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## Bridge scandal fuels bully accusations against Christie

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TRENTON, N.J. — Since November, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie has been busy racking up victories: crushing his Democratic opponent while cruising to re-election, ascending to the helm of the Republican Governors Association, and - while he has not announced he's running for president - receiving from polls the mantle of being his party's 2016 front-runner.

But the hard-charging governor, who has defined himself by always going on the offensive, took the biggest hit of his terms as governor Wednesday with the disclosure of 22 pages of email and text messages linking his deputy chief of staff to a series of massive traffic jams in September at the George Washington Bridge.

Perhaps most damaging for Christie, the accusations against his office fuel the biggest criticism his opponents have long pushed, without (until now) much su

The story instantly went national. It set Twitter afire throughout the day and was the talk of cable news shows in the evening, with the aggrieved mayor of Fort Lee on CNN blasting Christie in an interview with Wolf Blitzer.

In Washington, reporters hounded Republicans from New Jersey for comments, though few wanted to speak.

Cary Covington, a political scientist at the University of Iowa, said that in that state, that hosts the first presidential contest with its caucuses, clean politics matters.

"Iowans care about this stuff," Covington said.

As Democrats in Trenton hammered Christie, national Democrats also plunged into the fray. A story they had tried to draw attention to for months suddenly had new life.

"These revelations are troubling for any public official, but they also indicate what we've come to expect from Gov. Christie - when people oppose him, he exacts retribution," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., chair of the Democratic National Committee. "When people question him, he belittles and snidely jokes. And when anyone dares to look into his administration, he bullies and attacks."

Democrats aren't alone in seeing benefit from the controversy.

"I guarantee you that virtually every Republican running against him for president will have this in one or more TV ads. It's irresistible," Sabato said.

Several political observers questioned the point of meddling with the lanes. With Christie eyeing a blowout victory over Democratic State Sen. Barbara Buono, why bother?

"What the hell could the mayor of Fort Lee bring to the table at that point?" said Carl Golden, a former press secretary to Republican Govs. Thomas H. Kean and Christie Whitman, and now a senior contributing analyst at the William

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