



annual report 2008



from the director



As the winds of political change blew across America in 2008, Vermonters for the most part chose to return incumbent politicians to office. But that doesn't mean that Vermont voters were out of sync with candidates calling for significant change in the direction of our economy, health care and energy production.

The possibility of real change is one reason why our state saw a huge voter turnout on Election Day and in the weeks leading up to it through early voting. Many young people were excited to cast ballots for the first time. And while PIRGs across the country helped to register tens of thousands of young voters through the nonpartisan New Voters Project, VPIRG worked to improve elections and make voting easier in Vermont.

Over the course of the year we also led the charge in calling for the troubled Vermont Yankee nuclear plant to be replaced with clean, local, renewable power sources like wind, solar and hydro power. We scored victories in the Legislature that will save Vermonters money on home heating by expanding state weatherization programs and promoting renewable power. Outside the legislative process we joined with the Conservation Law Foundation in winning approval for an expansion of Efficiency Vermont's award winning work.

VPIRG also helped to develop and pass legislation that gives all Vermonters access to affordable screening mammograms, which in turn could save lives and reduce health care costs. On a larger scale, we continued to press for improvements in state health care programs and we were appointed as the Vermont liaison to a major national coalition called Health Care for America Now.

Vermont became a safer place for kids in 2008 thanks in part to the organizing, education and advocacy work of VPIRG and our partners through the Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Vermont. We passed four major environmental health laws that will reduce threats posed by lead, mercury and chemical plasticizers known as phthalates.

There is of course much more to be done at home and in Washington, D.C. The difficult economy only heightens the need for progressive change that truly improves people's lives. Because of your loyal support, you can count on us to keep working for you.

Paul Burns, Executive Director

“Sound energy and healthcare policy are extremely important to me. VPIRG has been pivotal in finding solutions to dramatically decrease energy consumption and develop safe and renewable sources of power for Vermont along with working tirelessly to bring health care to all Vermonters.

— Julie Elmore, VPIRG member, Westford

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 36 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.

VPIRG
Vermont Public Interest
Research Group

141 Main Street, Suite 6
Montpelier, VT 05602

802-223-5221
www.vpirg.org
vpirg@vpirg.org



VPIRG's Field Team: Educating, mobilizing, empowering

VPIRG's effectiveness comes from our ability to back our advocacy at the State House with thousands of citizens across the state joining in our campaigns to protect Vermont's health, environment, and democracy.

2008 marked our most successful summer outreach season to date. By meeting Vermonters face-to-face in their communities and inspiring them to support and get involved in our work, VPIRG collected post-cards from more than 12,000 citizens urging their elected representatives to choose clean, renewable energy over 20 more years of Vermont Yankee.

Throughout 2008 VPIRG trained local leaders giving them the tools and skills they needed to effect change. Our field team held community forums that explained exactly how we can replace Vermont Yankee with renewable energy sources, and organized a citizen lobby day at the State House empowering citizens to talk to their elected officials directly. In response to our calls for urgent action on specific legislation, over 1,100 Vermonters sent more than 6,000 advocacy messages to legislators through our online action network.

In the fall VPIRG and partner organizations brought together more than 250 Vermonters at the Environmental Action Conference for a day of skill-building and strategizing on issues ranging from clean water to sustainable energy to working with the media, and keynote speaker Dr. Sandra Steingraber inspired attendees to fight toxic hazards that threaten our health, our children's health and the environment.

“Working with VPIRG's field team has been so helpful. They were there every step of the way supporting my community's efforts to replace Vermont Yankee with green energy”

— Susan Mills, VPIRG member, Randolph Center



FACTS:

2,287 Vermonters became NEW members of VPIRG through our summer outreach program

6,097 electronic advocacy messages were sent to key decision makers

5,049 new online activists

12,000+ postcards to legislators collected and mailed

Health Care reform makes progress on both state & federal levels

In 2008 we accelerated our campaign to achieve high quality, affordable health care for everyone at both the state and national level. Our work on the creation and launch of Catamount Health, the most progressive public health care program in the country, led directly to VPIRG being chosen by Health Care for America NOW (HCAN) as the Vermont coordinator for its national campaign. Although Catamount remains an imperfect solution to the health care crisis, through diligent advocacy VPIRG has defended it against attempts to limit eligibility and increase premiums. We continue to fight to get rid of restrictions like exclusion of treatment for pre-existing conditions.

