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News Coverage on EffectiveNY

"Despite Cuomo's Vow of Sunlight, a Bid to Keep Aides' E-Mail in the Dark"

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07/16/2012

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ALBANY — Aides communicate with untraceable messages sent from BlackBerry to BlackBerry. Nothing delicate is shared using e-mail. And in-boxes are regularly wiped clean.

When he ran for office, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo vowed to operate the most transparent administration in New York State history. And his aides argue that he has: they say that their communication methods differ little from those of other elected officials, and that Mr. Cuomo will preserve more documents than any of his recent predecessors.

But while Mr. Cuomo has taken steps to improve citizen access to the State Capitol, literally as well as digitally, he and his aides have also set up an executive chamber that prides itself on leaving few footprints.

"It communicates a culture of — I don't know if paranoia is the right word; maybe it's control," said Bill Samuels, a Democratic activist and the founder of the New Roosevelt Initiative, a government-reform group. "But it's not healthy long-term."

The Cuomo administration's sensitivity to sunlight is well known. Aides in the governor's office have been warned about discussing work matters at Albany haunts. On one occasion, Mr. Cuomo's spokesman worried publicly that someone was rummaging through the office's trash. And the administration has been aggressive in redacting documents before sharing them with the public; in June, when it turned over months of Mr. Cuomo's schedules to The New York Times, even the daily weather forecast was blacked out. (The office has since pledged to release the forecasts.)

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