



cost, and - most of all - unimpressed by the failure to shake the administration narrative that the lane closures were concocted and executed by rogue staffers.

Two staff members whose appearances before the committee were expected to produce new information instead confirmed that the culpable parties were former Deputy Chief of Staff Bridget Anne Kelly and ex-Port Authority staffer David Wildstein.

Wildstein has already asserted his Fifth Amendment rights, and it's certain that Kelly, if called, will do likewise.

Committee co-chairs Assemblyman John Wisniewski and Sen. Loretta Weinberg have defended their work, pledging to forge ahead by taking testimony from Port Authority Executive Director Patrick Foye early next month.

Foye, who e-mailed the governor's office in September that the access-lane closures may have violated federal or state law, is perhaps the most critically important witness thus far. His testimony will weigh heavily on any decision concerning the committee's future and could vindicate Democrats' insistence that it continue.

Should, however, Foye fall short of adding significantly to knowledge about Bridgegate or fail to answer in any definitive way the question of who knew what and when, the committee may find itself approaching a dead end.

Obviously, a great deal hinges on Foye's appearance. The committee could be re-energized by his testimony, convinced it is on the path toward uncovering all the culprits involved in the scheme.

But if his testimony is replete with suppositions or fails to cast a wider net of responsibility, it will increase doubts about spending more taxpayer money on the probe.

The idea of deferring to the U.S. attorney will grow more appealing. That move would still provide a credible, non-political investigation while ending the cost and partisan in-fighting that has marked the committee's deliberations.

The Republicans have carefully built their case to raise doubts about the committee's motives. Like the prosecutorial model their strategy has embraced, they've presented their case to the jury of New Jersey citizens and taxpayers.

And, like a prosecutor, they'll now sweat out the verdict.

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