

Kennedy bends on Cape Wind stand

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A congressional bid to grant Gov. Mitt Romney veto power over the Nantucket Sound wind farm looks dead in the water following weeks of surging opposition.

U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy, a Cape Wind critic who had lobbied for the provision, said he is open to a compromise proposal that would instead give the Coast Guard commandant final say over the offshore project.

If approved, the compromise measure would pose far less risk to Cape Wind's controversial plan to build 130 turbines on the Sound, a proposal Romney, as well as several gubernatorial candidates, opposes.

Kennedy agreed to a compromise because the anti-Cape Wind legislation, known as the Stevens amendment, had created a deadlock over the \$8.7 billion Coast Guard bill to which it had been linked, said Melissa Wagoner, a spokeswoman for the senator. The amendment was authored by Sen. Ted Stevens, an Alaska Republican.

While lawmakers had not reached a final agreement on the Stevens amendment, Kennedy apparently recognized the Cape Wind issue was threatening to stall the Coast Guard bill completely. He remains convinced, however, that navigation and aviation concerns would be addressed properly with Coast Guard oversight, Wagoner said.

"He still believes the governor should have a say and that the state should have a voice," she said. "But sometimes you have to compromise, as long as public safety is still the top priority."

Winding road

The compromise would add another twist in the nation's evolving framework for reviewing offshore renewable energy projects.

The U.S. Department of Interior is already reviewing the Cape Wind project specifically even as it crafts over-arching guidelines for offshore projects. The Coast Guard's First District is one of several federal agencies providing input into the Cape Wind review.

The offshore energy compromise that Kennedy is seeking resembles early versions of a proposal included in the House version of the Coast Guard bill last year by U.S. Rep. Don Young, another Alaskan Republican. But a later version of the so-called Young amendment attracted national attention when the Alaskan congressman suggested that wind farms be banned within 1½ miles of shipping and ferry lanes in U.S. waters.

Last month, after weeks of discussion behind closed doors, a conference committee instead

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targeted the Cape Wind project specifically, giving the Bay State governor final veto authority over the project. The conference committee's proposal met stiff opposition in the House and Senate, with lawmakers delaying a vote on the Coast Guard bill in an effort to protect the Cape Wind project.

Battle lines drawn

As Congress has wrangled over offshore wind farms in general and Cape Wind in particular, the Nantucket Sound project has spawned editorials in dozens of American newspapers and prompted lawmakers nationwide to choose sides. One lawmaker called the Cape Wind debate a "referendum on renewable energy" for federal lawmakers.

U.S. Rep. Charles Bass, a New Hampshire Republican who has cited the need for new electricity sources in New England, has fought congressional attempts to block the project.

"It appears that the stalemate we've drawn the game into is about to break in our favor," said Tad Furtado, a Bass spokesman. "At the end of the day, most people (in Congress) are pragmatic. And the likelihood of (Stevens' supporters) being able to prevail either in the House or Senate was growing slimmer and slimmer as time passed."

U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, the Cape's congressman and a Cape Wind critic, conceded the legislative process is always about compromise. But he said it is encouraging that the Coast Guard will have an enhanced role in the Cape Wind review.

"We need assurances that the safety of the public, in terms of maritime navigation and air traffic, will be involved in the process," he said. "This falls within their current mission and function."

A spokesman for the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, a Cape-based group that lobbied for amendments targeting Cape Wind, said it is too early to comment on the latest compromise.

Cape Wind spokesman Mark Rodgers was equally cautious, declining to address the emerging compromise directly until more details are known. "We are hopeful something can be worked out so that Cape Wind can deliver the public benefits of cleaner air, greater energy independence and lower energy costs as soon as possible," he said.

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