

## The Ezra Klein Show: Ezra Klein Interviews Bill McKibben

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### Transcript of Opening Remarks

I have this frustration with the rhythm of how we cover American politics. I've had it for a very long time. It's this — so we spend, in the press, all this time covering elections, and campaigns, and politicians. And then they get elected. And we cover their fights, and their legislative battles, and is the bill going to pass, and what's happening to Build Back Better, and what is Joe Manchin doing.

And then finally, sometimes, if you're lucky, something big and good passes. And then we just move on. We just go on to the next thing. But bills don't do all that much on their own. They actually have to be implemented. They have to become something real in the world to have the effect they were meant to have.

And that's where we are now in climate. Over the past two years, the Biden administration and the Democrats, they passed a huge series of climate bills. The Inflation Reduction Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act. It's about \$450 billion in climate investment.

And behind that number, lurks all kinds of new agencies, and standards, and mandates and goals. And even more than that, those bills and that politics has been a signal to the private sector which is investing here, to lots of young people who are going into climate tech and climate activism, to all kinds of members of the building trades who are reorganizing and retooling and retraining to know how to build everything we're going to need to build, to electrify, to weatherize. It's big. What has to happen in the coming years is big. And we can't just expect that it'll happen on its own.

So I've done, a couple of months ago, this big long conversation with Jesse Jenkins about the imagined path to decarbonization here, what the drafters of these bills hope will happen. I really recommend that conversation to understand the context. And I'll put a link in show notes.

But this conversation is different. This conversation is about how to make it happen. Something I've heard again and again in the past few months is that the climate movement is fracturing under the weight of its own success. Actually getting these bills done, actually moving to where you can implement them, now there are a lot of fights, now there's a lot of really hard trade-offs that have to be made.

But I really don't think fracturing is the right term here. I think the right term is governing. Writing legislation forces choice. You got to make all these decisions. Massive coalitions that can come together in opposition or come together when what you're passing or creating is imaginary. They always crack apart. They always find their deep tensions when they succeed and have to govern.

But that is not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of power. It happens to candidates all the time. They run for office as radicals promising to change the system. Then they win and they actually have to govern. And the trade-offs they make, and the compromises they have to make, and the fact that they need to make a budget work, it alienates a lot of their former allies. People who looked radical begin to look incremental.

But at the same time, instead of the change they imagined just being a hypothetical, it begins to happen in the real world. Real people's lives are made better. New groups and power centers join their coalition. These are transitions, not the solutions. Fracturing makes it sound like the movements are simply losing power. In truth, they're gaining power.

That's where the climate movement and anyone working on climate is now. Enough bills have passed. Enough money has been set aside. Enough technologies have been created or are being created that we really do have a chance. It's remarkable. We really do have a chance to avert the worst of global warming.

But that means a movement that has spent most of its life learning how to stop terrible things from happening, it needs to become something different. A movement that builds real things in the real world at a breakneck pace. A movement that doesn't just say yes, but figures out how to make all kinds of communities and groups and cities around the country say yes. Yes and yes and yes, again and again and again, faster than we have in decades.

The climate movement has to govern now. They have to help this country build this whole infrastructure that they have imagined. And governing and building in this country, it is damn hard. But this should be, I think, a space not just for hope but for excitement.

I mean, one reason I wanted to have this topic, this conversation right now, post-election, is that however the House turns out, these next two years are not going to be a period of passing major climate bills through Congress. There's going to be a lot of paralysis, a lot of infighting. But that doesn't mean the next two years will be a time of stasis.

The next two years, and long beyond that, are going to be about making good on the promise of the legislation passed in 2021 and 2022. It's going to be about building the world those bills promised to make. It's going to be about actually getting us on a better path for our climate.