

N.J. lawmakers put hold on Christie nominees to Pinelands panel



The Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday put a hold on Gov. Christie's nominations to the New Jersey Pinelands Commission following the two men's interviews before the committee. (Carlo Allegri / Reuters)

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TRENTON The Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday put a hold on Gov. Christie's nominations to the New Jersey Pinelands Commission following the two men's interviews before the committee.

In May, Christie nominated Dennis Roohr, Republican mayor of New Hanover, and Robert S. Barr, secretary of the Cape May County Democratic Committee, to replace D'Arcy Rohan Green and Robert Jackson, whose three-year terms had expired. Environmental groups charged that Christie was seeking to "stack" the 15-member commission with members inclined to vote in favor of allowing a controversial gas pipeline through protected Pinelands forest.

In January, Green and Jackson were among seven commissioners who voted against granting a waiver that would have allowed South Jersey Gas to lay 10 miles of the 22-mile-long pipeline through the Pinelands.

About 30 opponents of the Christie nominations picketed the Capitol before Thursday's hearings. Many also signed up to address the Judiciary Committee following Roohr's and Barr's interviews, but at the close of interviews Chairman Sen. Nicholas P. Scutari announced that there would be no public comment "because we are holding the nominations."

Earlier, several senators had voiced surprise when Roohr told them he was unacquainted with the pipeline controversy and Barr said he had no opinion on how he might vote if South Jersey Gas applied for a new waiver. Barr is a former volunteer in the office of Sen. Jeff Van Drew (D., Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland), an ardent advocate of the pipeline.

The directors of several environmental organizations said they had expected the committee to vote immediately after the interviews on whether to recommend Barr and Roohr's nominations to the full Senate, since Scutari had indicated at the start of the hearing that it would do so.

Van Drew's and Scutari's offices did not return calls for comment.

- David O'Reilly