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**QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES****QUESTION 1:**

**Why is the immediate and transparent divestment of the endowment from the top 200 fossil fuels companies not more seriously entertained as an important issue for the Board? Considering recent (unacknowledged) protests not only directly about divestment (last board meeting), but also climate change and social justice (every child matters) protests locally and around the world, I would hope that the Board would at least put this issue on the agenda. A letter to support divestment in the interest of health was also sent before the meeting in December, signed by the Undergrad and Masters Nursing Societies and PGSS equity commissioner along with hundreds of faculty, chairs, directors, staff and students from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, in the hopes that this issue would be discussed in the as the weight of signees demonstrate the growing understanding that these investments are at best not logical and at worst a health hazard. This lack of acknowledgement of this growing concern is hard to understand as the Board must uphold the best interest of the university, as per its mandate, with “interest” always being best determined by members of the university.**

**RESPONSE:**

Further to the communication issued in response to your email on December 15, 2022, this answer provides further details on the Board’s consideration of the question of divestment.

The Board has seriously considered the question of divestment a number of times, most recently in 2018, over a two-year period. The Board’s review of the issue resulted, in April 2020, in the adoption of meaningful actions that the University is taking to decarbonize, including through divestment, the University’s endowment fund. For more information about the Board’s consideration of the issue and resulting actions and commitments, please see: [2019 report](#), [2020 action plan](#), [annual reports](#).

The Board and its Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility are committed to ensuring that the commitments made by the Board in 2020 are implemented and monitored. As part of its commitment, the Board will review the University’s SRI practices in 2025 and it may take further actions, in the best interests of the University, in order to ensure that McGill remains committed to implementing meaningful and

responsible actions in the area of sustainability, including through socially responsible investment.

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## **QUESTION 2:**

**Many universities such as Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, University of Toronto, University of British Columbia, Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Princeton University, Dartmouth, University of Waterloo, University of Guelph, Simon Fraser, Laval University, UDEM, Concordia, and many more have committed to total divestment from the fossil fuel industry. In Montréal, McGill is the only major university not to have announced a commitment to divestment. The Senate, representing the students, faculty, and staff, has voted for and recommended divestment to the board but was rejected in 2019. In the past 10 years, the board has rejected such commitment 3 times. Why has McGill chosen not to divest yet? Why do all these top universities of the world think that fossil fuel investments is causing grave social injury and McGill not? CAMSR has argued that fossil fuel companies are not causing grave social injury despite IPCC findings. What evidence must be given to prove that an industry causes grave social injury? Since McGill's decarbonization plan does not require divesting from fossil fuel companies, how is the board truly ensuring for a sustainable future for McGill students, faculty, and staff?**

## **RESPONSE:**

The Board has seriously considered the question of divestment a number of times, most recently in 2018, over a two-year period. The Board's review of the issue resulted, in April 2020, in the adoption of meaningful actions that the University is taking to decarbonize, including through divestment, the University's endowment fund. For more information about the Board's consideration of the issue and resulting actions and commitments, please see: [2019 report](#), [2020 action plan](#), [annual reports](#).

At the time that the question of divestment was considered by the Board, the University undertook a process of due diligence to learn about the types of actions that were being taken by other Universities in response to requests calling for divestment. It was surprising to see that proponents of divestment were claiming that a number of universities were divesting as such claims were not always borne out by facts uncovered during the University's due diligence process. As the situation may have changed since last reviewing the status of divestment decisions at other universities, the University will update its work on this file for future activities.

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McGill remains committed to implementing meaningful and responsible actions in the area of sustainability, including through socially responsible investment.

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### QUESTION 3:

**One hot meal, including a main and two sides (not including a drink, desert, or snack) at the McGill cafeteria costs approximately \$14. On average, McGill students have to pay approximately 4 times more on food than the average Canadian does. Students in residence have reported going hungry and developing eating disorders due directly to the current food and cafeteria systems in place at McGill (McGill Tribune). Cafeteria prices for basic items have continued to increase semesterly without corresponding compensation to students who had already purchased (or been forced to purchase, because of being in residence) a meal plan. Unlike other universities, McGill refuses to subsidize its cafeteria prices. Also unlike other universities, McGill refuses to monetarily support soup kitchen organizations on campus such as Midnight Kitchen, which is funded entirely by limited student fees. Similar organizations such as the People’s Potato at Concordia do receive funding directly from the university, and therefore are able to support students at a more sustainable level. What action will McGill take in order to stop its students from going hungry? COVID-19 has also impacted food inflation in which the cost is put on to students. Why has the school not used any of its \$1.89 billion endowment in subsidizing basic human needs such as food? Isn’t the purpose of endowment to be used in the event of emergencies, which COVID-19 qualifies as?**

### RESPONSE:

The current mandatory, declining balance, meal plan offers residence students an introductory base amount of food dollars. The cost of the mandatory meal plan has not increased in recent years but due to high inflation and increased food costs, students on the mandatory meal plan have seen their purchasing power drop since the pandemic. To address these issues, the University is developing a change in the meal plan model to a dine-in, All-You-Care-To-Eat (AYCTE) meal plan model which would provide students unlimited access to fresh and nutritious meals and snack options throughout the day while removing the worry or need to budget food dollars.

