

Suspend the Rules and Pass the Bill, H.R. 5631, with Amendments

(The amendments strike all after the enacting clause and insert a new text and a new title)

119TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. 5631

To appoint a Geothermal Ombudsman and establish a Geothermal Permitting Task Force from within the Bureau of Land Management, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 30, 2025

Mr. HURD of Colorado introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources

A BILL

To appoint a Geothermal Ombudsman and establish a Geothermal Permitting Task Force from within the Bureau of Land Management, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Geothermal Energy
5 Advancement Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. EFFECT OF PENDING CIVIL ACTIONS ON PROC-**
2 **ESSING APPLICATIONS RELATED TO GEO-**
3 **THERMAL LEASING.**

4 Section 4 of the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 (30
5 U.S.C. 1003) is amended by adding at the end the fol-
6 lowing:

7 “(h) EFFECT OF PENDING CIVIL ACTIONS ON PROC-
8 ESSING APPLICATIONS RELATED TO GEOTHERMAL LEAS-
9 ING.—

10 “(1) REQUIREMENT TO PROCESS APPLICA-
11 TIONS.—Notwithstanding the existence of any pend-
12 ing civil action that affects an application for a geo-
13 thermal drilling permit, sundry notice, notice to pro-
14 ceed, right-of-way, or any other authorization under
15 a valid existing geothermal lease, the Secretary shall,
16 unless a United States Federal court vacates or pro-
17 vides injunctive relief for the applicable geothermal
18 lease, geothermal drilling permit, sundry notice, no-
19 tice to proceed, right-of-way, or other authorization,
20 approve and issue, or deny, each such application
21 not later than 60 days after completing all require-
22 ments under applicable Federal laws and regula-
23 tions, including the National Environmental Policy
24 Act of 1969, the Endangered Species Act of 1973,
25 and division A of subtitle III of title 54, United
26 States Code.

1 “(2) NO NEW AUTHORITY FOR FEDERAL
2 COURTS.—Nothing in this subsection shall be con-
3 strued as modifying any existing authority of a Fed-
4 eral court to vacate or provide injunctive relief for
5 a geothermal lease, geothermal drilling permit, sun-
6 dry notice, notice to proceed, right-of-way, or other
7 authorization.

8 “(3) DEFINITION OF AUTHORIZATION.—In this
9 subsection, the term ‘authorization’ means any li-
10 cense, permit, approval, finding, determination, or
11 other administrative decision issued by a Federal
12 agency, or any interagency consultation, that is re-
13 quired or authorized under Federal law or regula-
14 tions in order to site, construct, reconstruct, or com-
15 mence operations of a geothermal project adminis-
16 tered by a Federal agency.”.

17 **SEC. 3. COST RECOVERY FROM GEOTHERMAL LEASING,**
18 **PERMITTING, AND INSPECTIONS.**

19 Section 6 of the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 (30
20 U.S.C. 1005) is amended by adding at the end the fol-
21 lowing:

22 “(j) COST RECOVERY.—

23 “(1) IN GENERAL.—During the period that be-
24 gins on the date of enactment of this subsection and
25 ends September 30, 2033, the Secretary may require

1 an applicant for, or a holder of, a geothermal lease
2 to reimburse the United States for all reasonable ad-
3 ministrative and other costs incurred by the United
4 States from—

5 “(A) processing the application for the
6 geothermal lease, including any application for
7 an operations plan, geothermal drilling permit,
8 utilization plan, site license, facility construc-
9 tion permit, commercial use permit, and any
10 other approval associated with a geothermal
11 lease; and

12 “(B) inspecting and monitoring—

13 “(i) geophysical exploration activities;

14 “(ii) the drilling, plugging, and aban-
15 donment of wells; and

16 “(iii) the construction, operation, ter-
17 mination, and reclamation of any well site
18 or facility for the utilization of geothermal
19 resources pursuant to the geothermal
20 lease.

21 “(2) CONSIDERATIONS.—In determining wheth-
22 er to require reimbursement under paragraph (1),
23 the Secretary shall consider whether there is in ex-
24 istence a cooperative cost share agreement between

1 the United States and the holder of a geothermal
2 lease.

3 “(3) ADJUSTMENTS.—The Secretary may re-
4 duce the amount to be reimbursed under paragraph
5 (1) if the Secretary determines—

6 “(A) that full reimbursement would impose
7 an economic hardship on the applicant; or

8 “(B) that a less than full reimbursement is
9 necessary to promote the greatest use of geo-
10 thermal resources.

