

# Michael Caputo

**Michael R. Caputo** (born March 24, 1962<sup>[1]</sup>) is a Republican political strategist, and media consultant. He became enamored with Ronald Reagan while serving in the military and became a Republican, later working for politicians including Jack Kemp. He worked for the Reagan Administration with Oliver North, then as assistant director of the House of Representatives Gallery of the Radio and Television Correspondents' Association. He left that role to serve as director of media services on the campaign for President George H.W. Bush in the 1992 United States presidential election.

Caputo moved to Russia in 1994 after the fall of the Soviet Union, and was an adviser to Boris Yeltsin and helped elect Yeltsin to a second term as President of Russia. He worked for Gazprom Media in 2000 where he helped improve the image of Vladimir Putin in the U.S. He moved back to the U.S. and founded a public relations company, and then moved to Ukraine to work on a candidate's campaign for parliament.

Caputo worked as the campaign manager for Carl Paladino in his 2010 bid for Governor of New York. In 2016, Caputo joined the Donald Trump campaign, and was put in charge of communications for New York. He left the campaign after publicly voicing his approval for the replacement of campaign manager Corey Lewandowski with Paul Manafort.

Caputo was investigated by the United States House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence as part of their investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election. In May 2016, Caputo and Roger Stone met with Henry Greenberg, a Russian national who claimed to have damaging information about Hillary Clinton. Caputo later denied contact with Russian officials or having discussed Russia with Trump or with other campaign aides.<sup>[2]</sup> Caputo stated it was not until prosecutors informed him that Greenberg was Russian that he learned the man he had spoken with in 2016 was not a US citizen.<sup>[3]</sup>

<b>Mike Caputo</b>	
<b>Born</b>	March 24, 1962 (age 58)
<b>Education</b>	University at Buffalo (BA)
<b>Occupation</b>	Republican political strategist and media consultant
<b>Years active</b>	1983–present
<b>Known for</b>	Reagan Administration adviser George H.W. Bush campaign adviser Carl Paladino campaign manager Boris Yeltsin adviser Vladimir Putin media consultant Donald Trump campaign adviser
<b>Political party</b>	Republican

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# Early life and education

Caputo was born in 1962 to father Raymon Caputo.<sup>[1][4]</sup> He spent the bulk of his early years in Buffalo, New York, in the region known as Southtowns.<sup>[4][1]</sup> Caputo garnered early public relations work situated in Hawaii while with the United States Army, which he joined directly after finishing high school.<sup>[4][1]</sup> Subsequent to his experiences in the Army, he enrolled at the University at Buffalo in 1983.<sup>[4]</sup>

He was employed by Republican politicians such as Congressman Jack Kemp.<sup>[1]</sup> He gained experience in crisis management and working for the insurance company operated by his father.<sup>[1]</sup> Caputo was mentored by Roger J. Stone Jr. in the ways of political advisement, and became his personal driver.<sup>[1][4]</sup> He learned from Stone that political campaigns could be turned into wins for candidates if the public found them entertaining.<sup>[1]</sup> Caputo was influenced by Jerry Garcia and Ronald Reagan, and has written about his views supporting safeguarding the environment.<sup>[1][4]</sup>

# Career

## Reagan Administration and Bush campaign

During the Reagan Administration, Caputo helped support the president's agenda in Central America.<sup>[1]</sup> He worked with Oliver North to foment propaganda as part of Reagan's public relations efforts in South America and in Central America.<sup>[4]</sup> After his work for the Reagan Administration he served as assistant director of the House of Representatives Gallery of the Radio and Television Correspondents' Association.<sup>[5]</sup> He next worked for President George H.W. Bush as director of media services in Bush's campaign in the 1992 United States presidential election.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Russian advisor and media consultant

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Caputo established residence in Russia in 1994.<sup>[5][4][6]</sup> He served as an adviser to Boris Yeltsin in 1995.<sup>[1]</sup> In his capacity as advisor to Yeltsin, he was employed with the United States Agency for International Development.<sup>[5][7][1]</sup> He served as president of The Florence Group from 1994 to 1999, and stated he "played a pivotal role in electing Boris Yeltsin to his second term as President of the Russian Federation."<sup>[8]</sup> He was employed by Moscow-headquartered subsidiary of Gazprom, Gazprom-Media.<sup>[9][7][6]</sup> Caputo was contracted by Gazprom in 2000 to work for Russian leader Vladimir Putin.<sup>[5][7]</sup> His task was to increase Putin's public relations standing, specifically his support level in the U.S.<sup>[9][7][6]</sup> He moved back from Russia to the U.S. in the year 2000.<sup>[4]</sup> After returning to the U.S., he was called by his former mentor Roger Stone who convinced him to move to Miami Beach, Florida, and then Caputo founded his media advising company Michael Caputo Public Relations.<sup>[4]</sup> Caputo moved back to Europe in 2007 while advising a politician's campaign for parliament in 2007 Ukrainian parliamentary election.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Paladino campaign manager

Caputo worked as the campaign manager for Carl Paladino in his 2010 bid for Governor of New York.<sup>[1][10]</sup> Caputo was profiled in a subject piece about him during the campaign in The New York Times; the paper said of his campaign strategy: "Michael R. Caputo's impish spirit and no-holds-barred campaign style have helped propel his boss, Carl P. Paladino, a relatively unknown real estate mogul from Buffalo, to the Republican nomination for New York governor".<sup>[1]</sup> Paladino was supported at the time by the Tea Party movement, and in an interview with The New York Times, his campaign manager embraced the outsider nature of their bid in the 2010 New York gubernatorial election: "This is a campaign of junkyard dogs, not pedigreed poodles. Carl knows the background of everyone who works for him. He knows that each of us comes to the campaign with warts. And he has his own warts. We don't hide anything."<sup>[10]</sup> Paladino explained his hiring choice of Caputo as campaign manager to The New York Times: "I'm facing some major demons here, and I needed someone who could go right back on top of them in a matter of minutes. You've got to let them know they are going to get punished."<sup>[1]</sup>

