

# OPINION: WHAT THE BRIDGEGATE SCANDAL COST GOV. CHRISTIE

CARL GOLDEN | NOVEMBER 4, 2016

The toxic traffic jam didn't help Christie's run for the GOP presidential nomination, and surely lost him the VP slot on the Trump ticket

To all of those who were convinced that the access lane closures at the George Washington Bridge in Fort Lee and the traffic jams they produced three years ago were of little consequence and would quickly fade from the public consciousness, take note of the following:

- Gov. Chris Christie conceded that the scandal damaged his pursuit of the Republican presidential nomination.
- Republican nominee Donald Trump offered the vice presidential spot to Christie after the governor pleaded his case directly to him, but withdrew it 24 hours later after his advisers convinced him that Bridgegate would haunt his candidacy.

Even the governor's communications chief, in what, in retrospect, was a monumental error in judgment, dismissed the episode as a one day story that the public was largely ignoring.

The cascade of events and revelations unleashed by investigations conducted by a select legislative committee and the U. S. Attorney's office embedded the term "Bridgegate" in the public mind and guaranteed it would dominate the political environment for nearly Christie's entire second term.

It is understandable that in the first days of the lane closings, the resulting gridlock was seen as a typical garden variety traffic jam, the type that New Jersey commuters have become accustomed to and accept with weary resignation as the price to pay for working in New York City.

As more details emerged, along with rumors that the lanes had been closed to exact revenge on the Democratic mayor of Fort Lee for refusing to endorse Christie's reelection, the crucial mistake was committed: A cover story was concocted that the action was a traffic study authorized by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey with the goal of easing congestion at the world's busiest bridge.

That fateful decision and the administration's insistence on clinging to it in the face of mounting evidence that political retribution lay at the heart of the lane closings, eventually brought the entire

are considered unworkable at best or outlandish at worst, stuffed into a file drawer and forgotten.

The scheme to shut down the bridge access lanes arrived in the governor's office from David Wildstein, then director of interstate capital projects at the Port Authority, and someone who even the governor's top staff people described as coming up with one bizarre, wacky idea after another and attempting to sell the administration on them.

Whether his scheme was considered relatively harmless and easily explained with the tale of an authority sanctioned traffic study isn't known.

It was, however, set in motion on the opening day of school in September 2013, producing the desired result — four days of complete traffic gridlock, trapping cars, trucks, school buses, and emergency vehicles for hours while backing up surrounding local streets.

When the governor's office received a message from an outraged executive director of the authority that the lane closures violated the law and he intended to order them lifted, it should have been an unmistakable signal that it was a disaster in the making.

Had the administration acted immediately, ordered the lanes opened, and characterized the entire episode as poorly thought out and executed, it may well have ended at that point.

There may have been a day or two of critical media coverage, editorial demands for greater oversight of the authority and its operations, but the controversy could have been put to rest and quickly forgotten.

The public can expect the her

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