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S.A. Resolution #56  
Support of the Divestment from Fossil Fuels

ABSTRACT: Resolution to divest Cornell University’s endowment from all investments in coal, oil, and natural gas.

**Sponsored by:** Julian Kroll ‘20, Indigo Pavlov ‘22

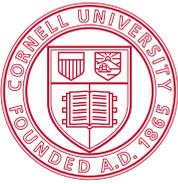
Whereas, many reputable financial publications have suggested that the fossil fuel industry is in the preliminary stages of a significant market decline, while renewable industries such as wind and solar energy promise sustainable, meaningful growth.

Whereas, in August 2019, the [Financial Times](#) reported that “Climate Change has been framed as an ethical issue for years now, with mixed success. But now the calls for socially responsible investing to save the planet are increasingly being reinforced by cold economic logic. Mainstream institutional investors are recognising that climate change is not just a threat to the health of the planet, but also a threat to the wealth of their clients”.

Whereas, the Financial Times reported on October 1, 2019 that “Investors who bet on a shift from fossil fuels to clean energy are being richly rewarded as solar and wind stocks outperform oil and gas shares by a widening margin this year”.

Whereas, Bloomberg’s New Energy Outlook ([NEO](#)) 2019 reported that solar and wind power have become the most cost effective way to create new energy sources. This report also suggests that wind and solar operations will be able to produce power at lower cost— without subsidy— than existing coal and gas plants across the world by 2030. Since 2010, the cost of solar energy has fallen by 85% and the cost of wind powered energy has dropped by roughly 50%.

Whereas, Deloitte’s [2019 Renewable Energy Industry Outlook](#) report states that some of the market and industry phenomena that “drove growth in 2018 were declining costs of wind and solar generation, advances in battery storage technology, and grid operators’ growing expertise and expanding toolset for integrating intermittent renewable power into the grid. And, perhaps most significant, was robust demand from most market segments. Utilities demonstrated strong “voluntary demand,” as opposed to the demand driven by policy mandates we’ve seen in the past”. In regards to specific drivers of renewable growth, the Deloitte report states that, “while the current US administration is not focused on decarbonization, states, cities, communities, and businesses with increasingly ambitious sustainability goals are driving renewable growth. Market developments such as the entry of smaller corporations into the corporate procurement market, renewed interest from oil and gas players, and greater involvement of asset management companies offer new opportunities for renewable growth”.



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42 Whereas, a portfolio manager of the Investec Global Environment fund stated that  
43 “Decarbonisation is the largest investment the world has ever had to make in peacetime and the  
44 yield curve is giving us an extremely attractive environment in which to make that investment”.

45  
46 Whereas, the global financial community is increasingly averse to oil investments. In late September,  
47 for example, the French oil and gas company Total announced an intention to accelerate dividend  
48 growth in years to come. Despite this effort to spur interest in Total’s stock, the company’s shares  
49 have nonetheless remained stagnant since the announcement.

50  
51 Whereas, in both 2017 and 2018, renewable stocks outperformed gas and oil shares.

52  
53 Whereas, a significant body of market analysts have indicated that as renewable energies become  
54 more cost effective, the infrastructure of renewable energy becomes more robust, and industrial  
55 actors become more interested in sustainability and more averse to fossil fuels, it is more financially  
56 prudent to invest in renewable energies than in the fossil fuel industry.

57  
58 Whereas, as stated in the 2015 fossil fuel divestment resolution, “there is overwhelming evidence  
59 that the use of fossil fuels is disrupting the Earth’s climate system and acidifying its oceans, and that  
60 such disruptions will significantly challenge the subsistence of human civilization”;

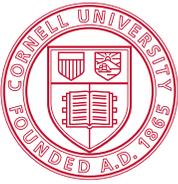
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62 Whereas, the metabolism of fossil fuels emits carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and nitrous oxide (NO) into the  
63 global atmosphere. A particle of CO<sub>2</sub> spends between 20 and 200 years in the atmosphere. A  
64 particle of nitrous oxide has an atmospheric lifetime of 110 years.

65  
66 Whereas, the presence of greenhouse gases carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, hydrogen gas,  
67 and chlorofluorocarbons raise the specific heat capacity of atmospheric gas, trapping solar rays as  
68 they are reflected off of the earth’s surface.

