

Every Strategy Should Be Used to Address Climate Crisis—Including Divestment

Professor Wittman makes several assumptions. He assumes that those supporting divestment do so because they think it will drive down stock prices or will necessarily hurt companies economically. He assumes that divestment is aimed at “stigmatizing” fossil fuel companies. He assumes that those supporting divestment are not doing other things to help achieve a rapid transition to a low- to zero-carbon economy, cutting GHG emissions by 50% in the next eleven years if we are to meet the goals of the Paris Accord. For many who support divestment, all these assumptions are wrong. It is, or should be, All Hands on Deck to address the climate crisis. This includes a carbon tax. This includes changes in personal habits and changes in municipal, regional, and national policies, regulations, and laws. This includes education of the public. This includes energy innovation and technology that does not prolong but *shortens* or *eliminates* the use of fossil fuels. And it can and should include divestment, taking that money and investing it in something that furthers the transition *away* from fossil fuels, a transition we need—and one to be achieved not just by taxing carbon more, or storing carbon dioxide underground, or all the other ways that one can imagine a mitigated but *continuing* use of fossil fuels. Present world-wide CCS is minuscule compared with present emissions, 1/1000 each year of US carbon dioxide emissions alone. In many places renewable energy is now cheaper than fossil-fuel energy (and would even more so if a carbon tax were imposed and fossil fuel subsidies ended). For every coal-fired plant that now opens, more than one is shut down. Professor Wittman should be applauded for promoting a tax on carbon. But his view that those supporting divestment for the reasons he ascribes to them projects a naïveté onto those supporters that in almost all cases they do not have. The naïveté is rather his for underestimating the fact that almost all supporters of divestment are doing *all* that they can to reduce fossil fuel use, including the refusal to invest in companies whose business models demonstrably subvert the Paris goals. To date, more than 1,000 institutions, pension funds, and sovereign wealth funds have divested from fossil fuels using various standards over various time scales (it cannot be done overnight). More than 11 *trillion* dollars in assets are under the rule of divestment. Divestment is, in part, a moral statement, and the climate crisis is, in part, a moral challenge, as well as an economic, political, and social one. Divestment helped promote the end of apartheid. Try telling Desmond Tutu (or Nelson Mandela’s ghost) otherwise. He will tell you it did help, and, moreover, he will tell you that divestment could and *ought* to have come earlier. Many support both divestment and a carbon tax. We have enough “precious time and energy” to do both—and much more.

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