OSPIRG

2018 ANNUAL REPORT
Finding common ground and making real progress

Dear OSPIRG Member,

Given the partisan rancor in our nation, one might reasonably wonder if it’s still possible for Americans to find common ground and solve problems.

It is. And we have examples:

1. Consumers, patients, doctors and nurses from across the country came together to stop the food industry’s overuse of antibiotics, a practice that leads to antibiotic-resistant bacteria—or “superbugs”—that cut short tens of thousands of lives each year. This wasn’t about red America or blue America, it was all Americans sharing a common interest that convinced McDonald’s to commit to reducing antibiotics in its beef supply chain. (See page 3 for more.)

2. From Oregon to Connecticut, growing numbers of people agree that it’s time to say goodbye to the single-use consumer plastics that burden our landfills and litter our neighborhoods. Our national network helped win bans on the worst type of single-use plastics, polystyrene foam cups and containers, which are toxic and non-biodegradable. (See page 10.)

3. A bipartisan majority in the last Congress approved a law allowing consumers to freeze their personal credit reports for free—the simplest and most effective step we can take to prevent identity theft. (See page 7 for how our Consumer Watchdog team made it easier for consumers to protect themselves.)

Many threats to our health and safety cut across political divides. When we get beyond the filter bubbles that inhibit real dialogue in Washington, D.C., and on social media, we can find support for solutions to these problems and others like them.

Your support for OSPIRG is helping to bring people together and find answers for a healthier, cleaner, safer and more secure future for all Americans. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Charlie Fisher
State Director, OSPIRG

Photo credits: (cover, clockwise from top) Staff, Staff, Ricky Osborne, CBS News; (above) Kimball Nelson.
Democracy for the people

OSPIRG is working to give small donors a voice in our elections and limit the influence of big money. In 2018, we made it clear that we will not let special interests continue to dominate Oregon’s elections.

Elections should be determined by voters—not big money. That’s why OSPIRG is supporting laws and policies that return agency to the people at the polls.

In 2018, OSPIRG Foundation released a report, “Big Money in Oregon State Elections,” highlighting the disparity between large and small donors in Oregon’s 2016 elections. According to the report, just 424 large donors contributed more than a third of all funding, giving nearly $9 million to candidates running for legislative or statewide races. That’s an average of $21,424 per person.

By contrast, more than 29,000 small donors contributed a total of $2.4 million, for an average donation of $129. In other words, small donors were outspent nearly 4 to 1 by a small fraction of wealthy donors and special interests.

That’s why OSPIRG is pushing for a small donor matching program in Oregon that would help boost the voices of everyday Oregonians. According to our report, if a 6 to 1 matching system had been in place during the 2016 election, small donors would have accounted for 1.5 times all large donors’ money. ■
Stopping the misuse of life-saving antibiotics

Because of your support this past year, OSPIRG and our national network were able to help reduce the overuse of antibiotics on factory farms.

The overuse and misuse of antibiotics in humans, animals and agriculture is creating “superbugs” that are resistant to treatment. The World Health Organization has named antibiotic resistance one of the top 10 global threats to human health. According to an estimate from researchers at Washington University School of Medicine, as many as 162,000 people die from multidrug-resistant infections annually in the U.S., making these infections the third leading cause of death.

OSPIRG and our national network have gathered support from activists, corporate actors and health professionals across the country to address the looming dangers of antibiotic resistance. A group of physicians and health experts, The Health Professional Action Network, is ready to be our voice in the media, in state capitols, and wherever we need to counter misleading claims or advocate for new solutions.

In honor of World Antibiotics Awareness Week in November, our national network partner, U.S. PIRG Education Fund, featured seven infectious disease physicians, specialists, scholars and pediatricians from our Health Professionals Action Network in an eight-part video series. These champions of medicine joined staff to discuss antibiotic resistance and the need to reduce antibiotic use in human and veterinary medicine.
On Nov. 15, U.S. PIRG Education Fund joined a group of panelists at Harvard University to discuss the future of antibiotics. Speakers presented solutions such as stopping the routine use of antibiotics on factory farms, investing more time and money into developing new antibiotics, and implementing legislation that curbs the overuse of antibiotics.

