



FROM THE DIRECTOR



In your whole life, have you ever had to build up the courage to go knock on a stranger's door to talk about a cause, a candidate or a cookie? How about many doors in many neighborhoods...in the rain?

I have, and it isn't easy. In fact, around here we call it a "character-building" experience. But it can also be fun, rewarding and incredibly powerful if it's done right.

In the summer of 2013, we not only did it right, we did it better than ever before. You'll read

some of the impressive details across the page, but I just want to say for the record, this group of summer canvassers and directors established a new bar for grassroots organizing and outreach in Vermont. Thanks to our amazing staff, we now have members in every town in the state — every town that has people anyway. And it's our members who give us our strength.

We couldn't take on the likes of Monsanto, Entergy Louisiana, Gaz Metro and the chemistry industry — at least not effectively — if it weren't for you. But as you'll see, we did take them on in 2013. And we didn't stop there. It was another remarkable year with the announced retirement of Vermont Yankee, House passage of GMO labeling legislation, a new law banning toxic flame retardants, and a major new campaign to stop a fracked gas pipeline in Vermont.

So, here's to you and your continued support, and to the most impressive group of canvassers it's been my privilege to know.

Paul Burns, Executive Director

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 in support of priority public interest issues and campaigns and seeks legislative and policy solutions to issues affecting 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 42 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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Cover photos

Main photo: The VPIRG canvass team celebrates a chart-topping summer in which they broke every record in the book, reaching doors in every single town in Vermont and collecting over 30,000 signatures in support of GMO labeling. *Small photos* — *Left:* VPIRG staff, volunteers, and interns were among the 300 Vermonters who trekked to the top of Georgia Mountain for the grand opening of Vermont's newest wind farm in July. *Center top:* Clean Energy Advocate Ben Walsh outlines VPIRG's 2013 clean energy priorities. *Center bottom:* VPIRG members take action against the Fracked Gas Pipeline. *Right:* Consumer Protection Advocate Falko Schilling speaks with the media.



In 2013, the VPIRG summer outreach team broke every record in the book. As the largest canvass team VPIRG has ever assembled, we talked to over 50,000 Vermont citizens from every city, town, gore, and territory in Vermont (all 256 of them) about our GMO labeling campaign. The team of 70 college-aged grassroots organizers collected over 32,000 postcards to senators, sending the strong message that Vermonters believe they have a right to know about GMOs.

“Canvassing has reaffirmed my impression that Vermonters are engaged in local issues and willing to take action. No matter how much money pours in from Monsanto and the biotech industry, I know that our legislators will listen to Vermonters.”

—VPIRG Canvass Co-Director Dylan Zwicky

The journey of 30,000 postcards



Reaching every single town

VPIRG is dedicated to building the bridge between legislators and constituents, no matter where they may be. And when we say we are Vermont’s voice, we mean it. By getting input from as many Vermonters as possible, we’re able to translate those direct, face-to-face conversations into people power.

That’s why our crews of canvassers journeyed to the farthest reaches of the state to talk to Vermonters about our campaign to label GMOs. A three-day camping trip in June marked the first time VPIRG had canvassed many towns in Essex County, including all of the United Towns and Gores (UTG).



Behind the scenes

In order to prepare the tens of thousands of postcards for delivery, the unsung heroes of the summer — dozens of volunteers and interns — spent close to 550 hours sorting, making copies and entering data. These people helped to translate member power into campaign success.



Bringing your voice to the State House

Why did we collect all of these postcards? To send the strong message to Senators that Vermonters deserve the right to know what’s in the food we eat and feed our families. And we did just that. In a celebratory event in front of the State House in August, dozens of VPIRG organizers — alongside Vermont Right to Know GMOs Coalition partners, Sen. Bernie Sanders, and other key allies — delivered the postcards to key legislators.

“I am encouraged by the overwhelming reception that these young people received...I think it shows that there is broad public support for the passage of strong GMO labeling legislation this session.”

—Senator David Zuckerman

Photos

Left: The VPIRG summer outreach team was so dedicated to knocking on doors in every single town that even in towns where there was no door, we hiked our own in.

Middle: Volunteers sorting postcards. *Right:* Canvassers marching to the State House rally with boxes of postcards.



BEYOND DIRTY ENERGY

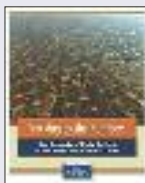
HIGHLIGHTS:

- Helped lay the groundwork for legislation that made \$11 million available for low-interest loans, making it easier for individuals and small businesses to invest in efficient heating.
- Successfully backed improvements to the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative to bring in additional dollars to help Vermonters weatherize their homes.
- The Senate voted 16–14 to gut legislation aimed at blocking renewable energy development in the state. VPIRG members played a big role in preventing the anti-clean energy legislation from passing.
- On August 27, 2013, Entergy announced its plan to shut down Vermont Yankee in 2014.

