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October 15, 2024

Christine Guhl-Sadovy
President
New Jersey Board of Public Utilities
44 South Clinton Avenue
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Dear President Guhl-Sadovy,

I am writing today to bring to your attention the legitimate concerns held by many of my constituents about the construction of massive offshore wind turbines off the coast of New Jersey and the accompanying high-voltage power cables, commonly referred to as the prebuild infrastructure (PBI) set to run through Sea Girt, Manasquan, Wall and Howell.

It is a positive sign that the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) hosted a public meeting on October 1st about this issue, but this meeting occurred far too late and only after significant public attention on the issue. Based on the comments shared during this meeting, the BPU failed to assuage or address many of the fears and concerns held by the public.

I encourage the BPU to set up a mechanism by which complaints and concerns from the public can be seriously heard and sufficiently answered. Additionally, public comment on the project is of little effect if the decision is a foregone conclusion and valid local concerns are ignored by the BPU- much like the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has done for comments on the wider offshore wind ocean industrialization campaign.

Given the lack of responsiveness from federal executive officials, it would be very disappointing and dangerous should state officials, similarly, fail to address citizens' genuine concerns about the cost and safety of these projects.

In a hearing on August 13th hosted by my colleague, Rep. Jeff Van Drew, former Commissioner of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, Dianne Solomon, noted her concerns about BPU's review of offshore wind. According to Mrs. Solomon, when choosing to override local concerns to construct prebuild infrastructure for the Ocean Wind offshore wind farm, BPU failed to develop a "full, complete and transparent record" for its review. She continued that this was a "contentious if not contested matter" and that the BPU "should have referred these matters to the Office of Administrative Law to develop the

record.” According to her this would have been common practice when reviewing contentious energy infrastructure, but in the case of Ocean Wind this was not done.

Following BPU’s approval, Ocean Wind was cancelled by its developer citing inflation and the steep costs associated with its construction. This was a massive failure on the BPU’s part. A proper review should have concluded the project was not feasible. Is it any wonder people want answers after seeing the hasty approval of Ocean Wind which ultimately turned out to be a mistake?

While this is concerning on its own, it is not the only matter eroding public confidence in the cost and safety of these projects. Also of note is the recent failure of a Vineyard Wind turbine off the coast of Nantucket. The collapse of this turbine, which dumped large fiber glass shards and foam chunks onto Nantucket beaches, should be ringing alarm bells here in New Jersey as well. The silence from the BPU and the state following this event worried the public that, next time, instead of the developer abandoning a project—already approved by BPU—local beaches will end up covered in fiber glass and NJ taxpayers will be left on the hook for decommissioning ocean industrialization projects abandoned by the private developer.

Additionally, following BPU’s stakeholder meeting I have heard from many residents who are still concerned despite BPU’s presentation on a host of issues, including the dangers associated with PBI construction sites potentially exposing existing groundwater contamination plume from the White Swan/Sun Cleaners Superfund site.

Even without a catastrophe, taxpayers could be in trouble without proper oversight. The Leading Light Wind project, which is proposed to run through the PBI has requested a stay of its approved BPU order and may not be able to proceed due to lack of a viable wind turbine supplier. Furthermore, the manufacturer of the blades for the previously mentioned Vineyard Wind has announced it will begin laying off workers, citing industrywide challenges for offshore wind and troubling economics underlying the turbine supply chain. These economic uncertainties likely signal a higher cost for these projects than anticipated—and higher electricity rates for New Jersey citizens.

It is my hope that BPU will work in good faith with residents of Manasquan, Sea Girt, Wall, and Howell to address these concerns related to the PBI for offshore wind projects to ensure that BPU and the State of New Jersey are not sleepwalking into a disaster.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress