

Gov. Christie skips Stafford event after GWB traffic scandal blows up

By DEREK HARPER and SARAH WATSON, Staff Writers | Posted: Thursday, January 9, 2014 12:01 am

STAFFORD TOWNSHIP - Ocean County officials and residents were wondering what happened Wednesday morning after Gov. Chris Christie's staff abruptly canceled a Hurricane Sandy recovery event at a Manahawkin fire station.

The sudden change came along with revelations about his administration's involvement in the closing of access lanes onto the George Washington Bridge in Bergen County.

"The only thing I heard was he was on his way and there was some kind of emergency and he had to turn around and go back to Trenton," said John R. Spodofora, the Republican mayor of Stafford Township, which includes Manahawkin.

He said he had no idea what the matter was, and Christie's people did not respond to emails asking to describe the emergency.

The governor's press office had called the 11 a.m. event at Stafford Township Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 as a press conference in English "Sandy Housing Recovery Milestone Announcement with Homeowners."

Instead, people streamed out of the building over the next 15 minutes following the 10:24 a.m. cancellation, some audibly expressing disgust or disappointment.

"He's the governor, he can do what he wants," one man said to another the event had been canceled.

The surprised attendees included Republican state Sen. Chris Connors and Republican Assembly members Brian Rump and DiAnn C. Gove, Spodofora said. Connors and Rumpf did not respond to calls, but Gove said Stafford Township Council members Henry Mandir, Stephen Fessler and Sharon McKenna also were there.

Gove said she wasn't familiar with all of the details, but said "of course you're upset if it's true," adding "There's just disappointment there."

U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo, R-2nd, whom Christie endorsed in the Statehouse on Monday, tweeted "I only know what I read in papers. All facts should come out & confident (Christie) will take appropriate action."