OPINION: THERE'S NO GOOD TIME TO ANNOUNCE BAD NEWS -- NOT EVEN FRIDAY AFTERNOON

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As Gov. Christie and Gov. Cuomo learned, issuing a Port Authority press release before the weekend only made it more visible

Carl Golden

Perhaps the most enduring tradition in government holds that when it's necessary to announce unwelcome or embarrassing news, it's best to do it late on a Friday afternoon -- ideally at the start of a three-day holiday weekend -- in the belief it will be seen or heard by a fraction of the audience it might normally attract in the middle of the workweek.

While the practice might not date quite as far back as the dawn of the Republic, it's been followed for years by presidents, governors, mayors, and anyone else in elected office that cling tenaciously to the theory that people are preoccupied with weekend or holiday activities and gloss over news about politics and government or ignore it altogether.

Despite the persistent use of the late Friday afternoon ploy, in reality it doesn't fool anyone anymore. Indeed, it's become counterproductive, as was apparent with the recent simultaneous vetoes by New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Gov. Chris Christie of legislation adopted unanimously by the legislatures in the two states to reform the operational procedures of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

The vetoes were announced on the Saturday immediately preceding the week leading into the Christmas holiday, along with a statement from the two chief executives that they preferred the recommendations submitted by a panel of consultants rather than the provisions of the legislation.

The ferocity of the criticism of the specifics of the competing proposals

was matched by the intensity of those who accused both governors of conspiring to suppress the news by timing its release on the preholiday weekend.

The reaction to the circumstances surrounding the announcement drew heightened attention, feeding the conspiracy theories that it was a deliberate attempt to hide or at least minimize the impact of their actions.

Rather than slipping the news past people preoccupied with holiday plans and activities, embracing the Friday afternoon tradition produced the opposite effect. The media -- long accustomed to such efforts at manipulation and largely overlooking them -- seized on the vetoes and gave the story greater exposure.

Reporters delved deeper into the recommendations of the consulting group and concluded that, rather than the genuine reforms necessary to corre

And the media hinted darkly, it was all carried out quietly and revealed only at a time when the two governors' offices believed their actions would be obscured by the distractions of the holiday season. Public cynicism, it was suggested, was more than warranted.

While conflicting opinions were voiced over the proposed procedural reforms, many of which were the equivalent of "inside baseball" and too arcane to capture the public imagination, one recommendation stood out, easily understood and politically troubling for Christie -- a reduction in service on the PATH commuter line between New Jersey and Manhattan, removing the system from authority jurisdiction and turning it over to a private operator.

The reaction was swift and damning. For Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop, who many believe is positioning himself for a run at the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 2017, the service cut and privatization proposals were a stunning political gift.

While acknowledging the reductions would affect only early-morning and weekend service when ridership is at a low point, Fulop sprang to the defense of the hundreds of thousands of PATH commuters from Hudson, Bergen, Essex, Passaic, and Union counties -- large, vote-rich locales -- and argued that mass transit should be enhanced rather than undercut.

He also sided with those who are convinced that "privatization" is a euphemism for "fare increase." A private operator with a profit motive, when faced with operational losses, will look first to raising the cost to the consumer (the commuter) and then to cutbacks in service to tip the balance sheet in its favor.

Senate President and gubernatorial-candidate-in-waiting Steve Sweeney, whose South Jersey constituents are not PATH users, nonetheless recognized the political advantage Fulop had achieved as a result of the reduction and privatization proposals and, within two days, announced that he, too, opposed the idea. Other Hudson County leaders -- including reliable Christie ally State Sen. Brian Stack -- couldn't wait to get to a microphone and in front of cameras to denounce the proposal.

Fulop, though, whose city and county would be impacted heavily should PATH service be curtailed, has the upper hand. He emerged as the leading opponent of the idea and one who can speak with greater authority and insight than can Sweeney on the economic consequences that would befall the region if commuter service is reduced.

The committee's rationale for its recommendation