

[N.Y. / Region](#)

Port Authority's Chairman May Be the Next to Topple

JAN. 14, 2014



David Samson Todd Heisler/The New York Times

[About New York](#)

By [JIM DWYER](#)

It is starting to look as if this could be the traffic jam that ate New Jersey.

David Samson, one of the closest advisers to Gov. [Chris Christie](#), is a little-known potentate in New Jersey politics: A former attorney general appointed by a Democratic governor, he was named chairman of the [Port Authority of New York and New Jersey](#) by Mr. Christie, a Republican. Mr. Samson served in Mr. Christie's campaign for governor as counsel, and was chairman of the transition committee. His law firm, Wolff & Samson, is hired by developers and others for work in which the lawyers' political connections, though not their visibility, are especially prized assets.

Yet Mr. Samson, 74, has emerged as a pivotal figure in efforts to contain the scandal around the throttling of access lanes at the George Washington Bridge as political punishment. Emails released last week show that Mr. Samson was regularly consulted by the political operatives at the port who conceived and carried out the shutdown.

Now, Mr. Samson, who had spoken about stepping down long before the uproar over the bridge, has again raised the subject, according to government officials who said that no final decision had been revealed and so spoke only on the condition of anonymity. They expect that could take place before the authority's next board meeting in February. Aides to Mr. Christie said they knew of no plans by Mr. Samson to resign, and in an email on Tuesday night, Mr. Samson said, "The story is incorrect."

If Mr. Samson is called to testify by legislators investigating the events, he is sure to be asked questions that he has yet to address in any public forum about his actions in the aftermath of the traffic jam.

During a news conference last week, Mr. Christie said he felt sure that Mr. Samson was not involved.

"I sat and met for two hours yesterday with Mr. Samson — General Samson — and again, I'm confident that he had no knowledge of this, based upon our conversations and his review of his information," the

governor said at the time. “So I think, you know, as he said yesterday, he is angered by this and upset about it.”

But in Port Authority emails, Mr. Samson expressed no anger about the traffic jams manufactured at the bridge by allies of his and the governor.

Instead, he railed about the executive director, Patrick J. Foye, who had been kept in the dark about what was going on at the bridge and who immediately ordered an end to it when he learned about it. Mr. Samson said Mr. Foye was “stirring up trouble.”

In a Sept. 18 email to Scott Rechler, the vice chairman of the board, Mr. Samson wrote: “This is yet another example of a story, we’ve seen it before, where he distances himself from an issue in the press and rides in on a white horse to save the day. (If you need prior examples I will provide) In this case, he’s playing in traffic, made a big mistake.”

In fact, Mr. Foye did not have to distance himself from the bridge issue; supervisors of operations at the bridge had been told by Christie political operatives that they were specifically not to inform Mr. Foye of the lane shutdowns.

Mr. Samson was upset about an article in The Wall Street Journal that quoted from a memo Mr. Foye had sent within the Port Authority, ordering the lanes to the bridge reopened and saying that the action may have broken state and federal laws. Mr. Foye also said it was “reckless, ill-advised” and a threat to public safety.

Mr. Rechler, who, like Mr. Foye, is an appointee of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York, replied that he did not believe Mr. Foye had been the source of The Journal’s article.

“More evidence of reckless, counterproductive behavior,” Mr. Samson replied.

In another email to Mr. Samson, Bill Baroni, a political operative appointed by Mr. Christie, said he was going to complain to Mr. Rechler: “General, I shall again make my concern known to the vice chairman.”

During his news conference last week, Mr. Christie said that Mr. Samson had work to do at the agency. He would “lead a discussion at the Port Authority about what could be done in the future to stop such conduct,” the governor said.

David W. Chen and William K. Rashbaum contributed reporting.

A version of this article appears in print on January 15, 2014, on page A18 of the New York edition with the headline: Port Authority’s Chairman May Be the Next to Topple.