VPIRG was also successful in developing and passing legislation that gives all Vermonters access to affordable screening mammograms which should go a long way toward increasing early detection and



consequently saving lives and reducing health care costs.

Health Care Advocate, Stefanie Sidortsova at HCAN kick-off.

2008 Accomplishments:

- Access to screening mammograms — VPIRG led the charge to pass this bill (S.340) that ensures no Vermonter will have to pay more than \$25 out of pocket for a screening mammogram. VPIRG discovered that, through a loophole in Vermont’s law, insurance companies were allowed to assess the cost of a screening mammogram against a woman’s deductible. Addressing this loophole led to a broader conversation about gaps in our current health care system.
- Partnering with national campaign — VPIRG was chosen as the lead organization in Vermont for a national health care reform coalition: Health Care for American Now! (HCAN) VPIRG is working with HCAN to win a guarantee of quality, affordable, accessible health care for everyone in America. Leading this campaign in Vermont has allowed VPIRG to be involved with both the planning process for our state-based approach and to foster stronger relationships with our federal delegation, key state partners, and citizens.
- Community forums on access to health care — VPIRG partnered with several advocacy groups to sponsor a series of community forums on access to health care in counties around the state. These forums connected legislators with their constituents in an informal setting that encouraged participants to share personal stories about their experiences with accessing health care and offer their suggestions for ways to improve access to health care.

“Our experience with ‘access to health care’ has and continues to be complicated — a system gone awry with lots of cracks and discontinuity of care. We are let down.”

— Participant caring for husband with dementia, VPIRG’s Burlington Health Care Forum

FACTS:

A December 2008 study by the Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities & Health Care Administration (BISHCA) found that 7.61% of Vermonters — over 47,000 — remain uninsured one year after Catamount Health was launched.

Source: BISHCA’s Household Health Insurance Survey, December 2008

Currently, 185 Members of Congress support the campaign principles of Health Care for America Now!, including Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT).

Source: www.healthcareforamericanow.org

REPORTS RELEASED:

Scoring Catamount Health: Examining Vermont’s Progress Toward an Equitable Health System — Phase Two: Initial Enrollment, Released August 2008

2008 Accomplishments:

VPIRG and the Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Vermont helped pass four laws that

- Ban the production or sale of children’s products and other consumer products containing lead.
- Ensure that more children will receive screening tests for lead exposure in addition to enhancing existing regulations to minimize lead exposures in housing.
- Require thermostat manufacturers to share in the responsibility for the proper disposal of mercury-containing thermostats.
- Restrict the use of phthalates — toxic chemicals that makes plastic soft and pliable — in toys and child care articles. Vermont was the third state in the country to pass such a law. Immediately after Vermont’s bill was signed into law, the U.S. Congress passed similar legislation.

VPIRG co-sponsored the 3rd Annual Environmental Action Conference which included keynote speaker Dr. Sandra Steingraber, a leading figure in the environmental health movement. During the conference, Dr. Steingraber joined VPIRG’s environmental health advocate Charity Carbine and Steve Dickens from River Network in leading a workshop on reproductive toxins.

The Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Vermont wins four victories

2008 saw the State House debut of the Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Vermont, a diverse coalition of almost two dozen organizations, including VPIRG, working to reduce the threat of toxins in consumer products and the environment. VPIRG collaborated successfully with the Alliance not only to pass good public policy to limit lead and other dangerous substances, but also to educate legislators and the public about the dangers and potential health effects of toxins that are present in commonly used products.

VPIRG also helped Vermont become a national leader on the regulation of lead and phthalates (another dangerous toxin) and, along with two other states, paved the way for Congress to pass the first improvements to the Consumer Product Safety Commission in decades.



At a VPIRG press conference, environmental consultant Todd Hobson demonstrates how an XRF gun is used for detecting lead in toys.

“People definitely have the impression that the government would not allow a product, particularly a toy, to be sold if it weren’t safe, and the sad fact is that’s just not true.”

— Paul Burns, VPIRG Executive Director, *Times Argus*, November 26, 2008

FACTS:

Phthalates are chemicals that are added to plastics to make them soft and flexible. Phthalates have been linked to serious health problems including reproductive defects, liver and thyroid damage, neurological impacts, and even cancer.

