

# US official opposes Cape Wind measure

## Calls it unwise to give state veto

By Stephanie Ebbert, Globe Staff | May 6, 2006

The Bush administration weighed in on behalf of the wind farm project proposed off the Cape and Islands yesterday, urging Congress to drop a measure that would allow the governor of Massachusetts to block the controversial project.

In a strongly worded letter dated Thursday, Under Secretary of Energy David K. Garman called the measure backed by US Senator Edward M. Kennedy unwise and said it could threaten future renewable energy projects that the administration hopes to foster.

"More broadly, singling out wind generation in this manner could have a chilling impact on the continued investment and growth of this promising renewable energy resource," Garman wrote to the House and Senate chairmen of the committees involved with the legislation.

The statement put the Bush administration at odds with Kennedy and Governor Mitt Romney, who oppose the offshore wind farm, which would be the first in the nation.

Under the measure backed by Kennedy, the governor would be given the authority to block the project, even though it would be built in federal waters.

Kennedy's office issued a statement vowing to continue to fight for the measure, which is part of a broader bill that authorizes funding for the US Coast Guard.

The bill could come up as soon as next week in the House. A Romney spokesman declined to comment yesterday on the administration's stance.

While the Bush administration has been generally supportive of the project, the letter that was released yesterday included unusually pointed language and came at a crucial point in the battle over the measure.

The provision giving Romney veto power over the wind farm project was approved by a conference committee last month, leading the wind farm developer, Cape Wind Associates, and its allies in the environmental and labor movements to stir opposition on Capitol Hill.

But public furor over escalating gas and energy prices and new demands for alternative energy sources also made lawmakers uneasy about supporting the measure.

This week, several members of the House and Senate announced their efforts to kill the anti-Cape Wind measure.

The chairman and ranking Democrat on the US Senate Energy Committee sent a letter to Senate leaders warning that he will try to block a final vote on the Coast Guard bill on the Senate floor unless the anti-Cape Wind provision is removed.

And US Representative Charles F. Bass, a New Hampshire Republican, is circulating a letter asking House leaders to kill the Cape Wind language before passing the bill; a bipartisan group of at least five other representatives signed on yesterday.

"It sets a terrible precedent," said US Senator Pete Domenici, the New Mexico Republican who chairs the Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee. He added it would be "a very bad idea to give states veto

authority over the siting of renewable energy projects on federal land in a bid to stop a particular project."

But opponents of the wind farm -- including Kennedy, who helped engineer the maneuver with his Senate colleagues -- say the project provides a sweetheart deal to a single developer.

With little regulation now covering offshore projects, Cape Wind Associates would be allowed to use 24 square miles of Nantucket Sound for its own profit without competitive bidding, the critics said.

"It's no surprise that this administration would support no-bid contracts," Melissa Wagoner, a Kennedy spokeswoman, said in a statement. "Senator Kennedy will continue to oppose a process that treats the Cape Wind proposal differently than every other proposed offshore wind development, because a sweetheart deal for a developer is not right or fair to the people of Massachusetts."

Cape Wind Associates has proposed building 130 wind turbines in a shallow area of Nantucket Sound and said it could produce enough wind power to handle three-quarters of the electric needs of the Cape and Islands.

As an offshore wind farm, Cape Wind would be the first of its kind in the nation, and, historically, there has been no explicit criteria for reviewing offshore wind development.

Last year's Energy Policy Act transferred the oversight of future wind farm proposals to the Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service, which has a similar role in overseeing offshore drilling.

Audra Parker, assistant director of the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, which opposes the wind farm, pointed out that the Minerals Management Service began yesterday to advertise public meetings aimed at developing the criteria for the review of offshore alternative energy projects. The act that transferred authority to the Minerals Management Service exempted Cape Wind and another project that was being reviewed from a new set of reviews.

"Why would you make an exception for the single largest offshore wind development? Why should the Cape Wind project get special treatment to reward a developer for jumping ahead of the rules?" Parker asked.

Garman's letter was not the first show of support from the administration.

Last year, Garman wrote a letter to the US Army Corps of Engineers, which was reviewing the Cape Wind proposal then, calling such endeavors "important to our national interest."

"Projects like Cape Wind are responsive to the administration's policy to increase renewable energy development on federal lands and to reduce air emissions in collaboration with the private sector," Garman wrote in March 2005.

Jim Gordon, president of Cape Wind Associates, echoed that sentiment yesterday in reflecting on the turnaround his project has encountered in recent weeks.

"I think it's a combination of two things: People are getting very serious about renewable energy, and they want to do more than just talk about it," he said.

"And I think there's a fairness element in it, as well," Gordon said. "I think people have seen our company for five years following the rules, going through a legitimate, comprehensive, and inclusive regulatory process, and I think people see the promise in this project." ■