



2005 ANNUAL REPORT





Like no other organization in the state, VPIRG plays both the “insider” and “outsider” role to bring about change.

Paul Burns, executive director of the Vermont Public Interest Research Group

FROM THE DIRECTOR

It's not possible to do true justice to a year's worth of work in the span of a few pages. However, in this annual report we have attempted not only to recap some of our major achievements of 2005, but to give you an insider glimpse into how we did it as well.

Like no other organization in the state, VPIRG plays both the “insider” and “outsider” role to bring about change. Our issue advocates are our policy experts and State House lobbyists. They identify problems, research solutions, build relationships with the media and decision-makers, and act as watchdogs to ensure that the public's interest is never ignored.

Our grassroots organizers work to harness the clout of our members, our partners and the public in each one of our campaigns. As Field and Communications Director Drew Hudson puts it, “We don't have a lot of members because we win victories, we win victories because we have a lot of members.”

You'll note that our members, advocates and organizers racked up an extraordinary number of victories in 2005. One more factor in that success is worth mentioning: For just the second time in Vermont's history the House of Representatives is being led by a woman as Speaker — Gaye Symington of Jericho. Speaker Symington cited health care, clean energy and sustainable agriculture among her top priorities as she assumed the role of Speaker in January of 2005. Her leadership and that of her colleagues in the House opened doors to progress that had been closed in recent years.

We have more work to do, of course. And with your help, our success will continue.

Founded in 1972, VPIRG is the largest nonprofit consumer and environmental advocacy organization in the state, with approximately 20,000 members and supporters. VPIRG established the Vermont Public Interest Research and Education Fund (VPIREF) in 1975 as a 501(c)(3) outreach and education arm. For over 30 years, we have brought the voice of average 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

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS

CLEAN POWER ACT

Requires utilities to meet 100 percent of new demand for electricity between now and 2013 using renewable resources; provides incentives to spur investments in local projects such as wind turbines, hydro-electric upgrades and combined heat and power generation; and removes an arbitrary cap on funding for the state's efficiency utility, Efficiency Vermont.

UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

Ultimately vetoed by Governor Douglas, this bill would have provided health insurance for uninsured Vermonters, including \$43.8 million for primary and preventive health coverage for 35,000 people through a one to three percent payroll tax on employers not currently offering health benefits.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

In the absence of reforming the health care system, this VPIRG-backed law allows Vermonters without prescription drug coverage to purchase refills at a cheaper price from pharmacies in Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland through the statewide I-SaveRx program.

SMOKE-FREE WORKPLACE AND FIRE-SAFE CIGARETTES

Extends the prohibition on smoking to include all bars and private clubs and requires that all cigarettes sold in Vermont be manufactured with a fire-retardant paper band designed to make untended cigarettes self-extinguishing.

MERCURY

Gradually bans the sale of products containing mercury such as thermometers, thermostats, switches and relays. Also prohibits schools from using elemental mercury and requires dental offices to have equipment for recycling mercury amalgam. In related legislation, VPIRG helped to craft and pass a resolution re-establishing Vermont's mercury dairy manometer removal and replacement program.

MINING WASTE

Gives companies that produce contaminated mining waste an incentive to reduce contaminant levels in their waste. The final legislation requires Omya, the state's largest mining company, to undertake comprehensive groundwater and rock tailings studies, and the legislature will reexamine the issue in three years.

AGRICULTURE WATER QUALITY

Allocates \$5.5 million to help farmers meet new water quality requirements by creating manure containment pits and/or establishing plans to prevent excess runoff of nutrients into nearby water supplies.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Closes a loophole in existing regulations that allowed certain independent expenditures to go unregulated by requiring anyone that raises and spends \$500 or more to influence the outcome of an election to file a report with the Secretary of State.

GIFT CERTIFICATES

Requires gift certificates sold in Vermont to be valid for at least three years, with any expiration date clearly visible. Upon expiration, unused portions must be returned if requested, and companies may no longer deduct money off the gift card if it goes unused for weeks or months.

ADVOCACY

When opponents of the Clean Power Act reached the State House last year, they were confident of victory. For two years, bills requiring Vermont's utilities to increase their use of renewable energy died in the House under a barrage of inaccurate claims that it would bankrupt Vermont employers. But their tactics failed in 2005, bested by VPIRG's Energy Advocates Azur Moulart and James Moore, who brought hard facts to legislators wavering under industry pressure.

