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TOP STORY

## **With signs of Democratic skepticism on wind power, local mayors renew push**

**Bill Barlow**

Aug 15, 2023

**M**ultiple officials in Cape May and Atlantic counties and shore communities beyond welcomed recent comments from two prominent Democrats raising questions about offshore wind projects.

In a **letter** released Tuesday, officials urged Senate President Nick Scutari and state Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin to go further.

Last week, the two legislative leaders expressed concerns about the Board of Public Utilities' approach on offshore wind projects, a process South Jersey officials have described as overly rushed. Scutari and Coughlin appeared to echo concerns raised in shore towns about the potential damage to the multibillion-dollar summer tourism industry.

“There are still many unanswered questions about the economic impact these projects will have on ratepayers as well as potential impacts to one of our state’s largest economic drivers, tourism at the shore,” read the statement from Scutari and Coughlin. “The BPU should be able to share these impacts with the communities affected and the Legislature before moving forward with these new offshore projects.”

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No one from Scutari or Coughlin’s legislative offices responded to a request for comment Tuesday.

“You have identified the very serious and challenging issues that many of us have been raising for some time now. It is refreshing to see the leadership you have taken on the potential negative impacts of the build-as-fast-as-possible approach that the state of New Jersey is currently taking on offshore wind,” reads the letter, signed by Len Desiderio, director of the Cape May County Board of Commissioners; Dennis Levinson, the Atlantic County executive; and 31 mayors.

Gov. Phil Murphy and President Joe Biden, both Democrats, have strongly supported the development of offshore wind power as key to reducing carbon emissions connected to global climate change.

Murphy has a goal to generate 11,000 megawatts of electricity via wind power by 2040, and to generate all of New Jersey’s power via green energy by 2050. In July, Murphy signed a bill giving a tax break to Ørsted, the Danish power company developing **Ocean Wind 1** off the coast of South Jersey.



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That is the furthest along of several projects in the works for the New Jersey coast, with plans to start construction next year. When completed, the wind turbines are expected to be visible from beaches in Cape May and Atlantic counties.

A spokesperson for Ørsted said the power company did not have a comment.

Officials in multiple shore towns have sought to slow the projects. The comments from Scutari and Coughlin were the highest-profile Democratic concerns in an issue that breaks down primarily, but not entirely, along party lines.

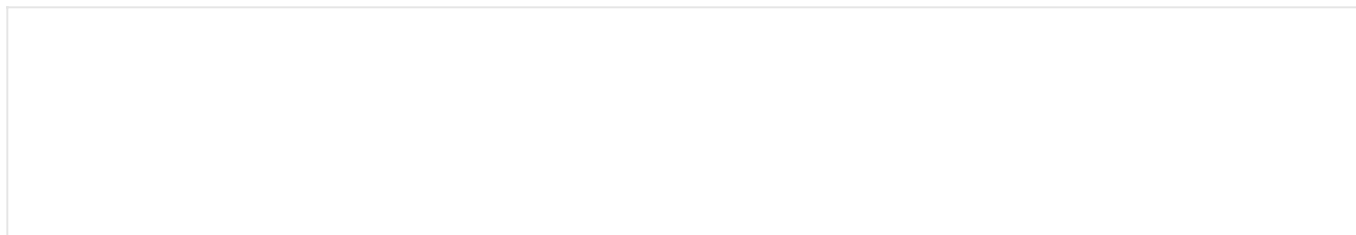
John Froonjian, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University, said Tuesday the comments from the Democratic leaders seem surprising given Murphy's support of wind energy.

Surprising, that is, but for the November election in which every seat in New Jersey is up for a vote.

"I think this shows the campaign spearheaded mostly by Republicans has been effective at stirring opposition and concern about wind turbines off New Jersey beaches," Froonjian said. "The Democratic majority in Trenton may want to insulate themselves politically on the issue with an election less than three months away."

He noted that the legislative leaders did not come out in opposition to wind power projects off the coast, but instead questioned their potential impact on tourism and the economy.

"The lawmakers likely do not want to appear tone deaf to the pockets of opposition loudly voicing objections," he said. "It remains to be seen whether legislators' concerns are serious enough to threaten the massive projects or whether the BPU's answers — and pushback from environmentalists — are enough to overcome them."





### **Cape May County seeks dismissal of offshore wind lawsuit**

In a letter copied to area media, local officials said the full impact of the wind projects cannot be known, given the size of the turbines and the scope of the proposals.

“What is happening now is that the waters off the coast of New Jersey are being utilized to advance a massive experiment with little understanding or concern for the many, potentially catastrophic, impacts the installation of these industrial power generating facilities will have,” the letter reads.

Cape May County officials were heavily represented among the names.

