

‘Gratuitous politics’ fuel calls for coronavirus nursing home probes: Cuomo

By Bernadette Hogan and Aaron Feis

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Bipartisan [calls for probes](#) of Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s widely-criticized policies towards nursing homes amid the coronavirus are “gratuitous politics,” Cuomo said Thursday, while clearing a fifth New York region to slowly reopen.

“I would like to say that we are enlightened enough, where this is going to be a period where we don’t play gratuitous politics,” said Cuomo during a press briefing at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, NY. “But everybody makes their own decisions.”

The governor was asked specifically about calls from Republican lawmakers for an investigation, but several state Democrats have also voiced the need for a probe of the ballooning scandal.

At the heart of the issue is a [March 25 directive](#) from Cuomo’s Department of Health saying that nursing homes can’t deny people for admission or readmission just because they test

positive for the coronavirus.

Despite repeatedly acknowledging that seniors are among those most at risk to the pandemic, Cuomo has fiercely defended the mandate and insisted that he and other state officials [“did everything we could.”](#)

He even clung to that defense on Sunday, as he [effectively curbed](#) the March order by mandating that hospital patients must be coronavirus-free before they can be discharged to nursing homes.

Cuomo had contended that nursing homes always had both the right and an obligation to ask the state for help rather than taking on residents they’re not equipped to care for.

Statewide, nursing homes have now seen 2,787 confirmed coronavirus deaths, and another 2,646 presumed fatalities, in which the deceased wasn’t officially tested but displayed telltale signs of the disease.

The overall confirmed death toll for the state grew to 22,170, meanwhile, spurred by 157 new losses in the 24-hour period ending at midnight Thursday.

“Still terrible and tragic,” said Cuomo. “But headed in the right direction.”

With metrics continuing to trend in the right direction, Cuomo announced that Central New York had become the fifth of the state’s 10 economic regions to qualify for the first phase of reopening once the statewide Pause order expires at midnight Friday.

Four other regions — the North County, the Southern Tier, the Mohawk Valley and the Finger Lakes — had [already qualified](#) by meeting [all seven state criteria](#) on hospital admissions, available beds, testing and tracing.

To begin with, those five regions can return to low-risk activities such as construction, manufacturing, curbside pick-up retail and landscaping.

But while half of the state's regions have now been cleared for a partial reopening, two of those still on the outside looking in took steps backwards between Wednesday and Thursday.

After meeting five of the seven metrics on Wednesday, Long Island and Western New York were downgraded Thursday to clearing just four of the hurdles, joining hard-hit New York City as the farthest from reopening.

The Capital Region and Mid-Hudson have each fulfilled five of the seven criteria.

For those regions not yet cleared to reopen, Cuomo has [effectively extended](#) the Pause order through at least June 7.