were in town.

My mother would send up care packages with my father on Monday and all we had to do was warm the prepared meals. My father insisted that we sample every wine made in the State of New York and we were soon connoisseurs of New York's best wines. Fabian, who was a portly fellow at time, wore a shirt with no sleeves, which was stretched over his belly tighter than a drum skin. He wore boxer shorts with dark dress socks over the calf. I assumed he had chronically cold calf muscles. My father, who was

modest and always formal in attire, was perpetually frustrated with Fabian's dress. And he would say to Fabian, why can't you dress for dinner, Fabian? And Fabian would say, out of respect for you, I have. He would say "I wore my fancy boxers out of respect for you. I respect that you are the Lieutenant Governor and one heart attack away from having a real job." And then Fabian would laugh and the laugh would make his belly shake and my father, not loving being mocked, would smile slowly.

After dinner they would turn on the TV and we would sit on the couch and watch the television. We would watch a ballgame or the news, but it didn't really matter. The function of the TV was just to introduce a topic that they could debate. And they could debate anything. An item on the news or a soap commercial, it didn't really matter. They debated to debate. They just loved it and they were great at it. Eventually, the debate invariably turned to politics and government and I could see my father refining and honing his own personal philosophy.

In 1982 my father ran against Ed Koch for governor. It was the impossible race that couldn't be won but my father was ready and he believed he was ready and he believed he was better suited to be governor than Ed Koch. The pollsters, with their charts demonstrating the impossibility of his pursuit were unpersuasive. If my father thought he was fighting the right fight, it didn't matter whether we were going to win or lose. It was "the right thing to do." And there is one rule to live by, which is you always do the right thing.

Mario Cuomo did not fit neatly into any political category. He believed that government had an affirmative obligation to help the excluded join the mainstream. He believed it was the country's founding premise and that more inclusion made the country a stronger country. Better education, better health care, economic opportunity and mobility, helped the new immigrants progress and made the community stronger. Not to invest in the progress of others was a disservice to the whole. He believed in compassion for the sick and the needy. This was also the essence of Christianity and Jesus' teachings. But there were no giveaways, responsibility and hard work was expected from all. He was not a spend thrift and came from a culture of fiscal responsibility. He was an executive and as Governor needed to balance a budget. He cut taxes and he cut the workforce. When he took office the top tax rate in New York was 14%. When he left office 12 years later, it was 7%. The state workforce 12 years later was smaller than when he took office.

Mario Cuomo, intellectually, was all about subtlety and nuance. He was called the great liberal. He resisted the label. His philosophy defied a single label, especially an undefined one. An undefined and nebulous one. My father called himself a progressive pragmatist. Progressive values, but a pragmatic approach. He believed he needed to separate the two separate components, the goals and the means. His goal was progressive, but his means were pragmatic. I told him at the time, it was too complicated to communicate and no one would understand what he was saying.

Frankly, I still don't understand what he was saying. But he said he didn't care and that he wouldn't be reduced by the shortcomings of others, including mine. My father was skeptical of the people and organizations that profited from government — to whom government was a business, rather than an avocation. And he always focused on the goal of government rather than the means — the product not the process — to help the people, the student, the parent, the citizens.

The truth is he didn't love the day-to-day management of government, the tedium and absurdity of the bureaucracy was mind numbing for him. Nor did he appreciate the political back and forth with the posturing legislature. As governor, he was criticized by the right, as the icon to the left. He was criticized by the zealots on the left because his lofty rhetoric couldn't match the program reality of his government. We both commiserated. He called it the curse of the executive. New understanding or appreciation of the economic reality of needing to balance a budget, or having the votes from a Republican Senate no matter how unpleasant a task that is, Dean.

At his core he was a philosopher and he was a poet, an advocate and he was a crusader. Mario Cuomo was the keynote speaker for our better angels. He was there to make the case, to argue and convince and in that purist he could be a ferocious opponent and powerful ally.

And he was beautiful.

A speech never started with the words — it was about the principle, the idea and the passion — the righteousness the injustice — and then came the words, arranged like fine pearls — each chosen for its individual beauty but also placed perfectly, fitting just so with the one that came before and the one that followed so that there was a seamless flow, in logic and emotion, leading one ultimately to the inevitable conclusion — his conclusion — which was the point of the speech in the first place.

He was a religious man and his relationship with the church was important and complicated. His famous and influential speech at Notre Dame was done more for himself — to explain how he separated his personal views from his professional responsibilities. The public official fulfilling a constitutional responsibility was different but consistent with laymen following Christ's teachings. He believed Jesus' teachings could be reduced to one word. And the word was love. And love means acceptance, compassion and support to help people. To do good. And that's what he wanted government to be. A force for good. His love was not a passive love, but an active love. Not tough love, but a strong love. The good fight was a fight for love and it was a fight and a fight he was ready to wage.

In many ways my father's view on the church was ahead of his time.

He was excited about our new Pope Francis and his enlightened perspective on Catholicism with an emphasis on inclusion and understanding.

My father thought that Pope Francis would agree that Jesus himself was probably from an outer borough.

As you heard from Father Witt, my father loved Teilhard de Chardin — a French Jesuit who modeled service and a dedication to sustainable community as a way of life.

My father was a Lincoln scholar attracted by Lincoln's example of government as the pursuit of the great principles. He also appreciated that Lincoln was the triumph of substance over style and that his life exemplified the relative isolation of people in power.

We were a working-class family and proud of it. No fancy trips, no country clubs for us. He was the workingman's governor and remained loyal to the old neighborhood values always. His grandchildren, my children, will speak of grandpa's sweetness.

My father always had a sweetness, but it grew over the years, much as a fine wine turns into a brandy.

I, however, remember his younger years and sweetness is not the first word that comes to mind. Make no mistake, Mario Cuomo was a tenacious, competitive, incredibly strong man. He was impatient with the bureaucracy, unrelenting in the face of bigotry,

uncompromising in remedying injustice. And he was really, really, really tough. It would have been malpractice not to be. These battles were for real consequences and made a difference to real people. And he was also competitive by nature. Whether in a campaign, fighting the legislature, or on a basketball court — you opposed him at your own risk and peril. I have the scars to prove it.

The basketball court remained for him the one place where he could allow himself to be his fully aggressive self. Governors, you see, are supposed to comport themselves with dignity and decorum. The basketball court was then his liberation. We had epic battles, he and I. He hated few things as much as a timid opponent on the basketball court because you cheated him of a real contest. I was bigger than my father and I was not intimidated by the fact that he was the governor — he couldn't fire me.

We played in the State Police gym in Albany. He liked to play one-on-one because it was the purest form of competition. He was a solid 240 pounds and fast for a big man.

He would make faces at you, taunt you, talk constantly in a distracting and maddening banter designed to unnerve you. He would hit you in places the human body did not have anatomical defenses. The issue of calling fouls plagued us.

We tried using State Troopers as referees, but they were afraid of angering my father. That with one wrong call and they would wind up on a weigh station somewhere up on the Northway. We tried letting the trooper be anonymous so there was no fear of retaliation. But the troopers also wanted to be able to wear a gun after the one was attacked, by my father or myself, I can't recall which now, for making a bad call.

After I left Albany, the basketball competition became more institutionalized. My father started a basketball league with a number of teams. They had professional referees and any disputes were settled by the commissioners. And my father served as the commissioner, and captain of one of the teams. At the end of the season there would be draft selections depending on the results. Some people accused my father of hiring state employees only for their basketball talents. He denied that it ever happened. Well at least let's say it didn't happen often. Basketball was my father's outlet and it was always in good humor and always with good sportsmanship, at least by the next day.

My father loved to battle the press. They were like the opposing counsel in a

courtroom. He thought if they could judge his actions and communicate that to the public then he had the right to challenge their facts and judgment. He was unmoved by his staff's passionate arguments that this was counterproductive. You don't fight with people who buy ink by the barrel, as the old saying goes. My father was undeterred.

The crusade was too important to tolerate sloppiness or misinterpretation. The public deserved the truth and the press did not have the right to distort it, certainly not with impunity. He railed against the ivory tower pundits and the reporters with an agenda. He had no problem calling a reporter at 7 a.m. to give them a critique of their article. Most often, it was fair to say the critique was not overly positive. I have evolved and I would never call a reporter at 7 a.m. I wait until at least 9 a.m., which I think is decent. But he also admired journalism done well and he respected the occupation. Jimmy Breslin, Pete Hamill, Jack Newfield, Murray Kempton and Mike Lupica, Mary McGrory, Marcia Kramer, all stars in the constellation of lives well lived.

He was humbled to be in public service and had disdain for those who demeaned it, with scandals or corruption, or cheap public relation stunts. It was a position of trust and deserved to be honored.

Mario Cuomo served 12 years with integrity. You can disagree with Mario Cuomo over those 12 years, but he never dishonored the State and he never dishonored his position. In his private life he was exactly as he appeared in his public life. He had a 60-year love affair with his wife Matilda. Not a storybook romance — no late-night kissing in the park, at least as far as we knew — but a real life partnership built on a foundation of mutual respect and tolerance. Commitment to Mario Cuomo was sacrosanct.

His children were everything to him. Although I may look the oldest, Margaret is actually the oldest and a source of great pride. He beamed when he said, "My daughter is a doctor." Maria, his artistic altruistic delight. With Maria, he probably had probably the purest loving relationship. Madeline made him proud as a great mother and a tenacious attorney. Chris, talented, facile and funny, could always make him laugh.

He loved his daughters-in-law, Sandy and Christina and his sons-in-law, with whom he had a special relationship. Kenneth, Howard, and Brian. They enjoyed a true father-son relationship with him. It was mutual and they were adored.

He had a small group of friends, Jimmy Breslin, Vincent Tese, Fabian Palomino Mike

Delguidice, Sandy Frucher and Joe Percoco, were his intimate world.