69  
70 Whereas, “Human activities are estimated to have caused approximately 1.0°C of global warming  
71 above pre-industrial levels, with a *likely* range of 0.8°C to 1.2°C. Global Warming is likely to reach  
72 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 if it continues to increase at the current rate” - IPCC 2019 Climate  
73 change report

74  
75 Whereas, “Warming from anthropogenic emissions from the pre-industrial period to the present will  
76 persist for centuries to millennia and will continue to cause further long-term changes in the climate  
77 system, such as sea level rise, with associated impacts, but these emissions alone are *unlikely* to cause  
78 global warming of 1.5°C”. - IPCC 2019

79  
80 Whereas, carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide remain in the atmosphere for decades to  
81 centuries after their original emission and trigger positive reinforcement cycles which both release  
82 additional greenhouse gasses and slow their reabsorption or decomposition.



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83 Whereas, climate change's impacts on natural and human systems have already been documented.  
84 The nature of future climate-related risks depend on the trajectory of warming and extent of human  
85 preparedness.

86  
87 Whereas, the effects of global warming vary geographically, disproportionately impacting people of  
88 greater geographic vulnerability who lack robust economic and/or social resources.

89  
90 Whereas, the gradual increase of global mean temperatures will correspond to more extreme weather  
91 events, more frequent and intense precipitation in several regions, increased frequency of droughts  
92 in some regions, marine ice sheet loss, sea level rise, and risks related to sea level rise.

93  
94 Whereas, Cornell's Board of Trustees issued a statement in 2016 detailing the circumstances under  
95 which they would initiate divestment proceedings. The criteria are as follows:

- 96 1. A company's actions or inactions are "morally reprehensible," **Additionally, either...**
- 97 2. The divestiture will likely have a meaningful impact toward correcting the specified harm  
98 and will not result in disproportionate offsetting societal consequences; **or**
- 99 3. The company contributes to harm so grave that it would be inconsistent with the goals and  
100 principles of the university

101 Whereas, the operations of the fossil fuel industry are **morally reprehensible**

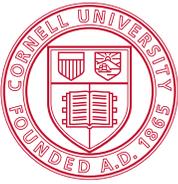
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103 Whereas, the body of research supporting the fossil fuel industry's moral reprehensibility has grown  
104 significantly since the Board of Trustees' 2016 negative fossil fuel divestment decision.

105  
106 Whereas, the [U.S. EPA](#) states on their website that "Climate change is very likely to affect food  
107 security at the global, regional, and local level. Climate change can disrupt food availability, reduce  
108 access to food, and affect food quality. For example, projected increases in temperatures, changes in  
109 precipitation patterns, changes in extreme weather events, and reductions in water availability may all  
110 result in reduced agricultural productivity. Increases in the frequency and severity of extreme  
111 weather events can also interrupt food delivery, and resulting spikes in food prices after extreme  
112 events are expected to be more frequent in the future. Increasing temperatures can contribute to  
113 spoilage and contamination".

114  
115 Whereas, fluctuations in temperature, sea level, precipitation, and the frequency and severity of  
116 extreme events will compromise the infrastructure and economy of energy production, delivery, and  
117 consumption in the United States.

118  
119 Whereas, global warming will increase demand for electricity through elevated cooling activity in  
120 warmer months, while elevated global average temperatures will reduce the efficiency of fossil fuel,  
121 nuclear power plants, and other production facilities that use water as a coolant.

122



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123 Whereas, as efficiency of energy production decreases as a result of decreased factor productivity of  
124 water-based coolants, and demand for energy increases in warm months as global average  
125 temperatures increase, it is likely that energy shortages will occur. People of lower socioeconomic  
126 status who lack the buying power to purchase energy at elevated prices will be most egregiously  
127 affected. This will lower quality of life, raise barriers to socioeconomic mobility, and create medical  
128 risk, among other negative effects.

129  
130 Whereas, climate change will cause a reduction in energy production efficiency that will hinder the  
131 infrastructure of fresh water transportation. Simultaneously, climate change will reduce many  
132 regions' access to fresh water resources by drought. Thus, climate change will create regionally  
133 specific elevated demand for fresh water in addition to a weakened freshwater transportation  
134 infrastructure that will be less capable of meeting this demand.

