

## Sen. Ayotte opposes pipeline

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U.S. Sen. Kelly Ayotte came out against the controversial Kinder Morgan Northeast Energy Direct natural gas pipeline during a conference call on Tuesday, saying there remain too many unanswered questions about the project.

The Nashua Republican said unless a series of basic questions are addressed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, she could not support the roughly 419-mile pipeline, about 78 miles of which are in New Hampshire, moving forward. Ayotte was critical of the federal agency for not directly answering inquiries regarding any possible threshold determination related to public need and a proper review of all natural gas projects in the region.

She also asked how FERC plans to take into account public comments from New Hampshire residents about the project, including safety concerns, and the role of the Pipeline Hazardous Material Safety Administration, which establishes national policy and sets standards for the industry.

Constituents have raised real concerns about this, and "these are very important, legitimate questions that should be answered," said Ayotte, who is up for re-election next year and is anticipating a high-profile race against current Gov. Maggie Hassan, a Democrat.

"And in my view, unless and until these questions ... are sufficiently answered and the concerns of local residents are meaningfully addressed, I oppose this project going forward," she said. The question about the pipeline during the Tuesday call with Granite Staters came from state Rep. Jack Flanagan, a Republican from Brookline. The pipeline has been a major issue in his town.

The Tennessee Gas Pipeline LLC, a subsidiary of the Texas-based energy giant Kinder Morgan, has proposed a roughly 3-foot-diameter pipeline buried across southern New Hampshire and underneath the Souhegan and Merrimack rivers before connecting with existing networks in Londonderry.

It is designed to carry natural gas from western Pennsylvania and New York state into New England in order to, according to advocates, supply the region with direct access to low-cost energy.

Kinder Morgan hopes to have the project in service by 2018, according to its website. Given the time of the conference call, a representative from the company could not be reached for comment.

Multiple public forums have been held here since the project was announced and several meetings involving the federal commission, which may approve or deny a public convenience certificate for the plan, have been held this year.

Last month, several municipal groups representing Massachusetts and New Hampshire communities along the pipeline route have called on FERC to consolidate all the natural gas proposals in New England into one review.

Ayotte is the first of New Hampshire's federal delegation to take a position on the pipeline. Previously, the congressional foursome - Ayotte, U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen and U.S. Reps. Frank Guinta and Annie Kuster - have remained neutral on the issue and, this year alone, released five joint statements calling for more transparency, public meetings and expressed concern about Granite Staters' ability to contribute to the review process.

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