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My Word | The winds of change are blowing

By **JEFF HUNERLACH**

A single blade of an offshore wind turbine can span the length of a football field, and once assembled, wind turbines can stand as tall as the Washington Monument. The floating platforms that offshore wind turbines stand on can require thousands of miles of support lines and transmission cables.

For construction of California's first-ever offshore wind energy project in Humboldt County to begin, state officials must confront a central challenge in the investment of this urgently-needed clean energy resource — upscaling California's ports to accommodate the offshore wind industry's broad range of operations.

As a member of the California State Delegation Offshore Wind Study Tour to Europe, I was able to see the immense scale of offshore wind projects and supporting port capacity we need to fully realize offshore wind on the West Coast. Transporting these colossal components to sea will require highly-specialized boats and state-of-the-art modern ports. Constructing the turbines, boats and revitalizing the port will create booming industries, and Humboldt County's strategic location between wind lease areas in Central California and Southern Oregon presents us with the opportunity to become an important regional center for the state's offshore wind industry.

Immediate action is necessary to begin planning for port revitalization, ship and turbine construction — and here in Humboldt, we have the chance to reinvigorate the local economy. More often than not, many residents have to travel hundreds of miles to find work to sustain their families. By investing in the offshore wind industry, we can create many high-quality, family-sustaining jobs and help deliver affordable, reliable and pollution-free energy to millions of households across California amid the ongoing volatility of fossil fuel prices.

As a district representative for Operating Engineers Local 3, I know firsthand that we have a skilled and trained labor force ready to embark on this development. And for those seeking highly-skilled, family-sustaining jobs, there are currently apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training programs to fast-track their careers and help improve the quality of their lives and those of their families.

The offshore wind industry is already unfolding at Humboldt's shores, as Crowley Wind Services, a renowned marine logistics and offshore wind developer, opened its first West Coast office in Eureka. This comes on the heels of a Harbor District staff presentation detailing the range of needs in the state's offshore wind industry from the U.S.-built support vessels to operations and maintenance crews, turbine manufacturing facilities and also floating turbine platforms. This development stands to create greater cohesion between ports along the state's coastline, including the Port of Long Beach, which will help reduce transportation and logistics costs, mitigate supply chain risks and disruption and also foster innovation to improve efficiency.

A conservative estimate in an economic assessment found that the revitalization of the Port of Humboldt Bay could create as many as 830 local jobs and more than $130 million in industry output over five years, representing a small portion of the overall benefits the industry will contribute. Port revitalization projects are not only key to spurring the domestic clean energy supply chain but also providing career experiences in the growing renewable energy industry. A partnership between the Yurok Tribe, Cal Poly Humboldt, labor and the College of the Redwoods will launch an initiative to invest in and prepare local Native and non-Native communities for the offshore wind workforce, equipping them with knowledge and skills to benefit from the clean energy economy of the future.

Turbine design companies are already innovating to tap into the state's offshore wind resources with Aikido Technologies (San Francisco), FloatHOME (Emeryville) and OCG Wind Full Cycle (Oakland) being three of nine teams that have progressed to phase two of the Department of Energy's national FLoating Offshore Wind ReadINess (FLOWIN) competition. These teams are breaking new ground to help tackle critical manufacturing and supply chain challenges and realize the commercialization of floating offshore wind turbine technology through efficiency and design improvements to minimize costs and risks for utility-scale deployment.

The alignment of federal and state goals, incentives, and policies has laid a solid foundation for Humboldt County to emerge as a national leader in the offshore wind industry. Floating offshore wind turbine projects are essential to meeting California's grid needs while reducing reliance on fossil fuels and securing affordable and reliable energy. By leveraging these projects, we can advance equity in the workforce, revitalize port communities and boost the economy to keep the wind on our back and ensure a just transition to clean energy.

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