

DeSantis' office quietly backed Florida ban on wind energy

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Gov. Ron DeSantis' office quietly helped write a bill to curtail wind energy in the state of Florida, email records provided to the Tampa Bay Times show.

A version of that bill is now awaiting DeSantis' signature to become law, which will ban [offshore wind turbines](#) in state waters. It also proposes to delete the majority of references to climate change found in state law, the Times previously reported.

Florida lawmakers passed the bills, Senate Bill 1624 and House Bill 1645, in early March, even though the state has no operational wind farms because Florida generally has slower wind speeds. Still, the ban on offshore turbines in state waters puzzled and frustrated opponents, who pointed to the fact that wind energy technology is rapidly improving and [offshore wind energy](#) could become more feasible in the near future. The bills' sponsors, including Sen. Jay Collins, R-Tampa, said if that happens, they'd repeal the ban.

While debate over the bill continued in the halls of the Legislature, DeSantis' office weighed in via email. Cody Farrill, a deputy chief of staff in the governor's office, sent wording related to the wind ban multiple times to Collins and his staff in late January and early February. Some of the emails include Rep. Thad Altman, R-Indianapolis, who, along with Collins in the Senate, sponsored a standalone ban on wind energy. That bill received no hearings, which by February meant it was in danger of dying.

"As discussed with Rep. Altman and Senator Collins, this is the preferred alternative for" the bills banning wind energy, wrote Farrill in one email addressed to the two lawmakers. It included an attachment with proposed bill language that would prohibit "the construction, operation, or expansion of a wind energy facility or an offshore wind energy facility in this state."

That ban on all wind energy in the state is more expansive than the offshore-specific language eventually passed by lawmakers. In mid-February, similar language curbing wind energy was tacked on to a larger

energy omnibus bill that had momentum in the Legislature, and was eventually passed by lawmakers.

The emails were first reported by independent journalist Jason Garcia of the Seeking Rents newsletter. They were provided to the Tampa Bay Times by the Energy and Policy Institute, a utilities watchdog group, which obtained them through a public records request.

The governor's office did not respond to emails asking about his staff's involvement and why the governor was interested in banning wind energy. Collins and Altman did not respond to voicemails seeking comment. Neither did Rep. Bobby Payne, R-Palatka, who sponsored the House version of the energy omnibus bill.

It's unclear whether the governor's office authored the original language that appeared in the first version of the wind energy ban, filed in early January. The first email included in the records request showing Farrill suggesting language tweaks was from Jan. 30.

In some of the suggestions, the governor's office focused on banning wind energy facilities near "critical infrastructure." At one point, a draft borrowed language from a separate law that limits land purchases by residents of certain foreign adversaries—including China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and Venezuela—near similar infrastructure.

"The close involvement of the governor's office in the wind energy ban really seems to indicate that this is another DeSantis culture war in an attempt to win political points as opposed to addressing any serious issues that Floridians are actually concerned about," said Alissa Jean Schafer, a research and communications manager at the Energy and Policy Institute. She said that the attempts to ban wind turbines near critical infrastructure could "lay a foundation for anti-renewables fear-mongering."

During the legislative session, rumors spread that DeSantis was backing the offshore wind ban. A Times/Herald reporter in late February asked Florida House Speaker Paul Renner whether it was something the governor wanted.

"I don't know who wanted it," Renner said at the time, adding that the prohibition made sense for the state. "It's very similar to offshore drilling: Floridians don't want to sit on the beach and look at oil derricks and they don't want to sit on the beach and look at big windmills right off the beach."

DeSantis' office referenced the energy [bill](#) in a news release touting victories from the legislative session, under the section title of "Stopping the Woke." The changes ensure "Florida's energy policy focuses on the viability and availability of energy resources in the state, without subjecting the reliability of Florida's grid to the pressures of the global Green New Deal regime," his office wrote.

Other states, including Texas and those in the Midwest, have embraced wind as a clean source of energy. The power produced by the rotations of wind turbines helps the United States avoid 336 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually, according to the federal government, reducing the pollution that contributes to climate change.

A 2021 report from the nonpartisan Pew Research Center found that most Americans—77%—support expanding wind energy. But pollsters found that a wedge was starting to form, as backing among Republicans and conservative independents had dropped 13 percentage points just since the previous year.

It was the widest partisan gap since Pew started asking about wind power in 2016.

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