Finding common ground and making real progress

Dear OSPIRG member,

Sometimes people ask if it’s frustrating to be involved in political advocacy right now.

Sure, we’ve seen the divisions in our country deepen in recent years, and we’ve watched them harden in Washington, D.C., in ways that make positive action on issues that affect Americans’ lives nearly impossible. That’s frustrating.

But from the beginning, the approach of OSPIRG and our partner groups across the country has been to make progress wherever we can, whenever we can—as best we can—even when things are gridlocked in D.C. That’s as true today as it was in 1971, when PIRG began.

Over the last few years, our national network has focused our energy at the state and local levels, winning changes that are documented in these pages.

For example, our Beyond Plastic campaign helped win bans on single-use plastics in cities and communities across the country. In 2019, six more states passed plastic bag bans, including Oregon, and the city of Eugene passed a municipal ban on foam cups, containers and plastic bags at restaurants.

As we work to improve air quality and cut down on climate emissions, our Transform Transportation campaign is winning support for public transit, electric buses, electric cars and other clean, healthy alternatives to wasting billions on new or expanded highways.

To empower consumers and reduce waste, our Right to Repair campaign called on companies to remove barriers that prevent us from repairing their products. Our advocates and coalition partners put model legislation to guarantee our right to repair in front of 20 state legislatures.

Our leaders in Washington should be doing much more on these and other issues. But we don’t have time to brood about their failures. There are too many opportunities elsewhere to make progress for our health, our safety and the quality of our lives.

Thanks to you, our staff and other supporters are seizing every opportunity we can to win positive results for the public.

Charlie Fisher
State Director, OSPIRG

P.S. Our staff quickly shifted to working remotely as the COVID-19 crisis swept the United States. But rest assured, we have continued our work to advocate for you and for a healthier, safer world.
Standing up for Oregonians in the medical marketplace

People in Oregon have access to some of the best health care in the world. But our system has some serious flaws that allow medical costs to spiral out of control. In 2019, OSPIRG continued to advocate for policies that will make health care more affordable in Oregon.

OSPIRG Foundation advocates and Rep. Tiffiny Mitchell have both pointed toward expanding Oregon’s robust public healthcare option as a way to reduce health care costs.

OSPIRG Foundation report outlines possible paths toward fuller health coverage

Oregonians are feeling the pinch of health care premiums.

An April 17, 2019, report authored by our research partner OSPIRG Foundation found that individual health insurance premiums are on the rise, due in part to overall rising health care costs and disruptive policy changes by the Trump administration and Congress. The average monthly premium for the second-cheapest silver plan on the marketplace was $443 in 2019—nearly double the cost of a similar plan in 2014.

“Oregon needs to take on the problem of health care costs,” said Numi Lee Griffith, OSPIRG Foundation’s health care advocate. “The policy options described in this report provide a path forward to improving marketplace stability and improving consumer choice.”

OSPIRG’s Numi Lee Griffith (right) and John Mullin (left), President of the Oregon Coalition for Affordable Prescriptions, advocate for a bill to allow Oregon to import prescription medicines.

Oregon drug prices five times higher on average than in other countries, report finds

Prescription medications in Oregon, on average, cost five times as much as the most expensive international prices.

That is the major finding from Oregon’s Prescription Drug Transparency program, which was minted in 2018 to bring greater accountability to the prescription drug market. The program’s first annual report found that biologic products and brand-name drugs are the biggest contributors to the high cost of medications in Oregon.

OSPIRG Foundation is calling on the Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS) to improve transparency by requiring drug manufacturers to publish their profits among other information—often purported to be “trade secrets.”

“For this program to succeed, DCBS will need to challenge the questionable trade secret claims most reporting manufacturers have made to avoid disclosing their profits and other critical data in their reporting to the state,” said Numi.
Working for a more representative democracy

Democracies thrive when everyone has a voice and everyone is represented. That’s one reason why OSPIRG is committed to checking the influence of moneyed interests by encouraging the active participation of small donors. That way elected officials are accountable to, and dependent on, the people—not private interests.

