



2023 Annual Report



New York Public Interest Research Group Fund

From Our Executive Director

It was an unprecedented year.

New York State enacted a first-in-the-nation mandate banning gas hookups in new building construction – a critical step to meeting the state’s critical climate goals and reducing carbon emissions. New York’s voter registration deadline was reduced from 25 days to 10 days before an election, and for the first time, colleges with over 300 registered voters on campus were required to have a polling site on campus. Voters approved \$4.2 billion for the Clean Water & Clean Air Environmental Bond Act, and a new pilot program for five free New York City bus routes was created. Funding for critical programs, including public higher education, drinking water, mass transit and tobacco control was increased.

NYPIRG played an important role in these victories through our direct public engagement, reports, media outreach, coalition work, events, direct services, and more.

Yet, it was unprecedented in other ways. From the Buffalo blizzard to orange, smoke-filled skies, from the hottest summer on record to flooded homes and subway stations, extreme weather events are escalating. And so are climate costs – since August 2022, New York taxpayers are on the hook for \$2.7 billion to repair climate-related damages and mount community protection programs. New Yorkers could see those costs rise to as much as \$10 billion annually.

The question facing policymakers will be: Who pays? NYPIRG believes that it should be the oil companies, not taxpayers. Big Oil has known for decades that the burning of fossil fuels would trigger a warming planet

and possible devastation. The most recent revelation is that the industry knew as early as 1954 of the possible dangers. That adds to the evidence that despite knowing the industry did all it could to undermine efforts to address the climate crisis they caused and knew was coming.

Unless climate polluters pay, the costs of addressing the damages from a worsening climate – repairing roads and bridges, protecting low-lying areas, adding air conditioning to schools and much more – will be borne by taxpayers. We all learned this rule in kindergarten: if you make a mess, you clean it up! Big Oil companies have made a whopping \$870 billion in profits since 2021. NYPIRG will strive to hold polluters accountable – and make certain that Big Oil cannot pass the charges onto consumers.

NYPIRG will continue to raise awareness and support for substantive, equitable policies that:

- shift New York toward reliance on electricity generated by solar, wind, and geothermal to ensure that New York is reaching its climate goals;
- safeguard drinking water supplies and decrease plastic waste;
- reduce energy, consumer, and transportation costs; and
- curtail the power of wealthy special interests and reduce ethical conflicts of interest for policymakers.

As always, our work would not be possible without our incredible supporters, volunteers, staff, and partners. To all of you, my sincere thanks and appreciation.

---Blair Horner

Mission

The New York Public Interest Research Group Fund (NYPIRG) is a non-partisan, nonprofit, research and public education organization dedicated to enhancing the public voice in critical public policy debates to strengthen democracy, enhance the rights of consumers and voters, and protect the environment and public health in New York. Over the past four decades, we have educated hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, recruited thousands of community members from all parts of the state, conducted research, produced studies and reports, and promoted key public interest issues in the media, enhancing NYPIRG's institutional impact and empowering New Yorkers.



Fossil Free Future Campaign

The climate crisis threatens our planet and our health.

NYPIRG launched its Fossil-Free Future Campaign to make New York State a national and global leader in the fight to combat the devastating effects of climate change. Future generations are depending on us to protect them from climate catastrophe caused by global warming.

Across the United States, communities are already dealing with temperature changes, coastal flooding, roaring wildfires, and threatened drinking water supplies due to climate change. The last eight years have been the hottest on record with 2023 being the hottest in recorded history. The rising heat triggered devastating storms: from 2000 to 2024, the state experienced 65 separate billion-dollar weather disasters due to the climate crisis. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has found that these events have cost New York up to an estimated \$100 billion.

Since the 1970s, the fossil fuel industry has known the environmental risks associated with burning fossil fuels and accurately predicted the timetable in which those changes would occur. Avoiding responsibility, the industry used its considerable clout to withhold the evidence from the public, undermine climate science, and hire consultants and lobbyists to derail health and environmental reforms.

Victory! Voters approved \$4.2 billion for the Clean Water & Clean Air Environmental Bond Act, to help the State combat climate change, protect drinking water, and respond to solid waste pollution – including funding for climate friendly, electric school buses.

Victory! First-in-the-Nation law enacted banning gas hookups in new building construction – a critical step to meeting the state’s critical climate goals and reducing carbon emissions.

Victory! \$400 million was allocated for the Environmental Protection Fund to support projects critical for protecting water, combating climate change, and keeping public spaces clean.

Victory! Moratorium of siting of facilities and transportation of Liquefied Natural Gas and petroleum gas extended.

