

Harsha Saxena, Founder and CEO of IICSR, on the Climate Litmus Test Facing Corporates in the USA

Harsha Saxena of IICSR says easing US climate rules will reveal which corporates act from conviction, not compliance, as IICSR expands globally.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, UNITED STATES, June 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Harsha Saxena](#), Founder and CEO of [IICSR](#), on the Climate Litmus Test Facing Corporates in the USA

By [IICSR Sustainability Express](#)

In California this spring, climate action appeared less as a distant environmental agenda and more as a test of institutional character.

Across Los Angeles and San Francisco Climate Weeks, the language of sustainability moved beyond familiar pledges and targets. The discussions were sharper, more practical and, at times, more uncomfortable. Climate finance, artificial intelligence, data-centre energy demand, wildfire resilience, food systems, public-private partnerships and corporate accountability were all on the table.

The question running beneath many of these conversations was not whether climate change matters. It was whether businesses, investors and institutions would continue to act when the regulatory pressure becomes uneven, the economics become complicated and the political mood becomes less predictable.

For Harsha Saxena, Founder and CEO of the International Institute of Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility, or IICSR, the moment represents a turning point.



“The United States is becoming a climate litmus test for corporates,” said Harsha Saxena, Founder and CEO of IICSR. “If regulatory pressure eases, the organisations that continue to invest in sustainability will reveal whether their climate commitments were rooted in compliance or conviction. The real believers and doers of climate action will be visible in how they act when no one is forcing them.”

That question has become particularly relevant in the United States, where climate ambition often moves alongside political contestation, regulatory change and market volatility. Yet the events in California also showed that climate action is not disappearing. It is becoming more complex, more local and more deeply tied to technology, capital and infrastructure.

California as a Climate Laboratory

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Climate leadership is tested when regulation eases; real doers act from conviction, not compliance, and continue building sustainable futures.”

*Harsha Saxena, Founder and
CEO IICSR Group*

Los Angeles Climate Week offered a view into the breadth of that transition. At Earth Summit 2026, organised by AI LA, with Kate Guernsey and Dr Shanti Rao among the convening voices, the conversations reflected the expanding boundaries of climate work. The opening remarks included public-sector participation, including Christopher Pimentel, Mayor of El Segundo, and Michael Anderson, Climatologist with the State of California.

The event examined climate not as a single-sector concern, but as a question of food systems, energy, technology, governance and business models. A session on the climate impact of animal agriculture, led by Dr Shailesh Rao, author of *There IS a Planet B*, pushed the audience to consider the emissions implications of consumption choices that are often treated as personal rather than systemic.

Another discussion focused on artificial intelligence and climate, raising questions that are



Harsha Saxena with Governor of California Gavin Newsom and other dignitaries at the event

quickly becoming central to the sustainability debate: how much energy will digital infrastructure require, whether renewable energy can meet that demand, whether nuclear energy will re-enter the conversation, and how far policy frameworks lag behind technology deployment.

That tension — between the promise of technology and the physical footprint of its infrastructure — became one of the strongest threads connecting Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Artificial intelligence is increasingly marketed as a tool for climate optimisation. It can support energy modelling, supply-chain monitoring, climate-risk analysis and operational efficiency. But the systems that make AI possible depend on data centres, cooling systems, electricity, water, rare minerals and hardware supply chains. In other words, AI is not immaterial. Its environmental impact is physical, measurable and growing.

This made the climate conversation in California more grounded. It was not simply about innovation, but about the conditions under which innovation becomes responsible.

Finance Meets Resilience

At the SidePorch convening, Resilience & Long Horizons, the focus shifted towards climate finance, long-term risk and investment in resilience. The event brought together voices from philanthropy, public systems, climate



Kathryn Barger, LA County Supervisor with Harsha Saxena, Founder and CEO IICSR Group



California Senator Josh Becker with Harsha Saxena, CEO IICSR

capital and community resilience, including Amber Martinez of LA Parks Foundation, Mitch Rubin of Elemental Impact, Brendan Bell of Aligned Climate Capital, Matt Gonser, Climate Resilience Officer for the County of Los Angeles, and moderator Alexander Kapur of SidePorch.

The discussion reflected a growing reality in climate finance: capital is interested in the transition, but capital alone cannot deliver it. Investors need credible projects, communities need protection, public agencies need coordination, and companies need the patience to work beyond short-term returns.

The session *Innovating at the Pace of Problem*, with Lily Bui of SoCal Grantmakers, brought attention to the practical challenges of grantmaking and community-level implementation. It offered a counterbalance to the often glossy language of climate innovation. The real work of climate resilience is not only about funding new ideas. It is about building trust, addressing local realities and ensuring that solutions reach those most exposed to risk.

Los Angeles, with its history of air pollution, wildfire vulnerability and environmental activism, offered an apt backdrop. References to Dr Ann Carlson's *Smog & Sunshine* and the role of the Mothers of East LA served as a reminder that environmental reform in California has often been shaped by civic pressure as much as by government design.

From Circularity to Regeneration

Other events during Los Angeles Climate Week turned attention to circularity and regenerative systems.

