







# Letter from the Director

In early 2015, the U.S. Senate failed to approve a nonbinding amendment stating that 1) climate change is real, and 2) human activity significantly contributes to climate change. Not exactly a high point for science in our nation’s capital.

At VPIRG, we immediately set out to prove that in Vermont, at least, most elected officials do believe in science. Admittedly, this wasn’t a high bar, but we thought it was important to demonstrate that facts still matter in debates around climate or anything else.

Weeks later, when the Vermont state Senate took up a similar resolution, all but five senators voted in favor. What’s more, the resolution went

even further to say that we have a responsibility to act. We must do our part to stop global warming.

Passing this climate resolution wasn’t our most important achievement of 2015, but it did demonstrate once again that we can get things done in Vermont that seem impossible elsewhere. Our members and supporters are a big reason why.

In the pages that follow, you’ll read more about the victories you helped bring about in 2015 — from expanding voting rights to banning plastic microbeads. Together, we pressed for greater access to affordable dental care and beat back health insurance rate increases. We led the charge for clean energy and

helped to pass a Renewable Portfolio Standard. We stood up for our GMO labeling law and reined in the power of lobbyists in Montpelier.

And, of course, we and our partners made huge progress growing the grassroots Energy Independent Vermont campaign, aimed at putting a price on carbon pollution, cutting taxes and investing in Vermont.

All this was made possible because in 2015 we had more supporters and a larger staff than ever before — thanks to you.

Let’s keep it going!

Paul Burns

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Governor Peter Shumlin signs Election Day Registration into law as VPIRG Government Reform Advocate Julia Michel (right) looks on. Read more about VPIRG’s government reform efforts in 2015 on page 7.

“This wouldn’t have happened if it weren’t for VPIRG, like so many other great things in Vermont.”

# About VPIRG and VPIREF

Founded in 1972, the Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG) is the largest nonprofit consumer and environmental advocacy organization in the state. As a 501(c)4 nonprofit advocacy group, VPIRG conducts non-partisan public interest advocacy, runs grassroots campaigns and seeks legislative and policy solutions to some of the most pressing issues facing Vermonters. Donations to VPIRG are not tax deductible.

VPIRG established the Vermont Public Interest Research and Education Fund (VPIREF) in 1975 as its 501(c)3 outreach and education arm in order to conduct independent research and public education on the range of issues on which we work. Donations to VPIREF are tax deductible.

For 43 years, we have brought the voice of Vermont citizens to public policy debates concerning the environment, health care, consumer

protection and democracy. The common mission of VPIRG and VPIREF is to promote and protect the health of Vermont’s people, environment and locally based economy by informing and mobilizing citizens statewide. VPIRG advocates and organizers use independent research, policy analysis, public outreach and grassroots mobilization to design and implement effective strategies for each of our campaigns.

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# Getting VT to RPS

## The Inside the State House Story of How Vermont Passed a Renewable Portfolio Standard

### Eighth graders in green blazers.

That's the preferred message delivery system inside the Vermont State House.

When Vermonters call the State House to register their thoughts with lawmakers, those messages are written on pink sheets of paper. The papers are then given to pages (the aforementioned eighth graders), who are tasked with tracking down the right lawmakers and delivering the messages.

The 2015 legislative session was in its final throes when Ben Edgerly Walsh, VPIRG's Climate and Energy Program Director, saw a green blazer young woman heading toward him.

Ben was in the middle of a conversation with a senator — making the case that Vermont needed to make progress on clean energy by passing a renewable portfolio standard and beating back attempts to block solar and wind development in Vermont — when he and the senator were interrupted.

"Excuse me," said the page — handing the slip to the lawmaker. The "pink slip" contained a message from a VPIRG member, asking the

lawmaker to support the same things Ben had just been talking about. And this was the fourth time this had happened to Ben... that morning.

This was certainly a good sign. It looked like Vermont might finally get its RPS. But Ben knew not to take anything for granted.

He had seen defenders of the fossil fuel status quo block a similar bill in the closing days of the 2012 session.

There was still work to be done.

**"It was the most glaring omission in electric policy."**

A renewable portfolio standard or RPS, is a policy that requires utilities to provide a certain amount of renewable energy to their customers. At the beginning of 2015, 29 states had an RPS, and Vermont was not among them.

"It was the most glaring omission in Vermont electric policy," Ben says now — reflecting on last year's effort to pass an RPS.

The thought was, attempting to pass an RPS while Gov. Jim Douglas was in office would have been futile because of his general lack of support for renewable energy. So in 2005, Vermont passed the "SPEED" program instead. SPEED helped get some clean energy built in Vermont, but it lacked the requirements of a true RPS.

After Gov. Peter Shumlin took office in 2011, supporters of renewable energy saw an opportunity. In 2012, a coalition of clean energy leaders managed to get an RPS passed through the House, only to see opponents of the bill run out the legislative clock and prevent its ultimate passage.

But 2015 looked to be different.

"We had a lot of support from a broad collection of stakeholders, right from the very beginning," Ben says.

The environmental community was behind it, the utilities were on board, and the administration and key legislative leaders helped drive it forward from the get go.

As the legislation took shape, it became clear that this RPS would be somewhat different from what other states had done. As with all others

though, at its core it was focused on requiring clean energy while reducing Vermont's fossil fuel usage.

