



Committee: Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee

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

Date: September 16, 2026

Executive Summary:

On September 16, 2026, the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee held a hearing to discuss 24 bills on *Energy Policy & Conservation Act* reform, geothermal energy, and hydropower, among other topics. Democrats raised questions regarding the value of deregulation during a time when energy costs and grid strain are already mounting. Please see below for the list of relevant legislation discussed; the full list of legislation can be found [here](#).

- [S.5402](#): A bill to extend authorizations for aquatic ecosystem restoration projects, multi-benefit watershed health projects, and WaterSMART grants, and for other purposes.
- [S.1568](#): LIT Act of 2025
- [S.456](#): STEAM Act
- [S.4116](#): Geo POWER Act
- [S.4166](#): SECURE Grid Act
- [S.4846](#): TAAP Act
- [S.4870](#): Earth MRI Reauthorization Act of 2026
- [S.5048](#): Hydropower Licensing Affordability Act (HLAA)
- [S.5338](#): Energy Efficiency Reform Act of 2026 (EERA)
- [S.5352](#): Desalination Reauthorization Act
- [S.5360](#): Rural and Municipal Utility Cybersecurity Act (RMUCA)

Member Toplines¹:

Chair Mike Lee (R-UT): Lee attributed appliance price increases to Department of Energy (DOE) energy efficiency standards. He highlighted that his EERA bill would require the DOE Secretary to examine whether test procedures are technologically and economically feasible for new covered products, end the six-year lookback period, and clarify the federal government's authority in issuing new or amended standards. He defended his LIT Act, which would remove incandescent lightbulbs from federal efficiency requirements and "allow consumers to decide for themselves."

Ranking Member Martin Heinrich (D-NM): Heinrich raised concerns that the Chair's EERA would "thoroughly dismantle" DOE's Appliance Standards Program (ASP). He reported that ASP saves American households almost \$600 annually on their utility bills. He noted that by undermining ASP, the bill would increase electricity demand by as much as 32 GW by 2040, would eliminate existing standards, and give the administration backsliding authority, the latter which would undermine domestic manufacturing and allow Chinese products to flood the market. Heinrich noted that AHRI, NEMA, and AHAM have all submitted public comments to

¹ Opening statements were not available online at the time of this memo's distribution.

DOE opposing energy efficiency standard backsliding, and submitted the letters of opposition to the record. He expressed similar opposition to the LIT Act, and submitted NEMA's letter of opposition to the record. On the HLAA, Heinrich expressed disappointment at lack of a witness and the bill's weakening of tribal protections. He stated that he will submit questions to the record for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

Sen. David McCormick (R-PA): McCormick spoke in favor of his RMUCA bill. He shared that it reauthorizes the DOE's Rural and Municipal Utility Advanced Cybersecurity Grant and the Technical Assistance Program, and helps rural and municipal utilities protect their systems. He noted that in 2024 alone, 70 percent of cyberattacks involved critical infrastructure. He also pointed to mounting cyber attacks on water and wastewater utilities.

Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT): Daines spoke in favor of his four bills, including HLAA and the Geo POWER Act. On the former, Daines asserted that federal agencies have weaponized mandatory conditioning, leading to mounting costs and undermining hydropower projects. He noted that his bill would add one line to the mandatory conditions section, ensuring that it is limited to those that "reasonably mitigate the direct adverse effect of the applicable project."

Sen. John Hickenlooper (D-CO): Hickenlooper spoke in favor of his GEO Power Act, which authorizes DOE to provide "innovative financing" to catalyze geothermal development. Turning to the Earth MRI Reauthorization Act, Hickenlooper attested to the value of the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Earth Mapping Resources Initiative (Earth MRI), noting that it has accelerated project timelines and lowered costs in the process.

Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA): Padilla expressed opposition to selling Yosemite National Park land and submitted a bipartisan and bicameral letter with over 150 signatures to the record.

Sen. Angus King (I-ME): King expressed opposition to EERA. He emphasized that now is not the time to repeal energy standards, citing increased electricity costs, increased demand, and limited capacity. He reiterated concern that a repeal of standards would open up the domestic market to poor quality, imported products that will then lead to increased energy consumption and increased consumer costs.

- In response, Chair Lee again defended consumer choice, noting that some individuals may want more of a "yellow light," erroneously attributing bulb color to incandescent versus LED status.

Witness Toplines:

Alex Fitzsimmons, Associate Deputy Secretary of Energy, Department of Energy (DOE):

Fitzsimmons asserted that the DOE has been implementing President Trump's agenda of energy dominance, lowering energy costs, and strengthening national security. He attested to the importance of the SECURE Grid Act, which formalizes the inclusion of additional data within state energy security plans. He iterated the value of RMUCA, which has assisted over 500 utilities to date. Fitzsimmons also expressed support for both the LIT Act and EERA on the grounds of consumer choice, and highlighted that EERA freezes the energy conservation standard for distribution transformers. Turning to HLAA, he reiterated that it limits environmental

and fishway mandates to the direct impact impacts of the facility being licensed, eliminating “out-of-scope regulatory demands.” Fitzsimmons attested to the importance of the GEO Power Act and the DOE’s Office of Hydrocarbons and Geothermal Energy’s next-generation geothermal pilot projects.

