

RALPH NADER

Corporatism's Threat to Democracy

Interviewed by David Barsamian

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Ralph Nader, a legendary figure, has spent a lifetime fighting on behalf of ordinary people. *Life* magazine ranked him as one of the most influential Americans of the twentieth century. *The Atlantic* named him one of the hundred most influential figures in U.S. history. Founder of Public Citizen, he is a long-time advocate for consumer safety and workers' rights. He rose to fame in the 1960s when he took on General Motors and its unsafe Corvair car. His 1965 book *Unsafe At Any Speed* not only created a sensation but also was instrumental in the enactment of the Motor Vehicle Safety Act. His efforts helped create the Environmental Protection Agency. He has exposed the misdeeds of the corporate sector as well as of the political system. In recent years he has led the struggles around NAFTA, the WTO, corporate welfare, and single-payer health care. He is the author of numerous books including *Return to Sender*, *Unstoppable*, *To the Ramparts* and *Breaking Through Power*. He is co-author of *Fake President* and *Wrecking America*.

Welcome to the program.

Thank you, David.

Biden's appointments and policy announcements since the January 20 inauguration. What do you like and what don't you like so far?

In the first flush of his administration, after January 20, all of us obviously felt a sense of relief. So he had an easy act to follow, if he didn't do what Trump did. That is insult everybody and tweet by the hour and lie by the hour. He came out pretty good. So he had the right tone for that moment in time. He did raise the issue of expanding the response of the federal government on the COVID-19 pandemic coordinating with the states and expanding various medical services. So that was a plus. And that's ongoing. The vaccinations are going up. And the health research group of Public Citizen has looked into the data and everything and have decided that that's a good thing given the cost benefits. So that's one.

The second he completely reversed Trump on climate disruption, the climate crisis by re-establishing federal research in the area, getting rid of the taboos on even using the term climate change that Trump imposed on the federal civil service. And in other ways connected with the Paris Climate accords, which are modest and not binding, but at least he's connecting with the international community on this and putting the train on the tracks for strengthening regulation. So that's a plus.

On the minus side he's put in, pretty much, nominees who are sympathetic to Wall Street in some of his agencies, with the exception of Gary Gensler as head of the Securities and Exchange Commission, which regulates the stock market. He has Wall Street regulatory experience under Obama and he's one of the better ones. The first sign of reversing Trump at the EPA, Environmental Protection

Agency was good. And the nominee, while not the most aggressive, certainly is far better than the predecessor. A good nomination was Rohit Chopra, who comes over from the Federal Trade Commission where he was a commissioner to head the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which regulates the credit economy, all the fraud and over-billing and fee penalties and deception and all of that. So that's good, too. We're still waiting for the Food and Drug Administration is one good nominee, potential Josh Sharfstein. But there's one bad one, Dr. Janet Woodcock high up in the FDA. She has been there for years and is very close to the drug companies. We haven't seen the nominees for the auto safety agency or the FAA.

But I would say he's a little better than the Obama regime that he was a vice president of. What is worrisome is he's beginning to start the attacks abroad. This bombing of Syria that just occurred is just part of the unauthorized military presence in these various countries without congressional authority. But it doesn't seem he's going to be as aggressive in drone warfare the way Obama was, with attacking people in their 20s in roadside gatherings who fit some algorithmic profile. They were called signature strikes, and people would be vaporized instantly. So he's more cautious than Obama in that direction. Military budget looks like more of the same. He hasn't suggested, nor have the Democrats in Congress, cutting the bloated, wasteful military budget that's draining away public funds for infrastructure, community jobs and repairing America back home.

He is very bad on single payer, in fact, by signaling during the campaign, his people remember, he said he vetoed a single payer bill that came to his desk from Congress, pretty atrocious. When you consider over 100,000 Americans according to a Yale study die every year, because they can't afford health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time. Apart from the enormous billing fraud, waste, corruption, redundancy, bad medicine,

that characterizes the present corporate dominated, so-called health care system. And the worst part of that is he is collaborating with Nancy Pelosi to discourage rank and file House Democrats from signing on again, as they did in the last session of Congress to representative from Washington Pramila Jayapal's gold standard single payer bill. And here's how bad it is. Pelosi announced in January that she would release the co-signers February 1 with the bill. She put the bill in the hopper. He hasn't done that because the House Speaker is telling House Democrats to focus on expanding modestly, I might say, Obamacare, and don't focus on single payer. So Pelosi doesn't want to release this bill with fewer co-signers than occurred under Trump. Now, there's a Democratic president. Let's see what happens. She had over 130 House Democrats sign on in 2019. It was HR 676. It's got a new bill number now. So Biden's very bad on that.

On infrastructure, he's going to try to push a bill through. On the COVID-19 stimulus he's going to get that through under reconciliation where it just needs 51 votes in the Senate. It's already passed the House. And that has a lot of good immediate relief aspects to state and local governments, to clinics, and, of course, expanding federal unemployment compensation benefits and direct checks to tens of millions of people. That's roughly the summary. He has called for an international democracy summit. And that means he's got to practice what he preaches back home. And so he should oppose restrictions on wrongful injury laws, that is so-called tort reform. He's got to fund the IRS, so it has a budget to collect some of the \$400 to 600 billion they estimate in uncollected taxes. Over 80% of which come from corporate tax evasion, especially the global corporations. There aren't anywhere near enough auditors or investigators. And so the tax evaders are getting a free hand.

