To the university administration and Board of Trustees,

Our homes are burning, flooding, and freezing. We live in fear for our lives, the lives of the people we love, and the lives of people we don’t even know. Political leaders around the world are failing to curb the worst effects of the climate crisis. Amid these failures and our despair, George Washington University has arisen as a leader confronting the climate crisis. Your commitments to climate action inspire us to ask you to meet this moment, and continue your leadership.

Last week, the United Nations climate change conference COP26 came to a close without a plan to keep global warming to the Paris Agreement targets of well below 2 degrees Celsius. Decades after killing US support for the Kyoto Protocol and countless other international climate measures, the fossil fuel industry remains committed to obstruction and obfuscation. The industry sent over 500 lobbyists to the conference in Glasgow, more than the delegation of any single country. Like their efforts to undermine COP26, the fossil fuel industry mobilized members of Congress, flushed with campaign donations, to successfully lobby against key climate provisions of President Biden’s agenda, pushing our own American climate targets nearly out of reach. However, the fossil fuel industry’s efforts to obstruct climate action go far beyond the realm of politics.

For decades, the fossil fuel industry and allied organizations have spent billions of dollars to mislead the public about the science of and solutions to climate change. This strategy includes funding research in higher education, which has successfully influenced academic inquiry, tempered universities’ willingness to challenge the industry, and bolstered the credibility and social license of fossil fuel companies even as they imperil humanity. The fossil fuel industry and allied organizations are the architects of a crisis that threatens the lives and livelihoods of all people, especially in marginalized communities. To end this era of dangerous lies and deadly inaction, our institutions must reevaluate their relationships to those responsible for the crisis.

As students deeply concerned about the climate crisis and committed to our university, we are calling on you to take the next steps towards building a better future for all of us. When our university committed to full divestment from fossil fuels, campus carbon neutrality by 2030, and the reversal of its entire 200 year carbon footprint, among other measures across academic and campus operations, we asserted ourselves as leaders in the fight against the climate crisis. However, there is still work to be done. We divested from fossil fuels to align our investments with our commitment to climate action. Now, in order to lead on climate in higher education, GW must examine how the fossil fuel industry's investments in our university square with those same commitments.

We call on you to live up to the promise the Board of Trustees made in June 2020: “Today, it is more obvious than ever that decisive, meaningful action on many fronts is required to combat the growing threat of environmental catastrophe. We are committed to being a
role-model for this action and leading by example.” To make that vision a reality, we call on you to take the following steps:

1. **Enact** a ban on funding from the Slippery Six, the six companies and organizations subpoenaed by Congress for their role in the “Disinformation Campaign to Prevent Climate Action,” and from the top ten funders of the US climate change counter-movement, “a complex network of organizations that function to obstruct climate action.” These ten are the only funders who contributed at least 2% of all climate change counter-movement financing.

2. **Adopt** a plan to end reliance on funding from the full Carbon Underground 200, “the top global publicly-owned coal, oil, and gas reserves owners ranked by the carbon emissions embedded in their reserves.”

Banning funding from an industry proven to lie about the impact of its products on human health is hardly unprecedented. Many schools, departments, and other institutions around the country have banned funding from the tobacco industry over issues remarkably similar to those present in the fossil fuel industry. Both industries have tampered with research, misled the public, and allowed their products’ negative public health impacts to continue unabated. GW’s own Milken School of Public Health placed an embargo on tobacco industry funding in 2018, while Faculty Senate leaders pushed for a university-wide ban. The fossil fuel industry draws countless comparisons to the tobacco industry, including a few weeks ago, when fossil fuel executives testified before Congress about their industry’s deception, just as Big Tobacco CEOs famously did in 1994.

To be clear, there are other steps GW must take to fully end its complicity in the climate crisis beyond reevaluating fossil fuel funding. We outlined those steps in February. They include university-wide funding disclosure, stronger conflict of interest policies, and specific actions regarding the fossil fuel-funded Regulatory Studies Center. An explosive video was released in July of an ExxonMobil lobbyist admitting to the company’s role in funding disinformation campaigns to undermine climate science and stop climate legislation, in part by contributing to shadow groups that would carry out its agenda. The Dallas Morning News connected this disinformation campaign to GW: “Exxon has donated to organizations with questionable climate change backgrounds, including...the George Washington University Regulatory Studies Center.” The lack of action on this issue from GW leadership has remained a disappointing stain on our university’s name.

By taking the steps we called for today, GW can address issues deeper than any one center. It is time to be a model across higher education for how to best position institutions to take on the greatest challenge of our time.

By the end of this semester, **December 22, 2021**, we ask that you take public, concrete steps to end the corrupting influence of fossil fuel funding on campus.

The stakes are high, so we challenge you to raise higher.