



OPINION: CHRIS CHRISTIE KEEPS THE PRESS EXACTLY WHERE HE WANTS IT -- IN THE DARK

CARL GOLDEN | APRIL 16, 2015

The governor's carefully staged 'town halls' and radio shows foster the illusion that he is accessible to just plain folks



The relationship between the governor's office and the reporters assigned to cover it day in and day out can often be testy, occasionally combative, and generally in the nature of a fragile truce.

The Statehouse corridor that separates the covered from the coverers is a marble demilitarized zone, respected and understood by those on either side of it.

short-term disappointment without nursing long-term grudges.

Access -- the ability of reporters to engage in face-to-face interaction with the policy setters and decision makers -- has always been the magic potion to soothe bruised egos and hurt feelings.

Access has now become the flashpoint that has sparked criticism and soured the relationship between Gov. Chris Christie's office and the media.

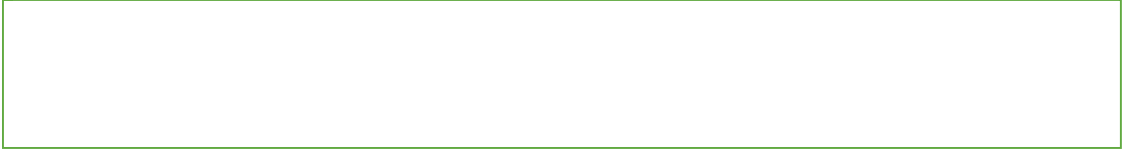
The governor has not held an open news conference or met with the Statehouse reporters since November -- coming up on six months. That is an unheard of time span for a chief executive to fail to carve out an hour or so to take questions from those whose job is to report to the public actions taken or contemplated, decisions reached, explanations offered, proposals considered, or insights into administration thinking.

Meetings with newspaper editorial boards -- a staple of previous governors' media relations -- have been sporadic at best and the elapsed time between them has been even longer than the gap in news conferences.

All governors and their top staffs are tempted by a go-over- the-traditional-media strategy because it offers the opportunity to maintain tight control of a carefully scripted message and to do so in a venue most favorable to the image one wishes to project. In this environment, the chances of an embarrassing mistake or unintentional gaffe are greatly minimized if not eliminated altogether.

The Christie administration, it seems, has carried the concept considerably further than its predecessors.

A major portion of the governor's communications staff is devoted to significant utilization of social media, flooding YouTube with clips of Christie at his best, confronting critics with barbed retorts, or displaying his more charming and gentler side comforting those facing hard times in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.



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