



Senator Edward M. Kennedy backs a bill that would effectively halt the proposed construction in Nantucket Sound of 130 wind turbines similar to this one in Hull. The bill would give Governor Mitt Romney the power to veto the Cape Wind plan. (Stephan Savoia/ Associated Press/ File)

## Kennedy faces fight on Cape Wind

### Key lawmakers oppose his bid to block project

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By Rick Klein, Globe Staff | April 27, 2006

WASHINGTON -- As record oil prices turn attention to the need for renewable fuels, momentum is building in Congress to buck Senator Edward M. Kennedy's bid to block the proposed Cape Cod wind energy project, potentially reviving efforts to construct the sprawling windmill farm in Nantucket Sound.

The chairman and the top Democrat on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee said yesterday that when the bill Kennedy backs that would effectively halt the wind farm comes up for a vote in the Senate, they will object on procedural grounds. They say they'll argue that a renewable energy project shouldn't be lumped in with a bill governing the Coast Guard.

Meanwhile, a group of rank-and-file House members, worried about the political ramifications of rejecting alternative energy sources while motorists pay \$3 a gallon at the gas station, have persuaded House leaders to sidetrack the entire bill for at least several weeks, even though it was slated for action this week. The delay could give supporters of the wind farm time to make their case to members of Congress.

"Are we going to be for developing alternative energy or not?" said Representative Charles Bass, a New Hampshire Republican who helped persuade House leaders to table the bill until at least mid-May. "The longer you delay it, the longer there is for people to examine the issue, and to determine what's going on here."

The efforts to move the wind farm forward occur amid growing attention to Kennedy's role in the secret, behind-the-scenes maneuvering to stop it. Republican Ted Stevens of Alaska, the senator who inserted the wind-farm provision into the Coast Guard bill, has acknowledged discussing the matter privately with the Massachusetts Democrat.

Environmental groups have launched an aggressive advertising and lobbying campaign to persuade Democrats to abandon Kennedy and back a promising source of renewable energy. If the wind farm becomes a reality, advocates say, it could provide three-fourths of the Cape and Islands' energy needs and could set an example for the nation.

The maneuver to stop the wind farm "is clearly a backroom deal, and they're going to get called publicly on it," said John Passacantando, executive director of Greenpeace USA. "The Democrats are going to kill the first big offshore wind farm in the United States because of their relationship with Ted Kennedy."

The 130-turbine, 24-square-mile cluster of windmills would be about 8 miles from Kennedy's home in Hyannis Port, and he has long opposed it. The Coast Guard bill would give Governor Mitt Romney, another wind farm opponent, the power to veto it, even if the project clears all other hurdles.

Kennedy rejected suggestions that he doesn't like the wind farm because it would be near his Cape home, and said the project probably wouldn't be visible from the Kennedy compound. He said he's against the project because it would create a range of environmental and navigational problems and would hurt tourism, one of the area's key industries.

The Cape Wind developers, he said, want to erect a sprawling, for-profit field of giant windmills on public, state-owned territory. Kennedy noted that the project was the beneficiary of more lenient regulations included in last year's energy bill, which could have put it on a faster track to construction; therefore, a special deal was warranted to stop it.

Ultimately, Kennedy said, Massachusetts and its governor should get to decide yes or no on the site for the farm, Kennedy said.

"We had an opportunity to right a wrong," he said of the provision in the Coast Guard bill. "The people who ought to be irate ought to be the citizens of Massachusetts. I don't shrink from my advocacy for them. I welcome it. I'm going to continue to make sure that . . . a wealthy developer is not going to ride roughshod over the state's interests."

Kennedy said the effort to block the wind farm started in the House, where Transportation Committee Chairman Don Young, another Alaska Republican, originally inserted it in the House version of the Coast Guard bill. Young and Stevens maintain that states should have a say in energy projects off their coastlines.

"I just believe it's a state's right," Stevens said yesterday. "If that were in Puget Sound, don't you think people in Washington would want to say something about it? If it's off our coast, we'd want to know."

Stevens said he "conferred" with Kennedy about adding a provision to the bill that would allow the state to veto the Cape Cod project. He said Kennedy agreed with that idea, an account that Kennedy confirmed.

But the project's supporters don't like the manner in which the provision was included in the bill, an argument that appears to be catching on with some lawmakers. The final language was hashed out in secret by a small handful of lawmakers -- a group that included Young and Stevens.

"They've lost in the court of public opinion, so they're taking this to the back room because it's the only way they can get it done," said Sue Reid, a staff attorney for the Boston-based Conservation Law Foundation, which backs the wind farm. "There's growing outrage against this provision," said Reid, who was in Washington yesterday to lobby Congress.

Senator Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, the ranking Democrat on the Senate energy committee, said it's important to encourage development of renewable energy sources like wind power.

Bingaman and Chairman Pete V. Domenici, Republican of New Mexico, will try to round up enough senators to strip the provision from the Coast Guard bill. That would send the bill back to the conference committee -- with the Senate on record against interference with the Cape Wind project.

The Kennedy-backed provision "would short-circuit the process and kill the project, which I think would be a mistake," Bingaman said.

"If there are problems with the project, they ought to come out and be discussed. But they shouldn't be dealt with this way."

Bass said the Cape Wind project has been treated differently in Congress because powerful lawmakers and special interest lobbyists vacation on Cape Cod and treasure the ocean views.

"It's odd that the people who are against it are the people who have [scenic] views," Bass said. "I'm sorry about that, but the project ought to rise or fall on its merits."

Kennedy dismissed such talk as "their response to any kind of raising of questions" about the project's problems. "It's just an easy response to an argument that has merit." ■