



# GEOTHERMAL RISING POLICY

## POWERING OUR RENEWABLE FUTURE.

**Testimony of Dr. Bryant Jones, Executive Director, on:**

- H.R. 6482, “*Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act*”;
- H.R. 7370, “*Geothermal Energy Opportunity Act*” or the “*GEO Act*”;
- H.R. 7409, “*Harnessing Energy At Thermal Sources Act*” or the “*HEATS Act*”; and
- H.R. 7422, “*Geothermal Cost-Recovery Authority Act of 2024*”.

Wednesday, March 6, 2024. 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

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Good morning Representative Stauber, Representative Ocasio-Cortez, and Members of the House Natural Resources Committee and Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today’s hearing and discuss the potential and opportunity of geothermal energy in our nation's energy mix.

My name is Bryant Jones, and I am the Executive Director of Geothermal Rising, the world’s oldest geothermal association, serving as the main professional and educational organization for the geothermal community in the United States. Our members harness the heat beneath the Earth’s surface for direct-use, geothermal heat pumps, and to generate 24/7 carbon-free electricity, critical to achieving reliable, affordable, fully decarbonized buildings, industries, and power grids. As a 501(c)(3), *Geothermal Rising* (GR) membership includes project developers, service and equipment providers, universities and research groups, government agencies, public utilities, and other stakeholders.

GR’s mission is to “use the earth to save the earth” by tapping into the extraordinary potential of our abundant, stable, and clean geothermal resources. GR’s policy work supports this mission by advancing a comprehensive agenda of geothermal technology-agnostic federal and state-level policies, regulatory work, and general initiatives to accelerate the deployment of all forms of geothermal energy.

Inexhaustible geothermal energy offers a solution to some of our most pressing challenges such as energy reliability and emissions reductions. It is a resource that can generate 24/7 clean electricity, provide heating and cooling for homes and industries, and much more. Frankly, it is an energy source we can’t afford not to invest in. Our work at Geothermal Rising centers on decreasing energy costs, increasing efficiency, promoting a strong geothermal workforce, and contributing to a sustainable planet and energy independent nation.

Currently, in the United States, geothermal power plants have an installed capacity of 3,692 MW, however, this represents only 0.4% of total U.S. utility-scale electricity generation and accounted



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for 1.9% of electricity generation from renewable sources,<sup>1</sup> underscoring the substantial opportunity we have to scale up geothermal energy as we enter this new generation of geothermal technologies and innovation. Geothermal energy provides heating and cooling to less than 1% of the market, again a small market share of a valuable renewable energy source.

The first geothermal power plant in the United States started up more than 60 years ago based on a now mature suite of technologies. Today's newer geothermal technologies leverage the expertise and experience of the North American oil and gas sector and are poised to unleash even more of the United States' geothermal energy potential. Other advantages of geothermal include the domestic coproduction of critical minerals, reduction of geopolitical risks on existing global supply chains, and high paying jobs that directly transfer from the fossil fuel energy sector. Lastly, the United States is well poised to be the hub of technological development and deployment of geothermal energy that can be implemented at home and exported around the world. However, critical to the success of our industry and the broader energy goals of our nation, are legislative innovations to support the nuanced needs of geothermal energy development.

Today, GR is pleased to endorse a number of pro-geothermal bills, the first of which being H.R. 6482, "*Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act.*" H.R. 6482 necessarily provides precise yet comprehensive definitions and clarification to match the diverse activities, technologies, and ongoing innovations in our industry. Furthermore, the bill reinforces the justifiable and reasonable proposition that geothermal exploration projects and covered activities shall not be considered major actions under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The bill also mandates the designation of certain federal lands as priority areas for geothermal leasing, directing more resources and attention to areas with high geothermal potential.

The second bill we wish to endorse is H.R. 7370, the "*Geothermal Energy Opportunity Act*" or the "*GEO Act.*" The *GEO Act* would amend the *Geothermal Steam Act of 1970* with provisions to streamline the processing of geothermal drilling permit applications, while ensuring all environmental documents required under NEPA for authorization approval are met. Geothermal has the lowest lifecycle carbon footprint of all renewable energy technologies and the smallest environmental footprint of *all* energy technologies. Yet, geothermal developers face the strictest permitting processes. While GR appreciates the BLM is working on an administrative categorical exclusion specific for geothermal, we believe it is vital for congressional action to ensure geothermal developers receive the nuanced permitting exclusions under NEPA that are needed to develop and scale the cleanest and most stable energy resource available to us as we continue to transition into a clean energy economy.

Third, H.R. 7409, the "*Harnessing Energy At Thermal Sources Act*" or the "*HEATS Act,*" would further amend the *Geothermal Steam Act of 1970* by enabling reasonable exemptions from Federal permits and allowing geothermal activities to commence and receive a state permit in a practical timeframe.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/electricity/electricity-in-the-us.php>



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Last, regarding H.R. 7422, the “*Geothermal Cost-Recovery Authority Act of 2024*,” we accept the provisions therein as a reasonable compromise. Although requirements to “reimburse” the government for administrative costs in connection with geothermal permitting may be counterintuitive on the surface to accelerating the development of a renewable resource that already faces a relatively high degree of capital risk and regulatory uncertainty, we acknowledge that reinjecting reimbursed funds into BLM to maintain efficient application processing is a necessity. Therefore, we support the bill based on the understanding that recovered administrative costs will be recycled into BLM to specifically cover administrative costs in connection with geothermal permit application processing.

It is probably no surprise that America’s geothermal industry association endorses propositions that reduce risk and increase certainty for our members and stakeholders. Although we are inclined to support terms and concepts such as “streamlining” and “exemptions,” I wish to remind the Committee that our members are in this industry because we care deeply about the environment. Frankly put, more geothermal development directly equates to emissions reduction, energy diversification, national security, jobs, stability, and prosperity.

As we continue to advocate for the responsible development of geothermal resources and compatible reductions of regulatory red tape, GR acknowledges the importance of environmental assessments and compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). While new legislation creating exemptions and streamlined processing of applications for geothermal activities would accelerate clean energy development, it must be approached with caution and responsibility, ensuring adequate safeguards and transparency. We believe the bills before this Committee today balance environmental conservation, successfully address concerns around carbon production, and empower the cleanest renewable energy industry humanity has access to, the energy of the earth, geothermal.

In representing the geothermal community, GR strives to be a consensus organization, recognizing that our members may have diverse viewpoints on certain issues. Therefore, while we support the general direction of proposed regulations and legislative efforts to streamline permitting and the development of the geothermal industry, it's important to note that our members may have slightly deviating priorities and interests.

Again, while we advocate for permitting reform in a broad sense, we also emphasize the need for a balanced approach, namely, environmental responsibility and public participation. With the values of responsible resource development at the forefront, the United States can lead the way in clean, renewable geothermal energy while safeguarding our ecosystems and communities.

We are excited to see policy movement supporting geothermal development on Capitol Hill and look forward to working with all of those in our national agencies and Congress to provide a framework to responsibly increase pathways to establish streamlined permitting practices for this unique and vast energy resource, while also providing adequate safeguards and transparency.



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The world is watching the United States for how it designs its portfolio in the energy transformation. Geothermal energy must be leveraged if we are to rapidly develop nation-wide robust power and thermal systems and a clean sustainable fuel mix, all while creating jobs and bolstering innovative economic and industrial outputs.

Thank you again for this opportunity, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have to the best of my knowledge.

Dr. Bryant Jones  
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