

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 407 TRANSCRIPT

**Tom Morello:** I'm Tom Morello and you're listening to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

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

**David Feldman:** Hello, Steve.

**Steve Skrovan:** Good to hear you. And it is always good to hear from the man the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** We talked with a lot of authors on this program. We do a great job of exposing a problem, but we also like to highlight some of the people who take action in their own communities to fix those problems. When Hurricane Ida hit the Gulf Coast this summer, thousands of people in New Orleans lost power. That's when community organizer Devin De Wulf took action. He turned his home into a solar power charging hub for his neighbors. Now he wants to turn neighborhood restaurants into a microgrid, a stormproof system of solar panels and batteries that could act as hubs during outages. And we look forward to hearing about the empowering potential in combining microgrids with restaurants and how grassroots organizing and mutual aid can step up when institutions leave people high and dry. Or in that case, low and wet.

Then we'll welcome Nathan Proctor from US PIRG, the US Public Interest Research Group. He has worked tirelessly for years on their Right to Repair campaign. What's Right to Repair? It's simply the right to fix your own electronics and other things. For instance, a company like Apple [Inc.] would rather have you buy a whole new iPhone or MacBook than take it to a repair shop to get it fixed. Mr. Proctor's fight is to pass legislation that will prevent companies from blocking consumers' ability to do that. He could tell us about how the Right to Repair campaign fits in with US PIRG's larger zero waste efforts, what consumers can do to reclaim full ownership of their own property and what recent Right to Repair developments from Apple mean for those of us who own their products.

As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our tireless corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's hear from a man who had an idea, a light bulb moment if you will, and put it into action. And his community is better off as a result. David?

**David Feldman:** Devin De Wulf is founder of the Krewe of Red Beans, Feed the Second Line, and the Get Lit Stay Lit project. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Devin De Wulf.

**Devin De Wulf:** Thanks for having me. It's a pleasure to be with y'all today.

**Ralph Nader:** Listeners should know that Devin has come up with a solution to a certain problem I'm gonna describe that could be spread all over the country. Talk about self-reliance. And it works. Hurricane Ida made landfall in Louisiana on August 29th. Over a million people lost power across the state of Louisiana. Almost everyone who hadn't been able to evacuate before the storm was stuck in the sweltering aftermath where the heat went up to 110 degrees in New Orleans. And so you had these stranded people without power and Devin thought of

something that could help. And it did. And we have him on the program now. And just think of your own community. There are a lot of communities that have lost power in the last few years due to hurricanes and other natural disasters. And you know what happens when you don't have electric power. Devin, what did you do, how did it work, and what do you have by way of recommending all over the country should be done?

**Devin De Wulf:** Yeah. So, I guess the first thing I should explain is that I'm a community organizer, and during COVID I've been working to create jobs for people in New Orleans and trying to create a safety net for our city's culture. So, during COVID, we've had different initiatives and we've literally created a million dollars of jobs for people. All of those people are New Orleans' musicians, New Orleans' culture creators, Mardi Gras Indians, Baby Dolls, things that are really special to our city. And basically because of that background, when the hurricane hit, I sort of sprang into action.

My wife works in the ER and in preparation of the eventuality of a hurricane, we installed solar panels and batteries on our house because our infrastructure in New Orleans isn't really that great and we sort of anticipated there would be a power outage, especially with hurricanes. So, we were prepared, and normally we would evacuate for a storm, but my wife actually was scheduled to work a night shift the day of the hurricane. So, we stayed because I didn't really want to drive on the interstate in the middle of a hurricane. So, we just hunkered down.

And as your listeners probably know, everyone who doesn't evacuate for a hurricane, I would say 99% of those people don't evacuate due to financial hardship. It's really expensive to evacuate. You have to have hotel rooms; you lose all your food in your refrigerator. And it can easily become a thousand dollars to evacuate. So, people who are lower-class and working-class people just don't evacuate, not because they don't want to, but because they can't. So, the hurricane comes. And the day after the storm, you are pretty much by yourself. It's just you and your neighbors. And so with this hurricane, luckily our house wasn't damaged. And the very next day I went out and assessed how's my neighborhood, how are people doing. And because of our batteries, my house had power. So, we didn't run the air conditioning. We had all the fans. We had ice makers. We had a freezer. We had pretty much everything that we needed to get through. And that was very helpful for my neighbors because I could assist them as well. So, my front porch became a cell phone charging station, which is one of the most essential things after a hurricane. That's pretty much your only way to communicate with the outside world. So, having a cell phone that's fully charged is really vital. Probably 200 to 300 people used my front porch charging station. And when they were there, I could give them ice water, which was really helpful, especially for elders because that heat was actually life threatening. We had about 10 people die in New Orleans due to heat exhaustion.

So, I was able to assist the neighbors that way. And then more importantly, one of my neighbors has an oxygen machine that needs power, so we ran an extension cord and hooked it up. And another elder couple that lives kind of on my backyard side, we were able to run their freezer and their refrigerator during the daytime with the solar power. So, what was happening is I was helping my neighbors, my immediate neighbors, ride out the aftermath. They were better positioned because we had the solar and the batteries.

And I started getting phone calls from restaurants and from hotels actually who have walk-in coolers and full of food. And because of my community work, they were calling me asking if I could magically get rid of all their food that was about to go to waste. So, a typical restaurant could easily have \$10,000 of food in the walk-in and we're talking, you know, 2,000 to 3,000

pounds of produce and meat and cheese and all this stuff. New Orleans has some of the best restaurants in the world. Our city is full of restaurants, but none of them are equipped with solar panels and batteries. So, really, what we're trying to do with Get Lit Stay Lit is basically give the restaurants what my house has. And the idea is if the restaurant has solar panels and the battery, then they will be able to open immediately and they can become a cooling center for their neighborhood. They can become a food spot for their neighbors. After day four, day five, literally people were going hungry throughout New Orleans while at the same time, there was massive amounts of food waste. The food waste actually causes methane as well, so, if we can nip that one in the bud, then that's a really good thing for the planet as well.

So, that restaurant, if we hooked it up with solar and the batteries; batteries are really the key. If we get that stuff installed, then it really solves seven problems all at once. It solves methane, food supply problems. It solves hunger. It creates a cooling center. They have ice machines. They can become a phone charging center. And best of all, it gives locals more control of the emergency response.

My philosophy that I've kind of learned during COVID, and this is applicable for every community, the idea that nobody really cares about us. So, no one listening to your show cares about New Orleans as much as I do. Because this is my city. This is my community. And if you think of that and apply it to every community, what it allows each of us to do is to take it upon ourselves to step up for our community, because nobody else can care about your community as much as you do.

And that is why local control of disaster response is really vital because the current model that we have in America is a hurricane hits and maybe the [American] Red Cross or maybe World Central Kitchen will fly a bunch of staff into a place, but we don't need that. All we have to do is enable the local restaurants and the local people to be the first responders. And they're gonna do a great job because it's their community. So, they're gonna know who is the elderly person across the street who might need extra support. Or they might understand the cultural differences that are at play. So, it's really vital to give locals more support.

**Ralph Nader:** I'm gonna get into more detail about the batteries in a minute, but the *Washington Post* thought enough of what you're doing to invite an op-ed that you wrote [for the] September 14th, 2021, *Washington Post*. Listeners, you can get through to it. It's by Devin, D-E-V-I-N, DeWulf, D-E capital W-U-L-F. And he lays it all out. The one part of the article that caught my attention is the cost of all this. Until I reached the cost, I thought it was less than what you said. These are large batteries, the size of suitcases. And you say, "Each battery costs ~~us~~ around \$10,000 and the cost per restaurant would be \$40,000 to \$60,000. A hefty sum, but one that could be offset with tax credits." I'm quoting from your article in the *Washington Post*. Now, clearly, the battery you had didn't cost \$10,000. So, do you want to give us some range of alternative size batteries for neighborhoods where a restaurant would wanna be able to serve a larger area?

**Devin De Wulf:** Yeah. So, actually, my house did cost \$60,000. We have two Tesla Powerwall batteries, and each battery was \$10,000.

**Ralph Nader:** Wow.

**Devin De Wulf:** And then the solar panels was about \$40,000. You have to match the number of batteries to your energy consumption and then you match the solar panels to the number of batteries that you have. Because you want the batteries to become fully charged basically every

day. And then at night you use battery power instead of taking power from the grid. But [from] that initial investment, currently, you can get 24% back with a federal tax credit. So, that's obviously helpful. And then over time, it pays for itself because my electric bill currently, like for this month right now, is \$15. In the past, it would've been \$150 to \$200, because I'm not asking for energy from the utility company until I need it. The rest of the time, I'm just using my battery power and my solar power.

