

There have already been signs of an increasing weariness with the investigation and its cost, and it will be a difficult task to regenerate interest in it in mid-summer when attention is focused on long planned family vacations rather than following a political drama that has lost much of its drama.

Wisniewski has led the committee admirably, maintaining its focus and demonstrating his skill as an interrogator. In the face of concerted attempts by committee Republicans to force a suspension of the panel's work and defer to the United States Attorney, Wisniewski's calm demeanor kept the investigation from deteriorating into a partisan political brawl.

The hard reality, however, is that after months of hearings and scrutinizing tens of thousands of pages of memos, emails, and phone logs provided by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the governor's office, there has not been a shred of credible evidence directly implicating Gov. Chris Christie or his top staff in the madcap plot to close the access lanes.

Each of the administration witnesses has related the same story: They knew nothing in advance about the scheme prior to its implementation, were not involved in any way in its planning or execution, and were shocked by the disclosures. Despite differences in specific dates or timelines, the core of their testimony emerged unshaken.

In point of fact, their testimony cemented the administration's case that the closures were the brainchild of former Port Authority staffer David Wildstein, that former deputy chief of staff Bridget Anne Kelly was aware of it, and that former Christie confidant and campaign manager Bill Stepien had some level of involvement.

The administration has stuck steadfastly to its account and, for the most part, it has held up -- considerable cynicism, skepticism, and outright disbelief notwithstanding.

They all accepted the initial representation by Wildstein and former Port Authority deputy executive director Bill Baroni that closing the lanes -- or "realigning" them as the two preferred to characterize it -- was part of a traffic study that had gone awry due to a failure to inform local officials and law enforcement.

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be ignored.

Wisniewski and his Democratic colleagues on the committee voiced their incredulity that, in spite of the intense media attention and speculation, no one in the administration undertook to determine what had occurred.

The committee, as one member expressed it, was "curious about the lack of curiosity."

While that conclusion is understandable, the more likely explanation is that the administration's strategy was to keep the issue at arm's length, confine it to the Port Authority and out of the governor's office, and play for time in the belief that it would be overtaken and swept aside quickly in the crush of other more pressing matters.

That strategy collapsed, producing a major political uproar and career-threatening scandal with the revelation of the "time for traffic troubles in Fort Lee" email from Kelly to Wildstein.

In developing an exit strategy, Wisniewski is in an excellent position to recite what the committee's activities have revealed:

An administration that chose to disregard growing evidence of possible misconduct and abuse of government power in its ranks.

An administration obsessed with securing political advantage to an extreme point at which a part of the governor's office became a partner in his reelection campaign, pushing relentlessly against and arguably exceeding the boundaries separating official duties from political involvement.

An administration in which an ugly mindset had taken root, one which not only encouraged beatdowns of political opponents, but celebrated them.

An administration in which the number of "I don't recall" or similar responses suggested that amnesia had become a communicable disease.

Wisniewski deserves much credit for standing firm in the face of mounting political pressures. Had it not been for his perseverance, none of the foregoing would have been become widely known, nor -- and perhaps most importantly -- would the United States Attorney have begun an investigation.

Leading a legislative committee investigation into actions of the executive branch controlled by the opposition party is a task that requires sober judgment, a clear-eyed sense of balance and proportion, a recognition that an end has been reached and a conclusion necessary.

Wisniewski has demonstrated those qualities. Now is the time to take advantage of the Legislature's preoccupation with the state budget and secure his committee's place as having carried out its duties in a responsible and fair-minded fashion.

U. S. attorney Paul Fishman is waiting in the wings.
