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Investing federal stimulus funds to keep RI at the forefront of America's offshore wind industry - by Steven King

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Steven King

With over \$1 billion in federal American Rescue Plan Act money still to be invested, Rhode Island has a unique opportunity to live up to our nickname of the "Ocean State". At Quonset, we have a detailed plan to invest a portion of these funds in a way that modernizes our economy, creates hundreds of good-paying, green jobs in the offshore wind industry and builds the infrastructure necessary to support the development of renewable energy to power our state.

I recently spoke with the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce's Transportation Committee about the Quonset Development Corp.'s (QDC) proposal to invest \$78.5 million in federal infrastructure funds at the Port of Davisville. This proposal would preserve existing international port business, while positioning Rhode Island to take advantage of the opportunities for economic growth and environmental stewardship presented by the burgeoning offshore wind industry.

QDC's proposal builds on the success at Quonset Business Park's Port of Davisville, Rhode Island's only public port and one of North America's Top 10 auto importers. In 2019, prior to the pandemic, the Port had 224 ship calls and imported a record-breaking 296,706 vehicles. Our plans allow us to build on that success while adding capacity to prepare for the offshore wind opportunities of the future.

This \$78.5 million proposal will fund a portion of the Port Master Plan, which is an ambitious \$234.5 million, multi-year effort. \$120 million has already been secured for ongoing work to rehabilitate Pier 2, dredging the Port berths, and beginning upgrades to Pier 1. Project elements of the Master Plan that will create opportunities for offshore wind include:

1. Upgrading port infrastructure to handle offshore wind components (blades, tower, foundations, etc.) which are extremely heavy - the blades alone weigh up to 27,000 pounds.
2. Constructing new docking space to support Crew Transfer Vessels (CTVs) and Support Offshore Vessels (SOVs) for offshore wind construction projects.

3. Building a new multi-purpose Pier at Terminal 5 to add capacity at the Port to support both Davisville's international automobile imports and all aspects of offshore wind farm construction.
4. Adding 19 acres of land leased from the Rhode Island Airport Corp. and making landside terminal laydown space improvements.

QDC's proposal will preserve nearly 1,700 existing jobs at the Port of Davisville while supporting the creation of 1,100 new jobs in the offshore wind and marine shipping industries. Construction activity at the Port would immediately create hundreds of jobs.

The Port of Davisville is positioned to become the regional leader in the offshore wind industry. Its location positions Rhode Island to benefit from offshore projects from Maine to New Jersey. There are currently 2,510 MW of offshore wind projects proposed in the region (for context, the Block Island Wind Farm is only 30 MW). These projects will require all available port space in New England— including Davisville. This investment in Davisville will allow Rhode Island to capture a significant share of the new wind energy jobs.

Rhode Island has a first mover advantage having played a key role, both at Davisville and ProvPort, in the construction of the first offshore wind farm in the United States off Block Island. Investing in the Port of Davisville's Master Plan builds on that advantage and aligns with Rhode Island's priority of alleviating the negative impacts of climate change. It is an investment that confers benefits equitably and inclusively across Rhode Island's population and is sustainable over the long term. It will improve Rhode Island's economy and quality of life in a fundamental way. It will also help our state respond to the negative economic, health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to create a better future for all.

World-class infrastructure, like that envisioned by this proposal, has been key to Quonset's success. In our role as Rhode Island's leading engine of job creation and economic development, Quonset Business Park is home to over 200 companies and 12,200 jobs, with wages 19% higher than the Rhode Island average. Quonset generates \$1.3 billion in income annually for Rhode Island families, as well as \$136 million in state and local taxes and PILOT payments. Today, one of every six manufacturing jobs in Rhode Island is at Quonset.

We are committed to equitably making Quonset accessible to Rhode Island's workforce with support to the Quonset Express, a daily free express bus service operated by the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority to bring urban residents to work at Quonset and the Port.

QDC is a leader in renewable energy initiatives - 100% of QDC's Business Park operations are powered by renewable energy.

With consistent support from our partners in government, business, and the electorate, Quonset is a window into what is possible in Rhode Island. Over the years, Quonset has leveraged \$700 million of public infrastructure funds into nearly \$3 billion in private investment across the Business Park.

This new proposal will allow for a similar return on investment as we keep Rhode Island at the forefront of America's offshore wind industry and build on Rhode Island's "first in the water" advantage.

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