

Pipeline opponents protest as Senate panel considers Pinelands Commission replacements

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A coalition of environmental groups will try to stop the replacement of two Pinelands commissioners who voted against the South Jersey Gas pipeline, with a rally Thursday on the Statehouse steps.

In its meeting at 1 p.m. the state Senate Judiciary Committee is interviewing two men nominated to the Pinelands Commission by Gov. Chris Christie, and environmentalists will also speak at that meeting, said organizer Jaclyn Rhoads, of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance.

In May Christie nominated Robert S. Barr, of Ocean City, who is active in local Democratic politics and has ties to pipeline supporter and state Sen. Jeff Van Drew. Christie also named farmer Dennis Roohr, Republican mayor of New Hanover Township in Burlington County.

Barr is nominated to replace Democrat Robert Jackson, of Middle Township, a businessman, former West Cape May mayor and the only African-American on the commission. Jackson was appointed by Gov. Jon Corzine in 2008.

Roohr is nominated to replace Republican D'Arcy Rohan Green, of Bay Head in Ocean County, who was appointed by Christie in 2011.

Both Jackson and Rohan Green voted in January against entering into a memorandum of agreement with the Board of Public Utilities that would have allowed South Jersey Gas to build a pipeline through about 10 miles of protected Pinelands Forest to the B.L. England Generating Station in Beesley's Point, Upper Township.

Commissioners serve three-year terms, but they remain on the commission until a new appointment is made. Commissioners are unpaid volunteers.

"Green is an active Republican but did her job as a commissioner and voted the way she thought was right, as did Robert Jackson," said New Jersey Sierra Club Director Jeff Tittel. "That's why we see it as a real threat to the Pinelands, because they want to put people on the commission to do what the political powers-that-be and special interests want, not necessarily what is best for the Pinelands."

He said the commission has been successful at managing growth and development since its inception in 1979 because it has been independent. Without that independence, "everything becomes „Let's make a deal,"" Tittel said.

Governor's Office spokesman Kevin Roberts said the opposition is disrespectful to the nominees, whose names were put up only after Jackson's and Rohan Green's terms expired. "These are two objectively qualified individuals who are hardworking, independent and have deep roots and extensive records of service in their communities," Kevin wrote in an email Wednesday. "Suggesting otherwise is not only disrespectful to Mr. Barr and Mr Roohr, it is another sign that this is just more baseless nonsense from agenda-driven critics who oppose any action by this Administration, no matter how factually sound the policy or how qualified the candidate."

Port Elizabeth artist Leslie Ficaglia was the first commissioner who voted against the pipeline to lose her seat, but since she was an appointee of the Cumberland County Board of Chosen Freeholders, no action

in the Legislature was needed. She was voted out at a freeholder meeting in April, after serving on the commission for 18 years. The board instead appointed Vineland real estate agent Jane Jannarone.

In addition to the PPA and the Sierra Club, the other groups that will participate in the rally Thursday are Clean Water Action/NJEF; Environment New Jersey, and the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters. The pipeline is necessary to allow the plant to convert from coal and oil to natural gas, so it can meet clean-air requirements and stay open. Without it, the plant will likely have to close. Its continued operation is supported by a variety of business and political groups and residents who believe its loss would hurt the region economically.

Other commissioners who voted against the pipeline and whose reappointments may be in jeopardy are Chairman Mark S. Lohbauer, a downtown redeveloper appointed by Christie in 2011 whose term was up in June; U.S. Department of the Interior appointee Joseph DiBello; planning consultant Candace McKee Ashmun, a governor's appointee since 1979 whose term was up in 2012; and Richard H. Prickett, a member of Pemberton Township Council, appointed by the governor in 2012 whose term is up later this year.

Commissioner Edward Lloyd, clinical professor of environmental law at Columbia Law School who joined the commission as a gubernatorial appointee in 2002, recused himself and did not vote. His term was up in 2005.

Commissioners voting for the pipeline were blueberry farmer Paul E. Galletta, appointed by Atlantic County since 2007; Cape May County appointee William J. Brown, an insurance and real estate broker, on since 1981; Ocean County appointee Alan W. Avery, reappointed in December 2013; Burlington County appointee Sean W. Earlen, of Constructural Dynamics Inc. of Fairless Hills, Pa., on since 2011; Lacey Township Mayor Gary Quinn, owner of Eastport Builders, on since 2011; Gloucester County representative and architect Francis A. Witt, on since 2004; and Camden County representative Edward McGlinchey, Winslow Township public works manager, on since August 2010.

Contact Michelle Brunetti Post: 609-272-7219 -- MPost@pressofac.com