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# Spinning Negativity

## Discourses of Delay on Offshore Wind in the 118th Congress

Brown University Climate and Development Lab

Institute at Brown for Environment and Society

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# Frontmatter

This report was written and published by **Isabella Garo** and **Timmons Roberts**.

**About the Climate and Development Lab:** Brown University's Climate and Development Lab (CDL) is a student-faculty think tank based at the Institute at Brown for Environment and Society and was founded in 2010 as an experiment in engaged learning and scholarship. The CDL seeks to produce timely, accessible, and impactful research that informs more just and effective climate change policies. We work with leading actors in government, civil society, and the media around the world in the attempt to bring about change by identifying and filling important research gaps and generating ideas for action on climate change. The CDL fosters transformational learning experiences by equipping Brown students with the tools to effectively shape policy and explore the intersections between climate change, public policy, and global governance.

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**Disclaimer:** This report represents an initial phase of research into offshore wind opposition in the United States Congress, produced by a team of undergraduates in Brown University's Climate and Development Lab. The statements, views, opinions, and information contained in the report are personal to the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Brown University.

## Executive Summary

Our review and analysis of anti-offshore wind rhetoric in the 118th Congress from January 1 to July 16, 2023, uncovered 441 claims about why offshore wind and other forms of renewable energy are bad. Most fall under categories identified in the emerging scholarly literature on "discourses of climate delay." Many of them rise to the level of misinformation, falling into tactics identified in the FLICC categorization of misinformation tactics. Several do not fall into these typologies, being specific to the U.S. Congress or emerging types.

March 16th, 2023 Field Hearing on Offshore Wind, Wildwood, New Jersey. Credit: David Matthau

In the main section of the briefing, we review five major claims that have been leveled against the effort to deploy offshore wind on the East Coast of the United States. Three argued against wind itself. These are that offshore wind development is responsible for whale injuries and deaths, that harm to military readiness and navigation will be unmanageable, and that tourism and fishing industries will be irreparably harmed by the development of offshore wind. Two more sets of claims attack renewable energy more generally. Those were that being an intermittent source of energy, wind turbines (and other renewable energy sources) are unreliable and therefore not helpful to fighting climate change, and that offshore wind is bad because it is associated with Joe Biden and the environmentalist elite.

For each major claim, we review who raised it, and what they claimed. We go on to examine what the claims were based on (Were they biased? Were facts cherry picked?). We then connect each to the frameworks mentioned above-- What types of established discourses are these examples of (Emphasizing the downsides, Appealing to Well-being, Cherry-picking)? Finally, we provide initial refutations of the claims, examining what are the problems with the claims. A full set of the 441 claims is provided in a supplemental online Appendix.

## Introduction: a Storm Surge of Opposition

After lengthy study, consultation, and permitting processes spanning over a decade, finally in late 2023 offshore wind was beginning to be installed at scale off the East Coast of the United States. The process here has been laborious, halting, and slow. For about two decades, a massive effort has been undertaken to study the value and the constraints of installing offshore wind turbines off the East Coast of the United States, and many adjustments have been made to reduce the negative impacts of their installation and operation. The siting of one early project off of Cape Cod was dragged out for over a decade and finally canceled.[1] States up and down the coast have new targets for the reduction of climate warming gasses, based on updated science of what's needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.[2] A number of studies modeling how states could meet those targets have settled on offshore wind as a uniquely valuable potential resource for these states since a world-class quality wind resource is a very short distance from the region's large cities.[3] But while Europe has deployed over 5,400 large turbines and is installing hundreds more per year, the U.S. had two small pilot projects spinning, totaling just seven turbines.[4] Sharply increased costs had led to uncertainty and delay in construction.[5]

The paradox of offshore wind in the USA is that just as deployment is beginning, a surge of opposition is arising, threatening to derail the ability of states and the nation itself to reduce their dependence on oil, gas, and coal, whose burning is heating up the atmosphere. This opposition is sprouting up in a growing number of coastal towns, in a series of groups utilizing social media and protesting state and local boards and councils.[6] While those groups appear to have sprung up spontaneously and be "grassroots" in origin, they appear to be receiving an "information subsidy" and tactical input from right-wing think tanks, some of whom are in turn funded by the fossil fuel industry.[7]

In a previous research briefing, we analyzed the claims of one such organization in Rhode Island, categorizing many of their arguments as "discourses of climate delay" and using common misinformation tactics.[8][9][10] Additionally, a new study by our lab provides a first map of the key organizations and individuals seeking to block offshore wind in the northeast United States.[11]

Starting in late 2022, we saw similar arguments being made about offshore wind in the U.S. Congress; we know of no systematic study that has been undertaken. Our review here covers both chambers of Congress, but we found that nearly all of the anti-wind claims are being made in the House, with very little in the Senate. Republicans took over the House in 2022, while the Senate remained in Democratic hands. Coastal conservative districts in New Jersey and Florida appear to host the leading critics, and House districts are smaller so the representatives are more reliant on coastal votes and donations. The attack on wind fits with the Republican agenda of slowing or stopping the deployment of renewables and expanding fossil fuel leasing. Climate change and energy policy are mobilized as a wedge issue to peel off voters by making Democrats seem out of touch with the everyday concerns of regular Americans.[12]

We found the relevant hearings and set out to read the transcripts. In 2023, a series of hearings were organized by House Republicans to voice what they claim is a tidal surge of opposition to wind. In March 2023, Representative Jeff Van Drew hosted a field hearing in New Jersey. (At the same event the year before in the same room, Van Drew was *for* offshore wind.) The House Natural Resources Committee and a subcommittee held a Feb 28th Hearing on the Building US Infrastructure Through Limited Delays and Efficient Reviews Act of 2023. On February 28th, the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee held a hearing on Transparency and Protection of American Energy. In the hearing, Republicans called witnesses from the National Mining Association and the Independent Petroleum Association of America. The House Oversight Committee hearing on February 8th included a lobbyist from the coal-producing Navaho Energy Transition Company.