If passed, it would require electric utilities to provide 75% renewable energy to their customers by 2032. Ten percent of the utilities' power would need to come from distributed renewable generation — the strongest such requirement in the country. And, in a first-in-the-nation move, it would require utilities to help a significant portion of their customers reduce the use of fossil fuels for heating and transportation as well — a provision that would help nearly a hundred thousand Vermonters make energy upgrades.

"There were some aspects of the 2012 bill that were better. For instance, it would have gotten more new wind and other medium to large renewables built," Ben points out. "But in other ways, the 2015 bill was a big improvement."

The bill, which was introduced as H.40, made its way through the House fairly smoothly — with one exception. The House Ways and Means Committee included an amendment to cut the funding for Efficiency Vermont. Fortunately, that





▲ Ben Edgerly Walsh navigated his way through what he described as “procedural chaos” prior to the Senate vote.



▲ Polls continue to show huge support for clean energy in Vermont. In September, clean energy advocates gathered at Crossett Brook Middle School in Duxbury to show their support for solar power — including VPIRG Executive Director Paul Burns.

provision was removed in the Senate committee process.

But as the bill moved to the Senate floor in the final week of the session, things took a turn for the dramatic. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of that week, opponents of renewable energy introduced one amendment after another that would have made it harder to build clean energy in Vermont, and others that would have cut efficiency efforts.

“We had to write a different red-alert email to our members three days in a row. Which is a first for us — at least in my time,” Ben recalls.

And one by one, those amendments were defeated. But as the clock ticked down on the legislative session, passage of the RPS was still very much in doubt. Members of the environmental community feared a repeat of 2012.

And according to Ben it could have been, if not for two very important forces: grassroots support for clean energy and a senator who stuck to his guns.

During that final week, VPIRG members, and supporters of VNRC, Vermont Conservation Voters and our other allies, flooded the State House phone lines demanding their senators pass the RPS and defeat any attempts to slow down

Vermont’s clean energy transition. The pages in their green blazers dashed throughout the State House, delivering one message after another from clean energy supporters to their senators — many times on the heels of a conversation with Ben.

“It’s hard to overstate how powerful that one-two punch is,” Ben explains, referring to the combination of in-the-building advocacy and grassroots action.

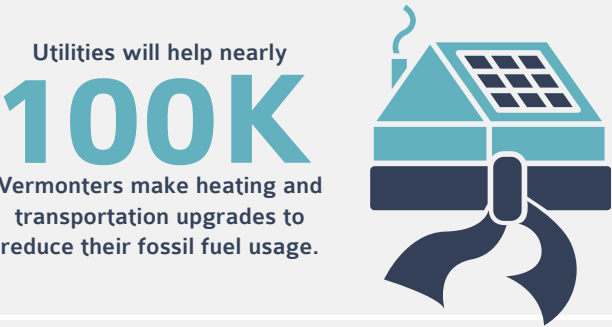
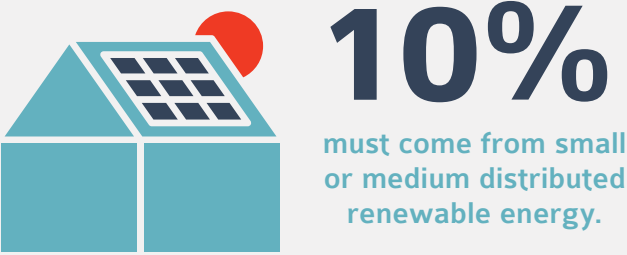
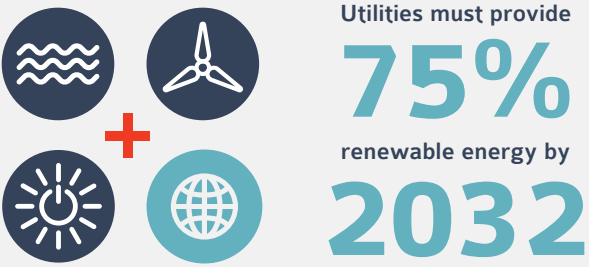
Meanwhile, Senator Chris Bray — Chairman of the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee — bucked pressure to approve poorly thought through proposals to slow the construction of renewable energy and undercut the progress the bill would make.

“Through it all,” Ben says, “Senator Bray remained steadfast. He defended the committee’s work with his colleagues and pushed to ensure this bill would remain strong.”

On Friday of that week — after what Ben could only describe as “procedural chaos” that was “clearly intended to kill the bill” — the Senate finally voted and passed H.40 22 to 6.

The House gave its final approval the next day, and one month later, Gov. Shumlin signed the bill into law. At last, Vermont had its RPS.

Vermont Passed an RPS: What does it do?



More Voters, More Transparency:  
Democracy Victories in 2015

VPIRG’s Government Reform program focuses on getting more people to participate in the elections process and reducing the influence that big money and special interests have over our government. We had success on both fronts in 2015.

With the support we gathered from thousands of VPIRG members, we were able to help pass two bills that will boost voter participation in elections and rein in the power of corporate lobbyists, respectively.

