RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 376 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host, David Feldman. Hello there, David.

David Feldman: Hello, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: And the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello.

Steve Skrovan: We've got a great show today. In the first portion of today's program, we'll be joined by climate reporter, Steven Mufson. His article in *the Washington Post* examines some recent corporate commitments to become carbon neutral in the next 20 years. Public pressure about the climate crisis has finally pushed companies like Amazon [.com, Inc.] and FedEx [Corporation] to take some sort of action to reduce emissions. But how will these climate conscious policies mesh with the corporate culture of shareholder supremacy? Well, we'll find out.

Then many of the structures that previous generations could rely on from a community supporting its local businesses to Social Security and pension funds waiting for you to cash out at ~~an~~ old age have largely left millennials and GenZers hanging high and dry. In place of reliable institutions or stable jobs, we've seen the rise of the gig economy and the uncertain present and even more uncertain future that accompany it. Sure, it could be freeing to have choices of what you do and what you become. But as Pete Davis explorers in his book, *Dedicated*, how can we improve our relationships, our communities, our world, if we don't commit to them? He'll be our second guest today. We'll talk to him about how in a society that fetishizes, keeping your options open, making a commitment, can be an act of rebellion.

Then if we have time, Ralph will answer some of your listener questions. And as always, we'll get the latest in corporate crime from our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, can the market save the planet, David?

David Feldman: Steven Mufson is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who reports on the business of climate change for *the Washington Post*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*, Steven Mufson.

Steven Mufson: Glad to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Steve. Your article is titled “Can the market save the planet?” FedEx is the latest brand-name firm to say it’s trying. More than 50 companies have vowed to be carbon neutral by 2040. That is a real tall order. It's 19 years from now. And we've had a lot of corporate pledges in all kinds of areas and promises. Banks pledged to put billions of dollars in low-income areas, for example. And there's rarely a follow-up. There's rarely a way to measure the progress between the present day and when they expect their promise to be fulfilled. What did FedEx tell you about that?

Steven Mufson: Well, I think FedEx, there are some things you can see by numbers in FedEx. They are talking about electrifying their fleet of more than 180,000 vehicles. So that's something you'd be able to see relatively clearly. It's not as obscure as for some companies. Also, an important part of this whole exercise would have to be a much greater degree of transparency than companies have now. The [Joe] Biden administration, I think, is going to try to get the Securities Exchange Commission [SEC] to require that companies reveal more about their greenhouse gas emissions. In FedEx's case, they're already doing that. So you can look back and say, okay, FedEx made a commitment about its air fleet a few years ago, but in fact, they didn't get there and you can see that with FedEx's own statistics on emissions. So of course, ideally you'd like people to be transparent and to actually succeed in hitting those targets. But I think that gives you a little bit of a sense of where people are trying to go or talking about going.

Ralph Nader: Well, there are other groups other than the SEC that can push these companies for periodic updates and reporting. For example, shareholder responsibility groups could do that. Environmental groups could supervise, demand disclosure that way. You mentioned a lot of other companies that have made similar promises. IBM [International Business Machines Corporation], Microsoft [Corporation], Unilever, Johnson Controls [International plc], Coca-Cola, Uber [Technologies, Inc.], Best Buy [Co., Inc.]. You have mentioned one company, Acciona[, S.A.], a Spanish energy and infrastructure company that already went carbon neutral in 2016.

And for those of you in the audience who don't know what carbon neutrality is, I'm quoting from Steve's article. It means "companies must rely entirely on renewable fuels or offset the burning of fossil fuels with the capture and storage of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere." And of course, renewable fuel displacement is understandable. What is puzzling to a lot of people is this carbon recapture. Can you talk about that?

Steven Mufson: Sure. It's a technique for taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and then storing it and you can do this in a lot of different ways. And people have a lot of different feelings about this whole process. Oil companies are very interested in this because they think that will enable them to continue to sell oil and gas and that they'd somehow be able to recapture it from the air or from other kind of flue streams. So some of the bigger chunks of money are going at this technique. And you can use the carbon dioxide if you're an oil company to enhance recovery from wells and to get more oil out of them. So obviously, this isn't really a kind of long-term solution. And I think a lot of other companies are looking at it in different contexts, but that's what's happening there now. And it's being assisted; all these programs are being helped in the United States by a piece of legislation which gives tax credits for companies that can successfully capture and store carbon dioxide from the air.

Ralph Nader: Well, carbon capture as you know has been an elusive phenomenon. I mean, there are a lot of false starts. I remember talking with a Princeton [University] professor ten years ago and he was telling me he's working on carbon capture with government grants. And that was ten years ago. Now Fred[erick W.] Smith, the head of FedEx, has just given his alma mater, Yale [University], $100 million for a new Yale Center for Natural Carbon Capture. Does this involve offsets? In other words, could FedEx say, well, we're gonna reduce our net carbon contribution

to the atmosphere by expanding of forest and planting a lot of trees? Or is there a more technological fix here envisioned in this grant to Yale?