Our review and analysis of anti-offshore wind rhetoric in the 118th Congress from January 1 to July 16, 2023, uncovered 441 claims about why offshore wind and other renewables are bad. Most fall under categories identified in the emerging scholarly literature on "discourses of climate delay".[13] Many of them rise to the level of misinformation, falling into tactics identified in the FLICC categorization of misinformation tactics developed by Cook, Coen, and colleagues.[14][15] Several do not fall into these typologies, being specific to the U.S. Congress or emerging types.

Block Island Wind Farm, which includes five of the US's seven original turbines. Credit: Neil Ever Osborne

## Methodology

This study utilized the Congressional Record online search tool, using [offshore wind] in the search bar.[16] We did not use quotation marks, which means documents shown contained both the terms "offshore" and "wind," but not necessarily "offshore wind." For the 118th Congress, we searched all documents available on the site: legislation, committee reports, meetings and publications, the Congressional Record (floor speeches), and House and Senate Communications from January 1 to July 12, 2023. We then manually checked each document for claims about climate change, renewable energy, offshore wind, and fossil fuels. Any documents that did not contain such claims were then excluded from the study. For larger documents we keyword searched for [offshore], [wind], [renewable], and [green]. Passages that contained claims about offshore wind were included in the study.

Hearings/markups that were recorded but not transcribed were listened to in full; only relevant sections (i.e. those containing claims about climate change, renewable energy and offshore wind, or fossil fuels) were transcribed and included in this study. Non-transcribed meetings were only included if they were attached to a written document that appeared during the search. For example, if a written amendment contained the terms "offshore" and "wind" and that amendment was debated in a markup that was not transcribed, the amendment's presence in the search would have enabled the discovery of the markup and thus its inclusion in this study. One further hearing was added to the study that was not found through searching the Congressional Record: the New Jersey Field Hearing on March 16th, 2023.[17]

## Two Frameworks for Interpreting Claims

Once all relevant documents/passages were collected and all relevant meetings transcribed, each was analyzed using the two frameworks and each negative claim was tagged. Once this process was completed, every claim about wind was collected into one document (see Appendix).

This brief examines arguments made in hearings and floor speeches of the 118th Congress, using existing peer-reviewed frameworks on climate misinformation. We categorize several example arguments from 2023 Congressional speeches using Lamb et al.'s (2020) "Discourses of Climate Delay" framework, which outlines four overarching misinformation strategies used to delay climate action. We also apply Cook's (2020) "FLICC" framework to point out additional misinformation strategies in their claims. We use these frameworks to examine whether (1) arguments used in Congress draw from the well-documented strategies of climate disinformation groups; and (2) to understand how the effort seeks to undermine scientific facts, misrepresents sources, and overemphasize the negative impacts of offshore wind while obscuring the significant ecological, social, and economic costs of *failing* to transition to renewable energy.

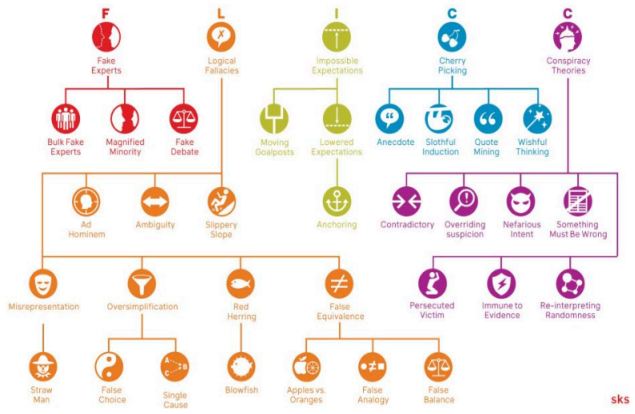
**Discourses of Climate Delay:** This framework organizes discourses of climate delay into four overarching categories: *Emphasize the Downsides, Redirect Responsibility*, *Push Non-Transformative Solutions*, and *Surrender to Climate Change*. In our analysis of arguments in Congress in 2023, we find witnesses and Congresspeople frequently deploy three types of discourses:

- **Emphasize the Downsides:** This discourse emphasizes the downsides of climate action, presenting the costs of mitigating climate change as greater than the costs of inaction. Three types of this argument are common: *policy perfectionism, appeal to well-being, and appeal to social justice*.
- **Push Non-Transformative Solutions:** This discourse pushes for the use of energy sources that fail to effectively mitigate climate change, such as technologies that are not yet viable on a large scale (fusion), or

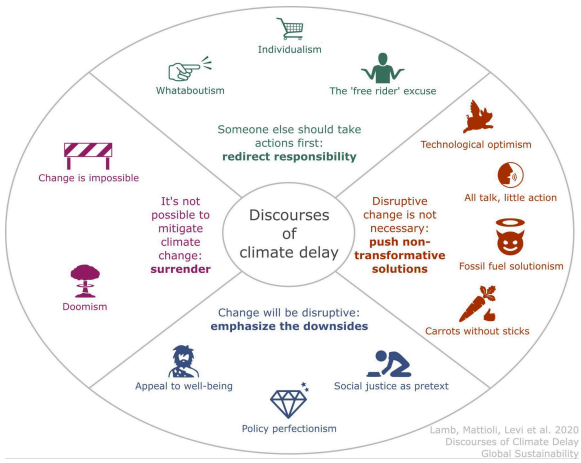
still require the combustion of fossil fuels (natural gas and even coal).