## Trump communications adviser

Donald Trump hired Caputo in 2014 to launch an astroturfing campaign in support of his stalking-horse bid for the Buffalo Bills. Caputo established a shell organization named "12th Man Thunder" (later renamed "Bills Fan Thunder" after a trademark dispute with the Texas A&M Aggies football team) and hired a fake leader, amputee Chuck Sonntag, whom Trump and Caputo figured would earn sympathy. When Trump placed his bid and was no longer allowed to have ties to the organization, Caputo went fully rogue and launched a naked smear campaign against one of the other bidders, Jon Bon Jovi and Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment. The group's publicity stunts capitalized on already-simmering anti-Toronto sentiment, but it was ultimately a competitor to both bids, Buffalo Sabres owner and natural gas tycoon Terrence Pegula and his wife Kim Pegula, that bought the Bills franchise, grossly outbidding both Trump and Bon Jovi. Bills Fan Thunder remains in operation as a charity.<sup>[11]</sup>

In 2016, Caputo had offices of his company Michael Caputo Public Relations located in East Aurora, New York.<sup>[4]</sup> He additionally had workers in his employ located both in Miami Beach, Florida and Moscow, Russia.<sup>[4]</sup> During the 2016 New York Republican primary, Caputo became a political adviser to Trump in order to help him win the primary in that state.<sup>[6][4]</sup> At the time of his hiring he was employed as a commentator on a political talk program on WBEN AM radio.<sup>[4]</sup> In order to support Trump in New York, he joined forces with his former employer from the 2010 gubernatorial race, Carl Paladino.<sup>[4]</sup> While working on the Trump campaign, Caputo was placed in charge of communications for the candidate in New York.<sup>[7]</sup> Caputo resigned from the Trump campaign shortly after Corey Lewandowski was replaced as campaign manager by Paul Manafort.<sup>[8]</sup> He had tweeted in support of Lewandowski leaving, and in his resignation letter to Manafort said he regretted the statement on Twitter.<sup>[9][8]</sup> He was a senior adviser to Trump's political efforts November 2015 to June 2016.<sup>[12][2][8]</sup> After leaving, Caputo later maintained contacts with associates in the Trump Administration.<sup>[13]</sup> After reporting revealed Donald Trump's disclosure of classified information to Russia, Caputo told the Associated Press about leaks from within the Trump Administration to the media: "This has all the markings of a coordinated, silent coup."<sup>[13]</sup> Caputo said to USA Today that he attributed the leaks to disaffected members of the Stop Trump movement.<sup>[14]</sup> He called them "anti-Trump zealots".<sup>[14]</sup>

Due to his time working on the Trump campaign and the fact that he previously worked for politicians in Russia, Caputo was contacted by the United States House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on May 9, 2017, as part of their investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.<sup>[12][8][2]</sup> The House Intelligence Committee requested Caputo come in and be interviewed voluntarily and submit to the Committee relevant documents associated with their investigation.<sup>[12][8][2]</sup> During a March 20, 2017 hearing, Representative Jackie Speier questioned FBI Director James Comey about Caputo, and cited employment with Gazprom and history in Ukraine.<sup>[12][8][2]</sup> Caputo worked with the House Intelligence Committee in order to acquiesce to their queries.<sup>[9][2]</sup> Posting to social media, Caputo

denied ties to Russia while on the Trump campaign.<sup>[2]</sup> Caputo told the House Intelligence Committee: "The only time the President and I talked about Russia was in 2013, when he simply asked me in passing what it was like to live there in the context of a dinner conversation."<sup>[9][2]</sup> Caputo hired attorney Dennis Vacco to represent him during the investigation, and subsequently stated that he had liquidated his children's college funds to pay Vacco.<sup>[15]</sup>

In 2017 and 2018 Caputo was a frequent guest of CNN programs.

## Personal life

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While working in Russia in the 1990s, Caputo met and married a Russian student studying astrophysics although they would later end their marriage.<sup>[4][5]</sup> Caputo became a Catholic in 2000, later saying this religious change helped him find peace.<sup>[4]</sup> While advising in Kiev, Ukraine in 2007, Caputo met Maryna Ponomarenko, who became his second wife.<sup>[12][8][4]</sup> As of 2016, Caputo resided in East Aurora, New York with her and their three children.<sup>[4]</sup>

## See also

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- [Vladimir Gusinsky](#)
- [Mikhail Lesin](#)
- [Links between Trump associates and Russian officials](#)<sup>[16][17]</sup>
- [New York Republican primary, 2016](#)
- [The Plot to Hack America](#)
- [Timeline of Russian interference in the 2016 United States elections](#)
- [Timeline of post-election transition following Russian interference in the 2016 United States elections](#)
- [Timeline of investigations into Trump and Russia \(January–June 2018\)](#)
- [Donald Trump presidential campaign, 2016](#)

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## Further reading

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## External links

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- [Michael R. Caputo](https://twitter.com/MichaelRCaputo) (<https://twitter.com/MichaelRCaputo>) on [Twitter](#)
  - [PoliticsNY.net](http://politicsny.net/) (<http://politicsny.net/>) - Caputo's political news site
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