There are all kinds of taxes that could lead to infrastructure jobs in the community. He has done nothing on that yet. And he has not gotten to Congressman Richard Neal, who is a crypto-Democrat, Republican-lite from, can you believe, Western Massachusetts. He is the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee. He did not push for a sufficient increase in the IRS budget, which has been savagely cut since 2011 by the Republicans who I've accused of aiding and abetting corporate tax evasion. People are stunned that the budget of the IRS to collect trillions of dollars annually is less than the cost of building one new aircraft carrier which costs between \$11 and 12 billion. So a lot of corporations and the super-rich are getting away with not paying their legal fair share of taxes. Biden has not extended his campaign pledge to restore the Trump tax cuts which are running at \$2 trillion over 10 years. So there are a lot of question marks. But again, because he has an easy act to follow after Trump, with all his lies, corruption, criminal violations, offenses against the Constitution, defying congressional subpoenas and on and on, he looks

pretty good. But we can't measure Biden by Trump. We have to measure Biden by civic standards of justice, civic standards of respecting posterity and waging peace instead of waging war.

You alluded to the bombing of Syria on February 25. One thing I found very curious and I wonder if you've noticed this, he ends almost every speech with "God bless our troops."

That's because he wants to appear patriotic to right of center and right-wing voters. Democrats are very sensitive about being accused of being weak on defense. And so he does that. The second thing is his son who passed away from cancer, Beau Biden, served in Iraq. And so that's part of respecting his memory.

You've long been a critic of Big Pharma. How have they performed during this pandemic in terms of developing accessible and affordable vaccines?

These corporate capitalist giant drug companies are desperately seeking socialism. So Pfizer got almost \$2 billion in advance payments for drugs before they were even emergency approved. The government is being charged excessively for each vaccine shot, probably twice as much as that as Moderna and Pfizer should charge. So these are government subsidized development of vaccines against COVID-19 virus and to speed it up, and to allow people to go to clinics and hospitals and drug chains and get it free, they don't really have to pay out of pocket the taxpayer pays. So what's not to like with Joe Biden, from the drug companies?

In addition, years ago, most people don't know this, Congress passed an immunity bill. So for vaccine manufacturers who are racing to develop the vaccine, they knew in the last year or so that they could never be sued, if there is a bad, negligent adverse reaction due to gross negligence or, or carelessness. So you can't sue the drug companies. There's a very tiny nonprofit fund that the legislation years ago set up 75 cents of every vaccine shot that goes into a nonprofit fund for anybody who loses their life or has direct connection adverse effects to the vaccines. It's a fairly high standard proof compared to Europe, by the way.

The pandemic has exposed huge fissures in American society. We've a half a million dead, and we're well on our way to surpassing the 1918 pandemic death toll of 675,000 people. The numbers are astonishing when you think about the U.S. having only 4% of the world's population, and yet it has 20% of the global deaths. What accounts for that?

Trump's virus. First of all, Trump denied that it was going to be much of anything. Then he said, well it'll just be 15 or 20 people. Then he said, it's not much more than a flu, it's going to go away. Miraculously. He refused to wear masks. He encouraged his people not to wear masks. He joked about it. He harassed scientists like Dr. Fauci, even at press conferences. He bullied the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He was not candid with the American people. He said he didn't want to alarm the people, when he was caught lying to them in April saying, Don't worry, there's nothing to worry about when his own internal advisors told them there was a lot to worry about.

So a lot of these deaths can be attributed to Trump. Eugene Jarecki, the documentary filmmaker, developed and put up a death clock in Times Square in New York for several weeks. The numbers were tabulated daily based on scientists who ascribed a certain percentage of the deaths to Trump's negligence and denial, which wouldn't have occurred if you had another kind of president. That was in Times Square. Then he toured the country with it. Surprisingly, *The New York Times* never covered it. But that's one.

The second is too much money into the military industrial complex. We're blowing up places all over the Third World, creating more enemies and boomerangs and insecurity, huge loss of civilian life in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, that's Hillary's war, Libya, under Obama, completely illegal and unconstitutional. And the wreckage continues to this very day, instead of investing in public health and safety in the U.S. Talk about national security. So we weren't ready with federal infrastructure, with stockpiles of personal protective equipment like masks and gloves. We still import all the gloves that are used for the pandemic from abroad, places like Italy. We can't even produce our own gloves, we've ventilator shortages, and very low budgets for the state departments of public health in our 50 states, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

So are we going to learn the lessons? Well, only if the people mobilized. We're back to the people again. I mean, to know and not to do is not to know. That was a very wise saying by a prominent Chinese philosopher in the 14th century Ming Dynasty. We're full of knowledge we don't use. Full of problems we don't deserve. And we've got to do more than talk. Talk is cheap. Excuse me, David, with apologies to you. Talk is cheap without action. And there's simply not enough connection between all the progressive magazines and progressive talk radio. And the citizens listening out there saying, Hey, we're going to start Congress watchdogs. We're going to have a letterhead. Nobody can stop us. We're going to get enough names so we can summon our senators and representatives to our own town meetings with our own agendas face to face after the COVID, virtually, during the COVID. People don't know their own power. They don't know they start out with We

the People, not We the Congress, not We the Corporation. They start out with owning the greatest wealth in the country, the public airwaves, the public lands onshore offshore, trillions of dollars of their taxes that built industry, aerospace, pharmaceutical, nanotech, biotech, Silicon Valley, internet, computer is all built, the basic research and development was done by you, the taxpayer. So what are you getting in return?