Steven Mufson: I think that the grant to Yale is multifaceted. Most of it's about natural storage, which means basically more trees or better tilling techniques and that sort of things. And FedEx could use that, I suppose, to offset things like jet fuel. It's a little hard; there are certain economic activities that are harder to zero out the greenhouse gases for. So jet fuel is one of those. So I think that's one reason why FedEx is interested. Doing this through offsets is always a bit tricky because measuring them is tricky, preventing a certain amount of corruption is tricky. So I think among in the environmental movement, there's a lot of emphasis on companies zeroing out their own emissions and not using offsets to do otherwise.

Ralph Nader: Which leads to my next question. This is the most obvious one. When people say, who are supporting building new nuclear plants or doing investment in carbon storage, the obvious question is why don't you take that kind of money and put it in energy efficiency and solar energy? In other words, as long as you're going to spend all this money on carbon storage, which is a long delayed process and a lot of unknowns, but we know how to make the use of energy efficient. And as they say, a megawatt of electricity saved is a megawatt of electricity you don't have to produce. What about that approach?

Steven Mufson: I think it's hard to argue with that. I mean, energy conservation is always better. No question about that. And I think that carbon capture faces a lot of obstacles. One of them is that it's an energy intensive process. In order to suck the carbon dioxide out of the air requires heating up certain parts of the process. So, it's not a great solution, and energy efficiency would be much better.

Ralph Nader: The other aspect of all this is there are some mid-size companies, Steve, that have already done this. I mean, Interface Corporation in Atlanta, which is the largest carpet tile manufacturer in the country has factories all over the world. And they started over 20 years ago, the company drive to be carbon neutral. And they announced in 2019, they've reached the goal. And now they're going for carbon negative by 2040. In other words, that means that they give back to the earth more than they take out of it. So they're already carbon neutral and it was an excruciating process.

The great CEO Ray Anderson, who passed away in 2011, he was like an engineering efficiency professor. Every little item, everything – the supplies, the transportation, the factories – had to be redesigned. Why is it that companies like Interface and Patagonia in California, which is far more advanced than most other companies in terms of moving toward carbon neutrality, why don't they get more coverage? Because they meet the bottom line. They make profit. They are successful companies. And you would think those would be more publicized yardsticks for some of the larger companies you mentioned in your article.

Steven Mufson: Well, it's not the only article we've run on this subject. I did another story recently about the need to mobilize and channel private capital into projects that would reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases. Of course the government should be doing that, but it often lacks the will and it often lacks the means to do as much as the private sector can, if the private

sector can be mobilized. So, we see some of that in the month like this April, which is when most companies have their big annual meetings. So there's a lot of pressure, or a lot compared to the past anyway, on companies to do something. But my feeling about – this is the way my feeling is about a lot of aspects of climate change, and that is that there are a ton of really interesting things happening from carpet makers to battery makers. But what's missing is speed and scale. These things aren't happening fast enough and they aren't happening on a large enough dimension to prevent us from hitting catastrophic climate change in another ten or 20 or 30 years. So I'm not disagreeing with you. I think that there are a ton of interesting things happening and the trick is to try to get more of them going.

Ralph Nader: Extending what you just said, there are two other areas worthy of exploration. One is to have public yardsticks year by year, just the way you have economic yardsticks, GDP yardsticks. And the government is really the institution that should be doing more of that because that really keeps the dynamic moving. And the other thing is sort of its twin, which is – and I'll ask the question in terms of FedEx, when FedEx announced this, did United Parcel make any reaction? Did the Post Office make any reaction? They have hundreds of thousands of trucks too.

Steven Mufson: Yeah. And I've spoken to someone who is trying to get the [US] Postal Service trucks changed over. So I think there's a lot of hope at the Postal Service because the president has said that the entire government fleet will be switched to electric vehicles. And I think that the Postal Service is hoping either to be included in that or to be added to that.

Ralph Nader: And how about United Parcel which is a big competitor with FedEx?

Steven Mufson: Yeah, I don't know what United Parcel's position is.

Ralph Nader: Well, many years ago, actually 1964, I went down to the General Service Administration [GSA]. We were trying to get auto safety legislation in Congress. I said, you know, you buy 40,000 cars a year for federal employees. Why don't you require seatbelts? Why don't you require some of these safety standards? You're a big buyer. [The] customer is always right. And they actually did it! And it helped get the bill through Congress. Is the GSA rising to the occasion? You alluded to what the Biden administration is talking about. Now they have far more than 40,000 vehicles purchased every year. Are they making any noises?