When the grid goes down, all of those houses in New Orleans that have solar panels - but no batteries - are useless, [i.e.,] the solar panels are really just decor at that point. But the moment that you have a battery, you can use your power without having the grid on. And that's really the key. So, the combination of the energy savings and the tax credits actually creates a pathway for us to install solar batteries and solar panels on all of the restaurants in my city. The way that we do it is when we get one restaurant hooked up, we ask that that restaurant will pay back into the program \$200 a month, which is basically free money for them because it comes from their energy bill savings. And as soon as I can get 300 restaurants paying \$200 a month, at that point, I can do a fully funded restaurant project every single month.

**Ralph Nader:** Tell us a little bit about the solar panels. How much did they cost and do they cover your entire a roof?

**Devin De Wulf:** It really depends on your house or your business or your building's situation. You wanna have a south facing wall or roof, I should say, with no tree cover or shade. So, that's kind of the first step is doing an assessment. And then you can build or put together as many solar panels as you want. If you had your neighbor join with you, for example, you could build a microgrid that way. I'm not an electrical engineer or a solar expert. I'm really just a consumer that's had experience with my own home.

And the really nice thing about solar panels, for me, in Louisiana, is that they hold up really well to hurricane force winds. So, I've seen panels that are perfectly intact, that are sitting in the hardest hit parts of the state, where 90% of the homes are destroyed. So, it's a really good solution for hurricanes. And I think applicable for everybody and every community that's on the Gulf Coast and the East Coast and Hawaii and Puerto Rico. Everybody that deals with hurricanes should really get their restaurants to have solar panels and batteries.

**Ralph Nader:** How much did it cost you to put the solar panels on?

**Devin De Wulf:** Yeah. So, our house was about \$60,000 for the batteries and the solar.

**Ralph Nader:** The whole system which allows you to go off grid, right?

**Devin De Wulf:** Yeah, that's correct. And we have to really consider the full cost. Because if you imagine a restaurant, the walk-in cooler has maybe \$10,000 worth of food. So, if the restaurant loses power and they lose all that food, that's \$10,000 right there. Then you have to consider the cost of buying a generator or getting gasoline for your generator or trucking in ice. Or what is the cost of evacuating an elderly person to a hospital or flying them to another hospital in the region? If we really start to think of all of the costs that are associated, costs that can be avoided by having restaurants with solar panels and batteries, then it really becomes a no-brainer.

**Ralph Nader:** And the tax credits are big, aren't they?

**Devin De Wulf:** Yeah, 24%. And in my opinion, this should be something that the federal government funds. Like every restaurant in America that's in a hurricane zone should just have solar panels and batteries automatically. Ditto nursing homes and places that take care of elderly

people because we just don't need the suffering that we had in New Orleans after Hurricane Ida. And we all know that it's only a matter of time until we have another hurricane. So, it's not like it's the only time this will happen.

**Ralph Nader:** And what's the reception by restaurants so far?

**Devin De Wulf:** Actually, they love it. Restaurants are a low-profit margin business and typically they don't have a lot of capital just sitting around that they can use for, say, buying solar panels and batteries. So, by giving them an option to have another funding mechanism, it is a really easy sell for the restaurant owner or the chef. Because really no chef wants to waste food. And I think during COVID, we've really seen restaurants step up for their communities all over America, whether it's feeding frontline workers or just helping people survive with the economic difficulties that we've all endured over the last two years. So, restaurants are really part of the community that should be enabled to really be their first responders for their community.

**Ralph Nader:** And so far, it hasn't been that long since Hurricane Ida. How many restaurants have signed onto your approach?

