



October 2, 2023

To the university administration and Board of Trustees,

Nearly two years ago we [reached out](#) to you in fear of the impact of the fossil fuel industry, desperate for you to show continued [leadership](#) in confronting the climate crisis, particularly in a time where political leaders around the world are [failing](#) to curb its worst effects.

Allow us to reiterate the urgency and severity of this moment: 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.

Since issuing our first letter in November of 2021, we have [concrete evidence](#) to support that **GW is a hotspot for fossil fuel industry influence**. The Dallas Morning News [connected](#) the fossil fuel industry's aforementioned disinformation campaign to GW: "Exxon has donated to organizations with questionable climate change backgrounds, including...the George Washington University Regulatory Studies Center." Research has corroborated this statement, showing that GW has accepted, at an absolute minimum, \$4,463,083 from fossil fuel companies charged with many of the worst [human rights violations](#) and cases of [environmental destruction](#). The lack of action on this issue from GW leadership has remained a disappointing stain on our university's name.

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 this new administration to take the next steps towards building a better future for all of us. When our university [committed](#) to full divestment from fossil fuels by 2025, 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 committed to divestment 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, again, 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 at least 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.”
3. **Investigate** the Regulatory Studies Center for violations of academic freedom. In 2018, ten funding [agreements](#) for the Mercatus Center at George Mason University were released and showed clear violation of the norms of academic freedom by giving donors influence over hiring. Former RSC Director Susan Dudley was the Director of the Regulatory Studies Program at the Mercatus Center [while](#) some of these practices were ongoing. In addition, [three](#) of these ten norm-violating agreements were with the Koch Foundation, including one from 2009, the same year the RSC was founded. Other RSC donors have been found in [violation](#) of the principles of academic freedom in the past as well. It is reasonable to ask if RSC funding agreements with the Koch Foundation (or any donor) from the same era similarly violated the norms of academic freedom.
4. **Establish** a proactive institutional conflict of interest policy, such as the [model policy](#) outlined by UnKoch My Campus, and mandate university centers and departments disclose funding and terms of funding agreements as outlined in the Coalition for Ethics and Transparency’s [letter](#).
5. **Update** the university community on the progress of the ESG [commitments](#) made in 2020 at least once a semester. The GW community has received exclusively [vague notions](#) of progress, with no figures or suggestions as to whom our endowment is being divested from. It is essential that the university be transparent about the details of divestment so the community remains updated and involved in the process.

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 19, 2023**, we ask, again, that you take public, concrete steps to end the corrupting influence of fossil fuel funding on campus.

Rise to the status of the new moniker, seize the opportunity to be revolutionary.