

## Setback for Christie is likely an omen

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**TRENTON** — The recent startling housecleaning at the Port Authority forced two of Chris Christie's closest friends and top advisers out early from jobs that paid a combined \$440,000, a rare political setback for the 51-year-old Republican governor.

But analysts say it's a signal of what's to come for Christie when he begins his second term in office Jan. 21 — a succession of bruising fights, thanks to his national ambitions and because New Jersey's term limit for governors braves up state Democrats looking to settle old scores with Christie.

"There's going to be plenty of heat from inside the state, and the national Democrats, folks who did virtually nothing to help Chris Christie's opponent in the gubernatorial election, are taking Christie seriously now," said Ben Dworkin, a Rider University political scientist. "That's because he's the presumptive favorite to win the GOP 2016 presidential nomination. He's a threat to the national Democrats."

Bill Baroni, the deputy executive director, and David Wildstein, another Christie appointee, left the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey in the wake of a furor over lane closures from Fort Lee to the George Washington Bridge. Christie's critics claim the closures were meant to bully the town's mayor, who had refused to endorse the governor for re-election.

The Democratic National Committee released a video saying Christie was "playing politics." Correct the Record, a Democratic super PAC, used its website to link Christie with "political retribution."

Pressure mounted on the Christie appointees when Middlesex County Democrat John Wisniewski, chairman of the influential Assembly Transportation Committee, handed out subpoenas to authority officials and conducted hearings in Trenton.

Wildstein quit first. Then Wisniewski called for Baroni's resignation after a hearing last Monday. Baroni was out four days later.

Wisniewski in an interview Friday said politics has not motivated his panel's investigation.

"We're trying to create a body of knowledge that will allow us to reform the operations of the Port Authority. What happened at the George Washington Bridge in the first week of September is one of the many symptoms of dysfunction that exist in the authority," Wisniewski said.

Christie, when announcing Baroni's resignation, was asked if he ordered the lanes closed.

“Absolutely not,” Christie said, adding he had “no reason to believe” that anyone on his staff ordered the closures.

“I’ve made it very clear to everybody on my senior staff that if anyone had any knowledge about this, they needed to come forward to me and tell me about it. And they’ve all assured me that they don’t,” Christie said.

Wisniewski said Christie “is taking the