135  
136 Whereas, Climate Change leads to increased salinity in oceans through disruption of otherwise stable  
137 patterns of evaporation and precipitation. This disrupts ocean current patterns and reduces  
138 freshwater resources. When coastal regions are inundated with this increasingly saline ocean water,  
139 the soil is overly salinated and less conducive to agricultural productivity.

140  
141 Whereas, "Of 105,000 species studied, 6% of insects, 8% of plants, and 4% of vertebrates are  
142 projected to lose over half of their climatically determined geographic range for a 1.5°C, increase in  
143 global temperatures, compared with 18% of insects, 16% of plants, and 8% of vertebrates for a  
144 more extreme global warming of 2°C."

145  
146 Whereas, many ecosystems are delicate, interconnected, and dynamic. The loss of a relatively small  
147 portion of flora or fauna will catalyze significant disruptions.

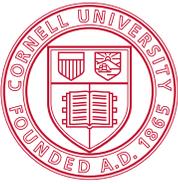
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149 Whereas, if their emissions of greenhouse gases are not drastically reduced, the fossil fuel industry  
150 will play a significant role in precipitating an anthropogenic mass extinction that will threaten human  
151 subsistence.

152  
153 Whereas, phenomena caused by global warming will displace populations located on islands, coasts,  
154 and peninsula.

155  
156 Whereas, the United Nations issued a statement in 2011 urging the island nation of the Maldives to  
157 prepare for displacement resulting from rising sea levels, salinization, coastal erosion, declining  
158 access to fresh water, and more frequent storms and flooding.

159  
160 Whereas, it has been estimated that many islands will become uninhabitable within decades due to  
161 the destruction or compromise of freshwater resources and an increased frequency of flooding.

162  
163 Whereas, migration away from these islands— such as the Maldives, the Marshall Islands, and other  
164 small Pacific Island nations, as well as coastal regions like the Louisiana coast or southern Florida—  
165 will occur as this land becomes uninhabitable.



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166 Whereas, the creation of new refugee populations could incite conflict through the disruption of  
167 existing global geopolitical dynamics.

168 Whereas, negative externalities produced by the fossil fuel industry have been shown to  
169 disproportionately impact marginalized communities— particularly communities of color with lower  
170 average socioeconomic status.

171 Whereas, Black Americans are three times more likely to die from exposure to air pollution and  
172 twice as likely to lack access to potable water.

173 Whereas, a study by Lelieveld et al. published by the National Academy of Sciences of the United  
174 States of America asserts that “fossil-fuel-related emissions account for about 65% of the excess  
175 mortality rate attributable to air pollution”.

176 Whereas, 68% of Black Americans live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant.

177 Whereas, the NAACP published a report in April 2019 entitled *Fossil Fuel Foolery*, detailing the tactics  
178 employed by the fossil fuel industry to manipulate and disempower communities of color. These  
179 strategies generally involve manipulation of information and public perception. The manner in  
180 which the fossil fuel industry treats communities of color is particularly relevant because these  
181 communities tend to bear disproportionate amounts of the negative externalities produced through  
182 fossil fuel enterprise.

183 Whereas, 35% of sites of fossil fuel extraction lie either directly on or near Indigenous land.

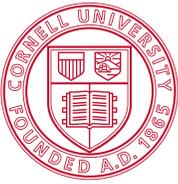
184 Whereas, fossil fuel projects have consistently violated indigenous human rights and caused  
185 significant long-term damage on indigenous traditional territories. These actions must be  
186 contextualized by a history of antagonism and colonialism that has weakened indigenous  
187 communities.

188 Whereas, Cornell University occupies the territory of the Cayuga Nation.

189 Whereas, for instance, the process of oil extraction and tar sands developments in Canada has  
190 created massive waste pools that can be seen from space in the center of Dene people’s territory,  
191 fracturing and destroying their land.

192 Whereas, the direct and robust contribution of the fossil fuel industry to climate change, a  
193 phenomena which has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt to threaten the production and  
194 transportation of food, energy, and freshwater, is morally reprehensible. As these resources become  
195 more scarce, populations across the world will inevitably lose access to them.

196  
197 Whereas, the direct and robust contribution of the fossil fuel industry to climate change, a  
198 phenomena that threatens to cause an anthropogenic mass extinction, is morally reprehensible. The



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199 impact of collapsing global ecosystems on human subsistence is not negligible; human agricultural  
200 processes are often interwoven with local flora and fauna.

