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Law firm pulls donation from University of Alberta as Suzuki backlash continues

Tax law firm and engineering dean weigh in on U of A's honouring environmentalist and broadcaster David Suzuki



Environmentalist David Suzuki poses with Kinder Morgan protesters in Burnaby, B.C., in March. (DARRYL DYCK / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

By **HAMDY ISSAWI** StarMetro Edmonton

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EDMONTON—The University of Alberta continues to draw the ire of the internet after announcing it would award noted broadcaster and environmentalist David Suzuki with an honorary doctorate of science.

And now the school's decision seems to be costing them money.

The Calgary office of Moodys Gartner, a tax law practice, publicly released a letter Monday slamming Suzuki —who has long been critical of oilsands extraction — for using his position to criticize the oil industry, which they refer to as “the very foundation of our province's success.”

In the letter, addressed to university chancellor Doug Stollery and president David Turpin, the law office said it was cancelling the remainder of its five-year, \$100,000 donation to the law school's Bowman Tax Law Moot Team.

The firm started began paying yearly instalments of the full donation in 2015. The remaining amount is about \$40,000.

“While we acknowledge Mr. Suzuki has made significant contributions to science awareness and education, he has inappropriately used this platform to attack the very foundation of our province's success without engaging in rational discourse and debate, two things that are also essential to a full and beneficial post-secondary education,” the firm's letter says.

The letter acknowledges the loss to students, saying the firm will be looking for other ways to support the law school.

Fraser Forbes, professor and engineering dean at the University of Alberta, also took aim at Suzuki Monday. In an open letter posted to a online faculty news blog, he criticized Suzuki for fostering what Forbes called a “crisis of trust.”



“It truly saddens me to know that many of you are, as an I, left feeling that one of Alberta’s most favoured children, the University of Alberta, has betrayed you by choosing to confer this honorary degree,” the letter read.

In the post, he pointed out that honorary degree recipients are chosen by the university’s senate, and that faculties can’t participate. He called on the engineering community to advocate for the province’s industrial sectors.

The letter ended with an apology on behalf of the university for the hurt the Suzuki honour has, in Forbes’ estimation, caused Albertans.

The University of Alberta declined to comment specifically on Moodys Gartner’s rescinded donation, but in a statement last week university officials said that Suzuki was being recognized as a longtime science educator.

“The conferral of an honorary degree by the University of Alberta is not a signal of institutional agreement with any individual perspective on a controversial issue,” the statement read.

“Rather, it honours the contributions and full body of work of those who represent diverse backgrounds and fields of endeavour.”

The ceremony for Suzuki’s honorary degree is set for June 7.

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