Vermont Becomes 14th State to Enact Election Day Registration

For the better part of a decade, VPIRG led the charge to allow citizens to register and vote on Election Day — and in 2015 we finally realized that goal. Starting in 2017 Vermonters will join their New England neighbors in New Hampshire and Maine (as well as citizens in 10 other states) in being able to register to vote on Election Day. It was a long,

sometimes difficult effort, but this success could not have come at a better time.

Vermont’s voter participation has stagnated in recent years and national studies have found that registration deadlines are preventing millions of Americans from casting a ballot. Experts estimate Election Day Registration laws can increase

voter participation by three to six percentage points. At the bill signing in June, Governor Peter Shumlin singled out VPIRG and our members for praise, recognizing our tireless efforts to see this reform through. “This wouldn’t have happened if it weren’t for VPIRG,” Shumlin said, “like so many other great things in Vermont.”

Strengthening Our Lobbyist Disclosure Laws

Under previous Vermont law, big-money lobbyists could spend huge sums of advertising dollars — often in an effort to derail public interest legislation — without disclosing who was behind the ad or revealing how

much they spent until months after the fact.

For instance, the beverage industry alone spent well over a half million dollars to influence Vermont lawmakers in 2015 — a

fact that did not come to light until the session was nearly over — allowing such efforts to escape the scrutiny of the public and lawmakers when it mattered most.

That’s why VPIRG worked closely with a tri-partisan group of lawmakers to pass legislation requiring large advertising expenditures by lobbyists to be reported to the secretary of state within 48 hours.

The new law also requires much more frequent reports from lobbyists on all of their expenses during the legislative session.

“Lobbyist advertising isn’t a Democratic problem or a Republican problem or a Progressive problem,” said House Minority Leader Don Turner, (R-Milton). “It’s a need-to-know problem. I believe in transparency and feel that this law moves us in the right direction.”

VPIRG advocate, Julia Michel, organized students and other supporters in a march to Burlington City Hall to highlight the importance of voting and need for increased participation in the electoral process. In 2015, VPIRG succeeded in helping make Vermont the 14th state to enact Election Day Registration — removing one more unnecessary barrier to democratic participation.





# Thinking Big

Year one into the largest campaign in VPIRG history

In November 2014, VPIRG announced we would be partnering with the state’s top environmental organizations, low-income advocates, clergy, economists, local businesses and energy leaders to form Energy Independent Vermont: a coalition dedicated to transforming our state – by investing in clean energy and efficiency; saving Vermonters money; cutting taxes on income, employment and sales; and paying for it with a tax on carbon pollution.

We knew that taking on the fossil fuel industry would not be easy, and we said then that this would likely be the largest campaign we’ve ever run. We were right.

In 2015, VPIRG and our coalition partners transformed this campaign from a collection of groups and individuals with a good idea and built it into a massive grassroots effort. And we did this by focusing on three key principles: democracy, community and accessibility.

While world leaders gathered at the COP21 climate conference in Paris in November, the Energy Independent Vermont campaign delivered 25,241 postcards to representatives urging Vermont to establish an Energy Independence Fund and put a price on carbon pollution.



VPIRG summer canvassers spoke with more than 40,000 Vermonters about our campaign and collected over 25,000 postcards in support of carbon pricing.



VPIRG organizers have been presenting our plan and recruiting new activists to our campaign in living rooms and community gatherings all across the state.



In December, VPIRG Executive Director Paul Burns and UVM economist Jon Erickson squared off in a debate over carbon pollution tax reform against the climate science denying Ethan Allen Institute.

## Democracy

VPIRG and our partners spent 2015 taking our plan directly to the people of Vermont. We knew from the beginning that the fossil fuel corporations and their allies would do whatever they could to sow fear and misinformation about a proposal that would help Vermonters reject dirty fuels and save money. So we pulled out all the stops to get our message directly in front of Vermonters and mobilize them to demand action from their elected officials. That’s why we ran our summer canvass on the issue, where we knocked on more than 100,000 doors, spoke with over 40,000 Vermonters and recruited more than 25,000 people to sign on in support of our cause. By nearly every measure, it was the most successful canvass in VPIRG history.

## Community

With a broad base of support for our plan identified, VPIRG embarked on an intense organizing campaign to build even deeper grassroots support in towns across the state. Our team of organizers has been going into living rooms, community centers, church halls, libraries — anywhere we could find an audience — to give people deeper insight into the campaign and recruit new activists and volunteers who will become the lifeblood of this movement. In 2015 alone we held more than 70 events with more than 3000 attendees in communities all across the state.

## Accessibility

We also knew from the beginning that we wouldn’t be able to run a bumper sticker campaign. We knew we’d have to work hard to educate as many Vermonters as possible about our proposal in a truthful and accessible way. Along with our partners we developed a detailed FAQ on the Energy Independent Vermont website ([www.energyindependentvt.org/FAQ](http://www.energyindependentvt.org/FAQ)). We developed an animated video to explain the proposal ([www.vpirg.org/CarbonPricingExplained](http://www.vpirg.org/CarbonPricingExplained)). And in December VPIRG Executive Director Paul Burns joined with University of Vermont economist Jon Erickson to debate the merits of carbon pollution tax reform with representatives of the climate-change denying Ethan Allen Institute.





# Filling the Gap

## Emma Helverson shares her first-hand experience with Vermont’s dental care access crisis and our efforts to address it.