**Devin De Wulf:** Well actually, we've been slowly but steadily figuring out how to do it. The problem in my city is that a lot of the solar companies are kind of sleazy and I have to figure out a way that we can do all the installations in-house. I have to basically ensure that we are mission-driven and that we are efficient and kind of vertically integrate the whole process. So, I've been working on that and we're pretty close to being able to do our first installation. We've raised \$93,000 so far. So, we've got our first restaurant identified. I should also say that I want the restaurants to be chosen and concentrated in high poverty areas because that's where you're gonna have more people that can't evacuate. So, that's part of it too. It's really making sure that each neighborhood in my city, especially the ones that are with the highest poverty rate, are better positioned for the next hurricane. And I'm optimistic that once we install the first restaurant, it creates a round of media coverage and then that'll create more donors hopefully and then we'll just keep at it until we've got 300 restaurants. And that would be a really big improvement on the current situation in New Orleans, which is we have I think 12 to 14 city-run cooling centers and food distribution centers. But in a big city like New Orleans, you can't help everybody with only 12 locations; you need really hundreds of locations. You need every neighborhood to be set up. So, we're gonna work towards that and just hopefully get it as good as we can.

**Ralph Nader:** What kinda response have you got from around the country when you're in the *Washington Post* or on other media?

**Devin De Wulf:** Well, obviously, it's a story that is good and something that's applicable for other communities. I grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, and this solution would be also very helpful in my hometown, for example. And I can imagine a scenario where if we had an investor or somebody who could give us the seed money for doing the first 300 restaurants, at that point, we are unstoppable because of that \$200 a month from each restaurant going back into the program. I want these to be all over Louisiana. And then let's do the whole Gulf Coast. Let's do Florida; let's do the East Coast. If you're in a hurricane area, which is a lot of Americans, you might need this one day. And even if you don't need it one day, it's still good to do because it might help out in a snowstorm or whatever other random disaster comes our way.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it seems some foundations in New Orleans ought to be interested in this. I mean, this is the real thing. This has great multiplier effects. And once it's installed, you know,

the sun is there and you've got a microgrid and you're self-reliant and you don't have to rely on Entergy, which is the big utility in your area, which doesn't like what you're doing, because obviously, you're advancing displacement of their sales. Are they still opposing you?

**Devin De Wulf:** You know, I actually tried to pitch it to them as the investor because I thought that would be fun, but they're kind of a dubious company with a dubious track record. So, it wouldn't be surprising that they wouldn't be excited about what I'm trying to do. And my job is just to talk about it and try to get as many people aware as I can. I'm just a guy who lives in New Orleans; I'm not a fancy bigwig or anything like that. So, I'm just trying to get the idea out there and hopefully somebody hears it and decides to support it. This is the thing that I think is one of the best things I can do for my community. And I'll just try to get the word out there. Our governor has a radio show I was a caller at the other week (chuckle). I was like, I'm just gonna try this out because I just need to get the word out there. And if you've got connections to a president or a House congressional representative or a senator, maybe there's somebody who can think about this and say, "This should be funded federally." Because should this idea really be funded by some random guy in New Orleans running a nonprofit, raising money here and there with small donors? Or should it be something that is an investment by the federal government or a state government? So, I'm really just trying to create a model and get the idea out there.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, if you need legal help, Tulane Law School has good clinics and contact a young professor there whose name is Michael Shammas and see what other contacts he can give you. So, at least you have some of the university know-how behind you, and they often have contacts with foundations. We're running out of time. We've been talking with the doer, the doer, Devin De Wulf. Almost reminds me of the attitude of Benjamin Franklin, Devin. You know, you have a problem, you sit down, you methodically figure out a way to get the neighborhood involved. And so, you're in a good tradition here. Steve, David, any comments on what he's doing?

**Steve Skrovan:** Well, yeah, this is incredibly inspiring, Devin, and Ralph pretty much covered all the substance of anything I would ask. But so, I wanted to kind of turn it to you personally because we love having the doers, as Ralph said, on the show and promoting that and connecting you with other doers. How did you personally, in your personal biography, come to your activism? What is it about you, your temperament, your upbringing, that made you this great community organizer?