Over the years the press would love to give their dime store psychoanalysis of our “complex” father and son relationship. It was all a lot of hooey. It is this simple, I was devoted to my father, from the time I was 15 joining him in every crusade. My dad was my hero, my best friend, my confidante, my mentor. We spoke almost every day and his wisdom grew as I grew older. When it works, having a working partnership with your father adds an entirely new dimension to the father-son relationship. And for us, it worked. Politics is not an easy business. It shouldn’t be. But we carried the same banner. I helped him become a success and he helped me become a success and we enjoyed deeply each other’s victories and we suffered the pain of each other’s losses. My only regret is that I didn’t return from Washington to help in his 1994 race. Whether or not I could have helped, I should have been there. It was the right thing to do and I didn’t do it.

I loved winning the Governorship more for him than for myself. It was redemption for my father. Cuomo was elected governor — the first name was not all that relevant. It was a gift to have him with us this past election night. The doctors didn’t want him to go but I insisted. Bringing him on the stage for one more fist pump, holding up his hand, I felt his energy surge, his face brightened and his eyes shined as he gave us that great, satisfied smile one more time. He walked off the stage and said “wow what a crowd that was.” It was the best medicine I could provide for Mario Cuomo.

He loved being Governor and thought he could do 4 terms and he valued that over anything else — even the Supreme Court. Why didn’t he run for President?, people asked. Because he didn’t want to — he was where he thought God wanted him to be.

He was a man of principle — of honor, of duty, of service and that defined his life. He had simple tastes, no expensive cars, no planes, no fancy homes.

A weekend meal with family. Watching a baseball or basketball game with my father’s running commentary, reading a good book, and just talking — but really talking — there was no small talk or superficiality with Mario Cuomo.

My father never lost his interest in public affairs. We would talk at 5 a.m. and he would have read all the papers and had his full analysis ready and was ready to tell me everything I did wrong the day before. We would talk about the problems and how to

find a way through the maze.

He was recently very troubled by the Washington mess, as he would call it. He was concerned about the city. My father's 1984 convention speech was called "The Tale of Two Cities" and he was adamant about pointing out inequities in our society and divisions in our society. But the goal was always to unify, never to divide. And the current factions in New York City were very concerning to him. He governed during Howard Beach and Benson Hurst and he knew the racial and class divisions are the New York City fault lines.

They say your father never leaves you. If you listen carefully, you will hear his voice. I believe that's true. But one doesn't need to listen that carefully or be his son to know what Mario Cuomo would say today — that it's time for this city to come together, it's time to stop the negative energy and keep moving forward. The positive course is to learn the lessons from the past tragedies to identify the necessary reforms, to improve our justice system, better safety for police officers and to move this city forward.

And that's just what we will do, dad. I promise you.

For Mario Cuomo, the purpose of life was clear — to help those in need and leave the world a better place — Mathew 25, Tikkun Olam, to heal the divide, Tzedakah, to do justice. It's that simple and yet that profound. It's that easy, and yet that hard. By any measure, Mario Cuomo's voice inspired generations, his government initiatives helped millions live better lives; he left the world better than he found it. His list of opponents goes on and on. Leading opponent of the death penalty, electing the first African American to the Court of Appeals. His Liberty Scholarship Programs. His pioneering child health insurance program. A leader in AIDS treatment research.

New York is a better state thanks to Mario Cuomo.



Former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo. ASSOCIATED PRESS

The last few days he was slipping and I said to him, to give him something to look forward to, that he needed to stay strong for the inaugural because I wanted to him hold the bible. And he asked in a semi-conscious state “which bible?” Which only Mario Cuomo would ask. And I said the St. James bible. He said the St. James bible would be good for this purpose. I didn’t follow up. A few weeks later he said he was too weak to hold the bible, but he would be here, he said. He would be here. The day of the inauguration I stopped at his apartment, went to his bed and I said “dad the inauguration is today. You want to come? You can hold the bible, or you don’t have to hold the bible.” There was no response. I said well let me know because there is a second event in Buffalo and if you change your mind you can come to Buffalo. During that afternoon, my sister played the inaugural speech for him. He knew that the Buffalo event was at 4:00. My father passed away at 5:15.

He was here. He waited. And then he quietly slipped out of the event and went home. Just as he always did, because his job was done.

We believe the spirit lives and I believe my father is not gone and that his spirit is with us — in Amanda’s song, Michaela’s charisma, Tess’ dance, Christopher’s laugh and in every good deed I do.

I believe my father’s spirit lives in the hope of a young boy sitting in a failing school who can’t yet speak the language. His spirit lives in a young girl, pregnant and alone and in trouble. It lives in South Jamaica and the South Bronx. His spirit lives in those

outsiders still living in the shadow of opportunity and striving to join the family of New York.

And Pop, you were right once again, and I was wrong — tell Winston Churchill I now agree, I read every line, Pop, word for word because it's not about what they want to hear. It's about what I wanted to say. And I said it. Pop, tell Officer Ramos and Officer Liu we miss them already, tell Fabian and Jack Newfield Grandma and Grandpa, and Uncle Frank we love them. I will listen for your voice. You taught us well, you inspired us, we know what we have to do and we will do it. We will make this state a better state.

We know what we have to do and we will do it. We will make this state a better state and we will do it together. On that, you have my word, as your son. I love you pop, and always will.

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ANDREW CUOMO

EULOGY

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MARIO CUOMO

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