Charlie Fisher hit the road last year to find out how Oregonians would solve corporate influence in our elections

It’s no secret that corporations and moneyed interests have an outsized influence in Oregon’s politics.

OSPIRG State Director Charlie Fisher went on the road in Sept. 2019 to hear how Oregonians would reform campaign financing. He was joined by state Rep. Dan Rayfield, a champion for finance reform in the Legislature, and partners Common Cause and Unite Oregon.

“If we’re going to overcome the power of wealthy donors and special interests in our state, we need everyone to show up and make their voices heard,” said Charlie before kicking off the Campaign Finance Roadshow.

At seven public forums along the way, Oregonians voiced their strong support for strict limits on campaign contributions as well as support for public financing that would empower candidates to run for office without having to rely on wealthy donors and private interests.

Scorecard shines light on how your state legislators voted

How did your state representatives vote on issues that affect your health, safety and well-being?

OSPIRG’s 2019 Legislative Scorecard has answers. The Aug. 19 scorecard ranks 12 key public interest votes taken during last year’s state legislative session and tracks where lawmakers came down on the issues. Our top legislative victory? A new law requiring drug manufacturers to give 60 days notice before significantly raising prices.

Generally pleased with some results of last year’s legislative session, Charlie also pointed out some shortcomings, such as the Legislature’s failure to safeguard personal data online, confront e-waste or reform campaign finance.

“While we’re proud of what was accomplished during the legislative session,” said Charlie, “more needs to be done to make sure the public interest is represented in Salem.”

The 2019 Legislative Scorecard can be found in full on OSPIRG’s website.
Working to ban Roundup

Since the World Health Organization labeled glyphosate, the main ingredient in Roundup, a probable human carcinogen, we’ve been warning the public and working to ban Roundup unless and until it can be proven safe.

In 2019, two more juries ruled that there was enough evidence to hold Roundup culpable for causing the cancers of three plaintiffs, making that three guilty verdicts since August 2018. More than 42,700 farmers, landscapers, home gardeners and others filed lawsuits claiming Roundup’s makers knew of its cancer risk but failed to warn consumers. And the list of U.S. cities that have banned or restricted glyphosate-based herbicides continues to grow. But Roundup is still putting our health at risk, and more needs to be done.

Public education, member action strengthen call to ban Roundup

The more we educate the public about Monsanto’s weed killer Roundup and other glyphosate-based products, the more support we find for banning them—the residue of which can be found practically everywhere.

In July 2019, OSPIRG and our national network kicked off a summer public education drive in 15 states.

“We’re doing all we can to get the facts to legislators about why we should ban Roundup until and unless it’s proven safe,” said Kara Cook-Schultz, director of our national network’s Ban Roundup campaign. “The support and action of our members are making it easier to get local decision-makers to listen.”

Over the course of the summer, our canvassers enlisted more than 47,000 citizens nationwide to join our call for state leaders to ban Roundup and other glyphosate-based products.

Studies find weed killer in beer and wine

The last thing you want to think about when you pour yourself a glass of wine or a cold beer is whether it contains even small amounts of a potentially carcinogenic weed killer.

But the use of glyphosate, the main ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup, is now so widespread that the chemical is found virtually everywhere—including, as a Feb. 22, 2019, report from our research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund found, in 19 of the 20 beer and wine products tested.

“No matter the efforts of brewers and vintners, [U.S. PIRG Education Fund] found that it is incredibly difficult to avoid ... that consumers will likely drink glyphosate at every happy hour and backyard barbecue around the country,” Kara told USA Today.

