

People & Places

Media

CNN suspends Cuomo

Loyalty to family puts Chris at risk

NEW YORK, Dec 1, (AP): There's family, and your job as a journalist. **Chris Cuomo's** willingness to put the latter at risk in service to his brother has led to his suspension by CNN.

The network took him off the air Tuesday, saying that material released by New York's attorney general shows that he played a greater role than previously acknowledged in defense of his brother, former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, as he fought sexual harassment charges.

Transcripts of emails and Chris Cuomo's testimony before state investigators revealed that he strategized regularly with the governor's aides, and tried to help them learn what other journalists were reporting about harassment allegations.

CNN said that he was more involved than its executives — not just the general public — had been aware of.

"As a result, we have suspended Chris indefinitely, pending further evaluation," a CNN spokesperson said.

Neither Cuomo nor the lawyer who represented him in testimony before investigators for state Attorney General Letitia

James this summer returned messages seeking comment.

The Cuomos are part of a New York political dynasty that began with their father, Mario, serving three terms as governor from 1982 to 1996. Andrew was in his third term before resigning earlier this year, and he burned to beat his dad's record.

Andrew was his father's most trusted aide and protector during Mario's first campaign and early years as governor — an example of loyalty that Chris grew up watching even though, at 51, he is more than 13 years younger than his brother.

They frequently describe themselves as best friends. "He's my brother and I love him to death no matter what," Chris Cuomo said in his testimony this past July. "I only got one."

Still, they were fiercely competitive, said Michael Shnayerson, author of "The Contender," an unauthorized biography of Andrew that was published in 2015.

Judgment

"Always, under the mockery and machismo, was a powerful bond — the Cuomos against the world," Shnayerson said. "I can imagine it all too easy for Chris to let that bond cloud his judgment when it came to reporting the news, and following up on leads about Andrew's political enemies."

Throughout his testimony, Chris Cuomo frequently returns to family when asked to explain his frequent contact — often combative — with Andrew's aides as they tried to figure out a way to save the governor's job.

"This is my brother, and I'm trying to help my brother through a situation where he has told me he did nothing wrong," Chris testified. "And that's it for me. How do I help protect my family? How do I protect him? Probably should have been thinking more about how I protect myself, which just never occurred to me."

James' investigation found that Andrew Cuomo sexually harassed at least 11 women. He resigned as governor in August to avoid a likely impeachment trial.

The last time he talked to his brother about the charges, Chris Cuomo said during his testimony, was to figure out what was going to happen and what he would tell their 90-year-old mother.

Cuomo has insisted he has done nothing to try and influence CNN's coverage of his brother's political problems, and that it would be quickly found out if he did.

While people can relate to wanting to help a family member, his primary obligation as a journalist is to CNN's viewers, said Kathleen Culver, director of the Center for Journalism Ethics at the University of Wisconsin. These revelations can damage CNN's reputation, and all journalists, at a time people are already suspicious of the profession, she said.

Journalists need to establish independence from newsmakers. Cuomo "was not independent of his brother in any sense of the term, and that's a very, very big problem," Culver said.

When it was first reported by The Washington Post last May that Cuomo had strategized with his brother's aides, CNN said that it was inappropriate but did not discipline him.

"When Chris admitted to us that he had offered advice to his brother's staff, he broke our rules and we acknowledged that publicly," the CNN spokesperson said on Tuesday. "But we also appreciated the unique position he was in and understood his need to put family first and job second."

Information

At the request of his brother's aides, Cuomo also used his contacts to find out what other journalists were going to report, most notably the New Yorker's Ronan Farrow. Cuomo said "the idea of one reporter calling another to find out what's coming down the pipe is completely business as usual."

For competitive reasons, journalists are frequently curious about what rivals are working on, although a phone call for that reason would likely result in an angry hang-up.

In this case, Cuomo was seeking "inside information that would be valuable to his family member," Culver said. "It is not inside information that serves the public. That's what makes this extraordinary."

CNN's ultimate decision on Cuomo's future is complicated, in part because it draws attention to how it has treated the issue in the past and its own efforts to investigate his activities. Cuomo testified that he didn't tell anyone at CNN that he was contacting other journalists to find out about the Farrow piece.