Source: *EXPOSED – The Toxic Chemistry of Everyday Products and What’s at Stake for American Power* by Mark Shapiro ©2007

According to the Consumer Products Safety Commission, toy-related injuries sent more than 80,000 children under the age of five to emergency rooms in 2007.

REPORTS RELEASED:

Trouble in Toyland — The 23rd Annual Survey of Toy Safety, November 2008

Protecting Vermont’s Children from Poor Indoor Air Quality: A Report Card on Act 125, October 2008

VPIRG makes progress for change in spite of leadership void

2008 Accomplishments:

- VPIRG successfully led the fight for a new clean energy law, S.209, the Vermont Energy Efficiency and Affordability Act, which will promote the growth of renewable energy sources and save Vermonters money on heating their homes by expanding state weatherization programs.
- VPIRG and our partners at the Conservation Law Foundation successfully advocated for increased funding for the state's energy efficiency program, Efficiency Vermont. We overcame initial opposition from the Douglas administration and won a 33% increase in funding for energy efficiency totaling \$10 million.
- VPIRG was invited to provide expert legislative testimony six times on energy related issues before the House and Senate energy committees.
- VPIRG's energy campaign was referenced in over 100 print, radio and television news stories in 2008, including an article in the *NY Times*.
- VPIRG was appointed to represent the public interest on the Vermont (electric) System Planning Committee.
- VPIRG was named as a member of Efficiency Vermont's Advisory Board.

In spite of consistent opposition by the governor, VPIRG pushed forward in 2008 and made steady progress toward creating a clean energy future for Vermont. Through advocacy at the State House and extensive community outreach, VPIRG continued to promote rapid deployment of energy efficiency measures and development of renewable energy sources making steady progress towards reducing Vermont's contributions to global warming pollution.



Solar panel installation

When we are able to successfully implement a building efficiency program that looks not just at electricity but pollution from heating, that will be an incredible model for other parts of the country to follow that will dramatically reduce our global warming pollution.

—James Moore, VPIRG Clean Energy Advocate, *Times Argus*, July 6, 2008

FACTS:

In 2008, the first carbon auctions under the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) were held. Vermont brought in over \$400,000 in this first auction and is expected to generate \$2.6 million in 2009. Because of legislation VPIRG helped to pass, 100% of this money will be reinvested in energy efficiency and other efforts to reduce Vermont's use of fossil fuels.

Source: *Burlington Free Press* 9/7/2008

REPORTS RELEASED:

Falling Behind: New England Must Act Now to Reduce Global Warming Pollution — March 2008, in collaboration with Environment America, New England Climate Coalition and the Clean Water Fund

Feeling the Heat — Global Warming and Rising Temperatures in the United States — October 2008, in collaboration with Environment America

Renewing America: A Blueprint for Economic Recovery — November 2008, in collaboration with Environment America

Douglas blocks democracy bill — again

The 2008 presidential contest was by all accounts one of the most exciting and historic our nation has witnessed. It was also by far the most expensive election ever conducted in the U. S. The candidates, political parties, and interest groups spent a record \$5.3 billion — a 27 percent increase over 2004.

For the second year in a row, overwhelming majorities in the House and Senate passed commonsense legislation establishing reasonable limits on campaign contributions from corporations, individuals, PACs and political parties. The governor, who has benefited greatly from unlimited party contributions in the past, once again vetoed the bill. Senators overrode the veto in bi-partisan fashion. But in the 150 member House, the override came down to the last vote, and reformers lost 101-99 as one Democrat and one Independent joined all 49 Republicans in siding with special interests.

“Of course the governor himself has some history of gorging at the trough of the national Republican Party. The governor’s vetoes today unfortunately carry the stench of extreme political partisanship.”

— Paul Burns, VPIRG Executive Director - *Rutland Herald*, April 5, 2008

FACT:

In 2008, young voter turnout surged by at least 3.4 million votes over 2004 levels. And for the first time, young voters’ share of the electorate also surpassed that of voters over 65, with young people making up 18 percent of the electorate and those over 65 making up 16 percent.

