

From: Springer, Darren [Darren.Springer@vermont.gov]
Sent: Friday, April 08, 2016 9:48 AM
To: Gray, Laura
CC: GPS; Allen, Susan; Coriell, Scott
Subject: Re: Divestment Article in Digger

Finally !

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 8, 2016, at 9:45 AM, Gray, Laura <Laura.Gray@vermont.gov> wrote:

**DIVESTMENT TASK FORCE MEMBER RESISTS CHALLENGE TO HIS OBJECTIVITY
APR. 7, 2016, 7:07 PM BY MIKE POLHAMUS 1 COMMENT**

The chairman of the state pension fund oversight committee has refused to recuse himself from deliberations on whether to divest the fund of certain fossil fuel assets, after three environmental groups accused him of lacking objectivity.

Representatives of three Vermont environmental nonprofits asked Tom Golonka, the chairman of the Vermont Pension Investment Committee, to step aside, saying his public comments have included a statement that past evidence showed divestment would be “an expensive way to approach something that has minimal impact.”

The letter to Golonka, written by Lauren Hierl of Vermont Conservation Voters, James Ehlers of Lake Champlain International, and Johanna Miller of the Vermont Natural Resources Council, questions Golonka’s ability to “undertake an open, fair and unbiased analysis” of the wisdom of divestment.

In his written response to the advocates, Golonka said it’s imperative to ask critical questions before potentially implementing a change.

In an interview Thursday, Golonka said he would not step down from a subcommittee evaluating the idea of divestment. “I read their letter, and I have no intention of recusing myself,” he said.

Golonka said he’s “impartial to the point that I’m willing to hear arguments for and against” divestment.

If divesting the retirement account of certain fossil fuel assets will bring the same returns for the same investment, or if doing so will make more money with less risk, Golonka said, he’ll support divestment.

Golonka is a member of a subcommittee State Treasurer Beth Pearce agreed to form as part of a recent deal with legislators who have called for divestment of Exxon Mobil, coal and other fossil fuel assets. Legislators at the time said they asked her to form a committee as a way to move forward on the issue without passing laws ordering divestment.

Gov. Peter Shumlin has been a driver of the effort to divest.

Golonka has said that a study the Vermont Pension Investment Committee commissioned last year showed that divestment of fossil fuel assets would cost the fund extraordinary amounts in lost revenue and fees. Critics say the study was written not to discover whether divestment could be done affordably, but to demonstrate that it would be costly for the state to divest itself immediately of all fossil fuel assets and replace them with renewable energy assets.

The divestment subcommittee of which Golonka is a member is charged with finding an answer to the former question.

Depending on how it is calculated, the state has as little as \$700 to as much as \$1.1 million in coal assets, and about \$200,000 in Exxon Mobil.

The divestment subcommittee is scheduled to hold its first two meetings Wednesday and April 26.