Setting off a chain reaction
In October, OSPIRG released our national network’s “Chain Reaction IV” report grading the top 25 U.S. burger chains on their antibiotics policies. Most, including McDonald’s, received failing grades. BurgerFi and Shake Shack were the only two chains to earn “A” grades for sourcing beef raised without routine antibiotics.

The routine use of antibiotics in livestock significantly contributes to the spread of antibiotic resistance. In fact, nearly two-thirds of the medically important antibiotics sold in the U.S. are intended for use in livestock and poultry operations.

Fast food restaurants, as one of the largest markets for meat in the U.S., can play an instrumental role in pushing producers to use antibiotics responsibly if they commit to only purchasing beef raised without routine antibiotics.

Throughout 2018, OSPIRG and our national network called on McDonald’s to use its influence to take action that could spark an industry-wide shift toward curbing the overuse of antibiotics in the meat industry. Today, we’re pleased to inform you that McDonald’s made a commitment to do just that.

McDonald’s made a commitment
Antibiotics vital to human medicine are routinely given to animals to help them survive crowded, stressful, and unsanitary conditions, regardless of whether the animals are actually sick, threatening the efficacy of our life-saving medications. That’s why OSPIRG and our national network have been calling on fast food chains such as McDonald’s to phase routine antibiotics out of their beef supply chains.

And in December, McDonald’s showed us it was listening. The company committed to monitor and set reduction targets for antibiotic use in its global beef supply chain by the end of 2020. Whether you eat at McDonald’s or not, this is a huge victory for public health.

“The Golden Arches just raised the bar for responsible antibiotic use in meat production. We can’t afford to misuse these precious medicines. Otherwise, we risk losing our ability to treat life-threatening infections,” said Matt Wellington, director of our national network’s Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics campaign. “McDonald’s new commitment is a promising step forward that will help preserve antibiotics for the future, and that’s something we should all be happy about.”

Infectious disease specialist and member of the Health Professionals Action Network Dr. Sheryl Henderson talking about the dangers of antibiotic overuse in U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s video series for Antibiotics Awareness Week.

The routine use of antibiotics on livestock is creating antibiotic-resistant “superbugs” that are threatening human life.
Protecting consumers from dangerous products

In 2018, OSPIRG Foundation and our national Consumer Watchdog team conducted independent testing and research to identify dangers that can pose risks to our health, safety or well-being; and worked hard to get dangerous products off of store shelves.

There are more than 80,000 chemicals on the U.S. market, many of which were never tested for their health impacts. In the absence of government action on some of these products, retailers are stepping up to protect consumers.

Last year, 31-year-old Drew Wynne, the proud owner of a cold brew coffee business, died from toxic fumes while properly using a methylene chloride-based paint stripper. After hearing Drew’s story in May, OSPIRG Foundation joined a coalition in an effort to get dangerous paint strippers off store shelves.

Along with our coalition partners, we sent Lowe’s more than 7,000 petition signatures, urging the company to drop these deadly products. Lowe’s listened, announcing it would do so by the end of 2018. Next, we shifted our attention to Home Depot and Walmart. After receiving thousands of comments from our network, both retailers announced plans to phase out these paint strippers.
**Toxics in kids’ products**

In 2018, OSPIRG released a series of reports by our research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund. March’s “In Your Face” report found asbestos in three different shimmery makeup products sold at Claire’s, with one containing more than 150,000 fibers of asbestos per gram of product. Asbestos is an extremely dangerous substance that can increase the risk of skin cancer and cause lung cancer, mesothelioma and even death.

Our network quickly alerted Claire’s to these test results, and asked the company to recall the items and inform customers immediately, but representatives refused. OSPIRG is now calling on Congress to pass legislation that will protect our kids by requiring appropriate testing and labeling of cosmetics.

After testing dozens of markers, crayons, binders and more, our research partners found some common school supplies containing asbestos lead or other dangerous substances. Released on Aug. 7, the “Safer School Supplies Shopping Guide” warned consumers about the toxic products we found, and offered suggestions for safer alternatives.

