

# "The Fifth Risk" excerpt

your name:

---

CHRIS CHRISTIE NOTICED a piece in the *New York Times*—that's how it all started. The New Jersey governor had dropped out of the presidential race in February 2016 and thrown what support he had behind Donald Trump. In late April he saw the article. It described meetings between representatives of the remaining candidates still in the race—Trump, John Kasich, Ted Cruz, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders—and the Obama White House. Anyone who still had any kind of shot at becoming president of the United States apparently needed to start preparing to run the federal government. The guy Trump sent to the meeting was, in Christie's estimation, comically underqualified. Christie called up Trump's campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, to ask why this critical job hadn't been handed to someone who actually knew something about government. "We don't have anyone," said Lewandowski.

Christie volunteered himself for the job: head of the Donald Trump presidential transition team. "It's the next best thing to being president," he told friends. "You get to plan the presidency." He went to see Trump about it. Trump said he didn't want a presidential transition team. Why did anyone need to plan *anything* before he actually became president? *It's legally required*, said Christie. Trump asked where the money was going to come from to pay for the transition team. Christie explained that Trump could either pay for it himself or take it out of campaign funds. Trump didn't want to pay for it himself. He didn't want to take it out of campaign funds, either, but he agreed, grudgingly, that Christie should go ahead and raise a separate fund to pay for his transition team. "But not too much!" he said.

① Explain the purpose of a transition team and how it gets paid for:

And so Christie set out to prepare for the unlikely event that Donald Trump would one day be elected president of the United States. Not everyone in Trump's campaign was happy to see him on the job. In June, Christie received a call from Trump adviser Paul Manafort. "The kid is paranoid about you," Manafort said. The kid was Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law. Back in 2005, when he was U.S. attorney for the District of New Jersey, Christie had prosecuted and jailed Kushner's father, Charles, for tax fraud. Christie's investigation revealed, in the bargain, that Charles Kushner had hired a prostitute to seduce his own brother-in-law, whom he suspected of cooperating with Christie, videotaped the sexual encounter, and sent the tape to his sister. The Kushners apparently took their

② Explain why not everyone wanted Christie in this role;

grudges seriously, and Christie sensed that Jared still harbored one against him. On the other hand, Trump, whom Christie considered almost a friend, couldn't have cared less. He'd invited Christie to his and Melania's wedding and then pressed him to attend his daughter, Ivanka, and Jared Kushner's wedding. *That'd be awkward!* said Christie. *I'm paying for the wedding and I don't give a shit,* said Donald.

Christie viewed Jared as one of those people who thinks that, because he's rich, he must also be smart. Still, he had a certain cunning about him. And Christie soon found himself reporting everything he did to prepare for a Trump administration to an "executive committee." The committee consisted of Jared, Ivanka Trump, Donald Trump Jr., Eric Trump, Paul Manafort, Steve Mnuchin, and Jeff Sessions. "I'm kind of like the church elder who double-counts the collection plate every Sunday for the pastor," said Sessions, who appeared uncomfortable with the entire situation. The elder's job became more complicated in July 2016, when Trump was formally named the Republican nominee. The transition team now moved into an office in downtown Washington, DC, and went looking for people to occupy the top five hundred jobs in the federal government. They needed to fill all the cabinet positions, of course, but also a whole bunch of others that no one in the Trump campaign even knew existed. It's not obvious how you find the next secretary of state, much less the next secretary of transportation—never mind who should sit on the board of trustees of the Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation.

③ What are your thoughts about those that were vetted for Trump's team?

By August, 130 people were showing up every day, and hundreds more working part-time, at Trump transition headquarters, on the corner of Seventeenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. The transition team made lists of likely candidates for all five hundred jobs, plus other lists of informed people to roll into the various federal agencies the day after the election, to be briefed on whatever the federal agencies were doing. They gathered the names for these lists by traveling the country and talking to people: Republicans who had served in government, Trump's closest advisers, recent occupants of the jobs that needed filling. Then they set about investigating any candidates for glaring flaws and embarrassing secrets and conflicts of interest. At the end of each week Christie handed over binders, with lists of names of people who might do the jobs well, to Jared and Donald and Eric and the others. "They probed everything," says a senior Trump transition official. "'Who is this person?' 'Where did this person come from?' They only ever rejected one person, Paul Manafort's secretary."

The first time Donald Trump paid attention to any of this was when he read about it in the newspaper. The story revealed that Trump's very own transition team, led by New Jersey governor Chris Christie, had raised several million dollars to pay the staff. The moment he saw it, Trump called Steve Bannon, the chief executive of his campaign, from his office, on the twenty-sixth floor of Trump Tower, and told him to come immediately to his residence, many floors above. Bannon stepped off the ele-

vator to find the governor of New Jersey seated on a sofa, being hollered at. Trump was apoplectic, actually yelling, *You're stealing my money! You're stealing my fucking money! What the fuck is this??* Seeing Bannon, Trump turned on him and screamed, *Why are you letting him steal my fucking money?* Bannon and Christie together set out to explain to Trump federal law.

Months before the election, the law said, the nominees of the two major parties were expected to prepare to take control of the government. The government supplied them with office space in downtown Washington, DC, along with computers and trash cans and so on, but the campaigns paid their people. To which Trump replied, *Fuck the law. I don't give a fuck about the law. I want my fucking money.* Bannon and Christie tried to explain that Trump couldn't have both his money and a transition.

*Shut it down,* said Trump. Shut down the transition.

Here Christie and Bannon parted ways.

In the days after the election, the people in the building on Seventeenth and Pennsylvania were meant to move to another building in downtown Washington, a kind of White House-in-waiting. They soon discovered that the lists that they had created of people to staff the Trump administration were not the lists that mattered. There was now this other list, of people allowed into the new building, and most of their names weren't on it. "People would show up to the new building and say, 'Let me in,' and the Secret Service would say, 'Sorry, you're not on the list,'" said a civil servant who worked in the new building. It wasn't just Chris Christie who'd been fired. It was the entire transition team—though no one ever told them so directly. As Nancy Cook later reported in *Politico*, Bannon visited the transition headquarters a few days after he'd given Christie the news, and made a show of tossing the work the people there had done for Donald Trump into

the garbage can. Trump was going to handle the transition more or less by himself. Not even Steve Bannon thought this was a good idea. "I was fucking nervous as shit," Bannon later told friends. "I go, 'Holy fuck, this guy [Trump] doesn't know anything. And he doesn't give a shit.'"

(4) Does this story of the Trump transition matter to democracy? Why or why not?