Fossil Free Future Campaign Actions

- 240 community groups released a letter sent to Governor Hochul urging her to make big oil companies, not taxpayers, financially responsible for the growing climate damages facing the state.
- Congressmen Dan Goldman and Jerry Nadler joined with NYS legislators, NYPIRG and other advocates to call on Albany leadership to make corporate climate polluters pay.
- Organized and participated in dozens of media events and rallies across the state that brought together students, residents, and community groups in support of pro-climate policies.
- Released a policy paper juxtaposing the record profits by Big Oil and the rising costs to the public for mitigating climate damages, and calling for Big Oil to pay their fair share.



- Brought together dozens of organizations across state to highlight the need for state action on climate goals and calling for the creation of a Climate Superfund.



Electrify New York

Buildings generate up to 60% of New York's greenhouse gas emissions. NYPIRG, in partnership with New York Communities for Change, Food & Water Watch and WEACTION-NY, led organizing efforts to raise public support for electrification of new construction and major renovations in New York State. Ending new gas hook ups for buildings would combat the climate crisis by slashing fossil fuel use, creating clean energy jobs, and preventing gas explosions, fires; and more deadly local air pollution.

This year, we turned out New Yorkers in force to rallies, news conferences, and actions in New York City and Albany, engaging a swell of grassroots

support from individuals, organizations, and community leaders.

In New York City, we also worked to ensure that the implementation of Local Law 97 – an ambitious new law to reduce the emissions produced by the city's largest buildings 40 percent by 2030 and to achieve net zero by 2050 – moved forward and that efforts to weaken the law were thwarted.

Our coalition, now in its fourth year, won a landmark victory when New York passed a first-in-the-nation law to mandate all-electric construction in new buildings in New York State!



Safeguarding Drinking Water

Seven years ago, NYPIRG launched a new, comprehensive effort to protect and improve drinking water resources in New York. We developed and released What's In My Water?, an online tool to educate New Yorkers about the state of their drinking water, the presence of contaminants found through laboratory testing, and location and nature of some potential threats to local drinking water. Our work has increased public access to information about drinking water supplies, raised the profile of drinking water issues in New York at the state and federal level, and led to critical improvements and protections for New York's drinking water.

Victory! \$500 million for drinking water infrastructure and new protections enacted for waterways to protect fisheries, recreational boating areas, and fishing areas from harmful pollutants.



Solid Waste Reduction

Plastic pollution is a global problem – creating millions of tons of non-biodegradable plastic waste that pollutes our oceans and natural environments, impacts food chains, and harms wildlife. In New York State, the solid waste crisis is at a critical level. Recycling, reuse, and reduction rates must improve, or landfills will fill past capacity and incinerators will continue to spew toxic waste by burning garbage. Packaging manufacturers must also reduce and detoxify packaging waste.

NYPIRG has been instrumental in bringing together a large coalition of organizations and businesses to raise public awareness about the plastic and municipal waste crisis, and ways the state can address the issue. More than 300 community organizations and businesses signed a letter in support of policies to expand New York's container recycling program.



Empowering Voters and Protecting Democracy

New Voter Engagement Project

It has been well-established that the key to future voter participation is engagement early in adulthood. NYPIRG's New Voter Engagement Project: (1) Recruits and train students across the state through experiential learning to register and mobilize their peers to vote; (2) Conducts public education efforts about voter policies being considered at the local and national level; and (3) Fosters lifelong voting and civic participation habits among young voters. A key priority is expanding voting access to college students. Our efforts paid off when New York State created a mandate for poll sites on or near college campuses where more than 300 active registered student voters reside. We also conducted education and public outreach in support of other policies that reduce barriers to voting, like eliminating voter registration deadlines and no excuse absentee voting. We will continue this work to expand voting rights and increase voter participation among young adults.

National Voter Registration Day

On September 20th, NYPIRG took part in the 11th annual National Voter Registration Day, to highlight the importance of registering to vote and voting in elections. We hosted voter registration activities across the state, joining organizations across the country to promote this day of civic action.

Victory! Voter registration deadline reduced from 25 days to 10 days in advance of an election day.

Victory! New voting law goes into effect — for the first time, all eligible students who live at a college campus with at least 300 active registered voters will be able to vote at a poll site placed at, or near, their college campus for the 2022 election.

Victory! Constitutional amendments and other questions on election ballots must now be written in plain, clear language.

Victory! More than 9,000 New Yorkers registered to vote.



Promoting Open and Accountable Government

The incredible scandals and controversies that have rocked the state capital in recent years have provided an opportunity for NYPIRG to research and offer best ethics practices to guide policymakers in their debate over needed reforms. NYPIRG continued to be a leading voice in support of government practices that are open, accountable, and that best serve the public.