VPIRG members who called our office or sent us a message in 2015 probably know Emma Helverson. As our Membership Coordinator, Emma is the first line for inquiries on all things VPIRG — inquiries that she usually responds to with an understanding smile. But finding someone in Vermont to help keep that smile in shape can be a real challenge — something Emma learned first-hand before coming to work for VPIRG. The year was 2013, and Emma was in Newport, Vermont on an Americorps placement. Americorps members receive a relatively low income, so Emma enrolled in Medicaid for health coverage. “In Newport, I actually got lucky. I was able to find a dentist and get an appointment fairly quickly. But I know that for other Americorps members — it was the total opposite.” Emma’s colleagues — like so many others in the Northeast Kingdom and other parts of

Vermont — waited months to get a dental care appointment. “And it’s not even just those on Medicaid,” she explains. “Even people I knew on private insurance had trouble getting in — there’s just not enough dentists.” And a few months later, when Emma moved to Burlington, her luck ran out. “I had moved to Burlington and I wanted to get a teeth cleaning,” she remembers. “And I called around to about a dozen dentists, and they all said ‘We don’t take Medicaid.’” Eventually Emma talked to one dentist who said he believed only one private practice in the Burlington area accepted Medicaid patients — and that she might have better luck at a clinic. “What was crazy is when you call the clinics you don’t even talk to a person — they just ask you to leave a message,” Emma says. “And even though they called me back pretty quickly, they told me I could be put

on a waiting list — and it would be six months to get a cleaning.” Emma’s story is indicative of a broader problem in Vermont — a serious lack of access to dental care, especially for those with a lower income. “We have an oral health crisis in Vermont.” That’s how VPIRG Health Care Advocate Falko Schilling classifies it. “Thousands of Vermonters go without needed dental care every single year,” he explains. In 2011 and 2012, nearly 100,000 people didn’t get the care they needed. In 2013, more than 40% of kids and teenagers with Dr. Dynasaur didn’t have any dental visits. “There are a lot of reasons why people with Medicaid and Dr. Dynasaur so often can’t get the dental care they need,” Falko says. “They may live in a rural community without a dentist, or they may live in a town with a dentist but still have no luck because many Vermont dentists



▲ VPIRG Membership Coordinator Emma Helverson has personally experienced the difficulties many Vermonters have getting dental care. When she was on Medicaid, Emma discovered that the wait times for basic cleanings could sometimes be months. In 2015, VPIRG made addressing the dental care access crisis a major priority.

don’t take Medicaid or Dr. Dynasaur insurance because it doesn’t pay them as much. Or, if the dentist does take Medicaid, he or she sees only a few patients that have it and may not be taking new patients.” That’s why in 2014, VPIRG joined with other allies dedicated to addressing this issue. And in 2015 the Vermont Oral Health Care for All Coalition worked hard to move S.20 — a bill that would allow mid-level dental providers, called dental therapists, to practice in Vermont. Dental therapists have a scope of practice greater than a hygienist, but

more limited than a dentist. They perform some of the most needed dental procedures such as fillings and simple extractions. Dental therapists have already been added to the dental team in Alaska, Minnesota, Maine and more than 50 countries around the world. In Minnesota, a State Department of Health report found that dental practices employing dental therapists are reporting extremely positive experiences. They see more Medicaid patients; they see more patients overall; travel and wait times have decreased; and

dentists have more time to perform complicated procedures while delegating routine care. In 2015, VPIRG and our allies scored a major breakthrough as the Vermont Senate passed the dental therapist bill. That success left Emma and a whole lot of others in Vermont smiling. “I think this will make a big difference,” Emma says. “No one should have to go months without access to dental care. I’m really glad to see this move forward.”



## S.20 Passes House and Becomes Law in 2016

We succeeded in pushing S.20 through the House in 2016. As this is being written, we expect Gov. Shumlin to sign the bill into law soon, making Vermont the 4th state to add dental therapists to the dental workforce. Look for more details in our summer newsletter or visit [www.vpirg.org/dental](http://www.vpirg.org/dental) to get the latest.

# The Journey to Label GMOs: How a Little State Made a National Impact

VPIRG’s approach to our campaigns is simple: we do our research, we run principled grassroots campaigns, and most of all, we follow through. There is no better example of this strategy than when we helped Vermont become the first state in the nation to require GMO-labeling.

But passing an unprecedented law is never an easy feat, and the fight against Monsanto and the biotech industry has taken Vermont’s labeling law from our tiny State House to the courts and finally on to Congress. And VPIRG’s been there every step of the way.

Check out the long journey that’s taken GMO-labeling from conversations on Vermont doorsteps to national headlines – with major developments in 2015 and beyond.

February 6, 2014  
**Vermonters Pack the House for Their Right to Know**  
VPIRG organizers put in calls, organized buses and ran advertisements across the state to make Vermonters aware of a public hearing at the State House in front of two key Senate committees. Over 250 Vermonters packed into the State House hoping to testify and 80 had their chance – every single one speaking in support of labeling-GMOs.



April 9, 2014  
**Vermont’s GMO Debate Heats Up in Congress**  
In reaction to Vermont’s success, Representative Mike Pompeo (R-Kansas) introduces the infamous bill dubbed the “DARK Act” in Congress. This bill would preempt Vermont’s labeling law and keep consumers in the dark about what is actually in their food.