11 “(4) USE.—The amounts reimbursed under this
12 subsection shall be credited to the currently applica-
13 ble appropriation, account, or fund of the Depart-
14 ment of the Interior as discretionary offsetting col-
15 lections, and shall be available only to the extent
16 provided in advance in appropriations Acts for—

17 “(A) processing the application for geo-
18 thermal leases, including any application for op-
19 erations plans, geothermal drilling permits, uti-
20 lization plans, site licenses, facility construction
21 permits, commercial use permits, and any other
22 approval associated with geothermal leases; and

23 “(B) inspecting and monitoring—

24 “(i) geophysical exploration activities;

1 “(ii) the drilling, plugging, and aban-
2 donment of wells; and

3 “(iii) the construction, operation, ter-
4 mination, and reclamation of any well site
5 or facility for the utilization of geothermal
6 resources pursuant to geothermal leases.”.

7 **SEC. 4. REPORT.**

8 (a) REPORT.—Not later than 5 years after the date
9 of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Interior,
10 in consultation with the geothermal industry and other
11 stakeholders, shall submit to the Committee on Natural
12 Resources of the House of Representatives and the Com-
13 mittee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate,
14 and make publicly available on the website of the Depart-
15 ment of the Interior, a report that includes—

16 (1) an assessment of how the amendments
17 made by section 3 of this Act affected the Bureau
18 of Land Management’s geothermal program;

19 (2) any recommendations for reauthorization of
20 section 6(j) of the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970,
21 as added by this Act; and

22 (3) any other recommendations for updates to
23 such section and the Bureau of Land Management’s
24 geothermal program.

1 (b) CONSIDERATIONS.—In developing the report re-
2 quired in subsection (a), the Secretary of the Interior shall
3 solicit facts or information from the geothermal industry
4 and other stakeholders.

5 **SEC. 5. PUBLICATION OF “GOLD BOOK” FOR GEOTHERMAL**
6 **OPERATIONS ON FEDERAL LANDS.**

7 (a) IDENTIFICATION.—Not later than one year after
8 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the
9 Interior, in consultation with other relevant Federal agen-
10 cies, shall identify standard procedures and guidelines for
11 efficient and environmentally responsible geothermal leas-
12 ing and permitting to the extent such standard procedures
13 and guidelines are not addressed in the fourth edition of
14 the Bureau of Land Management’s “Surface Operating
15 Standards and Guidelines for Oil and Gas Exploration and
16 Development”, commonly known as the “Gold Book” and
17 last revised in 2007.

18 (b) PUBLICATION.—

19 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 270 days
20 after identifying standard procedures and guidelines
21 under subsection (a), the Secretary of the Interior
22 shall publish an updated version of the Gold Book
23 incorporating any changes necessary to support effi-
24 cient and environmentally responsible geothermal
25 leasing and permitting for use by the field offices of

1 the Bureau of Land Management and geothermal
2 operators.

3 (2) RENAMING GOLD BOOK.—The Secretary of
4 the Interior shall rename the Gold Book to reflect
5 the incorporation of standard procedures and guide-
6 lines related to geothermal development.

7 (c) CONSULTATION.—Before publishing an updated
8 version of the Gold Book, the Secretary of the Interior
9 shall consult with—

10 (1) other relevant Federal agencies, including
11 field offices of the Bureau of Land Management;
12 and

13 (2) outside stakeholders, including developers
14 and other experts.

15 (d) INCLUSIONS.—Each updated version of the Gold
16 Book shall include standard procedures and guidelines for
17 ensuring the efficient review and approval of environ-
18 mentally responsible geothermal development, including—

19 (1) exploration and geophysical operations;

20 (2) permitting lease operations;

21 (3) compliance with all applicable laws and reg-
22 ulations;

23 (4) construction and maintenance; and

24 (5) drilling, production, and utilization oper-
25 ations.

1 (e) PERIODIC REVISION.—The Secretary of the Inte-
2 rior shall—

3 (1) at least once every five years, review the
4 most recent version of the Gold Book; and

5 (2) if determined necessary by the Secretary of
6 the Interior to support efficient and environmentally
7 responsible geothermal leasing and permitting, pub-
8 lish an updated version of the Gold Book.

