

Senate backs Barr after initially blocking him

By [Max Pizarro](#) | 03/16/15 2:24pm

TRENTON – The Senate just reversed itself and approved the appointment of Robert Barr to the Pinelands Commission.

The vote was 21-17.

Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3) and Senator Joe Pennacchio (R-26) added their ayes to the appointment after the full senate vote for the controversial Barr [initially failed](#).

“A sellout of the Pinelands,” said Jeff Tittel, executive director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. “It was a major setback for the Pinelands and the integrity and independence of our boards and commissions. Political games and arm twisting are more import than protecting the Pinelands.

“It’s dirty politics,” Tittel added.

Following the senate president’s reintroduction of the Barr nomination and passage by the backer of a natural gas pipeline through the Pinelands, environmentalists erupted in the gallery.

Sweeney threatened to dispatch the senate sergeant at arms unless the activists restored order.

Cape May Republican Committee Chairman Mike Donohue didn’t deride the deal Gov. Chris Christie struck with state Senator Jeff Van Drew (D-1) to get the support for Barr, a confidant of the Cape May senator who volunteered in his office.

“The governor has a practical consideration,” Donohue said. “Jeff Van Drew has run to the right almost his entire career because it’s a right-leaning district. His district demands it. That is the practicality of it. There are larger considerations. It is frustrating at times but I get it. You have a Democratic legislature, you have to navigate through it to get stuff done.

“We are in agreement on the pipeline,” the chairman added. “It is important to have this power plant and natural gas, instead of coal power, operating. The mistake was someone who was political coming right from Van Drew’s office but hindsight is 20-20.”

A backer of the clean gas pipeline, Van Drew came out of the voting session convinced that those who opposed the new commissioner will ultimately see his friend’s value. “He’s a strong advocate for the environment,” Van Drew said of Barr. “He will have an open mind. They will find him to be a friend at the end of the day.”

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