201  
202 Whereas, the direct and robust contribution of the fossil fuel industry to climate change, a  
203 phenomena that threatens to displace populations and create a new generation of environmental  
204 refugees, is morally reprehensible. The effects of these imminent disruptions to volatile global  
205 geopolitical dynamics are unpredictable.

206  
207 Whereas, the overwhelming amount of human death, suffering, and disruption that climate change  
208 threatens to cause is inherently morally reprehensible. The disproportionate impact of climate  
209 change upon indigenous communities, communities lacking robust socioeconomic resources, and  
210 communities of color bears similarities to an apartheid state, in which operates a system of  
211 segregation and violence based on color, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

212  
213 Whereas, the process of fossil fuel divestment has a meaningful impact towards correcting the fossil  
214 fuel industry's emissions of carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide through diminishing their external  
215 funding, stock value, and legitimacy in the global marketplace.

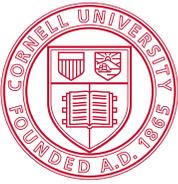
216  
217 Whereas, a 2017 study written by Ekwurzel et al. showed that 90 fossil fuel companies account for  
218 two thirds of all carbon dioxide and methane emissions produced in the industrial era. Destabilizing  
219 the fossil fuel industry is a prudent route to a sustainable and just future.

220  
221 Whereas, Cornell University's divestment from the fossil fuel industry would follow the UC system's  
222 recent decision to divest from fossil fuels, and would set a precedent for the rest of the Ivy League  
223 and other peer institutions. As more institutions choose to divest from the fossil fuel industry, the  
224 symbolic and material objectives of fossil fuel divestment are more fully realized.

225  
226 Whereas, if successful, the global drive for fossil fuel divestment will incentivize fossil fuel  
227 companies to transition into reliance on renewable technologies.

228  
229 Whereas, divestment from fossil fuels legitimizes contemporary climate science. This is particularly  
230 important in today's context, given the Trump Administration's consistent denial and repression of  
231 climate science. The Trump administration's institutionalized climate change denial has manifested  
232 itself in the following ways, among others:

233  
234 1. **Altering economic models of climate change by deliberately miscalculating the social**  
235 **cost of carbon:** The Trump EPA's 'social cost of carbon' is calculated as the social cost of  
236 one ton of carbon to the U.S. economy and environment, as opposed to the previous model  
237 which calculated the impact of one ton of carbon upon the global environment and  
238 economy. As a result, the social cost of one ton of carbon sank from \$50 to between \$1 and  
239 \$7. As this data is factored into the formation and implementation of environmental policy,  
240 greater amounts of carbon dioxide pollution will be permitted. Additionally, a social cost of



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241 carbon based solely on domestic carbon impact is surely inaccurate given our interconnected  
242 global economy, which will encounter higher transportation and energy costs due to  
243 greenhouses gases like carbon dioxide.

244 **2. Removing mention of human-made climate change from research conducted by**

245 **National Park Service Scientists:** The release of Maria Caffrey’s 2013 research on the  
246 impact of climate change on 118 coastal parks in the U.S. was delayed until 2017. When the  
247 report was released, all mention of human-made climate change was removed. The scientist  
248 who published the report was subsequently demoted and dismissed. Documentation of the  
249 agency’s actions was made available through the Freedom of Information Act.

250 **3. Direct quotes from the president of the United States endorsing conspiracy theories**  
251 **and misinformation in regards to climate science:** In 2012, Donald Trump tweeted that

252 climate change was a hoax invented by the Chinese government in order to weaken  
253 American industry. There is no evidence supporting this claim. On April 2nd, 2019, Donald  
254 Trump stated in a speech that noise from wind turbines causes cancer. There is no evidence  
255 supporting this claim. During an especially cold November weekend in 2018, Donald Trump  
256 tweeted “Whatever happened to Global Warming?”. This act reflects a deep  
257 misunderstanding of the nature of climate change.

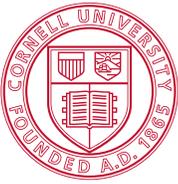
258  
259 Whereas, Cornell University’s divestment from fossil fuels will not result in disproportionate  
260 offsetting societal consequences. While a degree of structural unemployment may be experienced as  
261 primacy in the energy market shifts from fossil fuels to renewable technologies, this negative impact  
262 is certainly not disproportionate to the social value generated by the mitigation of climate change.

