

4 hours ago

## Commentary: Floating offshore wind is a new industry by Maine, for Maine

By Dana Connors, Maine State Chamber of Commerce

I have spent most of my career helping to strengthen and grow Maine's economy, and I'm thrilled with the opportunities presented to Maine today.



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Yes, there are challenges – but the good news is that our core assets, our people, our natural resources and the infrastructure every economy needs are stronger and more valuable than ever.

Most prominent among these opportunities is to make Maine an international hub for a new and disruptive energy technology, one built in Maine by Maine workers, one essential for the world to meet the renewable energy demands of the climate challenge: floating offshore wind.

The patented VolturnUS floating offshore wind technology created by the University of Maine puts Maine in a potential technological and manufacturing position of dominance unequalled since Maine built most of the nation's clipper ships in the 1850's, and the creation of the paper industry in Maine in the early 20th century. Maine's floating offshore wind opportunity draws on the lessons taught by these predecessors, which shaped Maine life for decades.

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First, Maine's technology, despite some policy delays, remains ahead of the world's competing technologies and can achieve Maine's goal of a manufacturing hub if Maine acts quickly. That's because virtually all world offshore wind investment to date, \$70 billion in Europe and a contracted \$100 billion on our East Coast is built on foundations in shallow waters (less than 150 feet): almost none of it floats. But that development has exhausted available shallow waters. The rest of the world's offshore wind must float, in deeper waters, including the vast Gulf of Maine, the Pacific coast and Asia.

Second, the patented Maine technology is designed to be low cost, built mostly with Maine materials, on land, and then launched dockside and towed to project locations, with surprising speed. Building the massive hull platforms, weighing 10,000 tons, 300 feet in diameter and composed of cement, rock and some steel, will employ hundreds of workers. Maine is on the verge of building and launching its Monhegan full scale turbine test project and plans a nine- to 12-turbine research array far at sea soon, so Maine is moving rapidly. These projects will build capability to scale up to build scores of these massive hulls every year and add the towers, turbines and blades to projects to be towed all over the world.

Third, Maine can leverage advantages like those that propelled Maine with clipper ships and paper: plentiful indigenous materials at low cost, a strong workforce, a winning technology, a coastline with deep water ports and a culture wed to the sea. Earlier industries like shoes and textiles, now almost all gone, lacked access to plentiful essential natural resources to construct, launch and ship the product at low cost, and most importantly, lacked ownership of the intellectual property, the true source of long-term wealth. The University of Maine patents will be licensed where contracted with the fees benefitting Maine. This is how a society creates wealth to sustain future generations.

Finally, this floating technology and future industry are not fleeting, untested ideas. The University of Maine, three governors and multiple legislatures since 2006, the U.S. Department of Energy, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, the citizens of Maine in referendum and numerous other entities have rigorously tested the underlying policies, hull design, construction processes, energy production capability and other aspects of the technology and industry potential.

Over these nearly 15 years, offshore wind has expanded geometrically worldwide, lowering production costs dramatically and achieving spectacular production levels, factually disproving most doubters. The University of Maine has licensed its Monhegan project to New England Aqua Ventus, comprising affiliates of two international companies which account for nearly 25% of world offshore wind projects. Floating offshore wind construction in Maine is no longer only a vision: floating offshore wind construction by Maine, in Maine, is a genuine, live opportunity that amplifies the very best of our heritage and can actualize our hopes for Maine's future.

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Gov. Janet Mills says, “Maine can’t wait.” I agree, and I would add, we would be unwise to delay, lest the opportunity of this century pass Maine by.

### About the author

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