**Devin De Wulf:** I have a very weird and diverse skill set because I was a middle-school teacher and I'm really interested in culture. I created a parade in New Orleans so I'm a culture creator as well. And when you're a parade organizer, you're actually a community organizer because I managed hundreds of crew members. And when something bad happened to one of our members, we stepped up and helped as a community. And that started the pathway that I've been on. When COVID hit my wife being in the ER, the first thing that we did was create the largest operation in America to get really good food to the healthcare workers as a morale boost at the beginning of COVID. We raised a million dollars in six weeks and I was responsible for literally feeding every single ER and ICU in the city of New Orleans twice a day for six weeks. And when I did that along with the help of my crew, we surprised everyone because we were an unknown small neighborhood group and we did this big thing to help our city. And then that just kind of started because I learned a lot in that process. So, I've been doing other initiatives, like I said, and we created Feed the Second Line, which is a nonprofit dedicated to the culture barriers

of our city. And it's just what I want to keep doing, because again, nobody cares about my city except us. So, we have to be the ones that step up for it.

**Ralph Nader:** And give the contact number if anybody wants more information.

**Devin De Wulf:** Yeah. They can check out our website, which is [feedthesecondline.org](http://feedthesecondline.org). The campaign, our initiative of Get Lit Stay Lit is there. We have the short video about it that you can see. And if any of the listeners actually wants to directly contact me, my email address is [devin.dewulf@gmail.com](mailto:devin.dewulf@gmail.com). And you can even call me: (504) 520-9953. And I'm pretty accessible and reachable.

**Ralph Nader:** Give that website and telephone number again slowly.

**Devin De Wulf:** Oh, sure. Feed The Second Line is the website. So, [feedthesecondline.org](http://feedthesecondline.org). And my email is [devin.dewulf@gmail.com](mailto:devin.dewulf@gmail.com) and (504) 520-9953. Especially if there's anybody who has money that they would like to invest in saving all of the restaurants down here in New Orleans, that would be great. And we will give you tax credits right back if you are an investor, which would be super cool. I'm trying to get 18 million dollars of seed funding basically to do 300 projects. And once we have 300 projects done, then we can have a nonstop evergreen funded pathway of doing another restaurant every month. And that's what I'm working towards. So, you never know who is listening and if anybody else wants to holler at me, I'm happy to chat with anybody.

**Devin De Wulf:** Good. David, before we conclude?

**David Feldman:** Yeah. It's mindboggling that this is such a great idea and that the government isn't jumping on top of it. But by doing this, you're saving the government money during an emergency. What is the argument against it? Like what – I'm just curious, who says it's a bad idea? Why? How do they justify attacking this idea?

**Devin De Wulf:** I haven't had anybody attack it per se. I think that the political reality of my city is really complicated. Our city is like a Democratic bubble in a Republican state. But the Democratic bubble of my city is also run by political machines that aren't really responsive to the needs of the people here. So, it's kind of hard to get the idea out into the air, to the decision makers, or the people with power. It's not like I can call the White House or anything like that, so I'm just trying to get it out there as best I can. And hopefully, one day, somebody is like, oh yeah, that's a no brainer.

**David Feldman:** It's fiscally sound. It appeals to both parties.

**Devin De Wulf:** Yeah. And I would relish the opportunity to speak or meet with Steve Scalise, for example, who is a right-wing conservative from Louisiana. And I don't really care to talk about solar panels from an environmentalist perspective. Instead, I'm really talking about them from a hurricane preparedness viewpoint. And I think hopefully that's something that everybody can agree with, because if we had these all over South Louisiana, we would be much better positioned to deal with the next hurricane. And you know, it's only a matter of time, like I said. So, yeah, I'm just trying to get the idea out there and that's my purpose.

**Ralph Nader:** Scalise is the Congressman from Louisiana, right?

**Devin De Wulf:** Yeah. He's the Congressman of Metairie, which is like the Republican next-door neighbor of New Orleans. I've tried to speak with my congressman, who has been like, "Yeah, we'll help you," but nothing really has happened. And as a citizen I have basically no way

of getting in touch with either of my two U.S. senators, [my house member] or the president and it's just hard to get a good idea out there. So, I appreciate y'all covering it because maybe somebody will hear this interview.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, we're out of time, unfortunately. We've been talking with Devin De Wulf from New Orleans. You can contact him at [feedthesecondline.org](http://feedthesecondline.org), [feedthesecondline.org](http://feedthesecondline.org). Well, good luck. I hope some people will latch onto this and you can diffuse this idea not just through New Orleans, but throughout the whole country. Thank you, Devin.

