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Harvard sit-in protests school's investments

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PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Chloe Maxmin, a senior and cofounder of Divest Harvard, gave a phone update to a reporter from The Harvard Crimson on students' activity in the hallway during the sit-in Thursday. The building was then closed to anyone unauthorized.

By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT FEBRUARY 12, 2015

CAMBRIDGE — Several dozen Harvard students staged a sit-in on campus Thursday to demand that the university, which has the largest endowment of any college in the world, divest from fossil fuel companies.

But Harvard officials reiterated that the university does not plan to divest and condemned the students' demonstration inside an administrative building, calling it "disrespectful."

"We fully respect their opposing point of view and their opportunity to express it openly and vigorously," university spokesman Jeff Neal said in a statement. "But we are deeply disappointed that divestment advocates have chosen to resort to a highly disruptive building occupation as a means to advance their

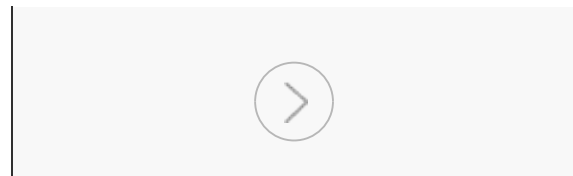
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view.”

He said in the statement that Harvard president Drew G. Faust would meet with the protesters if they agreed to exit Massachusetts Hall, which houses the offices of Faust and other top administrators. But sit-in organizers said via Twitter that they had rejected the offer.



The sit-in was a part of a series of events planned around the world over the next few days that will call on colleges, governments, and other organizations to shed their investments in companies that produce oil, gas, and coal. The fuels have been identified as a cause of global warming.

Jasmine Opie, co-coordinator of the group Divest Harvard, said that supporters of the cause do not expect divestment will bankrupt fossil fuel companies.

Rather, “It’s essentially a political tactic to say that what the fossil fuel companies are doing is dangerous and reprehensible,” said Opie, a 21-year-old Harvard junior.

In recent years, students, faculty, and alumni from many colleges have called on their schools to divest. A key target of the movement has been Harvard, which has a \$36.4 billion endowment.

Nineteen colleges have pledged to divest from fossil fuels in some form, though most that have done so have small to modest endowments. In December 2011, Hampshire College in Amherst became the first college in the United States to make such a pledge.

Stanford University is by far the best known and wealthiest college to pledge to divest from fossil fuels in some form. The school, which has an endowment worth \$21.4 billion, said in May it would divest from publicly traded coal mining companies.

At Harvard, Faust announced in October 2013 that the university would not divest, though it also unveiled several initiatives to strengthen its commitment to environmental sustainability.

But the issue has not died down.

Last spring, about 100 Harvard professors signed an open letter — which now has more than 200 faculty signatories — urging Faust and members of the university’s governing body to reconsider.

A few weeks later, students protested the university’s decision by blocking entrances to Massachusetts Hall.

In November, a group of seven Harvard Law students filed a lawsuit against the Harvard Corporation, the university’s governing board, that seeks to force the school to divest from fossil fuel companies.

Other “Global Divestment Day” events were scheduled between Thursday and Saturday, including at several

other area colleges: Boston College, Boston University, Brandeis University, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, Stonehill College, UMass Amherst, and Worcester State University, according to organizers from the Fossil Free campaign and 350.org.

Students, youths, local legislators, and community leaders gathered Thursday at the State House for a rally promoting fossil fuel divestment and for panel discussions.

Thursday's sit-in at Harvard began around 10 a.m. when more than 30 students walked into Massachusetts Hall and occupied a first-floor hallway.

Campus police and other Harvard officials arrived. Officers stood guard outside, blocking entrances to the facility and stopping anyone not authorized from entering.



MATT ROCHELEAU FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Students gathered in protest.

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