Steven Mufson: Well, this is one of those areas where I believe the president has executive authority and it's only been 100 days for Biden, but he seems determined to do something about that. So again, the question will be, how fast can we get those vehicles made and onto the streets? Because it does require some changes in the auto lines and stuff like that. So I'm just not sure how fast they can go, but I think the president seems to have a tremendous sense of urgency. So we'll see how that translates.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. And the thing is to strike at the continuum, where prevention, technological prevention-- more efficient vehicles, more efficient heating, more efficient lighting--rather than at the other end of the energy cycle, trying to pick up the pieces by carbon recapture. I think in your article, you quoted a former chief economist for the Council of Economic Advisers under [Barack] Obama. His name is Michael Greenstone. He teaches at the University of Chicago. And

he said, “You see some real live investment in carbon removal. But we’re in the top of the first inning on carbon removal, so we don’t know what that’s going to deliver yet.” That's not very reassuring compared to the acceleration of energy conservation and new technology that can reduce the amount of energy used per unit of work. Wouldn't you say?

Steven Mufson: Yeah. Well, I'm not in the business of reassurance. [chuckle] So I think that one of the big questions on the climate change issue is whether we already have the technology to solve this problem, or whether we are still waiting for some sort of breakthrough technology. If you’re Bill Gates, you're betting on the breakthrough and he has devoted a lot of money to that area. Other people will say, look, we've got this technology. Now it's just a question of applying it on a massive scale. And I think that's one of the struggles going on below the surface in the environment and climate action front.

Ralph Nader: One variable, Steve. We're talking with Steve Mufson of *the Washington Post*. Whenever you see his byline, you know it's an important article; it's not fluff. But one variable that pops up here, Steve, is leadership. Interface basically did what it did because of the leadership of Ray Anderson, the CEO. Patagonia is doing what it's doing because of Yvon Chouinard, the CEO and founder of that company. And when companies aren't doing it, you just don't see that kind of leadership.

Even in the article that you wrote, if you look at the leadership of the Post Office and United Parcel and FedEx, the one that pops up most frequently in terms of assertiveness is Fred Smith, who did his Yale senior thesis on logistics of air transporting products and turned it into FedEx. Quite a story, as you know. What do you think of the leadership theory here in terms of inciting competition? In other words, does a leader, like say Fred Smith affect the leaders of the other companies that are in the same field to move. Have you ever found out anything about that?

Steven Mufson: Well, I think that's true that leadership does make a huge difference. We have done surveys on people's feelings about climate change, for example. And even among Republicans, I think about 60% of them believe that climate change is real and that people are contributing to it. So that number has been inching upward over the last decade or so, but inching is the operative word. I think that Fred Smith is one of a growing number of chief executives who understands this issue. But again, speed is essential. And there are a lot of CEOs out there who I still think either think that this isn't going to affect them or that it's inevitable and that it's something that they don't need to pay attention to. So I think there are still a lot of CEOs out there like that and - fewer and fewer every week, I feel - but it's a question of getting to where we need to go by the time we need to get there.

Ralph Nader: Well, your point on speed and scale obviously is well taken. The thing that scares executives of corporations is unanticipated costs. And with tornadoes and floods and wildfires and droughts and hurricanes, they're getting unanticipated costs, which brings in a key factor--the insurance industry. The insurance industry is pretty upset about this from Swiss Re [Swiss Reinsurance Company Ltd], the reinsurer. Tell us about that as a goad to these companies.

Steven Mufson: Absolutely. I mean, the insurance business was one of the first ones hit because climate change contributes to flooding, more frequent flooding, hurricanes and wildfires. So the

insurance industry is making it much tougher for you to get insurance for your beach house, say in a place that's vulnerable. I want to also mention that utility companies are also in the forefront here. That's partly because a lot of states set regulatory standards for the utilities to switch to green the grid, basically, to have more renewable energy. And the utilities didn't need too much persuading because they get a return on their investment, no matter what they're investing in. So they're happy to invest in a wind and solar plant just as much as a coal plant. So I think in those two areas, we're seeing a lot of movements and a lot of change though when you get to the oil and gas sector, it's a little tougher going.

Ralph Nader: Well, this is where the President of the United States comes in as a catalyst, as a mover and shaker and synthesizer, pushing all these pieces together that we've been discussing. Anyway, we're out of time. Thank you for giving us the time. We've been talking with Steve Mufson of *the Washington Post*. Readers and listeners may want to follow his articles because they're really right on top of the issues of the day. Thank you, Steve.

Steven Mufson: Thanks, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Steven Mufson. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. When we come back, we're going to talk about the counterculture of commitment. If you want to find out what that means, stay tuned. Right now, let's take a short break and check in with our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, May 21, 2021, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

An additive used in Skittles, Starburst, Hostess [Brands] Donettes and thousands of other foods should no longer be considered safe for human consumption. That's according to a new study from the European Union's top food safety agency. A scientific panel created by the European Food Safety Authority found that titanium dioxide can no longer be considered as safe when used as a food additive. The panel, citing concerns about titanium dioxide's genotoxicity, or its ability to damage DNA, based its conclusion on a review of hundreds of scientific studies. The Environmental Working Group in the United States called on the Food and Drug Administration to quickly consider whether to ban titanium dioxide from use in food. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. A few nights ago, my wife and I were scrolling through Netflix[, Inc.] trying to find a movie to watch after dinner. And two days later we still haven't picked one. We live in a world with so many choices where it seems like we can surf and browse forever without ever settling on anything. Our next guest is going to make the case for commitment. David?

