

## Christie: Bridge scandal no reflection on my leadership

The Port Authority controls most of the infrastructure that gets NJ residents to NYC. Here are 5 amazing things you don't know about the agency that have made commuting into NYC so expensive. STAFF VIDEO BY BOB BIELK STAFF VIDEO BY BOB BIELK

(Photo: File photo)

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TRENTON, N.J. — Facing new questions stemming from the George Washington Bridge probe, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie said Wednesday that the scandal was [no reflection on his brand of leadership](#).

Appearing on CNN one day after the chief executive officer of United Airlines quit, apparent fallout from the U.S. Attorney's Office's flowing probe into the agency that runs the bridge and Newark Liberty International Airport, Christie bristled at the suggestion that the controversy reflected poorly on his leadership.

"You appointed (former Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Chairman David Samson). This is isn't the first time one of your appointees has come under legal fire," said host Jake Tapper.

"I've been in public life now for 13 years," Christie replied. "My entire life has been about making sure the law is enforced, making sure people hold to certain ethical and legal standards in their conduct in office."

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[With United CEO's resignation, Bridgegate comes back](#)

"I've stayed by that standard my entire career and I hold everyone that works for me to that standard. And if they don't hold to that standard, then they're fired."

He added: "We'll see what happens with this situation, but the fact is, (when) we have 60,000 people working for you there are going to be occasions when someone doesn't hold up that standard."

Christie wasn't implicated when investigators said allies at the Port Authority shut down lanes at the George Washington Bridge in 2013, in an act of political payback. Nonetheless, the ongoing probe of the agency's affairs threatens to blow up his bid for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination.

On Tuesday, United CEO Jeff Smisek and two other airline executives resigned amid company and U.S. Attorney's Office inquiries into dealings between the airline and Samson, a longtime Christie loyalist.

"It's becoming one of the most corrupt administrations in the state's history," said Democratic Assemblyman John Wisniewski, who led a legislative investigation of the bridge lane closures. That inquiry unearthed the "time for some traffic problems in Fort Lee" email from Christie's fired deputy chief of staff, Bridget Anne Kelly.

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[United CEO Smisek undone by N.J. corruption investigation](#)

She and former Christie loyalist Bill Baroni are set to stand trial on Bridgegate-related charges. A third Christie ally, former Port Authority official David Wildstein, pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges for his role in the lane closures.

The controversy has long dogged the presidential ambitions of Christie, once considered a front-runner for his party's nomination.

"Any mention of Bridgegate is another nail in Gov. Christie's coffin," Matthew Hale, a Seton Hall University political scientist, said Wednesday. "In early primary states, all people will hear is Bridgegate and that is enough for most to move on to one of the (many other) presidential candidates they have to choose from."

The Bridgegate controversies resurface as Christie steps up efforts to be heard over the din caused by Donald Trump, leader in the Republican race. Christie has been omnipresent on cable news, maintaining a high profile in advance of Thursday's deadline for public-opinion polls — surveys CNN will use to determine which candidates to invite to its Sept. 16 debate. Christie appears likely to make the cut.



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On a TV appearance early Tuesday, Christie took aim at New York Mayor Bill di Blasio, blaming him for recent gun violence, and stating that if he were mayor “stop and frisk would be back ... in about five minutes.” Hours later, however, the airline announced the departure of the executives and the political discussion returned to Bridgegate.

Christie’s campaign spokeswoman, Samantha Smith, discounted the idea that the airline’s leadership change diminishes the governor.

There is “no impact on the campaign as the governor has nothing to do with this investigation,” Smith said.

Tom Donelson, an Iowa businessman and Republican activist, said Christie’s poor standing in the GOP field means the scandal isn’t likely to be a factor for conservative voters still shopping for a candidate.

“I see Christie’s campaign as a lost cause. I can’t see him jumping over all the people ahead of him,” Donelson said. “Bridgegate is only a factor if anybody cares. But Christie is at 2% support in some polls. If you have 2%, nobody cares.”

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David Redlawsk, a Rutgers University professor who is on sabbatical in Iowa researching the state’s caucus process and its impact on national politics, says scandal news could cost Christie a chance to pick up support from undecideds.

“My sense is that voters are looking for leaders to take responsibility. It’s the old buck-stops-here bit,” Redlawsk said. “While I suspect Iowans are not particularly aware of the specifics, they do want leadership. It is difficult to convince people you are a leader with a message of ‘these things happen.’”

The departure of the airline officials was a sign that a spinoff investigation of Samson, the influential lawyer who chaired Christie’s gubernatorial transition and was Christie’s hand-picked selection to head the Port Authority, was not going away. Samson has not publicly responded to the latest developments.

Prosecutors have been examining various aspects of United’s operations at the Newark airport and Atlantic City International Airport during Samson’s tenure, including the restoration of a twice-weekly flight between Newark and an airport in Columbia, S.C., close to Samson’s vacation home. The route was canceled days after Samson left the authority in 2014.

The U.S. Attorney’s Office inquiry sprung from the George Washington Bridge lane-closure scandal, where Christie loyalists have been accused of causing massive traffic jams in Fort Lee in fall 2013 in a bid to exact revenge on a mayor who wouldn’t endorse Christie’s re-election campaign.

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Wildstein, when he entered his guilty plea, told a judge the episode was an act of political revenge.

Wednesday marked the two-year anniversary of the start of the week-long traffic jams.

Wisniewski called for Christie to end his presidential campaign, saying there has been a “culture of corruption within the Christie administration and among his appointees at the agency.”

“Despite the governor’s insistence to the contrary, it is obvious that the work of law enforcement authorities growing out of the Bridgegate investigation is far from over, and we have yet to learn the full scope of the abuse of power engaged in by this administration,” Wisniewski said.

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