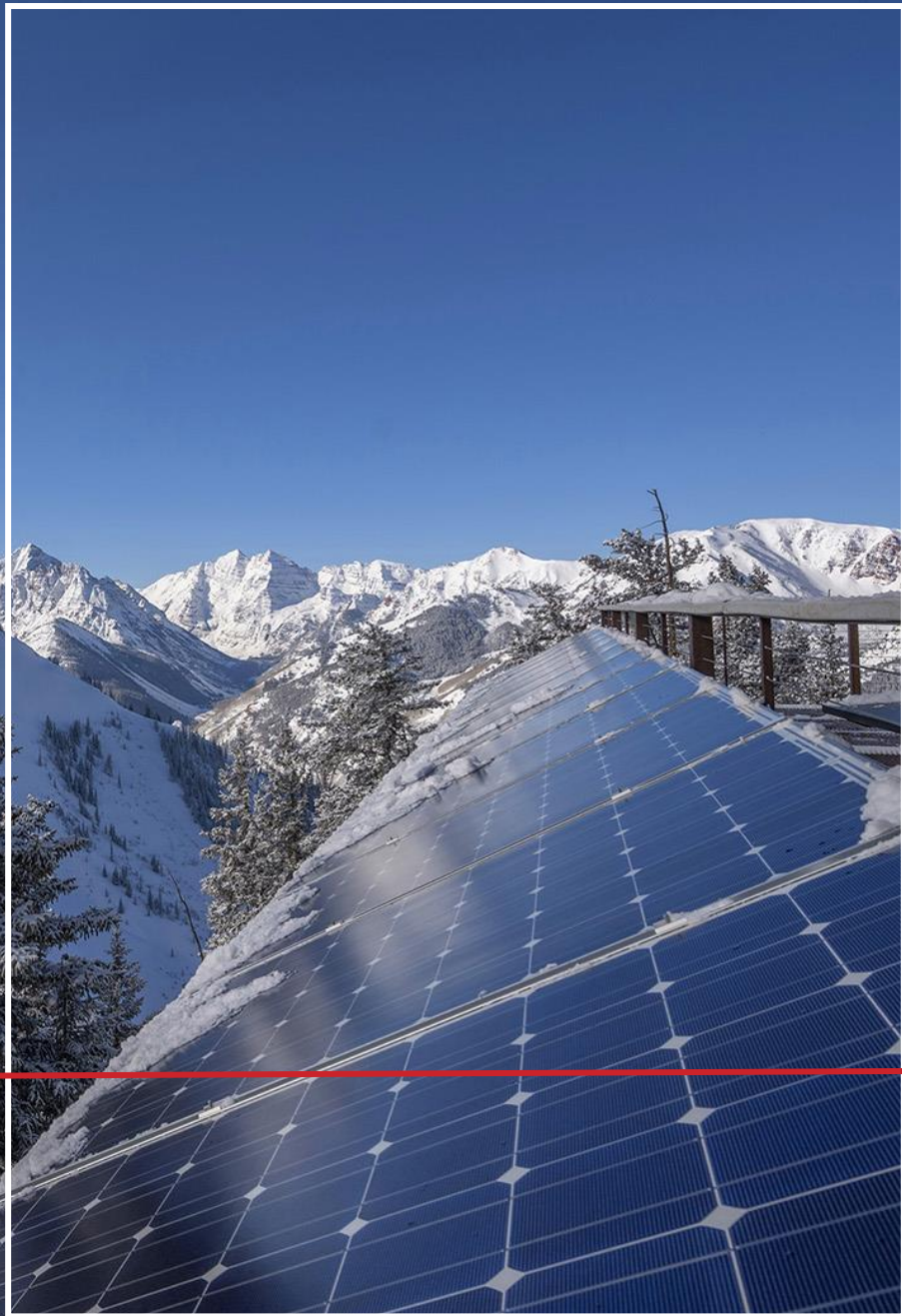




The Unsustainability of Corporate Sustainability

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ASPEN  SNOWMASS.