David Feldman: Pete Davis is a civic advocate, co-founder of the Democracy Policy Network and the author of *Dedicated: The Case for Commitment in an Age of Infinite Browsing*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*, Pete Davis.

Pete Davis: So glad to be here. Thank you so much.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, Pete. I think I should tell our listeners that you worked with us for a couple of years before you went to Harvard Law School. And you also put out a report from Harvard Law School on its bicentennial and talking about the law school's failure to encourage its graduates to go into public interest law and leaving the option being corporate law. And I helped you on that project. So listeners, you should know that I am very sympathetic to what Pete Davis has been doing as a public advocate. And now we have his first book, which is not easy to summarize. When I'm looking at the contents, I notice that he analyzes habits that are very prevalent among the young generation, but not only young generation, infinite browsing mode, he calls it, and then he moves into the counterculture of commitment. And then he talks about people who are committed as citizens, patriots, builders, stewards, artisans, companions.

Pete, I thought the chapter on long-haul heroism was a real grabber and it was the scene at the Boston Music Hall on New Year's 1863 at midnight when the Emancipation Proclamation would take effect and the poets, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Ralph Waldo Emerson, helped organize the event. The famous author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe, was in the gallery. William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist newspaperman, was also in the gallery. And you describe it in such a compelling way; it almost makes you feel like you are there. As an example of long-term commitment, years and years, decades and decades, abolitionists advocacy and all of the suffering and pain that went along with it culminated in this Emancipation Proclamation, which, as you know, did have its limitations. So let's ask you, as the author, to tell us what this book is all about.

Pete Davis: Yeah. I'm so glad you talked about – that is my favorite part of the book as well, Ralph, because I wanted to show people – and this is kind of the political angle on the book. I wanted to show people that politics is neither fast nor impossible. There's a lot of people that think you do one big event, you join the big march in the streets, or you do this one electoral campaign, and then you find out that you didn't change much, you didn't reach the promised land. And then you find yourself in the second group of people, which is you become a cynic who believes that nothing ever changes. And what I wanted to show with this book is that things do change, but they require long-haul commitment. Sometimes they take 10 years, 20 years, 30 years to fight for. And the reason that I wanted to tell that story of the abolitionists was I wanted to show a party and a celebration at the culmination of a long haul. But then I wanted to flash back that, you know, Longfellow [Henry Wadsworth] started his fight 20 years before when he published *Poems on Slavery*. Emerson [Ralph Waldo] started his fight two decades before when he started *The Atlantic*. William Lloyd Garrison started *the Liberator* newspaper 32 years before. Frederick Douglass, 24 years before that escaped from slavery.

Ralph Nader: And Frederick Douglass was there and described the scene in the Boston Music Hall as a "wild and grand scene. People threw hats and bonnets in the air. Old nemesis from intra-movement divides, hugged, and Douglas's, his friend began singing his favorite hymn and the crowd joined him."

Pete Davis: Yes. And often when we talk about politics, it's always doom and gloom, but I want to say that with the right commitment, with the right strategy, with everyone bringing their skills

to bear on something, similar long-hoped-for triumphs await us too. It's very possible for a young listener listening to this that if you started now, that in a few decades, we might see the last fossil fuel extracted from the ground. We might see the day when they announce that a majority of firms are cooperative firms instead of corporate firms. We might see the day where the Congress is from all different walks of life and not disproportionately one group than another and fighting for it. We might see the day where Medicare for All is passed. And it's going to be because of long hauls that are emerging now or emerged a while back and you joined up with and campaigned for. And so the message is a call to action to become a long-haul hero yourself. It's a very actionable book. And it's a call to arms against the often stated argument that a lot of young people get from their elders, which is that the highest thing you can do is keep your options open, that don't commit to anything don't commit to a cause or a place or a person or an institution because that'll tie you down. But when you look at the people who earn the most respect, for me, it was you, Ralph. When I looked at heroes like you and others in your movement, like Lori Wallach and others, it's the ones that decided to commit to a particular cause. It's the ones who decided to commit to a particular place. Not the ones who said, "I'm going to go get a job or flitter around. That will allow me to keep my options open in the most maximal way." And it's not just about impact, it's also about joy that there's a lot of happiness that comes when you commit to things as well.

Ralph Nader: Well, you make that very clear, but you do alert the readers to this browsing culture in some detail and how damaging it can be, and short-lived in terms of its gratification. Is commitment the only way out? Why don't you describe – you really are very graphic in the way you describe people who are stuck in this mode of browsing around and keeping all options open, and we would call it in the old days, drifting.

