

Forget Bridgegate ... It's Fandom That May Hurt Chris Christie



In a piece he wrote for the Politico earlier this week entitled “Why Republicans Are Ready for Hillary,” Matt Latimer makes some compelling points for why the prospective field of GOP presidential candidates should recognize Mrs. Clinton as a very beatable opponent in 2016. He also tackles some popular media myths about some of the candidates.

One of those *myths*, Latimer writes, is that New Jersey Governor Chris Christie was permanently damaged by the Bridgegate controversy:

“The scandal remains—solely—a Washington fixation. Want to bet how many people in South Carolina or Iowa or the Super Tuesday states can recite the details of that episode? Mention “Bridgegate” to most of them and they’ll think you’re referring to tires. If there’s one thing candidates can count on, it’s the short attention span of the voters.”

I agree with Latimer. As desperate as MSNBC and other media outlets have been to derail Chris Christie’s imminent candidacy, the controversy hasn’t done a whole lot to hurt the governor. No one but the hard left cares about it, and Christie has been pretty well cleared of any wrongdoing.

What I *do* think will hurt Christie, however, is something Latimer touches on earlier in his piece:

“He [Christie] didn’t make himself a presidential contender through his sensible compromises with Democrats in the New Jersey legislature, but his passionate harangues against conservatives’ favorite enemies: the media, big unions, government bureaucracy. It was for that reason that so many Republicans pined for him to run in 2012—the great hope of conservatives and the world.”

These qualities are certainly what turned *me* onto Chris Christie a few years ago. Boldly and effectively laying out conservative principles, and then actually implementing them into effective policies is what made Christie a darling of many on the right. Conservatives liked his blunt, unapologetic talk and they liked how he took on the big government institutions that were crippling the state of New Jersey. He was a rock star in a political party full of dry personalities that was in desperate need of a charismatic figure to get behind.

Somewhere along the way, however, the Christie persona began to change – and not in a good way. I touched on this in a piece I wrote two years ago about some growing similarities I noticed between him and former California governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger. Both rode into office on a bold platform of principled, conservative *change*. Both did their best to implement that change for the good of their states. But once they felt slighted by the people whose opinions mattered the most to them, they seemingly began to worry more about their own, personal popularity than they did being strong leaders.

I believed that Christie was starting to enjoy – a little too much – the mainstream *celebrity* status he had achieved by embracing President Obama in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, and publicly blasting big names within his own party. When he showed up in a comedy skit on Saturday Night Live, and later danced with Jimmy Fallon on his show, I was sure of it. Sucking up to *the left* (including Hollywood) can come with its rewards, but it doesn’t necessarily bode well for an aspiring

Republican presidential candidate.

Still, from an optics standpoint, it's not so much the apparent need to be in front of the camera that hurts Christie the most... To me, his biggest problem is that he now comes across less as a celebrity, and more as a fan who is seeking acceptance from his celebrity superiors.

In response to the now famous video of Christie celebrating the Dallas Cowboys' playoff victory with owner Jerry Jones last Sunday, Byron York of the *Washington Examiner* tweeted this: "*Probably not Chris Christie's most presidential moment.*"

York's comment nails the problem.

Some pundits are claiming that the moment was politically damaging from a team-loyalty and electoral-map perspective, but I don't think that's much of an issue. The issue is that when Christie appears on camera embracing people like President Obama, Bruce Springsteen, or Jerry Jones, he comes across as the least commanding presence in the shot. When he dances with Jimmy Fallon, he doesn't look like the good sport he's trying to look like, but rather a court jester. He tends to carry himself as a fan hoping for an autograph, and that's just not a good thing if you're hoping to be the leader of the free world.

Where is the Chris Christie of old – that larger-than-life fellow who seemed very much his own man?

Am I being unfair or petty? Maybe. But as someone who thinks Christie might make a good candidate and even a good president, I'm also being honest. Optics *do* matter, especially when you're already dealing with a news media that wants to see you fail. *Looking* presidential is pretty important if you hope to be the president.