

The Fiduciary Focus

Investment News From a Pro-Shareholder Perspective

November 4, 2025

This Week: Shareholder activists target Amazon, Meta, PayPal over links to controversial group; More carbon credits go belly-up; The Bitcoin Brief looks at Wall Street's favorite pet rock.

Shareholder activists target Amazon, Meta, PayPal over links to controversial group



Following years of one-sided activism at the corporate ballot box, some conservative groups are punching back. Last month, the Heritage Foundation filed shareholder proposals at several prominent companies asking them to cut ties with the controversial Southern Poverty Law Center, the [Daily Signal](#) reports.

SPLC's Divisive Practices: The Southern Poverty Law Center purports to "fight hate" by tracking and working to dismantle "extremist" hate groups, but some conservatives believe that the organization affixes the label to any organization that doesn't share its progressive views. For example, the group has lumped Charlie Kirk's Turning Point USA and the Alliance Defending Freedom together with actual hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan. The result, according to the Heritage Foundation, is dangerous: "[by] equal[ing] mainstream conservative beliefs with hatred, they help create a culture of dehumanization with deadly consequences."

Corporate Partnerships Abound: Despite the controversial nature of SPLC's practices, many companies have embraced the group in recent years, including:

- Google and Meta, which allow SPLC to police "hate speech" on their platforms, despite the fact that both tech companies have been accused of censoring legitimate conservative views.
- Amazon and Starbucks, which allow SPLC to decide which charities are eligible for their donation matching programs.
- Mastercard and PayPal, which allow SPLC to weigh in on who they should deny banking and payment processing services to, despite federal laws requiring financial institutions not to discriminate based on political belief.

The Proposals: The proposals ask the companies to evaluate and disclose "the benefits, costs, and legal, reputational, competitive, and other relevant risks of the use of diagnostic tools created by politicized corporate partners."

Why It Matters: In today's heated political environment, the companies on the receiving end of these proposals are in a bind. Keep their partnership intact and they risk further angering conservatives; drop it and risk angering progressives. But the bind is one of their own making: By embracing a relationship with a divisive activist group, these companies opened themselves up to scrutiny from both sides going forward. The lesson is clear: for companies that care about their shareholders, they should focus on business alone, and leave the political activism to the activists.

More Carbon Credits Go Belly-Up



The world's largest carbon offset certifier, Verra, has determined that the vast majority of credits from a Zimbabwe forest-protection project were bogus, [Bloomberg](#) reports.

The Bogus Credits: The project sold tens of millions of dollars of carbon credits based on the premise that it was protecting a forest of Puerto Rico from annihilation. As it turns out, however, the forest wasn't at risk of destruction at all, with neighboring, unprotected reference forests still almost perfectly intact. That means the project failed to help the atmosphere in any meaningful way, with some estimates saying that the carbon credits were inflated by a factor of 8.

Corporate Reliance: The credits at issue were relied on to support environmental claims by companies including:

- Volkswagen
- Gucci
- Nestle
- McKinsey & Co.

Volkswagen was the only one who responded to Bloomberg when asked what it plans to do to make good on these credits. Its response? Nada. The credits are already "retired" and so "no action is required from stakeholders who have already retired them."

A Growing Trend: This is hardly the first time a carbon credit project has gone bust. Last year, Verra canceled 37 rice farming projects in China for violating its rules. No solution—either making good on the climate claims or revoking the credits—has been offered in that case either. The preferred course, it seems, is for fraudsters to create bogus projects, Verra to verify them, companies to spend millions on the credits, and then simply ignore the problem when the scheme is exposed.

The Takeaway: None of this tomfoolery is good for the environment, of course, but it isn't good for companies either. They're throwing away tens of millions of dollars on carbon credits that do nothing but line the pockets of fraudsters, while potentially misleadingly their customers and investors about their climate impact. That's a recipe for financial ruin—one that no amount of organic Chinese rice paddies or imperiled African forests will be able to offset.

Glass Lewis Drops Benchmark Voting Policy



Proxy advisory firm Glass Lewis will stop issuing a benchmark voting policy in 2027, instead issuing different policies tailored to investors' differing investment priorities, [Reuters](#) reports.

Catch Me Up:

- Glass Lewis is one half of the proxy duopoly, that, together with ISS, controls up to 97% of the proxy advisory market.
- For years, their standard, benchmark voting policy was relied on by many investors and large asset managers to decide how to vote in corporate elections and on shareholder resolutions, giving Glass Lewis substantial power.
- Historically, Glass Lewis used that power to promote ESG and other social causes, such as fighting climate change and selecting directors based on demographics rather than merit, even when such measures harmed shareholder value.
- Financially-minded investors, [Congress](#) and states like [Texas](#) have all asked Glass Lewis to reduce its corporate political advocacy.
- In response, Glass Lewis is tossing its "benchmark" policy, instead offering a choose-your-own-adventure menu of voting options based on whether investors want to focus on climate change, social justice, or investment returns.

Following the Big Three's Lead: In some respects, Glass Lewis's move follows that of the Big Three, which have all [split](#) their voting and engagement groups into separate teams, which are expected to vote differently on the same issues across funds.