Pete Davis: Drift versus mastery [*Drift and Mastery*], I guess, is the famous Walter Lippman book. There are pleasures. I start the book with giving browsing its due and I think this is why people browse. One is the pleasure of flexibility. Everything becomes a lot more light, a lot less serious, a lot more – as in the words of young people – chill. Second is it leads to a lot of novelty. You get to experience all these exciting new things. You get to flitter through all these interesting videos or interesting ideas or opinions. And on a deepest level, sometimes browsing allows you to throw off the chains of inauthenticity and find your authentic self.

But all of those pleasures are haunted by pains. With flexibility, jumping from thing to thing, comes choice paralysis. You suddenly think it's scary to pick anything because you've seen all the other hundred things you could do, all the other causes you could work on, all the other places you could be, institutions you could be with. Also that novelty comes with shallowness. You've flitted through a hundred videos, but you haven't learned anything. You read a thousand tweets, but you might as well have spent that time reading a book because you're going to remember that book years later, and you're not going to remember any of those tweets.

And authenticity is very important, finding your authentic self, but if your authenticity is about never subsuming yourself in something bigger than yourself, never dealing with the messiness of working with other people or being part of a larger thing that might not fit you perfectly, you might end up with what the philosopher Émile Durkheim and sociologist called anomie--the feeling of total spiritual isolation, that there's no meaning in your life at all because there's no –

it's not just the pain of losing a game; it's the pain of having no scoreboard. It's not just the pain of being lost on the journey, but there being no map or journey at all. And if we can overcome the fears of regret, of missing out, of associating with other people, the messiness of associating with other people, we can find the freedom of purpose that comes with commitment, the joy of community that comes with the commitment, the power of depth and expertise and experiential knowledge that comes with commitment. And this book is trying to nudge people past those fears, seeing those pains that come with the pleasures of browsing, so that they can get those joys and importantly impact that comes with committing to something for the long haul.

Ralph Nader: Well, the anomie point, there's nothing new about that. It's elaborating and virtual reality in the internet, but it goes back hundreds and hundreds of years, especially in novels; Russian novels and other novels point out the young generation feeling meaningless. And I thought that knowing a little bit more history, Pete, might reduce that kind of sense of meaninglessness, that sense that nothing can ever change, that the big boys will always run the show. Look at the tobacco history. When I went to Washington, the tobacco industry was considered invincible, that the members from Virginia and North Carolina and other tobacco areas just had a lock. And the tobacco companies could induce youngsters outside elementary schools to pick up smoking by giving them free tobacco. They dominated the advertising airwaves. And a few people started saying, "No, this is the biggest killer coming out of the corporations--430,000 lives a year; we're gonna change it."

Now, those very young people that you're addressing in this book, *Dedicated: The Case for Commitment in an Age of Infinite Browsing*, would be absolutely stunned if they walked on an airplane or walked into a hospital waiting room or even went to their workplace and people were smoking cigarettes, because they're not allowed to anymore. I remember at Princeton, I'd walk into my lecture hall and there was some times I could hardly see the students; there was so much smoking going on. If the very people who are engaged now in infinite browsing would realize how many of the things they take for granted that they like in this country started out with a few people who said, "No, we're not going to have a flitting short attention span life. We're going to have a life of commitment and we're gonna choose the course of justice that our temperament and our priorities lead us to." So I think a little more history might even strengthen your argument.

Pete Davis: I interviewed 50 long-haul heroes from all different types of things we like to talk about like causes, but also people who committed to reviving communities or being honorable in their profession, or even just mentors and teachers and pastors. And almost all of them mentioned that exact point, Ralph, which was they studied history. And that they studied their own family history, if it was like an interpersonal thing. They studied their local history to gain strength or they studied the history of causes.

I interviewed – one of my favorite interviews was with Evan Wolfson, who is the leading lawyer that helped secure the recognition of gay marriage in America. It was a 32-year battle. He wrote about a constitutional right to same-sex marriage in his 3L [third year in law school] law school paper. And he walked that fight, along with many others, from the lowest form of legal writing, a 3L paper, to the highest form of legal writing, a [US] Supreme Court decision, 32 years later. And I asked him, "How did you stick with it? It was only fun in the last five years when you

started really getting victories. How did you deal with your time in the desert when everyone was against you?" And he said, literally said that, "I studied history." [Abraham] Lincoln, [Mahatma] Gandhi, [Rev. Dr. Martin Luther] King[, Jr.], the women's suffrage movement, even ancient history, and reading about those past struggles gave him great constellation and helped him get through it. And I'm very inspired by people have asked me what are some action items that leaders can take to lead to a more dedicated people. And one of the examples that seems like a soft thing, but I am very inspired by the Dig Where You Stand the movement, which was this movement of popular history that came out of Sweden, which started in the union fight to have you research the history of your company, but then has expanded to all types of local history and saying, we need to make local history and institutional history and causes history and professional history alive in young people today, so they know that things take time, but they do change. And that everything we cherish today, like you said, Ralph, has come from a long-haul fight from the past.

