

October 24, 2019

To: Harvard Faculty Supporting Divest

As the climate crisis deepens, we are writing to you as The Ad Hoc Committee for Harvard Divestment, a group of Harvard alumni who have been deeply supportive of Harvard over many decades. We are proud to be one part of the faculty-student-alumni coalition that is working together to persuade Harvard to divest its endowment from fossil fuels. We greatly admire the work which faculty are doing to support divest, and we have benefitted from your suggestions.

We have met with Senior Fellow Lee and President Bacow, and have requested a meeting with the full Board of the Harvard Corporation. Attached is a copy of our most recent request, detailing again our perspective and hopes that Harvard will change course.

To date the University has stuck with two central arguments, and we suspect that President Bacow will use them again in the meeting which he has scheduled with you for Tuesday, November 5. It might be useful to review each of them briefly:

Argument #1: “The endowment should not be used for political purposes.”

As one of the members of our group, Bill McKibben ’82, asked “why is investing apolitical and divesting is political?”

Our colleague Bevis Longstreth HLS ’61 has written: “The climate issue has never been an expression of “political purpose.” To think it is to confuse politics with public interest, which a quick look at what goes on in Washington would reveal are very different things. To advocate for and to act in service to the public interest is what, in a democracy, being a good citizen, whether an individual or institution, entails. Halting the use of fossil fuels to prevent destruction of the planet fits neatly into the notion of public interest. In fact, it is public interest on an existential scale. For a tax-exempt institution with the pretensions to greatness of Harvard, its refusal to get involved in this matter by palming off public interest as political purpose is a disgrace.”

Argument #2: “Harvard must engage with the fossil fuel industry as shareholders.”

We have repeatedly asked the University what they mean by “engagement,” and how Harvard or the greater community has benefitted from this engagement strategy. We have yet to receive a reply.

We hope that this brief discussion and our more fulsome letter are useful. We wish you well in your meeting with President Bacow, and look forward to the results of your deliberations.

Timothy Wirth ‘61

Joan Hutchins ‘61

On behalf of the Ad Hoc Committee (membership listed in the attached letter),