**Devin De Wulf:** Yeah. Thanks for having me. And y'all have a great day.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Devin De Wulf. We will link to his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Let's take quick break. When we come back, we're gonna ask the question: Why can't you take and legally repair your Apple device or your tractor for that matter? We're gonna talk to someone who is trying to do something about that. But first, let's 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 Thursday, December 23, 2021; I'm Russell Mokhiber. The Securities and Exchange Commission is investigating claims that Cassava Sciences, the sixth-best performing US stock this year, manipulated research results of its experimental Alzheimer's drug. That's according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Cassava disclosed in a securities filing that it is cooperating with government investigations, without naming the agency. The National Institutes of Health, which awarded \$20 million in grants to Cassava and its academic collaborators since 2015 for drug development, is also examining the claims, according to the company's CEO. The accusations appeared in a public petition filed in August. The petition's authors are two physicians who said they came to doubt Cassava's research and have shorted the stock, betting the share price would fall once investors recognized the problems they found, they said. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan and along with David Feldman and Ralph. How hard could it be to replace a phone battery? Turns out, harder than you think. David?

**David Feldman:** Nathan Proctor leads the US Public Interest Research Group's Right to Repair campaign. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Nathan Proctor.

**Nathan Proctor:** Thank you. It's great to be here.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Nathan. I'm so proud of US PIRG for its work here. I started the PIRGs back in the early 70s going to hundreds of colleges and universities, and this is one of their most important accomplishments. And fortunately, unlike their other accomplishments, they're getting some good mass media coverage, especially with the concession by Apple, which we're gonna talk about in a minute. The Right to Repair is not just respecting America's fix-it culture. You know, in the old days, people would bring out the wrench and the hammer and the saw and they'd fix things; they would fix their cars. Cars were fixable in those days. But now there's another benefit to the Right to Repair movement, which is the global climate disruption matter. Because the more you can repair things, the less you throw them away, the less replacements have to be made, which start with mining and fossil fuels and all the rest of it. So, there's a double benefit from what the US Public Interest Research Group drive is attaining. And



these are student-funded groups from California to New York and they have funded a national group called the US Public Interest Research Group, which a while back spun off a large environmental group. And these are students and their full-time staff that they support like Nathan, who are really getting things done. And they almost get no coverage in the national media, the *New York Times* included. So, we're very pleased to have you, Nathan, to talk about this. And I know that the focus is on the tech industry. They're adopting the auto industry's product obsolescence marketing approach. But what it is, the Right to Repair movement, is one that demands that tech manufacturers provide the necessary components and manuals for customers to fix their own smartphones, tablets, and computers. I'm reading from the *New York Times* article of November 17th. And the main companies that are receiving the attention here are "Apple, Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and others that have long fought proposed legislation," The *Times* reports, "that would make such repair resources publicly available. But the movement gained momentum this summer when the Federal Trade Commission [FTC]," goaded by US PIRG, I might add, "announced that it would ramp up law enforcement against tech companies that made it difficult to fix their gadgets." So, here you are, Nathan Proctor, tell us what's coming next.

**Nathan Proctor:** One thing to point out is that basically every manufacturer today is a tech company. And the more technology--especially the more software that's running in everything from our light switches to our cars, to our tractors, to our appliances--the more opportunity there is to lock you out of things that you should otherwise own. I have a quick story just to illustrate this because it's like so intuitive that people should be able to fix things that it takes a little bit of unwinding for us to look and realize, like, how did we get here where we're surrounded by products that are completely unfixable by design? I had a friend who broke his 1960s KLH [R&D Co.] radio in his front hall. The dog pulled out the power cable on the back. And he was able to find a complete wiring manual for that 50-year-old radio, which included all the wiring diagrams in all the information he needed. He figured out that it was blown fuse. It was a standard part so he ordered it and replaced it. The same day, his daughter broke her Fitbit 4, and there is not a single spare part available. There's no parts list. There's no diagrams showing the parts and how they go together. The only remedy from Fitbit for that kind of problem is to replace the whole product. And so, we used to just have this understanding that when you got a car, it came with a full-service manual in the glove box. Then companies realized that they didn't have to share that with you or they weren't being forced to share that with you. And then they could basically collect monopoly rents on the service. And then, increasingly, part of that is this planned obsolescence program where when nobody can fix it, then they can force you to buy new things all the time. And it just increases the rate of product obsolescence.