Ralph Nader: And it seems quite obvious that if people don't know history, they don't have a mooring in their culture. I ask people, how much would you know about yourself if all you knew was the last six months of your place on earth here? It's so obvious. Now you went to Harvard Law School as I did, and you were considered an agitator, a respected agitator. You gave-one of the commencement speeches on the counterculture of commitment and this book is an outgrowth of that. Can you describe to our listeners what life was like at Harvard Law School? Do the students reflect your description of the age of infinite browsing or were they singular minded, and knew exactly where they wanted to go to practice?

Pete Davis: Well, it was funny. When you talk to people who end up going into corporate interest law instead of public interest law, and this was the big fight at the law school because 80% of people come in saying – 70% to 80% come in saying in surveys, I am going to law school because I want to fight for justice or fight for the public interest or support my community. And 70% to 80% end up leaving, you know, fighting for the most powerful and wealthy forces in the country! And usually not in their home community, but in New York or DC or LA [Los Angeles] or the like. And when you ask them, you think you would assume it's all about the money. But part of it's about the money, part of it's about debt, part of it's about where you're being encouraged through status. But a huge part of it was everyone said to themselves, well, I want to keep my options open for future jobs. And I still care about justice, but this is a good start that will allow me to go into anything else later. And what you find out in the survey data about where they go into, they don't end up usually going into public interest or justice fights later, that keeping your options open is a mode of life that kind of becomes inertia and you eventually never commit if you lean too far into that. And I see exactly what we're talking about there in the culture of the law school, where the law school exists outside of time. You don't have a sense of history of the law and all the fights that went into the fight for equal justice under law or the rule of law. You don't have a sense of the future, which is not just – you're talking about history, that's memory. The future is prophecy, which sounds like this grand word, but it's really about vision for the future. What are alternative ways the law could be structured? What are fights that we're fighting for to change things? You never talk about the future. And you don't even talk really about the present. You'd bring this up all the time, Ralph. You don't learn about the empirical reality of what's actually going on--the total evils that are perpetuated, the total abdication of the mission of the rule of law and equal justice under law, the total corruption of

the institutions like the prison system, the criminal legal system, the civil legal system. And thus you're kind of floating in the air, never given the elements that attach you to something that makes you become an honorable professional.

Ralph Nader: An amazing thing about it is that the law professors are the best and the brightest. If you didn't believe that, all you had to do is ask them. And they had a curriculum that asked the question how rather than asked the question why. How does this monstrous Internal Revenue Code work so you can negotiate it on your behalf of your lucrative client, instead of why did this monster come about and be so inequitable and so needlessly complex?

Pete Davis: Amen to that. They never ask these questions of mission. I talk about the difference between a professional school and a careerism school. If you think about careerism, that is all about giving you as an individual tools for your own personal advancements – going inner and inner, higher status and higher status, bigger and bigger, richer and richer. A profession is a community of competence. And professionalism is not stuffiness, wearing a suit, talking in proper terms. That's like the surface level of professionalism. The deeper sense of professionalism is the idea that a profession has a mission and that mission should be alive in the daily life of the profession – at the conferences, at the ways people in the profession talk to you, and at the most vibrant in the professional schools. And yet the mission of the law, for example, the mission of the law, I believe, is protect the rule of law and fight for equal justice under law – it's kind of this dual mission – was never present in the schools. We talked a lot about rules and ethics, cold neutral rules and ethics. Don't steal money from your clients. Don't lie. But we never talked about the deeper moral and mission questions of what are we even doing here? What is the purpose of a criminal legal system? What is the purpose of a civil legal system? Are we living up to this mission as a profession right now? Is the school living up to its mission as being a watchdog of the profession? And you need the professors and the deans of these professional schools to make that mission alive in the school. And in my experience, they were abdicating it while I was there.

Ralph Nader: And there's more than just the commercialization of law schools, which relate to how much fair play there’s going to be in everyday people's lives. But they create myths. People go through law school and they think that the law of contract means a voluntary meeting of the minds between say the consumer and the vendor, or if you're wrongfully injured, you can get a trial by jury in a court of law. And they're not taught how these two private pillars of law in America are being destroyed by corporate power. Look at all the fine-print contracts. Are you really voluntarily entering into an agreement with Facebook[, Inc.] or your credit card company [chuckle] or your large landlord? No, it's all preprinted standard form; take it or leave it. And so they're actually producing myths, which is the worst kind of education. Because what happens is that these students have no sense of inequitable systems of power and they gravitate to the most powerful law firms without thinking through how they want to spend 50, 60 years of their professional lives.