If genocide won't mobilize corporations, can climate?

“Corporate sustainability” really means “business management.”

To do anything meaningful, corporate sustainability departments need to change their names to government affairs.

Asking corporate sustainability departments to do government affairs is like trying to drive a nail with a crescent wrench.

Asking corporations to care about social or environmental good has mostly proven to be a dead end. It is not clear this will change. See: H and M.



“Sustainability” as practiced is just “Management”

- ▶ What is the goal of corporate sustainability?
- ▶ If we are going to use the term, then it ought to have something to do with sustainability, which would involve solving climate change.
- ▶ But we’ve run a thirty year experiment, and the work we’re doing isn’t getting us closer.
- ▶ If corporations are OK with that—that corporate sustainability is just good management that slightly reduces fees, provides good PR and cover from environmental criticism, worker retention and attraction, and license to operate—then they should call it “business management” and drop the sustainability term, which puts them at risk of being called greenwashers or hypocrites.



We have one last chance to act meaningfully

- ▶ David Roberts: [Crunch time: this is America's last chance at serious climate policy for a decade](#)
- ▶ It's going to be a clean energy standard & clean energy tax credits, or nothing.
- ▶ Congress is working on what is likely to be its last big shot at climate change policy for a decade or more. If things go well, the legislation will include a clean energy standard (CES) and clean energy tax credits, which together would revolutionize the US electricity system. If things don't go well, there will be no substantial climate legislation for many years to come.



Disney and Apple enviro statements

- ▶ Disney: ACTING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT IN MIND
- ▶ The Walt Disney Company is committed to protecting the planet and delivering a positive environmental legacy for future generations as we operate and grow our business.
- ▶ Apple: Since 2020, we have been carbon neutral for our corporate operations. Building on this achievement, we set an ambitious and urgent goal to make carbon neutral products by 2030. And our green chemistry and recycling innovations are moving us closer than ever to one day make our products without taking from the earth.
- ▶ In all of this work, we're partnering with communities and local leaders to make sure our environmental efforts are also a force for equity and justice.



Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, D-RI

- ▶ There is no company that shows up in congress on climate, except maybe Patagonia. Tech associations barely mention it. I am involved in a number of secret climate conversations with some of my republican colleagues but they can't find a single corporation that will come out and say "I've got your back." It should not be too much to ask corporate American to align their lobbying with their stated values."
- ▶ <https://grist.org/politics/big-businesses-talk-a-big-climate-game-just-not-on-capitol-hill/>



Against: Apple, FedEx, Pfizer, Disney

- ▶ “America’s largest corporations have [decided to fight](#) the one real effort to do anything about it. It is the most nihilistic decision that Apple and Exxon and Walmart and Pfizer and Disney and FedEx and Lowes and the rest may ever have taken: to keep their tax rate a few points lower they’re willing to sacrifice a working future.” [Bill McKibben](#)
- ▶ “Why does Mickey Mouse want to destroy civilization?”
- ▶ OK, that’s probably not what Disney executives think they’re doing. But the Walt Disney Company, along with other corporate titans, including ExxonMobil and Pfizer, is reportedly gearing up to support a major [lobbying effort](#) against President Biden’s \$3.5 trillion investment plan — a plan that may well be our last chance to take serious action against global warming before it becomes catastrophic.” [Paul Krugman](#)





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Questions for Research

- ▶ How have societies driven large scale change, and how have those movements started and grown in history? How can we use that info to improve and accelerate the climate movement?
- ▶ When has business moved the needle in a positive direction vs. focusing on its own interest? (Ie, Chicago pollution.)
- ▶ Is the idea that corporations might be able to move public policy through voice and lobbying a legitimate idea, or are there reasons (other than will) that this isn't a good strategy? Is climate different enough from past issues that we need to think differently about the role of business, perhaps ignoring it?

