

Testimony of Joseph Uehlein  
Founder and Board President, Labor Network for Sustainability

Before the House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources  
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On H.R. 7422, Geothermal Cost Recovery Authority Act of 2024

Good afternoon Chair Stauber, Ranking Member Ocasio-Cortez, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Joseph Uehlein. I'm the founder and Board President of the Labor Network for Sustainability (LNS). We are dedicated to making a living on a living planet. We believe that sustainability starts at the kitchen table, where working people every day worry about how they will secure health care, send their children to college, save for a family vacation, and maybe save for a pension. Advanced industrial societies around the world provide many of these things to their people. We do not.

I worked building the Texas-Eastern Pipeline as it wound its way through the rolling hills of Central Pennsylvania. I worked on the construction of the Three Mile Island nuclear facility near Harrisburg. I worked in an aluminum mill in Mechanicsburg, PA. As secretary Treasurer of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Division, and Secretary to the North American Coordinating Committee of the International Chemical, Energy, and Mine Workers Federation, I have represented fossil fuel and manufacturing workers throughout my career.

In 1988 I began attending meetings of the United Nations first global warming commission. At that time 2c of warming was a level we never wanted to reach. Now it's a goal, and we are ushering in a world of hurt for a lot of people. This has to stop, and be reversed. I have spent my life working on labor and environmental issues, with climate change at the core of my endeavors.

My experience tells me that climate change is the real job killer, not the answers to climate change. Climate is as much an economic issue as it is an environmental issue. The impacts of unchecked global warming and climate

change will decimate our economy and ecology. Whether you work on the ports, or in the agricultural fields, or in a warehouse, or in transportation, manufacturing, health care ~ even nurses and public employees will all suffer job loss due to unchecked global warming and climate change.

Before 2010 we would have one, maybe two, one-billion dollar weather events a year. Then we had a dozen such events in one year. The earth was waging its own public relations campaign. The costs of dealing with forest fires has increased dramatically over the past decade, and that's just fire. Hurricane Katrina destroyed 40% of the New Orleans economy. Over time, much of that has come back, but not all of it. Massive storms, massive fires, melting polar ice caps, melting glaciers, famine, water shortages, and more are ravaging the planet and the people on it are suffering and fleeing to find a more stable places to live. You think we have an immigration problem now? You ain't seen nothing yet. We will see mass migration of starving angry people. What do we do then? Wage war on humanity?

Climate change is a budget-killer, and is also a dagger pointed at our jobs. The fossil fuel industry and its allies love to spin the jobs v environment frame. We not only can, but we must, provide good jobs for our people, and protect the only planet we know of that can support life. The costs of fighting wild fires in the west has grown astronomically in the past 20 years. And this is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Renewable energy is a big part of the solution, for the climate and for working people. Geothermal energy is an essential part of the overall renewable energy mix, and provides clean, reliable, baseload power, with minimal carbon emissions. This will help reduce our reliance on polluting and climate destroying fossil fuels. And the beauty of geothermal is that the job skills are readily transferable. Pipefitters in an oil refinery or nuclear power plant, or pipefitters that build big pipelines like I did, can do geothermal work. But it's more than pipefitters. To do this work we need operating engineers, truck drivers, laborers, and carpenters, depending on how the deep the hole is, like for the fracking process of enhanced geothermal, which allows for more efficient extraction of geothermal heat found deep in the ground. Conventional geothermal taps heat sources closer to the earth's surface. For both methods, the skills needed are all transferable.

But we need to make sure that the federal government has the capacity to permit geothermal, (and other renewables), responsibly as the industry grows. Rather than cutting environmental review and public input, we need to fund and staff our agencies appropriately. Note that I say “our” agencies. If you believe in government of, by and for the people, as I do, you have a responsibility to see to it that public input is sought and valued, and that environmental review is a sacred requirement. Public input from impacted communities, and rigorous environmental review, are things we should want and value, not oppose and undermine.

Rep. Ocasio-Cortez’s *Geothermal Cost-Recovery Authority Act of 2024* will allow the Bureau of Land Management to have more flexibility to hire third-party environmental reviewers and specialists, charge for inspections and monitoring of geothermal, and otherwise charge cost-recovery fees. This will help enhance BLM’s geothermal program without constraining the agency’s limited budget.

Climate change is a job killer, and a budget killer. You’ve heard it said, and I don’t mind repeating it, that this is the only planet we have, and the voices of the future are calling back to us and asking that we see beyond our own time.