Source: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement and U.S. PIRG’s New Voters Project

2008 Accomplishments:

- VPIRG once again championed a modest and reasonable bill (S.278) to restrict the amount of money political parties, political action committees, and individuals may donate to a single campaign in any given election cycle. This bill passed both houses and was vetoed by the governor. The veto override succeeded in the Senate but lost in the House by just one vote.
- VPIRG also worked to pass a bill (S.108) requiring that Vermont’s federal delegation be elected by an instant runoff voting system (IRV). This system would be similar to that used very successfully in both the 2006 and 2008 mayoral elections in Burlington. As with campaign finance reform, the IRV bill passed both houses but was vetoed by the governor and the legislative leadership chose not to pursue a veto override.
- At the federal level, the U. S. House voted in March to set up an independent office to police ethical scandals under a plan recommended by a special task force and endorsed by VPIRG. VPIRG’s Executive Director Paul Burns praised Rep. Welch, a member of the House Rules Committee, for supporting a truly independent office that would end the practice of “self-policing” that allowed so many powerful lobbyists to shower Congress with favors for years.



2008 Accomplishments:

- VPIRG’s legal intervention in Verizon Wireless’s bid to acquire Unicef’s assets in Vermont resulted in a deal that benefited consumers, improved competition and finally brought the iPhone to Vermont.
- On August 14, 2008, President Bush signed a law overhauling the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). The bi-partisan Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008 makes consumer products safer by requiring that toys and infant products are tested before they are sold, and by banning toxic chemicals like lead and phthalates in toys. Months earlier, a VPIRG-backed law passed in Vermont that also banned lead and phthalates in toys.

VPIRG advocacy brings safer products and the iPhone to Vermont

Protecting consumers from false advertising, corporate rip-offs and unsafe products is one of VPIRG’s most important objectives. We had our hands full in 2008 taking on the likes of Verizon Wireless, Comcast, toy manufacturers and the direct marketing association.

In one major victory, VPIRG took legal action that helped to convince regulators at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to require Verizon Wireless to sell some of its assets in Vermont after acquiring Unicef. This move was designed to ensure continued wireless phone competition in the state, and finally opened Vermont’s doors to AT&T and the Apple iPhone. VPIRG worked very closely with U. S. Senator Bernie Sanders on the Verizon Wireless campaign.

Recognizing VPIRG’s wide-ranging consumer protection credentials, Sen. Sanders called on Executive Director Paul Burns to join him at a public forum that Sanders held in Rutland in October. The packed forum focused on the TV cable provider Comcast, its poor service and outrageous prices.

VPIRG also backed a bill in the state Legislature that would have allowed citizens to opt out of receiving junk mail. The direct marketing industry and the Postal Service fought back against the bill, however, and it died in the House Commerce committee.

“The new federal law gives the Consumer Product Safety Commission the tools it needs to do a better job for America’s littlest consumers.”

— Charity Carbine, VPIRG Environmental Health Advocate



Paul Burns with Junk Mail
Photo: Jeb Wallace-Brodeur

FACTS:

Each year the direct mail industry sends Vermont residents over 40 million pounds of junk mail — over 64 pounds per person.

It costs Vermonters more than \$2 million/year to dispose of junk mail (and that figure is growing).

Over 100 million trees are destroyed every year to produce junk mail sent in the U. S.

Source: Central Vermont Solid Waste District, Center for A New American Dream

REPORTS RELEASED:

Total Recall: The Need for CPSC Reform Now — U.S. PIRG July 2008

Strong programs = steadfast support

For 36 years, VPIRG has built its organizational strength around solid campaigning and broad public support. This year was no different. In a year that was marked by economic uncertainty for many, Vermonters recognized the vital importance of our key campaigns to their own economic security and stepped up to the plate to support our work like never before. By taking on the tough challenges like our energy future and the need to secure quality, affordable health care for all, VPIRG campaigns continued to be a top priority for Vermonters.

