

CAPE WIND DEBATE | JOHN DEVILLARS AND SUSAN TIERNEY

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## In support of a Sound plan

By John DeVillars and Susan Tierney | April 23, 2006

THE RECENT back-room, closed-door attempt by a congressional conference committee to kill the wind farm planned for Nantucket Sound is shameful. If the action stands on the floor of Congress, its consequences will be severe.

Regardless of whether you support Cape Wind's proposal, as we do, or oppose it, it is hard to see the action as anything other than a subversion of the public interest in fair, honest, open decision-making.

As virtually every informed citizen and policy maker knows, the world's foremost atmospheric scientists are near-unanimous in their opinion that the earth's warming is in part caused and accelerated by the burning of fossil fuels. Without concerted action now -- including the development of wind and other renewable energy projects -- the scientists' warnings of potentially cataclysmic consequences are very possible, if not likely.

In the face of this, the United States has failed to translate increased scientific knowledge and consensus into rational energy policy and to make any progress in advancing large-scale renewable energy projects. We have earned the enmity of much of the world as a consequence.

The Cape Wind project has received considerable attention in foreign capitals and news media. Policy makers and citizens across the globe are watching closely and with hope. The message Cape Wind sends is that at least in one tiny corner of our country there is a turnaround in America's view of its shared responsibility for the planet's health and future. The conference committee vote sends the opposite message. This alone is reason enough to reverse the action.

There is another audience closely watching the fate of the Cape Wind project. Congress's upcoming action will have symbolic importance to them as well.

Power producers, developers, and investors are poised to tap into a potential multibillion-dollar renewable project marketplace in the United States. But before they invest the time and capital necessary to successfully find sites for large-scale renewable energy infrastructure, they want to know if it is even possible, let alone profitable, to do so.

They have followed the ups and downs of the Cape Wind project closely. They know that Cape Wind has played by the rules, done its homework, and modified the plan to meet legitimate concerns raised through an open review process. Five years of technical studies and environmental review are completed; at least two more years of further analysis and review remain.

If allowed to stand, the conference committee action sends a dispiriting message to this next wave of developers and investors: Even if you do it the right way, a handful of well-lobbied congressmen and senators can pull the rug out from under you -- no process, no debate, no recourse.

The symbolic import of the committee's action is also surely not lost on citizens in communities in our state and across the country suffering environmental and public health consequences of coal- and oil-fired plants. The message to them: If you can raise \$8 million to hire well-connected lawyers and lobbyists, we can help; if not, you're on your own. A rigorous environmental review process is fine for your community; back-room deals are reserved for our well-heeled friends.

It is ironic that just six months ago the Congress affirmed and in fact strengthened the federal interest in the siting of a host of energy facilities -- power lines, nuclear power plants, gas terminals, pipelines, and more. Now in the shadows, a handful of members want to grant total discretion for rejecting one specific facility to a governor, without regard to the kind of multi-year public process that is used to assess every other similar project's impacts on safety, navigation, and the environment.

This is not the outcome the public deserves nor the process by which they are best served. For both reasons, the full Congress should reject the amendment.

John DeVillars served as Massachusetts secretary for the environment from 1988 to 1991 and as New England administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency from 1994 to 2000. Susan Tierney was the Massachusetts secretary for the environment from 1991 to 1993, and assistant secretary for policy at the Department of Energy from 1993 to 1995. ■