9 **SEC. 6. GEOTHERMAL OMBUDSMAN AND PERMITTING TASK**
10 **FORCE.**

11 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

12 (1) GEOTHERMAL AUTHORIZATION.—The term
13 “geothermal authorization” means any license, per-
14 mit, approval, finding, determination, or other ad-
15 ministrative decision issued by the Bureau of Land
16 Management and any interagency consultation that
17 is required or authorized under Federal law in order
18 to site, construct, reconstruct, or commence oper-
19 ations of a geothermal energy project administered
20 by the Bureau of Land Management.

21 (2) GEOTHERMAL ENERGY PROJECT.—The
22 term “geothermal energy project” means a project
23 wholly or partially located on public land that uses
24 geothermal energy to generate heat or electricity.

1 (3) PUBLIC LAND.—The term “public land”
2 means lands subject to geothermal leasing under
3 section 3 of the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 (30
4 U.S.C. 1002).

5 (4) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
6 the Secretary of the Interior.

7 (5) TASK FORCE.—The term “Task Force”
8 means the Geothermal Permitting Task Force estab-
9 lished under subsection (c).

10 (b) GEOTHERMAL OMBUDSMAN.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 60 days after
12 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary
13 shall appoint from within the Bureau of Land Man-
14 agement a Geothermal Ombudsman.

15 (2) DUTIES.—The Geothermal Ombudsman ap-
16 pointed under paragraph (1) shall—

17 (A) act as a liaison between—

18 (i) the individual field, district, and
19 State offices of the Bureau of Land Man-
20 agement;

21 (ii) the Division Chief of the National
22 Renewable Energy Coordination Office of
23 the Bureau of Land Management; and

24 (iii) the Director of the Bureau of
25 Land Management;

1 (B) provide dispute resolution services be-
2 tween the individual field, district, and State of-
3 fices of the Bureau of Land Management and
4 applicants for geothermal authorizations;

5 (C) monitor and facilitate permit proc-
6 essing practices and timelines across individual
7 field offices of the Bureau of Land Manage-
8 ment;

9 (D) develop best practices for the permit-
10 ting and leasing process for geothermal re-
11 sources; and

12 (E) coordinate with the Federal Permitting
13 Improvement Steering Council.

14 (c) GEOTHERMAL PERMITTING TASK FORCE.—

15 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 60 days
16 after the date of enactment of this Act, the Sec-
17 retary shall establish within the Bureau of Land
18 Management a Geothermal Permitting Task Force.

19 (2) LEADERSHIP.—The Task Force shall be
20 headed by the Geothermal Ombudsman appointed
21 under subsection (b).

22 (3) PERMITTING SUPPORT.—The Task Force
23 shall support the duties of the Geothermal Ombuds-
24 man appointed under subsection (b).

1 (4) CROSS-OFFICE PERSONNEL ASSIGN-
2 MENTS.—

3 (A) IN GENERAL.—In their capacity as
4 head of the Task Force, the Geothermal Om-
5 budsman may coordinate with any Depart-
6 mental bureau or office to assign personnel with
7 relevant expertise to assist with completion of
8 geothermal authorizations in field, district, or
9 State offices other than the official duty station
10 where such personnel are located if—

11 (i) the Departmental bureau or office
12 determines that such assignment will not
13 materially delay ongoing completion of au-
14 thorizations within the office where the
15 employee is located; and

16 (ii) approval is received from the head
17 of the official duty station where the as-
18 signed employee is located.

19 (B) ASSIGNED PERSONNEL REQUIRE-
20 MENTS.—Department personnel assigned to as-
21 sist with completion of geothermal authoriza-
22 tions under subparagraph (A) shall—

23 (i) work in-person full-time at an offi-
24 cial Department office;

1 (ii) if necessary as determined by the
2 Geothermal Ombudsman, travel to the Bu-
3 reau of Land Management field, district,
4 or State office with jurisdiction over the
5 geothermal authorization to which the em-
6 ployee has been assigned by the Geo-
7 thermal Ombudsman;

8 (iii) participate as part of the team of
9 personnel working on geothermal author-
10 izations to which the employee has been
11 assigned by the Geothermal Ombudsman;
12 and

13 (iv) regularly report to the head of the
14 field, district, or State office of the Bureau
15 of Land Management with jurisdiction over
16 geothermal authorizations to which the em-
17 ployee has been assigned by the Geo-
18 thermal Ombudsman.

