

DU needs more sustainable solutions on campus



The evidence is clear: our planet is undergoing man-made climate change due to greenhouse gases. This is, in part, caused by the burning of fossil fuels for energy, a practice that is unnecessary. The real problem of climate change can be confronted one thing at a time, and divesting the endowment of fossil fuels is a great place to start. How we use energy on our campus is something we as students have a say in, and we need to recognize the reality of climate change in order to encourage DU to further take steps in the right direction.

The exploitation of fossil fuels is extreme, as 2,795 gigatons of carbon dioxide, five times the safe amount, would be released into the atmosphere if the fossil fuels that corporations currently have on reserve were burned. However, they don't have to be burned. Divest DU is an on-campus organization whose goal is to take part in the global movement to divest the endowment of fossil fuels here at the University of Denver.

Worldwide over 400 divestment campaigns exist on campuses. Nick Stubler is an international studies major from Grand Junction, Colorado and the organizing director of Divest DU. "The greatest single action DU can take is to divest, and with that framework the greatest action students can take is to urge the university to do so," said Stubler.

Students agree. Sophomore Amy Caswell from Minnesota explained, "Divesting is important because the money that would be put into fossil fuels is instead put into renewable energies."

In 2007, Chancellor Coombe signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, which addressed climate change by creating a network of colleges and universities that committed to carbon neutrality by 2050. At that point DU formed the Sustainability Council, which was to be the group in charge of implementing this feat.

According to council officer Rebecca Powell, the council is “dedicated to purchasing offsets and RECs (renewable energy certificates) for the energy we use.” Additionally, total university greenhouse gases have [decreased by 24% since 2007](#).

While these are steps in the right direction, DU could do much more. Energy use has been decreased, effectively releasing fewer carbon emissions, however, the source of this energy, mainly coal, remains the same. “Increased efficiencies are a great benefit, but ignore the greater problem of the lack of renewable energy on campus,” said Stubler.

DU Solar is another on-campus organization that is pushing for change in this area. As Denver is known for its “[300 days of sunshine](#),” solar energy would be a reliable source of energy on campus we have not yet utilized.

“There are no renewable energy sources on campus at the moment in part due to the price structure. There are issues with wanting projects to pay off investments within a timeline because part of sustainability is remaining financially stable,” said Powell. While renewable energy sources are an investment, they are worthwhile. In fact, the [Huffington Post reports](#) that, “the U.S. coal industry has lost 76 percent of its value over the past five years [and] Greenpeace spokesman Joe Smyth says it makes financial sense to divest.” With this in mind, it appears the fossil fuel industry is no longer a worthwhile investment, all environmental factors aside.

This quote comes from an email conducted interview with Chancellor Rebecca Chopp, explaining her view on divestment: “After a great deal of research and lots of careful consideration, I am not convinced that divestment from fossil fuel companies could have an impact on climate change. Far more effective, in my view, is our direct reduction in consumption of fossil fuels and our investment, including academic research, in alternative renewable energy products. If we—and others across the world—cut back on fossil fuel consumption, companies will see decreased revenues from fossil fuels and will need to develop and offer alternative, renewable energy products over time.”

It appears that the end goal is the same, it is just the mode of implementation that is up for debate. On Nov. 9., Divest DU met with Chancellor Chopp, Vice Chancellor Craig Woody, Board of Trustees Chair Doug Scrivner and Board of Trustees Investment Committee Chair K.C. Gallagher to work toward common goals (see page 4 for news coverage).

Students need to care about climate change, how it is affecting them now and how it will affect them catastrophically in the future if voices for justice are not heard. Everyone at DU has a say in what happens on campus. Students can attend monthly Sustainability

Council meetings to let their voices be heard, participate in clubs like DU Solar and Divest DU and personally make sustainable lifestyle changes. There are so many ways each person can create change, and we must start now.