

Remarks of the Chair of the Academic Senate to the Regents

Robert May  
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Thank you, Chair Pérez.

As mandated by the by-laws of the Academic Senate, I have transmitted to the President of the University for submission to the Regents, a Memorial calling for the University of California to divest from fossil fuel companies. The Memorial reads as follows:

The U.C. Academic Senate petitions the Regents to divest the University's endowment portfolio of all investments in the 200 publicly traded fossil fuel companies with the largest carbon reserves

The Memorial was approved by a vote of the membership of the Academic Senate, with an affirmative vote of 76.7% of voters. As Chair of the Academic Senate, I urge the Regents in the strongest terms to implement this call from the Academic Senate. In doing so, the faculty voice joins that of many others in University community - including UC researchers who have made epochal contributions to our understanding of the climate change catastrophe, and the clear voices of our students from whom you have heard many times at these meetings – in calling for the University to lead in all possible ways fighting climate change.

From the perspective of the UC investment portfolio, divestment represents the culmination of the current on-going significant reduction of fossil fuel in UC holdings, and a concomitant increase in investment in renewable and green energy. These actions are laudable, and reflect the wisdom in the Regents' Investment Policy that a prudent investment strategy "shall incorporate environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and governance (ESG) . . . in its investments decision making."

The value of a strategy of divestment is well-attested, notably by our divestment from South Africa in 1985, to the importance of which President Nelson Mandela referred following the 1994 elections in South Africa. Similarly, by acting on this memorial, the University will be making a strong and clear statement, nationally and internationally, on this most pressing issue of our times. This is especially important now, particularly given the appalling vacuum of political leadership at the national level; it will set an example to other universities to comparable actions, while contributing to the University's and the State of California's overall efforts to address climate change.

It is no hyperbole to say, in words presented to the Academic Senate membership, that "A thousand years from now, our generation will be remembered only for what it did, or did not do, to address the climate crisis. An effective response will require, more than anything, a shared political will." Developing that will require action. Accordingly, the Academic Senate asks the

Regents to develop now an explicit path to fossil fuel divestment from UC investments, with clear landmarks for implementation.

Turning to other matters, since we last met, there have been two other significant events on which the Academic Senate, in alignment with other organs of shared governance, has affirmed core values of the University. The first is Elsevier Publishing's decision to cut-off to UC access to their publications, an action taken in response to their failure to negotiate a contract with UC that respects our open-access policies. The Academic Senate's response, in a statement released last week, is to reaffirm these policies as an essential reflection of academic freedom of dissemination of scholarship, and accordingly re-assert our support for our negotiating position, and our solidarity with our colleagues in the University Libraries. No doubt, there will be inconvenience to many in the University, but we have full confidence in our Libraries to maintain alternative access that will meet the needs of our faculty, students and researchers. As many are aware, UC is the leader of an international movement: Our goal, in the words of the Academic Council statement, is for "UC [to] help change the system of scholarly communication for the betterment of all".

The second event that undermines freedom of inquiry was the alarming decision by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to place significant barriers to and limits on support for research using fetal tissues. The Academic Council condemned this action. This research conducted on our campuses has led to the development of effective treatments for debilitating and life-threatening diseases, including Alzheimer's, hemophilia, HIV, and eye disease among other essential medical applications. The Council made clear that "political attacks on science and academic freedom . . . threaten not only UC research, but also the nation's economic prosperity, the health of its population, and the nation's global scientific leadership". The Academic Council's statement joined those by Chancellor Hawgood and President Napolitano in calling for the continuation and maintenance of this vital research.

As a last request to the board, I harken back to my remarks at our previous meeting, in which I discussed the University's policies of non-discrimination, and put the following proposition to the Board:

*That it be Regents policy that the University of California, inclusive of its campuses, medical centers, and divisions, does not affiliate or have contractual obligations, financial or otherwise, with any institution that does not fully and explicitly endorse the University's non-discrimination policies, in accordance with Regents Policy 1111 – Statement of Ethical Values, and Regents Policy 4403 – Principles Against Intolerance, as well as other relevant Regental and University policies.*

At heart this is a simple request, namely, that we expect others to meet the high moral standards to which we hold ourselves - we cannot claim that we live up to our own standards if we do not expect the same of others. It is a request to affirm a core value in a world that increasingly sees discrimination of all sorts as commonplace and justifiable. This is a clear and straightforward

principle, and should be enshrined as a cornerstone of our University, appropriately in Regents policy.

A final remark. Universities, at our core, are institutions of values. We exist, and have historically existed, in order to maintain and protect environments in which research and scholarship can be conducted to the highest professional standards, freely expressed and disseminated, all the while unencumbered by coercion or direction. That is, universities are institutions of academic freedom. It has been an honor to sit at this table for the past two years, and, during the past year, to have had the privilege of addressing the Board, to participate with you in the public trust of maintaining this institution – the University of California - as the world's greatest university, a beacon of academic achievement and opportunity. I offer profound thanks for all that I have learned, and close with the fervent hope that the Board will continue to maintain the values that are the foundation of our University's greatness.

Thank you, Chair Pérez, this concludes my remarks.