

House factions gird for battle on wind farm

■ As congressional opposition to a Coast Guard bill amendment grows, a vote may be delayed until late May.

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A single amendment tucked into a massive Coast Guard bill has lawmakers nationwide taking sides on a divisive proposal to build a wind farm off the coast of Cape Cod.

U.S. Rep. Charles Bass, R-N.H., will lead a fight in the House of Representatives against the Coast Guard amendment, which would give the Massachusetts governor authority to veto wind turbines proposed for Nantucket Sound.

Bass, a House leader on energy and budget reform issues, says the closed-door attempt to kill the Cape project undermines a congressional call

Amendment: House opposition grows

continued from A-1

to address the nation's energy needs and regain the trust of the American public.

Opponents of the wind farm, say some lawmakers are trying to characterize the struggle over the project as a NIMBY debate to score political points, while ignoring legitimate local concerns.

Wind farm foes also point to language slipped into the Energy Policy Act last year that they say would benefit Cape Wind Associates, the wind farm developer.

No matter whom one believes, surging congressional opposition to the antiwind farm amendment has apparently bought the project's supporters a few more weeks to make their case - and once again positioned the Cape as a battleground in the national debate over renewable energy.

"Mainly, that's because of the pressure that's beginning to build in the House," said Tad Furtado, a Bass spokesman who said a vote on the Coast Guard bill, originally expected this week, could be pushed deep into May.

Furtado predicted U.S. Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, the powerful congressman who first introduced language targeting offshore wind turbines, will fight to preserve the antiwind farm amendment.

On Wednesday, U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a champion for government reform in the Senate, slammed the Coast Guard amendment during an interview with Capitol reporters, calling it a "violation of the way we do things around here."

The amendment was originally authored by U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, and urged by U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy, a Hyannisport resident and Cape Wind opponent. With the backing of the powerful insiders,

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U.S. REP. WILLIAM DELAHUNT

the amendment was inserted into an \$8.7 billion Coast Guard reauthorization bill by a conference committee.

Kennedy's stance

Kennedy has faced increasing criticism lately - including television ads sponsored by Greenpeace in several states - for his role in keeping the amendment alive.

Kennedy could not be reached for comment yesterday. But in an op-ed piece published in today's Cape Cod Times, he defends his opposition to the project, arguing the Coast Guard and the governor of Massachusetts should have final say over projects on Nantucket Sound - "not the developer."

If the project is approved, Cape Wind would build 130 wind turbines in the shallow waters of Nantucket Sound, an ambitious plan that could be the nation's first offshore wind farm.

While supporters call Cape Wind's plans an opportunity to produce renewable energy on a large scale, opponents say Nantucket Sound is the wrong place.

Debate over the full Coast Guard bill will likely begin in the House. While amendments tacked on by a conference committee cannot be changed on the House floor, the entire bill could be sent back for further negotiations if enough House members object to the legislation.

U.S. Rep. William Delahunt,

the Cape's congressman and a Cape Wind opponent, said yesterday many people are accepting misinformation about the amendment at face value.

National environmental groups and some politicians have tried to portray the debate as a showdown on global warming, Delahunt said. But he said they have neglected valid local concerns such as the effects on maritime navigation and aviation radar.

"We keep hearing about rich people and their views. Baloney!" Delahunt said during a telephone interview. "It's people who live on the Cape, who earn their money on the waters and enjoy this national treasure that is Nantucket Sound."

No competitive bidding

He also pointed to Energy Policy Act language he said was tailored to give Cape Wind preferential treatment on the

Sound. In particular, the act included language that exempts the developer from competitive bidding on the Horseshoe Shoal site where turbines would be built.

The so-called Stevens amendment, Delahunt said, has been subject to more public debate than the Energy Policy Act deal for Cape Wind.

"Cape Wind obviously has some very powerful friends here in Washington," he said.

"I don't think it's good public policy."

Cape Wind officials say they never pushed for special privileges from Congress, looking instead for assurances that they wouldn't be penalized for being the first applicant for an offshore permit.

With project supporters now lobbying Congress to reject the Coast Guard amendment, Cape Wind spokesman Mark Rodgers said yesterday he believes lawmakers will somehow defeat the legislation.

"I don't know how," he said, "but I think they'll find a way to remove this amendment."

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