

Corporate America's Bully and the money machine

Chris Christie: Can corporate America's candidate get out of this jam?

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It was a snowy December day in New York City when a few dozen of the rich and mighty gathered in a private room at a posh Midtown eatery for lunch. In attendance was enough political and financial wattage to constitute a Bilderberg quorum: J.P. Morgan CEO Jamie Dimon, Goldman Sachs chief Lloyd Blankfein, legendary Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the future former mayor of New York Michael Bloomberg; the list went on. At one of the tables the talk turned to politics -- and speculation about who would carry each party's banner into the next presidential election. There was easy consensus for Hillary Clinton as the Democratic nominee, but what about for the Republicans?

"Chris Christie," pronounced Ken Langone, the billionaire founder of Home Depot and a major booster of the New Jersey governor. That drew a quick objection from Vernon Jordan, the Democratic superlawyer and quintessential Friend of Bill from the Clinton years. "He's a bully," Jordan said.

Langone returned the volley: "It's Christie!"

Jordan countered: "He's a bully. He's a bully."

It's worth noting that this good-natured schoolyard squabble came a month before the revelation that Christie aides had engineered those Fort Lee, N.J., traffic snarls around the George Washington Bridge, apparently for political retribution, setting off a national firestorm and prompting career-threatening questions about the New Jersey governor's role. Jordan, it seems, was awfully prescient.

But at the lunch the real question wasn't about Christie's temperament. Rather, it was about how a moderate, even a blustery one, could secure the nod of a rightward-lurching party. For that, Langone had a wordless reply, rubbing his thumb and fingers together to indicate the flood of money that will sweep Christie through.