OSPIRG and our national network are calling on federal, state and local officials to ban the use of glyphosate. We’ll drink to that.
Stopping the overuse of antibiotics

The idea that our antibiotics might no longer work in the near future is alarming. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that at least 35,000 Americans die every year from drug-resistant infections—that’s one person dying every 15 minutes. Other researchers suggest the number of deaths could be nearly five times as many. It’s clear that we need to take urgent action to stop the overuse of antibiotics and keep our life-saving medicines working when we need them.

OSPIRG and our national network have been hard at work for the last five years to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics, building a network of leading health professional advocates, and convincing the country’s biggest restaurant chains to stop serving meat raised on the routine use of antibiotics. Here’s some of the ongoing work you’ve helped make possible in 2019.

45,000 tell the EPA: Don’t let growers spray antibiotics on citrus trees
Antibiotic overuse is becoming a global health crisis, threatening to make life-saving medicines ineffective. Yet the Trump administration is moving to allow growers to spray 650,000 pounds annually of these life-saving medicines on citrus trees.

On March 13, 2019, advocates from the research and policy arm of our national network, U.S. PIRG Education Fund, delivered signatures from more than 45,000 people asking the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to deny the proposal.

“The more you use antibiotics, the greater the risk that bacteria resistant to the drugs will flourish and spread. The bottom line is that the potential problems created by spraying massive amounts of strepto-
mycin on citrus fields could outweigh the original problem the EPA wants to solve,” said Matt Wellington, who directs U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics campaign.

Spraying antibiotics on citrus fields is supposed to combat citrus greening, but it won’t cure or prevent the spread of the disease. On top of that, the EPA has clearly not fully considered the consequences of this unprecedented antibiotic use.

**We launched a campaign calling on Wendy’s to ‘Hold the Antibiotics’ from its beef supply chain**

How can the country’s third-largest burger chain help save the cornerstone of modern medicine? By buying only beef raised without the routine use of antibiotics.

On March 28, 2019, OSPIRG and our national network launched our campaign to convince Wendy’s to do just that. The CDC now estimates that 35,000 Americans die each year due to antibiotic-resistant infections. Large meat buyers such as Wendy’s can help keep our antibiotics effective by only sourcing beef from livestock farms that don’t overuse our medically important antibiotics.

“We can’t waste life-saving medicines to produce cheap beef. Wendy’s can use its buying power to help move the beef industry away from overusing antibiotics,” said Matt, who directs our national network’s Hold the Antibiotics: Wendy’s campaign.

Wendy’s no longer serves chicken raised on medically important antibiotics. But the chain earned only a D- on the 2019 Chain Reaction scorecard authored by our research partner U.S. PIRG Education Fund, which graded top burger chains on antibiotics use in their beef supply chains.

**Superbugs Unplugged: U.S. PIRG launched a podcast about antibiotic resistance**

Get ready for some alarming stories—which are all the more alarming because they’re true.

On Nov. 14, 2019, our partner U.S. PIRG and the Antibiotic Resistance Action Center (ARAC) of George Washington University launched “Superbugs Unplugged,” a podcast that will dive into the alarming issue of rising antibiotic resistance. Matt co-hosts the podcast with Dr. Lance Price of ARAC.

“[It’s just] totally baffling to me [that] we treat these drugs, not as the life-saving medicines that they are, but as tools in agriculture and wherever else we’re using them,” said Matt in the podcast’s inaugural episode. “I’m really excited for this podcast ... to be a forum for how we address this problem comprehensively.”

The approach of an era when, because of overuse, our antibiotics might no longer work, and what used to be common, treatable infections may become deadly, is truly terrifying. Our podcast will educate the public and promote solutions to avoid this nightmare scenario.
For more than 40 years, our national network has been warning consumers about hidden dangers and helping them to protect themselves. In 2019, our Consumer Watchdog team continued to be on the case: We alerted the public to major food, drug and product recalls, worked to get dangerous products off of store shelves, and more to keep consumers healthy, safe and secure.