"With no independent staff working for them, and an army of special interest lobbyists telling them that renewable energy was bad for the economy, legislators had started to believe the special interest hype," James explains. "But VPIRG countered the misinformation with reports using peer-reviewed science, and data from the Department of Public Service to show that clean energy is cheaper for consumers, better for the environment, and a great way to grow the Vermont economy."

VPIRG's studies proved critical in educating lawmakers and the public about the need for the Clean Power Act.

"It was a great pleasure to work with James and the VPIRG team in passing the Clean Power Act in 2005," remembers Senator Ginny Lyons (D-Williston), chair of the Senate Natural Resources

Committee. "And it was an even greater pleasure to be at the signing in that wind turbine factory because it drove home the message that the future of Vermont's economy is in clean, safe and affordable power."

Even though the State House is known colloquially, and affectionately, as the People's House, it remains a challenge to ensure that legislators continue to hear the voice of Vermont's citizens amidst the cacophony of moneyed interests.

VPIRG's Health Care and Consumer Rights Advocate Theresa Cassiack worked to balance the scales in favor of the public by monitoring and testifying before key legislative committees debating universal health care, legislation to extend the ban on smoking in workplaces, a VPIRG-crafted bill requiring that all cigarettes sold in Vermont be "fire-safe", and establishing a prescription drug importation program for uninsured Vermonters.

"As chair of the House Health Care committee, I have benefited from VPIRG's expertise in working to solve Vermont's health care crisis this year," says Representative John Tracy (D-Burlington).

But even VPIRG's expertise and persistence are not enough to pass a bill. On the issue of health care, we knew success depended on a little help from our friends.



top photo: VPIRG Clean Energy Advocate James Moore (right) talks with Senator Ginny Lyons (D-Chittenden) and Governor James Douglas (left) over the blade of the wind turbine that Douglas used in signing the Clean Power Act.

middle photo: Douglas shakes hands with VPIRG's Environmental Advocate Ben Davis following the signing of the Farmer Right to Know Act.

bottom photo: Health Care and Consumer Advocate Theresa Cassiack shares a lighter moment with Douglas after he signed the Fire-Safe Cigarettes law.

VPIRG therefore convened and led a broad-based coalition of supporters that included AARP, the VT State Nurses Association, the AFL-CIO of Vermont and others.

“Thousands of Vermonters struggle to pay their bills and pay for life-saving medication,” says Alicia Weiss, executive director of the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights. “We appreciate VPIRG’s important work in pulling together the advocacy community on this critical issue for Vermonters.”

Changing Vermont laws to protect our environment and consumers and grow the economy does not stop at the steps of the State House. As VPIRG Environmental Advocate Ben Davis can attest, sometimes regulators must be watched and pressured to implement the law.

In 2004, Ben won a huge victory when the legislators passed the Farmer Right to Know Act, which required all GMO seeds sold in Vermont to be labeled. But Vermont Secretary of Agriculture Steve Kerr failed to fully enforce the law, negotiating instead with the biotech companies to create loopholes. Legislators turned to Ben, an original author of the seed labeling law and their trusted source for information on the issue, to make sure the Agency followed through.

“When we passed the Farmer Right to Know Act in 2004, we intended for GMO seeds to be labeled. Now we’re relying on VPIRG to make sure that the Agency of Ag delivers on the promise we made to all Vermont farmers that they will be given timely, accurate information about GMO seeds,” says Chairman of the House Agricultural Committee David Zuckerman (P-Burlington).

Ben used Freedom of Information Act requests to reveal the agency’s failure to implement the law, resulting in a series of headlines from Burlington to Brattleboro.

In late August, Jack Lazor, an organic dairy farmer, announced that his neighbor had accidentally planted unlabeled GMO corn, and that he was now facing thousands of dollars in losses due to the potential contamination of his organic corn crop. VPIRG continues to work to fully implement the seed labeling law, and Ben’s work has created a groundswell of support that will be impossible to ignore.

Despite the gulf of resources between corporate lobbyists and VPIRG’s staff, 2005 was a stellar year for our advocates whose expertise and vigilance brought victories in health care, consumer rights, environmental health, and energy (see page 2).