- **Redirect Responsibility:** This discourse redirects responsibility from the actors most responsible for climate change (individuals, corporations, and state actors who have historically been the biggest polluters) to "purposefully evade responsibility for mitigating climate change." They often imply that others should take the lead before we consider action ourselves.

**Frameworks for Interpreting Claims**




**FLICC (Cook 2020)**




**Discourses of Climate Delay (Lamb et al 2020)**

**FLICC: A Framework:** The "FLICC" framework outlines five overarching techniques of science misinformation that can be heard in Congressional hearings:

- **Fake Experts:** Fake experts are spokespeople that convey the impression of expertise on a topic while possessing little to no relevant expertise.
- **Logical Fallacies:** Logical fallacies occur in arguments where the premises or starting assumptions do not logically lead to the conclusion.
- **Impossible Expectations:** Impossible expectations demand unrealistic or unattainable standards of scientific proof.
- **Cherry Picking:** Cherry picking involves selectively focusing on particular data that leads to a conclusion different from the conclusion arising from all available data.
- **Conspiracy Theories:** Conspiracy theories involve the suggestion of secret plans to implement nefarious schemes and are a common theme in climate misinformation.

In addition, we observed a significant amount of partisan attacks, and unsupported claims (lies). Neither framework included a category directly including these, so we have added a new set.

## Findings: 441 Claims Over Six Months

Our review and analysis of anti-offshore wind rhetoric in six months of the 118th Congress uncovered 441 claims about why renewable energy is bad. Of these claims, 165 are specific to offshore wind. Though this is a moderate number, it is illustrative of the novelty of anti-offshore wind rhetoric in Congress. By comparing these claims to the 276 claims found about renewable energy generally, we were able to examine the unique language used by offshore wind opponents to sow doubt and cause delay.

Of the **Discourses of Climate Delay**, three appeared frequently in Congressional hearings. 128 times speakers **Emphasized the Downsides** of renewable energy, including 87 appeals to well-being; this was equally common in both offshore wind and general renewable opposition. 80 times witnesses and Congresspeople pushed **Non-Transformative**

**Solutions**, such as the idea that fossil fuels are the solution to climate and energy issues (fossil fuel solutionism); this was significantly more common in offshore wind-specific opposition. 22 times speakers attempted to **Redirect Responsibility** through an argument known as whataboutism, where one claims others--like China and India--should be acting first; this type of claim was used exclusively in opposition to renewables generally.

Of the **Misinformation Tactics** identified by Cook et al., the most common were 85 cases of **Conspiracy Theories**, including 49 instances of nefarious intent (Rep. Crenshaw (R-TX): "We have to introduce this bill because, bewilderingly, energy security has been under relentless attack by radical leftists and the Biden administration."); offshore wind opponents were slightly more likely to utilize this tactic than those opposing renewable energy generally. **Cherry Picking** data or facts also occurred 49 times, with offshore wind opponents more likely to do so. There were 77 instances of **Logical Fallacies**, with the most common being confounding correlation with causation, documented 29 times (for example, blaming wind surveying for whale strandings); logical fallacies were observed at roughly the same rate in both offshore wind and general renewables opposition. Another logical fallacy commonly found was red herring, of which there were 22 instances (Rep. Harris (R-MD): "I don't know why we don't have discussions of that, why we're still discuss- why we're still discussing a technology that's literally centuries old. I mean windmills are centuries old technology, shouldn't even be talking about it."). Some important claims didn't fit well in these two frameworks, so we developed new categories. Most frequent of those was **Partisan Association**, that wind is Biden's or Democrats' policy, which was heard 80 times. 73 claims we characterized as **Untrue or Unverified**. Witnesses and Congresspeople resorted to **Fearmongering and Exaggeration** 31 times. **Appealing to Anti-Foreign Sentiments** took place 26 times. **NIMBYism** and **Fantastical Claims** were each heard in 9 cases. Straight out **Climate Denial** was heard 6 times, a high number given this happened in 2023, but its proportion of only 6 of 441 claims shows that the tactics of those opposing climate action have largely moved on from direct denial of the science of climate change to attacking climate solutions. It is also interesting to note that, while climate denial was utilized in discussions surrounding renewable energy and fossil fuels generally, it was never used in discussions about offshore wind.

**Prominent Pushers of OSW Disinformation in Congress**

**Representative Jeff Van Drew (R-NJ)**

Credit: Reuters/Joshua Roberts

March 16th NJ Field Hearing:
"Our energy is going to be controlled by the rest of the world."
"So we have the classic case of big companies joining with big government, colluding together. You know they like to use that word collusion, this is collusion, colluding together, not telling the truth, not caring about our health, our environment, our jobs, our tourism, our economy, our future, our children, our grandchildren."

H.Amdt.167 to H.R.1:
"Proponents of offshore wind claim that it is a necessary step in order to transition the United States to clean energy. Yet, oddly enough, BOEM's own environmental impact statement admits that offshore wind will have no impact of any substance on combating climate change and will, in fact, increase greenhouse gas emissions."
"I beg to differ with the proponents who claim that offshore wind will boost our ecotourism along the coast. Would you choose to go to a shore that consisted of thousands of industrialized wind turbines that rise to nearly 1,000 feet tall?"

**Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ)**


Credit: Ken Cedeno/UPI

March 16th NJ Field Hearing:
"...[Lapp] asks, 'Where's the substantial review?' Nowhere to be found. All of us up here believe serious aggressive and independent analysis of the ocean-altering impact of these projects is so egregious that they must be at the very least -- the wind farms approval process has been shoddy at best."
"...especially the size of the one that Governor Murphy… and President Biden are forcing on us and this is using the coercive power of the state…"
"This is a cover-up in real time that we're experiencing. You know, there's no transparency…"

H.Amdt.166 to H.R.1:
"Remember, Mr. Chairman, these are about 1,000 feet tall. They could topple like dominoes."
"Mr. Chair, like canaries in coal mines, the recent spate of tragic whale and dolphin deaths and a well-founded suspicion that geophysical surveys, including the use of sonar may be a contributing cause…"

## Analysis: Five Major Claims, Fifteen Arguments Against Offshore Wind and Renewable Energy

In this main section of the briefing, we review five major claims that have been leveled against the effort to deploy offshore wind on the East Coast of the United States: three sets against wind itself, and two more that generally attack renewable energy. For each, we review who raised it, and what they claimed. We go on to examine what the claims were based on and connect each to frameworks described above. Finally, we provide initial refutations of the claims, examining what are the problems with the claims? We do not pretend to provide complete or systematic refutations of the claims, but do seek to point out some of the weaknesses of how the claims are being presented in Congress. Further analysis on these and other claims about OSW is available at the website RealOffshoreWind.org.

### OSW Major Claim 1: Marine Animal Disruption and Deaths

**THE CLAIM:** Wind turbines and surveying the ocean floor in preparation for building them kills whales.

**WHO MADE THE CLAIM:** During a New Jersey field hearing on March 16th, **Bob Stern** from the organization **Save Long Beach Island** stated "We've encountered nine whale strandings in a three-month period. The annual average is seven. So we've seen nine in three months, which is obviously an unusual spike in the number of whale strandings and the only- just looking at this logically, the only difference offshore recently has been now the presence of five to six vessel surveys out there that use high intensity noise equipment to characterize the seabed." This point has been reiterated by Congressmen, such as **Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ)** who during debate on the legislation H.R.1 claimed that there is a "well-founded suspicion that geophysical surveys, including the use of sonar may be a contributing cause" to the "recent spate of tragic whale and dolphin deaths." During a Natural Resource Committee Markup on March 9th, Representative Hoffman (D-CA) introduced an amendment that would have prohibited oil and gas leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf. In response, **Representative Tom Tiffany (R-WI)** stated "I am looking at the synopsis here, that this is just oil and gas. Would this include wind? You said where you drill, you spill, right? Where you sail, you may lose the whales, is what we're hearing on the east coast. Does this include wind if it's killing some precious species?"

**STARTING FROM FACTS:** In recent months, there has been a surge of concern surrounding the number of whale deaths on the east coast. Though they are certainly distressing, these deaths are part of a years-long trend of unusual mortality events (UMEs) for a number of whale species, such as the UME declared for the North Atlantic Right whale which began in 2017.[18] However, many organizations have implied or asserted that surveying activity for OSW projects are to blame for these deaths.

**PROBLEMS WITH THE CLAIMS:** This assumption is flawed in that it is based in the **logical fallacy "correlation vs causation."** Because these whale deaths happened in the same time frame in which OSW surveying was taking place, they have assumed that there must be a causal relationship between the two events. However, there is no evidence that this causal relationship exists. In a statement by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection, the Department asserted that they were not aware of any "credible evidence that offshore wind-related survey activities could cause whale mortality."[19] The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration has made similar summations of the science.[20] An explanation they offered was warming waters due to climate change that may have compelled the whales to hunt in areas closer to land, where ship traffic is higher.

Additionally, **Bob Stern**'s claim is an example of **cherry-picking**. He compared the number of recent whale deaths to the average number of whale deaths over the last 20 years (as he clarified later in the hearing). Using the average number of deaths over 20 years takes this information out of context and ignores the higher number of whale deaths that have occurred in recent years due to UMEs that are unrelated to OSW.

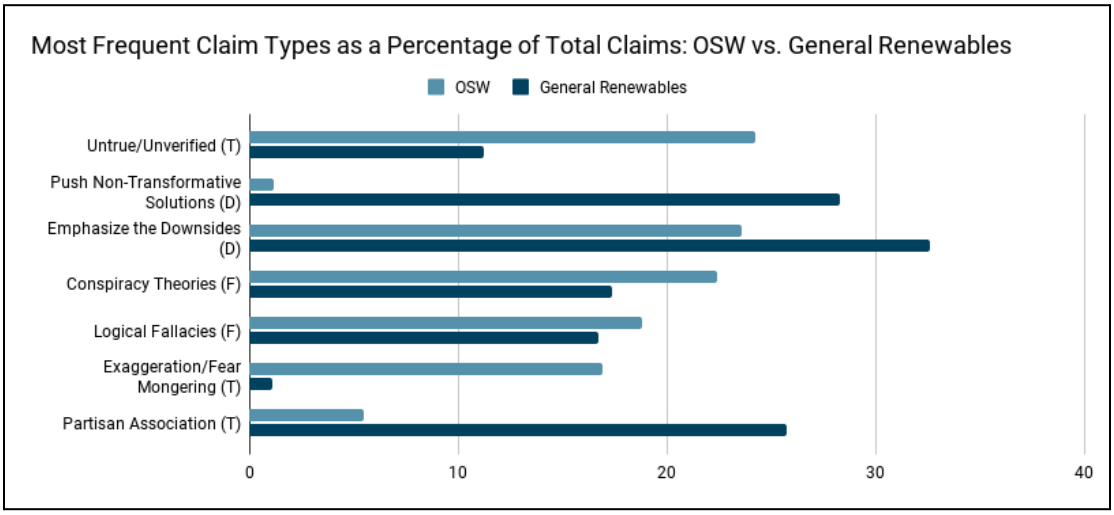
**ON HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEYING, SEISMIC TESTING, AND AIR GUN USE:** Firstly, hydrographic surveying is not specific to offshore wind. Surveying our coasts is a necessary step in a number of activities, including port and harbor maintenance, coastal engineering (e.g. beach erosion mitigation efforts), and nautical chart development.[21] Secondly, **Save LBI** has cited the harmful effects of air gun use as a reason to halt all OSW surveying.[22] However, while air guns are used during surveying for offshore oil and gas projects, they are not used for OSW projects.[23]