April 27, 2015  
**And the Ruling is: Vermont 2 – Big Food 0**  
Vermont wins round one of the GMO-labeling lawsuit when Judge Christina Reiss rejects the food companies’ plea to stop Vermont’s labeling law from moving forward.



February 19, 2016  
**DARK Act 2.0**  
Senator Pat Roberts (R-Kansas) — Chair of the Agriculture Committee — introduces the Senate version of the “DARK Act” in an attempt to build on the House’s attempt to preempt Vermont and any other state’s mandatory GMO-labeling laws and put voluntary labeling under the jurisdiction of the USDA. VPIRG works with the Shumlin administration, coalition partners and our national representatives to do everything possible to keep democratic senators on the right side of this debate.

## 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016

January 2012  
**With Our Powers Combined We Can Label GMOs**  
VPIRG joins forces with NOFA Vermont, Rural Vermont and Cedar Circle Farm to create the Vermont Right to Know GMOs coalition. Within the year the coalition will grow to include thousands of Vermonters and over a hundred businesses and introduce a bill that is the basis for what will later become Vermont’s label law.



“Grassroots democracy – that’s what you guys [at VPIRG] have done, and thank you very, very much for that,” Sanders said.

April 2013  
**VPIRG’s Summer Canvass Kicks Off!**  
Over the next four months VPIRG’s summer canvassers knock on doors in EVERY town of the state generating support for our campaign to label GMOs in Vermont.

May 10, 2013  
**Labeling Passes the House!**  
In a historic vote, Vermont takes GMO-labeling legislation further than any other state in the U.S. when the Vermont House of Representatives votes 99-42 in support of Vermont’s GMO-labeling bill — H.112.

August 15, 2013  
**Bernin’ for GMO Labels**  
Senator Bernie Sanders helps VPIRG celebrate the most successful summer outreach campaign ever! Over 60 VPIRG staff and canvassers deliver 30,000 signed postcards to legislators from Vermonters in every county of the state who want to see foods containing GMOs labeled in Vermont. Now that’s YUGE.

April 23, 2014  
**Vermont Legislature Says Let’s Label GMOs!**  
After years of hard work Vermonters across the state celebrate as the Vermont House of Representatives approves the Senate’s version of the bill in a 114-30 vote. Next stop — the bill lands on Gov. Peter Shumlin’s desk.

May 8, 2014  
**GMO Labeling is the Law!**  
Thousands of Vermonters across the state celebrate on this day when Governor Peter Shumlin signs the GMO-labeling bill into law making Vermont the first state in the nation to require labels on genetically engineered foods.



June 12, 2014  
**The Food Fight Goes to Court**  
The Grocery Manufacturers Association file suit against the state of Vermont in an attempt to stop our GMO-labeling law from going forward. Working with the Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic from Vermont Law School, VPIRG files amicus briefs in support of Vermont’s Law.



“I’m just a rock ‘n’ roller who believes people should know what they’re eating,” Young said at a backstage pre-show press conference with Peter Shumlin.

July 19, 2015  
**Rockin’ for the Right to Know**  
Rock legend Neil Young visits Vermont to perform songs from his new album “the Monsanto Years.” VPIRG, alongside the governor’s administration, host a pre-concert press conference where Neil Young pledges \$100,000 to Vermont’s Food Fight Fund.

July 23, 2015  
**Congress Takes a Walk on the DARK Side**  
The U.S. House of Representatives approves the “DARK Act” introduced by Representative Pompeo that would preempt Vermont’s label law and keep consumers in the dark about what is in their food.

March 16, 2016  
**U.S. Senate Supports Consumers Right to Know**  
In a win for consumers across the country, the U.S. Senate votes 49-48 against advancing the “DARK Act.” VPIRG celebrates yet another GMO victory with the governor, legislative champions and representatives for Senator Leahy during a press conference.

March 21, 2016  
**The Dominoes Begin to Fall**  
This week, four food giants including General Mills, Kellogg, Con Agra and Mars make the announcement that they will join Campbell’s in labeling genetically engineered foods sold in the U.S. to comply with Vermont’s upcoming GMO-labeling law.

July 1, 2016  
**We Just Labeled It: Vermont’s GMO Labeling Law Set to Go Into Effect!**  
All foods containing GMOs are required to be labeled as of this day!





# After the Signature

## The Effort to Keep the Toxic-Free Families Act Strong



◀ VPIRG Environmental Health Advocate Falko Schilling talks about potentially dangerous toys as part of a press conference to unveil our annual Trouble in Toyland report in November 2015.

In 2014, VPIRG and our supporters were instrumental in passing the Toxic Free Families Act — a law designed to give Vermonters new information about which children’s products contain potentially dangerous chemicals. But as is the case with many major reforms, getting the bill signed into law is not the end of our advocacy work. Industries often try to use the implementation stage to water down or derail a law they don’t like, and the Toxics Free Families Act was no exception.

We sat down with our Environmental Health Advocate Falko Schilling to talk about our efforts to ensure the Toxic Free Families Act works as intended, and VPIRG’s role in the sometimes overlooked, but very important “rule-making process.”

