



Connecticut Port Authority: Repairing the ship while sailing it

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The same day we read about the Connecticut Port Authority's questionable procurement and expenses for their office's interior design, our neighbors in Rhode Island were rappelling down the exterior of a bridge over the Narragansett Bay as part of a wind-turbine job training demonstration.

And last month, within days of our governor rightfully calling for the resignation of the port authority's board chair, New York's governor was announcing the creation of 1,600 anticipated jobs and \$3 billion in expected economic activity as a result of the largest offshore wind procurement in the country.

At a time when our state and the city of New London face real economic challenges, we cannot afford to be crippled by mismanagement, misdirection, and mistrust, which could leave our state trailing behind on investing in renewable energy and job creation. We must get our house in order now.

As Connecticut's treasurer and one of the newer board members on the Connecticut Port Authority, to say the state of affairs at the port authority has been unfortunate and frustrating would be a gross understatement.

Sunshine is the best disinfectant. We owe a debt of gratitude to New London's local leadership, reporting by The Day, and concerned citizens who've brought issues about the port authority's missteps to light. In fact, the port authority's issues have raised many other questions about the governance and effectiveness of other quasi-public agencies. Now, more than ever, we need competence within our governing bodies and confidence in the decision-making processes if Connecticut is going to leverage these quasi-public entities to help move our economy forward.

Without question, the port authority's fiscal and management issues warrant further scrutiny and corrective action. I applaud Governor Lamont for demanding a closer look at the port authority's financial practices and management while an independent accounting firm audits the books and makes recommendations. I also appreciate the leadership of Mayor Passero and the New London legislative delegation; and the speed of the transportation committee to conduct an oversight hearing at the request of state Sen. Osten.

As elected leaders, we need to take a hard look at the port authority's board structure and management oversight. We need further reforms that advance good governance and inclusive decision-making, while ensuring that the city of New London has a seat at the table and their port has diverse economic opportunities for decades to come.

While poor judgment and weak management at the authority has shaken public confidence, let's not let it undermine our commitment to a promising future with offshore wind power. There is no question that advancing wind power development in the region makes sense and has broad support: it can help create jobs, lower electricity costs for residents, and help reduce Connecticut's dependence on fossil fuels.

Nearly every state along the Atlantic seaboard is hoping to cash in on the jobs and economic benefits associated with offshore wind farms. It's quickly becoming an East Coast gold rush and Connecticut should get its fair share.

With that said, Connecticut should be thoughtful and transparent as we move forward. New London deserves to have their voice heard, which includes the maritime community. Now is the time to right the ship and bring greater transparency and accountability to the port authority and the decisionmaking process.

Our greatest obstacles to success are not among us, here in the State of Connecticut. There will be hard decisions to make, but this state can come together and figure it out. We always do.

The real alarm may be with the administration down in Washington, where just last week, the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management delayed approval for the nation's first major offshore wind project in Massachusetts, which is in its final stages in the permitting process.

To put our port authority challenge into perspective: we have to repair the ship while continuing to sail it. There's too much at stake for Connecticut and New London's economic prosperity, so we have to get this right.

Shawn T. Wooden is the Connecticut state treasurer.