ORGANIZING

Being a member of VPIRG means knowing that your voice, and that of your neighbors, will be well represented at the State House; it also means joining a community of like-minded activists. When Vermont's leaders need to hear from their constituents face-to-face, VPIRG's Field and Communications team swings into action with events ranging from our annual Environmental Citizen Action Day, to issue-oriented living room meetings in your community, and the ever-expanding reach of our summer canvass.

"VPIRG believes that democracy is a tool that works best when used by many hands," explains Drew Hudson, VPIRG's field and communications director. "Our advocates are some of the smartest and hardest-working people in Montpelier, but without the backing of our members, we'd have a tough time up on the hill. You have to understand, VPIRG doesn't have a lot of members because we win victories, we win victories because we have a lot of members."

Hudson has spent ten years as an environmental field organizer across the nation and still counts the summer outreach office as the high point of year.

"There's nothing like meeting people face-to-face if you want to change the world. From the civil rights movement to the ratification

of the American constitution, organizers have been going door-to-door to raise money, build power and change the world for a long time. And in Vermont, VPIRG talks to more people at the door than any other organization and most candidates for statewide office," Drew says.

The 2005 summer canvass was one of VPIRG's largest ever, with more than 20 staffers biking and walking to more than 25,000 households across the state. We offered the Governor a five-point action plan for fighting global warming and delivered more than 5,000 supporting signatures to his office at the end of the summer.

"When you talk to Vermonters in every corner of this state, it is clear they understand that global warming is a threat to our economy, our environment and our way of life. It is also clear that Vermonters want more leadership from Governor Douglas than we have seen to date," said Canvass Field Manager Liza Campbell.

Our canvassers may be the public face of VPIRG, but legislators couldn't miss us coming as part of the 120 activists who participated in the 2nd Annual Environmental Citizen Action Day in February. Citizens traveled to Montpelier from all corners of the state to receive training before meeting with their legislators to lobby them



top photo: Congressman Bernie Sanders (center) met with our summer outreach staff in the midst of a record-breaking year for the canvass.

middle photo: Environmental Advocate Ben Davis behind the piles of toxic e-waste collected by VPIRG in Montpelier.

bottom photo: Press, staff and volunteers gather on the State House steps just before VPIRG delivered thousands of comments demanding action on global warming to Governor Douglas.

on an environmental platform that included VPIRG-backed energy, GMO and toxics legislation.

VPIRG also joined with the AFL-CIO, True Majority and Democracy for America to organize more than 20 house parties where more than 200 people heard directly from Speaker of the House Gaye Symington (D-Jericho) and Senate President Peter Welch (D-Windsor) about the prospects for real health care reform.

This coalition later brought 100 people to the State House in March to lobby for a health care bill and put pressure on Douglas to sign it. We got into the field on renewable energy as well, sponsoring town hall meetings in Waterbury and Norwich for close to 100 people on building a clean energy future for Vermont.

"There's no doubt that the most compelling thing a legislator can see or hear is one of their constituents, a voter, a neighbor they trust, sitting down to tell them that it matters how they vote on issues like energy policy, GMOs or health care," says Hudson.

"For some legislators, a VPIRG member calling them or visiting as part of our annual lobby days may be the only constituent they hear from that month. That means that every email, phone call, and meeting where voters connect to their elected officials has a real

impact on the future of Vermont."

In addition to people, VPIRG also brought tons of "trash" to the State House in 2005 as one stop in our electronic waste (e-waste) collection campaign. The events had dual purposes of recycling more than 57,000 pounds of electronics and raising public awareness about the toxic hazards of improper disposal of these items. E-waste is the fastest growing type of toxic waste in Vermont, containing a host of chemicals including mercury, lead, cadmium and toxic flame-retardants.

These collections were done in cooperation with the Central Vermont and Chittenden Solid Waste Management Districts, which conducts regular e-waste recycling at local collection sites.

"To responsibly recycle these devices requires education and diligence which is often only achieved at significant taxpayer expense," says Central Vermont District Director Donna Barlow-Casey. "We will only succeed if we cease to see this as a waste stream that must be managed at the end of its useful life, but begin to see these products as resources that should be designed up front to be reused and recycled."



top photo: Activists from around the state marched on the State House to lobby for increased environmental protections at the 2nd Annual Environmental Citizens' Action Day.

bottom photo: Jack and Anne Lazor, owners and operators of Butterworks Farm in Westfield, remain concerned about contamination in their organic crops without sufficient regulation of GMOs.

