

## COMMENTS TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, JANUARY 31, 2020

“When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up. You have to say something; you have to do something.” Those are the words of John Lewis, UVM’s guest this fall.

I am here because of those words. This is my first visit to the board in 26 years as a professor of Geology and Natural Resources at UVM, a place I love, the only place I have ever worked. My 87 year old mom graduated from in 1955; my sister spent two years here.

I am here to say something because our board that does not reflect the diversity of our University, our State, and the world from which we recruit. I am here to say something because our board has yet to take the climate crisis seriously by divesting from fossil fuels and pledging to decarbonize UVM.

You trust me teach 400 students about Climate because that’s my expertise. You celebrate our papers in Science and Nature that illustrate the fragility of Earth’s climate system and the climate work we do on UVM’s homepage. You ask me to convince prospective students to join our Environmental University and you hail write ups we’ve had in the New York Times, the Globe, and the Wall Street Journal, write ups showing the environmental prowess of UVM.

Yet, after the hottest decade on record, you refuse to take action addressing UVM’s involvement in climate change; the arguments from the board are unchanged from 2013: it’s too risky to divest from fossil fuels and those stocks make up only 5% of our endowment, it won’t matter.

I am here today to say it’s time to look again at the evidence and to change course. To trust the scientists, policy makers, and economists on campus. To listen to the voices of our students and faculty. To be the environmental University we claim that we are.

If none of this sways you, then read UVM’s own web site. While the UVM green fund earned 9% last year, the general fund earned 2.5%. Divest and we’d have some good company – the entire UC system, Middlebury college, and some great press for UVM. Divestment is the start, decarbonization is the end goal. Without it, expect a Vermont climate that looks like Tennessee by the end of the century – yes, Tennessee. So much for our great UVM ski teams and the Olympians they repeatedly nurture.

You trust me to write and accept grants from the US National Science Foundation to increase diversity. You celebrate when I train as many woman graduate students as men and when they publish papers and get hired – helping to make geoscience gender balanced. Because of my close friendship and collaboration with the Provost at Jackson State University, I’m called to Waterman for meetings with UVM leadership so we can build bridges with an historically black University and increase our recruitment and retention of faculty and students of color. I am all

in. But look around you and see what the people we recruit to UVM see. They see a board that does not look like them, does not come from where they come from, and has not had their life experiences.

The data are clear – diverse leadership structures make better decisions and avoid group think. Diverse leadership gives people role models they can aspire to. Diverse leadership tells people of color, indigenous people, people of less economic means, and people of different races, religions, genders, sexualities and backgrounds that they too belong here at UVM. UVM knows this – every unit except one on campus has an Inclusive Excellence Action Plan, a thoughtful road map to diversification. Who's missing that plan – the UVM Board of Trustees.

We have heard that changing the board is difficult, we have heard it's complicated. Look around. Middlebury's done it. Williams College has done it. Our own school of Natural Resources has done it. They all have diverse and gender balanced boards. Today I hand you more than 1000 signatures on a petition asking UVM to diversify the Board of Trustees. These are the voices of faculty, students, alums and staff. People care.

Tuesday afternoon, in the signature event of UVM's MLK celebration and remembrance, I packed into the chapel to hear Dr. Ibram Kendi speak about racism and anti-racism. If you didn't hear the talk – here's the bottom line. There is nothing neutral, nothing in the middle, no gray zone. You are either part of the problem or part of the solution. Inaction makes you part of the problem. We, UVM, are part of the problem.

Today, I ask the UVM Board of Trustees to help us be part of the solution – diversify your ranks and make UVM a better place. Divest from fossil fuels, decarbonize UVM, and make our world a better place. I realize change is not easy or comfortable but it's important and it's the right thing to do.

You have the power to make UVM part of the solution, not part of the problem. We, faculty and students of UVM, are here to help you! Please, ask us for ideas.

Thank you.

Paul Bierman, UVM Professor of Geology and Natural Resources since 1993  
[pbierman@uvm.edu](mailto:pbierman@uvm.edu), 802 863 3609