



Committee: House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources

Event: [Beneath the Surface: Earth MRI and America's Resource Potential](#)

Date: June 25, 2026

Executive Summary:

On Thursday, June 25, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources held a hearing to discuss reauthorization of the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Earth Mapping Resources Initiative (Earth MRI). There was bipartisan agreement on the importance of domestic critical mineral development and the success of Earth MRI. However, Members diverged on if the main mission of Earth MRI is to facilitate private investment or make scientific progress.

Member Toplines¹:

Chairman Pete Stauber (R-MN-08): Stauber spoke in support of the Earth MRI, arguing that its mapping capabilities have been helpful in understanding the U.S.'s mineral wealth and strengthening domestic critical mineral development. He highlighted the program's ability to support the public and private sectors, tribes, and universities through data and partnerships.

Ranking Member Yassamin Ansari (D-AZ-03): Ansari discussed the importance of Earth MRI's research and praised it for incentivizing innovation. She highlighted the program's multi-sector benefits including decreasing investment risks for geothermal and mining companies, strengthening community planning and infrastructure, and lowering environmental risks. She expressed concern over the Trump administration's lack of support for Earth MRI's academic partners.

Witness Toplines:

[Dr. Colin Williams, Program Director, USGS:](#) Williams applauded Earth MRI's success, specifically citing how the program's data has benefited the critical mineral sector through identifying mineral-abundant land. He also highlighted usage of Earth MRI data for geothermal energy development and revealing fault boundaries. Williams emphasized the importance of Earth MRI for USGS research and committed to maintaining its collaborative approach.

[Dr. Nick Hayman, President-Elect, Association of American State Geologists:](#) Hayman stated his belief that Earth MRI is one of the most effective federal-state programs and should be reauthorized by Congress so current scientific momentum is not lost. He emphasized that the program is an informational tool that provides necessary information to governments,

¹ The opening remarks of Chair Stauber and Ranking Member Ansari were unavailable at the time of this memo's distribution.

businesses, and communities, allowing them to make the best decisions possible regarding geology and natural resources.

[Dr. Elizabeth Holley, Professor, Colorado School of Mines](#): Holley discussed the importance of modern geological data that Earth MRI provides, specifically as it reduces investment risks, informs decision making, and builds domestic critical mineral development. She called for increased reprocessing of mine waste, continued collaboration, and a national milling sample to gather geochemistry data.

[Dr. Graham Lederer, Principal Scientist, Jataware](#): Lederer urged Congress to reauthorize Earth MRI, citing that much of its mandated work is unfinished but both its current momentum and domestic need for its data are at a high. He discussed the program's benefits for the private sector as the data shared streamlines geological exploration and minimizes risk. Lederer discusses the link between Earth MRI and artificial intelligence (AI), given that AI could help accelerate the development of projects that produce the critical minerals needed for AI technologies.

[Jeff Lovin, Senior Vice President, Woolpert](#): Lovin highlighted his support for reauthorizing Earth MRI, and increasing investment in the program. He argued programs like Earth MRI strengthen our mineral intelligence and reduce risk for the private sector environment.

Major Takeaways:

Critical Minerals

- Ranking Member Ansari asked Williams if the current 2031 deadline for a national comprehensive surface and subsurface map was achievable.
 - Williams replied that Earth MRI will have 50 percent of areas with identified potential for critical minerals mapped by the end of this year, and is on track to have all areas mapped by 2031.
- Ansari asked about the need for a national milling sample.
 - Holley responded a national milling sample is necessary as the U.S. currently does not have a good understanding of the rocks that are mined, leading to a limited ability for investment into processing byproduct or mine waste.
- Rep. **Adelita Grijalva** (D-AZ-07) supported Earth MRI as necessary research, but she stressed that its data should not be the only factor when considering mining projects. She further discussed the consequences Arizona has faced due to mining projects, while acknowledging that critical minerals are necessary for a transition to clean energy.
- Reps. **Sarah Elfreth** (D-MD-03), **Gabe Evans** (R-CO-08), and **Jeff Crank** (R-CO-05) all shared their concerns for the aging mining workforce, and shared their support for helping grow that workforce in the future.
- Reps. **Susie Lee** (D-NV-03), **Harriet Hageman** (R-WY-AL), and **Jeff Hurd** (R-CO-03) asked about mine waste reprocessing and its potential.
 - Williams highlighted this as one of Earth MRI's priorities, stating they have been working with other departments to research potential, make an inventory, and sample legacy mine waste to see how it can be used. Williams and Holley both

emphasized that mine waste reprocessing is important as it allows the U.S. to recover critical minerals that are not currently mined.

Geothermal

- Elfreth emphasized the bipartisan priority for geothermal energy, and asked about the utilization of the USGS GeoDAWN program to find geothermal opportunities.
 - Williams stated GeoDAWN has been successful in identifying geothermal systems that can be imaged through new data on fault lines. He also highlighted the use of Earth MRI to support domestic geothermal development and its ability to complete simultaneous geothermal mineral resources assessments.

AI

- Reps. Hurd, **Nick Begich** (R-AK-AL), **Ross Fulcher** (R-ID- 01) all questioned how AI can support and improve Earth MRI's work.
 - Williams stated its use was being explored in mineral resource assessments, data usability, and anomaly identification.
 - Lederer also highlighted AI's ability in streamlining data processing for an exploration target; however, he added AI could not totally substitute for the experts working with Earth MRI.

FEOCs/China

- Crank shared his concerns about foreign adversaries being able to access Earth MRI's public data.
- Fulcher and Hageman focused on the importance of this program in relation to combating China. Williams said the continued work of Earth MRI will help the U.S. catch up to other countries on mineral resource development.