**NOISE FROM PILE DRIVING AND TURBINE OPERATION:** Opponents of OSW have repeatedly cited noise and its potential harm to marine life as a reason not to move forward with OSW projects. During the March 16th field hearing, **Representative Smith** claimed that pile driving would "cause catastrophic noise levels," and **Bob Stern** asserted that pile driving "gives off an intense noise and that process is- goes on for several years…"

**PROBLEMS WITH THE CLAIMS:** Pile driving would only take part during a portion of the construction process -- and not during times of year when endangered Right Whales are in the area. OSW developers employ a number of mitigation measures to prevent or reduce the harm caused to nearby marine life. Pile driving begins more quietly and increases in intensity, so animals can move away.[24] Second, developers are deploying "bubble curtains." Tubing emits bubbles that act as a "buffer zone" to reduce the impact of soundwaves.[25] Finally, pile driving is used for a number of construction projects, including bridges and piers;[26] to single out pile driving as it pertains to OSW appears to be another delay tactic. In sum, though it is fair to be concerned about the potential impacts of pile driving, to frame the issue as an exclusively OSW-related problem -- or to call its impacts "catastrophic" -- is dishonest.

**CLAIMS ON NOISE CAUSED BY TURBINE OPERATION:** During the March 16th field hearing, **Bob Stern** claimed, "We did some estimates. They showed the noise from the operation was going to permeate out to very large distances before it dropped down to a safe level. Knowing that the powers that be would not believe us we hired an acoustics company to look at the full project… what

Table 1: Differences in frequency of negative claims between OSW specifically and renewables generally. For example, **pushing non-transformative solutions** was much more common when discussing renewables as opposed to OSW, appearing in 28% of general renewables claims. D=Discourses of Climate Delay; F=FLICC framework. T=This study.




it showed was that the noise from the operation would extend out from shore 93 miles…"

**PROBLEMS WITH THE CLAIM:** Stern is referencing a study solicited by Save LBI from a firm called Xi Engineering Consulting, as seen on these slides from Save LBI's website.[27] The study itself does not appear to be peer-reviewed or published in any reputable academic journal and these results appear to be *at significant odds with peer-reviewed research*. Take for instance this figure[28] from an article published in the Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, which is informed by several peer-reviewed studies.[29] This figure suggests that not only do offshore wind turbines rarely exceed 130 dB, but their noise levels drop to 90 dB within 1 km. The study concludes that "source levels are at least 10–20 dB lower than ship noise in the same frequency range" and generally "well below ambient levels." This is starkly different from the noise levels reported by Stern and Save LBI, which would suggest a noise level of 145 dB near the wind farm and only a 5 dB drop per 100 km. Such a vast discrepancy suggests either mishandled, distorted, or **cherry-picked** data. Assertions are entirely inconsistent with what the conclusions of the article cited. The peer-reviewed evidence suggests that anti-OSW actors have **exaggerated** potential impacts using **cherry-picking** and **fake experts**.

## OSW Major Claim 2: Military Readiness and Navigation

**THE CLAIM:** As pointed out by many of the individuals quoted in this study, offshore wind farms will pose a new navigational challenge for marine vessels operating in their vicinity. A popular talking point pertains to radar interference caused by OSW turbines, and that there is no research or preparation by the military to handle this new challenge.

**WHO MADE THE CLAIMS:** During the March 16th New Jersey Field Hearing, **Representative Smith (R-NJ)** claimed that "...mitigation techniques for marine vessel radar have not been substantially investigated, implemented, matured, or deployed. Where is that in all of this pushed by the governor and by Biden…" In that same hearing, **Seafreeze lobbyist Meghan Lapp** stated, "In 2018 I went to Coast Guard headquarters to discuss this issue with the chief of the office of navigation systems. As I placed several offshore wind radar interference interference studies on the table the captain was shocked, completely unaware of the issue. Upon leaving that meeting when we asked 'what should our next steps be,' Coast Guard Personnel responded 'we don't know what to tell you this is literally the first we've heard of this.'"

**STARTING FROM FACTS:** Marine and aviation vessels utilize radar systems for navigation, and the rotating metal blades on wind turbines can cause

radar interference by "creating clutter, reducing detection sensitivity, obscuring potential targets, and scattering target returns" which can "inhibit target detection, generate false targets, interfere with target tracking, and impede critical weather forecasts," in the words of a Sandia Labs Report.[30]

**PROBLEMS WITH THE CLAIMS**: Though it is not an exaggeration to say that OSW turbines pose a navigational challenge, it would be inaccurate to suggest that nothing has been done to study and mitigate this interference. The Department of Defense has known about the radar interference capabilities of wind turbines for quite some time. In 2010, the White House asked various federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, to participate in a working group to address wind turbine interference with surveillance technologies.[31] This resulted in the establishment of the Interagency Field Test and Evaluation (IFT&E) Program, which conducted a series of flight tests to investigate short- and long-term mitigation strategies. In that same year, Congress created the DoD Siting Clearinghouse, which acts as the voice of the DoD to "assess potential mission compatibility impacts of energy-related projects… and explores mitigation options while preserving military mission readiness and operations."[32]

Later, in 2014, the federal government established the Wind Turbine Radar Interference (WTRI) Mitigation Working Group, which includes the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, the Federal Aviation Administration, NOAA, and BOEM.[33] Through collaborative efforts with researchers, the Group was able to develop an official mitigation strategy in 2016, with a follow-up strategy established in 2023.[34 35 36] Additionally, the Coast Guard reviews applications for offshore renewable energy installations and evaluates potential impacts as described in the Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular No. 01-19.[37] All these efforts to research and mitigate wind turbine radar interference are only the tip of the iceberg; needless to say, suggesting that our military is unaware of this issue or has done nothing to address it is completely **untrue**.

