

GEOTHERMAL OMBUDSMAN FOR NATIONAL
DEPLOYMENT AND OPTIMAL REVIEWS ACT

MAY 20, 2026.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of
the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. WESTERMAN, from the Committee on Natural Resources,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 5631]

The Committee on Natural Resources, to whom was referred the bill (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, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment and recommends that the bill as amended do pass.

The amendment is as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Geothermal Ombudsman for National Deployment and Optimal Reviews Act”.

SEC. 2. GEOTHERMAL OMBUDSMAN AND PERMITTING TASK FORCE.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) **GEOTHERMAL AUTHORIZATION.**—The term “geothermal authorization” means any license, permit, approval, finding, determination, or other administrative decision issued by the Bureau of Land Management and any interagency consultation that is required or authorized under Federal law in order to site, construct, reconstruct, or commence operations of a geothermal energy project administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

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

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

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

(5) **TASK FORCE.**—The term “Task Force” means the Geothermal Permitting Task Force established under subsection (c).

(b) **GEOTHERMAL OMBUDSMAN.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall appoint from within the Bureau of Land Management a Geothermal Ombudsman.

(2) DUTIES.—The Geothermal Ombudsman appointed under paragraph (1) shall—

- (A) act as a liaison between—
 - (i) the individual field, district, and State offices of the Bureau of Land Management;
 - (ii) the Division Chief of the National Renewable Energy Coordination Office of the Bureau of Land Management; and
 - (iii) the Director of the Bureau of Land Management;
- (B) provide dispute resolution services between the individual field, district, and State offices of the Bureau of Land Management and applicants for geothermal authorizations;
- (C) monitor and facilitate permit processing practices and timelines across individual field offices of the Bureau of Land Management;
- (D) develop best practices for the permitting and leasing process for geothermal resources; and
- (E) coordinate with the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council.

(c) GEOTHERMAL PERMITTING TASK FORCE.—

(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall establish within the Bureau of Land Management a Geothermal Permitting Task Force.

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

(3) PERMITTING SUPPORT.—The Task Force shall support the duties of the Geothermal Ombudsman appointed under subsection (b).

(4) CROSS-OFFICE PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In their capacity as head of the Task Force, the Geothermal Ombudsman may coordinate with any Departmental bureau or office to assign personnel with relevant expertise to assist with completion of geothermal authorizations in field, district, or State offices other than the official duty station where such personnel are located if—

- (i) the Departmental bureau or office determines that such assignment will not materially delay ongoing completion of authorizations within the office where the employee is located; and
- (ii) approval is received from the head of the official duty station where the assigned employee is located.

(B) ASSIGNED PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS.—Department personnel assigned to assist with completion of geothermal authorizations under subparagraph (A) shall—

- (i) work in-person full-time at an official Department office;
- (ii) if necessary as determined by the Geothermal Ombudsman, travel to the Bureau of Land Management field, district, or State office with jurisdiction over the geothermal authorization to which the employee has been assigned by the Geothermal Ombudsman;
- (iii) participate as part of the team of personnel working on geothermal authorizations to which the employee has been assigned by the Geothermal Ombudsman; and
- (iv) regularly report to the head of the field, district, or State office of the Bureau of Land Management with jurisdiction over geothermal authorizations to which the employee has been assigned by the Geothermal Ombudsman.

(C) RETENTION ALLOWANCES.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Subject to the availability of appropriations, the Geothermal Ombudsman may pay a retention allowance to an employee assigned to assist with the completion of geothermal authorizations under subparagraph (A). Retention allowances—

- (I) shall be stated as the percentage of the rate of basic pay of an employee, and may not exceed 25 percent of such rate of basic pay;
- (II) may not be considered to be part of the basic pay of an employee, and the reduction or elimination of a retention allowance may not be appealed; and
- (III) shall be paid at the same time and in the same manner as the employee's basic pay is paid.

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

- (I) an employee's specialized expertise related to geothermal authorizations;

(II) the demonstrated need to retain an employee to meet the performance improvement objectives for geothermal authorization timelines and develop best practices for completion of geothermal authorizations; and

(III) the difficulty in recruiting or replacing qualified personnel with relevant expertise related to geothermal authorizations.

(D) SAVINGS CLAUSE.—Cross-office personnel assignments carried out under this paragraph shall not alter the underlying jurisdiction of other offices of the Bureau of Land Management over applicable geothermal authorizations.

(d) REPORT.—The Geothermal Ombudsman shall submit to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate and the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives an annual report that describes the activities of the Task Force and evaluates the effectiveness of geothermal permit processing during the preceding 1-year period.