Pete Davis: Amen. And this book, it has some of that message of the desert that we're in culturally in many of the professions. But it's also a very hopeful book about how we can turn it around and the almost miraculous experiences you will discover if you just commit to something for a bit. So I tell the story of these 20, 30-year walks, but even reaching year five of a

commitment, amazing things happen. In our example of the law, Lina Khan, she's my age. She's in her very early 30s. In 2016, when she was, I think, 26 years old, she started working on an essay called "Amazon's Antitrust Paradox", which was the first major law review article on the case for breaking up Amazon and doing antitrust enforcement against it back when Amazon wasn't the big boogeyman yet that it is in the headlines today. She wrote that, did all this deep dive, long-haul work of writing this very coherent, popular law review article. And then she agitated around the article after she published it. And five years later, she's been invited into the [presidential] administration to help effect the administration's antitrust policy. And Amazon, she's one of kind of enemy number one because they're so scared of how effective and impactful she's going to be.

Ralph Nader: All right. Let's get to your view of dedication. On page 49, your book, you define it. You say, "Dedication requires a cultivation what could be called the "dedicatory virtues." "It requires imagination, that is the ability to envision what isn't there just yet. It requires synthesis, that is the ability to make connections. It requires focus, the ability to concentrate, and doggedness, so you can return to the same task again and again, even if there's nothing new about it are key. So is passion, the enthusiasm required sustain engagement. And there can be no passion without reverence, the ability to be awed by something. Above all, dedication requires commitment, the ability to stick with something, despite there being other available options."

I might add, Pete, those are the traits that make for a great sports player and a great artist. They spend years and years honing their skills with passion and all the virtues of dedication. Now with that background, tell us about your chapter "Open Options Morality: Indifference versus Honor".

Pete Davis: Yeah. So, in the beginning of the book, I talk about a lot of this in terms of individual psychology. What are the personal fears? The fear of regret or missing out or associating with other people that come with commitment. The pleasures and pains of browsing versus dedication on an individual level. But in the end, I talk about three ways on a bigger level – cultural, political, institutional – that affect our ability to make commitments. And so one of those, I talk about is economics, you know, how our economy forces you out of jobs and throws you in every which way, or our education system, we've talked a bit about. But morality is one of those three I talk about, which is the dominant morality of our time is you don't bother me, I don't bother you; we're all just doing our own individual ends. You shouldn't judge other people and other people shouldn't judge you. And the highest level you can be in this morality is you follow the ground rules and you don't bother other people. And so that sounds good to many young people our age and it sounds good to me too on some levels. We don't want people to be nosy. We don't want people to be hypocritically casting stones. We definitely don't want the old judgments of patriarchy and white supremacy and homophobia that oppressed and belittled so many people. But a world where you have no morality, no judgment, is a world where people get away with things. And I try to point to examples of good forms of judgment, the forms of – Ralph, when you say this corporation is acting immorally, or this institution is not living up to its mission; it's become corrupted, or this warmonger is trying to whitewash his legacy and reenter polite society without anyone calling them out, and saying, you just spent 20 years doing horrible things; why are we welcoming you to the parties still without any atonement?

Judgment is what keeps communities going. And that's when I talk about moving from a culture of indifference to a culture of honor. I talked about it in terms of negative terms, but a culture of honor is also a culture where we celebrate people who live up to a mission. We say we celebrate people who have virtues like honesty and fidelity and courage and awareness. When someone does a heroic act, we give them awards. And I know that's something you're very big on, Ralph, that when you give annual awards, it's not really about celebrating that one person. It's mostly about telling everyone else in the audience these qualities are worth celebrating. An honor culture is a world where missions are talked about and people who are going wayward on them are called out.

And the two types of figures I talk about who really promote a culture of honor are one is mentors, elders who are more experienced than something telling young people, here are not just tools for you to do whatever you want, but here are some worthy attachments, here are some worthy commitments. And the other one I talk about is prophets, which we talk about usually in this grand biblical predicting the future sense. But a prophet in the deepest sense of the word is someone who calls a community back to its mission, who is the conscience of a community. And in a world without prophets, institutions get corrupted, people get away with things that are wrong, harms and injustices are perpetuated. And in a world with many more prophets, people being the stick in the mud and saying, this is wrong, this is not right, we should judge this, are the people that kind of bring us back to what the type of community that we want.

Ralph Nader: Now, one point you made that very few authors make is on page 237, future readers of this book. And it calls the culture of commitment, "The Counterculture of Commitment is also the most capable of solving our collective challenges. One of the biggest barriers to tackling the great challenges of our time is the lack of people seriously dedicated to tackling them. We have too many one-off dragon slayers and not enough long-haul heroes ready to spend 10, 20 or 30 years reviving places, institutions, communities, crafts and causes. There aren't enough people, who are not just willing to die for something, but are willing to live for it."