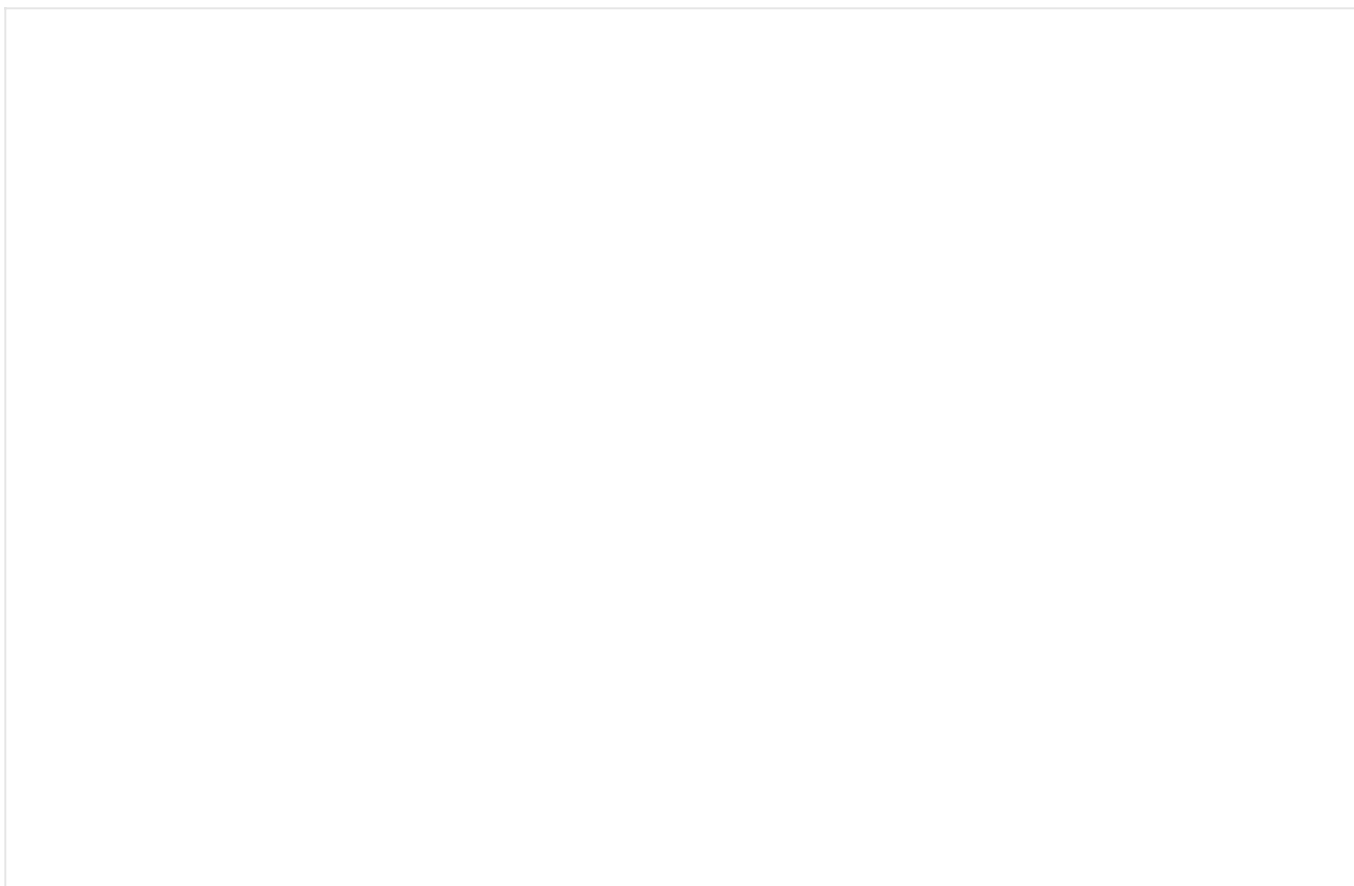
Also signing were Mayor Jay Gillian of Ocean City, Mayor Patrick Rosenello of North Wildwood, Mayor Judy Davies-Dunhour of Stone Harbor, Mayor Don Cabrera of Wildwood Crest, Mayor Bill Pikolycky of Woodbine, Mayor Tim Donohue of Middle Township, Mayor Zeth Matalucci of Dennis Township, Mayor John McCorriston of Avalon, Mayor Frank Sippel of Lower Township, Mayor Vince Sera of Brigantine, Mayor Darren Matik of Linwood, Mayor Michael Collins of Margate, Mayor Lance Landgraf of Ventnor and several others.

Much of the discussions of wind power over the past year has centered on the potential impact on marine mammals. While federal experts have said there was no evidence of harm to whales or other mammals, many wind power critics saw a string of beached whales over the winter as confirmation of their concerns.

The letter focused on economics.

“While there are myriad serious concerns, as you noted, one of New Jersey’s largest economic drivers is tourism,” the letter reads. “The Ocean Wind One/Two and Atlantic Shores offshore wind projects seek to place hundreds of thousand foot tall towers and turbines off the beaches of Atlantic and Cape May Counties. Atlantic County generates over \$7.7 billion in tourism-related revenue annually with the state realizing over \$800 million in tax revenue. Cape May County generates over \$7.4 billion in Tourism-related revenue annually with the state realizing over \$600 million in tax revenue.”

The potential economic impact could be widespread, and that impact has not been properly studied, the letter continues.





**4 new offshore wind power projects proposed for New Jersey Shore; 2 would be far out to sea**

“It must be determined before these projects are built in the manner proposed if the price to our economy is too high. Finding that out after the projects are built will be too late,” it reads.

On Monday, New Jersey’s Republican leadership asked Democrats to reconvene in Trenton to impose a moratorium on offshore wind development.

Senate Republican Leader Anthony M. Bucco and Assembly Republican Leader John DiMaio cited concerns from shore communities.

“We hope you will follow through on your promise to address these concerns and immediately reconvene the Legislature so we can reach a bipartisan solution to these critical issues facing our residents,” they **wrote** to the Democratic leaders.

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