RESEARCH

GMOS THREATEN VERMONT'S ORGANIC FUTURE

In January of 2005, VPIRG released this groundbreaking report detailing the explosive growth in Vermont's organic sector and the threat posed to all farmers



by the unregulated use of GMOs. Over the last decade, rising consumer demand for organic food has propelled the rapidly expanding organic sector of Vermont's farm economy, reflecting the growing commitment

by consumers and farm families across Vermont to forego the use of pesticides, synthetic chemicals, and genetically-engineered seeds.

The spread of GMOs increases the risk of contamination through windborne cross-pollination of crops, and VPIRG testing revealed that risk had already moved from theory to reality in Vermont. With the coming addition of new wind and insect pollinated species geared for home gardeners, the unregulated use of biotechnology threatens the most promising sector of our agricultural economy.

Certified organic acreage under production in Vermont soared by more than 200 percent between 1999 and 2004, with reported gross organic sales exceeding \$18.5 million in 2004. Without increased oversight and control, the expanding use of GMOs threatens to erode growth in the organic sector by undermining consumer confidence.

Our report also suggested several straightforward remedies for legislators

and regulators to protect the organic industry, including passing laws establishing strict liability for harm caused by GMOs, requiring GMO manufacturers to carry some form of insurance, and pursuing a moratorium on the planting of all GMO crops with a permanent ban on varieties of special concern in order to allow policymakers time to fully consider the ecological, economic and human health impacts of GMOs.

AMERICA IDLES

Retail gasoline prices hit \$2.00 a gallon early in 2005 and have stayed well above that ever since across the country. In May, we released *America Idles*, demonstrating how the Bush Administration's energy policies continue to exacerbate rather than address these problems. The best way to reduce our dependence on oil and save money at the pump is to increase the fuel efficiency of America's cars. However, our fuel economy has stagnated at a 24-year low of 20.8 miles per gallon (mpg), despite data from the National Academy of Sciences indicating that we already have the technology to reach an average of 40 mpg.

To add insult to this consumer injury, in 2004, the top ten oil companies enjoyed net profits of \$100 billion, an increase of more than 30 percent from 2003. Yet, in April 2005, the House passed an energy bill that gave new tax breaks to the oil and gas industry while doing nothing to make cars go farther on a gallon of gas. The Energy Information Administration (EIA) concluded that Congress' policies would increase U.S. imports of foreign oil by 85 percent and do nothing to lower gasoline prices. In fact, the president later admitted that his bill "wouldn't change the price at the pump."

If Bush had taken a bold step to increase the fuel economy of cars and SUVs to 40 mpg by 2012 instead of announcing his



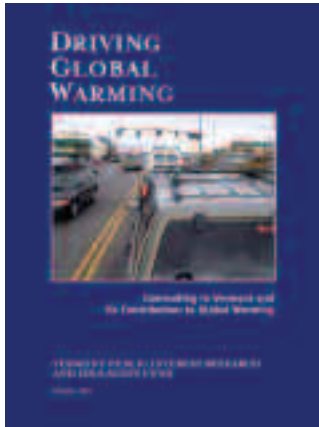
flawed energy strategy, consumers and the U.S. economy would be have reaped the benefits. In 2005 alone, America would have consumed 350,000 fewer barrels of oil per day — more than half of our imports from Iraq. Consumers would save more than \$5 billion at the gas pump, about \$300 per new vehicle on the road and the nation would offset 23.9 million tons of global warming pollution.

DRIVING GLOBAL WARMING

Transportation is the leading source of Vermont's global warming pollution, accounting for more than half of all annual emissions, and increased commuting lengths are a major contributor to the problem. In June, we released *Driving Global Warming* at a press conference in the path of the proposed Circumferential Highway, calling on Governor Douglas to take immediate action to reduce transportation related emissions.

This report showed that suburban commuters from towns outside Burlington like Richmond, Hinesburg and Milton, are responsible for 2.5 times as much carbon dioxide as are residents from Burlington and its core suburbs. Our research also demonstrated that "exurban" residential development in Vermont and the resulting long-distance commutes pose major challenges in the state's efforts to reduce global warming.