And getting back to your point about the climate, we did a study that found that if Americans use their cell phones one year longer on average, it would have the same climate benefits as taking 636,000 cars off the road. So, the amount of damage we're doing to the planet by just filling society with disposable electronics is severe! And that's why it is such an important campaign. We were really pleased that Apple has kind of reversed course. And so, the news on Apple is that they are gonna launch a program in January to sell spare parts and provide service manuals for a set of their newest products. And then eventually, hopefully including a larger array of things. Right now, it's still kind of limited, but it's a very significant concession in part because the industry has been running around state legislatures all over the country, including and notably, Apple, saying that it would be a huge safety and security disaster. The sky would fall if people were allowed to fix stuff. Because then it would burst into flames. And this has been their

lobbying technique. So, the fact that Apple is basically admitting that that's all malarkey is a big deal because we hope to pass some of these laws. We had bills in 27 states that would guarantee consumers access to parts, tools, and service information necessary to fix stuff. And, you know, those bills run up against giant industry pressure against us. But as these companies have started to feel the crunch from the FTC [Federal Trade Commission] and the Biden administration and public support, we're gonna pass some of these laws and we're gonna guarantee this right for consumers and then we can get on to other problems.

**Ralph Nader:** This is very exciting, Nathan. By the way, the website for US PIRG, go to [uspirg.org](http://uspirg.org). You'll see what else has these student-supported, full-time groups are doing around the country. If students or parents of students are listening to this program and the students are saying, you know, I know we have to change the world, but we don't know what to do. Well, just connect with [uspirg.org](http://uspirg.org). There are all kinds of internships. There is door-to-door canvassing going on all over the country. I think at least 25 states have PIRGs or canvassing PIRGs.

In your press release announcing your victory over Apple, and of course, I know you're gonna be very, very watch doggy to see if Apple tries to sneak out of this with some technical casuistry and their manuals in order to preserve their control. But you'll be very alert to that, I'm sure. But you said in your press release, "Our coalition of tinkerers, fixers, repair shops, do-it-yourselfers, and consumer and environmental advocates has forced one of the world's biggest companies," that's Apple, "to change for the better. It's a win for repair shops." Yeah, Main Street, USA. "It's a win for repair shops. It's a win for consumers and it's a win for the planet."

Two comments on that, Nathan. You left something out, which is worker health and safety. The more of these thrown away Apple computers and iPhones end up being dismantled by the dismantling industry, which often uses often third-world workers who get sick. There's a lot of carcinogenic material when they take these thrown away products apart. The fewer of those, the safer workers are gonna be. Because once you have a Right to Repair, it's going to have legs. They're gonna have to look into how to make the product simpler, more functional, less secretive from its user? How do you make it with safer products. So, there is a worker health and safety plus here that you might want to add in your future remarks.

But just to give you a local flavor here. In our town, there used to be a fix-it shop and it was an aunt and her nephew and the place was filled of all kinds of products people would bring in – stoves and refrigerators and repair products and chairs and everything. And then they went out of business. And one reason they went out of business is what you're pointing out – that the designed-in obstacles to repairing a product by the consumer have become overwhelming. So, I wanna ask you, have you tiptoed at all into the automobile area? Because fewer and fewer people are being able to fix their cars in front of their garage these days. Are you gonna look into that?

**Nathan Proctor:** Yeah. one of the things that's different about the car industry than these other industries that I've worked with, and, we've been working on consumer products, tractors and medical equipment, most specifically, as well as enterprise computing equipment like servers and routers. But there's an existing car coalition and we are partnered with and we support the things that they're doing. And the difference between that industry and these other industries is 75% of all car repair in America is done by the aftermarket. So, it's like Goliath versus Goliath fight, I guess, is another way to put it. They're not quite as big as the manufacturing industry, but it's not like there is no comparable kind of large, organized, independent fix-it shops that are fixing vacuum cleaners and television sets, right? It's so much smaller; it's almost on the verge of extinction. Probably the only thing that is actually succeeding is cell phone repair right now.

Everybody else is dying. And this is a huge problem. If we do not have a repair infrastructure in this country, it is a huge loss for consumers and the planet.