REPORT:

Fracking by the Numbers —

This report, written by the Environment America Research and Policy Center



is the first study of its kind to measure the footprint of fracking damage to date — including toxic wastewater, chemical use, air pollution, land damage and global warming emissions.

Read the full text of the report at www.vpirg.org/resources



Photos

Above: VPIRG staff, allies, and partners celebrate the closure of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant.

Below: VPIRG members participated in Global Frackdown Day.

“Building a pipeline in this state to transport fracked gas isn’t just immoral — it’s shortsighted.”

—National climate activist Tim DeChristopher

Moving away from dirty energy



Vermont Yankee

In August, Entergy Louisiana made the announcement that many Vermonters had been waiting to hear for decades: Vermont Yankee (VY) would finally cease its operations by the end of 2014.

The news came after years of dedicated activism by thousands of New England residents who wanted to see the nuclear plant replaced by cleaner and safer power sources. Legal proceedings in which VPIRG argued that VY should not be allowed to run for another 20 years had just wrapped up at the Public Service Board (PSB) when Entergy threw in the towel.

“After establishing a track record of breathtaking untrustworthiness, Entergy finally gave us the truth — it made no sense to operate this plant any longer,” said VPIRG Director Paul Burns.

But the battle is not over. Shortly after the announcement, VPIRG turned to the critically important questions surrounding decommissioning (when, how, and who pays?), and whether the plant should be given permission to operate for one more year. We urged the PSB to deny Entergy a Certificate of Public Good, and pressed the Board to grant a future governor of Vermont more authority to demand that Entergy take steps toward decommissioning once they have sufficient funds available. A decision on these matters will be made by the PSB before the summer of 2014.

Stop the fracked gas pipeline

On the heels of our successful campaign to ban fracking for gas or oil in Vermont in 2012, VPIRG tackled Vermont Gas System’s proposal to dramatically expand its fracked gas pipeline infrastructure in the state in 2013.

Despite new evidence pointing to the disastrous climate impacts of fracking, the environmental damage the new pipeline would cause, and the threat that the explosive fossil fuel could pose to homes and neighborhoods along its route, Vermont Gas proposed expanding the fracked gas line from Chittenden County down to Middlebury and then underneath Lake Champlain all the way to Ticonderoga, New York.

VPIRG turned out hundreds of citizens opposed to the plan for a September hearing of the PSB. We also released a report on the dangers of fracking, promoted safer alternatives available right now, provided legal assistance to homeowners, and intervened in the formal proceedings.



CLEAN ENERGY

Building a clean energy future

Rooftop revolution

Have you or your neighbor gone solar yet? If so, you're not alone. A 2013 report released by Environment America ranked Vermont 9th in the nation for per capita solar installations (see sidebar).



Solar's success in Vermont is built on Vermont's net metering law, which allows Vermonters to go renewable and offset their electric bills in return.

This solar energy boom is great news because solar power is a clean, abundant, and local source of energy. With net metering, Vermonters can generate their own energy, reduce their carbon footprint to address climate change, and help the state as a whole move away from dirty, dangerous fossil fuels.

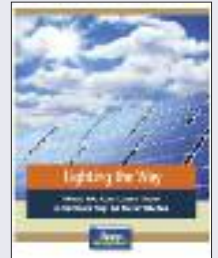
By mid 2013, several utilities had reached their net metering cap and stopped letting their customers install renewables. To set ourselves up to expand net metering in 2014 and ensure all Vermonters once again had the right to go renewable, VPIRG generated scores of phone calls and emails to decision makers and made sure that the story of solar's value was front and center in media coverage of the issue.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2013, the solar industry grew ten times faster than the US economy as a whole. With more solar jobs per capita than any other state in the country, Vermont is leading the rooftop revolution.

REPORT:

Environment America Research and Policy Center report, *Lighting the Way: What We Can Learn from the Nation's Top 12 Solar States 2013*.



Read the full text of the report at www.vpirg.org/resources

"It's no accident solar is taking off in Vermont. Our state has made a conscious decision to make going solar easier and more affordable, and that's led directly to the kind of growth we saw this summer."

—VPIRG Clean Energy Advocate Ben Walsh

Wind

In one of the key votes of the legislative session, Senators voted 16-14 to strip the most offensive provisions out of an anti-renewable energy bill — S.30. This legislation threatened to block wind, solar and other renewable energy sources of various sizes, and would have represented a major retreat from Vermont's commitment to clean energy.

