

Polls? Ratings? Only thing that matters for Christie is cash

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When John Boyd Jr., principal of the Princeton-based Boyd Company, made the trek out to Park City, Utah, last month for the annual Sundance Film Festival, he wasn't surprised that Gov. Chris Christie was the first topic to come up.



Boyd Company principal John Boyd Jr.: “Bridgewater is not an issue (with big donors).”

“(It's) all people are really interested in right now,” he said.

But unlike the airwaves and front pages back home, scandal wasn't among the discussion topics for this group of big donors to the Republican Party, Boyd said.

These “major players” and “heavy hitters” didn't care about lanes being closed on the GW Bridge or an allegation of a political shakedown by Christie's lieutenant governor. They all still wanted to talk about the business-friendly candidate who might yet still be the frontrunner for the party's nomination in a 2016 presidential race.

“Bridgewater is not an issue,” Boyd said.

These big-time donors, Boyd said, are “sophisticated” in the sense that they can decipher who's worth throwing their money behind. At this point in time, he said, there's been no indication that person is anyone but Christie.

“No one is deterred here,” Boyd said.

If anything, Boyd said, the negative coverage Christie has received in the wake of the scandals has served to bolster his national profile as a leader.

“This put Christie back in the national spotlight,” he said.

Michael Egenton, senior vice president of government affairs for the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, says he's not surprised to hear that business leaders in other states are still in support of the governor. When he travels outside the state, that's the kind of feedback he gets as well.

“There are a lot of folks out beyond our borders that like this governor,” Egenton said.

And those are the folks that matter.

The polls have been devastating to Christie of late. His job approval and favorability ratings are way down; his negative ratings are up.

But David Redlawsk, a professor of political science at Rutgers University and director of the Eagleton Poll, says that while most polls, including his own, show a Christie that at the moment seems to be trending down, it really doesn't mean all that much yet.

Voters, Redlawsk says, won't be able to judge Christie as a potential presidential candidate until at least the Iowa caucuses in 2016.

“The voters don't actually matter right now,” Redlawsk said. “They're not going to weigh in for another two years.”

Until then, what does matter is what Redlawsk refers to as the “invisible primary,” in which potential candidates spend their time jockeying for big donors rather than votes. And, he says, understand that the voters aren't a major focus right now and that there's a lot of time for the governor's image to turn around again.

It's not like they have to rush to get behind a candidate either. It's still 2014, barely, and there's still plenty that can be done behind the scenes.

“The money folks right now don't have to make any public commitments,” Redlawsk said.

And with Christie set to travel around the country in the coming months as the head of the Republican Governors Association, no other party hopeful appears to be in as good a position to attract donors.

“This is exactly why he's the head of the RGA right now,” Redlawsk said.

E-mail to: andrewg@njbiz.com

On Twitter: @andrgeorge

www.NJBIZ.com