OSPIRG released our national network’s annual “Trouble in Toyland” report in November, identifying unsafe toys that skirted safety regulations and made it onto store shelves and internet marketplaces. Our national network and health professionals across the country held news events to alert parents and others of the dangers some toys pose to children.

Stay up to date on the latest threats to consumers with the PIRG Consumer Watchdog. Sign up for consumer alerts at www.ospirg.org.
Protecting consumers from data security threats

From warning of data breaches to preventing credit fraud to protecting consumers from identity theft, OSPIRG and our national network are here to help you keep your data safe and secure.

More than one year after announcing the biggest data breach in history, Equifax still hasn’t been held accountable or provided the information and tools consumers need to adequately protect themselves. The breach exposed 148 million consumers’ social security numbers and birthdates, and, for some people, credit card numbers and driver’s license numbers, putting them at increased risk of identity theft. That’s why our network stepped in.

On Sept. 7—the anniversary of the public announcement of the Equifax data breach—OSPIRG released our national network’s report detailing the government’s failure to hold the company accountable and offering tips for consumers to protect themselves. The report also concludes that both oversight and financial consequences are needed to prevent future large-scale breaches.

“We’ve put together tips for preventing, detecting and resolving different types of identity theft and fraud, all in one place,” said Mike Litt, member of U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s national Consumer Watchdog team.
A major victory for data security
The best way to protect yourself against the Equifax breach and similar data security threats got a little easier in 2018.

OSPIRG helped pass a state-level bipartisan law requiring credit bureaus to offer free credit freezes—a vital protection against identity theft. And as a result of state action in Oregon and elsewhere, the United States Congress passed a similar law later in the year.

“It’s about time the credit bureaus stopped charging us for the right to control our own information. We didn’t give them permission to collect or sell our information in the first place,” said Mike Litt, member of our national Consumer Watchdog team.

We recommend that everyone freeze their credit with all three major credit bureaus: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. If you freeze your credit, the credit reporting bureaus can’t share your information with new lenders unless you first thaw the freeze—making it more difficult for criminals to open a fraudulent account in your name.
Working to ban Roundup unless and until it’s proven safe

On August 17, a study from Environmental Working Group found glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup, in a number of oat-based breakfast foods marketed to kids.

“Roundup has been linked to cancer by the World Health Organization and the state of California, but it, and generic versions of it, is still the most widely used herbicide in the U.S.” said Kara Cook-Schultz, our national toxics program director. “If it’s showing up in kids’ breakfast foods, we should be absolutely sure of its long-term health effects.”

According to the study, 31 out of 45 tested products had glyphosate levels higher than what some scientists consider safe for kids. Using this and other growing evidence of Roundup’s widespread effects on public health, OSPIRG’s Toxics program worked hard in 2018 to gather support for state-level legislation to ban the hazardous pesticide.

**Monsanto’s day in court**

In 2014, Dewayne Johnson, a father of two, was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma, a deadly form of cancer. As a former county school pest manager, Johnson sprayed hundreds of gallons of Roundup—using it 20 to 30 times per year.

In August 2018, a jury supported Johnson’s claim that Roundup caused his cancer, finding Monsanto accountable for hiding the health risks of Roundup and awarding Johnson millions in damages.

“I would never have sprayed that product on school grounds or around people if I knew it would cause harm,” Johnson testified.

Twenty-six million pounds of Roundup are sprayed on school grounds, parks and gardens every year, and Johnson’s case was the first to go to trial of more than 800 people suing Monsanto, claiming Roundup caused their cancer. The evidence against Roundup has been piling up for years, and in 2018, our national network was able to help pass five bans on Roundup in cities and counties across the country.
A renewed commitment to move us toward zero waste

From electronics to plastics, we throw away too much stuff. Some of this waste could be reused, recycled or repaired. Some of it should never have been produced in the first place. OSPIRG and our national network are tackling America’s trash problem.

**Defending our right to repair**

If a product you own breaks, you should be able to fix it or find someone who can. But products ranging from dishwashers to smartphones are purposefully made to be difficult, if not impossible, to repair.