**CLAIM TWO ON DEFENSE AND OSW:** Another talking point concerns DoD exclusion zones and what it means for an OSW project to be leased within them. During the March 16th New Jersey field hearing, **Bob Stern of Save LBI** stated, "Just to amplify on the, uh, the defense issue, uh the first half of the site off LBI from about nine to 14 miles out is labeled by the Navy as a DoD exclusion zone. We tried to contact the DoD to find out what that means. We could not get any information, maybe it's classified, I don't know." Additionally, House Resolution 239, submitted by **Representative Van Drew (R-NJ)**, mentioned, "Whereas the Department of Defense's Offshore Wind Mission Compatibility Assessment ruled much of the offshore east coast a 'wind exclusion zone', for defense and defense training reasons…"

**PROBLEMS WITH THIS CLAIM:** These actors appear to be implying that, because certain lease areas are located within these zones, that these projects are then completely incompatible with military operations and thus must be prevented. However, this is an example of a **red herring**. The DoD has completed a number of OSW Mission Compatibility Assessments and has used the results of these assessments to classify offshore areas as one of the following: Unrestricted, Site-Specific Stipulations, and Wind Energy Exclusion Zone.[38] Of the areas assessed on the Atlantic coast, only 27% are classified as Wind Energy Exclusion Zones; the other 73% permit OSW development with either no restrictions or site-specific stipulations.[39] It seems that focusing on the presence of Wind Energy Exclusion Zones is intended to distract and frighten people into opposing any and all OSW projects.

### OSW Major Claim 3: Tourism and Fishing

**THE CLAIMS:** Many communities along the Atlantic coast rely on tourism and fishing for their local economy, and OSW opponents often play on fears of local economic collapse to build community

opposition to OSW projects. An area of particular focus is the perceived impact that the view of turbines on the horizon might have on local tourism. In defending an amendment to H.R.1, the Lower Energy Costs Act, **Representative Luna (R-FL)** claimed, "People travel from all around the world to our pristine beaches, not to see windmills." When proposing a different amendment to this bill, **Representative Van Drew (R-FL)** stated, "I beg to differ with the proponents who claim that offshore wind will boost our ecotourism along the coast. Would you choose to go to a shore that consisted of thousands of industrialized wind turbines that rise to nearly 1,000 feet tall?" In the March 16th New Jersey field hearing, **Former New Jersey Superior Court Judge Mike Donohue** claimed, "Ørsted's own information related to Ocean wind 1 and published on their website indicates that only 85 percent of visitors to the Jersey Shore will return after windmills are installed 15 miles offshore."

**PROBLEMS WITH THE CLAIMS:** The representatives are touching on a concern shared by some in coastal communities: that even a dozen or more miles away, turbines may decrease the number of visitors. Donohue is referencing a factsheet from Ørsted titled *Ocean Wind 1: Tourism*.[40] The factsheet references a survey done of New Jersey residents, and it states, "More than 70% of voters say they vacation at the Jersey Shore and 85% of those would still continue to vacation there with wind turbines 15 miles off the coast." This does not take into account non-New Jersey residents who vacation on the NJ coast. The factsheet also states that "75% of New Jersey voters think that tourism in the Jersey Shore communities would stay the same or even increase as a result of wind turbines off the coast of Atlantic City." Lastly, the factsheet references a study done on the impacts on tourism of the Block Island wind farm, stating, "Researchers at the University of Rhode Island found that turbines at the Block Island Wind Farm in Rhode Island have been linked to increased tourism on the island."

The Final EIS for the Ocean Wind project asserts that there would be a moderate to minor beneficial impact on tourism.[41] It is also worth noting that wind farms have the potential to attract ecotourism as some would be interested in traveling to see the wind turbines (as seen with the increase in tourism to Block Island, RI). A study done by Montclair State University confirmed the potential benefits of ecotourism in Ocean City, NJ.[42] Needless to say, the idea that OSW puts the coastal tourism industry at "grave risk," as stated by **Representative Smith (R-NJ)** at the March 16 field hearing is a conclusion based on **cherry-picked** data. Luna's statement is based on a **logical fallacy**. Just because people do not come to the beach to see windmills does not mean that they will stop coming to the beach if there are wind turbines on the horizon. Secondly, Van Drew's statement is pure **NIMBYism** (NIMBY = Not In My BackYard). Simply stating that you would not wish to see turbines on the horizon is not an adequate reason to prevent OSW infrastructure and eliminate a major part of society's transition off fossil fuels. Energy facilities all have downsides.

**CLAIMS ON FISHING:** One frequent claim asserts that BOEM, OSW developers, and other involved organizations ignore or do not engage with fisheries during the planning process. In proposing an amendment to H.R.1, **Representative Van Drew (R-NJ)** stated, "Plus, BOEM has admitted that commercial fisheries will have to--this is important--completely abandon their fishing grounds as a result of offshore wind." During the March 16th New Jersey field hearing, **Representative Smith (R-NJ)** stated, "The devastating impact on commercial and recreational fishing is largely ignored." In that same hearing, **Daniel LaVecchia of LaMonica Fine Foods** claimed, "[We] were completely ignored with total disregard for our recommendations to construction and operation."

