



4 former N.J. governors oppose Christie's Pinelands pick



Former Governors Brendan Byrne, Tom Kean, James Florio and Christie Whitman have penned a letter urging state Senators to reject Gov. Chris Christie's pick for an open spot on the Pinelands Commission. *(File photos)*



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Four former New Jersey governors are urging state legislators to reject Gov. Chris Christie's pick for an open slot on the Pinelands Commission amid concerns he'll support a pipeline through the forested and ecologically-sensitive region.

Democrats Brendan Byrne and Jim Florio and Republicans Christie Whitman and Tom Kean sent a letter today to all 40 members of the New Jersey Senate asking them to "withhold confirmation" of Robert Barr, who was approved by the the Senate Judiciary Committee in February.

Barr was nominated to replace Robert Jackson, a Pinelands commissioner who voted against South Jersey Gas' proposal to run a natural gas pipeline through the pines to the B.L. England power plant in Beesley's Point. The full senate will vote on his nomination in coming weeks.

Critics accused Christie of replacing Jackson with someone who would vote in favor of the project, though Barr has testified he was not an automatic "yes" vote for the pipeline.

The former governors wrote in their letter the move threatened the independence of the Pinelands Commission, which is tasked with protecting the environmentally sensitive area.

"For thirty-five years, the Pinelands Commission has been the bedrock of the Pinelands conservation effort," they wrote. "Its extraordinary success in that mission is due in great part to the fact that it has functioned as an independent executive agency without undue interference in

its implementation of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan. Recent events threaten to erode that independence."

The four governors previously sent a letter in 2013 to the Pinelands Commission to voice opposition to the project.

A Christie spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment.

Environmentalists have also criticized the Democratic leadership in the Senate for working to approve the nomination. Barr, a Cape May Democrat, is a friend of Sen. Jeff Van Drew, a Democrat who favors the pipeline project.

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