At the Carbonauts gathering, hosted by Katherine Jones, the conversation moved towards regenerative investing, regenerative labour and the possibility of building economic models that repair rather than merely reduce harm. Indy Rishi Singh's reflections connecting farming practices from Haryana to California suggested that climate solutions may not always flow from the Global North to the Global South. In many cases, traditional knowledge and local ecological intelligence may offer models that modern systems need to rediscover.



Eva Longoria at Founders Inc and Harsha Saxena, CEO IICSR

The Social Enterprise Collective, organised by Bree Jensen, brought a more human and immediate dimension to the climate discussion. Its panel, From Chaos to Coordination: How Cross-Sector Collaboration Builds Recovery That Actually Works for Communities, explored wildfire recovery, insurance challenges and the lived experience of communities trying to rebuild after disaster. Participants included representatives from public leadership, philanthropy and community organisations, including LA County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, GoFundMe, Pasadena Community Foundation and Day One.

These sessions showed that climate action cannot be reduced to boardroom strategy or policy architecture. It is also about households, neighbourhoods, insurance systems, public trust and the ability of institutions to respond when crisis becomes personal.

The AI Question Moves to San Francisco

If Los Angeles Climate Week exposed the breadth of the climate challenge, San Francisco Climate Week sharpened the question of technology.

At UC Law San Francisco, the session Sustainable AI Infrastructure – Policy and Regulations was hosted as part of the Accelerating the Transition (ATT) Conference, organised by John Berger, Founder and CEO of ATT. The conference brought together leaders from policy, technology, finance, energy and law to examine pathways for accelerating climate solutions and sustainable innovation.

Within this platform, Harsha Saxena moderated the panel on Sustainable AI Infrastructure – Policy and Regulations, which explored how AI infrastructure can scale without worsening climate risk. The session featured Commissioner Siva Gunda, Vice Chair of the California Energy Commission, as plenary keynote speaker. The panel also included Nikunj J Parekh, Founding CTO of ParEx.ai and AI/data leader; Christina Sewell, Associate Director, Sustainable Finance at S&P; Kevin Benedicto, lawyer and Commissioner of Police in San Francisco; and Sudeshna Pabi, Head of Energy Resilience at EPRI.

The discussion came at a time when AI's energy demand is no longer a specialist concern. It has become a boardroom issue, a policy issue and an infrastructure issue. The growth of AI is pushing companies to ask whether their digital transformation strategies are aligned with their net-zero commitments.

The emerging challenge is not whether AI should be used in sustainability. It is whether AI itself can be made sustainable.

That requires stronger energy-efficiency standards, cleaner grids, better cooling technologies, sustainable data-centre planning, responsible procurement and regulatory frameworks that do not arrive years after deployment. It also requires companies to be honest about the trade-offs

between productivity gains and environmental costs.

A Test for Corporate Climate Conviction

The broader climate backdrop in the United States remains complicated. Corporate sustainability teams are navigating regulatory uncertainty, shifting political signals, investor scrutiny and public scepticism around greenwashing. Some companies are becoming more cautious in how they communicate climate commitments. Others are quietly continuing the work while reducing public visibility.

For Harsha Saxena, this is precisely why the coming period matters.

“Climate action cannot be built only on regulation,” said Harsha Saxena. “Regulation is necessary, but it is not the only driver of responsibility. The deeper test is whether companies continue to decarbonise, build climate capability and invest in sustainable innovation because they understand the long-term risk and opportunity.”

IICSR's own increasing engagement in the United States is part of this wider reading of the market. The institute, which works in CSR, ESG, sustainability education and professional capacity building, has been building its presence across US climate and sustainability ecosystems through convenings, collaborations and knowledge exchange.

IICSR is accredited and recognised through ACTD in the United States, EAHEA in Europe and MEPSC/NSQF-linked skilling ecosystem references in India. Its work focuses on building sustainability capacity among professionals, corporates, entrepreneurs and institutions.

As IICSR builds strength globally, the USA has become a major focus area. But its expansion is not limited to North America. The organisation is also deepening its Southeast Asia presence, including through an MoU with MUST University in Malaysia, collaboration with the SCB Conference in Vietnam, and other emerging regional partnerships.

This dual focus — the United States and Southeast Asia — reflects a broader shift in sustainability education. Climate knowledge now needs to move across borders, because supply chains, finance, technology and regulatory expectations already do.

From Compliance to Capability

One of the clearest lessons from the California climate weeks was that the sustainability agenda is entering a new phase. The first phase was awareness. The second was commitment. The third is implementation.

That implementation phase is harder. It requires data, finance, talent, governance and operational discipline. It requires companies to look beyond annual reports and ask whether

sustainability is embedded in procurement, technology choices, energy use, product design, employee training and risk management.

It also requires a more mature public conversation. Not every climate-tech company will scale. Not every carbon market mechanism will deliver integrity. Not every AI application will reduce emissions. Not every corporate climate pledge will survive economic pressure. But dismissing climate action because of these complications would be a mistake.

The more useful conclusion from Los Angeles and San Francisco is that climate action is becoming more real precisely because it is becoming more contested, more technical and more difficult.

The future of climate leadership will not be defined by the loudest announcements. It will be defined by the organisations that continue to act when incentives are uncertain, regulations fluctuate and public attention moves elsewhere.

In that sense, the United States may indeed be entering a climate litmus test.

For corporates, the question is no longer whether they can speak the language of sustainability. It is whether they can keep building when the easy applause fades.

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