A fishing boat navigates a wind farm. Credit: Ørsted

**PROBLEMS WITH THE CLAIMS:** It is true that OSW turbines increase navigational complexity by causing radar interference and increasing the number of physical obstacles that must be maneuvered around. Some areas will prove impossible for *some* types of fishing boats to navigate, and it is important to acknowledge the complexity and uncertainty of this topic and the concern for commercial fisheries' livelihoods. However, claims that local fisheries have been completely ignored, or that their industry is at risk of being completely decimated by OSW, are greatly **exaggerated** or **untrue**. Ocean planning processes that include fishers have gone on since 2008 in some locations. Federal agencies and OSW developers have made substantial concessions in wind farm siting and layout. For example, as a result of input from fisheries, five OSW leaseholders in New England agreed to adopt a uniform turbine layout on a 1-nautical mile grid in spite of the fact that this would cost them 30% of the area's potential energy production.[43] Other lease areas have been removed from consideration entirely, including parts of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New York.[44] Meetings with local fisheries have been an integral part of the planning process, and any potential impacts on local fisheries are analyzed as part of each project's environmental impact statements.[45] As the final EIS for Ocean Wind explains, "It is conceivable that some of the small number of fishing operations that derive a large percentage of their total revenue from areas where Project facilities would be located would choose to avoid these areas once the facilities become operational… However, it is estimated that the majority of vessels would only have to adjust somewhat to account for disruptions due to impacts."[46]

Luckily, mitigation strategies exist (and are still being developed) to reduce these impacts. For example, the Rhode Island Navigational Enhancement and Training Program provides RI fishermen and for-hire vessels with a free training session on navigating wind lease areas in addition to more advanced navigation equipment.[47] For those who lose revenue in spite of these mitigation measures, funds are being negotiated to make up the difference, such as the fisher compensation fund established by Vineyard Wind.[48] However, these funds are currently established on a case-by-case basis. Regardless, claims that the commercial fishing industry is "facing annihilation," as phrased by lobbyist **Meghan Lapp of Seafreeze** in the March 16th field hearing, are highly speculative and sensationalized, placing all the blame for the industry's struggles on OSW.

### Renewables Major Claim 1: Intermittency

**THE CLAIMS:** During this research, we encountered distorted claims that not only concerned OSW, but renewable energy technologies more generally as well. A popular claim was that intermittent energy, which includes wind and solar, was unreliable and even ineffective. The connection between "intermittent" and "unreliable" was succinctly made in a House Natural Resources Committee oversight hearing on February 13th in which **Representative August Pfluger (R-TX)** stated "They are impacting green energy, if you want to call it green, intermittent, unreliable energy." Another example of this argument occurred during a March 28th House debate on H.R.1 in which **Representative Tim Burchett (R-TN)** stated "The Biden administration, unfortunately, and the Democrats in Congress keep pushing these Green New Deal-style agendas. Honestly, Mr. Chair, [renewables] just don't work. There hasn't been a new development in solar in over 20 years, and windmills are just what they are. The wind doesn't always blow and the sun doesn't always shine…" During a February 8th oversight hearing in the House Natural Resources Committee,

**Matthew Adams, Vice President and Senior Tax Counsel for Navajo Transitional Energy Company**, stated "But, wind and solar cannot replace the tens of thousands of megawatts of baseload power supplied by our coal-fired power plants. Coal provides more than one-third of the electricity generation in the world and is a critical source of baseload generation." Representatives can use this argument to advocate for an "all-of-the-above" approach to energy rather than a full transition to renewable energy. An example of this phrasing can be found in the March 28th House debate on H.R.1, where **Representative Byron Donalds (R-FL)** stated "[H.R.1] is an all-of-the-above strategy… as opposed to funding these Green New Deal think tanks and these Green New Deal energy consortiums that haven't proven that they can deliver baseload power to address the needs of the American people."

**PROBLEMS WITH THE CLAIMS:** No proponent of renewable energy suggests that one source can on its own provide continuous supply--rather all are combined on the electrical grid, including grid-scale energy storage, nuclear, and other peak-load supplies during times of shortage.[49] During decades of transition, oil and gas peaker plants can be retained for that purpose.[50] Renewables can be used to sharply reduce use of fossil fuels during the times they are available, and advances are being made all the time on storage and non-fossil energy sources.[51]

**CLAIM TWO: OUR FOSSIL FUELS ARE CLEANER:** Representatives have found other creative ways to advocate for the expansion of domestic fossil fuel production. A popular argument is that, due to the US's environmental standards, our fossil fuel production is "cleaner" than that of other nations, and therefore it would reduce emissions to produce that energy at home. This has been asserted by both public and private actors; during a Natural Resources Committee oversight hearing on February 8th, **Kathleen Sgamma, President of the Western Energy Alliance**, stated "Calling the oil and gas industry polluters is just simply misinformation… we produce oil and natural gas more sustainably and more environmentally protective than any other country in the world." Some Representatives have taken this argument a step further; rather than claim that our fossil fuels are clean*er*, some Representatives have referred to our fossil fuels as simply "clean." One such example comes from **Representative Doug LaMalfa (R-CA)**, who in a March 28th House debate on H.R.1 stated "We must not forget that, in the clean energy conversation, America's energy is cleaner than other top producers that will keep producing, like China and Russia. American energy is clean energy." Others have taken this claim even further, removing it from its original "ours vs theirs" context, as **Representative Troy Balderson (R-OH)** illustrated during the same debate: "In this country we are blessed with an abundance of clean and affordable energy resources capable of meeting our energy needs for many generations to come."