“While companies profit, the public is forced to pay the price in financial costs and environmental damage,” said Nathan Proctor, director of our national campaign for the Right to Repair.

When Microsoft pressed criminal charges against e-waste recycler Eric Lundgren for copying restore disks that allow people to fix old computers—even though the software on those disks is available online for free—our national network launched an effort to urge Microsoft to work with recyclers, not penalize them.

Over the past year, our national network supported Right to Repair reforms in 18 states, because it shouldn’t be this difficult to keep our products away from the trash heap.

**Moving beyond plastic**

Every day, people throw away tons of plastic “stuff”—cups, plates, bags, containers, forks, knives, spoons and more. All of this waste not only clogs our landfills, trashes our parks, and litters our streets, but it also washes into our rivers and oceans, where it can harm wildlife.

Scientists are still documenting the scope of plastic pollution and investigating its effects. But for decades we’ve known that one of the worst forms of plastic pollution is polystyrene foam, the kind used in foam cups and take-out containers, which most of us call “Styrofoam.”

In 2018, OSPIRG and our national network built nationwide support to ban single-use foam takeout containers. Our coalition sent tens of thousands of comments asking state lawmakers to eliminate polystyrene cups and containers for good, but we’re just getting started.

Plastic foam bans have already passed in more than 200 cities and other communities, from Portland, Oregon, to Portland, Maine. Some companies are also getting with the program. Just last year, McDonald’s phased out foam cups and containers worldwide, in favor of 100 percent recycled materials.
Prescription drug costs have skyrocketed in recent years, preventing some people from getting critical medications, but OSPIRG is working to increase transparency in pricing.

High-value health care

Advocating for affordable, quality health care for all Oregonians is a top priority for us at OSPIRG. In 2018, we made great strides in protecting consumers from prescription price gouging, health insurance price hikes and more.

The high and rising cost of prescription drugs is a burden on all Oregonians, not just those who depend on expensive specialty medications. Over the last five years, the price of drugs has risen at 10 times the rate of inflation, increasing insurance premiums and stretching the state budget.

In March 2018, OSPIRG helped pass the Prescription Drug Price Transparency Act, which requires drug manufacturers to explain where all the money is going when they raise prices.

Experts agree that prescription drug prices have little relation to what the manufacturer spends on research and development, and that those expenses are routinely overstated by the drug industry. By requiring transparency and accountability from drug companies, this law will help prevent some of the most egregious price gouging and expose valuable information about price factors that will enable Oregon to take further, concrete steps to rein in the high cost of prescription drugs.
Health insurance rate watch protects consumers
While the cost of health care continues to rise, OSPIRG’s rate watch program is saving consumers money.

Last June, Providence Health Plan proposed raising insurance premiums on more than 90,000 Oregonians by an average of 13.6 percent, and as much as 24.1 percent. Since rate hikes like these threaten many families’ access to affordable health care, OSPIRG sought to make sure the raise was justified. Our researchers analyzed Providence’s records and noticed many flaws—Oregonians were being wrongly asked to pay higher rates.

“The more we dig into Providence’s justification, the more concerned we are that the proposed rates may overcharge consumers,” said then-OSPIRG Policy Director Jesse O’Brien.

After we published our findings in June, state regulators cut Providence’s rate hike to 9.5 percent. While we’re still concerned, our analysis helped soften the blow.

Health care value advocate of the year
Jesse O’Brien spent years with OSPIRG advocating for policies and strategies to improve the value proposition of health care for Oregonians.

At the beginning of last year, the national health care advocacy organization, Families USA, named Jesse “Health Care Value Advocate of the Year” in recognition of his leadership both in Oregon and nationwide.

“Jesse has long been recognized as a leader, not just in Oregon, but on the national level for his leadership in fighting for health care affordability and value,” said Patrick Willard, a senior director at Families USA.

From 2012 to 2018, Jesse led OSPIRG’s Health Insurance Rate Watch program, which has helped cut over $280 million from health insurance premiums for Oregonians, and helped pass legislation to protect consumers. During his tenure with OSPIRG, he joined members of our national network in an effort to push for action at the state level to contain costs and improve quality of care in states across the country.
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