Highlights from our work this year:

- Maintained and updated our [“Representative Finder”](#) that allows New Yorkers to look up the names and contact information of their state and national representatives. In New York City, residents can also look up their city representatives.
- Released [Tale of the Tape: NYPIRG’s 2023 Legislative Review](#), our annual review of the New York State Legislative session.
- Maintained and updated our [“Legislative Profiles”](#) which allow New Yorkers easy access to background information on their state legislators. The profiles list relevant committee assignments, outside income information, the most recent election results, the identity of significant campaign contributors, as well as information about the demographic and partisan makeup of the district’s population.
- [In coalition with other good government groups, made recommendations to new members of the NYS State Commission on Ethics and Lobbying](#) that would improve enforcement, transparency, and training, and reset expectations about the state’s ethics oversight.
- Continued shining a light on government practices via dozens of news articles and op-eds.



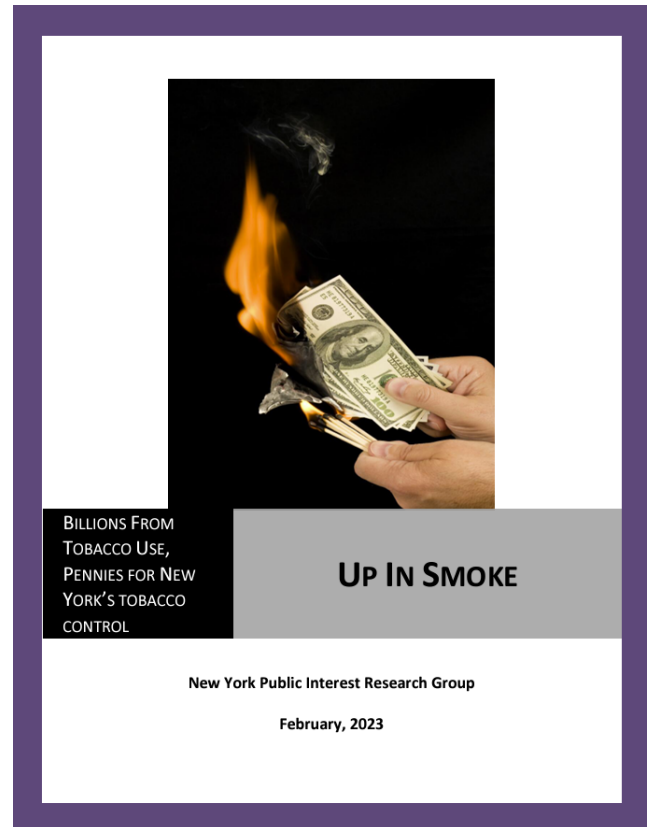
Protecting Public Health

Tobacco Control

Cigarette smoking remains the number one cause of preventable death in the United States. According to the New York State Department of Health, 1.7 million New Yorkers smoke, with increased rates among low-income New Yorkers. Moreover, the high rate of e-cigarette use among young people is cause for concern, as e-cigarette users are more likely to smoke in the future.

It is more important than ever that New York State continues to invest in the Tobacco Control Program, which has proven to reduce smoking rates among New Yorkers. Sadly, investment in tobacco control programs has waned in recent years.

In response, NYPIRG released [Up in Smoke: Billions from Tobacco Use: Pennies for New York's Tobacco Control](#). The report reviews the science behind tobacco control, the recommendations of the nation's experts on how to run a pro-health tobacco control program, and the new threats posed by flavored tobacco products. In addition, the report examines the responsibilities of the Tobacco Control Program (TCP) and shows how, despite massive available revenues, New York has spent pennies on the dollar and allowed those resources to go up in smoke.



Health Care

Health care in the U.S. leaves too many people out, costs too much and does not meet acceptable standards of quality. NYPIRG is working toward solutions that will shift the healthcare system to focus on ensuring that everyone is covered, that the state's regulators ensure the highest quality of care, that drug prices are monitored and reduced, and that public health programs benefit from enhanced state investments. We hosted a series of End Medical Debt workshops across the state, participated in media events and rallies in support of health care access for all, and worked to update the state's antiquated wrongful death laws.

Ensuring Access to Quality and Affordable Public Higher Education

Through our events and organizing, NYPIRG demonstrated strong public support for fully funded public higher education, an increase in full-time professors, and increased financial aid for college students. To raise public awareness about the increased state investment in higher education, NYPIRG, along with New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness released a [policy paper](#) highlighting the economic benefits of state investment in public higher education.

