

Cuomo Takes Queries on Rival, but Doesn't Answer Them



Michael Appleton for The New York Times

Andrew M. Cuomo, taunted by Carl P. Paladino with unflattering epithets, refused on Thursday to say anything unkind, or in fact anything, about him.

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[Andrew M. Cuomo](#), the Democratic candidate for New York governor, on Thursday made his first public appearance since [Carl P. Paladino](#) won the primary this week to become Mr. Cuomo's Republican challenger.

But whereas Mr. Paladino has assailed Mr. Cuomo as "Prince Andrew," "the entitled one" and "Status Cuomo," Mr. Cuomo had virtually nothing to say about his opponent in a half-hour news conference during which he was by turns detached, amused and determinedly evasive.

Pressed to contrast himself with Mr. Paladino, Mr. Cuomo repeatedly suggested that his views of Mr. Paladino's statements, policy proposals and past conduct were irrelevant to the campaign between them.

“I don’t know Mr. Paladino, and I don’t think my characterization is all that relevant or appropriate, you know?” Mr. Cuomo told reporters in the lobby of his office in Lower Manhattan. “That’s why we have a democracy. That’s why we have elections. And the people of the state are going to tell you what they think. And they’ll listen to positions and they’ll read words and then they’ll render a judgment. And their characterization is the one that counts.”

Mr. Cuomo had called the news conference to announce a \$1 million settlement with Bill White, the former president of the [Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum](#), for his role in a wide-ranging state pension fund scandal, but spent nearly all of the event answering questions about his campaign.

Mr. Cuomo would not venture an opinion on racist and pornographic e-mails that Mr. Paladino had forwarded to friends, which led a parade of his fellow Democrats, including Gov. [David A. Paterson](#), to denounce Mr. Paladino as unfit for office.

“‘Racist’ and ‘bigoted’ are loaded concepts and loaded words,” Mr. Cuomo said, noting that Mr. Paladino had described the messages later as inappropriate. “They’re his e-mails. I’ll leave them to his characterization, and for other people to make.”

Even seemingly mundane questions elicited elliptical responses.

Should voters see Mr. Cuomo as the head of his party’s ticket?

“What does the head of a ticket look like?” Mr. Cuomo mused, taking the question literally.

Should people view Mr. Cuomo, an incumbent state official and the son of a former governor, as the true outsider?

“Inside, outside, upside down,” Mr. Cuomo said in his trademark singsong. “You know, I don’t know what that means.”

Mr. Cuomo’s antiseptic remove was all the more striking compared with the heated reactions of his fellow Democrats around the state, who have passionately denounced Mr. Paladino.

In a newspaper interview on Wednesday, the state [Democratic Party](#) chairman, Jay Jacobs, described Mr. Paladino as “a wacko.” In an appearance at a forum in Manhattan on Thursday morning, Mr. Paterson said of Mr. Paladino, “I don’t think he is fit for public

service.” The governor said that one of the e-mails circulated by Mr. Paladino included a picture of a plane crashing into the ground in Africa near a group of black people, whom Mr. Paladino referred to by a common racial epithet.

But when asked about those comments at his own appearance, Mr. Cuomo refused repeatedly to agree with them — or, for that matter, to disagree.

“I think the governor stated his opinion; Mr. Jacobs stated his opinion,” Mr. Cuomo replied.

“From my point of view, as a candidate in the race, I think the opinion that is most relevant to me is the opinion of the voters,” Mr. Cuomo added. “And I’m going to leave it to the voters to make their own decision. And I don’t think they need a characterization from me.”

Mr. Cuomo suggested that he wanted to focus on talking to voters about concrete issues, like his record as attorney general, his plan to reduce property taxes, and the ever-growing state budget. But when pressed to respond to some of the specific proposals Mr. Paladino has made — 20 percent cuts to taxes and spending in his first year, \$20 billion cut from [Medicaid](#) spending, layoffs of thousands of government workers — he demurred, saying such details could wait until later.

“It’s a set of numbers,” Mr. Cuomo said of Mr. Paladino’s plan. “The question is then, how do you do it, what do you cut, what services, where?”

For most of his tenure as attorney general, Mr. Cuomo has largely avoided engaging in any political dealings in public — a strategy devised in part to distinguish his public persona from that of other Albany officials, who have drawn the anger of voters.

But his appearance on Thursday suggested that Mr. Cuomo may seek to take the same approach in what is likely to be a heated general election battle.

Asked what he had to say to the hundreds of thousands of angry voters who powered Mr. Paladino’s victory, Mr. Cuomo said he wanted to avoid mudslinging. “They are right to be frustrated. And they are right to be disappointed. The question is then, what do you do about it? And my point is, now’s when we get constructive,” Mr. Cuomo said. “Now’s when we get positive.”

Barely 90 minutes later, officials at the state Democratic Party, which Mr. Cuomo controls, released an advertisement on the Internet attacking Mr. Paladino as a hypocrite and

suggesting that he donated money to politicians to win millions of dollars in tax breaks and government contracts.

Mr. Cuomo did muster a direct answer at the end of his appearance, when asked whether he, like Mr. Paladino, owned a dog.

“I have no cat, I have no dog,” Mr. Cuomo said. “I have no pet at this time. I am petless.”

Sam Roberts contributed reporting.

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