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CAPITAL NEW YORK

“Cuomo responds to Moreland rebuke”

Laura Nahmias, April 10, 2014

ALBANY—Governor Andrew Cuomo said Thursday that the ethics commission he empaneled last year was always intended as a "temporary" device to compel legislative action on ethics reforms.

“The commission was always a temporary commission by design,” Cuomo told reporters in Rochester, where he was delivering a budget address. “It was never a permanent commission. It was created because the Legislature wouldn’t pass something called the Public Trust Act.”

“Last session I said if they didn’t pass it, I would empanel a Moreland Commission. I also said when they do pass it I would disband the Moreland Commission,” he said.

Cuomo’s decision to disband the Moreland Commission was criticized on Thursday by Southern District U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara, who has announced his office will take possession of the records generated by the commission. In a radio interview, Bharara called the dissolution of the commission “premature,” because it had not yet finished its investigations.

Cuomo said he "was not creating a perpetual bureaucracy" when he created the commission, to great fanfare.

“We have plenty of enforcement mechanisms by and large,” Cuomo said, referring to district attorneys and U.S. Attorneys who prosecute corruption. “I don’t believe we needed yet another bureaucracy for enforcement. We needed laws changed.”

Asked by Thomas Kaplan of the New York Times if he thought Bharara was wrong to be concerned that the commission's investigations were being aborted, Cuomo reiterated that it was always temporary.

“By definition, this was the creation of a temporary commission. That’s what it was. It was created by definition for a short period of time,” Cuomo said.

Kaplan pointed out that Cuomo’s executive order had created the commission to last through 2015.

“No,” Cuomo said, before adding, “Yes, It had a two-year executive order. But it was created to spur the legislation and I said repeatedly, when the legislation is passed, the commission will be disbanded. Right? How many times did I say that? You heard it, how many times?”

“You said it but—” Kaplan responded, before Cuomo interrupted.

“So? That's what it was and that's what I did,” the governor said.

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