263  
264 Whereas, divestment from the fossil fuel industry will have a meaningful impact toward correcting  
265 the specified harm of climate change through delegitimizing the fossil fuel industry, stigmatizing  
266 their enterprises to potential investors and consumers, and empowering climate science, which  
267 clearly indicates that the fossil fuel industry’s operations are unsustainable and unjust.

268  
269 Whereas, A 2019 report from Truzaar Dordi and Olaf Weber asserts that “divestment  
270 announcements decrease the share price of the fossil fuel companies,” based on “several robustness  
271 tests using alternate expected returns models and statistical tests ... to ensure the accuracy of the  
272 result.” As share prices reflect the performance of the firm, this will incentivize fossil fuel companies  
273 to shift away from business as usual.

274  
275 Whereas, the divestment from the fossil fuel industry will have a meaningful impact towards  
276 correcting the specified harm of climate change by catalyzing our transition to a livable, just, and  
277 sustainable future powered by renewable energy. It will contribute to this transition by creating an  
278 economic incentive for fossil fuel companies to transition into reliance on renewable and just  
279 technologies and by disincentivizing the fossil fuel industry’s stagnation.

280



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281 Whereas, divestment from the fossil fuel industry will have a meaningful impact toward correcting  
282 the specified harm of climate change by reinvesting funds into sustainable and just technologies,  
283 enabling them to develop and implement industrial processes that will render fossil fuels obsolete.  
284

285 Whereas, Cornell University's investment in fossil fuels is dissonant with its Climate Action Plan,  
286 which advocates a "low-carbon future" and carbon neutrality on campus by 2035.  
287

288 Whereas, Cornell University is the leading Ivy League in sustainability rankings and regards itself as  
289 "a global leader in sustainability and climate change research."  
290

291 Whereas, to enthusiastically foster research and teaching aimed to elucidate the global threat of  
292 climate change while remaining significantly invested in the fossil fuel industry is irresponsible.  
293

294 Whereas, Cornell University must be cognizant of its direct contribution to climate change, a  
295 phenomena that existentially threatens the society that it prepares students to enter.

296 Whereas, at Cornell, "academic integrity is expected not only in formal coursework situations, but in  
297 all University relationships and interactions connected to the educational process, including the use  
298 of University resources." (University code of conduct)

299 Whereas some of the largest fossil fuel companies (including ExxonMobil, Shell, ConocoPhillips,  
300 Chevron, BP, and Peabody) withheld scientific findings asserting the existence of climate change in  
301 1977 and have since continued to fabricate uncertainty about climate science.

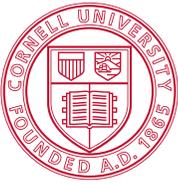
302 Whereas, ExxonMobil has spent \$30 million supporting think tanks that produce biased reports  
303 fabricating uncertainty about climate science.

304 Whereas, if Cornell University would not tolerate academic dishonesty in a Cornell researcher or  
305 undergraduate, Cornell must not tolerate self-interested dishonesty in the companies that it invests  
306 in.

307 Whereas, the direct and robust contribution of the fossil fuel industry to climate change, a  
308 phenomena that poses an existential threat to the world that Cornell University prepares its students  
309 to enter, is inconsistent with the goals and principles of the university.

310 Whereas, the direct and robust contribution of the fossil fuel industry to climate change is  
311 inconsistent with Cornell's commitment to sustainability and climate change research. The fossil fuel  
312 industry is both deeply unsustainable and has been shown to engage in frequent repression of  
313 climate change research.

314 Whereas, the many cases in which the fossil fuel industry has suppressed climate change research  
315 and contributed to the spread of misinformation concerning climate change is inconsistent with  
316 Cornell University's Code of Academic Integrity.



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317 **Be it therefore resolved,** that Cornell divest from all investments in coal, oil, and natural gas in an  
318 orderly manner and as rapidly as possible.

319

320

321 **Respectfully Submitted,**

322

323 Julian Kroll '20

324 *School of Arts and Sciences Representative, Student Assembly*

325

326 Indigo Pavlov '22

327 *Vice President of External Affairs, Womxn's Representative, Student Assembly*

328

329 Catherine Huang '21

330 *Executive Vice President, Student Assembly*

331

332 *(Reviewed by: Environmental Committee, 8-1-0, 03/11/2020)*