**Q: What makes the Toxic Free Families Act unique?**

**A:** This law is the first in the nation that will allow parents to know the exact children’s products that have chemicals-of-high-concern in them. There are similar programs in Maine, Oregon, and Washington, but they don’t provide the level of specificity that’s really needed for consumers to make informed decisions about the products they’re buying. Washington’s program, for instance, only requires manufacturers to disclose the type of products that contain these chemicals, but not the specific products themselves.

**Q: Gov. Shumlin signed this into law in 2014. What happened then?**

**A:** As with any law, when you pass it — that’s when a lot of the hard work actually begins. This law aims to create a searchable online database so that Vermonters can look and determine what children’s products contain known toxic chemicals. But it’s a process getting there.

**Q: So what’s that process?**

**A:** Well it started with the Department of Health creating a rule. They needed to make clear exactly what information they were looking for from manufacturers. And that was a big fight — one of the most contentious rule-making fights I’ve ever seen. And one of the main issues was: are we going to require manufacturers to disclose exactly what products contain these

chemicals? The industry pushed back against this, they wanted less specific disclosure requirements, which would be much less useful for consumers. But the Department of Health stood strong and, with the support of VPIRG and our members, they issued a rule that requires manufacturers to disclose exactly which products contain known toxic chemicals.

**Q: What role did VPIRG members play in all of this?**

**A:** Our members generated comments to the Department of Health in support of this rule. They attended hearings to lend their support. Ultimately, hundreds of VPIRG members weighed in on this and made their voices heard. This

grassroots effort helped move the process forward and ensure that we got a strong rule.

**Q: So as someone who’s seen many bills go from an idea to fully implemented law, what would you say about the importance of the implementation stage?**

**A:** As an advocate, you know that your work doesn’t end when the governor signs a law. In many ways that’s when it starts. You have to see it through to the very end and ensure that what the legislature intended and what we’ve been advocating for actually becomes a reality. And that can be trickier than it sounds.



### Government Reform

## 2015 Accomplishments

2015 was a tremendous year for VPIRG. We laid the groundwork for the largest campaign in our organization’s history — and still made huge strides to improve our democracy, protect consumers and move Vermont toward a clean, sustainable future. All this success can be attributed to VPIRG’s proven mix of informed advocacy, strategic coalition building, and the mobilization of thousands of citizen activists across Vermont. We are proud to share these 2015 accomplishments.

**Expanding Voting Rights** For more than a decade, VPIRG fought for a new law to make it easier for Vermonters to participate in elections by allowing citizens to register on Election Day. In 2015, our work paid off. By removing this barrier to exercising our right to vote, Vermont is primed to see increasing voter participation — in fact, in the dozen other states that allow voters to register on Election Day, voter turnout is 10% higher on average.

**Reining in Lobbyists** VPIRG believes the public has a right to know who’s footing the bill for advertising campaigns spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to influence debates in the State House. That’s why we fought hard to pass S.93, a bill to require more disclosure from lobbyists operating in Montpelier. If sunshine is the best disinfectant, then this legislation will help clean things up in the State House.

### Energy and Climate

**Passing a Renewable Portfolio Standard** One of the last pieces of legislation to pass in the 2015 session was a critical renewable energy bill. The Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) requires Vermont utilities to provide their customers with renewable electricity, and ensures at least 400 MW of new renewables will be built in Vermont over the next 15 years. The RPS also requires electric utilities to help Vermonters cut their fossil fuel use in the heating and transportation sectors, saving Vermonters an estimated \$390 million.

**Formally Recognizing Climate Change** Parting with the elected leaders in Washington, D.C. and other states who deny global warming, the Vermont Senate joined the most qualified scientific, military and economic minds alive today by approving a resolution to formally recognize the threat of global warming. By a 25-5 vote, the Senate approved this VPIRG backed resolution.

**Enormous Growth in the Carbon Pollution Tax Campaign** VPIRG and our partners in the Energy Independent Vermont coalition built a grassroots movement of Vermonters who believe that everyone should have the opportunity to save money in the clean energy future — and that we can do that by putting a price on carbon pollution. More than 25,000 Vermonters and 500 businesses signed on to the campaign to cut carbon pollution, cut taxes and invest in Vermont.

### Health Care

**Increasing Access to Dental Care** VPIRG backed legislation (S.20) to increase access to dental care cleared a major hurdle in 2015 by passing the Senate. The bill (which became law in 2016) allows dental therapists to practice in Vermont. Dental therapists are mid-level dental providers with a scope of practice greater than a hygienist, but more limited than a dentist.

**Beating Back Rate Increases** VPIRG once again mobilized hundreds of supporters to submit comments opposing proposed health insurance rate increases. The Green Mountain Care Board responded by cutting proposed increases from both Blue Cross Blue Shield and MVP Health Care.

### Consumer Protection

**Protecting Vermont’s GMO Labeling Law** Federal District Court Judge Christina Reiss rejected a motion from corporate food and chemical companies asking Vermont to stop implementation of the state’s GMO labeling law. In what might have been the most important aspect of the ruling, the judge said she believes the law’s requirement that GMOs be labeled is constitutional under the First Amendment.

**Instituting Rent-to-Own Protections** VPIRG helped pass consumer protection legislation that reins in the rent-to-own industry. This legislation puts caps on how much rent-to-own merchants can mark up their products and guarantees that customers will not pay full price for used items. The legislation also ensures consumers don’t lose what they have invested in an item just because they miss a payment.