So we got to wake up. It doesn't take more than 1% of the people, sometimes a lot less we did it. regulating the auto industry by Congress in the 1960s with less than a thousand people around the country. We had the facts. We knew what we're talking about. We had the public behind us. And we knew where to focus our energy not up in the ether with a march or rally, important as they are, but zeroing in on the key members of Congress who controlled the committees and were persuaded to regulate for the first time the biggest industry in America. So we've got to do that. And if people go to my website, nader.org, they'll not only get my weekly column free, but they'll get information on how to mobilize and how to form these. Congress watch locals. I wrote about it in my book *Breaking Through Power*, a little paperback that we discussed on an earlier interview.

Indeed. Is it your view that the Sanders AOC wing of the Democratic Party, the Green New Deal has essentially been sidelined by the liberals in the Biden administration?

Yes, in terms of using the phrase and in terms of going full blast. Now, obviously, the Biden administration is more pro solar and more wind power than Trump, who wanted nuclear and coal and oil and gas. So part of the Green New Deal will be part of the energy policy under the Biden administration. The former governor of Michigan, Jennifer Granholm is now the new energy secretary, a breath of fresh air again, compared to her predecessor. And so we'll get a greater emphasis. But how fast will it be? We don't have that many decades. We need to move fast in displacing fossil fuel nuclear with solar and energy conservation.

There is the well documented record of indifference, ineptitude, a mountain of mendacities and some would say, I think you might even say, criminality of the 45th president. The question arises, how did 74 million Americans vote for him? And it's probably likely that had there been no pandemic, he would have been reelected.

Excellent point. I was looking just recently at the voting statistics and if 45,000 votes switched in three states to Trump, 45,000 out of 158 million or so votes in Arizona, Wisconsin and Georgia, he would have tied Biden with 270 Electoral College votes. Then it would have gone to the House of Representatives where the vote is by states and Republicans control more states. He would have been

reelected without even going to the House of Representatives if you add one more state and 40 or 50,000 more votes, so you are still under 100,000 more votes switching. If you added one more state, and that state would have been Nevada, he'd have been elected for another four-year term.

This Democratic Party could barely defend the country against a monstrous repetition of four more years of Trump and his Trump warlords, savaging our federal government and selling it to Wall Street, and the highest corporate bidders. That's how close we came. So it behooves the Democrats to start looking at themselves in the mirror and asking why they came so close to disaster. They had all the money in the world. They had more campaign money than the Republicans. And they had \$150 million in two relatively small states, Kentucky, where Mitch McConnell was running for re-election, the majority leader of the Senate. And South Carolina, where that travesty called Lindsey Graham was running for re-election. And the Democrats lost and lost big. One of their candidates spent \$80 million and the other spent \$70 million. And they don't even have a look back to see what went wrong so it doesn't go wrong again in 2022 and 2024.

How did 74 million Americans vote for him? Why are people so gullible?

Here's an explanation as to why 74 million Americans voted for Donald J. Trump. It's multifaceted. We examine that in detail in the book that I wrote with Mark Greene called *Wrecking America*, which is a book for the future, not just the past, because he's coming back. And he may be running in 2024. So this book is unlike any other Trump book. It's to be used for civic action, for voter action, very clear, very documented. And it's a book that is good for discussions. And if the Democrats at the Democratic National Committee had any brains, they'd buy it in volume. So here are some of the reasons. One of them is almost never mentioned. And that is hereditary Republicans. Tens of millions of hereditary Republicans will vote for the Republican nominee, regardless of who that nominee is. Mayor Bloomberg when he decided not to run for president years ago, once said, 15% of Democrats will vote Democratic if Ayn Rand was the nominee. And 15% of the Republicans would vote for Republican if Leon Trotsky was the nominee. Those are his words.

But clearly, probably 30 or 40 million would vote the Republican ticket regardless. How about the rest? The rest are people who are largely single or double, or triple issues only. They have low expectations of what this most powerful person in the world can do for their children for the environment for peace, for tax equity, for rebuilding and repairing America, for consumer protection, for worker rights, living wage and full health insurance. All that they

don't care about. Here's what they care about. And here's what Trump gave them. One, the tax cut. Even though it was a tax cut for the rich, they believed his lies, and thought it was a tax cut for themselves.

Number two, deregulation, even though deregulation harmed them by exposing them to more pollution, less protection for their children from pesticides, for example, all kinds of harm, regardless of whether they were Trump voters or Biden voters. They all bleed the same way, being ripped off by credit card companies, insurance companies, banks, mortgage service firms, all the fine print contracts. They loved his talk about deregulation.

And the third that they bought into was that he was opposed to abortion. Here's this consummate philanderer who for years was for abortion. They said we're holding him to his word; and he did pursue policies against reproductive rights.

The fourth, probably got a few million votes, his belligerent talk overseas, when he would talk about wiping a country off the map and expanding the military budget beyond what the generals themselves asked.

What about Supreme Court justices and the other judges that he's appointed?

