



OPINION: CAN THE DEMOCRATS CASH IN ON GEORGE WASHINGTON 'BRIDGEGATE'?

CARL GOLDEN | DECEMBER 12, 2013

Gov. Christie's far too savvy to let a bungled traffic-flow study slow down his political machine



By any measure, the last four years of Democratic control of the Legislature yielded the party little political benefit.

But the Democrats may beD IAIN tt6)2.2 61c0p 2v f0s0e 224) W0 3 216)2 16a 3 n0e 0 d i a t e r political and public relations potential.

What has given Democrats the traction they've lacked up to this point was a quietly issued in September to conduct a traffic-flow study by closing three access lanes to the George Washington Bridge, an iconic structure administered by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, that carries tens of thousands of car commuters, buses, and trucks across the Hudson from New Jersey to New York City.

The initial legislative reaction was in response to the howls of protest from drivers stuck in massive traffic jams for hours on the bridge approaches and streets in Fort Lee. Attention, however, quickly shifted from examining what seemed to be a poorly thought-out decision to allegations that it was a calculated and vindictive abuse of power to punish Fort Lee's Democratic mayor for refusing to endorse the governor's reelection.

If true, it would rank as one of the monumentally stupid ideas of the decade.

There has been no suggestion, allegation, or evidence that the governor was informed of the lane-closing plan in advance or that he approved it. Christie's public response was to laugh it off and quip sarcastically that he secretly moved the traffic cones personally as a part of the study.

It's highly unlikely that Christie, someone who has exhibited finely tuned political instincts as governor, would have entertained seriously a cockeyed scheme to punish a small town mayor by paralyzing his town with traffic.

He may very well have been victimized by his own appointees whose hubris outweighed their better judgment. The political landscape is littered with such instances.

Like a great many issues, though, this one has landed on the governor's doorstep, his non-involvement notwithstanding. The administration is in a semi-hunkered-down position, referring inquiries to the Port Authority and declining comment on Wisniewski's demands.

Democrats, though, have the bit in their teeth, something they haven't had for four years. How far they can run with it remains to be seen.

Carl Golden is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

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