

GOLDEN: 'Bridgegate' an omen for Christie

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Just as the military and national security agencies use color codes or acronyms to determine threat levels and assess potential danger, the political establishment ranks information and intelligence on a scale of possible harm.

Green, yellow or red alerts, and terms like DefCon 1, 2, 3 or 4, have become part of everyday vernacular to convey heightened states of readiness by those responsible for the country's safety.

Protecting oneself politically — while certainly not rising to the level of guarding the nation against external or internal threats — is nonetheless crucial to all those directly involved, as well as those in jeopardy of becoming collateral damage.

In political speak, less ominous-sounding terms than those used by military and security officials are common. Designations like glitch, stumble, bump in the road and pothole, for example, are used to characterize incidents that can be dealt with swiftly and effectively, tamping down any long-term impact.

When the problem being confronted rises to controversy, it commands broader high-level attention and mobilization of resources. When controversy escalates to scandal, visions of television satellite dish trucks parked at the curb flash before one's eyes.

The secret shutdown of the Fort Lee access lanes to the George Washington Bridge for a fictitious traffic study began as a glitch. It's progressed through controversy until the media, by attaching "gate" as a suffix to bridge, has deemed it a scandal.

It has claimed two of Gov. Chris Christie's top appointees to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey — David Wildstein and deputy executive director Bill Baroni — both forced to resign in the aftermath of withering testimony before an Assembly committee that they cooked up a scheme to create chaos and paralyze Fort Lee by jamming the city streets with hundreds of cars, trucks and buses trying to get to Manhattan.

Speculation grew that the closures were ordered in retaliation for the refusal of the Democratic mayor of Fort Lee to endorse Christie's re-election.

While the administration hoped the story could be contained and eventually vanish with the resignations, it hasn't. A nationally syndicated columnist for the Washington Post has

Potentially more troubling for Christie is