Yes, I neglected to mention that. He came through. He appointed three of the most reactionary judges you could conceive of and got them confirmed with Mitch McConnell in the Senate. They now have a six to three majority in the Supreme Court for many years to come. And in that sense, he fulfilled his pledge. So you take all these issues and you can see why 74 million people voted for Trump. And by the way, the population keeps growing. So the fact that he got more votes than Mitt Romney, part of that was due to the expansion of the electorate.

But there is another factor that almost never is talked about. And that is, after the election in November, it was noted by the vote counters that he did better among Hispanics and Blacks, then it was expected for him to do. People couldn't figure that out. There were some theories, but they didn't seem to have evidence. Well, Tom Hartmann came up with the evidence. He's the progressive, syndicated talk radio host. He has been listening to Hispanic radio shows that have been taken over by right-wing Hispanic equivalents of Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh and Michael Savage. And they are beginning to dominate Hispanic radio. So let's not underestimate the transformation of millions of Reagan Democrats years ago with the rise of Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and others, after the Fairness Doctrine was repealed by George Herbert Walker Bush, his Federal Communication commissioners. So we have to look carefully at that. And indeed, to see whether it's beginning to occur in the Black media as well. And we're not talking about large percentages here. But if Trump got 10% more

Hispanic votes than he was expected to get, that's pretty worrisome for the Democratic Party going toward 2022.

There are a lot of things that Democrats should be worried about. You know American political history, particularly electoral history, having participated in it directly yourself. But what is curious and is a mystery to me, and maybe you have some insight into this is why didn't Biden have any coattails. He won the popular vote by more than 7 million. I don't recall anything like that in U.S. political history. This is very ominous for the Democrats, in the 2022 midterms coming up.

As to Biden not having any coattails, that's again, the Democrats don't do the kind of post-election self-assessment that the Republicans do when they lose elections. They're very arrogant. They don't return calls by progressives to the Democratic National Committee. The House Democratic Caucus is hard to reach. They don't seek out advice. They keep losing elections or not winning ones they should win in a landslide to the worst Republican Party in history. They have the same consultants who make huge amounts of money, 15% of all the TV ads, so they discourage the Democratic candidates from having a ground game. They say you got to go on television, you got to go on social media, so they can get the 15% commission. And as a result, the Biden victory was not matched. They lost two or three seats in California. Biden won California in a landslide. Another reason is gerrymandering. Gerrymandering puts up a resistance wall favoring the Republican state government-controlled gerrymandering. And so gerrymandering doesn't keep Biden from piling up votes. It keeps Republicans picking their own voters by these crazily shaped congressional districts in order to maximize their representation in Congress. For example, 60% of the vote, roughly in Pennsylvania was Democrat. And yet the majority of representatives in the House from Pennsylvania are Republicans. That's what gerrymandering does.

That's repeated in many parts of the country.

It is, but there's a bright light in Michigan. There's a 27-year-old young woman, her name is Katie Fahey. She wanted to have a statewide initiative to get rid of gerrymandering in Michigan because she was pretty outraged. Majority Democrat voters, and then, they get a majority Republicans in the House of Representatives. Now listen, she's 27. She has no money, no contacts, huge energy. So she starts petitions, starts getting signatures to get a nonpartisan redistricting commission to take over instead of the politicians in Lansing dominated, gerrymandered style by Republicans. So she starts getting thousands of signatures, tens of thousands. She starts getting hundreds of volunteers.

She starts getting money, people sending in small checks, donations, she starts getting the attention of some big donors. She ends up raising \$15 million. This is two years ago. She won the initiative. And now very shortly, a nonpartisan commission will be redrawing more rationally, more fairly, more democratically small d, the congressional districts in Michigan. Talk about one person making a difference. On my little radio program, *The Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, I askd her, Are you going to advise people in other states? I mean, if you pulled it off in Michigan, starting with no contacts and no money, you got a lot of advice to give to people. I asked her, Are you getting national publicity? No. The national media pretty much ignored her. That's why programs like yours are so important. Can you imagine a win like this? Right in the white heat of national elections and congressional elections? And she doesn't get on national TV.

Talk about the Grand Old Party, the GOP, the Republican Party, the party of Lincoln, as they so often like to say. What is it today? Senators like McConnell, Cruz, Hawley, people in the House like Kevin McCarthy, Lauren Boebert of Colorado and Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia. What's going on with the Republican Party?

It's been taken over by corporatists who have shoved even honest conservatives aside. For example, the Republican Party of Dwight Eisenhower, Senator Robert Taft, and others in the 1950s and 1960s, had certain conservative principles. I didn't agree with a lot of them. But for example, they believed in enforcing the antitrust laws. Look at all the giant mergers that they allowed under George Bush in industry after industry, the drug industry the railroad industry, communications industry and the auto industry. That's one. The second is the corporatists expanded corporate welfare, which the conservatives hate, they call it crony capitalism. So Trump was a big promoter of corporate welfare because he was a big corporate welfare king, with his gambling casino and real estate in New York City. So again, corporatism over conservatism. Conservatives were known to be a little bit isolationist. They didn't like empire. Some of them were hypocrites. But, generally speaking, they were hesitant about expanding empire and not engaging in what are called wars of choice. They're not wars of self-defense. They are wars of aggression, violation of international law and the UN Charter, by the way.