### Environmental Health

**Banning Microbeads in Vermont and Across the Country** One of the first bills of substance to be voted on in 2015, H.4 passed the House of Representatives 140-0 as legislators gave a resounding thumbs down to plastic microbeads in personal care products. Microbeads are microscopic plastic orbs used as exfoliates in home hygiene and beauty products like body scrubs, face wash and toothpaste. These tiny particles, barely visible to the naked eye, cannot be filtered out in waste water treatment facilities and end up at the bottom of our lakes, rivers, streams and local waterways. A flurry of state action, including here in Vermont, actually prompted federal action on the issue — and President Obama signed a bill banning microbeads in personal care products in December.

**Requiring Product Specific Toxic Disclosures** In November after receiving numerous comments from VPIRG and our members, the Department of Health and the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR) completed the rule-making process of The Toxic Free Families Act (Act 188) and formalized strong rules in favor of giving families the ability to make informed choices about the products they buy. The action by LCAR will give Vermonters real information about potentially dangerous chemicals still being used in children’s products.

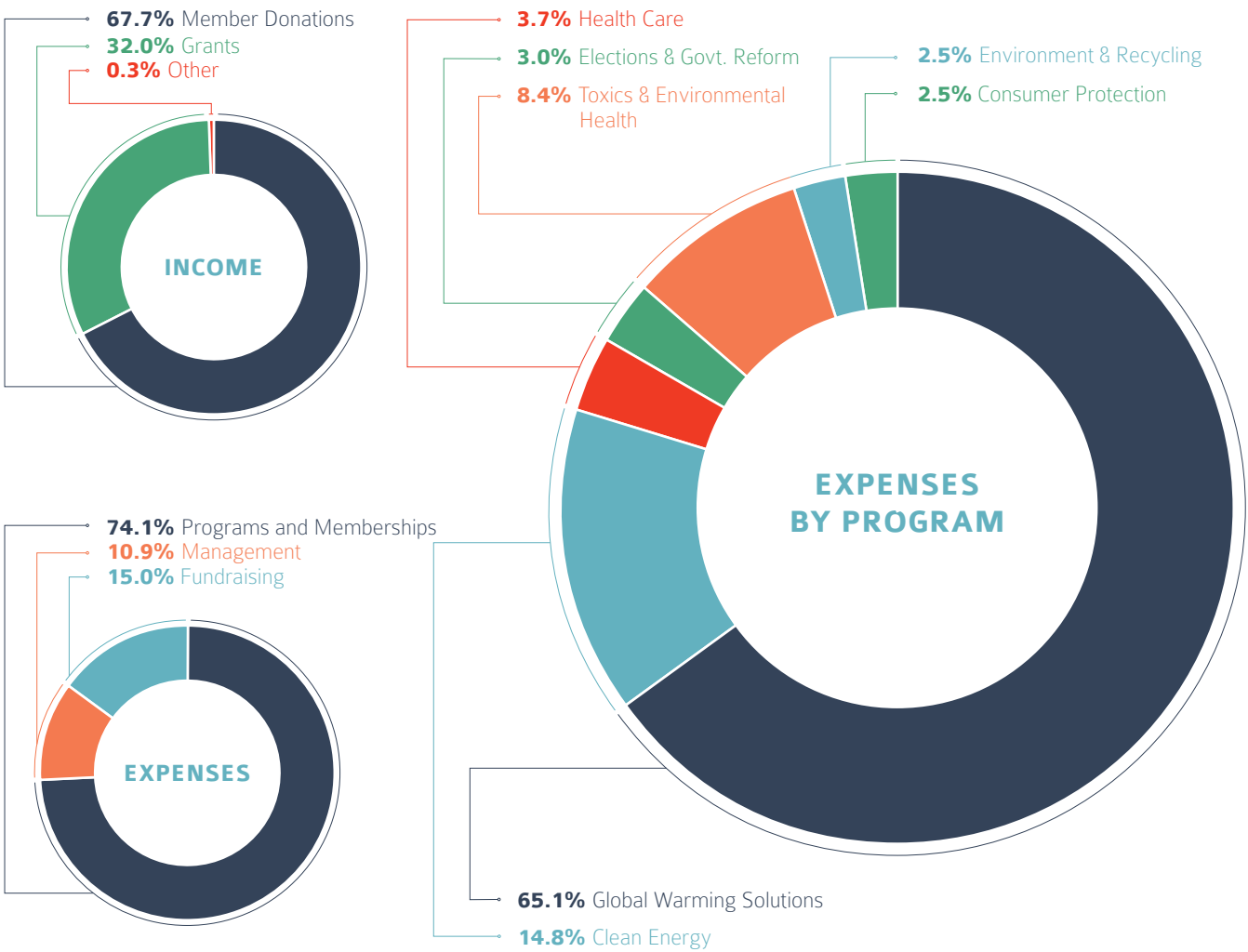


# Powered by You: Our 2015 Finances by the Numbers

VPIRG experienced another record-setting year of growth, witnessing an increase of 13% in annual revenue. This increased investment in our work is a testament to Vermonters’ belief in our power to advocate on their behalf effectively, efficiently, and to deliver results. It’s also an indication that there’s more need than ever for an organization like VPIRG to protect the public interest in the face of growing challenges — from climate change to money in politics and more.