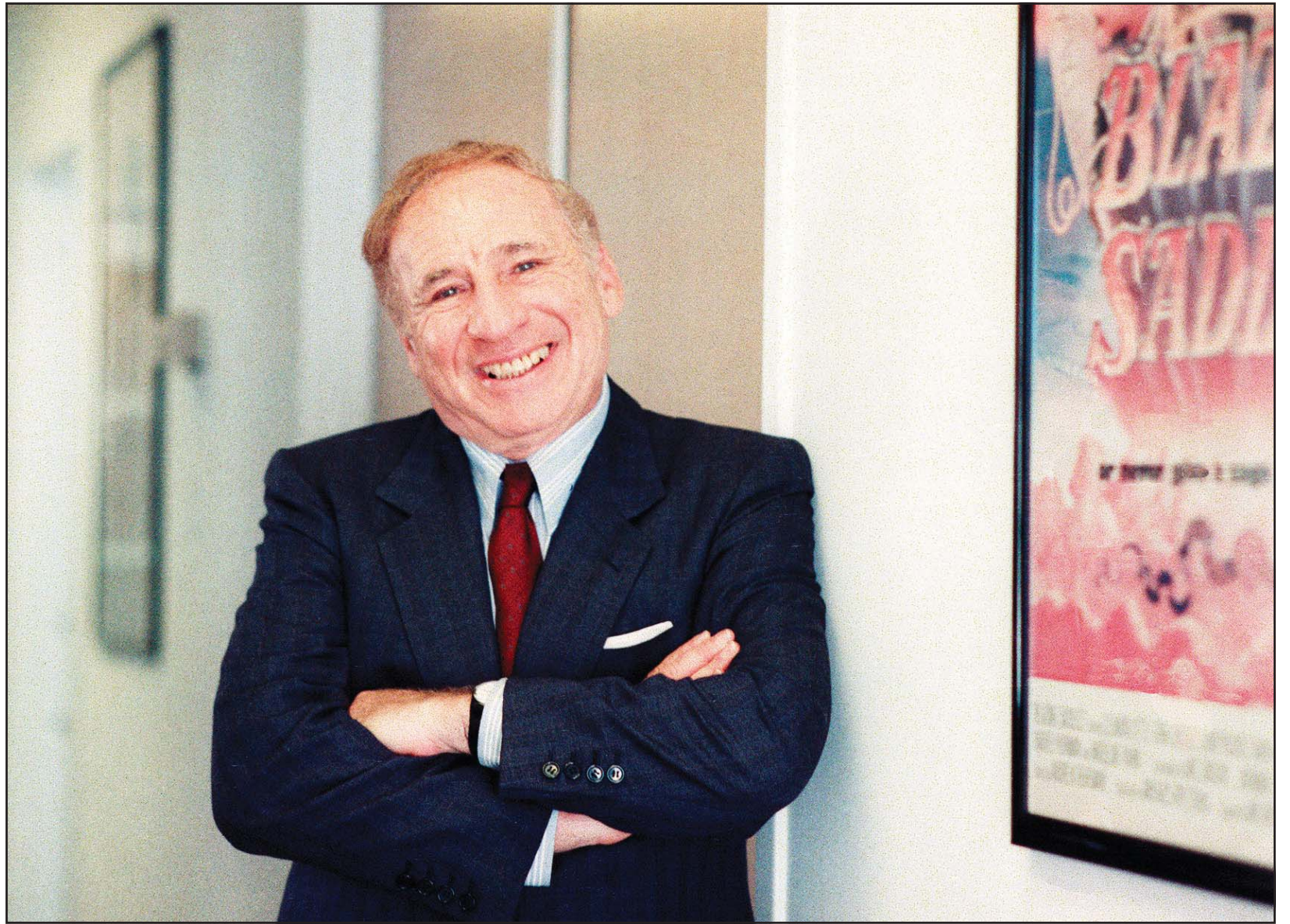
"His suspension from CNN is the correct move, and something that should have happened sooner," said Ben Bogardus, a journalism professor at Connecticut's Quinnipiac University. "The longer it dragged on, the more credibility CNN lost."

"Cuomo Prime Time" has averaged 1.3 million viewers a night so far this year, the Nielsen company said. While its audience is down sharply from the 2020 election year, like it is for many cable news programs, it's still CNN's most-watched show and Cuomo's exit would leave a big hole.

His suspension makes some of the advice that Cuomo told investigators that he gave to his brother during the harassment scandal sound eerily like it could apply to his own situation.



Cuomo



Actor-director-writer Mel Brooks poses next to a framed poster of his 1974 film 'Blazing Saddles' in Los Angeles on July 23, 1991. Brooks released a memoir, 'All About Me!: My Remarkable Life in Show Business.' (AP)

Film

Memoir is powerful, poignant and funny

Mel Brooks, 95, is still riffing

NEW YORK, Dec 1, (AP): Leave it to Mel Brooks to blurb his own memoir.

There, along with laudatory quotes from Billy Crystal, Norman Lear, Conan O'Brien and others is one from "M. Brooks," who hails "All About Me!" as: "Not since the Bible have I read anything so powerful and poignant. And to boot — it's a lot funnier!"