**How safe is our food? Not safe enough, says PIRG Consumer Watchdog team, and it’s trending in the wrong direction.**

Unsafe food recalls in the U.S. are trending the wrong way. From 2013 to 2017, they were up 10 percent overall, and up a whopping 83 percent for the most hazardous meat and poultry recalls.

These were the chief findings in 2019’s “How Safe Is Our Food?” report, written by U.S. PIRG Education Fund—the research and policy arm of our national network—and co-released by OSPIRG on Jan. 17. The report reached millions of people through coverage on CBS This Morning, NBC News and USA Today.

“We need to be looking for these farm-to-fork preventative solutions that are logical,” PIRG Consumer Watchdog Adam Garber told USA Today. “By doing that, we can protect people’s health.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 6 people in the U.S. contract foodborne illnesses each year. To stem the problem, our national network’s Consumer Watchdog team is calling for public health standards for agricultural water, a ban on salmonella in meat, and better recalls to get dangerous food out of people’s homes.
PIRG Consumer Watchdog found deadly infant sleepers still in use at day cares

Even PIRG Consumer Watchdog Adam has to stay alert for dangerous products: He discovered recalled inclined sleepers at his infant son’s day care in May 2019.

“They were still using the Fisher-Price Rock ‘n Plays, which were recalled back in April,” he told ABC Action News. Adam immediately alerted the day care to the recall and the Rock ‘n Plays have since been removed. But the incident reveals fundamental flaws in our recall system.

“We do a great job, for the most part, of preventing the sale of devices or products that have been recalled, but we have a long way to go to remove them from people’s homes and child care facilities.”

According to a July 2019 U.S. PIRG Education Fund report that surveyed 376 child care facilities, 1 in 10 indicated they were still using at least one Fisher-Price Rock ‘n Play. Inclined infant sleepers have led to the deaths of more than 73 infants and contradict medical guidance that babies should be placed on flat, hard surfaces with no restraints for sleeping.

U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s work to raise the profile of these dangerous sleepers contributed to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission taking action.

In the wake of the Capital One data breach, Ed Mierzwinski and Adam Garber explain how to protect your credit

Were you affected by the Capital One breach, one of the largest thefts of data from any bank to date?

On July 29, 2019, a massive data theft at Capital One was revealed, including the exposure of social security numbers and other data of more than 100 million people. So what can you do to protect yourself from this and other breaches? As Adam told The Wall Street Journal, “Freeze your credit immediately.”

Ed Mierzwinski, senior director of our national network’s federal consumer program, explained to C-SPAN’s Washington Journal, “Your social security number and your birthday are ... [your] financial DNA. They have a very long shelf life.”

Even if you’ve never had your identity stolen, it only takes one breach for hackers to cause you headaches and potential financial harm. Protecting yourself now can save you from significant financial issues down the road, even if you don’t bank with Capital One.

Remember: “Freeze your credit immediately.”
Standing up for our right to repair the things we own

You buy stuff. It breaks or doesn’t work right. You could throw it away and buy new stuff, but you’d rather repair it. But then you find out you can’t do it yourself—you can’t even bring it to a third party repair shop. You have to bring it back to the original company, which can charge an arm and a leg because there’s no competition—and sometimes they just won’t fix it. So you decide to throw the thing away.

This means more cost to consumers, and also means more waste. Americans dispose of 416,000 cell phones per day, and only 15 to 20 percent of electronic waste is recycled.

We imagine a different kind of system, where instead of throwing things out, we reuse, salvage and rebuild. But that means taking on the big companies who would push us into buying more and throwing more away. We’re working to give everyone access to the parts, tools and service information we need to repair products so we can keep things in use and reduce waste.

A year of milestone progress for our right to repair

It’s not as easy to repair our stuff as it should be, but after two years of running our Right to Repair campaign, we’re seeing some progress.

In 2019, the Right to Repair campaign, led by our national network of state PIRGs, Repair.org and iFixit, worked to get our model bills in front of 20 state legislatures, made our case before the Federal Trade Commission and the House Judiciary Committee, and convinced Apple and Microsoft to take
small but positive steps toward making it easier to repair their products.

