

Relationship between Christie and media probably beyond repair, says Carl Golden

Carl Golden For The Press Jan 6, 2017

In the relationship between the media and a governor, tension and conflict are two daily constants.

It cannot be otherwise. The former is engaged in mining for information while the latter is occupied with managing it. That the two should often collide is inevitable.

While the differences are usually resolved — often satisfying neither party — life goes on with each side pursuing their competing goals.

In the most recent clash between Gov. Chris Christie and the press covering his administration, though, the governor has escalated the conflict into take-no-prisoners warfare.

Angered over the Legislature's failure to consider a proposal he supported to repeal the requirement that governments publish official notices in local newspapers, Christie lashed back via Twitter messages and his radio call-in show, calling newspaper executives "pigs at the government trough."

When the proposal was initially sprung on the Legislature in its final session days, it was quickly labeled the "newspaper revenge" bill, an effort by Christie to punish the media financially for what he considered over-the-top coverage of the George Washington Bridge lane closing scandal.

Newspapers quickly mobilized with appeals to the Legislature urging the bill's defeat, arguing it would lead to job losses and the closing of small circulation daily and weekly papers which rely heavily on the revenue.

Despite the belief that the print media, because of its ongoing economic woes, had lost its ability to influence events, it prevailed.

In the past, Christie has been contemptuous of reporters, referring to them on occasion as idiots and ridiculing their questions as stupid.

The legislative loss, though, was widely interpreted as a stinging defeat, underscoring his lame duck status, his low public standing, and the embarrassment of being overlooked by President-elect Donald Trump for a cabinet or White House staff position.

He cut the ground from beneath his argument, however, by insisting the publication requirement cost taxpayers \$80 million, for which his office offered no documentation other than referring to a vague in-house study.

Newspaper executives placed the cost at \$20 million and said a good deal of that was actually paid by private interests.

The loss came even though the proposal was supported by Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto, which normally guarantees legislative approval.

Whether the issue will be raised again in the 2017 legislative session remains to be seen. It's unlikely that a major shift in sentiment will occur in the Legislature and the newspaper industry will certainly not back off its position.

Christie has jostled with the media almost since the day he assumed office. While much of it has been jocular, there have been numerous testy exchanges revealing an underlying belief on the governor's part that he has not been treated fairly.

The relationship at this point has deteriorated to a point where it's likely beyond repair and virtually guarantees that the Christie era will end on a bitter contentious note.

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