**The World’s Biggest Corporate Law Firms**

**“Called Out” For Being On The**

**“The Wrong Side” Of Our Climate Crisis**

In August 2021, the organisation Law Students for Climate Accountability created the “climate scorecard” which rated 100 of the top law firms from A – F based on their work in combatting climate change. The organisation has found that, over the last five years, these firms have facilitated $1.36 trillion in fossil fuel transactions, litigated 358 cases on behalf of fossil fuel clients and received $34.9 million in compensation for fossil fuel lobbying.

Some of the law firms which have scored low on the climate scorecard have released statements to promote their green goals for a sustainable future. In particular, the Magic Circle Law Firm Allen & Overy has said it does “more renewables work than any other law firm in the world by most key measures”.

Nevertheless, amongst these low scoring law firms, the report has identified Allen & Overy as the legal advisor on more transactional work for fossil fuel companies than 75 of the 100 law firms combined, Akin Gump as lobbying more for fossil fuel companies than 91 of the 100 law firms combined, and Paul Weiss as the firm responsible for more cases exacerbating climate change as 60 of the 100 law firms combined.

One of the most high-profile cases Paul Weiss has worked on was their representation of the American oil and gas corporation ExxonMobil. The company was accused of having misled investors about the risks of climate change to its businesses with the court ruling in favour of ExxonMobil in 2019. During the trial, in October 2019, climate protestors positioned themselves outside the New York County courthouse.

Tim Herschel-Burns, a third-year student at Yale Law School and co-founder of Law Students for Climate Change, stated “Everything fossil fuel companies want to do, they need lawyers to accomplish.” Herschel-Burns goes on, “But one thing that we found really striking is that overwhelmingly the top law firms are [representing] the wrong side of [the climate crisis].”

A statement from the legal director for the Center for Climate Integrity, Alyssa Johl, concurs with Herschel-Burns: “Elite law firms are representing the oil and gas companies and providing them with a deep bench of high-priced lawyers. For the communities across the country that are seeking justice, the end result is that their cases have been delayed and bogged down by procedural hurdles put forward by some of the biggest law firms in the country.”

Thom Wetzer, law professor and director of the Oxford Sustainable Law Programme, believes that law firms have a responsibility and incentive to actively move towards representing the ‘right’ side of the climate crisis: “Firms that engage constructively with the net-zero transition will be rewarded; clients will value their judgment and expertise, top talent will be more easily attracted and retained, and these firms will strengthen their social license to operate.”

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