"All About Me!," which landed on bookshelves Tuesday, is indeed chock full of stories, anecdotes and memories from a comedy master of biblical proportions. Brooks, 95, spent much of the pandemic working on the book — a year of remembering everything from getting hit by a Tin Lizzie as an 8-year-old in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, to writing the musical version of "The Producers" with Tom Meehan at Madame Romaine de Lyon in Manhattan over omelets.

"Like everybody else, I've been mostly stuck at home and fed up with the same diet of information and food," Brooks says. "Thank God I could let my mind roam free to remember."

For the first time, Brooks has put down on paper all of his tales, from growing up in Depression-era Williamsburg ("I loved the Depression!" he says cheerfully), serving in the army during WWII, starting out in the Borscht Belt, writing on Sid Caesar's "Your Show of Shows," launching his 2000 Year Old Man schtick with Carl Reiner, coming up with possibly the greatest comic conceit of all time ("The Producers"), and crafting the films "Blazing Saddles," "Young Frankenstein," "High Anxiety," among others. There are tender chapters on his wife Anne Bancroft, who died in 2005, and Reiner, who passed away last year. There are jokes and omelets.

In a long and lively phone interview from his home in Los Angeles, Brooks reflected on his the book and his life in show business — "the grandest adventure any human being could ever take," he says. "Being in the theater and making movies is just a world of make believe. Fabulous."

AP: What prompted you to write a memoir?

Brooks: My son Max said, "You know, Dad, you're going to be stuck in the house for who knows how long. Why don't you just write a memoir? Just tell them what you told me when I was growing up. You'll have a big fat book." He got me started. He got me a publisher. It was great. It saved me from going mad.

AP: The section on your childhood in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is especially vividly and fondly recalled. You write that while many think a life in comedy springs from pain and a difficult childhood, for you...

Brooks: I wanted to keep the party going. I wanted to keep the happiness and joy and explosions of laughter go-

ing into a dour part of our lives, not our childhood anymore. I was once interviewed and the guy said, "What was the happiest part of your life? Was it winning the Academy Award? Was it marrying Anne Bancroft?" I said no, not at all. It was my childhood. From about 4 or 5 or 9, it was the most exciting, happiest, joyous life that anyone could experience. The guy said, "What happened at 9?" I said, "Homework." I realized the world wanted something back. To this day, it's still a bad thing. Homework is a bad thing. It takes away precious minutes from your childhood.

AP: Depending on laughs for happiness can lead to a lot of heartache. Was there any downside to needing that response?

Brooks: Oh, yeah. When stuff didn't work. When you worked so hard on an idea or a project and the audience just said: No, thank you. There was plenty of heartbreak right there. When you had a show on television like "Get Smart," it was dropped after the first year. ABC just said no second year. There's ups and downs. I didn't write a lot of the downs in the book. Why bring the reader down when there's so many ups to talk about?

AP: You say that despite being a filmmaker and producer, you identify most as a writer. Was that always the case?

Brooks: Yes, always. It always started with an idea, with a bunch of characters that interplayed. It was the most interesting thing I could do with my life. I was a good reader and a good reader is maybe the basis for becoming a good writer.

AP: What books were you reading?

Brooks: When I was writing for "Your Show of Shows," I met Mel Tolkin. His name was actually Shmuel Tolchinsky, he was a Russian émigré who came to Canada when he was 14. He was kind of a sage. He introduced me to people like Nikolai Gogol. So when I started writing, already the stakes were high. I wanted to write like Gogol. I wanted to write like Tolstoy. I wanted to write like those guys. I fell in love with Dickens. I was very lucky to run into Mel Tolkin. I learned that writing was not just writing. It could be miraculous. It could be wonderful. It could be really funny. I didn't learn from a guy that just wrote jokes. I learned from a guy who learned from the masters.

AP: Years into the hallowed run with Sid Caesar, you implored him to join you in leaving television for the movies. You guys were then immensely popular. What drew you to film?

Brooks: I knew. I was so ahead of my time. I said: Harold Lloyd is still hanging from the clock in "Safety Last!" from 50 years ago and you do an hour and a half of incredible com-

edy that is gone the minute they turn off the TV set. It's gone forever. He understood that, but he couldn't turn down the offer they gave him. I understood. I said, "Well, I'm going to continue but I'm going to go into movies. You can do a lot more, you have a lot more time and they last. They're around. Every movie I've ever made is still around, playing somewhere. Maybe TCM or some little art house in Des Moines, but it's somewhere. It plays. A movie is forever."

AP: A kind of running gag in the book is the litany of film executives who give you notes that you gladly accept only to completely ignore.