**PROBLEMS WITH THIS CLAIM:** These private and public actors claim that American fossil fuels are "clean" because they are comparatively clean to fossil fuels from other nations. However, this argument is contingent on a **false dichotomy** in which the only two energy sources are domestic fossil fuels and foreign fossil fuels. Of course, this is not the case; renewable energy results in far less emissions than the burning of fossil fuels from any nation (see above). This can also be considered **cherry-picking**, as this argument only considers pollutants emitted during fossil fuel production and ignores the upstream and downstream emissions produced from extracting, transporting, burning the fuels and disposing of wastes. This is a **logically flawed** argument that ignores the existence of the alternative of renewable energy, while painting a false portrait of "clean" fossil fuels. It is intended to mislead the public by downplaying the dangers of fossil fuels and the need for renewable energy, while **appealing to their economic and patriotic sensibilities**.

## Renewables Major Claim 2: Biden's Climate Policies, Inflation, and Environmentalist Elites

**THE CLAIMS:** In another attempt to portray the energy transition as harmful, ineffective, and unnecessary, Representatives have argued that recent inflation is a direct result of the Biden Administration's energy policies. During a Natural Resources Committee oversight hearing on February 8th, **Representative Tom McClintock (R-CA)** stated "If you deliberately were to set out to destroy the prosperity of working Americans, is there a more effective way to do that than dramatically restrict mining and drilling, and then divert these limited resources from their most economically productive uses to the ideological hobbyhorse of the woke environmentalist left?" In a March 28th debate on H.R.1, **Representative Garret Graves (R-LA)** reiterated this argument: "It is happening because my friends across the aisle have refused to produce American energy. It is a supply and demand issue. This happened when they gained power. The day the President of the United States was inaugurated, Madam Chair, gasoline prices in my home State were as low as a $1.74 a gallon."

**PROBLEMS WITH THE CLAIMS:** These Representatives use **conspiracy** language, **appeal to well-being**, and **partisan association**. Firstly, the Representative claims that those advocating for an energy transition are "deliberately" attempting to "destroy the prosperity of working Americans," which is an unfounded accusation of **nefarious intent**. They attempt to **appeal to the well-being** of Americans by asserting that the energy transition will "destroy" their "prosperity." Lastly, the Representative portrays the energy transition as purely "ideological" and only desired by the "woke environmentalist left," a clear attempt to demonize the energy transition to his conservative base.

The Representatives above have confused **correlation with causation**. The United States is not the only nation currently struggling with high inflation rates; in fact, as of July 2023, the United States actually had the lowest rate of inflation across the G7 nations.[52] There are several reasons that countries across the globe are faced with rising costs, including the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain issues, the war in Ukraine, and price gouging by major fossil fuel corporations and retailers.[53] None of these are the result of Biden's climate policies. Though some legislators have argued that the energy supply chain disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine are reason enough to expand fossil fuel production, our continued reliance on fossil fuels will only leave us vulnerable to similar disruptions in the future. A truly energy-secure nation will not have to rely on energy imports from other countries, nor will they have to rely on finite resources dug out of the ground; so long as we rely on fossil fuels, we will not have achieved true, resilient energy security.

## Conclusion

As shown above, our review and analysis of anti-offshore wind rhetoric in the 118th Congress from January 1 to July 16, 2023 uncovered 441 claims about why offshore wind and other renewable energy technologies are bad. Most of these claims fall under categories identified in the emerging scholarly literature on "discourses of climate delay." This framework proved helpful, but many specific claims did not easily fall under those categories. Many of the claims rise to the level of misinformation, so the FLICC categorization of misinformation tactics proved useful to identify another set of claims. Several do not fall into these typologies, being specific to the U.S. Congress, or are emerging tropes.

This review of the major types of claims which are being leveled against the effort to deploy offshore wind on the East Coast of the United States revealed a range of claims, many of which fall into five main clusters. Three argued against wind itself. These are that offshore wind development is **responsible for whale injuries and deaths**, that **harm to military readiness and navigation** will be unmanageable, and that **tourism and fishing industries** will be irreparably harmed by the development of offshore wind. The problems with the first claim is that there are no documented cases of whale deaths from wind--rather they are suffering strikes by ships and

entanglement in fishing gear as ocean waters warm and their food species move.[54] The military and Coast Guard have devised workarounds to access areas inside wind farms, and wind developers are providing support to fishing communities to adapt their equipment and methods, or compensation packages are being negotiated. Some evidence from the Block Island wind farm shows that tourism and sport fishing slightly increased since its construction.[55] Renewable energy was attacked as an **intermittent and unreliable source of energy**, and is bad because it's part of the agenda of **Joe Biden and the environmentalist elite**. A full set of the 441 claims is provided in a supplemental online Appendix.

It's important to point out the limitations of this project and therefore the importance of more research in this area. Studies of discourses of climate delay are increasing, but are still nascent. This was a quite small-scale study--more systematic efforts, and those utilizing double-coding and/or machine coding of larger corpuses will be important contributions. Tracing the usage of anti-wind and other anti-renewables discourses will be useful for social science scholars and for actors engaged in seeking to advance climate action in the United States and beyond. We are seeking to improve understanding of the "information subsidy" from think tanks or PR firms to local groups and to political elites, and mapping other types of connections between them. Finally, frameworks for categorizing discourses, including those used here, are still being hammered out, and new discourses are always being developed and deployed. The new categories developed in this study provide useful new directions to examine whether they're being deployed in other contexts.

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