

# WISPIRG

**Standing Up  
To Powerful Interests**

**Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group & WISPIRG Foundation**



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From Recalls To Reforms**

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## **2008 ANNUAL REPORT**

# Product Safety: From Recalls To Reforms

## New Law Ensures Safer Children's Products

For several years, WISPIRG and our allies have been sounding the alarm about problems with the nation's product safety laws and urging reform for the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). This year, our efforts paid off.

In 2007, high-profile recalls of food, drugs and consumer products had families wondering what else was slipping through the product safety net. Twenty-five million toys were recalled because they were laced with lead or contained small, dangerous magnets.

The efforts of WISPIRG and our allies helped to turn the alarm into reform. On Aug. 14, 2008, President Bush signed the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act, which increases funding for the CPSC, and allows the CPSC to remove hazardous products more quickly and hand out fines to those violating product safety laws.



Staff

*WISPIRG Organizer Samantha Gibb releases our 23rd Annual "Trouble in Toyland" report, alerting parents and consumers to unsafe toys.*

# Voting & Democracy: Doing Our Part To Make History

## Record Young Voter Turnout In 2008

On Nov. 4, a record number of voters cast their ballots for president and, for the first time in 20 years, young voters' share of the electorate surpassed that of voters over 65.

In 2008, WISPIRG volunteers and staff joined the student PIRGs' New Voters Project to register 118,000 young voters across the country. Working on more than 100 campuses in 22 states, we combined good old-fashioned pavement pounding with high-tech outreach efforts. We sent a quarter-million text messages reminding voters to get to the polls. According to our analysis, text message reminders sent to young voters on Super Tuesday increased turnout by 4.6 percentage points.

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement estimated that 2.2 million more young people voted on Nov. 4, 2008 than in the last presidential election.



Staff

*Gov. Jim Doyle thanked WISPIRG New Voters Project volunteers for their efforts to turn out the youth vote on Election Day 2008.*

# Transportation: A Renewed Focus On Public Transit

## 21st Century Transportation For Wisconsin

Last year, WISPIRG launched its Transportation for the 21st Century campaign, advocating for a shift in our transportation priorities. Rising fuel prices and growing traffic congestion, along with challenges such as global warming and America's addiction to imported oil, all point toward the need for a new transportation future. WISPIRG is calling for investment in public transit, high-speed and intercity rail, neighborhoods that are less car-dependent, and the restoration of thousands of roads and bridges in failing condition across the United States.

Unfortunately, we're still facing stiff opposition from the automobile and roadbuilding industries, which stand to reap huge profits from new highway projects. WISPIRG is urging the state to prioritize public transit and maintain and modernize existing highways before building new ones.



Amtrak

*High-speed intercity rail could connect Milwaukee to Madison in the near future thanks to WISPIRG-backed measures in Congress.*

## Creating A New Vision For Transportation

WISPIRG has been leading the charge for new transportation priorities with research, outreach and advocacy. Thousands of Wisconsinites and dozens of local leaders have signed on in support of our 21st century transportation priorities.

In April, WISPIRG released a new report, “A Better Way to Go,” which found that, in 2006 alone, transit in Madison and Milwaukee was responsible for saving 1.2 million gallons of oil and more than \$3 million dollars that would have otherwise been spent on gas. In October, WISPIRG joined Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz, the Wisconsin Alliance of Cities and community leaders to call on the next president and Congress to strengthen our economy by building a 21st century transportation system.

## Progress In Wisconsin And In Congress

In southeastern Wisconsin, WISPIRG helped to form the Coalition for Advancing Transit, a coalition of community leaders, community organizations, business leaders and citizens who are advocating transit solutions for the region—including sustaining and upgrading existing transit networks and building new projects like the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) Commuter Rail line to connect the region. The Coalition has begun reaching out to key decision-makers to help move these projects forward.

In October, legislation was passed to strengthen the nation’s intercity passenger rail network to accommodate record ridership and make new routes possible. The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act authorizes close to \$13 billion over five years to promote rail travel and begin investing in high speed rail, potentially including high speed service between Madison and Milwaukee.

**BUILDING A COALITION**—WISPIRG helped to form the Coalition for Advancing Transit, a group of community and business leaders, local elected officials and others to support an improved transit system. For the full list of our coalition partners, visit: [www.wispirg.org/issues/transportation](http://www.wispirg.org/issues/transportation)

# Tax & Budget Reform: More Information For Taxpayers

## Making State Subsidies More Transparent

In March, WISPIRG helped to pass a new law requiring the state to disclose information about subsidies it provides for economic development. WISPIRG's Bruce Speight co-authored an op-ed in support of the bill in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel in March.

In 2007, an investigation by the Journal Sentinel found that companies that were awarded state subsidies fell about 40 percent short on the job creation they promised. In the absence of established accountability, the investigation reported that the state often lowers its requirements rather than canceling the subsidies or seeking repayment.

This legislation will help to hold companies accountable by making data available to the public, and by providing a sort of money-back guarantee for taxpayers if the recipients of subsidies don't make good on their promises.



Staff

*WISPIRG Advocate Bruce Speight joined Gov. Doyle for the signing of a new law that will give taxpayers more information about state subsidies for economic development.*

*At press time, WISPIRG was wrapping up another tax & budget victory. Read the full story: [www.wispirg.org/issues/tax-budget/close-corporate-tax-loopholes](http://www.wispirg.org/issues/tax-budget/close-corporate-tax-loopholes)*

# Public Health: Make Wisconsin Smoke Free

## Smoke Free Law Gains Ground In 2008

Secondhand smoke is the third leading cause of preventable death in America. That's why WISPIRG has been working with a broad coalition of public health organizations calling for the passage of a statewide smoke free air law for all public workplaces, including bars and restaurants.

