



## OPINION: IS GOV. CHRISTIE HEADED FOR A POLITICAL COMEBACK OR CATASTROPHE?

CARL GOLDEN | APRIL 22, 2014

Presidents Nixon and Clinton offer some very useful examples on how to manage through a crisis -- and how not to



Most political scandals ultimately come down to a public relations war. Bridgegate -- the uproar over closing access lanes to the George Washington Bridge in Fort Lee last September -- is headed in the same direction.

A little history:

In 1998, when President Bill Clinton was caught in an Oval Office dalliance with a woman barely older than his daughter, he lied about it for months. His strategy was to convince the American people that his misbehavior was a personal matter between him and his wife and did not impact his ability to continue as president. He adopted a tough-it-out approach, gambling that while people would find his conduct distasteful, they'd eventually agree that it was a family issue and not sufficiently egregious to drive him from office.

Clinton rode out the storm, finished his second term, embarked on a lucrative after-office lecture circuit, and rehabbed himself into a revered party figure in great demand as a fundraiser and campaigner.

Twenty-six years earlier, President Richard Nixon spent more than two years trying to ride out the storm of Watergate with a public relations offensive that insisted he knew nothing about what a gang of rogue operatives working in his re-election campaign had done. His strategy ranged from the dismissive (Watergate was "a second rate burglary.") to ridicule (He didn't intend to "wallow in Watergate."). None of it worked. Slightly more than two years later he resigned from office and -- like Clinton -- took up writing books and giving speeches.

Clinton's affair with an intern was remarkably stupid and publicly embarrassing, but it did not measure up to Watergate with its repeated lawbreaking and obstruction of justice.

The common thread was the effort to convince the American people to look past each president's conduct and forgive him for it. It worked for Clinton, whose party rallied to him; it didn't for Nixon, whose most fervent supporters deserted him.

The Christie administration's strategy for dealing with Bridgegate is similar: Ride out the storm, the select investigating committee may resign en masse is the next logical step in furthering strategy.

Bramnick claimed that he and his party colleagues were being ignored by the Democratic majority and that the committee's work had deteriorated into a partisan campaign to besmirch Christie -- and an expensive one at that. Republicans, he said, agreed to the committee's creation and to serve on it in good faith but after two months of testimony and examination of documents, little progress had been made and it was time to cede control of the investigation to the U. S. Attorney.

Had it not been for the original Assembly Transportation Committee hearings, though, the scandal and the intimate involvement of top Christie staffers would not have been uncovered. Since then, the committee has been stymied, and even its strongest supporters will privately admit there's been little of note revealed.

The committee's effort to obtain emails from former Deputy Chief of Staff Bridget Anne Kelly and Christie confidant Bill Stepien -- two central figures in the scandal -- was unsuccessful when a Superior Court Judge ruled the Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination covered the requested documents. The committee's failure to appeal the decision has produced speculation that the Democrats fear a higher

allowing the law to expire, and handing Christie a club to bludgeon legislative Democrats while surrounded by a few hundred cheerleading local officials.