For these corporatists it's empire *uber alles*. I mean, send over the troops, flatter the soldiers, send them over there, blow these guys apart, tear up the bridges and blow up the schools and electricity and drinking water system as they did in Iraq. We should be rebuilding infrastructure here in the United States with the money diverted from empire abroad. So you see they, conservatives were more likely to believe in infrastructure. They're like to repair roads and

build schools. The corporatists could care less. All they want are more tax loopholes, tax breaks, tax havens, no law enforcement against corporate crime, fraud and abuse. And judges that let them off the hook so when they are caught, they can get sweetheart settlements, with their own nominees high in officialdom in Washington. Like they put their own person in Treasury, Federal Reserve, the Energy Department, and other regulatory agencies. That's what the GOP is turned into. And it's very cruel, very vicious to poor families and children. It's beyond belief. It would seriously upset the old Republicans, not to mention Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and Republicans such as Wendell Willkie, who ran for president in 1940 against Franklin Delano Roosevelt on a peace program. I mentioned Mr. Conservative, Senator Robert Taft. He was for public housing. He was against war. Except he didn't like China. He was militant against Communist China. But he didn't like this runaway military budget, and he was a very powerful senator. So the future for the GOP is purely a function of how weak the Democratic Party is. If the Democratic Party was progressive. There wouldn't be much left of the GOP. They'd be lucky to get 30% of the vote. And that would generate a more reform movement among Republican voters.

Every once in a while, the truth is spoken. And we talked about gerrymandering leading to lopsided district boundaries. You remember Paul Weyrich, an influential conservative who coined the phrase "moral majority." He once told a meeting of evangelicals, "I don't want everybody to vote. As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down.

Trump's voter suppression, along with his Republican allies open. overt voter suppression was accompanied by Trump's famous statement when he said if we don't repress the vote, we'll never elect Republicans anymore. And he tried to do that and succeeded in some states and destabilized our postal service with Louis DeJoy as head postmaster. And it's continuing now. There are bills in legislatures in Georgia and elsewhere to suppress the vote for 2022. These legislators are controlled by right-wing, corporatist Trump like Republicans. Trump controls the state Republican committees, he controls the National Republican Committee, he can command far greater crowds than any competing Republican candidate and 2024. He can raise gobs of money. So he's saying to himself, I'm holding my Republican base, a huge number are still with me. They wanted to support me in the assault on Congress. They opposed my impeachment. And what's not the like for 2024?

Talk about the January 6 insurrection. Were you in Washington?

No, I listened to it on NPR. NPR, by the way, up until 3:30 or later, had nothing about the insurrection, which started getting into the national press around two o'clock. I complained to the public radio station in Albany. And I got a reply saying, what else is new? They've done this before. In other words, NPR's Washington bureau was late in a news feed to their network of public radio stations, about one of the biggest news stories in the last decade, an insurrection on Congress. I had it on two o'clock, 230. At 3 they had a one-hour program answering people's computer usage questions. Imagine that. There's no critique of public radio. There's no oversight of public radio. They look good because they're being compared with commercial radio stations. And by the way, I flipped through all the commercial radio stations on my dial on that portentous afternoon of January 6, and they had nothing on as well.

Were you at all surprised at what happened? And also the question about how was it organized? Who paid for it? The Guardian, the venerable British newspaper, said "It was enabled by very deep pockets." Do you have any information on that?

Some of them are just Republican donors. They basically thought it was going to be a big rally on the Mall to put pressure on the Republicans to hold firm in the Senate. No one can determine right now short of further investigation that they were funding an insurrection. But that's what occurred. Now obviously, there were organized people given the weapons they brought and the arrests that have been made so far. They were organized for trouble. They had weaponry, they had all kinds of crude type things that they were wielding, they had bear spray, pepper spray. So they knew what they were doing when they were heading to Congress. What was surprising is with all of the police presence, the soldier presence, the Pentagon, the militarization of Washington for years, that when that crowd started going down the Mall, they had at least 20 to 30 minutes preparation. And anybody who's been around the Congress knows, they could have just slammed the doors closed, and earlier called in the DC police, which finally came in and quieted the situation. Or they could have called the National Guard. It just wasn't done. So it's basically law enforcement people looking over each other's shoulders. That's what happens, well, we can't do it, someone else must be doing it. There aren't that many Capitol Police on any given time more than any other building in America, but they're not equipped for that kind of insurrection.

How concerned are you? How concerned should we be about such groups as the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and Three Percenters who follow QAnon and depend on One America News Network and Newsmax?

We should be very concerned if Trump remains their leader, and provocateur and supporter. Without Trump, they don't get all these tweets day after day. They don't get all the media, they don't get the legitimacy. They don't get the dog whistles. They don't get the partisan law enforcement people to look the other way because they're Trumpsters at heart. So if Trump is retired from politics, and he doesn't have that kind of direct media, the more extreme groups will be exposed without a political base. And if they engage in more violence, then they will be subject to normal prosecution by regular police and the Justice Department. The Justice Department is now obviously going to be much more of their adversary and investigator than it was under William Barr and Donald Trump.

It's interesting to see how the lexicon is changing in discussions about systemic racism rather than one-off random acts of cruelty. White supremacy and privilege is now often talked about as well.

