

## WIND POWER A REAL TEST FOR NEXT GOVERNOR

By, John P. DeVillars

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It is risky business to opine on the juxtaposition between wind power and a political campaign given most people's sense that a lot of what they hear during election season is so much hot air. Nevertheless, the intensifying debate over proposals for offshore wind farms in Nantucket Sound and other New England coastal waters and the campaign for governor creates not only the opportunity for commentary but, for the next governor, the real demands of public leadership.

As the recent Johannesburg sustainability summit reminds us, global climate change is real, and an accelerated search for solutions is imperative. The single most significant contribution to climate change is the burning of fossil fuels. Because of this, most of the world's scientific and political leadership have called for greatly accelerating efforts toward alternative energy resources.

Wind power represents one sensible alternative path. It is infinitely renewable, emissions-free, and increasingly cost competitive. Yet answers to the questions of where and how to site wind generation facilities remain elusive. The most advanced of the proposals for New England waters is the 170-turbine, 400-megawatt project put forth by Cape Wind for a 28-square-mile area of Nantucket Sound. Predictably, this proposal has generated more heat than light.

Some have rushed to become early adopters, embracing the effort based on presumed clean-air benefits. Others are now mounting well-financed, litigious opposition based on little tested, complex regulatory theories. Both or neither may be right. At this early point - with little economic or environmental research - it is hard to know.

But what is clear is that the debate is becoming increasingly polarized and hard-edged. The rhetoric of global energy independence versus NIMBYism abounds and is getting nastier. It's not a standoff that is likely to lead to well reasoned decision-making. Yet that is exactly what this precedent-setting decision about how to use our coastal resources requires.

Here are three modest steps that the next chief executive might take:

- Insist that President Bush and federal agencies get their acts together. Currently, officials seemed inclined to enter the fray with one arm tied behind their backs, suggesting that the most potent tool they have - the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA - will not apply in waters beyond the 3-mile limit. If allowed to stand, it will mean regulation under the limited, outdated, and outmoded Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899. A lot has changed since; so, too, should the legal framework for making decisions about the use of vast expanses of public resources. US Representative William Delahunt has wisely asserted that no action should be taken until we have a management regimen in place to govern private use of offshore public resources for renewable energy, as is currently in place, inadequate as it may be, for offshore oil and gas leasing. The next governor should insist on this as well as full NEPA review and make these issues a top priority for the traditional February meeting with the president.
- Ensure a robust public dialogue. The decisions made in the next four years will have generational significance. They must be informed not only by sound science and strong economic analysis but through open and lively public debate. Mitchell Adams and Rob Pratt of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative have led the Massachusetts Renewables Trust in valuable steps to

establish such a process. These efforts should be expanded. The next governor should see that they are.

- Lead, don't follow, in the effort to find the best site. More than 20 developers have come forward with wind farm proposals for the North Atlantic this year alone. Each has proposed a different site. The most advanced of those - Cape Wind's proposal for Nantucket Sound - is proposed by a developer, principled and well meaning as he appears to be, who is motivated by considerably more - or less, perhaps - than the public interest. If we continue with the current siting process, largely focused on the proposal that managed to get to the front of the line first rather than by careful review of a range of possible sites, the outcome is likely to be hand-to-hand combat waged in an incomplete and fractious regulatory arena. That is a recipe for stalemate and inaction at a time when the search for alternative energy supplies has never been more important.

It should be the responsibility of our government, not private industry, to weigh the complex issues of ecology, energy infrastructure, and economics in order to determine which is the best location for a wind farm. Fortunately, a mechanism for mounting this effort is already in place: the state's Energy Facilities Siting Board. Composed of the Commonwealth's secretary of the environment and the chief economic development and energy officials, its statutory mission is to ensure "a reliable energy supply for the Commonwealth with a minimum impact on the environment at the lowest possible cost." The next governor should put them to work doing just that, beginning with an effort to determine the best location. Wind energy is a good thing. So is protection of the rich ecological diversity of our marine and avian resources. With new leadership, we can have both.