PURPOSE OF THE LEGISLATION

The purpose of H.R. 5631 is to appoint a Geothermal Ombudsman and establish a Geothermal Permitting Task Force from within the Bureau of Land Management, and for other purposes.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

Reviews for geothermal drilling permits (GDPs), utilization plans, commercial use permits, and other geothermal authorizations are managed primarily by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) field offices with jurisdiction over the federal land in which a given project is located. With geothermal permitting, the mechanisms that allow for collaboration between field and state offices within BLM, or between BLM and other bureaus across the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), are limited. Instead, local field office personnel must fully process geothermal authorizations within their respective jurisdictions.¹ According to industry stakeholders, field office-specific processing requirements have produced significant variations in geothermal permitting outcomes.²

H.R. 5631, the “Geothermal Ombudsman for National Deployment and Optimal Reviews Act,” sponsored by Representative Jeff Hurd (R-CO), would improve coordination by appointing a Geothermal Ombudsman (Ombudsman) from within BLM. The bill tasks the Ombudsman with liaising between field offices and the BLM Director, providing dispute resolution services between field offices and applicants, monitoring permit processing, developing best practices, and coordinating with the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council (FPISC).

H.R. 5631 also authorizes the Ombudsman to coordinate the assignment of expert personnel from any DOI bureaus or offices to assist with approvals in state and local BLM offices as part of a newly developed Geothermal Permitting Task Force (Task Force). Notably, the bill provides relevant agencies within DOI with the ability to approve any Task Force assignments. Lastly, this legislation allows the Ombudsman to pay retention allowances to personnel assigned to the Task Force, subject to the availability of appropriations.

¹Dr. Bryant Jones, Written Testimony before the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, December 12, 2023, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20231212/116633/HHRG-118-II06-Wstate-JonesB-20231212.pdf>.

²Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, Majority Staff Correspondence with Geothermal Industry Stakeholders, July 21, 2025.

COMMITTEE ACTION

H.R. 5631 was introduced on September 30, 2025, by Representative Jeff Hurd (R-CO). The bill was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and within the Committee to the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources. On December 16, 2025, the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing on the bill. On March 5, 2026, the Committee on Natural Resources met to consider the bill. The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources was discharged from further consideration of H.R. 5631 by unanimous consent. Representative Jeff Hurd (R-CO) offered an Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute designated Hurd 01 ANS. The Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute was agreed to by unanimous consent. The bill, as amended, was ordered favorably reported to the House of Representatives by unanimous consent.

HEARINGS

For the purposes of clause 3(c)(6) of House rule XIII, the following hearing was used to develop or consider this measure: hearing by the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held on December 16, 2025.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

Section 1 names the bill the “Geothermal Ombudsman for National Deployment and Optimal Reviews Act.”

Section 2. Geothermal Ombudsman and permitting task force

Section 2 appoints an Ombudsman from within BLM, responsible for liaising between field offices and the BLM Director, providing dispute resolution services between field offices and applicants, monitoring permit processing, developing best practices, and coordinating with FPISC.

This section also establishes a Task Force from within BLM, headed by the Ombudsman, and authorizes the Ombudsman to coordinate the assignment of personnel from any DOI bureaus and offices to the Task Force to assist with the completion of geothermal authorizations in BLM field, district, or state offices. Section 2 further stipulates that personnel may be assigned to the Task Force only if the DOI bureau or office where staff are located determines that such assignment will not materially delay completion of authorizations within the office where the employee is located.

Section 2 authorizes the Ombudsman to pay retention allowances of up to 25 percent to employees assigned to the Task Force. This section requires the Ombudsman to submit an annual report to Congress that describes the activities of the Task Force and evaluates the effectiveness of geothermal permit processing during the preceding one-year period.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding clause 2(b)(1) of rule X and clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on

Natural Resources' oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the body of this report.

COMPLIANCE WITH HOUSE RULE XIII AND CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET ACT

1. *Cost of Legislation and the Congressional Budget Act.* Pursuant to clause 3(c)(2) of House rule XIII and section 308(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, and pursuant to clause 3(c)(3) of House rule XIII and section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has requested but not received from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office a budgetary analysis and a cost estimate of this bill.

2. *General Performance Goals and Objectives.* As required by clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII, the general performance goal or objective of this bill is to appoint a Geothermal Ombudsman and establish a Geothermal Permitting Task Force from within the Bureau of Land Management, and for other purposes.

EARMARK STATEMENT

This bill does not contain any Congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined under clause 9(e), 9(f), and 9(g) of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

UNFUNDED MANDATES REFORM ACT STATEMENT

An estimate of federal mandates prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act was not made available to the Committee in time for the filing of this report. The Chair of the Committee shall cause such estimate to be printed in the Congressional Record upon its receipt by the Committee, if such estimate is not publicly available on the Congressional Budget Office website.

EXISTING PROGRAMS

Directed Rule Making. This bill does not contain any directed rule makings.

Duplication of Existing Programs. This bill does not establish or reauthorize a program of the federal government known to be duplicative of another program. Such program was not included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111-139 or identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance published pursuant to the Federal Program Information Act (Public Law 95-220, as amended by Public Law 98-169) as relating to other programs.

APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that the legislation does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act.

PREEMPTION OF STATE, LOCAL OR TRIBAL LAW

Any preemptive effect of this bill over state, local, or tribal law is intended to be consistent with the bill's purposes and text and the Supremacy Clause of Article VI of the U.S. Constitution.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

As ordered reported by the Committee on Natural Resources, H.R. 5631 would make no changes in existing law.