VPIRG’s and VPIREF’s combined income totaled \$2,322,103, of which more than \$1.57 million came from individual member donations, 36% of that coming from our monthly sustaining members. Combined expenses totaled \$2,067,450, which included \$200,000 in pass-through grant funding to allies on our top priority campaigns. Program expenses and member services accounts for nearly three quarters of our expenses. Our top priority campaign, Global Warming Solutions, accounted for 65% of our program activities, and was complemented by campaigns in six other issue areas.

	VPIRG	VPIREF	TOTAL
Income	\$1,387,748	\$934,355	\$2,322,103
Expenses	\$815,328	\$1,252,122	\$2,067,450



# Strength in Numbers: Recognizing our Supporters

## At VPIRG, our members are our strength.

The primary reason we are able to successfully protect the public from well-moneyed special interests is that we have the force of 40,000+ members and supporters behind us.

Members like you provide both the financial support and grassroots muscle we need to be effective. Last year alone, VPIRG supporters made more than 60,000 donations and took nearly 40,000 actions (signing petitions, contacting lawmakers, writing letters to the editor, etc.)

It’s this kind of incredible people power that allows us to take on some of the largest and dirtiest industries in the country and win. Thank you for your support.

Check out these profiles of a few of our standout members and see a partial list of our members on the next page.

While we wish we could thank every single member, donor and supporter here, the generosity of those listed deserves special recognition.



### Ron Manganiello as told by Colleen Halley, VPIRG Associate Director

I met Ron Manganiello and his wife Ellen Bernstein ten years ago. We’ve been meeting regularly ever since. They share with me their thoughts on our issues and things going on in their community. I share with them updates on VPIRG campaigns, and we discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Vermont.

When I learned about Ron’s passion for biking (he founded Bike Recycle Vermont), I asked for his advice on our summer canvass’s use of bikes. As a result of Ron’s input and assistance, VPIRG has significantly improved the safety of our bike canvass, instituted a mandatory helmet policy and set up a partnership with Bike Recycle Vermont to help maintain the canvass bike fleet.

Ron and Ellen have grounded me in how VPIRG issues and campaigns impact Vermonters. They’ve served as a reminder of who I’m fighting for when the work gets hard. This year, they went even further, making arrangements for a planned gift that will continue to provide financial support for VPIRG’s work for years after they’re gone. All of us at VPIRG are humbled by their generosity and inspired by their dedication to the mission and vision we share for Vermont and its future.



### Jack Hanson

My name is Jack Hanson, I am a Senior at UVM and the President of the Renewable Energy Network, a club that connects students with Vermonters working in the field of renewable energy and energy efficiency. As an Environmental Studies Major, I understand the importance and urgency of transitioning our economy from fossil fuels to renewable energy as quickly as possible. I got involved with VPIRG my freshman year, spring of 2013, working to promote wind power in Vermont. This year I worked on my Environmental Studies Senior Capstone with VPIRG, working over 200 hours with the organization. I am also one of two UVM students serving on the VPIRG Board of Directors.

When looking at the massive challenges we face in Vermont, in the U.S. and globally, it is easy to become discouraged and feel powerless. When working with VPIRG, however, I am surrounded by a sense of determination, optimism and love. From top to bottom, VPIRG is full of great people who care deeply about our state and want to improve the lives of ordinary Vermonters, and who have the know how to get it done.



### Judy Geer as told by Ben Edgerly Walsh, VPIRG Climate & Energy Program Director

When I wrote to ask Judy if I could write a few words about her, she responded that while she didn’t mind, she wished she had more time to be “truly helpful.” Which is funny, since Judy is truly and deeply helpful to not only VPIRG, but to the larger cause of moving our state and our planet toward a cleaner, more sustainable future.

When she’s not working at Concept2 (the incredibly successful rowing equipment company founded by her husband Dick Dreissigacker and his brother Peter), Judy leads the team at the Craftsbury Outdoor Center. She and Dick bought the complex in 2008, and have shaped it with three goals in mind: to foster lifelong sports and healthy lifestyles, to protect natural resources and to use and teach sustainable practices. Judy and Dick have powered the center with solar and biomass, and have even built a net-zero lodge on site. Athletes from around the nation train at the Center — and every one comes away with a better understanding of what they can do to reduce their impact on the planet.

In addition to all of this, Judy also serves on the board for the Vermont Natural Resources Council. Oh, and did I mention she’s a three-time Olympian for the U.S. Rowing Team?

And yet, Judy is still able to find time to support VPIRG and take action on the wide variety of issues we work on. She is “truly helpful,” and we’re truly thankful for her support.



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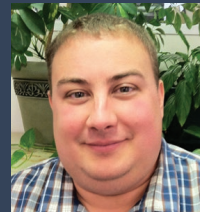
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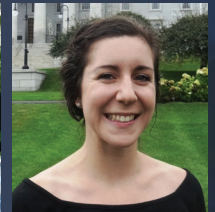
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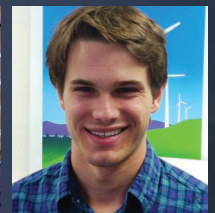
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