And if they don't have a lucky choice of parents, the way you did, Pete, with your mother Mary Clare Gubbins, and Shelton Davis, your father, who was a noted anthropologist and a great champion of indigenous tribal rights, such as in the Amazon, where are these people going to come from? Are they going to come from our elementary schools, our high schools, our colleges, our extracurricular activities? What are the cultural conditions to take people at an early age, when they're gonna decide what vector in life they're gonna pursue? Where is this yeast going to come from?

Pete Davis: This is a part I learned from you, Ralph, which is that people think there's all these clever, silver-bullet activities of how to solve all the problems. But really, in the end, we need more citizens, basically, more agents. We need to get to that 1% of people in different institutions or cities or the country as a whole, that are the ones that critical mass of people that can move something. So how do we do it? I talk about… this book is kind of aimed at you as an individual, mostly, and trying to turn you on, the reader on, to be a long-haul hero. But I do talk a bit about some of the cultural conditions of this. So one is we need – in our education system, I talk about four different places where you can get attached to things. One is the idea of craft, which is bringing back the teachers that are not just marching you through a syllabus of units that

are all disconnected from each other, but the types of teachers that actually deepen your relationship with an expertise. And there's the classic examples of craft, like wood shopper, your soccer coach. But I feel like when I worked at your office, Ralph, it was a form of craft as well. It was here's how to sharpen the tools of civic action. And we need more teachers and mentors that are willing to engage people in craft. That's where you learn a lot of lessons.

The second is teams. That's a place where you learn about how to work with other people, where you learn some of these virtues beyond just kind of technical education. You also learn about loyalty and fidelity and doggedness. A third is elders--having more older people reaching out to younger people and saying let's deepen relationships so that we're not only just learning from the blind leading the blind of peers, just leading each other. We need elders being willing to build relationships with younger people to show them about this history, to show them about what it's like at the other end of a long haul. What are the lessons you've learned? And the most important cultural one that I think everyone could do is to reignite a culture of heroes and heroism. I think there is a push against this today because people don't want to believe in the great man and woman theory of history--the idea that one person can change the world. And it's fair; we have to learn about the structural factors and economic factors that lead to changing the world. But as an individual, as a human who is just living in our lives, it doesn't guide us to hear that, oh, this revolution only happened because of the economy, or this revolution only happened because of cultural conditions. You need to hear who were the people that fought for this. You need to read biographies of that. You need to have award ceremonies and halls of fame. You need to have more portraits lining the hallways and people talking about who are those people and what did they achieve and why are we holding them up.

My town did a great example of this. They did a women's history walk this past weekend, where they killed so many birds with one stone, because they put up signs all around the town and gave out maps of doing the self-guided walk. And each sign had a woman in Falls Church Virginia's history, who contributed to making our community the way it was from the 1700s to today. And you'd walk around the town, learning about these people. And as I was walking, I kept thinking – and they really encourage students to go on this history walk. I kept thinking, oh, wow. I'm seeing the story of someone who worked for 20 years to set up this specific way we did the International Baccalaureate [IB] system in our school system. Oh, here's the person who is the reason we have this park in this town; here's the person that's the reason we have a farmer's market. And it makes you think, how can I do that too? And we need that presence of long-haul heroes in the daily life of our kids' lives.

Ralph Nader: I was just going to add to your progenitors of encouraging young people to commitment, neighbors encouraging neighbors and you just gave an example. And I'm not going to be able to talk about one of your finest examples, Karen Washington in New York City who started the Garden of Happiness. But there is an example of neighbors invigorating neighbors instead of not even knowing who their neighbors are in an atomized society. We're out of time, unfortunately. We've been talking with Pete Davis, the author of the brand new book, *Dedicated: The Case for Commitment in an Age of Infinite Browsing*. On the back jacket, you have some pretty impressive people praising this book: Robert [D.] Putnam of Harvard, Drew Gilpin Faust, the former president of Harvard. Cornel West [public intellectual, author, philosopher, political activist] calls it "a magisterial book on the moral counterculture of commitment and our shallow

culture money and fear. His depth of wisdom and scope of knowledge are astonishing and his powerful vision of decency and democracy is compelling." Well, good luck on talking about this book on media throughout the country and maybe throughout the world. Thank you very much, Pete Davis.

Pete Davis: Thank you, Ralph. I learned so much of the spirit from you and you are such a grand exemplar of a long-haul hero.

Ralph Nader: You're So generous. Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Pete Davis. We will link to *Dedicated* at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, Steven Mufson and Pete Davis. For those listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcasts listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph Nader's weekly column, it's free; go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com. To support Whirlwind Wheelchair, visit whirlwindwheelchair.org. They do great work showing people in the United States and around the world how to build sturdy, economical wheelchairs from local materials. It's whirlwindwheelchair.org. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music "Stand Up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: And thank you, everybody. If you're feeling charitable to result-oriented groups, Whirlwind Wheelchair is a prime potential beneficiary for your contributions. You go to their website, you'll see what I mean. They really produce all over the world, teaching people, using local materials how to build sturdy, safe wheelchairs.

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