

## COMMENTARY

# R.I. stakeholders - public, private and nonprofit - must row in the same direction on blue economy

The blue economy shouldn't benefit only coastal communities or workers with PhDs. Every Rhode Islander should be able to reap its rewards, writes Rhode Island's junior congressman.

By **Gabe Amo** Updated December 6, 2024, 6:00 a.m.



Revolution Wind completed installation of the project's first wind turbine off the coast of Rhode Island in September. REVOLUTION WIND

Rhode Island wouldn't be Rhode Island without Narragansett Bay.

Since the days of Roger Williams and the [Gaspee Affair](#), the bay has been central to our state's identity. But the largest estuary in New England isn't just a key to our past — it's critical to our future.

The bay has spawned industries such as commercial fishing, tourism, and shipbuilding, as well as marine manufacturing, offshore wind, and oceanic research. Leveraging our state's natural strengths, the ["blue economy"](#) is set to usher in a new age of prosperity for workers, small businesses, and research institutions alike.

Estimates show that the blue economy employs more than 36,000 workers in Rhode Island and contributes [over \\$5 billion to our gross domestic product every year](#). Across the country, there are approximately [2 million workers supporting the blue economy who contribute about \\$373 billion to our nation's GDP](#).

In Rhode Island, the blue economy is an answer to [economic blues](#) and a way to [revitalize neighborhoods](#). It helps our state [compete for the jobs of tomorrow](#) and incorporates long-term sustainability and economic development into our planning. Our former governor, Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, has noted that the blue economy is growing ["at nearly twice the rate of the overall US economy."](#)

I wanted to know how Rhode Island's success in the blue economy could be a model for the 129 million Americans who live in coastal areas like ours.

To find out, I talked to blue economy stakeholders across the state to learn more about their efforts and how Congress could help, including nonprofit leaders training union workers pursuing careers in offshore wind, researchers and higher education leaders working to deepen our understanding of the ocean, and cutting-edge manufacturing companies growing their footprints and investing in our communities.

My main takeaway is that the blue economy is truly interdisciplinary. We can weave together these separate strands to unlock opportunities for our state. And we need public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders rowing in the same direction.

But the blue economy shouldn't benefit only coastal communities or workers with PhDs. Every Rhode Islander should be able to reap its rewards.

We do this by directing federal funding toward community organizations - like [401 TechBridge](#) - that scale blue economy start-ups. The critical research they unlock leads to practical applications that strengthen our supply chains.

To support this positive feedback loop, I've introduced legislation that would authorize grants from the National Science Foundation to support ocean science activities. The [Blue Economy and Innovation Act](#) would also allow grant recipients to partner with Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs like Rhode Island's [Ocean Tech Hub](#), so they stay competitive for future grants and funding awards.

At the same time, we also need to further invest in the scientific understanding that is being advanced by government programs like [Sea Grant](#) and [EPSCoR](#), federal programs that support coastal and marine research and broader research. In our state, whether at the Naval War College's Naval Undersea Warfare Center, or at the University of Rhode Island — New England's [top public university](#) — students and faculty are discovering new breakthroughs in climate science and oceanography every day.

Investing in the blue economy means encouraging the best and brightest to stay here in the Ocean State after they graduate. We must fully fund researchers working to address sea level rise and climate change.

It's nearly impossible to go through daily life without using, wearing, or eating something that our blue economy has touched. Growing this economy is about fostering innovation — creating jobs, combating the climate crisis, and making our supply chains more resilient. But it's also about leaning into what makes Rhode Island a unique place to call home.

A little over two centuries ago, Rhode Islanders channeled the mighty Blackstone River to power Slater Mill and jump-start the industrial revolution in our state.

Today, we have an opportunity to lead the way forward for prosperity — this time, in a way that is equitable, ethical, and environmentally conscious for every R.I. resident. The blue economy can be our greatest resource, we just need to adjust our sails.

*US Representative Gabe Amo represents Rhode Island’s First Congressional District. He is a member of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.*

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RIRealtorBrian

12/06/24 - 8:36AM

We have the resources and the people, let's get going!



Prosperity For RI

12/06/24 - 9:33AM

Representative Amo should also help the people of Woodlawn in Pawtucket Save Morley Field. The Blue economy is going to be a part of our future, but so are green spaces in low income communities and Rep Amo is being complicit in the stealing of Morley Field, the last large Green Space in Woodlawn

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