

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 3708

To amend the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands to make that Act applicable to hardrock minerals, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JANUARY 28, 2026

Mr. COTTON introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

A BILL

To amend the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands to make that Act applicable to hardrock minerals, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Mineral Extraction for
5 Renewable Industry and Critical Applications Act of
6 2026” or the “MERICA Act of 2026”.

7 **SEC. 2. APPLICATION OF MINERAL LEASING ACT FOR AC-**
8 **QUIRED LANDS TO HARDROCK MINERALS.**

9 The Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands is
10 amended—

1 (1) in section 2 (30 U.S.C. 351)—

2 (A) in the sixth sentence, by striking “The
3 term” and all that follows through “embrace”
4 and inserting the following:

5 “(5) OIL.—The term ‘oil’ means”;

6 (B) in the fifth sentence, by striking
7 “‘Lease’” and inserting the following:

8 “(3) LEASE.—The term ‘lease’”;

9 (C) by striking the fourth sentence and in-
10 sserting the following:

11 “(4) MINERAL LEASING LAWS.—The term ‘min-
12 eral leasing laws’ means—

13 “(A) the Mineral Leasing Act (30 U.S.C.
14 181 et seq.);

15 “(B) the Act of April 17, 1926 (44 Stat.
16 301, chapter 158; 30 U.S.C. 271 et seq.);

17 “(C) the Act of February 7, 1927 (44
18 Stat. 1057, chapter 66; 30 U.S.C. 281 et seq.);

19 and

20 “(D) all Acts amendatory or supple-
21 mentary to any of the Acts described in sub-
22 paragraphs (A) through (D).”;

23 (D) in the third sentence, by striking
24 “‘Secretary’” and inserting the following:

25 “(6) SECRETARY.—The term ‘Secretary’”;

1 (E) in the second sentence—

2 (i) by striking “(36 Stat.” and all
3 that follows through the period at the end
4 and inserting “(commonly known as the
5 ‘Weeks Law’) (36 Stat. 961, chapter 186;
6 16 U.S.C. 552 et seq.).”; and

7 (ii) by striking “‘Acquired lands’ or
8 ‘lands acquired by the United States’ in-
9 clude” and inserting the following:

10 “(1) ACQUIRED LANDS; LANDS ACQUIRED BY
11 THE UNITED STATES.—The terms ‘acquired lands’
12 and ‘lands acquired by the United States’ mean”;

13 (F) in the first sentence, by striking “As
14 used in this Act ‘United States’” and inserting
15 the following: “In this Act:

16 “(7) UNITED STATES.—The term ‘United
17 States’”;

18 (G) by moving the paragraphs so as to ap-
19 pear in numerical order; and

20 (H) by inserting after paragraph (1) (as so
21 designated) the following:

22 “(2) HARDROCK MINERAL.—

23 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The term ‘hardrock
24 mineral’ includes deposits of—

1 “(i) minerals found in sedimentary or
2 other rocks;

3 “(ii) base metals;

4 “(iii) precious metals;

5 “(iv) industrial metals; and

6 “(v) precious and semi-precious
7 gemstones.

8 “(B) EXCLUSIONS.—The term ‘hardrock
9 mineral’ does not include deposits of—

10 “(i) coal;

11 “(ii) oil;

12 “(iii) oil shale;

13 “(iv) gas;

14 “(v) sodium;

15 “(vi) potassium;

16 “(vii) sulfur; or

17 “(viii) mineral materials subject to
18 disposition under the Act of July 31, 1947
19 (commonly known as the ‘Materials Act of
20 1947’) (61 Stat. 681, chapter 406; 30
21 U.S.C. 601 et seq.).”; and

22 (2) in section 3 (30 U.S.C. 352), in the first
23 sentence, by striking “and sulfur” and inserting
24 “sulfur, and hardrock minerals”.