***Victory!** Proposed SUNY and CUNY Tuition hike defeated.*

***Victory!** Increased funding for operating support for CUNY and SUNY, full-time faculty, and opportunity programs.*



Fighting for Consumer Rights

The Right to Repair

Victory! Legislation is enacted that requires electronics manufacturers to provide access to spare parts, repair software, and instructions so that New Yorkers can fix – rather than replace – a wide range of devices including cell phones and laptops, cutting waste and saving them money.

Almost all the products we use in our personal lives are now digital. They're expensive, they typically contain sophisticated electronics, and their useful life is limited. When these products – smartphones, tablets, laptops, cameras, etc. – break down as they inevitably do, consumers were often left with two choices: pay for expensive manufacturer repairs or buy a new item. This is bad for two reasons: It encourages “planned obsolescence,” which is a huge environmental problem; and it costs consumers more than is fair to repair or replace the product. This victory bridges our consumer and environmental work. This “fair repair” legislation requires manufacturers to make available to consumers and independent repair shops the information (like diagrams), diagnostic and other tools and parts on a fair basis to provide a viable choice to fix the item rather than trash or replace it. NYPIRG will continue pressing for measures that allow consumers to make informed decisions and promote consumer choice.

The Case for a Public Bank

NYPIRG is a member of Public Bank NYC, a coalition of more than 40 organizations across the city who support the creation of a public bank. Public Banking is a strategy to advance racial, economic, and environmental justice by investing in a municipally controlled and publicly accountable bank. A public bank is a financial institution that is owned and controlled by a government body and chartered to serve the public interest. Throughout the year, organizers and volunteers with NYPIRG hosted and participated in news events, virtual rallies, social media action days, stakeholder meetings, educational workshops, and other activities to raise awareness and support for public banking in New York.

Small Claims Court Action Centers

Since 1977, NYPIRG has offered help to New Yorkers with consumer problems and complaints, such as the purchase of defective goods, shoddy services, unreturned security deposits, property damage or falling victim to deceptive business practices. For many, New York's Small Claims Courts – the original “People's Court” – is the place for them to seek justice. In partnership with our affiliate, NYPIRG counselors across the state provide procedural information to consumers about the small claims court system in New York State via our [Small Claims Court Action Centers](#). This year, we increased outreach to community organizations, expanded our number of counselors and clients served, made systems-wide administration improvements, and added a [Spanish Language Small Claims Court Action Center page](#) to our website.

Improving Mass Transit Access and Affordability

For the past four decades, NYPIRG's Straphangers Campaign has been a leader in the fight for safe, affordable, and reliable mass transit in New York City. Our reports, media, advocacy, and public education efforts highlighted the need for a greater investment in transit infrastructure, and for improvements to make the system more accessible to all riders. Proper investment in public transportation will help fix historic inequities, deliver racial justice, and combat climate change.

This year, NYPIRG organized riders to voice opposition to the proposed MTA fare hike, encouraging them to share how they would be personally impacted by such an increase. We also continued to fight for bus service improvements, focusing on the need for more dedicated bus lanes, and an expanded fair fares program through our Student Bus Rider Platform.

For New York City's college students, affording a MetroCard swipe or OMNY tap can be the difference between earning a degree or dropping out altogether. [NYPIRG delivered over 7,300 signatures endorsing the Student Bus Rider Platform](#). The Platform calls for:

- Free MetroCards or OMNY cards for all CUNY students.
- Fare discounts and free transfers for MetroNorth and LIRR for college students.
- Expansion of the Fair Fares program to include all current CUNY students and other New Yorkers at 200% of the federal poverty level.

Victory! Pilot program for 5 free NYC bus routes approved.

Victory! Increased funding for MTA operating budget.



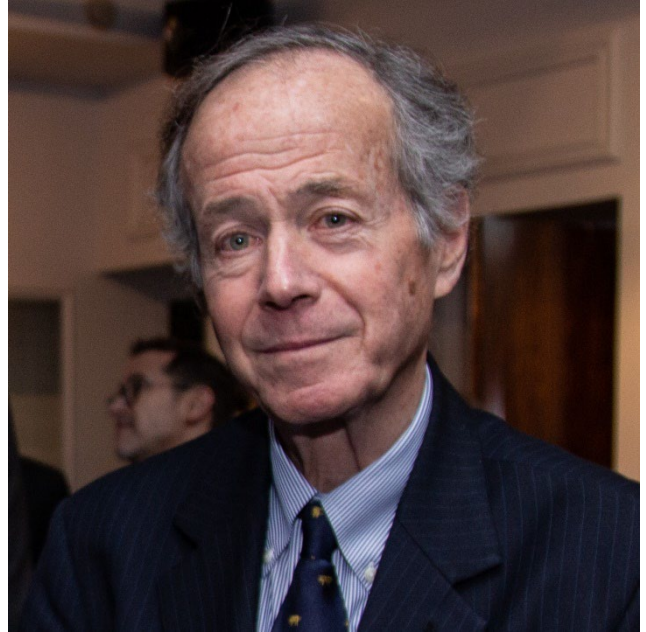
Remembering Donald K. Ross

Donald K. Ross, NYPIRG's first Executive Director, passed away on May 14, 2022. On September 23, NYPIRG – along with Donald Ross's family, friends, and colleagues – held an event to honor and celebrate his amazing life.

