



Committee: Senate Energy & Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests & Mining

Event: [To Receive Testimony on Pending Legislation](#)

Date: July 15, 2026

Executive Summary:

On July 15, 2026, the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests & Mining held a hearing to discuss legislation related to the development of geothermal energy, mining and drilling, the coal industry, and land conveyances. Please see below for the list of relevant legislation considered; the full list of legislation can be found [here](#).

- Plug Offshore Wells Act ([S. 4239](#)); introduced by Sen. **Peter Welch** (D-VT)
- Geothermal Ombudsman for National Deployment & Optimal Reviews Act ([S. 4383](#)); introduced by Sen. **Catherine Cortez Masto** (D-NV)
- A bill to amend the Mineral Leasing Act to provide for the payment of bonus payments of certain coal leases issued under that Act ([S. 4410](#)); introduced by Sen. **John Barrasso** (R-WY)
- Geothermal Cost-Recovery Authority Act of 2026 ([S. 4605](#)); introduced by Sen. **Rueben Gallego** (D-AZ)
- Offshore Leasing Standards & Accountability Act of 2026 ([S. 4715](#)); introduced by Sen. **Adam Schiff** (D-CA)
- Committing Leases for Energy Access Now Act (CLEAN) ([H.R. 1687](#)); introduced by Rep. **Russ Fulcher** (R-ID-01)
- Critical Mineral Dominance Act ([H.R. 4090](#)); introduced by Rep. **Pete Stauber** (R-MN-08)
- Harnessing Energy At Thermal Sources (HEATS) Act ([H.R. 5587](#)); introduced by Rep. **Young Kim** (R-CA-40)
- Geothermal Energy Advancement Act ([H.R. 5631](#)); introduced by Rep. **Jeff Hurd** (R-CO-03)
- License to Drill Act ([H.R. 7831](#)); introduced by Rep. **Mike Kennedy** (R-UT-03)

There was bipartisan support for increasing domestic mineral and energy production to reduce reliance on China and meet the country's rising electricity needs. However, on the latter point, Republicans focused on the need to revitalize the coal industry while Democrats emphasized the significant potential of geothermal energy.

Member Toplines¹:

Subcommittee Chair John Barrasso (R-WY): Barrasso emphasized the need for increased domestic coal production to provide reliable baseload power. He said that coal production has

¹ Opening statements were not available online at the time of this memo's distribution for Subcommittee Chair Barrasso and Ranking Member Cortez Masto.

been hampered by restrictive regulations and a moratorium on federal coal extraction leases under the previous administration. He advocated for extending the payment timeline for bonus bids to increase investment in coal. He said that the Committee is working towards a broader permitting package, but passing bills like S. 4410 are crucial in the meantime.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV): Cortez Masto highlighted geothermal energy as a “crucial part” of an all-of-the-above energy strategy. She praised the Geothermal Ombudsman for National Deployment & Optimal Reviews Act and the Geothermal Energy Advancement Act for improving the geothermal permitting process. Cortez Masto also discussed the geothermal provisions in her broader permitting bill, the FREEDOM Act ([S. 4795](#)). She urged the Committee to consider additional pieces of geothermal legislation, including the Next-Generation Geothermal Research & Development Act ([S. 4406](#)).

Full Committee Ranking Member Martin Heinrich (D-NM): Heinrich spoke on the Caja del Río Protection Act ([S. 4458](#)), highlighting its broad support from the community. He called for the Committee to prioritize similar bills that have strong local support and could be passed this Congress.

Witness Toplines:

[Leah Baker, Acting Director, Eastern States, Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\), U.S. Department of the Interior:](#) Baker expressed BLM’s support for the License to Drill Act, [S. 4410](#), and the Critical Mineral Dominance Act. She argued these bills would advance oil and gas exploration and production, revitalize the coal industry, and maintain the U.S. position as a global leader in energy and mineral development. She also supported the legislative efforts to streamline geothermal permitting.

[John Crockett, Deputy Chief, State, Private and Tribal Forestry, United States Forest Service \(USFS\):](#) Crockett spoke to the USFS’s support for the Critical Mineral Dominance Act, emphasizing that it mirrors provisions of [Executive Order 14154](#), “Unleashing American Energy,” by streamlining the approval of mining projects on federal lands.

[Katie Sweeney, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, National Mining Association:](#) Sweeney spoke in support of S. 4410, arguing it would incentivize the new coal production needed to meet the country’s skyrocketing energy needs. She also expressed support for the Critical Mineral Dominance Act and the Mining Regulatory Clarity Act ([S. 544](#)) as key solutions to unlocking the country’s domestic mineral resources and reducing reliance on China for critical minerals.

[Jenifer Davidson, County Manager, Douglas County, Nevada:](#) Davidson endorsed the Douglas County Economic Development & Conservation Act ([S. 4200](#)) and warned of the lack of resources the BLM has to address stormwater issues.

Major Takeaways:

Critical Minerals:

- Cortez Masto spoke about the importance of developing domestic critical mineral resources and thanked Sweeney for her organization's support of the Mining Regulatory Clarity Act. Cortez Masto said the bill is a major priority for her and Sen. **Jim Risch** (R-ID), the bill's co-sponsor, and that they are working with their colleagues, including Heinrich, to address concerns and move the bill as quickly as possible.

Coal Industry:

- Barrasso asked Sweeney about the benefits of his legislation. Sweeney said the bill would likely encourage more companies to participate in federal coal lease sales because it would reduce upfront financial burdens, provide greater budgeting certainty, and allow companies time to begin production before having to pay the bid in full.
- Barrasso then raised concerns about BLM's sealed-bid process, noting that companies bid without knowing the agency's confidential fair market value estimate. Sweeney responded that determining fair market value has become more difficult because past federal coal leasing moratoriums have resulted in very few recent lease sales, leaving little comparable market data. She suggested that industry, Congress, and the federal government work together to develop a clearer understanding of the inputs needed to estimate fair market value.
 - Baker expressed BLM's support for the bill and agreed to pull information on how the agency calculates fair market value with the Subcommittee.