A Resolution Calling Upon the University of Hawai’i System to Divest from Fossil Fuel Investments

WHEREAS

the University of Hawaii Student Caucus (UHSC) is an overarching, System level body representing approximately 60,000 part and full-time undergraduate and graduate students from across the University of Hawai’i System; and

WHEREAS

the leaders of 167 countries (including the United States) have agreed that any warming of the planet above 2°C (3.6°F) would be unsafe, and we have already (as of 2012) raised the average surface temperature 0.8°C, causing far more damage than most scientists expected¹; and

WHEREAS

according to the Carbon Tracker Institute, the proven coal, oil, and gas reserves of 6 of the top 200 fossil-fuel companies, and countries (e.g. Venezuela or Kuwait) which act like fossil-fuel companies, equals about 2,795 gigatons of CO₂, or five times the amount we can release to maintain a 2°C limit of planetary warming²; and

WHEREAS

Hawai’i is the most fossil fuel dependent state in the US, nearly 90% of the state’s energy is derived from fossil fuel, roughly 75% of which comes from foreign sources, producing the highest electricity rates in the US and jeopardizing the state’s security, economy and environment³; and

WHEREAS

Hawai’i is extremely vulnerable to climate change and sea level rise⁴; and

WHEREAS

President Obama stated in his 2013 inaugural address, “Some may still deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires, crippling drought, and more powerful storms. The path towards sustainable energy sources will be long and sometimes difficult. But America cannot resist this transition -- we must lead it. We cannot cede to other nations the technology that will power new jobs and new industries -- we must claim its promise.”⁵; and

¹ http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/11a01.pdf
⁵ http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama
WHEREAS former U.S. Securities and Exchange Commissioner Bevis Longstreth states that it is imprudent — perhaps even a breach of fiduciary responsibility — to bet on the long-term financial viability of the fossil-fuel industry⁶; and

WHEREAS numerous financial experts have concluded that it is possible to divest from fossil fuels and still earn strong returns and an industry study by Aperio Investment Management found that the theoretical risk to return from fossil fuel divestment is .0044%⁷; and

WHEREAS investment experts have acknowledged that divestment is possible for large institutions, even ones using commingled funds; and

WHEREAS the University of Hawai‘i is the only public university in the state serving as the intellectual epicenter of the state and region that is a widely respected Land, Sea, and Space Grant institution, and UHM researchers David Karl, Mark Merrifield, Axel Timmermann, and Shang-Ping Xie contributed as (Coordinating) Lead Authors to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change⁸; and

WHEREAS the Mission and Purpose of the University of Hawai‘i as outlined by Board of Regents Policy states that “The university shall be a global leader and model for the integration of sustainability throughout its teaching, research, operations, and public service.”; and

WHEREAS the University of Hawai‘i Strategic Directions (2015–2021)⁹, UHM Strategic Plan (2011-2015), UHM Sustainability Policy Statement (2012), and UH Mānoa Green Building Design and Clean Energy Policy (2006) contain commitments to clean energy and prioritizing environmental stewardship; and

WHEREAS several other universities and colleges across the United States have already divested from fossil fuels, such as Stanford University, San Francisco State University, and twenty other Universities have entered into formal processes to consider divestment¹⁰; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that the UH Student Caucus calls upon the UH Board of Regents to adjure the UH Legacy Endowment to stop of any new investment in fossil fuel companies; and to ensure that within five years none of its directly held or commingled assets

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⁶ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bevis-longstreth/the-financial-case-for-di_b_4203910.html
⁹ http://blog.hawaii.edu/strategicdirections/files/2015/01/StrategicDirectionsFINAL-013015.pdf
¹⁰ http://gofossilfree.org/commitments/
include holdings of either public equities or corporate bonds in fossil fuel companies as determined by the Carbon Tracker list; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UH Student Caucus encourages the UH Board of Regents to pursue continuing efforts to research financially stable companies and investing the endowment in a way that further maximizes the positive impact of the fund by seeking out investments in opportunities to limit the effects of burning fossil fuels or help to mitigate its effects including, but not limited to, clean technology, renewable energy, sustainable companies or projects, and sustainable communities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UH Student Caucus encourages the UH Board of Regents to support official dialogues at UH campuses on divesting the endowment from fossil fuels; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UH Student Caucus requests the UH Board of Regents to release bi-annual updates, available to the public, detailing progress made towards full divestment.

THEREFORE LET IT BE FINALLY RESOLVED that this resolution be sent to the University of Hawai‘i Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer Donna Vuchinich, Board of Trustees Chairman Ronald N.S. Ho, University of Hawai‘i Board of Regents Chair Randy Moore and Members, President David Lassner, the University of Hawai‘i Foundation Directors, the University of Hawai‘i Chancellors, the University of Hawai‘i All Campus Council of Faculty Senates Chairs Chairman Ron Bontekoe, campus student governments, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, and all campus student newspaper publications.