Traffic engineer Michael Oman noted that, "The proposed Circ highway will



over time produce more traffic, add to suburban sprawl and increase Vermont's global warming pollution. The project should not receive a dime of taxpayer money when cheaper and more effective proposals have been put forward by the Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative."

Melinda Moulton, re-developer of Burlington's Main St. Landing and a VPIRG Board Trustee added, "Economic growth in Vermont does not have to mean more highways and long commutes to work. Through investing in our downtowns and community centers we can maintain our quality of life while building our economy."

GLOBAL WARMING REPORT CARD

VPIRG's annual global warming "Report Card" gave Vermont a "C", improving from 2004's D+, but still ranking the third worst in the region. The improvement was largely a result of the clean energy bill passed by the legislature, steps taken to reduce pollution from state buildings and cars, and the planned adoption of stricter emissions standards for new cars announced over the summer. With the release of the report, we also delivered over 5,000 public comments to Governor Douglas asking him to do more to combat global warming.

The 2005 Report Card on Climate Change Action gauged the



progress of individual states and provinces in meeting the goals of the New England Governors'/Eastern Canadian Premiers' Climate Change Action Plan of 2001. That plan committed to consistent and targeted reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, beginning with a goal of reaching 1990 levels by 2010.

"Despite some good first steps and tremendous outpouring of public support, progress in Vermont has been slower than in the rest of the region," said James Moore, VPIRG's Clean Energy Advocate and author of Vermont's section of the report card.

VPIRG called on Vermont's leaders to develop and implement a comprehensive state plan to include: increased funding for Efficiency Vermont to lower our electricity related pollution; support for weatherization programs to decrease our oil consumption; and investments in our downtowns and village centers, not highways and big box stores that promote suburban sprawl.

SAFE TOYS

VPIRG released two reports in 2005 highlighting new and alarming research about the prevalence of dangerous and toxic toys in the United States. *The Right Start*, released in October, documented the presence of toxic chemicals, including phthalates and polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) in common children's products ranging from teethers and bath books to sleep accessories.

Three of seven infant sleep accessories sent to an independent lab tested positive for PBDEs, a class of toxic flame-retardants that can cause impaired learning and memory, cancer and impaired immune systems. Fifteen out of eighteen other products contained phthalates, a family of chemicals that have been linked to premature birth, reproductive defects and early onset of puberty. The European

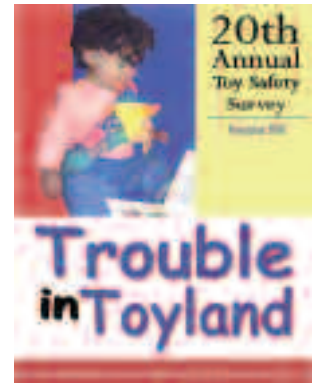
Union has banned some phthalates from all children's products.

"It violates common sense to expose babies, our most vulnerable citizens, to products containing potentially toxic chemicals that have never undergone a federal safety review. Chemical manufacturers should be required to disclose basic health and safety information on all chemicals they produce," said Senator James Jeffords (I-VT), ranking member of the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

In November, VPIRG also released our 20th annual toy safety survey, highlighting both dangerous and toxic toys that remain readily available in the state. 210,000 people sought treatment in emergency rooms in 2004 for toy related injuries, three-quarters of them under the age of 15. And sixteen children died as a result of unsafe toys in 2004.

Trouble in Toyland offered safety guidelines for purchasing toys for small children and highlighted examples of current products that pose potential safety hazards. Research focused on four categories of toys: those containing toxic chemicals, posing a choking hazard, those with a risk of strangulation, and toys that are dangerously loud.

"Why should a parent ever doubt the safety of something made especially for small children?" asked Barbara Postman from the Vermont Children's Forum. "We shouldn't need labels to warn parents, we need safe toys."



MEDIA

VPIRG's work with local, state and national media outlets in 2005 helped highlight new issues in need of action like e-waste, as well as existing and repeated threats, such as International Paper's (IP) plans to burn tires at their Ticonderoga Plant, and the Bush Administration's repeated efforts to roll back protections of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts.

"A truth whispered in the dark serves no one," explains VPIRG Executive Director Paul Burns. "If we want to make real change, we need to grab the bull-horn of Vermont's media to get our message out whenever possible. Fortunately for us, our 30 years of experience lead a lot of reporters to call us as often as we call them."

