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Why Republicans suddenly hate offshore wind

GOP concerns about wind energy and whale deaths nearly tripped up the big energy and permitting bill. Democrats say their arguments "ring hollow."

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Republican Rep. Jeff Van Drew, who represents a coastal New Jersey district, has expressed concern about the effects of offshore wind. | J. Scott Applewhite/AP Photo

E&E DAILY | In the weeks before their massive energy package reached the House floor, some Republicans were aghast about marine mammal deaths — and blamed the burgeoning offshore wind industry.

They said the rush to build out offshore wind in the Atlantic has been killing whales at a rapid clip and they tried to use the legislation to address their concerns.

"Like the canary in the coal mine, the recent spate of tragic whale deaths shed new light and increased scrutiny to the fast-tracking of thousands of wind turbines off our coast," Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) declared at a packed field hearing in New Jersey earlier this month.

The concern among Republicans was great enough that it cast some doubt on whether the energy package, [H.R. 1](#), the "Lower Energy Costs Act," would have enough votes to

"Disinformation shouldn't dictate policy," American Clean Power Association CEO Jason Grumet said.



A photo of a dead whale is seen at a Republican-led hearing on offshore wind this month in Wildwood, N.J. | Heather Richards/E&E News

One of the key witnesses from the March New Jersey field hearing, David Stevenson, has been a consistent opponent of offshore wind projects ([E&E Daily](#), March 17). The organization he works for, the Caesar Rodney Institute, has received funding from American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers. CRI is also connected to the State Policy Network, which receives money from Koch network foundations.

House Natural Resources Chair Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.), one of the chief drivers of H.R. 1, laughed off the idea that dark money groups were potentially driving the anti-offshore wind push.

"I find that amazing," he said during an interview at the Republican retreat in Orlando, Fla., earlier this month. "It doesn't change the fact that there are dead whales washing up on the shore. You would think the environmental groups would be raising the red flag. But they are turning a blind eye."

Westerman and several other Republicans interviewed for this story called Democrats guilty of double standards.

"Had that happened in the Gulf of Mexico, everybody would be blaming the oil industry," he said.

"The only thing that is changing on the East Coast is the wind industry. I don't know if that's affecting the whales or not, but we should probably do some kind of a study to find out what is causing those whale deaths."

Westerman's remarks were before the energy bill hit the House floor. But by Wednesday, Rep. Byron Donalds (R-Fla.) was willing to point the finger at the energy transition.

"The Green New Deal is on the backs of marine life," he said. "It's something that, in this rush to renewables, Democrats frankly ignore."

Interest 'suddenly springs up'

The whale issue could put Democrats in a difficult spot.

At a recent hearing, Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.) pressed an oil executive whether he cared about whale deaths — specifically blaming seismic surveys.

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