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NEW JERSEY: PUBLIC REACTS TO BRIDGEGATE CHARGES

Most say Christie was aware of lane closures

West Long Branch, N.J. – Gov. Chris Christie’s ratings have taken a significant hit in the *Monmouth University Poll*, with most New Jerseyans inclined to believe that he was actually involved in the decision to close toll lanes on the George Washington Bridge in 2013 or at least that he knew about it at the time. The first poll taken since the U.S. Attorney announced charges in the Bridgagate case also found that just 1-in-10 Garden State residents believe that the three individuals indicted in the scheme were the only ones involved.

Gov. Christie’s overall job rating currently stands at 35% approve to 54% disapprove among New Jersey residents and 35% approve to 56% disapprove among the state’s registered voters. This marks a significant drop from just a few months ago and is an all-time low in Christie’s net job rating. In February, his job rating stood at 48% approve to 44% disapprove among all residents and 47% approve to 46% disapprove among voters. The governor’s job approval rating in the *Monmouth University Poll* once stood as high as 70% – that was in February 2013 following Superstorm Sandy.

New Jersey Republicans continue to support their governor, giving him a 65% approve to 32% disapprove job rating, down only slightly from the 70% to 24% rating he received three months ago. He has lost significantly more ground among independents – 34% approve to 51% disapprove in the current poll compared to 47% to 43% in February, as well as Democrats – now 19% approve to 69% disapprove compared to 39% to 55% in February.

“Christie’s overwhelmingly positive ratings in the aftermath of Sandy have now been sliced in half,” said Patrick Murray, director of the independent Monmouth University Polling Institute.

“Christie’s ratings had stabilized after the initial Bridgagate revelations early last year. They started to erode again last fall, but these post-indictment numbers mark a significant acceleration in that decline.”

The U.S. Attorney's office unsealed indictments against three former Christie associates in the Bridgegate scheme on Friday, including a guilty plea entered by David Wildstein. Only 1-in-10 New Jerseyans (9%) believe the three people charged were the only individuals responsible for the decision to close the lanes. Another 3-in-4 feel others were involved, including 33% who say the conspiracy was limited to just a few others, 22% who feel that involvement in Bridgegate was fairly widespread throughout the Christie administration, and 22% who are not sure how many other people may have been involved.

The poll also found that more than 2-in-3 New Jerseyans (69%) feel Gov. Christie has not been completely honest about what he knew. Just 23% say he has come clean. Nearly 4-in-5 Democrats (79%) and 2-in-3 independents (68%) believe Christie is not telling the truth, which is not much different than the findings in a September 2014 Monmouth poll. However, a majority of Garden State Republicans (52%) now say that Christie has not been completely honest and just 39% believe he has. This is a marked reversal from last fall when most Republicans (52%) said Christie had told the truth and only 36% said he had not.

While Republicans now feel that Christie hasn't come clean, most still accept his assertion that he was not involved in the lane closure decision and that he did not know about it at the time. This puts GOP partisans at odds with Democrats and independents. Specifically, 56% of all New Jerseyans think that Christie knew about the lane closures as they were happening in September 2013 and just 33% say he learned about them sometime later. Majorities of state Democrats (71%) and independents (55%) say Christie was aware, but only 35% of Republicans agree.

Half of state residents (50%) also feel that the governor was personally involved in the decision to close the toll lanes, while just 34% say he was not involved. This marks a change from June 2014 when state opinion was more divided, with 46% saying Christie was involved and 42% saying he wasn't. This shift in opinion has come mostly from independents – 52% now believe Christie was involved compared to 43% who felt that way last year. About 6-in-10 (59%) Democrats say he was involved which is similar to the 56% who felt that way last year, while just 29% of Republicans feel he was involved which is similar to the 32% who said the same last June.

“The governor has maintained that he was not involved in the lane closures nor did he know about them as they were happening. Most New Jerseyans don't buy it,” said Murray.

David Wildstein's attorney alleged “evidence exists” that Christie knew about the lane closures at the time. Just over 4-in-10 (42%) say this makes them more likely to believe Christie knew, 6% say it makes them less likely, and 50% say this information does not change their opinion. [It should be noted that those who say the attorney's allegation makes them more likely to believe Christie had knowledge of the closures tend to be people who already feel that way.]

The poll found nearly half (49%) of New Jerseyans believe that the alleged reason for the lane closures – retaliation against a local official who would not support the governor – was “politics as usual” in the Christie administration. Another 41% feel this behavior was unusual. Democrats (53%) and independents (54%) are more likely than Republicans (34%) to feel this behavior was politics as usual.

The indictment also claims that employees of the administration’s intergovernmental affairs unit actively sought campaign endorsements for the governor’s re-election bid. Only 9% of New Jerseyans think it is acceptable for non-political staff to engage in this type of political activity, while 53% say it is not acceptable. Another 39% are not sure how they feel about this. There are few significant partisan differences in this opinion.