It was impossible to miss the tons of e-waste covering the State House lawn and overflowing from tractor-trailer trucks at our first e-waste collection in Montpelier, and Vermont's media jumped on the story.

Environmental Advocate Ben Davis was interviewed by WCAX, WPTZ, *The Times Argus*, *Rutland Herald*, the *Associated Press* and the *Burlington Free Press*, as a first step in bringing both the word and the concept of e-waste into our common vocabulary.

While media attention can bring new issues to the forefront, it is

also essential in keeping the spotlight on fights that take years to resolve. Vermont's leaders have been wrangling with IP for decades, most recently over the company's plan to burn used tires for fuel. When *WPTZ Channel 5* ran an editorial in favor of the tire-burn plan, the station contacted Paul to offer an on-air rebuttal on behalf of the vast majority of Vermonters who oppose the plan.

"Protecting Vermont's people, environment and economy is not the work of a day," Paul explains. "Dedication to stick with an issue, press it into the spotlight and use the media to keep highlighting injustice, pollution and corruption every time we find it is part of what makes VPIRG great."

VPIRG's national office also worked closely with all three members of Vermont's Congressional delegation in 2005, including efforts to pass the Leahy-Collins-Snowe resolution to reduce mercury pollution from power plants by 2009.

"When it comes to informing Vermonters about the disastrous environmental policies of the Bush administration, the corporate malfeasance of ExxonMobil or the importance of protecting the Arctic national Wildlife Refuge, we know we can count on VPIRG," says Bernie Sanders' chief of staff Phil Fiermonte.



top photo: Traffic engineer Michael Oman and Melinda Moulton speak at a press conference in the proposed path of the Circumferential Highway in Williston.

middle photo: USPIRG Director Gene Karpinski (left) stands with Senators Patrick Leahy and James Jeffords at a press conference just days before legislation to reduce mercury pollution was defeated in the Senate.

bottom photos: VPIRG's Environmental Advocate Ben Davis speaks at a State House press conference on mercury pollution (left). Executive Director Paul Burns delivers an editorial response on WPTZ Channel 5 (right).

THANK YOU!

VPIRG appreciates the financial support of all our 20,000+ members and supporters. While space prohibits us from listing each member, we wish to recognize the following groups and individuals who made significant contributions this year.

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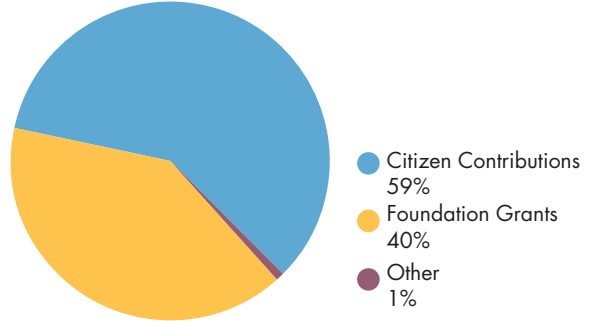
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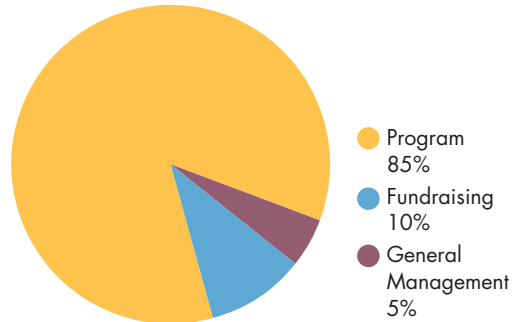
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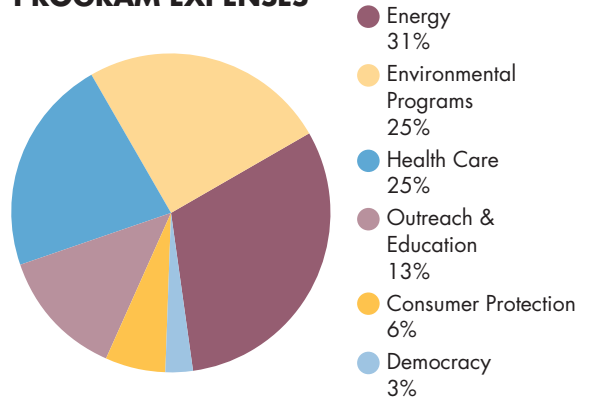
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