Well, I think we should talk as much about corporatism over the decades. Obviously, there was corporatism with cotton plantation corporations having black slaves. Corporatism creates economic and political conditions, money and corrupt politics, for example. It creates economic and political conditions, expanding racism, expanding lack of equity of pay of women, expanding, so many of the things that we don't connect to the concentration of giant political and economic power in the hands of global corporations, who have turned government against its own people and created a corporate state, which has been underway for many years under both Democrat and Republican administrations. In fact, in 1938, Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent a message to Congress to establish a commission to investigate concentrated corporate power, which they did. It was called the Temporary National Economic Commission, great hearings all over the country. And in his message, FDR said, when government is controlled by "private power," that's "fascism." Otherwise known as corporate control over government, through elections and infiltrations, and bribery and so on, and turning government against its own people.

So that is where I think we should add another ism, and talk about corporatism creating authoritarian government, that doesn't serve the people. And the poor and minorities take the brunt. But everyone takes a brunt. And the enormous contribution to deprivation and poverty that comes from corporate control, and super wealthy control of our income levels, our wealth and the suppression of voters, especially low-income voters, and above all the suppression of worker rights. Millions of workers today are making less in real inflation dollars than they made in 1968. Just imagine. The minimum wage is frozen at \$7.25 an hour,

that's corporatism. The tax code allows corporations to escape paying taxes to support our country, our public services. That's corporatism. They abuse worker safety by generating unsafe workplaces. That's corporatism. They block access to courts by restricting the law of torts for millions of wrongfully injured people. That's corporatism.

They destroy our freedom of contract by making us sign on the dotted line or click on horribly one-sided fine print contracts that take away our rights and prevent us from even going to court. When we're wrongfully injured, we're told we agreed on page 13 to waive our rights for a jury trial, to waive our liability rights, to waive our rights to have an open trial against people who stole from us, billing fraud or injured us with hazardous pharmaceuticals, defective motor vehicles, unsafe Boeing 737 MAX, that's corporatism. We've got to get used to that word. We got to get used to the corporate crime wave. We've got to get used to corporate crime, not white-collar crime. Without belaboring the point, liberals and progressives have learned to use flabby language. They describe criminal activity with words like "concerning." It's "troubling" and "problematic." They refer to gouging merchants, corporate sellers and vendors as "providers." They charge you 10 times more for insulin when you need it as a diabetic. You call that seller a provider? That implies something philanthropic, like giving a gift. They're sellers, they're vendors.

We have settlements that are illegal under international law in the West Bank. And they're called "settlers" like our settlers in the West that displaced native Indian tribes. They were really colonies. When you are moving into territory, illegally under international law, you should be called colonies, not settlers, which has a connotation of legality. So the language is weak. I've been trying to get people to stop using the term climate change. It's climate violence. It's climate crisis. It's climate catastrophe. It's climate disruption by manmade release of greenhouse gases. The person who coined climate change was Frank Luntz. He's the wordsmith for the hardcore Republican Party. In 2002, in Washington, he said, Why are you allowing people to use the term global warming? That alarms people. Use the term climate change. That's a common term. Well, climate change, often means summer, fall, winter, and spring, like in New England. And he got away with it. And what the Democrats did, like cats, they lapped it up like milk, and they're still using the term climate change. Confucius over 2000 years ago, we should listen to him, said, You have to start with the right language if you want to connect with reality.

There is a NASA rover called Perseverance exploring Mars right now. While back here on Earth, things are falling apart, people freezing to death in Texas, homes damaged and destroyed, lives ruined. That's quite a paradox.

It's a tremendous paradox. First, you have to be unbelievably impressed by the precision that they have constructed. This rover called Perseverance not only gets to Mars flawlessly, but it hovers over Mars, getting sensors over how firm the surfaces are here, how less firm it is there, how undulating it is over here, so it can figure out the best place to land. And we can't clean up contaminated drinking water for millions of people in the United States of America. We have the ways to detect lead, to detect levels of arsenic, to detect other heavy metals. It's not that we don't have the equivalent of NASA technology here on Earth. It's that we don't have the democratic power, the people power to use it, to sweep aside these corrupt politicians and these corporate polluters, and say, we're going to use our tax dollars for clean drinking water systems all over America.

What role did deregulation factor in the debacle in Texas?

Huge. What happened was that the Republican corporatist legislature wanted to have their own independent electric grid. The Lone Star State coming alive again. Rugged individualism. So they got the Republican administration and the Democratic administration in Washington, to let them have an independent grid that is not connected to other grids in other states. So if you have a shortage in Texas, you can draw on the grid from other states. Well, you know what happened. Everybody knows what happened. Along comes this Arctic storm, and you get freezing of pipes, you get infrastructure that has not been maintained, because Texas is a low tax state, right, come to Texas, pay low taxes. Like there's no price to pay for that? Look what happened in the last few weeks. And, above all, they didn't repair, they didn't weatherproof the pipelines, as they are in other states. Why have taxes for that, say the tax escapees in Austin and they didn't weatherproof even the wind power blades, like they do say in North Dakota and elsewhere, Kansas. So that's what deregulation does.

Deregulation is a word for let the corporation's do whatever they do for profit, no matter how many people die, get sick, injured or get ripped off in their family budget. And now they're paying four or five, six times for their electric bill. I don't know how long that's going to last for households in Texas.

