

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4383

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 SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 23 (legislative day, APRIL 22), 2026

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO (for herself and Mr. RISCH) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Energy and 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 Ombuds-
5 man for National Deployment and Optimal Reviews Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. GEOTHERMAL OMBUDSMAN AND PERMITTING TASK** 7 **FORCE.**

8 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 (1) GEOTHERMAL AUTHORIZATION.—The term
2 “geothermal authorization” means any license, per-
3 mit, approval, finding, determination, or other ad-
4 ministrative decision issued by the Bureau of Land
5 Management and any interagency consultation that
6 is required or authorized under Federal law in order
7 to site, construct, reconstruct, or commence oper-
8 ations of a geothermal energy project administered
9 by the Bureau of Land Management.

10 (2) GEOTHERMAL ENERGY PROJECT.—The
11 term “geothermal energy project” means a project
12 wholly or partially located on public land that uses
13 geothermal energy to generate heat or electricity.

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

18 (4) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
19 the Secretary of the Interior.

20 (5) TASK FORCE.—The term “Task Force”
21 means the Geothermal Permitting Task Force estab-
22 lished under subsection (c).

23 (b) GEOTHERMAL OMBUDSMAN.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 60 days after
25 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary

1 shall appoint from within the Bureau of Land Man-
2 agement a Geothermal Ombudsman.

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

5 (A) act as a liaison between—

6 (i) the individual field, district, and
7 State offices of the Bureau of Land Man-
8 agement;

9 (ii) the Division Chief of the National
10 Renewable Energy Coordination Office of
11 the Bureau of Land Management; and

12 (iii) the Director of the Bureau of
13 Land Management;

14 (B) provide dispute resolution services be-
15 tween the individual field, district, and State of-
16 fices of the Bureau of Land Management and
17 applicants for geothermal authorizations;

18 (C) monitor and facilitate permit proc-
19 essing practices and timelines across individual
20 field offices of the Bureau of Land Manage-
21 ment;

22 (D) develop best practices for the permit-
23 ting and leasing process for geothermal re-
24 sources; and

1 (E) coordinate with the Federal Permitting
2 Improvement Steering Council.

3 (c) GEOTHERMAL PERMITTING TASK FORCE.—

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

8 (2) LEADERSHIP.—The Task Force shall be
9 headed by the Geothermal Ombudsman appointed
10 under subsection (b).

11 (3) PERMITTING SUPPORT.—The Task Force
12 shall support the duties of the Geothermal Ombuds-
13 man appointed under subsection (b).

14 (4) CROSS-OFFICE PERSONNEL ASSIGN-
15 MENTS.—

16 (A) IN GENERAL.—In their capacity as
17 head of the Task Force, the Geothermal Om-
18 budsman may coordinate with any Depart-
19 mental bureau or office to assign personnel with
20 relevant expertise to assist with completion of
21 geothermal authorizations in field, district, or
22 State offices other than the official duty station
23 where such personnel are located if—

24 (i) the Departmental bureau or office
25 determines that such assignment will not

1 materially delay ongoing completion of au-
2 thorizations within the office where the
3 employee is located; and

4 (ii) approval is received from the head
5 of the official duty station where the as-
6 signed employee is located.

7 (B) ASSIGNED PERSONNEL REQUIRE-
8 MENTS.—Department personnel assigned to as-
9 sist with completion of geothermal authoriza-
10 tions under subparagraph (A) shall—

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

13 (ii) if necessary as determined by the
14 Geothermal Ombudsman, travel to the Bu-
15 reau of Land Management field, district,
16 or State office with jurisdiction over the
17 geothermal authorization to which the em-
18 ployee has been assigned by the Geo-
19 thermal Ombudsman;

20 (iii) participate as part of the team of
21 personnel working on geothermal author-
22 izations to which the employee has been
23 assigned by the Geothermal Ombudsman;
24 and

1 (iv) regularly report to the head of the
2 field, district, or State office of the Bureau
3 of Land Management with jurisdiction over
4 geothermal authorizations to which the em-
5 ployee has been assigned by the Geo-
6 thermal Ombudsman.

7 (C) RETENTION ALLOWANCES.—

8 (i) IN GENERAL.—Subject to the
9 availability of appropriations, the Geo-
10 thermal Ombudsman may pay a retention
11 allowance to an employee assigned to assist
12 with the completion of geothermal author-
13 izations under subparagraph (A). Reten-
14 tion allowances—

15 (I) shall be stated as the percent-
16 age of the rate of basic pay of an em-
17 ployee, and may not exceed 25 percent
18 of such rate of basic pay;

19 (II) may not be considered to be
20 part of the basic pay of an employee,
21 and the reduction or elimination of a
22 retention allowance may not be ap-
23 pealed; and

1 (III) shall be paid at the same
2 time and in the same manner as the
3 employee's basic pay is paid.

4 (ii) CONSIDERATIONS.—In exercising
5 the retention allowance authority described
6 in clause (i), the Geothermal Ombudsman
7 shall consider—

8 (I) an employee's specialized ex-
9 pertise related to geothermal author-
10 izations;

11 (II) the demonstrated need to re-
12 tain an employee to meet the perform-
13 ance improvement objectives for geo-
14 thermal authorization timelines and
15 develop best practices for completion
16 of geothermal authorizations; and

17 (III) the difficulty in recruiting
18 or replacing qualified personnel with
19 relevant expertise related to geo-
20 thermal authorizations.

21 (D) SAVINGS CLAUSE.—Cross-office per-
22 sonnel assignments carried out under this para-
23 graph shall not alter the underlying jurisdiction
24 of other offices of the Bureau of Land Manage-
25 ment over applicable geothermal authorizations.

1 (d) REPORT.—The Geothermal Ombudsman shall
2 submit to the Committee on Energy and Natural Re-
3 sources of the Senate and the Committee on Natural Re-
4 sources of the House of Representatives an annual report
5 that describes the activities of the Task Force and evalu-
6 ates the effectiveness of geothermal permit processing dur-
7 ing the preceding 1-year period.

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