19 (C) RETENTION ALLOWANCES.—

20 (i) IN GENERAL.—Subject to the
21 availability of appropriations, the Geo-
22 thermal Ombudsman may pay a retention
23 allowance to an employee assigned to assist
24 with the completion of geothermal author-

1 izations under subparagraph (A). Reten-
2 tion allowances—

3 (I) shall be stated as the percent-
4 age of the rate of basic pay of an em-
5 ployee, and may not exceed 25 percent
6 of such rate of basic pay;

7 (II) may not be considered to be
8 part of the basic pay of an employee,
9 and the reduction or elimination of a
10 retention allowance may not be ap-
11 pealed; and

12 (III) shall be paid at the same
13 time and in the same manner as the
14 employee’s basic pay is paid.

15 (ii) CONSIDERATIONS.—In exercising
16 the retention allowance authority described
17 in clause (i), the Geothermal Ombudsman
18 shall consider—

19 (I) an employee’s specialized ex-
20 pertise related to geothermal author-
21 izations;

22 (II) the demonstrated need to re-
23 tain an employee to meet the perform-
24 ance improvement objectives for geo-
25 thermal authorization timelines and

1 develop best practices for completion
2 of geothermal authorizations; and

3 (III) the difficulty in recruiting
4 or replacing qualified personnel with
5 relevant expertise related to geo-
6 thermal authorizations.

7 (D) SAVINGS CLAUSE.—Cross-office per-
8 sonnel assignments carried out under this para-
9 graph shall not alter the underlying jurisdiction
10 of other offices of the Bureau of Land Manage-
11 ment over applicable geothermal authorizations.

12 (d) REPORT.—The Geothermal Ombudsman shall
13 submit to the Committee on Energy and Natural Re-
14 sources of the Senate and the Committee on Natural Re-
15 sources of the House of Representatives an annual report
16 that describes the activities of the Task Force and evalu-
17 ates the effectiveness of geothermal permit processing dur-
18 ing the preceding 1-year period.

19 **SEC. 7. GEOTHERMAL ROYALTIES.**

20 (a) DEFINITIONS.—Section 2 of the Geothermal
21 Steam Act of 1970 (30 U.S.C. 1001) is amended by add-
22 ing at the end the following:

23 “(h) ‘Geothermal electric generating facility’
24 means a facility, including all necessary equipment
25 or structures (including turbines and cooling equip-

1 ment), that produces electricity using geothermal re-
2 sources. For purposes of section 5(a)(1), a facility
3 described in the preceding sentence shall be consid-
4 ered a separate facility from any other such facility
5 unless the facility shares a turbine with any other
6 such facility.

7 “(i) ‘In-service date’ means, with respect to a
8 geothermal electric generating facility, the date on
9 which the geothermal electric generating facility be-
10 gins operating.”.

11 (b) GEOTHERMAL ROYALTIES.—Section 5(a)(1) of
12 the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 (30 U.S.C.
13 1004(a)(1)) is amended—

14 (1) in subparagraph (A)—

15 (A) by inserting “with respect to a geo-
16 thermal electric generating facility producing
17 electricity from such resources,” before “not
18 less than”;

19 (B) by inserting “by the geothermal elec-
20 tric generating facility” after “produced”; and

21 (C) by striking “the first 10 years of pro-
22 duction under the lease” and inserting “each
23 year of the 10-year period following the in-serv-
24 ice date of the geothermal electric generating
25 facility”; and

1 (2) in subparagraph (B)—

2 (A) by inserting “with respect to a geo-
3 thermal electric generating facility producing
4 electricity from such resources,” before “not
5 less than”;

6 (B) by inserting “by the geothermal elec-
7 tric generating facility” after “produced”; and

8 (C) by striking “such 10-year period” and
9 inserting “the period of 10 years described in
10 subparagraph (A)”.

11 **SEC. 8. NEPA REVIEW.**

12 Section 390 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (42
13 U.S.C. 15942) is amended—

14 (1) in subsection (a), by inserting “, or the
15 Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 (30 U.S.C. 1001 et
16 seq.) for the purpose of exploration or development
17 of geothermal resources” after “or gas”; and

18 (2) in subsection (b)—

19 (A) in paragraph (2), by striking “or gas”
20 and inserting “, gas, or geothermal”; and

21 (B) in paragraph (3), by striking “or gas”
22 and inserting “, gas, or geothermal”.

Amend the title so as to read: “A bill to promote re-
sponsible geothermal energy development on public lands,
and for other purposes.”.