

Cuomo Saying Little on Bridge Scandal

By [THOMAS KAPLAN](#) and [SUSANNE CRAIG](#) JAN. 14, 2014

ALBANY — Gov. [Andrew M. Cuomo](#) of New York is not one to shy away from a political fight. But in the case of the scandal engulfing Gov. [Chris Christie](#) of New Jersey over retaliatory lane closings at the George Washington Bridge, Mr. Cuomo and his aides have kept to a simple mantra from the beginning: This was and remains a New Jersey issue.

Other than that, they are not saying a lot.

Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, has carefully avoided criticizing Mr. Christie, a Republican with whom he shares control over the bridge, for a simple reason, people close to the administration say: Doing so could backfire by giving credence to those who might try to turn the issue into an example of partisan politics as usual, or of petty cross-Hudson rivalry.

“He has been disciplined in staying away from it,” said an adviser to Mr. Cuomo, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. “There is simply no upside in him being involved.”

But Mr. Cuomo could still face more insistent questions: His top aides are bracing for the possibility of subpoenas from federal prosecutors investigating the lane closings, and two state lawmakers from Manhattan are asking for the New York State Legislature to hold its own hearings.

Mr. Cuomo is known for paying close attention to the management of agencies under his control, and few major decisions are made outside of his tight circle of advisers. In October 2011, Mr. Cuomo named one of his aides, Patrick J. Foye, executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates the George Washington Bridge.

But Kenneth Lipper, a former deputy mayor for Edward I. Koch and one of Mr. Cuomo’s appointees to the Port Authority’s 12-member Board of Commissioners, said he had had no contact with the governor or his staff over the lane closings.

“The governor is letting the board handle it,” Mr. Lipper said. “It’s a board matter, and that’s the right thing to do.”

The earliest known record of Mr. Cuomo’s office being told of the lane closings came the evening of Sept. 12, the fourth day the lanes were blocked off to bridge traffic entering from Fort Lee, N.J. Email correspondence released last week showed that Mr. Cuomo’s chief of staff, Josh Vlasto, was among the recipients of a nightly summary of news media inquiries received by the Port Authority, including one from The Record, in North Jersey, about the changes to the traffic pattern.

Mr. Cuomo’s office was alerted to the controversy the next day.

At 7:44 a.m. on Sept. 13, Mr. Foye sent a blistering email to other Port Authority officials ordering the lanes reopened. The vice chairman of the Port Authority’s board, Scott H. Rechler, a Cuomo appointee, quickly followed with his own outraged email. Around midday, Mr. Foye forwarded those two emails to

one of Mr. Cuomo's highest-ranking aides, Howard B. Glaser, the director of state operations in the New York governor's office.

Administration officials said Mr. Glaser believed Mr. Foye had handled the situation appropriately, and did not view the issue as important enough to bring to Mr. Cuomo's attention at the time.

By mid-November, records show, some of Mr. Cuomo's aides still appeared only vaguely familiar with the subject. When a Wall Street Journal reporter emailed Mr. Cuomo's communications director, Melissa DeRosa, and his press secretary, Matt Wing, asking why there had been "radio silence" from the New York governor's office on the lane closings, Mr. Wing forwarded the message to Mr. Glaser and Mr. Foye.

"What's the deal with this one?" Mr. Wing asked.

Mr. Foye suggested they talk, and then Mr. Glaser responded, "Wasn't this in New Jersey?"

Mr. Cuomo gave much the same nonresponse when asked about the lane closings on a radio show on Dec. 12.

"I don't know anything more than basically has been in the newspaper, because it's basically a New Jersey issue," he said.

Later that day, [The Journal reported](#) that Mr. Christie had complained to Mr. Cuomo in a telephone conversation that Mr. Foye was pressing too hard for information about the lane closures.

Mr. Christie denied that he had complained; Mr. Cuomo's office, in a carefully worded statement, backed up Mr. Christie's denial.

A few days later, Mr. Cuomo was asked if he believed Mr. Christie was telling the truth when he said the lane closings were part of a traffic study. He said he had a good working relationship with Mr. Christie.

"Our basic operating agreement is, when it has to do with New Jersey, Governor Christie handles it," Mr. Cuomo said. "When it has to do with New York, I handle it. If it's a management issue dealing with the port itself, we do it jointly. But I'm sure it is as Governor Christie says it is."

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