Diluted Advocacy: Of course, it's still not clear how this split advocacy will work in practice. It's hard to imagine BlackRock's purportedly returns-focused team effectively engaging with an oil giant to increase output if BlackRock's sustainability team is also in the room, urging the energy company to ignore that advice. But Glass Lewis, at least, might be able to sidestep this issue, as the proxy advisory company has long argued it doesn't owe fiduciary duties to anyone, because the company merely issues recommendations without handling any investments directly. And in our view, rendering the Big Three less effective at pushing their agendas, whatever they claim to be, is likely a win for shareholder value in any event.



Wall Street's "Pet Rock" Becomes Prime Collateral

By the end of the year, JPMorgan Chase will allow institutional clients to [hedge](#) against Bitcoin holdings, treating digital assets the same way it treats traditional securities in its lending book. The move signals that Bitcoin has crossed a significant threshold—from a novelty JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon once likened to a "pet rock" to legitimate collateral in the eyes of America's largest bank.

The new program will allow institutional clients globally to pledge their Bitcoin holdings directly as loan security, managed through third-party custodians. Earlier this year, JPMorgan began accepting crypto-linked ETFs as collateral, but now clients can pledge the actual Bitcoin themselves. For a bank whose chief executive dismissed Bitcoin as "hyped-up fraud" just years ago, the shift is more than symbolic—it's a fundamental acknowledgement that digital assets have earned their place alongside stocks, bonds, and gold in the plumbing of modern finance.

JP Morgan's evolution reflects a broader Wall Street awakening. Morgan Stanley is preparing to offer retail digital asset access through E*trade in early 2026. State Street, Bank of New York Mellon, and Fidelity have launched crypto custody services. The Trump administration's regulatory changes have created the conditions for this integration, but demand has been building for years. The digital asset-backed lending market has rebounded from its [2022 lull](#) to reach over [\\$40 billion](#) in Q2 of 2025, excluding stablecoin-backed loans.

While JPMorgan's initiative is currently limited to institutional investors, there may soon be opportunities for individuals to leverage their Bitcoin holdings as well. This past June, the federal housing agency instructed Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to develop proposals for counting Bitcoin as an asset for mortgage underwriting, without conversion to dollars first. That directive could eventually allow millions of homebuyers to qualify for government-backed mortgages using Bitcoin wealth. Until then, startups like Miami-based Milo have filled the void, originating over \$65 million in digital-asset-backed mortgages that let holders buy real estate while keeping digital assets intact. Now, Wall Street is stepping into the space that nimble firms pioneered.

Bitcoin's journey from a techno-financial experiment to recognized collateral has been neither linear nor inevitable. But as the world's largest bank prepares to treat it like any other security, the message is clear: Bitcoin has moved from the margins to the mainstream. Whether Jamie Dimon personally believes in Bitcoin is now beside the point—his institution does, and is willing to put billions behind the effort.



Strive's Jeff Walton to Speak at Bitcoin Amsterdam

Looking for a European getaway with the world's hardest money as your travel companion? Join Strive Chief Risk Officer Jeff Walton at Bitcoin Amsterdam November 13-14, where he'll be sharing his views on the future of Bitcoin, Bitcoin treasury companies, digital credit and global finance.

[Learn More](#)

The Best of The Rest

Additional stories about ESG investing, company happenings, and more.

- [Elon Musk calls out proxy advisors](#) after they recommend voting against a male Tesla director for "insufficient gender diversity" while also recommending shareholders vote against a female director as well.
- [GM lays off more than 3,300 EV workers](#) in U.S. plants, as company focuses on delivering cars that consumers want, rather than chasing UK business goals.
- [DEI backlash hits European shores](#), as more than half of UK businesses reconsidering their approach to DEI.
- [Levi's introduces new goal to reduce freshwater use](#) by 15% by 2030 to fight climate change.
- [Exxon sues California over climate disclosure rules](#); alleges free speech violation.

Know someone who might enjoy this newsletter? Be sure to share it with them. Not signed up and want to receive your own weekly copy of The Fiduciary Focus? [Click here](#) to sign up.

Who Are We?

Strive is one of the fastest growing asset management firms. Our mission is to maximize value for our clients by leading companies to focus on excellence. [Click here](#) to learn more.

What Makes Strive Different?

While many asset managers push companies to focus on other stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, the environment and society at large, we live by a strict commitment to shareholder primacy—the belief that **the purpose of a for-profit corporation is to maximize long-run value for investors**. [Click here](#) to learn why shareholder primacy is so important.

How Does Strive Maximize Value?

Our **corporate governance** team engages with the companies in which our clients are invested to advocate for the pursuit of excellence in corporate America. We are aggressively apolitical when it comes to utilizing our corporate governance tools and demand that companies focus exclusively on delivering long-term financial value for investors. The corporate governance team also determines how to cast our shareholder votes at annual meetings and special elections, evaluating each proposal through the lens of maximizing financial return.

Our research team conducts deep analysis of macro economic trends, market developments, and industry- and company-specific metrics to identify potential risks and opportunities for our clients. We then incorporate the results of this research into our engagement and voting strategy, and share it with our clients in the form of white papers and market research reports so they can make the most educated investment decisions possible.

Full disclosures and terms of use here.

Strive is a registered investment advisor. This newsletter is for educational purposes only and should not be construed as or relied upon for investment advice. More information about Strive, its investment strategies, and investment objectives is available on [Strive.com](#).