

Trustees of Williams College,

We are dismayed that you have rejected the request of students, faculty, staff, and alumni to divest the College's \$2.3 billion endowment from investment funds that include the world's 200 largest publicly traded fossil-fuel companies. Despite support from 71% of students who voted in record numbers in a student referendum, 55% of faculty, and hundreds of alumni, you instead chose a less ambitious path that fails to provide the leadership so desperately required to confront the biggest challenge of our time. Perhaps most alarmingly, in making this decision, you declared that fossil fuel companies' campaigns to attack science, spread misinformation, and impede informed democratic decision-making are consistent with the mission and values of the College. This is not consistent with the Williams we know and care about.

The initiatives announced in lieu of divestment (e.g. reducing campus emissions, purchasing carbon offsets, hiring new faculty focused on climate change) certainly represent a welcome step forward in the College's response to climate change, but they fall far short of the impact that would have been achieved by including divestment in the plan. Given the urgency of global climate change, Williams College needs both investment and divestment.

This is why President Falk's justification for a limited response to climate change is fundamentally flawed. To argue that we must first address our own fossil fuel consumption before demanding broader changes presents a false dichotomy that impedes efforts to engage fully with the urgent challenges of climate change. Furthermore, to divest is not asking someone else to change, as the president claimed. It is exercising responsibility. It is using our money in a manner that furthers our mission rather than in a way that works against it.

The College's planned initiatives help it address its own carbon footprint, but we are well past the point where we can be satisfied with individuals and institutions taking care of their own backyards. Instead, we need a strategy that galvanizes people to demand meaningful national policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and that stigmatizes the fossil fuel industry to such a degree that legislators are willing to act for the public welfare despite the substantial political and financial interest of fossil fuel companies. Effective climate action will require policies such as a carbon tax, renewable energy incentives, dismantling of fossil fuel subsidies, and rejecting new fossil fuel infrastructure. Williams's new climate plan simply fails to provide leadership toward the rapid, broad-based, and effective climate actions that the world needs.

Divestment, however, will help us achieve these policies. As more institutions commit to removing assets from the fossil fuel industry, the resulting stigmatization has

multiple effects. Economically, banks and multilateral financing institutions begin to evaluate the increased risk of fossil fuel investments and they limit financing for further exploration, changes that are already underway. Politically, stigmatization builds citizen and legislator support for meaningful regulations, something that we have seen recently with the rejection of the Keystone XL pipeline and the investigation into Exxon-Mobil's deliberate distortion of science. There is already ample evidence that the industry recognizes the fossil-fuel divestment movement as a powerful threat: Peabody Energy, one of the largest coal producers, stated that the divestment campaign may impact its share price; NRG cited the divestment movement as a key impetus for their decision to reduce CO2 emissions by 90 percent by 2050; and the fossil fuel lobby is funding public relations counter-campaigns, something that would be unnecessary were divestment insignificant. By contrast, campaigns to reduce fossil fuel consumption, like those that you propose, have no demonstrated record of influencing energy policy or economics.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of your announcement, however, is the rationale for rejecting divestment, based on the cost of complete abandonment of the current investment strategy within one year. The actual divestment proposal asked you to embark on a reasonable, strategic process of divestment over a five-year period, maintaining the current investment strategy by working with existing fund managers and seeking out new fund managers in order to develop a fossil-free portfolio. Large institutions with similar financial goals--such as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Wallace Global Fund--have found that this gradual approach to divestment is feasible and rewarding, and the College's own Advisory Committee on Shareholder Responsibility demonstrated how the College could build toward divestment. Instead, you seem to have ignored the actual proposal, the analysis of your own advisory committee, and the real-world experience of other institutions that are currently divesting.

Chairman Eisenson described the College's new climate actions as "a leadership response" that is "worthy of Williams." We believe that the standard for worthiness must be whether these actions help establish us as a national and global leader. Two questions to ask when considering institutional leadership are: 1) Do these initiatives raise the bar for institutional action and thereby influence peer institutions to rise to new levels of commitment regarding climate change? 2) Do these initiatives capture the attention of policymakers and the media, helping to advance the national debate about climate change? Unfortunately, in many regards, your new plan merely helps Williams catch up to our peers. For example, Middlebury, Colby, Bowdoin, Oberlin, Colorado College, and several others have already achieved or developed plans for carbon neutrality; many others have committed to targeted hiring and impact investments. The lack of leadership is reflected in the lack of national press on the College's announcement. Many people recognize Williams as the number

one liberal arts institution, but few if any will recognize us as a leader in addressing climate change based on our current commitments.

From the beginning, the divestment movement has been motivated by a deep love for the College, and a belief that Williams is at its best when all of its people come together to confront our most pressing challenges. Williams has always been an institution with outsized influence, and it is also an institution that has inculcated in its students a desire to use their knowledge for the betterment of the world. Now is the time to combine that influence and that calling. Now is the time for Williams to assume the mantle of true leadership, to strive for the most sustainable future possible for students and graduates in the 21st century.

Therefore, on behalf of hundreds of alumni and the majority of faculty and students who petitioned for divestment, we request that you (a) fully examine the path of divestment by engaging in ongoing conversations with existing fund managers and with other institutional investors who have committed to divestment, (b) make publicly available all of the documents and analysis that you considered when deliberating about divestment in order to facilitate a more comprehensive dialogue within the College community, and (c) engage divestment advocates in ongoing conversations about how to move toward real climate leadership. We firmly believe that Williams College, our investment office, and our fund managers can exercise creative, innovative leadership to forge a new path in investing. And we know that such leadership is necessary both for addressing climate change and for maintaining the integrity of the College as an institution grounded in respect for science, truth, and informed democracy.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

The Williams Endowment Initiative and Divest Williams