So the question is, are the Democrats going to get wise here and mobilize the votes and replace the Texas Legislature? Well, they didn't in 2020. They didn't in 2018. They had plenty of material to work with and now they have Mother Nature, who has come to their rescue. Let's see what they do. I talked to Jim Hightower and said this is the greatest opportunity for Democrats you can imagine. While Ted Cruz was acquitting Trump one week, the next week he is quitting Texas for Cancun. And Beto O'Rourke, his challenger in 2018, was passing out bottled water with his

sleeves rolled up helping with relief efforts. So let's see what happens.

Elon Musk is competing with Jeff Bezos as the richest person on Earth. He took the Texas low tax bait and moved the major Tesla factory from the San Francisco Bay area to Texas. But speaking of cars, it's the 55th anniversary of your landmark book Unsafe at Any Speed. More than 4 million lives have been saved because of auto safety measures that you proposed. What about the state of auto safety today?

It was put to sleep under Clinton, Bush, Obama, and of course, Trump. But it looks like now that we're going to get a better administrator under Biden. He's already retained a very progressive general counsel for the auto safety agency under the Department of Transportation. We're not going to have a right-wing corporatist as Secretary of Transportation. Pete Buttigieg is Secretary of Transportation. And there's a lot of long delayed recalls including a very thorough recall of Takata airbags is still unfinished business for millions of cars to have the right fix. And, of course, updating older auto safety standards for truck brakes, for tires, for vehicle handling, rollover side protection, up the standards for airbags and things that are well known. They're practical and ready to go. The automotive suppliers have been begging the auto companies to do it. They're the innovators by the way, the automotive suppliers, corporations selling to the auto industry.

Tiger Woods was recently in a serious single car crash recently. And the police looked at the vehicle after the accident and said that nobody could have survived the crash without multiple airbags going off from the steering wheel area and from the side area. What was exposed to the collision forces were his legs and ankles. Those were his major injuries.

So there you go. All over America people are benefiting from the regulation of the 1960s and 1970s. And especially under Joan Claybrook who headed the National Highway Traffic Administration under Carter, from 1976 to 1980, before Reagan put the agency on the shelf. He was a cruel man with a smile I might add. And so it looks like better days ahead for auto safety protection for the American people, for higher fuel efficiency standards. And its corollary, when you have more fuel efficiency in your car, you have lower pollution emissions.

How about airline safety and Boeing's 737 MAX passenger jet liner? And the Pratt Whitney jet engines made in East Hartford, not too far from where you are in Winsted.

That's right. Pratt and Whitney engines in the 777 seem to be and I say seem to be because there have been three episodes in the last few weeks of having their engines in the Boeing 777 experienced metal fatigue.

It was raining parts from the airplane right near Boulder.

And we should note that Boeing has returned these engines for thermal tests and other ways to determine their status and our grounding the 777 fleet. Maybe they've learned a lesson from their criminal negligence of destabilizing the 737 MAX, which resulted in 346 deaths in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian crash took the life of my grandniece Samya Stumo. But the families have organized incredibly effectively on Congress. They got an aviation safety bill through in December of this last year, which wasn't as strong as they wanted, but it was a lot more than anybody else could get through. They have a scientific and engineering fellowship program to educate the committees in Congress year after year and to provide new technical talent for the FAA. And they improved the knowledge about the 737 MAX.

By the way, we have X-the-MAX buttons with beautiful artwork by Mr. Fish from Philadelphia, which we're offering if you go to nader.org. The plane is starting to go up in the air. Look, it's going to fly and land safely thousands of times. It doesn't get one free crash due to Boeing destabilizing the plane due to the engine mismatch with the fuselage and having an inadequate software fix for the pilots. So they don't get just one more crash even though they may be flying many flights without crashes. And we have people asking for our buttons go to nader.org so they can show them on their lapels on social media, to expand a consumer boycott. So that you should never fly that plane. If you reserve a flight, ask what the equipment is, what's the plane? They'll have to tell you. And as of now, they're not charging you a reservation change fee. Southwest never charged a reservation fee, but Delta, American, United and others do, but not for this. So you can say, Okay, I don't want to fly this plane at two o'clock, I'll take the five o'clock on a non-737 MAX.

In Breaking Through Power, you quote a wonderful poem by Marge Piercy called "The Low Road." Please read it.

It goes on one at a time,
It starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again and they said no,
it starts when you say *We*
and know who you mean, and each day
you mean one more.

Howard Zinn liked that. He said, "Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can quietly become a power no government can suppress, a power that can transform the world." That goes with the point of *Breaking Through Power*. And we think almost every social justice

movement in our country's history, short of wars, like the Revolution, the Civil War was accomplished by less than 1% of active citizens linked together. The civil rights movement, the populist progressive movement, the women's right to vote movement, the anti-slavery movement apart from the Civil War, those never had more than 1%. But they had two other things. They knew what they were talking about. And they had public opinion on their side because they were morally and democratically right. And they focused that energy on the decision makers, which very often is the Congress and state legislatures and city councils. So they marched, they protested, they rallied. But they didn't let that civic energy peter out into the ether. They turned it around and laser beamed that focus on to senators and representatives like the environmental movement in 1970-71-72. It never took more than 1%. And that gives people a lot of optimism because we grow up being educated to be powerless, to exaggerate the overwhelming power of the big boys. And it's just not true.

