Finding common ground and making real progress

Dear CoPIRG 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. CoPIRG and our partners worked hard to make the case for forward-thinking transportation policy as candidates debated the state’s infrastructure needs during election season. After years of advocacy and organizing, we’re starting to see a shift in the state’s spending priorities—away from wasteful highway expansions and toward better public transportation, walking and biking options, and electric vehicle infrastructure. (See page 2 for more.)

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 6 for how our Consumer Watchdog team made it easier for consumers to protect ourselves.)

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

Sincerely,

Danny Katz
State Director, CoPIRG
Advocating for 21st-century transportation solutions

Colorado adopts new auto pollution standards
It’s unanimous: Colorado air regulators support a cleaner, healthier future.

On Nov. 16, 2018, Colorado’s Air Quality Control Commission (AQCC) voted to adopt the Low-Emission Vehicle Program (LEV) or Clean Cars Standards for cars and trucks. Vehicle emissions are the primary contributor to Colorado’s air pollution.

“This is personal. I bike, I run, I love hiking,” said CoPIRG Foundation State Director Danny Katz. “By adopting the advanced Clean Cars Standards, Colorado is taking a big step toward reducing smog and air toxins, cutting carbon pollution, and saving Coloradans money at the pump.”

Prior to the vote, CoPIRG Foundation and our network partners at Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center helped organize an event to announce that more than 7,600 Coloradans had called on the AQCC to adopt the standards.

Colorado is now one of 13 states to adopt the LEV standard. In 2012, the Obama administration instituted equally stringent federal emissions standards, but the current administration is working to roll them back.

Volkswagen settlement will give Colorado’s electric vehicles a boost
In March, CoPIRG Foundation and our advocates succeeded in convincing Colorado to invest $10.3 million of our settlement with Volkswagen for their emission-cheating, dirty-diesel cars into building 33 fast-charging electric vehicle stations at strategic points along our busiest corridors.

“The electric vehicle charging stations will eliminate a common barrier to electric vehicle ownership—not knowing if there will be a place to charge when you travel far from your home,” said Danny Katz.

CoPIRG Foundation was the first to organize media and grassroots events shining a spotlight on Volkswagen’s misleadingly dirty vehicles and making the case to go electric, and is now leading the way to help Colorado reach a cleaner, healthier future.

It is critical that we switch our cars, buses and trucks from gas-powered to electric-powered to reduce lung-damaging pollution. In addition to advocating for Volkswagen-funded charging stations, CoPIRG Foundation joined a coalition to launch the GoEV City campaign to get cities to commit to a 100 percent electric vehicle future.
Stopping the misuse of life-saving antibiotics

Because of your support this past year, CoPIRG 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.

CoPIRG 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, CoPIRG 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, CoPIRG 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 CoPIRG 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.”
Protecting consumers in the financial marketplace

From warning of data breaches to preventing credit fraud to protecting consumers from predatory lenders, CoPIRG and our national network are here to help keep consumers safe in the financial marketplace.

Last November, Colorado voters overwhelmingly supported Proposition 111 to limit payday loan interest rates. The measure passed with 77 percent of the vote, and will mean that payday lenders can no longer charge an annual percentage rate (APR) of more than 36 percent.

“Our coalition had over 100 groups in support of stopping predatory payday loans in Colorado,” said CoPIRG State Director Danny Katz. “Two hundred percent loans are ridiculous and create a cycle of debt. This is a huge win for Colorado consumers.”

Payday loans are no more than $500. They come with high interest rates and fees that primarily target low-income individuals facing financial hardships. Prior to Proposition 111, the law allowed for APR rates upwards of 200 percent.

To qualify Proposition 111 for the ballot, CoPIRG helped gather nearly 200,000 signatures in favor of the 36-percent cap. Our coalition included veterans, civil rights groups and faith leaders, and we are proud to be part of such a huge win for Coloradans.
Major victories for data security
From Equifax to Target, data breaches are too common, and last year, CoPIRG stepped up to help consumers protect themselves when corporate actors failed to.

In May of last year, CoPIRG helped pass the bipartisan House Bill 18-1128, which requires companies to notify you within 30 days of determining a breach occurred involving your information—one of the strongest data breach notification laws in the country.

In the spring, CoPIRG helped write HB 18-1233, which waived all fees for placing a credit freeze on the accounts of our kids. The single best way to protect yourself against new account fraud from identity thieves is to put a freeze on your credit. Unfortunately, major credit bureaus charged us to place and remove freezes.

Following Colorado and other states’ lead, Congress passed a bill removing all fees for credit freezes in 2018. When the law kicked into effect on Sept. 22, CoPIRG Foundation and our national network released a guide on what you need to know including how to place and remove a freeze.

Here’s a snapshot of action our national network has taken in the year since the Equifax data breach affecting 148 million consumers.

We connected with media outlets and our members and coalition partners to raise the alarm as soon as the breach was announced.

We worked with Congress, and in several states, to eliminate fees for getting and removing credit freezes at the three nationwide credit bureaus.

We developed and released a report and online resource on how state and federal authorities and consumers can safeguard personal information, as well as a step-by-step guide for placing credit freezes.
Making our democracy more democratic

Our democracy is based on the principle of one person, one vote. This principle is undermined when a handful of large donors can cut huge checks, but that’s about to change in some of Colorado’s elections.

In the Nov. 6 midterm election, voters in Denver overwhelmingly approved Initiative 2E, which creates a small donor empowerment program starting in 2020.

Initiative 2E allows candidates for municipal office to receive a 9-to-1 match for any contribution of $50 or less that they raise from Denver residents. This creates a path for candidates to successfully raise campaign dollars without being beholden to a small group of large donors and pushes back against the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision. Candidates who are neither independently wealthy nor know wealthy donors have a way to run for office and raise money by focusing on small donors and voters.

CoPIRG helped write the original version of the bill, and we hope this win will create a domino effect, encouraging legislators to expand similar programs throughout the state.

Taking the gerrymandering out of redistricting

Colorado voters also joined CoPIRG last November in approving Amendments Y and Z, which will reduce the ability of political parties to create gerrymandered districts by establishing a more impartial commission to draw the congressional (Amendment Y) and state legislative (Amendment Z) electoral districts in Colorado.

“Voting districts should be drawn in a non-partisan way that reduces gerrymandering—an attempt to stuff a minority of districts with one party’s voters so that the other party can win an unfair amount of seats across the state,” said CoPIRG State Director Danny Katz.

These amendments create an impartial commission and better rules to keep gerrymandering out of redistricting into the future. Anyone can apply to be on the commission, and non-partisan legislative staff will work with the commission to draw the maps. The districts need to be the same size, meet the Voting Rights Act of 1965, be compact, and keep communities together.
2018 PROGRAM REPORT

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