“Running a campaign opposed by companies worth $2.5 trillion makes any progress hard-won,” said Nathan Proctor, our national network’s Right to Repair campaign director. “But when I think back on what we’ve been able to accomplish, it gives me confidence that we can overcome the naysayers and secure our right to fix our own products.”

**Oregonians want to repair their stuff. Why can't they?**

More and more Oregonians just want to fix the things they own.

A new report released in August 2019 by our research partner OSPIRG Foundation shows that nearly a quarter of Oregonians browsed the popular repair site iFixit last year, looking for guides and parts to repair their phones, laptops, tablets, vehicles and more.

But of the 10 most popular manufacturers, Apple, Samsung, Sony and Microsoft still don’t provide adequate access to spare parts or the technical service information needed to repair their products.

“Throwing out a $1,000 smartphone because it needs a $40 battery is absurd,” said OSPIRG’s Marie Haefliger. “Manufacturers should provide better access to parts and information, and if they won’t, state leaders should step up and enact Right to Repair reforms.”

OSPIRG and our national network are working in states to build support for and to pass Right to Repair legislation.

**Nathan Proctor advocated for our right to repair at the FTC**

We’ve been telling everybody who will listen that the companies that make electronics and other products should make it easier for us to repair our stuff when it breaks. In July, we got to tell the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

Nathan was a featured speaker on July 16 at the FTC’s “Nixing the Fix” workshop, which explored restrictions on repair.

“I love Star Trek. They literally have six devices on Star Trek to do what one smartphone does,” said Nathan. “We buy these incredible $1,000 handheld supercomputers and treat them as disposable, (hopefully) recycling them for commodity value? That’s absurd and shows that something is going wrong here. One of the factors ... is the way in which the repair and maintenance of devices are severely limited by the manufacturers.”

Nathan delivered petitions signed by 7,900 supporters to the FTC calling for action to make it easier to repair our stuff.
Moving beyond plastic

With your support this past year, OSPIRG and our national network have made progress to move Oregon and our country beyond single-use plastic by getting rid of the most harmful waste and stopping the use of things we truly don’t need.

**Not one, not two, but six more states banned single-use plastic bags**

The number of statewide plastic bag bans in the U.S. multiplied six-fold in 2019, with Maine, New York, Vermont, Connecticut, Delaware and Oregon adding themselves to the list.

The states joined California in requiring retailers and grocers to replace single-use plastic bags with reusable or paper ones. Americans currently throw away 100 billion plastic bags every year, or 300 bags per person. We use these bags for just a few minutes, but they persist in the environment and impact public health for centuries to come.

“These states are leading the country in addressing plastic pollution,” said our national network’s Beyond Plastic campaign director, Alex Truelove. “Clearly, momentum is building on this issue. But these states cannot tackle our plastic pollution crisis alone.”

Together with our national network, OSPIRG is campaigning to ban other single-use plastic items, such as foam food containers, in Oregon and across the country.

**Eugene banned plastic foam cups and takeout containers**

Eugene joined the list of cities taking a step beyond plastic in 2019.

Following the advocacy of OSPIRG Students, the City Council of Eugene voted unanimously on Nov. 26, 2019, to ban foam cups, takeout containers and plastic bags at restaurants. Earlier in 2019, a similar bill in the Oregon Legislature that would have banned foam cups and containers statewide failed to pass by just one vote.

“We think this is going to be really good momentum for a statewide bill, and we’re hoping that when it comes back in the next long legislative session, it will pass,” OSPIRG Students State Board Chair Elizabeth Radcliffe told the Daily Emerald.

OSPIRG Students testified in support of the ban, built support for the ban from more than 50 small business owners and employees, and earned support from the student governments at the University of Oregon, Lane Community College and Southern Oregon University.