With a clear majority of Vermonters demanding more clean energy, not less, VPIRG and our allies worked with Sen. Bernie Sanders and climate champion Bill McKibben to ensure that senators got the message. Up until the final minutes of the debate, VPIRG's organizers, advocates, student interns and member activists led the charge to defend Vermont's clean energy future from the threat of the anti-renewable bill.



Photos

Above: Solar installation photo courtesy Kevin Lehman, SunCommon.

Below: VPIRG Director Paul Burns celebrated the grand opening of Vermont's newest wind farm, Georgia Mountain Community Wind.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Saved Vermonters \$20 million on health care plans by working with the Green Mountain Care Board and the Office of Health Care Advocate to improve the rate review process.¹
- Thanks to the passage of another VPIRG-backed disclosure law, we made huge strides toward a more transparent health care system by shining a light on denied insurance claims.
- With strong support from VPIRG and our allies, the state of Vermont became one of two states to go above and beyond the health care subsidies provided by the federal government, making plans on Vermont Health Connect more affordable for those in need.
- VPIRG joined a coalition of groups with a goal of increasing access to affordable dental care throughout the state.



Falko Schilling walks the House Health Care Committee through VPIRG's research into the insurer data required by the VPIRG-backed disclosure law.

On the path to reform

With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act nationally, and Vermont Health Connect here in the Green Mountain State, 2013 was a momentous year in health care reform. And it wasn't always pretty, as numerous glitches and delays plagued the initial rollout of the new health care programs. But VPIRG advocates and organizers remained focused on the larger goal: establishing an efficient universal health care system that pays doctors for keeping people healthy and not for the number of procedures they perform.

Vermont is one of the few places in the country where we have a real chance to get health care reform right, and VPIRG remains committed to doing so.

To keep the state on the right path in 2013, we provided detailed input to Green Mountain Care Board on key system design and reform elements, raised consumer-oriented concerns about financing plans, and pushed back hard against anti-reform extremists.

Rate review producing results

Vermonters will save \$20 million in health insurance costs through Vermont Health Connect, thanks to our state's new rate review program and the efforts of VPIRG and our health care allies.¹ A transparent rate review process is an excellent way to ensure that consumers aren't forced to pay for unjustified rate hikes proposed by insurers. VPIRG made improving Vermont's rate review process a top priority of our health care program in 2013, and it is producing immediate results.

“VPIRG is always in the room looking out for the best interest of consumers.”

—Chair of the Vermont House Committee on Health Care
Rep. Mike Fisher (Addison-4)

Source:

[1] Morgan True, *Report: Medical Expenses Now Nearly 20 Percent of Vermont's Gross Domestic Product* VTDigger, Jan. 26, 2014, <http://vtdigger.org/2014/01/26/senate-committee-confirms-al-gobeille-gmcb-chair>



Healthier environment healthier Vermonters

Toxic triumph

After learning that a cancer-causing chemical banned from children’s pajamas in the 1970s (chlorinated-Tris) was being used in various other children’s products and furniture, VPIRG’s Environmental Health Advocate Lauren Hierl took immediate action. She reached out to our allies at the Professional Firefighters of Vermont among many others, and coordinated an incredibly effective campaign to pass the nation’s strongest ban on these ineffective flame retardants.

While this was an important victory, it also served to highlight the fact that there is more work to be done to protect future generations from unnecessary toxic exposure.

Expanding and protecting the Bottle Bill

Vermont’s Bottle Bill is one of the most successful recycling programs anywhere, with more than four out of every five beer and soda containers being returned for redemption and recycling. But despite the law’s popular support and long track record of success, the beverage industry and its allies have been attempting to trash the recycling law for years. In 2013, VPIRG fought to protect the existing law, and argued that it ought to be expanded.

We exposed the fact that the research firm hired to study the effectiveness of the Bottle Bill had ties to the beverage industry and had even testified in favor of eliminating the Bottle Bill in the past. We identified numerous flaws and false assumptions in the firm’s report to the Agency of Natural Resources. And we recruited scores of Vermonters to attend a public hearing and hundreds more to submit comments to save the Bottle Bill.

Our campaign worked, as legislators left the Bottle Bill untouched in 2013.

“It was an honor working with the members of the Senate Health and Welfare and the House Human Services Committees, in coordination with VPIRG, to make Vermont a safer place for its citizens and firefighters by ridding the state of these harmful chemicals.”

—President of the Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont Benjamin O’Brien

REPORTS:

The 28th annual *Trouble in Toyland* report released in late November highlighted toys that were found to contain toxic chemicals or other hazards.



