HCox 07-26-23 SIC Comments

Hi. I'm Holly Cox, a NJ resident & taxpayer, who has paid local, county, & state taxes into the NJ state retirement fund for the last 25 years. It is unacceptable that my taxpayer dollars are being used to underwrite fossil fuel companies, fund the climate crisis, & create an unlivable situation for all of us. It's past time to divest.

Recently, UN Secretary General António Guterres said that the fossil fuel business model is inconsistent with human survival.

I'm here because climate change is quickly changing everything. Burning fossil fuels are causing extreme weather events like intense downpours, unbreathable air from climate-induced wildfires, floods, & unbearable heat.

The world just had the hottest 20 days on record, which follows the hottest June on record, including unprecedented Atlantic Ocean surface temps & Arctic & Antarctic ice melt.

Over 7 million people die prematurely every year from air pollution from the burning of fossil fuels.

All of this makes it imperative that you engage with the public over the issue of fossil fuel divestment. DivestNJ has been coming to these meetings for 5 years, raising the issue of climate change & divestment, & we have never once heard you have a real discussion about the risks of climate to your investment portfolio. Although you talk about risk, it is mind-boggling you never talk about the biggest risk to the global economy...climate change.

There is a risk to every aspect of our well-being & wealth if we keep investing in fossil fuels, yet here we are, with the NJ State retirement fund using our hard-earned taxpayer dollars to invest in our own demise.

As a taxpayer, I'm also concerned you don't appear to be taking the following facts into account, which make fossil fuels an even worse investment:

1 - Fossil fuel companies are facing billions of dollars in potential liability resulting from lawsuits, which are proceeding around the country & the world, including here in NJ.

2 - These extreme climate events threaten our State & national security.

3 - Fossil fuel companies are bad actors, who knew the effects of their products for decades, but continue to greenwash their industry.

4 - Although energy sector stocks are currently in an inflationary bubble, they've underperformed since 2010, while renewable technology stocks are significantly

outperforming fossil fuels. The transition to clean energy is happening. Fossil fuels are unsustainable, incompatible with human survival, & bad for tomorrow's retirement fund.

5 - Asset managers all over the world are divesting: 1,500 asset managers overseeing a combined $40 trillion are now committed to offloading fossil fuel holdings. NYC pension divested $3 billion. The EU's biggest pension fund is divesting $17 billion. The largest Presbyterian church body, the Ford Foundation, Harvard, & the States of NY & Maine are all divesting from fossil fuels, citing climate change concerns. And here, I see NJ, in denial & late to the game, making our state retirement fund vulnerable.

6 - You are following divestiture laws regarding Sudan, Iran, companies boycotting Israel, and now Russia, so why won't you recommend divesting from fossil fuel companies, where it is a scientific fact they are making our planet uninhabitable.

In closing, the more you continue to invest in fossil fuel companies, the more you undermine the long-term stability of the state retirement fund & underwrite the climate chaos we're experiencing. It is your responsibility to be prudent fiduciaries & protect our long-term investments. Just as Mr. St. John is concerned about guardrails, climate risk should also be a guardrail in your investment decisions. Members & taxpayers deserve a public discussion & explanation of why our money is still invested in fossil fuels at a time when irreversible planetary tipping points are being breached. "It's not an investment if it's destroying the planet".(1) I respectfully call on you to divest. It's past time.

Thank you.

(1) Vandana Shiva (an Indian scholar & environmentalist)