

San Francisco Chronicle

March 3, 2021

OPINION

Offshore wind can give California more renewable energy and well-paying jobs

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Californians have struggled through an unending series of crises over the past year. Although we've pulled together to protect our families and neighbors from the coronavirus, our state has tragically lost more than 50,000 lives, along with massive COVID-induced economic setbacks and the disappearance of more than a million jobs. Another devastating fire season, meanwhile, fueled by extreme temperatures that strained our power grid, has served as a reminder that our electric system will need to be much stronger as our state gets hotter. And that was before the days-long blackouts in Texas showed us how bad things can really get.

With vaccines being rolled out and this summer's heat just months away, it's time to start thinking about how we're going to encourage economic recovery and energy resilience with a focus on creating stable, lasting career opportunities for working Californians.

The good news is, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do both — 20 to 25 miles off California's coast, where our state has access to one of the world's greatest sources of renewable energy: offshore wind. A proposed bill, AB525 (Chiu), would put the state on the path to go and get it, along with the thousands of high-skilled, well-paying local jobs that would come with it.

California already has lots of renewable energy, of course, the vast majority of it built by the California Building Trades, which has helped make our state a global leader in utility-scale clean power, from solar and onshore wind to hydroelectric, geothermal, and pump storage. California's Trades have built 26 gigawatts of solar alone — the equivalent of 11 nuclear power plants. More than a third of our state's energy is now produced from renewable sources, and California has the aggressive goal of transitioning to 100% clean energy by 2045.

Last summer's heat waves and power outages showed, though, how much more there is to do — highlighting the desperate need to complement existing base load and renewable resources with additional power, especially in the evening hours, when the sun goes down.

This is where offshore wind comes in.

According to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, there is enough wind energy potential off California's coast to produce 112 gigawatts of energy — more than 1.5 times the state's total energy consumption.

With California looking to aggressively decrease carbon emissions, energy demand is only going up, as we use electricity to power everything from our cars to our homes and hospitals: According to a joint energy agency study produced last year, the state will need to double or triple its deployment of clean energy over the next two decades to power the economy. The same study concluded that at least 10 gigawatts of offshore wind would be needed to cost-effectively approach this target.

AB525 would launch a new offshore wind industry at scale, combining climate benefits with a major boost to the economy, including 14,000 new annual construction jobs at the height of construction — making clean energy and a skilled workforce a central part of the state's energy future.

Supported by a broad coalition of clean energy, labor, and environmental groups, this new legislation sets a state goal of producing at least 10 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2040, while directing state agencies to plan for large-scale offshore wind development. The bill also sets a shorter-term target of 3 gigawatts by 2030.

There are real questions to be answered about how to make offshore wind a reality, from identifying the best sea-space for development to investing in upgraded port infrastructure. AB525 directs the state to start planning now, while applying what we've learned from offshore wind efforts in other parts of the country. President Biden issued an executive order in January calling for a "doubling" of offshore wind production, and seven East Coast states have set targets for 29 gigawatts of offshore wind — jump-starting 16 new offshore wind projects and attracting \$1.3 billion in private sector investments in transmission infrastructure, manufacturing facilities, and supply chain development.

California has a similar opportunity to launch a next-generation clean energy industry — while also helping reboot the economy in the wake of COVID-19 by encouraging private investment in California and creating middle class blue collar jobs.

There is work to be done to get this right — and to get this energy online. It's time for California to harness the wind.

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