VPIRG used *Naptime Nightmares: Toxic Flame Retardants in Child Care Nap Mats* and *Playing on Poisons*, two new research reports by Center for Environmental Health, to highlight examples of unnecessary and toxic chemicals used in products Vermonters use every day.

To educate Vermonters and build support for this issue, VPIRG released a special report, *A Clean and Green Vermont*, detailing the ways in which the Bottle Bill is uniquely effective at collecting and recycling beverage containers, and how the program could become even better.

Read the full text of the reports at www.vpirg.org/resources

“Vermont must be proactive...Vermonters are being exposed to toxins everyday and it is taking a toll on the health of our citizens. What we need is a new and comprehensive approach to chemical safety at the state level.”

— House Majority Leader Willem Jewett



VPIRG’s Environmental Health Advocate Lauren Hierl, along with Gov. Shumlin, The Professional Firefighters of Vermont, and many others celebrated the passage of the nation’s strongest ban on flame retardant chemicals.



DEMOCRACY

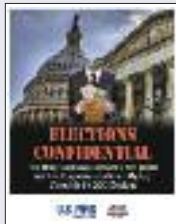


REPORTS:

Vermont was promoted from a “D” to a “C+” when it comes to government spending transparency, according to *Following the Money 2013: How the States Rank on Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data*, the fourth annual report of its kind by a federation of public interest research groups that includes the Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG).



Elections Confidential is a U.S. PIRG report describing how secret donors poured hundreds of millions into the 2012 election through “social welfare” non-profits that are really political vehicles and via shell corporations formed as conduits to hide a funder’s identity. The first post-Citizens United presidential election cycle was bought and paid for by a handful of wealthy donors, but the corrosive influence of money in politics was amplified by the fact that we don’t know who — or what — actually provided much of the funding.



Read the full text of the reports at www.vpirg.org/resources

Campaign finance: from bad to worse

The year began with great promise as Republicans, Democrats and Progressives announced separate plans to address the problem of money in politics following a 2012 election that saw Super PACs make their corrupting entry into Vermont politics for the first time.

“Seven years after the Roberts Court struck down Vermont’s campaign finance law, we thought 2013 was the year to reestablish common sense limits on contributions to candidates, PACs and political parties, and to make big improvements to our disclosure requirements,” said VPIRG Director Paul Burns.



But the commitment to genuine reform faded quickly among some lawmakers. Twice VPIRG threatened to oppose drafts of the campaign finance legislation before improvements were made in both the Senate and House Government Operations Committees. As the 2013 session ended, a conference committee was named to work out the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill.

In the late fall, members of the conference committee decided to make the legislation far worse than either the House or Senate version, ensuring that VPIRG and other advocates of reform would oppose the final bill to be voted on in 2014. As just one example, the limit on what a single source could give to a political party varied between \$3,000 and \$5,000 in the Senate and House bills, but the conferees raised the limit to \$10,000.

“In the end, the campaign finance legislation did little to improve transparency and in some ways made the problem of money in politics in Vermont much worse.”

—VPIRG Director Paul Burns



Cartoon by Tim Newcomb.



CONSUMER PROTECTION

Protecting your right to know

In Vermont, we take food seriously. Whether we grow our own, shop at the farmers' market, or buy from the local co-op or grocery store, we want to know where our food comes from and how it's made.

That's why VPIRG teamed up with our partners in the Vermont Right to Know GMOs Coalition to mobilize support for H.112, a bill that would require foods containing genetically engineered foods to be labeled.

On May 10, 2013, with just days left to go in the legislative session, the Vermont House became the first legislative chamber in the nation to pass a comprehensive GMO labeling bill.

After Monsanto and other industry opponents poured over \$45 million into a campaign to defeat a GMO labeling initiative in California, we knew that we had to mobilize tremendous grassroots strength in order to pass the bill in the Senate here in 2014. That's why we mounted our largest grassroots summer campaign ever.

Our diehard canvassers recruited members in every single town in the state — something we've never done before — and in the process gathered over 30,000 postcards in support of GMO labeling. Meanwhile, VPIRG retained the Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic at Vermont Law School to work with our consumer attorney, Falko Schilling, in defending the solid legal foundation for the legislation.

With momentum on our side, Vermont has the opportunity to be a national leader on GMO labeling in 2014.



HIGHLIGHTS:

- In a historic vote, the Vermont House of Representatives passed VPIRG-backed legislation to protect your right to know whether the food you're considering purchasing contains genetically engineered ingredients (aka GMOs).
- VPIRG's most successful summer canvass ever collected well over 30,000 signatures from citizens all across the state in support of GMO labeling. We delivered huge stacks of postcards to each state Senator, demonstrating the broad public support for the passage of strong GMO labeling legislation.