To the specific question of the usage of the endowment fund, it is important to realize that this fund is not a reserve that can simply be drawn from; most endowed amounts that make up the fund are earmarked for a specific purpose, according to the wishes of the original donor.

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#### **QUESTION IV:**

**Mental health services at McGill are inadequate as students have to endure long wait times to have access to counselling sessions, and even when they are able to access them, they are inconsistent and infrequent at best. In a written statement to the Tribune on behalf of the Wellness Hub, Frédérique Mazerolle, a McGill media relations officer, explained that “emergency care for students in crisis is not part of the Wellness Hub’s mandate, because the Hub does not have the means—financially or staff-wise—to provide such services”. In addition to not providing emergency care for students in crisis, students have reported wait times of weeks and sometimes months for access to psychological counselling at the Wellness Hub. McGill’s endowment, valued at 1.89 billion dollars, is described as “A source of funding for the University's core activities, including student aid, faculty positions, groundbreaking research, and much more.” Why, especially in the context of a significant increase in mental health conditions due to the pandemic, has the board of governors not provided the Wellness Hub with adequate funding to support students’ health and well-being?**

#### **RESPONSE:**

Best practice in the discipline is to separate the acute management of crisis situations from subsequent, ongoing management of student mental health, since these specialties are very different. Crisis is a broad term that may mean different things in different situations ranging from housing and personal interactions through to critical mental health issues. Crisis in this context refers to a critical situation that requires an immediate response to maintain the safety of any member of our student community. The Dean of Students Office provides support in these circumstances up to the point where a student is referred to emergency services in the community or to the Wellness Hub for follow up, as appropriate.

When the Student Wellness Hub was created in 2019, it represented a significant increase in funding for mental health services. The vision was to provide goal-directed, episodic care for a broad range of situations. Specialist care and longer-term management of mental health conditions require dedicated facilities and resources that are found in the broader community.

Wait times for mental health appointments have shown marked improvement since 2019, but we understand there are still challenges. A student can generally be seen by a mental health professional in 72 hours or less—and there are some same-day appointments available. Students who choose to seek appointments with specific clinicians focusing on particular issues or populations do experience longer wait times, averaging approximately three weeks. Appointments with medical doctors, on the other hand, remain a significant challenge, due to our difficulty recruiting medical doctors who will be active in the hub. We are actively looking for potential new ways of providing medical doctor services to the community.

## QUESTION V

**Only 8 of 25 members of the board are elected, resulting in the perpetual override of the democratic process at McGill. Firstly, divestment from fossil fuels has received broad support across the university: from SSMU, PGSS, MAUT, the faculties of Arts and Law and the McGill School of Environment. Furthermore, in 2018 the McGill Senate overwhelmingly passed a motion stating that it favoured complete divestment from fossil fuels. However, the Board of Governors continues to ignore this university wide support of divestment. Furthermore, McGill has also attempted to block the certification of the Association of McGill Professors of Law unionisation. Despite the support from Law Professors; the McGill Law Students Association; and other student bodies, the Board of Governors is continuing to fight against this issue. Finally, undergraduates overwhelmingly voted for a Palestinian Solidarity Policy during a Winter 2022 referendum (71% yes). However the Judicial Board autonomously attempted to block this issue from the referendum. The SSMU Legislative Council also democratically approved a Divest for Human Rights Policy and a Nakba Day statement, which the Board of Directors then refused to ratify. Following the outcome of the referendum, a member of the Board sent out an email demanding that the SSMU overturn the Policy, actually threatening to terminate the Memorandum of Agreement if the SSMU disobeyed. These examples are proof that the Board of Governors holds complete disregard for the democratically expressed demands of the 40,000 students and 4,000 members of staff at McGill. Will the Board propose a timeline for requiring all of its members to be democratically elected, and if not, why not?**

## RESPONSE:

It should be noted that some of the premises of the question are incorrect or outside the purview of the Board. The response provided concerns the composition of the Board, the election and appointment processes of members to the Board, and the Board's decision-making responsibility in the context of the fiduciary duties it holds.

The Board of Governors is composed of 25 voting members from different constituencies, the majority of whom are, in fact, appointed or elected to serve on the Board, based on established election or appointment processes that allow for the participation of various groups. Indeed, students, academic staff, administrative staff, alumni members and Senate members are able to participate in processes supporting the appointment or election of their candidate to the Board. As such, the idea of proposing a timeline for electing Board members is not aligned with current practices and expectations.

Besides the appointment of two ex officio positions, the Board has purview over the appointment of 12 members-at-large, who are all selected to serve on the Board following a nomination and approval process that is subject to the assent of the majority of Board members. This process ensures that each recommendation is considered by all voting members on an equal basis, as all members have the right to and are expected to participate in the decision.

The Board acknowledges that certain topics may be divisive within the community. In the context of making decisions on matters within its purview, the Board is bound by the fiduciary duty to act in the best interest of the University as a whole. While its deliberations are informed by the views of various constituencies, including students, academic staff and alumni, the Board makes decision as a single body with a view to protecting the long-term interests of the University. In addition, depending on the subject matter, the Board, in its decision making, is assisted by other bodies, including the University Senate and Board Committees.

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