If people begin with We the people, we're the sovereign the Constitution says, it's a good start. We would realize the extent of our own power and how fast we can turn things around for living wage, full health insurance, cleaner environment, renewable energy, clean elections, waging peace around the world, protecting our posterity, giving people access to justice for their personal grievances. All of this. I hate to say the phrase, but once 1% of people organize in these electoral districts, and they open up little offices with their volunteer donations for full time people, focusing on a very small number of people, 535 members of the Congress, a few hundred people in your state legislature, once they do that, and they realize there's a left-right alliance on so many things where people work, live and raise their family, this red state/blue state doesn't operate for a living wage. This conservative/liberal divide doesn't really operate for having universal health care with free choice of doctor and hospital, not depleting your life savings or being denied life-saving health care. It doesn't work for repairing the local main street and the public services of the country. It doesn't work for cleaning up our water and air pollution. There's no red state/blue state. There's no liberal conservative polarization. These issues have 70 to 80% support in the polls. And once people realize that, then it comes down to a piece of cake.

We got the auto industry regulated in less than a year after *Unsafe at Any Speed* came out in November of 1965. I was at the White House with Lyndon Johnson, he gave me a pen. We regulated the greatest powerful industry in America for the first time for safety standards, for pollution control, and for fuel efficiency. We had less than a thousand people, around the country helping us and you mentioned the number of lives saved, over 4 million, but they're tens of millions of injuries prevented and think of the family

anguish that was prevented. And think of the billions of dollars in waste and health costs that was prevented.

I think if people realize how easy it is, they will be much more likely to get civically engaged, to turn out, to show up, to petition, to lobby, especially if they come forward with a right left coalition, which I discuss in *Breaking Through Power*, published by City Lights Books in San Francisco. By the way, its great founder Lawrence Ferlinghetti just passed away. He was 101 years old. You probably knew him.

Yes, a bit. And just for full disclosure, I also have books published by City Lights.

Ferlinghetti had a poem called "What is Poetry?" and on each line he gave a reason. It's a beautiful poem that he published when he was 80.

Tell me about your book of letters.

It's called *Return to Sender*. It was all my letters to George W. Bush and Barack Obama. And except for one response from Michelle Obama, none of the letters were even acknowledged, never mind responded to. These were very serious letters on policy. I wrote a critical letter to the prime minister of Canada and I got a letter back under his signature saying thank you for the letter, we'll send it to the respective ministry. They automatically acknowledge letters. But members of Congress aren't acknowledging serious letters. They send graduation letters to graduates, things like that. But we're in a serious decline of exchange of correspondence. I used to often say to people, how are you doing? And they would say, Well, I'm catching up on my correspondence. You don't hear that anymore.

You've been at it for so many decades. You're a role model for many and the very definition of indefatigability. What keeps you going?

By being active. There's nothing worse than retirement. You know that you're never going to retire. The only real aging is the erosion of one's ideals, those aren't my words. I can't recall who actually said them. But it keeps you vibrant, keeps your mind active. The other motivation is a fervent desire for justice. I never liked bullies. When I was growing up I couldn't stand a fifth grader beating up a third grader and I'd intervene. And that sort of stayed with me when I had to confront corporate bullies or political bullying. And I think also it's just updating constantly what I and my associates, they used to be called Nader's Raiders, are doing. Nobody does it by themselves. We have thousands of young and not so young people with task forces, doing investigations of government agencies like the Department of Agriculture and the banking committee centers. And we

had groundbreaking books when publishers would rush to print them. And we would update them. So we were pioneers for food safety legislation and better inspection of meat and poultry plants. Well, over time, the lobbyists fight back, and they start watering down the enforcement. And they started with these terrible ads for junk food reaching our kids.

So what did I do? I just put out a book last year called *The Ralph Nader and Family Cook Book: Classic Recipes from Lebanon and Beyond*. It's just right for the COVID-19 period because more people are cooking at home from scratch. And more people are starting gardens. There's more attention to nutrition because it's a good resistance against all kinds of diseases. And unfortunately, I couldn't get on many book signing programs because COVID-19 took care of that. But if people want an autographed copy, if you permit me to plug, they can go to Akashic Books. It's a beautiful book that they published, akashic.com and they can get an autographed copy very good for a Mother's Day gift in early May. These are my mother's recipes. We grew up on them. They're Arabic recipes. It connects nutritious food with delicious food. There's an introduction I wrote on how she raised her children, talking about food at the dinner table, how it's grown, who grows it, why it's important to eat nutritious food to raise healthy youngsters. And above all, she taught us how not to whine about food. She would say why are you turning your tongue against your brain? You just want sugared food.

Well, Ralph, on behalf of many out there in radioland, the Alternative Radio network, I want to thank you for your decades of service and wish you a very happy birthday!

Thank you very much. It's the same birthday as Longfellow. Longfellow had his birthday on the 27th of February. Thank you David, for your persistence, and to your listeners who help support Alternative Radio all over the world. Most people don't know that. You have listeners all over the world.

(Due to time constraints some portions of the interview were not included in the national broadcast. Those portions are included in this transcript.)

Outro music – Oud maestro Marcel Khalife: Taqasim

For information about obtaining CDs, mp3s, or transcripts of this or other programs, please contact:



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