REPORT:

In July, we released the U.S. PIRG report *Apples to Twinkies 2013*, which revealed that federal subsidies for commodity crops are subsidizing junk food additives like high-fructose corn syrup at a rate that would buy each American taxpayer 20 Twinkies per year. In contrast, the limited subsidies for fresh fruits and vegetables would buy just one half of an apple per taxpayer.



“The House did a great job on the bill...so I'm looking forward to signing it. I'm a big believer that Vermonters should know what's in their food.”

—Governor Peter Shumlin

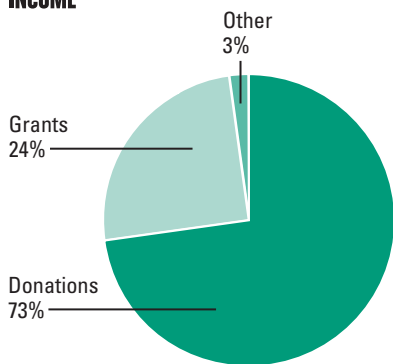


Strong support, strong programs

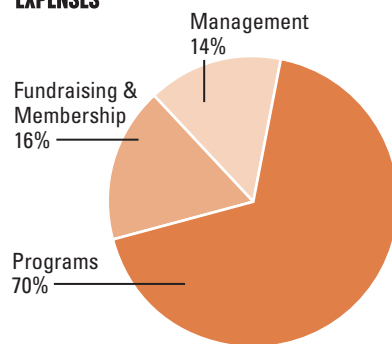
In 2013, VPIRG members and supporters made 47,269 donations to support our work. Support from individuals remains our strongest and most reliable source of revenue, accounting for 73% of our income in 2013. More than 2,700 members gave monthly gifts that accounted for \$386,908 — almost a quarter of our budget. Special thanks to all of our sustaining members for giving us the financial security and stability to plan strong and successful campaigns! The remaining revenue came through grants totaling over \$400,000, as well as other income sources including investments and events.

VPIRG and VPIREF combined income totaled \$1,641,684 — a notable 21% growth over 2012. That generous support gave us the ability to expand our program efforts, launch new campaigns, and increase our on-campus presence which resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of students getting involved. Expenses for 2013 totaled \$1,587,532 and supported nine major campaigns across five program areas, while providing member education and support for more than 30,000 members and supporters. We continue to grow our reserve fund and endowment to provide stability and build this organization to protect the public interest well into the future.

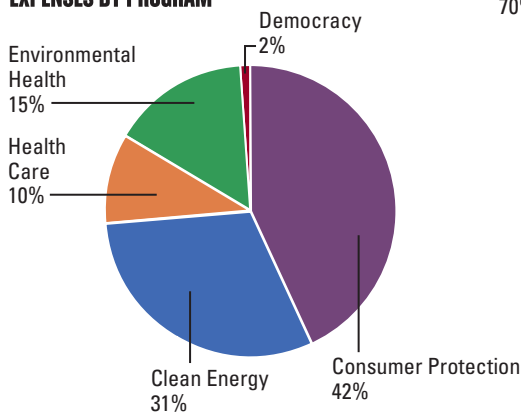
INCOME



EXPENSES



EXPENSES BY PROGRAM



Loyal members &

In the first year that our door canvass reached every single town, city, gore and territory in Vermont, we grew our member base by over 4,500 new members. VPIRG’s ability to deliver strong results on our campaigns year in and year out comes from the support of thousands of members, donors and supporters, along with a handful of foundations listed here. Generous member support is the source of our legitimacy, the majority of our funding, and most importantly, our political power. Thank you for making all of this possible!

While we wish we could thank every donor here, the generosity of those listed below deserves special recognition.*

FOUNDATIONS:

- Blittersdorf Family Foundation
- Community Catalyst
- Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps
- Educational Fund of America
- Harris & Frances Block Foundation
- Holborn Foundation
- John Merck Fund
- Lintilhac Foundation
- New Visions Foundation
- Organic Consumers Fund
- Patagonia
- SAFER
- Serena Foundation
- Seventh Generation
- Sierra Club
- Sustainable Markets Foundation
- Tides Foundation
- Voices for Vermont’s Children

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

- John Alarie
- Mark Alexander
- Jesse & Paul Alfarone
- Ed Anthes and Mary Ellen Copeland
- Brien Aronov
- Katherine Arthaud
- Betsy Austin
- Michele Authier
- Peter Auyden
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- Liz Barker
- Corey Barnes
- Brooke Barss
- Lydia Bartholow

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