In February, WISPIRG released a new report showing that smoke-free policies have protected public health without harming local economies. The report, "Smoke and Mirrors," used a vast library of independent, peer-reviewed scientific studies to debunk Big Tobacco's claims that smoke-free air policies are bad for local businesses and Wisconsin's economy.

With numerous Wisconsin communities—along with 20 other states—having voted to go smoke free, WISPIRG will continue to build support for a statewide law in Wisconsin.



Staff

*Cancer survivor and bicycling champion Lance Armstrong joined Gov. Doyle at a rally hosted by WISPIRG and our Smoke Free coalition partners.*

For the latest news on our efforts to make Wisconsin smoke free, visit [www.wispirg.org/issues/smoke-free-wisconsin](http://www.wispirg.org/issues/smoke-free-wisconsin)



# Money & Politics: Holding Our Officials Accountable

## Independent Ethics Team Put In Place

In March 2008, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to create an independent office to police ethical scandals under a plan recommended by a special task force and endorsed by WISPIRG.

The new Office of Congressional Ethics opened in December after Congressional leaders appointed an oversight board. WISPIRG Federal Legislative Director Gary Kalman and Democracy Advocate Lisa Gilbert were invited to brief the office's director and co-chair of the board about how to interpret the new ethics rules and establish enforcement procedures.

The new office will change the way ethics complaints against representatives are initiated and handled. It ends partisan gridlock that has stymied legitimate ethics investigations and secrecy that has been a hallmark of the Congressional Ethics Committee.



Joe Gough/shutterstock

*The new Office of Congressional Ethics will help to police ethical scandals in the U.S. House of Representatives.*

*In 2008, WISPIRG released a report detailing steps that many states have taken to uphold ethics laws. Read the report online at [www.wispirg.org/report](http://www.wispirg.org/report)*

# Financial Security: Building A Better Bailout

## WISPIRG Calls For Oversight, Accountability

In 2008, with the economy weakening and home foreclosures skyrocketing, Congress and the president empowered the Treasury to inject more than \$700 billion into Wall Street banks, investment firms and, ultimately, Detroit automakers. While reasonable people disagree about the necessity, and the efficacy, of these actions, one thing was clear: far more accountability and oversight is necessary.

“The hastily developed law gave unprecedented spending authority to the Treasury, but lacked basic protections for taxpayers or assistance for homeowners,” said Ed Mierzwinski, a senior fellow in WISPIRG’s Washington, D.C., office.

In the final weeks of 2008, WISPIRG and our allies were building support for a Main Street reform platform that would help to prevent the massive failures that led to the bailouts, and require greater transparency and accountability in financial regulation.



Larry Downing/Reuters

*WISPIRG and our allies are working to build more accountability into the Wall Street bailout. Above, former AIG CEO Martin Sullivan testifies before Congress.*

*For the latest on our efforts to watchdog the Wall Street bailout and prevent another financial crisis, visit [www.wispirg.org/issues/financial-privacy--security](http://www.wispirg.org/issues/financial-privacy--security)*

# **WISPIRG Supporters**

## Financial Information

Charts reflect Fiscal Year 2008 financial information for WISPIRG and the WISPIRG Foundation.

### FY08 Income



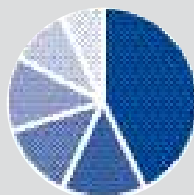
- ◆ Citizen Contributions **66%**
- ◆ Foundation Grants **6%**
- ◆ Student Chapters **24%**
- ◆ Other **4%**

### FY08 Expenses



- ◆ Program **78%**
- ◆ Fundraising **13%**
- ◆ Administration **9%**

### FY08 Program Expenses Breakdown



- ◆ Toxics **43%**
- ◆ Make Wisconsin Smoke Free **14%**
- ◆ Transportation for the 21st Century **13%**
- ◆ Voting and Democracy **13%**
- ◆ Consumer Protection **10%**
- ◆ Other **7%**

**PLANNED GIVING**—Members who include WISPIRG in their wills leave a legacy of activism that will protect consumers and taxpayers, as well as revitalize participation in the democratic process for decades to come. For more information about including WISPIRG in your estate and major giving plans, call (800) 841-7299 or send an e-mail to [plannedgiving@wispirg.org](mailto:plannedgiving@wispirg.org).



**Bruce Speight**  
State Director

Dear WISPIRG member,

*With a historic election and unprecedented voter participation, 2008 was an exciting year. But change isn't just happening in Washington, D.C.—we've made some real progress here in Wisconsin.*

*This year, WISPIRG helped pass a bill to give taxpayers more information about who is getting economic development support from the state. Our New Voters Projects registered and mobilized tens of thousands of young voters in Wisconsin. We launched new programs to advocate for 21st century transportation solutions and to make Wisconsin smoke free. We've also seen major reforms in Washington, including a historic overhaul of product safety laws.*

*With your support, WISPIRG will continue to push back against the powerful interests that are holding back reform, and ensure that 2009 brings more important victories for the public interest.*

# 2008 ANNUAL REPORT

## WISPIRG Staff (partial list)



**Megan Severson**  
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Director



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# WISPIRG

**Standing Up  
To Powerful Interests**

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