[Dr. Sarah Ryker, Associate Director, Geology, Energy, and Minerals Mission Area, U.S. Geological Survey \(USGS\), Department of Interior \(DOI\)](#): Ryker spoke about both the TAAP Act and the Earth MRI Reauthorization Act of 2026. On TAAP, Ryker noted that USGS does not support its reauthorization due to its focus on “higher priority operational responsibilities.” However, Ryker did express support for Earth MRI, detailing the bill’s expansion of data collection efforts to better quantify mineral resource potential.

Major Takeaways:

Efficiency Standards:

- Lee asked Fitzsimmons to discuss how the DOE’s ongoing efforts are aligned with both the LIT Act and EERA. Fitzsimmons replied that there have been significant energy savings from ASP over time, but that there needs to be an economic balance. He noted that some products may have a longer payback period than the product’s life itself. He agreed that some “energy efficient” products may have to be cycled multiple times, ultimately becoming inefficient.
- Lee asked for a timeline on the Process Rule. Fitzsimmons stated that it is an “important priority” and reiterated the importance of a cost-benefit analysis.
- Heinrich asked if the administration is aware that a rollback of efficiency rules would provide Chinese manufacturers with an advantage in selling cheaper, poorly-made goods. Fitzsimmons replied that “trade issues should be addressed through trade remedies,” and that DOE is more focused on balancing consumer choice.
 - Heinrich asked why DOE isn’t concerned if the net effect makes a Chinese heat pump dominant in the market at the expense of American manufacturing. Fitzsimmons replied that the “net effect” is to ensure that “products that consumers want to buy are not regulated out of the market...”
 - Lee argued that his bill protects U.S. markets against the introduction of new products from Chinese manufacturers or that have “substantial ties” to the Chinese government.
- King asked about the affordability benefit of an incandescent light bulb. Fitzsimmons replied that it has a cheaper upfront cost, but lasts less than an LED. King clarified that an LED lasts around 20 times longer than an incandescent bulb. He expressed that this “is ridiculous” and that incandescent is “grossly inefficient.”
 - Lee stated that he was unfamiliar with this data. Fitzsimmons offered to follow up with his team on lightbulb study data.
- Sen. **Catherine Cortez Masto** (D-NV) stated that NEMA and the American Lighting Association have said that the manufacturing infrastructure for incandescent lightbulbs has been dismantled and repurposed, rendering restarting production uneconomic. She asked what the goal of the legislation is and reiterated concern over Chinese products, as there is no domestic manufacturing capacity for incandescents. She asked if DOE has examined this.

- Fitzsimmons doubled down on “trade remedies” to counteract dumping.
- Lee said that he doesn’t think it’s a “foregone conclusion” that U.S. manufacturers won’t seize the opportunity to manufacture incandescents.

Cancelled Grants:

- Heinrich pointed out that Fitzsimmons's past testimony that the grants were not cancelled for political reasons was at odds with recent DOE testimony that affirmed that the cancellations were “based solely on the political identity of the grant recipient’s state.”

Geothermal

- Hickenlooper asked how the DOE would utilize the GEO Power Act authorities and the Geothermal Center of Excellence (CoE) to bring at-scale, commercial enhanced geothermal system (EGS) projects to Colorado and other states. Fitzsimmons noted that the bill would build on the technical expertise that is being developed at the CoE to accelerate EGS deployment.
- Hickenlooper asked Ryker about how Earth MRI can be leveraged to boost energy production. She noted that the information is key to evaluating potential for co-production of geothermal energy alongside critical mineral extraction.
 - Sen. **Lisa Murkowski** (R-AK) had Ryker elaborate on the value of reauthorizing Earth MRI.
- Murkowski raised her Next Generation Geothermal Research & Development Act and asked Fitzsimmons how he sees the new CoE developing the research and development framework within the bill. Fitzsimmons reiterated the value of the CoE serving as a technical expertise convener to accelerate deployment.
- Sen. **Catherine Cortez Masto** (D-NV) reported that her STEAM Act would extend fast-track energy exploration and development on previously disturbed or studied public lands to geothermal initiatives. Ryker agreed that DOI considers geothermal energy a priority and that USGS has already accelerated its related work. On staffing, Ryker reported that USGS is being creative in its adoption of artificial intelligence and geoscience modeling techniques. After further questioning, she acknowledged that there are a “number of long-term staffing gaps” that they are working to address.

Grid

- Cortez Masto had Fitzsimmons attest to the value of grid partnerships and coordination, highlighting both the SECURE Grid Act and RMUCA. She then entered a letter of support for the SECURE Grid Act from the National Association of State Energy Officials and NEMA into the record.

Water

- Padilla asked Ryker if the Desalination Reauthorization Act can help deliver needed water infrastructure improvements. She deferred to the Bureau of Reclamation’s [statement](#) for the record.