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World-renowned climate scientists and advocates join calls for MIT to heed its own committee's advice to divest from fossil fuels in open letter

Cambridge, MA — Climatologist James Hansen, actor Mark Ruffalo, MIT Professor Noam Chomsky, and Rockefeller Brothers Fund President Stephen Heintz are among 33 prominent signatories urging “the world’s foremost citadel of science” to drop fossil fuel company stocks from its \$12.4 billion endowment. [The open letter](#) follows [recommendations](#) by the MIT President’s own [Climate Change Conversation committee](#) to divest from coal, tar sands, and potentially from climate-denying corporations.

“Divestment is not only financially prudent but also politically effective, scientifically consistent, and morally right,” says the letter, whose signatories include 350.org founder Bill McKibben, author and climate advisor to the Pope Naomi Klein, science broadcaster David Suzuki, Pulitzer Prize winner and MacArthur ‘Genius’ Fellow MIT Professor Junot Díaz, Nobel Laureate and former MIT psychiatrist Eric Chivian, and Zipcar founder and MIT alumna Robin Chase.

The letter comes on the eve of MIT President Reif’s anticipated decision about how the Institute will act against climate change, which he has committed to announce [“early in the fall semester.”](#)

“Over the years,” the authors write to Reif, “MIT’s global leadership has been built around key [“moments of decision”](#). The singular great issue of our time is climate change, and with it, an opportunity for you to provide great leadership by divesting the Institute’s endowment from fossil fuels as part of a comprehensive climate action plan.”

The letter builds upon [3,400 MIT petition signers](#), open letters from [83 MIT faculty members](#) and [29 student groups](#), and a [resolution of Cambridge City Council](#), all calling for MIT climate action including divestment. MIT student group [Fossil Free MIT](#) has been campaigning for divestment since November 2012. President Reif’s graduation speech to the Class of 2015 [commended](#) the group for inspiring the campus debate on how to respond to climate change.

Pointing to another recommendation of the MIT president’s committee, the open letter argues “that MIT has a unique obligation to stand up for science by also divesting from those who undermine the principles of scientific inquiry and thereby threaten MIT’s own integrity.” The letter coincides with [revelations](#) from Pulitzer-winning investigative journalists at InsideClimate News, including MIT alumna Lisa Song, that Exxon learned about the threats of climate change as far back as the 1970s, and then led efforts to cover them up. MIT signed a five-year [\\$25 million deal](#) with ExxonMobil in November 2014.

Asked why he signed the letter, climatologist Michael Mann - whose [“hockey stick”](#) global warming graph has made him a well-known target of attacks by climate deniers - explained, “As one of our country’s leading institutions of science research and education, MIT speaks with great authority when it comes to issues of policy-relevant science like climate change. I hope they will use this voice for good by publicly dissociating themselves from fossil fuel companies whose business models ignore science, and from the forces of anti-science that attack it, including funders of climate change denialism like David Koch.” “By divesting, MIT can take a stand for the future of energy and against the toxic tide of climate disinformation. Its impact would be enormous,” Bill McKibben observed.

But with [MIT megadonor](#) David Koch as a [Life Member](#) of MIT's Board of Trustees, and with MIT more [dependent on industry](#) funding than almost any other university in the country, student organizers say "the climate question is far from a done deal." In the hopes of tipping the balance, on October 2 they will [rally](#) in support of a multi-faceted MIT climate action plan, just as the university's Board [convenes on campus](#). The rally will be the final day of a week-long series of public events called [MIT Climate Countdown](#), intended "to urge [MIT's leaders] to find the moral courage to do what science demands and what President Reif's own committee has recommended."

Other signatories to the letter, which endorses *MIT Climate Countdown*, include world-renowned climate scientists such as former NASA climate chief James Hansen and climate advisor to the German government and the Pope Hans Joachim Schellnhuber. The Union of Concerned Scientists has also signed. Its Director of Science & Policy Peter Frumhoff commented, "UCS was born at MIT and we share a deep commitment to scientific integrity and evidence-based decision-making. UCS has divested from fossil fuel companies because their decades-long record of climate disinformation and opposition to sensible limits on climate pollution are clearly inconsistent with this commitment. I strongly encourage MIT to join us."

Another major institution on board the letter is the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, whose President Stephen Heintz said, "We don't encourage divestment on a whim. But engagement with fossil fuel companies is not enough as we know from our own experience. We think MIT will find, like we are, that a prudent approach to divestment - from coal and tar sands immediately, and from oil and gas as soon as possible - is an economic, moral, and strategic opportunity. It will acknowledge the looming 'carbon bubble'. And it will align MIT's investments with the efforts of its scientists and engineers working on climate solutions. The symbolic power of this potent combination would be unique to MIT, and should not be underestimated."

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The open letter is attached and also available at MITClimateCountdown.org/open-letter/.