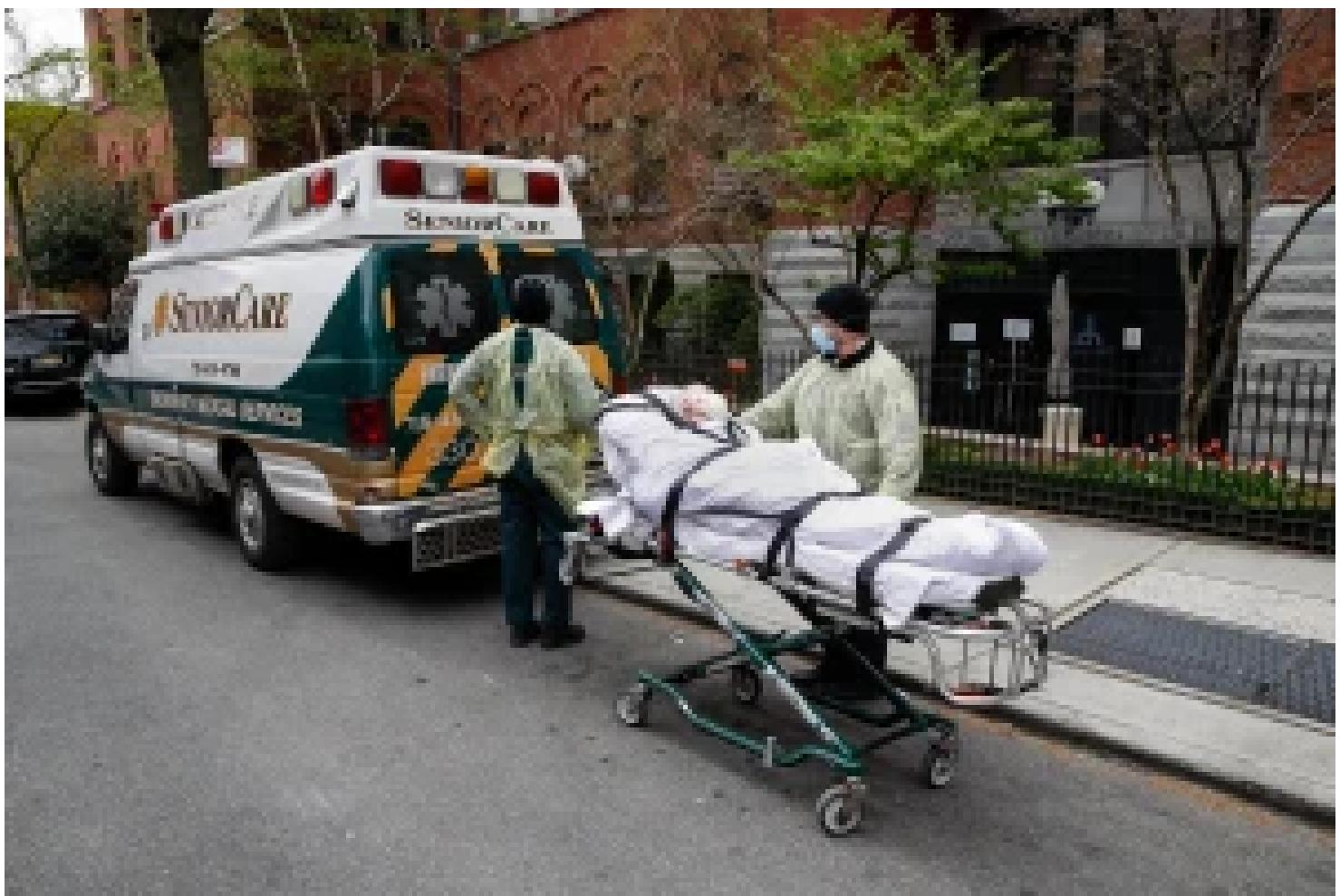


By Kevin Byrne

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On March 25, Cuomo's Department of Health issued a mandate forcing New York nursing homes to admit coronavirus patients -- the results were tragic.  
AP

Gov. Andrew Cuomo must have a short memory — either that or he's just trying to distract attention from his administration's deadly coronavirus failures by criticizing President Trump's many lifesaving actions.

During a recent press conference, Cuomo took yet another cheap shot at Trump, arguing that the president's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic was somehow **worse than the infamous Watergate scandal**.

"You look at the facts, the facts clearly demonstrate Trump was wrong from Day One, and New Yorkers have been right from Day One," Cuomo bragged.

The problem is that Cuomo has been resoundingly — and tragically — wrong about the pandemic himself. And unlike the Trump "scandal" that exists only within Cuomo's imagination, Cuomo's **failure of leadership** has been very real. More people have died of COVID-19 in New York than in any other state — at least 6,000 of them in our nursing homes. That is not something to be proud of.

On March 25, Cuomo's Department of Health issued a mandate forcing New York nursing homes to admit coronavirus patients — a move that **alarmed infectious-disease experts** nationwide.

"If you introduce 4,500 people sick with a potentially lethal disease into a vulnerable and notoriously imperfectly monitored population, people are apt to die," said Dr. Charles Branas, chairman of the Epidemiology Department at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health.

The executive director of the Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine, Christopher Laxton, also sharply condemned Cuomo for failing to consult clinical experts prior to implementing the policy.

After blistering criticism, the controversial mandate mysteriously disappeared from the Department of Health Web site, but it took almost two months for Cuomo to officially revise the deadly order. By that point, the damage had already been done. Many New York nursing homes had become breeding grounds for the virus, which turned out to be particularly dangerous to the elderly and infirm — exactly the sort of people who reside in nursing homes.

The Department of Health has now published its own report defending the March 25 order, but my colleagues and I are preparing for a public hearing and calling for an independent probe into the Cuomo administration's mandate to make sure we get the full, unvarnished truth.

The people of New York, nursing-home staff and the families of coronavirus victims deserve real answers from their governor — not deflection and partisan sniping.

Meanwhile, in contrast to Cuomo, President Trump has gone above and beyond to help New York win its battle against the virus, providing federal assistance whenever we needed it most. For instance, the White House deployed a Navy hospital ship, **USNS Comfort**, to Manhattan, which Cuomo himself admitted “not only brought comfort but also saved lives” in New York City.

At the president's direction, the Army Corps of Engineers worked closely with state authorities to convert the Javits Convention Center and Westchester County Center into dedicated COVID-19 hospitals.

Trump also secured thousands of ventilators for New York (that we ultimately, fortunately, did not need) and millions of items of personal protective equipment for our first responders and health-care workers. Our heroes were unable to rely on Cuomo or Mayor Bill de Blasio, but they were able to count on Trump.

Not long ago, the New York governor openly praised the president's response to the pandemic, cheering that Trump “delivered for New York” and that “by and large [his strategy] has worked.”

After the outbreak of the pandemic, I was careful not to pass early judgment against our elected leaders and their handling of the coronavirus. The loss of people's lives should never become a partisan issue, but Cuomo has made it clear that he is all-in on politicizing this virus, even as it has already killed more than 32,000 of our fellow New Yorkers.

Cuomo's desperate attempts to shift blame for his own failures onto the federal government must not distract us from the facts: New Yorkers must hold Gov. Cuomo and his administration accountable for their deadly failures.

*Kevin Byrne represents the 94th Assembly District, including portions of Westchester and Putnam counties, and serves as the ranking minority member of the Assembly Health Committee.*

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