One of the original “Nader’s Raiders,” Donald was the father of the Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs). It was Donald’s genius to see that a better world could be created by harnessing the energy, idealism, and smarts of college students. Not only could public policies be improved, but the experience of civic engagement would make these younger adults better citizens. Donald’s book, “Action for a Change” offered a blueprint for college student activism, with a formula that focused on accomplishments, bite-sized policy victories that could cascade into fundamental changes in governance. His book soon led to the establishment of dozens of PIRGs in states across the country.

Donald’s vision soon turned into personal practical application when, in 1973, he became the executive director of NYPIRG. From a handful of staff and dozens of student volunteers working on college campuses, he transformed NYPIRG into one of New York’s leading environmental and consumer advocacy organizations. His work taking on the nuclear power industry after the near-catastrophic Three Mile Island partial meltdown put NYPIRG on the national stage, with massive rallies in Washington DC and New York City.

NYPIRG’s work expanded into tough environmental challenges helping to launch clean-ups through a state Superfund program. Under his leadership, the Straphangers Campaign, NYPIRG’s well-known transit



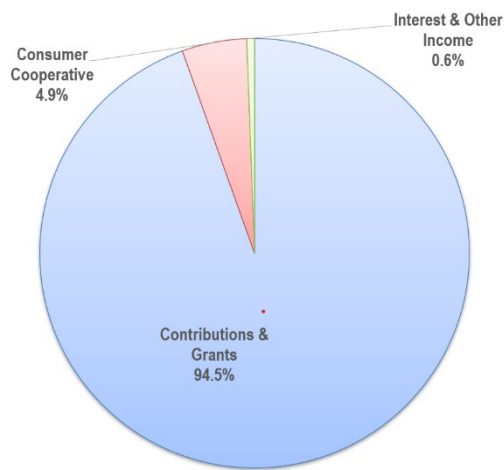
project, was launched. Among the many policy successes, Donald’s work touched the lives of hundreds of college students. For many of these individuals, Donald’s work led to life-changing career experiences. And as his vision was played out across the country, thousands of students’ lives were transformed. Essentially, NYPIRG became an “advocacy graduate school” for political organizers who went on to run state and national groups.

After he left NYPIRG in 1982, he went on to work at the Rockefeller Family Fund, helped establish the Environmental Grantmakers Association, chaired Greenpeace USA, and founded the law firm Malkin & Ross, as well as M+R, a consulting firm that was instrumental in winning hundreds of policy victories over the years, most notably in recent years around the issue of juvenile justice reform.

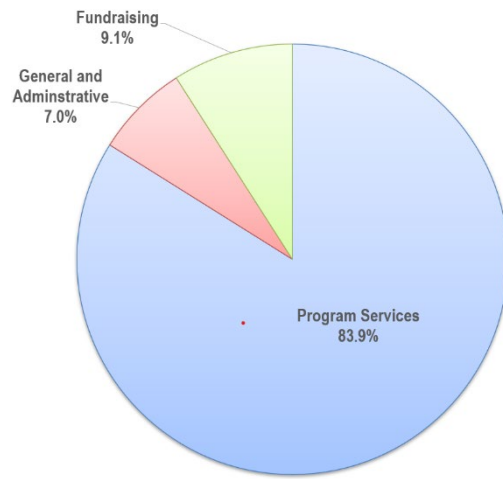
For those of us at NYPIRG, as well as the networks of PIRGs and other allied organizations, we owe more than we can express to Donald and his work. To honor his legacy, NYPIRG has launched the [Donald K. Ross Future Leaders Program](#), a unique internship program to help train the next generation of activists.

Financial Overview and Contact Information

The following is an overview of NYPIRG's income and expenses for the fiscal year ending August 31, 2023.



Income



Expenses

Board of Directors

Jay Halfon, President
Lisa Howard, Treasurer
Chris Meyer, Secretary
Neysa Pranger, Director
Camille Rivera, Director

Executive Director

Blair Horner

Contact Us

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