

"Nobody wants to start working for a candidate who may be tied up in ongoing, never-ending investigations," said Steve Duprey, New Hampshire's Republican National Committee member and the former chairman of the state party. But he said the scandal has had less of an impact on activists in the early-voting state, who rarely bring it up. "I think it's sort of old news unless something new comes out," he said.

Hogan Gidley, a veteran GOP operative in South Carolina who worked for Rick Santorum and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, said the scandal had hit early enough to give Christie time to recover, but said it would most definitely become a key primary issue if Christie runs, regardless of what investigations uncover.

"It's just too early to tell yet whether this is fatal to his campaign," he said. "I do think it gave a lot of people pause and it took a little bit of the bloom off the rose."

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