



Old Astoria Neighborhood Association (OANA)
www.OANA-NY.org

August 13, 2025

Stop Calling It a Flip-Flop — Changing Your Mind Is Leadership

Every election cycle, voters say they want leaders who listen and follow the facts. Yet the moment an elected official actually changes course, headlines scream “flip-flop.” We’ve built a political culture that punishes the very trait we claim to value: the ability to learn. That’s not just unfair, it’s dangerous.

Housing policy in New York offers a clear case. For years, development was treated as a threat and “developers” became a dirty word. Zoning rules, procedural delays, and political resistance throttled new building. The result: too few homes and rising rents. Now, facing a crisis they helped create, many officials are rethinking, supporting rezonings, streamlining approvals, and cutting red tape to get more housing built. That’s not weakness; it’s recognizing reality.

We see similar shifts elsewhere. In 2020, mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani aligned with “defund the police,” but after a mass shooting, he distanced himself, saying, “I am not defunding the police; I am not running to defund the police.”

Mayor Eric Adams proposed switching retirees to Medicare Advantage, then dropped the plan amid public backlash.

Former Governor Andrew Cuomo also evolved on major issues. In 2014 he called Mayor de Blasio’s \$13 minimum wage push a “non-starter” and opposed local increases, but by 2016 he had convened a State Wage Board and signed a phased-in \$15 statewide minimum wage (Politico). On fracking, he went from considering limited drilling to banning it outright in 2014, citing public health risks (CBS New York).

These are not opportunistic retreats; they reflect new facts, shifting needs, and changing realities.

Yet reporting rarely treats it that way. Too often, coverage rewards “gotcha” moments and replays past quotes without context. Labeling an updated position a character flaw might get clicks, but it’s lazy journalism. We should expect reporters to ask: What changed? Does the new approach offer better outcomes? How will we measure success? And demand answers.



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Policies shouldn't be set in stone. Circumstances evolve — economic pressures, migration patterns, climate trends, technology, public sentiment. Leaders who refuse to shift aren't strong, they're brittle. Changing your mind in politics is hard. It means admitting an earlier stance was incomplete and risking backlash from your own base. That takes intellectual courage.

We should set a better standard. When a public official changes course — on housing, policing, or anything else — our first response should be thoughtful inquiry, not condemnation. Dig into what pushed the change, how the new plan improves things, and what accountability looks like.

New Yorkers know adaptation works. We change subway routes when service shifts, move when rents spike, and fix what's broken. City Hall should do the same. A leader who says, "I was wrong, here's why, and here's my new plan," shows the flexibility needed to manage a city of 8.5 million with a \$100 billion budget. That's strength, not a flaw. Because the only thing worse than a leader who changes their mind is one who refuses to — no matter how much the world changes around them.

Richard Khuzami

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