

DIVESTMENT FROM FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRIES

“It makes no sense to pay for one’s pension by investing in companies that make sure we won’t have a planet to retire on.”
--Bill McKibben

WHEREAS, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has repeatedly acknowledged the urgency of addressing global warming and climate change, including in a 2012 resolution stating that climate change brought on by human activity is a dire threat to the quality of life on Earth, as polar caps melt, glaciers and snowcaps retreat, sea levels rise and salinize coastal areas such as Louisiana, and agricultural regions are devastated due to droughts and torrential storms; and

WHEREAS, the AFT resolved in 2012 to undertake an immediate campaign to educate members and the general public about climate change and other environmental problems and the urgent need to address them;¹ and in 2009 to lobby elected officials in support of federal legislation to limit and reduce greenhouse gases emitted from power plants, factories and other buildings, and that encourages the use of clean, fossil fuel-free energy sources and green building technologies;² and

WHEREAS, the AFT noted in a 2014 resolution that most experts recommend an energy policy that facilitates a transition from old to new sources of energy and has resolved to support federal legislation for a comprehensive national energy policy – one that will expand investments in new energy technologies that create green jobs and goods and provide a just transition for workers and communities that may be harmed due to changing energy sources;³ and

WHEREAS, the AFT, recognizing that a meaningful reduction in carbon emissions is an important step in the fight against global warming but that the United States Senate had failed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol (2005-2012), resolved in 2009 that the United States should return to the negotiating table to provide leadership on meaningful reduction of greenhouse emissions for all developed and developing countries and that enforcement mechanisms be part of the deliberations;⁴ and

WHEREAS, in December 2015, the United States did return to the negotiating table along with 195 other parties at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, an outcome of which was the Paris Agreement, recognizing a common moral obligation to limit further temperature increases to no more than 1.5-2 degrees Celsius, but an agreement that many environmental scientists have criticized as too limited, as it will still allow “this hot, sodden mess that is our planet” to warm dangerously above pre-industrial levels;⁵ and

WHEREAS, the fossil fuel industry, with 2,795 gigatons of coal, oil and gas reserves—five times the amount safe to use—has spent millions on lobbying and denying the well-documented environmental consequences of extracting and burning fossil fuels at the current rate; and whereas it has recently been revealed that some fossil fuel corporations knew of and suppressed information from their own scientists on global warming as early as 1981; and

WHEREAS, the viability of the planet requires that 75-80 % of fossil fuel reserves remain in the ground, according to a major study published in *Nature* by Christophe McGlade and Paul Ekins, and confirmed by a 2015 statement by leading economists and scientists;⁶ and

WHEREAS, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, a 25 percent renewable energy standard by 2025 would create three times as many jobs, 202,000, as producing energy

from fossil fuels and “would stimulate \$263.4 billion in new capital investment for renewable energy technologies, \$13.5 billion in new landowner income biomass production and/or wind land lease payments, and \$11.5 billion in new property tax revenue for local communities”;⁷ and

WHEREAS, the fossil fuel industry continues to use its power and billions of dollars to fight attempts to address climate change brought on by global warming;⁸ and

WHEREAS, AFT members’ retirement savings, whether defined contribution or defined benefit, may be invested in funds that include fossil fuel industries; and

WHEREAS, disinvestment from these funds will indicate that such an action is a step toward undermining financial support of an industry responsible for the devastation of the planet:

RESOLVED, that the AFT instruct its portfolio managers to disinvest from funds that provide finances to fossil fuel industries and find or establish funds free from fossil fuels, while not harming the AFT’s financial stability; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT urge its locals and state federations, while protecting members’ financial security and adhering to fiduciary responsibility, to disinvest pension funds and other investments from these industries and seek investments in renewable energy alternatives, including support for local community-owned renewable power; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT and state federations support candidates for office who support the withdrawal of federal subsidies from fossil fuel industries and the development of renewable, clean energy policies; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT support federal legislation to enable local governments to convert existing municipal buildings and public facilities to renewable energy and require the powering of new construction with renewable energy sources.

¹ American Federation of Teachers resolution, *Educating the Membership and the Public on the Urgent Need to Address Climate Change and Environmental Degradation* (AFT Resolution, July 2012), available from <http://www.aft.org/resolution/educating-membership-and-public-urgent-need-address-climate-change-and>.

² American Federation of Teachers resolution, *Global Warming* (AFT Resolution, July 2009), available from <http://www.aft.org/resolution/global-warming>

³ American Federation of Teachers resolution, *In Support of a Comprehensive Energy Policy* (AFT Resolution, July 2014), available from <http://www.aft.org/resolution/support-comprehensive-energy-policy>.

⁴ American Federation of Teachers resolution, *Global Warming* (AFT Resolution, July 2009), available from <http://www.aft.org/resolution/global-warming>.

⁵ McKibben, Bill. (2015, December 13). “Falling Short on Climate in Paris.” *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/14/opinion/falling-short-on-climate-in-paris.html?_r=0

⁶ Vaughan, Adam. (2015, April 22). “Earth Day: scientists say 75% of known fossil fuel reserves must stay in ground.” *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/apr/22/earth-day-scientists-warning-fossil-fuels->

⁷ Benefits of Renewable Energy Use. Union of Concerned Scientists. Retrieved 06 June 2016. http://www.ucsusa.org/clean_energy/our-energy-choices/renewable-energy/public-benefits-of-renewable.html#globalwarming

⁸ Abram, John. (2016, February 22). “Fossil Fuel Funded Report Denies the Expert Global Warming Consensus.” *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2016/feb/22/fossil-fuel-funded-report-denies-the-expert-global-warming-consensus>.

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