The *Monmouth University Poll* also found that only 30% of New Jerseyans now have a favorable opinion of Chris Christie as a person and 47% hold an unfavorable view. Another 23% have no opinion. State opinion was more evenly divided just three months ago at 38% favorable and 40% unfavorable. A majority of Republicans (55%) hold a positive view of Christie as a person, but just 29% of independents and 16% of Democrats feel the same.

“When you are running for President, your home state record is often less important than what kind of person voters think you are. These numbers are not encouraging for someone with aspirations to the White House,” added Murray. *Note: Monmouth will be releasing a New Jersey poll regarding Chris Christie’s presidential potential on Wednesday.*

The *Monmouth University Poll* was conducted by telephone with 500 New Jersey adults, including 441 registered voters, from May 1 to 3, 2015. The total sample has a margin of error of ± 4.4 percent and the registered voter sample has a margin of error of ± 4.7 percent. The poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute in West Long Branch, NJ.

DATA TABLES

The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

(* Some columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.)

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Chris Christie is doing as governor?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Approve	35%	35%	34%	19%	34%	65%
Disapprove	54%	56%	43%	69%	51%	32%
(VOL) Don't know	11%	9%	23%	12%	14%	3%

TREND: All adults Second term	May 2015	Feb. 2015	Sept. 2014	June 2014	April 2014	Feb. 2014	Jan. 2014	Dec. 2013	Sept. 2013	April 2013	Feb. 2013
Approve	35%	48%	46%	50%	51%	50%	59%	65%	61%	63%	70%
Disapprove	54%	44%	39%	42%	41%	44%	32%	25%	24%	26%	17%
(VOL) Don't know	11%	8%	15%	9%	8%	6%	8%	10%	15%	11%	14%
Unwtd N	500	805	802	800	803	803	541	802	783	806	803

TREND: <i>All adults</i>	Dec.	Sept.	July	April	Feb.	Oct.	Aug.	May	Feb.	Sept.	July	April	Feb.
<i>First term</i>	2012	2012	2012	2012	2012	2011	2011	2011	2011	2010	2010	2010	2010
Approve	67%	53%	52%	51%	52%	54%	48%	47%	47%	45%	44%	41%	33%
Disapprove	21%	35%	36%	35%	38%	38%	42%	49%	40%	38%	44%	44%	15%
(VOL) Don't know	12%	11%	12%	14%	10%	9%	9%	5%	12%	17%	12%	15%	52%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	816	805	803	804	803	817	802	807	801	801	801	804	803

TREND: <i>Registered voters</i>	May.	Feb.	Sept.	June	April	Feb.	Jan.	Dec.	Sept.	April	Feb.
<i>Second term</i>	2015	2015	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	2013	2013	2013	2013
Approve	35%	47%	46%	49%	51%	49%	58%	65%	63%	65%	70%
Disapprove	56%	46%	42%	43%	43%	46%	35%	27%	24%	26%	16%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	6%	12%	8%	6%	6%	7%	8%	13%	10%	13%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	441	712	680	717	690	690	470	698	674	694	697

TREND: <i>Registered voters</i>	Dec.	Sept.	July	April	Feb.	Oct.	Aug.	May	Feb.	Sept.	July	April	Feb.
<i>First term</i>	2012	2012	2012	2012	2012	2011	2011	2011	2011	2010	2010	2010	2010
Approve	69%	55%	53%	50%	55%	55%	50%	46%	49%	44%	45%	42%	31%
Disapprove	22%	36%	35%	38%	37%	37%	41%	49%	41%	40%	43%	44%	15%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	10%	12%	12%	9%	8%	8%	5%	9%	16%	12%	13%	53%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	726	715	678	692	709	693	730	725	718	726	747	719	716

2. Is your general impression of Chris Christie favorable or unfavorable, or do you have no opinion of him?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Favorable	30%	31%	24%	16%	29%	55%
Unfavorable	47%	49%	36%	63%	44%	27%
No opinion	23%	20%	39%	22%	27%	18%

TREND: <i>All adults</i>	May	February	June	April	February	January	February	September
	2015	2015	2014	2014	2014	2014	2013	2012
Favorable	30%	38%	45%	40%	42%	44%	70%	52%
Unfavorable	47%	40%	38%	35%	37%	28%	19%	34%
No opinion	23%	23%	17%	25%	21%	28%	11%	15%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	500	805	800	803	803	541	803	805

TREND: <i>Registered voters only</i>	May	February	June	April	February	January	February	September
	2015	2015	2014	2014	2014	2014	2013	2012
Favorable	31%	39%	46%	41%	43%	46%	71%	54%
Unfavorable	49%	42%	39%	37%	39%	31%	18%	34%
No opinion	20%	19%	15%	22%	18%	23%	10%	13%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	441	712	717	690	690	470	697	715

Turning to the closure of the George Washington Bridge toll lanes in Fort Lee in 2013.