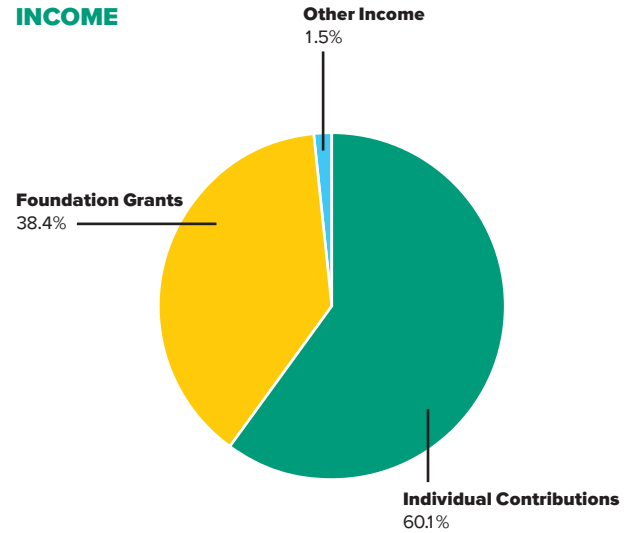
The 2008 summer door canvass was our most successful campaign on record, raising roughly \$200,000 in individual donations from Vermonters around the state, growing the size of our membership base and generating more than 12,000 public comments asking legislators to ensure that Vermont Yankee closes in 2012 as planned.

Overall, VPIRG added more than 3,508 new members to its roster in 2008. Individual donations from Vermonters again accounted for over 60% of our income. In addition to our individual donors, 17 foundation grants contributed 38.4% of our income. The remaining 1.5% of revenue was generated from other sources such as special events, rental and interest income. The combined income of VPIRG and VPIREF, our 501(c)(3) education and research arm, totaled \$1,080,353 and expenses totaled \$1,033,869.

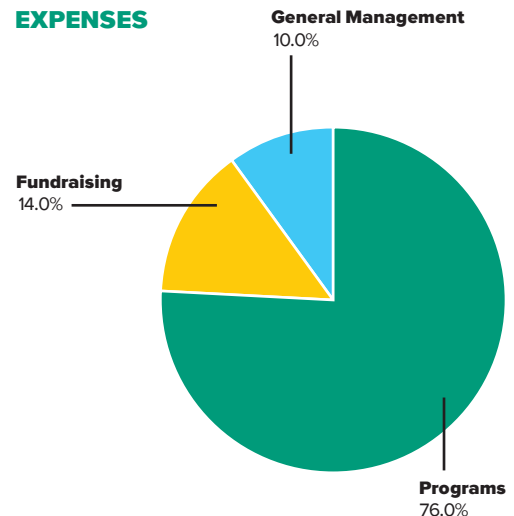
For organizations like VPIRG, which depend on public support to survive, financial responsibility is more important than ever. Thanks to the strong leadership of VPIRG's Board of Trustees and fiscal discipline of the staff, VPIRG remains on solid financial ground even as we weather a period of economic volatility. That's important, because our issues won't wait. Especially in these times, we must watchdog the corrupting influence of special interests and promote the voice of the citizen in public policy debates.

We are grateful for the generosity and commitment of our members and supporters which enables us to continue to fight the good fight — protecting the present and future well-being of Vermont's people, environment and locally-based economy.

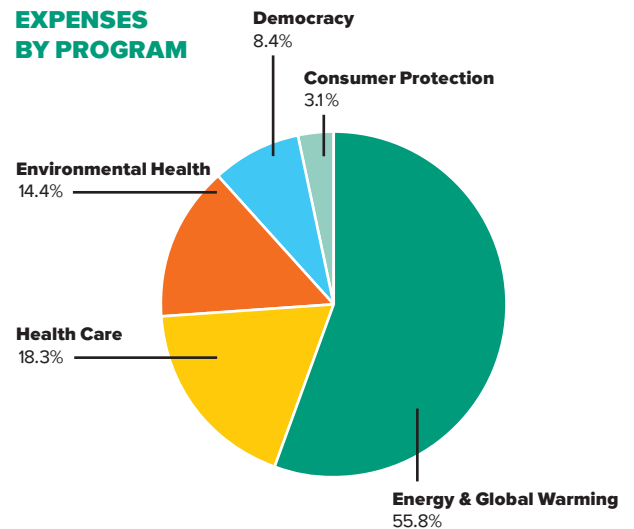
INCOME



EXPENSES



EXPENSES BY PROGRAM





To all our loyal members and supporters: **THANK YOU!**

As the state's largest environmental and consumer protection advocacy organization, VPIRG and the Vermont Public Interest Research and Education Fund (VPIREF), its companion 501(c)(3) arm, we receive the majority of our annual support of thousands of individual donors and many distinguished foundations. We are honored by their generous commitment to our goals and we work every day to ensure their trust in VPIRG is rewarded and that every contribution is used efficiently for the benefit of Vermont.

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141 Main Street, Suite 6
Montpelier, VT 05602

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