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Offshore wind is California's ticket to manufacturing jobs

By **Rick Chavez Zbur**

After more than three decades of sustained job losses in the manufacturing sector, Californians are starting to build stuff again. Manufacturing jobs have not only rebounded, but actually surpassed pre-pandemic levels.



The economy-wide transition to clean energy that is already well underway in California offers a golden opportunity to build on these gains in manufacturing. And while we are just getting started on our path to offshore wind in California, we have big plans. California policymakers envision offshore wind energy meeting 25% or more of our state's electricity needs by mid-century.

Anchoring offshore wind supply chains in California can create exactly the kind of family-sustaining, blue-collar jobs our state needs. I remember the tens of thousands of aerospace jobs created in California during World War II and the Korean Wars. If we want to capitalize on a very similar opportunity created by offshore wind, we need to act now and invest in the right policies to ensure offshore wind's success for our economy and our workers. There are two ways we can do this before the legislative session ends.

The first is a bill that I authored, AB 3, which explores the opportunity to manufacture 50% to 65% of the components of offshore wind energy projects in-state. With this bill, California can be sure we are among the first states to plant seeds that can grow into a flourishing offshore wind manufacturing sector.

Meeting California's target of 25 gigawatts of offshore wind energy will require hundreds of offshore wind turbines, the tallest of which may stand as tall as the empire state building. Manufacturing the components of these offshore wind turbines is set to become a multi-billion dollar business – one that we should capitalize on to create high-quality manufacturing jobs.

It will also require upgrading building infrastructure to transport and assemble these giant turbines, which will also be a big job creator. In addition to exploring in-state manufacturing, AB 3 would direct state agencies to develop a plan to enhance seaport readiness, allowing ports to put in place the infrastructure needed to become manufacturing and assembly hubs.

The second piece of policy that needs to get passed in order to clear the way for offshore wind energy is central procurement, or ensuring a consistent market for the mass renewable energy produced by offshore wind turbines. We can do this through a bill introduced by my colleague, Asm. Eduardo Garcia, (AB 1373) or similar policy being discussed in the Governor's office.

In either case, central procurement would allow the state to act as a centralized buyer for this clean energy, helping clear one of the most challenging hurdles of the initial phase of investment by providing an assured market for developers.

This buying power will help ensure large-scale resources are actually built. Offshore wind will create so much power, the developers cannot get by on piecemeal commitments from individual utilities. Having the state serve as the centralized buyer to secure power in large quantities that it can then dole out to the utilities will be critical in bringing costs down.

Offshore wind farms are just starting to come online here in the US, but they are already spinning off the coast of Europe and China in impressive numbers. In California, we just recently held our state's first offshore wind lease sale and are gearing up for a second in the Gulf of Mexico later this month – great first steps towards investing in this pollution-free energy resource.

As we build California's clean energy economy, we have the potential to create the kind of high-quality manufacturing and construction jobs that create a pathway into the middle class. Let's start by setting offshore wind up for success by passing AB 3 and central procurement policy.

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