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South Quay Marine Terminal ready for offshore wind industry - by Roberto DaSilva

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Roberto DaSilva
City of
East Providence

The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The realist adjusts the sails.

Offshore wind energy is a rapidly growing industry and Rhode Island workers are well-positioned to benefit. In 2016, the state launched the first offshore wind farm in the United States off the coast of Block Island, creating enough power to electrify 17,000 homes. Today, larger windfarms are in development off the state's coast. In 2018, Rhode Island went to market to buy 400 megawatts of wind power, resulting in the forthcoming development of Revolution Wind, a wind farm expected to generate enough clean energy to provide electricity to more than 400,000 homes in Rhode Island and Connecticut by 2023.

Incentivizing offshore wind development amongst stakeholders is the promise of thousands of well-paying jobs. Offshore wind could create 83,000 new jobs in the U.S by 2030, according to the American Wind Energy Association. Offshore wind creates jobs within many sectors, including supply chain manufacturing, construction, maritime and logistics. The sheer technical experience needed to construct offshore wind farms creates a high demand for skilled workers.

Wind turbines feature steel towers hundreds of feet tall that require high-precision manufacturing and assembly. To construct the Block Island Wind Farm, more than 300 local, unionized workers across a slew of trades were employed to assemble and install the facility. The average wage of workers on this project was competitive being roughly three times the state's minimum wage.

For communities with high offshore wind employment, the industry can be a game changer, as demonstrated in the cities of Grimsby and Hull in the United Kingdom. These coastal cities were economically depressed prior to offshore wind, dependent on unviable fishing and manufacturing industries. By leveraging preexisting factories and port infrastructure to support the offshore wind

industry, the area revived itself. Due to the offshore wind industry, unemployment in Grimsby and Hull was cut in half from 2012 to 2017.

Given Rhode Island's proximity to impending offshore wind development and its preexisting port infrastructure, the state is optimally positioned to capitalize on the economic opportunity offshore wind presents.

One optimal site could be the South Quay Marine Terminal, a proposed offshore wind port facility located in the city of East Providence alongside the Providence River. The site is attractive given its easy access to deep-water channels and its proximity to Providence Port. This site was originally constructed and permitted to serve as a port facility, but unfortunately was dormant for nearly 40 years. Smart development of this underutilized asset would produce significant benefits for East Providence and the regional economy.

The current momentum for energy renewables is building, and offshore wind presents an exciting opportunity for Rhode Island workers to secure well-paying, sustainable jobs.

East Providence, with its unique waterfront development opportunities, is positioned to be a key stakeholder in the development of offshore wind industry both in the state and the nation.

Roberto DaSilva is the mayor of the city of East Providence.

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