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The Central Coast is on its way to becoming the nation's clean energy capital

Assemblyman Jordan Cunningham is sponsoring legislation that would require CA to set offshore wind energy goals.

Morro Bay has been proposed as a site for offshore wind turbines similar to this one off the coast of Japan. KOJI SASAHARA ASSOCIATED PRESS



BY JORDAN CUNNINGHAM

The Central Coast has an idyllic climate with ample sunshine; a world-class university and research institution; two great community colleges with programs to train the next generation of skilled workers; an already-existing, experienced workforce; room for smart growth; ample coastline and open ocean; and multiple tie-ins to the statewide power grid.

In short, the region is uniquely suited to be the hub of burgeoning clean energy technologies. Our lives rely more upon electricity than ever. Witness the rapid growth of electric vehicles, cloud computing or homebuilding. It's not just these market-based changes that will force us to increase our power supply. The state also has its own clean energy mandates. Under current law, California will need to procure [60% of its energy from renewable sources](#) like solar, wind and geothermal by 2030.

However, as evidenced by last summer's rolling blackouts, meeting even current power demands has been difficult. Producing enough green energy to meet future demand will be tougher. The only way we can both meet our clean energy goals and add electrons to the grid to meet growing demand is to get creative. That means exploring offshore wind and small-scale nuclear as potential sources of generation. It also means developing energy storage infrastructure, like pump storage and battery storage, to help store power during low-demand, high-supply times.

The Central Coast is in a position to harness the creativity needed to solve the state's complex energy needs. We have the engineering and research talent at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo; we have the workforce training capabilities at Cuesta College and Hancock College; space to house a growing workforce and industry; we have a region anybody would love to call home; we have a workforce trained in the energy sector; and we have the capability to tie directly into the state's power grid without building new transmission lines.

In addition to all of our built-in advantages, we're already leading the way in the development of two new technologies. Over the past several years, local, state, federal and military leaders have worked to identify areas off the Central Coast to build the West Coast's first offshore wind farm. Last month, those efforts began paying off. On May 25, the federal government announced it would be opening [300 square miles of ocean off the Central Coast](#) for an offshore wind farm. If fully developed, this site could generate more than 26,000 gigawatt hours (GWh) annually — nearly 50% more than Diablo Canyon, which [generates 18,000 GWh annually](#).

On the state side, we're working on legislation [\(AB 525\) that would require the California Energy Commission to set offshore wind procurement goals](#). Offshore wind technology, while still relatively new, has proven to work in places like the United Kingdom. Over the last 20 years, Britain has brought nearly 96,000 GWh of offshore wind power online — and has plans to build out an additional 260,000 GWh by 2030. As a result of their investments in offshore wind, Britain has cut their carbon emissions by 44% since 1990 — the most of any industrialized nation. There are also plans underway to build the world's largest [lithium battery energy storage facility](#) in Morro Bay. This facility would be able to store and distribute roughly 600 megawatts of electricity.

Both the offshore wind project and battery storage project would be able to tie directly into the state grid at either Diablo Canyon or Morro Bay Power Plant and create plenty of local jobs. California's electrification presents a huge opportunity for us locally. We have all the pieces in place to lead in creative energy production and technology development. By working together as a region, the Central Coast can continue to attract investment, create head-of-household jobs, help move our state closer to its clean energy goals, and fully realize its potential as the nation's clean energy capital.

Assemblyman Jordan Cunningham (R-Templeton) represents the 35th District, which includes San Luis Obispo County and a portion of Santa Barbara County.