

Kennedy calls for federal study

The senator seeks \$500,000 for a National Academy of Sciences analysis of the impact of the offshore project.

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WASHINGTON - In his most specific statement yet on the proposed offshore wind farm, U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy is seeking a federal study of "the broad public policy implications" of the proposal to build 130 turbines in Nantucket Sound.

In a letter sent Thursday to U.S. Sens. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Harry Reid, D-Nev., Kennedy has requested \$500,000 for a study from the National Academy of Sciences, an organization that has examined national policy and health issues.

The analysis is "absolutely critical," Kennedy wrote. " ... The Nantucket wind farm could be the largest offshore wind farm in the world by the time it is completed.

"Yet there is no existing federal regulatory regime to govern the siting, construction, maintenance and ongoing oversight of such projects in (federal) waters," Kennedy wrote.

Cape Wind Associates of Boston and Yarmouthport wants to build 130 wind turbines in a 24-square-mile section of Nantucket Sound known as Horseshoe Shoal.

The proposal has generated opposition from business people, property owners, boaters and fishermen, and has divided the environmental community.

Critics say the benefits of a limitless source of non-polluting local energy are outweighed by what they perceive as the towers' visual blight and possible damaging effects on the birds, the seabed and marine life, tourism and the regional economy and property values of waterfront homes.

"National policy"

"Sen. Kennedy continues to believe that before we allow offshore wind energy projects to proceed along the nation's coastlines, we must put a national policy in place to ensure that we are maximizing the benefits of alternative energy, but also minimizing the costs to states and local communities, their economies and their environment," Kennedy spokeswoman Stephanie Cutter said yesterday.

Kennedy has refrained from expressing support for Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas Reilly's call for a moratorium on offshore wind farms until more rigorous federal regulations are in place, a proposal also supported by U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, D-Mass.

But Kennedy's request for the National Academy of Sciences study seems to hint that he is sympathetic to the proposals by Reilly and Delahunt.

Delahunt also wants Nantucket Sound to be designated a national marine sanctuary, which would halt commercial development while allowing commercial fishing, sailing and other current uses to continue.

Delahunt spokesman Steve Schwadron described Kennedy's proposal as "analogous to what we are trying to do with the national marine sanctuary designation."

Delahunt had asked the Provincetown-based Center for Coastal Studies to study the characteristics unique to Nantucket Sound that would warrant federal protection.

NAS praised

Schwadron described the National Academy of Sciences as "credible and independent" and said it could provide an overview with "world-class credibility."

"It's trying to bring to bear genuine expertise, not mere rhetoric or self-interest, and that's very constructive," he said.

Kennedy said a National Academy of Sciences study could "dispassionately and analytically" focus on "a broad range of environmental, economic, regulatory, resource management and energy development issues."

"Since 1863, Congress has turned to the National Academy of Sciences for consultation whenever it is confronted with an issue of substantial public policy importance but little precedence," Kennedy wrote.

Last year, Kennedy sought funds to study the health effects related to the PAVE PAWS radar installation in Sandwich.

Domenici and Reid hold influence over funding requests for such studies in their positions as the chairmen of the Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee and Environment and Public Works committee.

Kennedy's letter to his two colleagues included a list of 21 proposed wind farms off six states along the East Coast, for a total of 3,649 wind turbines.

Testifying before the House Energy and Mineral Resources subcommittee Thursday, Delahunt and Reilly criticized a bill filed by U.S. Rep. Barbara Cubin, R-Wyo., that would require developers to pay leases to the U.S. secretary of Interior to build energy projects on the Outer Continental Shelf.

Bill criticized

Both Delahunt and Reilly agree with the provision regarding developers to pay leases for their offshore projects, but said the so-called Cubin bill does not go far enough. They said it needs added provisions for competitive bidding, a mechanism for identifying appropriate sites for offshore wind farms and licensing fees for the government.

Delahunt filed legislation Thursday calling for "the promotion of sensible development of renewable energy facilities in the marine environment and the establishment of a predictable and open licensing program" for these projects.

The bill sets a deadline of one year from enactment for a "new federal licensing regime" governing offshore wind farms to be in place. Such projects would also need the approval of the U.S. secretary of Commerce and could not be built in national marine sanctuaries, as Delahunt is proposing for Nantucket Sound.

In his letters to Domenici and Reid, Kennedy described himself as "an ardent supporter of renewable energy and wind energy in particular."

"The promise of such projects is that they present the possibility of reducing our dependence on foreign oil, improving the quality of the air our children breathe and mitigating some of the effects of global warming," Kennedy wrote.

Kennedy also said the government should be making "substantially greater investments" in wind, solar and hydrogen fuel cell technology.

But the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm shows "there is no existing federal regulatory regime to govern the siting, construction, maintenance and ongoing oversight of such projects in OCS waters," Kennedy said. "By statute and tradition, these are some of our most public of natural resources."

"In the absence of such a policy, the Army Corps of Engineers has been left with very little framework with which to oversee an environmental impact statement for the \$600-700 million project" in Nantucket Sound, Kennedy said.

"I do not question whether the Corps will do its best, but I remain concerned that this burden should not be theirs alone simply because Congress has not, to date, set any rules for such projects," he said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is due to complete its Environmental Impact Statement on the Cape Wind project sometime this year, possibly in the spring.

Cape Wind needs a permit from the Army Corps to proceed, and the approval of the Massachusetts Energy Siting Board, the state's Coastal Zone Management office, the Coast Guard and the Federal Aviation Administration.

Attempts to reach Cape Wind President James Gordon and Dennis Duffy, Cape Wind's vice president for regulatory affairs, were unsuccessful.

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