3. Do you think the governor himself was or was not personally involved in the decision to close the toll lanes?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Was involved	50%	52%	36%	59%	52%	29%
Was not involved	34%	34%	34%	25%	31%	58%
(VOL) Don't know	16%	13%	29%	16%	17%	13%

TREND:	May	June	April	February	January
	2015	2014	2014	2014	2014
Was involved	50%	46%	47%	50%	34%
Was not involved	34%	42%	38%	40%	52%
(VOL) Don't know	16%	12%	15%	10%	14%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	500	800	803	751	474

4. Do you believe Chris Christie has been completely honest about what he knows about the incident, or not?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Been completely honest	23%	24%	21%	13%	24%	39%
Not been completely honest	69%	69%	67%	79%	68%	52%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	7%	12%	7%	8%	9%

TREND:	May 2015	September 2014	April 2014	February 2014	January 2014
Been completely honest	23%	29%	32%	33%	40%
Not been completely honest	69%	60%	61%	61%	51%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	11%	7%	5%	9%
<i>Unwt'd N</i>	500	802	803	751	474

5. Do you think Christie knew about the lane closures at the time they were happening in September 2013, or did he not learn about them until sometime later?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Knew at time they were happening	56%	56%	59%	71%	55%	35%
Did not learn until sometime later	33%	35%	23%	21%	32%	59%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	9%	18%	8%	13%	6%

6. Have you heard that one former Christie appointee pled guilty to crimes related to the lane closures and two others were indicted, or haven't you heard that?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Yes, heard	70%	75%	48%	68%	72%	70%
No, haven't heard	30%	25%	52%	32%	28%	30%

7. Do you think that these three people were the only ones involved in the conspiracy to close the toll lanes or were others involved? [IF OTHERS WERE INVOLVED: Do you think it was just a few others or was the involvement fairly widespread in the Christie administration?]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Only these three involved	9%	9%	13%	6%	8%	18%
Others involved – just a few	33%	37%	16%	34%	31%	38%
Others involved – widespread	22%	20%	32%	19%	27%	14%
Others involved – not sure how many	22%	21%	28%	28%	21%	16%
(VOL) Disagree with indictments – there was no conspiracy	1%	0%	3%	1%	2%	0%
(VOL) Don't know	12%	13%	8%	13%	12%	13%

8. It has been reported that the lane closure was retaliation because the Democratic mayor of Fort Lee would not endorse Christie for re-election. Do you think taking retribution against political enemies was politics as usual in the Christie administration or do you think that this behavior was unusual?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Politics as usual	49%	49%	50%	53%	54%	34%
Unusual	41%	41%	46%	39%	37%	57%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	10%	5%	9%	9%	10%

Note: The following question was asked previously regarding the closing of the toll lanes; “Do you think this kind of action is politics as usual in the Christie administration or do you think that this was unusual?”

TREND:	February 2014	January 2014
Politics as usual	49%	39%
Unusual	46%	55%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	7%
Unwtd N	751	474

9. The lawyer for David Wildstein, the person who pled guilty, says there is evidence that Christie knew about the lane closures when they were happening. Does this make you more likely or less likely to believe that Christie knew about the incident at the time, or does this not affect your opinion?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
More likely	42%	44%	32%	59%	41%	18%
Less likely	6%	5%	9%	3%	6%	11%
Does not affect opinion	50%	49%	57%	37%	51%	68%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%

10. There are also reports that non-political staff members in the governor’s office actively sought endorsements on behalf of Christie’s re-election campaign. Do you think this type of political activity by people in the governor’s office is acceptable or not acceptable, or do you have no opinion about it?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Acceptable	9%	10%	3%	7%	9%	11%
Not acceptable	53%	53%	48%	55%	54%	45%
No opinion	39%	37%	49%	37%	38%	44%

The *Monmouth University Poll* was sponsored and conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute from May 1 to 3, 2015 with a statewide random sample of 500 adult residents, including 375 contacted via live interview on a landline telephone and 125 via live interview on a cell phone, in English. Monmouth is responsible for all aspects of the survey questionnaire design, data weighting and analysis. Final sample is weighted for region, age, education, gender and race based on US Census information. Data collection support provided by Braun Research (field) and SSI (RDD sample). For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 4.4 percentage points (unadjusted for sample design). Sampling error can be larger for sub-groups (see table below). In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

<i>POLL DEMOGRAPHICS (weighted)</i>			
34% Dem	50% Male	28% 18-34	63% White
46% Ind	50% Female	39% 35-54	13% Black
20% Rep		33% 55+	15% Hispanic
			9% Asian/Other
<i>Registered Voter Sample (weighted)</i>			
36% Dem	45% Male	21% 18-34	67% White
42% Ind	55% Female	41% 35-54	13% Black
22% Rep		38% 55+	14% Hispanic
			6% Asian/Other

	<i>MARGIN OF ERROR</i>					
	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>REGISTERED VOTER</i>		<i>PARTY ID</i>		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
<i>Unweighted N</i>	500	441	59	153	226	111
<i>moe</i>	4.4%	4.7%	12.8%	7.9%	6.5%	9.3%

It is the Monmouth University Polling Institute’s policy to conduct surveys of all adult residents, including voters and non-voters, on issues that affect them. Specific voter surveys are conducted when appropriate during election cycles.

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