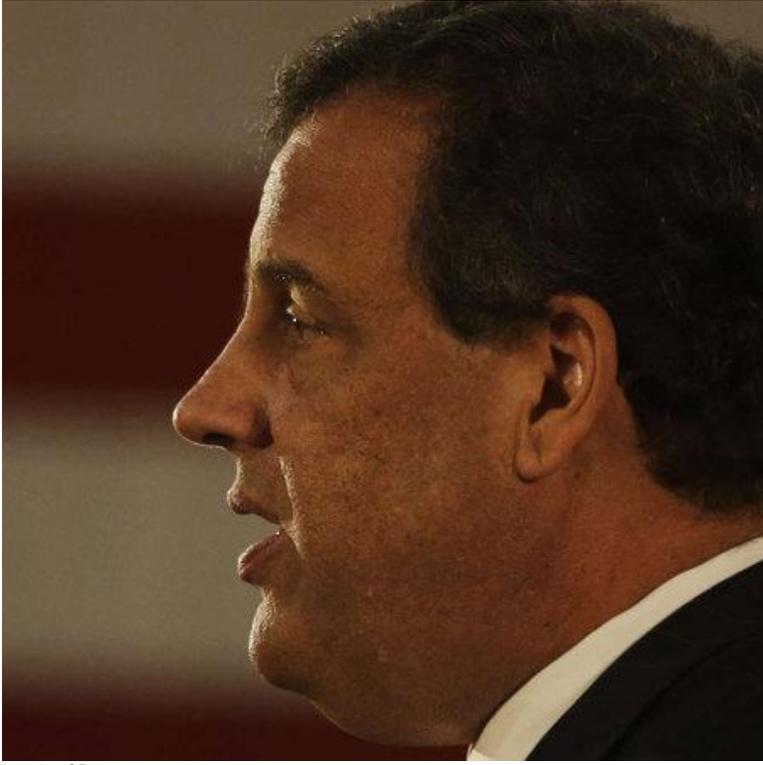


Inquirer Editorial: Mr. Vindictive strikes again



Associated Press

GALLERY: Associated Press

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The George Washington Bridge lane-closing scandal isn't the only reason some people may think *vindictive* is Gov. Christie's middle name. Look at what he's doing to the Pinelands Commission.

Christie has fired two commissioners who in January voted against letting South Jersey Gas run a 22-mile pipeline through the environmentally sensitive forest. But he wasn't the only one to retaliate. In April, freeholders replaced Cumberland County's representative on the commission, who also voted against the pipeline, and replaced her with a politically connected real estate agent.

These acts of intimidation clearly are meant to set the table to eviscerate the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan, written in 1980 to protect the region's drinking water and rare or endangered species by controlling development.

The proposed pipeline would deliver natural gas to the coal-burning BL England power plant in Cape May County, which would allow it to continue operation, rather than be shut down as ordered by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

The Pinelands Commission was right to follow the directives in its management plan. Allowing the pipeline would set a dangerous precedent that would make it extremely difficult to argue

against other proposed development that might threaten the 17 trillion gallons of clean water flowing within the Pineland's National Reserve.

Any nominees to replace the fired commissioners must be approved by the state Senate. Its members should take a stand against anyone who can't be trusted to withstand political pressure and protect the 1.1 million-acre Pinelands preserve. Unfortunately, though, environmentalists fear the Senate will sell out to development interests.

The complicity of Democrats, including the Cumberland County freeholders, in Christie's latest fit of pique is particularly exasperating. Senate President Stephen Sweeney, who frequently sides with the Republican governor, also favors the pipeline.

If Sweeney, who has all but said he wants to be the next governor, really wants that job, he needs to show New Jerseyans that he will stand up for the protection of their drinking water. Four former governors, Democrats and Republicans, are on record as being opposed to the pipeline. Sweeney and the rest of the Senate would be in good company by joining them.