Brooks: (Laughs) I always agreed to them, 100%, to their faces. When (producer) Joseph Levine said, "Get rid of this guy Gene Wilder in 'The Producers.' Get rid of him. He's funny looking. You can get a handsomer guy who has more star quality." I said, "Yes. He's out. You won't see him again." I never changed a thing. They forget. As soon as the money comes rolling in, they simply forget.

AP: Has what's funny to you changed at all with age?

Brooks: You never know what's funny to you until it hits you, and then you say, "Gee, that's funny!" Things that are positive surprises have always thrilled me. Like Bialystock and Bloom planning on having a flop and instead have an incredible hit. There's a kind of crazy secret in my writing that I didn't realize until I read the book myself. It seems that I know that in this world, it's either love or money. They don't both happen at the same time. I don't know whether I learned it from Russian literature or Mel Tokin or life. But it's money or love, and I go for love.

AP: Do you still think up 2,000 Year Old Man jokes?

Brooks: Well, without Carl, who I loved so much and who was such a great, deep important part of my life, I don't think very often of the 2,000 Year Old Man. Once in a while, I'll think of something and think, too bad Carl isn't alive and we could've nail that idea. But you meet people. You meet Carl Reiners and Tom Meehans and Anne Bancrofts. You meet people. And then you're lucky if you have children that you like and like you. I've been lucky in many departments.

AP: Do you remember your last conversation with Reiner before his death last year?

Brooks: Yeah. The day he died, I said, "Carl, you're eating two hot dogs." He said, "They ain't gonna bother me. I love hot dogs and hot dogs love me." But it wasn't true. By that night, the hot dogs had done him in. He lived a long, beautiful, loving, giving, happy life. I was so lucky he was my dearest friend.



Skylar Astin, (left), and Jane Levy, cast members in 'Zoey's Extraordinary Christmas,' pose together at the premiere of the film, Tuesday, Nov. 30, in Los Angeles. (AP)

Variety

NEW YORK: Author Alice Sebold publicly apologized Tuesday to the man who was exonerated last week in the 1981 rape that was the basis for her memoir "Lucky" and said she was struggling with the role she played "within a system that sent an innocent man to jail."

Anthony Broadwater, 61, was convicted in 1982 of raping Sebold when she was a student at Syracuse University. He served 16 years in prison. His conviction was overturned Nov 22 after prosecutors reexamined the case and determined there were serious flaws in his arrest and trial.

In a statement released to The Associated Press and later posted on Medium, Sebold, the author of the novels "The Lovely Bones" and "The Almost Moon," wrote to Broadwater that she was truly sorry for what he'd been through.

"I am sorry most of all for the fact that the life you could have led was unjustly robbed from you, and I know that no apology can change what happened to you and never will," she wrote.

She wrote that "as a traumatized 18-year-old rape victim, I chose to put my faith in the American legal system. My goal in 1982 was justice — not to perpetuate injustice. And certainly not to forever, and irreparably, alter a young man's life by the very crime that had altered mine."

In a statement issued by his lawyers, Broadwater said he was "relieved that she has apologized."

He went on, "It must have taken a lot of courage for her to do that. It's still painful to me because I was wrongfully convicted, but this will help me in my process to come to peace with what happened."

Sebold wrote in 1999's "Lucky" of being raped and then spotting a Black man in the street several months later who she believed was her attacker.

Sebold, who is white, went to police. An officer said the man in the street must have been Broadwater, who had supposedly been seen in the area.

After Broadwater was arrested, Sebold failed to identify him in a police lineup, picking a different man as her attacker because she was frightened of "the expression in his eyes." (AP)

CHICAGO: Prosecutors' case against Justice Smollett has focused on how Chicago police say they determined that what they initially believed was a horrific hate crime was actually a fake assault staged by the "Empire" actor with help from two brothers. Testimony was to continue Wednesday in the trial, which is expected to last about a week.

A lead investigator in the case, Michael Theis, said Tuesday that the brothers — who worked with Smollett on the Chicago set of "Empire" — detailed for police how the actor orchestrated the hoax. They said Smollett told them via text message to

meet him "on the low," paid for supplies including a clothesline later fashioned into a noose and took them for a "dry run" prior to the January 2019 alleged attack.

Theis, who now is assistant director for research and development for the Chicago Police Department, said roughly two dozen detectives clocked some 3,000 hours on the investigation, rebutting a defense attorney's statement that they rushed to judgment. He said police were excited when they were able to track the movements of two



Smollett



Sebold

suspected attackers using surveillance video and cellphone and records from ride-sharing services.

"The crime was a hate crime, a horrible hate crime," Theis said, noting Smollett — who is Black — reported that his attackers put a noose around his neck and poured bleach on him. He said the case had become national and international news and that "everybody from the mayor on down" wanted it solved, a reference to then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel. (AP)