

**BUSINESS & ECONOMY**

# Ayotte Weighs in On Budget, Casella, and Tariffs

By PAULA TRACY, InDepthNH.org April 9, 2025



*Paula Tracy photo*

Gov. Kelly Ayotte is pictured Wednesday speaking to reporters in her office.

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By PAULA TRACY, InDepthNH.org

CONCORD – Gov. Kelly Ayotte laid out her differences with the House GOP budget and priorities, weighed in on Trump’s tariffs and their impact on the state and said she was not surprised that former Gov. Chris Sununu has decided against a run for the U.S. Senate.

Meeting with the press Wednesday following the Executive Council meeting, she said whatever happens on Thursday with the budget in the House, there will be plenty of work to be done going forward when the Senate has its bite at the apple and likely has better revenue projections than the House did.

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“The revenue environment was just different,” she said when she drafted and presented her proposed budget in February.

“We reduced general fund spending from the last biennium to be able to meet the current revenue situation and to really fulfill what I thought were the most essential services of the state and especially taking care of our most vulnerable citizens,” Ayotte said.

The revenue numbers she said she laid out are actually more accurate than the House used and that is being borne out by how things are coming in.

“Of course, we are going to monitor April very closely because that is a very important barometer of a revenue month,” she said as taxes are being paid.

She said she is optimistic that there will be an opportunity to restore some things that the House has taken out from her budget.

#### BUDGET PRIORITIES

She said while not an exhaustive list of her priorities, she said restoration of funds and protection of the community mental health system is important. Another is the disability wait list “that we do not reinstate that wait list” along with travel and tourism dollars “because I believe we get a strong return on our investment for New Hampshire when we invest in promoting the state and as you know, as we look at our revenue numbers, whether it is rooms and meals (tax revenue) and other ways that travel and tourism impact our revenue numbers, I believe we will get return on those dollars if we restore where I had them in my budget,” she said.

The House Republicans removed \$14 million from the travel and tourism promotion budget which she had in her budget.

“Obviously there are many things that I am going to be working with the Senate to prioritize...”

Asked specifically about the Office of the Child Advocate, she said she supports maintaining that office.

She also said \$1.7 million for the NH Arts Council was in her budget, but has been eliminated under the GOP House plan.

#### TARIFFS

Ayotte said Canada is the state’s number two trading partner and there is a lot of back and forth business that we do and President Donald Trump’s tariffs are “not helping” including travel and tourism.

“I have urged the administration to resolve this issue in particular with Canada. Obviously there are other countries too that are involved but Canada is our neighbor and I am hopeful that the Trump Administration and Canadian officials will come together and resolve this quickly.”

#### CASELLA GOES TO COURT

The governor said she was aware that the state Department of Environmental Services is now being sued by the applicant, Casella Waste Systems of Vermont which was denied a permit to create a landfill near Forest Lake State Park.

Ayotte has been a vocal opponent to the siting there noting the pristine environment and residents’ concerns. But she said she would not interfere with the permitting process.

She said it is now a court process and expects that the court will make a ruling on the DES findings and expects that the state department did their work well and will be represented by the Attorney General's Office in court.

She noted in her budget she did include a one-year moratorium on any new landfills because she said it was important that "we take a step back to make sure that we think about what is the process we are using." She said many factors need to go into siting a new landfill including traffic, soils and impacts to residents.

Tom Irwin of the Conservation Law Foundation wouldn't discuss the Casella court case without studying it more.

"Even if DES were to consider it. This is a facility New Hampshire doesn't need and is sited in an inappropriate location that will threaten water resources in the end," Irwin told InDepthNH.org.

Jon Swan, founder of Save Forest Lake, said: "It only took six years and two rounds of failed permit application submittals for NHDES to finally inform Casella what so many have been saying all along, that the Dalton site is simply not a safe location for a mega-landfill. Instead of acknowledging this and acting responsibly, Casella Waste Systems of Vermont has opted to behave like a petulant child throwing a temper tantrum by suing the State of New Hampshire, thus placing greater value on corporate profit over public health and safety. I hope that is not lost on the decision-makers in Concord."

Jeff Weld, Casella spokesman, said: "It is unfortunate that despite providing thousands of pages of documents over the course of two years and nearly a dozen separate supplemental submissions in response to requests from NHDES, that they chose to deny the permit application based on dormancy.

"...The need for this disposal capacity to serve more than 60,000 customers and nearly 200 New Hampshire towns once NCES ceases operations in Bethlehem is made clear by NHDES in its biennial report. If additional capacity is not permitted, New Hampshire residents and businesses throughout the state will likely incur additional disposal costs due to increased transportation charges and decreased competition in the marketplace," Weld said.

#### SUNUNU'S BIG DECISION"

The governor said she was not surprised that former Governor Chris Sununu "an executive at heart" decided not to run for the U.S. Senate but is optimistic that Republicans will find a candidate to replace the retiring Democrat, Jeanne Shaheen.

Sununu said this week it was not right for him and his family at this time.

There is already one major candidate who has thrown his hat in the ring, Congressman Chris Pappas, D-NH.

Shaheen said Sununu's decision makes sense after eight years as the chief executive officer of the state and noted it is a big family decision.

In the end she said she was not surprised that he decided to spend time with his wife and children.

"I respect that," she said.