

## OPINION

# Why university students are uniting for divestment this week

More than 50 campuses — including Harvard, Boston College, Boston University, Tufts, MIT, Brandeis, Clark, and Worcester Polytechnic — will participate in Fossil Fuel Divestment Day.

By **Kyle Rosenthal, Eva Rosenfeld, and Bolaji Olagbegi** , Updated February 12, 2020, 4:49 a.m.



Students demanding Harvard University divest from fossil fuels block the entrance to University Hall in 2017. KEITH BEDFORD

In just one decade, the demand for fossil fuel divestment, once perceived as a lonely clarion call, has become a common sense response to the climate crisis. Today, the movement of institutions divesting their assets from the fossil fuel industry includes over

1,000 organizations, representing nearly [\\$14 trillion](#). The list includes cities, nations, religious organizations, and media companies, their motives ranging from moral imperative to financial pragmatism.

In January, BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, announced its decision to [drop coal investments](#) in a trend that CNBC "Mad Money" host Jim Cramer said marked the "[death knell phase](#)" for fossil fuel companies. Rarely does such a broad and diverse range of voices stand aligned on what is the right solution.

[Over 40](#) colleges in the United States have divested, including [Middlebury](#), [Doane University](#), [Smith](#), and the entire [University of California](#) system in 2019 alone. Yet most universities, purportedly institutions of progress and leadership, are denying this movement. They continue to support the corporations principally responsible for the destruction of communities and ecosystems across the globe: fossil fuel companies, several of whom engaged in [decades-long public misinformation campaigns](#) and in the [continual blocking of meaningful climate legislation](#).

Our universities are failing their roles as leaders in higher education, and their power and influence only make their negligence more stark. For the sake of our world, we cannot accept their actions.

This is why on Thursday, Feb. 13, students across Massachusetts and the country will take action of our own.

More than 50 campuses — including Harvard, Boston College, Boston University, Tufts, MIT, Brandeis, Clark, Worcester Polytechnic, Stanford, Yale, and the University of Pennsylvania — will work with [Divest Ed](#) to participate in [Fossil Fuel Divestment Day](#), standing in unity to call on our universities to divest from fossil fuels and reinvest in the safety and well-being of our communities.

Our actions will have impacts far beyond campus. Last February, Boston City Councilors Lydia Edwards, Michelle Wu, and Matt O'Malley [co-sponsored a hearing](#) to encourage

the city to divest its \$5 billion retirement fund from fossil fuels, private prisons, predatory loans, and weapons corporations and, instead, reinvest into community assets like local businesses, green energy initiatives, and community land trusts. Their efforts were supported by a broad coalition of community organizers, finance professionals, students, and workers. Our universities have enormous influence on major institutional investors like city and state pension funds.

The consequences of these institutions' failure to divest are severe and visible in Boston, with the fight to combat [sea level rise](#), [flooding](#), and [extreme heat](#) becoming more urgent. We have seen the dangerous consequences of fossil fuel use as gas explosions shook the [Merrimack Valley](#). And now a [natural gas compressor station](#) is being constructed in [Weymouth](#) — in spite of reports citing a “[decline in demand](#).”

We see in Boston what we have seen all over the world: Black, brown, indigenous, and poor communities face the gravest effects of climate change and our exploitative economy. As environmental justice organizations like Roxbury's [Alternatives for Community and Environment](#) have long shown, historically redlined neighborhoods face significant [health and economic consequences](#) from their exposure to higher rates of fossil fuel pollution and extreme weather. Indigenous communities like the [Wet'suwet'en](#) in British Columbia, the [Standing Rock Sioux](#) in North Dakota, and the [Ojibwe and Anishinaabeg](#) in Minnesota continually face violations of their sovereignty with impositions of gas and oil pipelines by fossil fuel corporations.

As students and as young people, we cannot allow the universities we are part of to profit from this injustice. We believe in a world in which educational institutions should act not like fossil fuel corporations, perpetrating ecological destruction across the globe, but like people who are part of supportive, resilient communities.

If our universities do not divest, history will look back and know whom to blame: the industry executives who knowingly steamrolled the ecosystems that made our planet livable, the policymakers who betrayed their constituents by doing little or nothing to protect them, and the universities who stood by.

*Kyle Rosenthal, a junior at Boston College, is a member of Climate Justice at Boston College and Laudato Si Generation and a coordinator of the Catholic Divestment Network. Eva Rosenfeld is a junior at Harvard College and an organizer with Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard. Bolaji Olagbegi is a senior at Boston University and president of DivestBU.*

[Show comments](#)

---

©2020 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC