

Richard Thomas  
Waterville  
LD 1262

Regarding ld 1262: Hi, I'm Richard Thomas, a psychologist and long-time climate activist in Waterville Maine. Thank you for the chance to talk to you today. I hope you're fully caffeinated because I have some good information for you.

I'll start with the context that underlies this bill and then give an example that shows how it is needed. The context is the question of whether climate change or any other environmental risk is real or not. Many corporations that profit from doing things that harm the environment have funded misinformation campaigns to keep the government from regulating them.

The fossil fuel industry has done this by using a sophisticated misinformation campaign to convince nearly half of our population to doubt that climate change is a real problem. This campaign targeted the conservative political media, making many conservatives mistrust climate scientists.

The fossil fuel industry pays the political media, politicians and Internet influencers to repeat endlessly that climate change is a hoax. Such constant repetition by people we trust is an effective strategy to mold public opinion, and it has worked very well. Recently, the fossil fuel industry invests nearly a billion dollars a year on this media campaign.

This is relevant because when Maine passed a law telling the agency that manages Maine's State employee Pension fund, Maine PERS, to divest from fossil fuels, Maine PERS decided to resist complying fully with the law. I don't think they would have done that if they believed what climate scientists tell us about the risk of climate change to our families. We're up against a sophisticated campaign that is controlling public opinion, and we need a stronger tool to resist that.

How do I know that climate change is a serious treat to our families? Consider the consequences when scientists and the political media lie. When scientists lie about their research, another ambitious scientist exposes them. The cheater loses their career. No one wants to hire them after that. But the political media isn't in the business of discovering the truth. Their job is to influence opinion, and lying is just another tool of the trade for them. They get promoted if they can lie in a way that causes people to hate or distrust climate scientists.

So that's the context. And 3 years ago, this legislature passed a law directing Maine PERS to divest from fossil fuels. Over the last 4 years, they did reduce their fossil fuel holdings from about 8% to 6% of their portfolio. They have 1.2 billion dollars in Fossil fuels now. A good beginning, but the problem is that they resist divesting further, despite the fact that they still hold millions of dollars in underperforming stocks like ExxonMobil; stock that could be sold without a financial penalty. They also hold a large index fund that includes 479 million dollars in fossil fuel holdings as of 2024. Transferring from this index fund to one that minimizes fossil fuel exposure is also possible without penalty.

Maine Environmental groups have been trying unsuccessfully to encourage Maine PERS to divest further. We have pointed out that these fossil fuel investments have significant climate risks. Our climate is rapidly becoming more and more disrupted and soon our government will recognize that the fossil fuel industry is harming our future. The tax breaks that make these corporations profitable will end. When the weather gets bad enough, the government may order that certain fossil fuel projects be shut down. Much of the money we put into those Investments now will be lost. Maine PERS has never acknowledged, never even mentioned the issue of climate risk when we raise it.

No one expects 100% divestment from Maine PERS. We do request much further divestment in a way that is responsive to Maine Law and that safeguards the pension fund.

Maine PERS's dismissive attitude about the divestment law is typical of agencies that do not believe that it is important to mitigate climate change. Their ability to ignore Maine's climate legislation shows that Maine needs a stronger means to enforce it's

laws about divestment. I urge you to vote for Ld 1262. Thank you very much.