

Christie Keeps High Profile as N.Y. Bridge Probes Advance

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New Jersey Governor [Chris Christie](#)'s schedule is packed with travel, from fundraising events for fellow Republicans around the U.S. to trade meetings next month in Mexico.

The 51-year-old father of four gyrated for the "Dad Dance" skit alongside late-night television host [Jimmy Fallon](#). He joined the Ice Bucket Challenge charity stunt, posting a YouTube [video](#) of his two youngest children blasting him with freezing water.

Yet almost one year after politically motivated traffic tie-ups at the George Washington Bridge in Fort Lee, Christie is shadowed by state and federal inquiries that threaten to dash a potential 2016 presidential run, even after a report commissioned by the governor concluded that he had no involvement. While the steady drumbeat of scandal news that rocked the administration early this year has slowed, the probes are advancing.

"Work is being done, even though we're not doing anything in front of the cameras," said state Senate Majority Leader [Loretta Weinberg](#), co-chairwoman of a legislative investigatory panel that subpoenaed Christie's aides to testify publicly about the bridge-lane closings.

U.S. prosecutors are probing whether the shutdown was illegal and whether the Christie administration threatened to withhold Hurricane Sandy aid to Hoboken if the mayor didn't back a real-estate development project.

Photographer: Scott Olson/Getty Images

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie greets guests after delivering a speech at the "An... [Read More](#)



Grand Jury

Lawyers for witnesses involved in the case say they expect U.S. Attorney [Paul Fishman](#) to decide in the coming weeks whether to bring charges related to the lane closings and the administration's response. A grand jury in Newark has heard evidence as prosecutors gather evidence, they said.

Rebekah Carmichael, a spokeswoman for Fishman, declined to comment on the probe.

Manhattan District Attorney [Cyrus Vance Jr.](#) and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission also are investigating whether the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey improperly financed the \$1 billion renovation of the Pulaski Skyway in New Jersey. The agency is controlled by Christie and New York Governor [Andrew Cuomo](#), a Democrat.

New Jersey lawmakers, after suspending their investigation in mid-July at Fishman's request, are about two weeks from asking him for clearance to contact several witnesses. Fishman had said the witnesses were critical to his criminal probe and that legislators should forgo talking to them, according to Weinberg, a Democrat from Teaneck.

Approval Slides

The scandal may be taking a toll on the governor, who says he'll decide next year whether he'll seek the Republican nomination for president. His approval rating dropped to 47 percent this month, the lowest in three years, a Quinnipiac University poll found. And almost half of New Jersey voters doubt the governor's contention that he was unaware of the bridge plot, according to a Rutgers-Eagleton poll released on Aug. 14.

“He needs a strong party base to run for president,” said [David Redlawsk](#), director of the Eagleton poll in New Brunswick. “If Republican voters in New Jersey are even somewhat skeptical, there might be an opening for his GOP challengers to define him by these allegations.”

In Iowa, a bellwether state in presidential races, almost 33 percent of Republicans have an unfavorable opinion of the New Jersey governor, according to an NBC/Marist survey in July.

Christie has repeatedly declined to comment on the probes. After an Aug. 15 appearance on the boardwalk in Asbury Park, he said he wouldn't answer a question about his strategy for dealing with them.

Tough Guy

Christie built a national fan base on his New Jersey tough-guy persona and victories over public-worker unions on cuts to pensions and benefits. His popularity peaked after Sandy, the devastating 2012 storm that led him to praise Democratic President [Barack Obama](#) for promising billions of dollars in federal aid and to slam fellow Republicans in Congress who delayed the relief.

His approval plunged after an aide's “Time for some traffic problems in Fort Lee” e-mail, made public in January, linked his administration to a political plot to punish Democratic Mayor [Mark Sokolich](#), who didn't endorse the governor for a second term. Lane closings at the bridge approach during four mornings in September delayed New York City commuters for hours and disrupted school buses and emergency vehicles.

Aide Blamed

A 344-page report by the New York law firm [Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP](#), commissioned at Christie's request and released in March, concluded that the governor had no advance knowledge of the jams. It put the blame on [Bridget Anne Kelly](#), a former Christie deputy chief of staff in the office of intergovernmental affairs, and [David Wildstein](#), a former interstate capital projects director for the Port Authority, which operates the bridge.

Lawmakers have yet to determine who authorized Kelly to send the e-mail, and why, according to Assemblyman [John Wisniewski](#), a Democrat from Sayreville and co-chairman of the legislative investigatory committee.

“An investigation makes progress by inches, not yards,” Wisniewski said. “Obtaining all of the relevant facts is not often easy, especially when the individuals from whom we're seeking these facts appear to be well practiced in making our job difficult.”

Mexican Trip

Christie plans to visit Mexico for three days in September, and as chairman of the Republican Governors Association, he'll be pressed into service for more political appearances heading into November, when voters will cast ballots in 36 gubernatorial races.

All the while, Christie will be working on what [Julian Zelizer](#), a Princeton University professor of public affairs, called a strategy to steer talk about him from the bridge to the White House.

“The specter of Bridgewater is still there -- it's a story that might have quieted down, but people are wondering,” Zelizer said. “It's as much about what's coming next as it is about what happened.”

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