And there was a time 20/30 years ago where every town had its own little repair shop and there was a camera repair and there was television repair. Those are basically all gone now. And in part, because some companies were making products that were either unfixable by design or they were enacting all kinds of monopolization techniques to restrict access to the repair infrastructure to be completely in-house, so that they would have control. And they used that control to price gouge on the price of repairs, but then also to push the sale of the new products.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, let's go to the most recent frontier you're confronting now. Medical equipment repairs push for Right to Repair during COVID-19 pandemic. And you quote a bioengineer, whose name is Nader Hammoud; no relation. Nader Hammoud is quoted as saying "it's definitely life and death" about his job as a biomedical engineer, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. He said, "You end up rushing to the hospital and you want to fix something because the hospital has given you an SOS and you can't fix it because of the way the medical device is designed and because of the intellectual property." That's another obstacle that Apple once posited against you, that it would interfere with their patent rights. And so Hammoud says, "It's always life or death in this domain. I don't see how a manufacturer can say, 'no, I'm not gonna let you do this.'" Meaning I'm not gonna let you fix this in a horrific situation, in an emergency room or in an ICU in a hospital. Could you elaborate on this? How far are you getting in this area?

**Nathan Proctor:** Yeah. First of all, I wanted to bring this back to the old school that I think it might have been in the 1970s that you did a study that was about electrocutions in hospitals. Do you remember this?

**Ralph Nader:** Yes, I did.

**Nathan Proctor:** So, your exposé led to the creation of a whole field and hospitals are required to have biomedical engineers and technicians who are capable and qualified to service medical equipment so that it's safe in use and that proper health and safety standards are continually maintained. Because before that, basically, it was the wild west and sometimes the equipment was so poorly maintained that people were getting electrocuted by the equipment. So, it builds off that work, right? So, these hospitals have these biomedical engineers and technicians, biomedics or BMETs, and they maintain the equipment; they make sure it's safe. They run all the different maintenance and cleaning and all the other things you would want to happen so that the equipment is completely reliable in a healthcare setting. But manufacturers have their own technicians. They have their own service contracts. Those service contracts typically have 80% margins for the manufacturer. So, they're charging \$200,000 to fix and maintain a set of equipment that might actually cost them \$15,000 on their side. So, they love forcing hospitals to buy these extremely extractive contracts. But hospitals, if they didn't have to wouldn't pay \$200,000 because their own in-house technicians could do it at cost. So, manufacturers have started denying access to manuals and denying access to spare parts. They lock the actual device with software so that if you want to change, that there's some cartridge or something that needs to be periodically swapped out, it will lock down the device until somebody punches in a code. And only their authorized service representatives have those codes. So, you're paying a ransom to the manufacturer to come in and punch a code to use equipment that you already own. And this interferes with hospital operations. Because especially during COVID, it was very difficult to get these manufacturer-authorized traveling technicians to travel to come in, because there

were so many travel restrictions in place, as well as restrictions for who was allowed to come in and out of the hospitals because we were in the middle of a pandemic. But instead of sharing the necessary service information with the hospitals, they were still giving people the runaround. So, a biomed like Nader, he has to come into the hospital. Somebody urgently needs a piece of medical equipment to perform a lifesaving procedure. It is malfunctioning or not working properly and he has to get it working properly ASAP, right? And then this is a hospital setting. So as he said, lives are on the line all the time. It's always life and death. And to have the manufacturer say, I'm sorry, you have the wrong kind of contract with us. We can't let you access the diagnostic readout of the device. We're not gonna let you look at this manual when they have no way of actually getting a technician there on time for what you need is outrageous. It's dangerous. It's profiteering. It's completely unacceptable. And our research found that this was an incredibly common occurrence in American hospitals.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah. It involves ventilators, for example. I mean devices that are right on patients, not back in some hospital lab. And by the way, the medical device industry, which is very profitable, has profited off the taxpayer enormously. A lot of the research and development that developed these devices came out of the US government, the National Institutes of Health, for no royalties back, by the way. Are there any lawsuits being filed when someone dies in the hospital because the manufacturer is pulling its intellectual property strings remotely and engineers like the ones that you quote can't fix the product? Any lawsuits to your knowledge, Nathan?

**Nathan Proctor:** There's a really interesting lawsuit now about a company, and I don't know of any cases where the biomed at that the hospital wasn't able to save the patient. And if they didn't, they probably aren't publicizing. Oh, the reason why, you know, Aunt Joanie died was because we didn't have the right manual. So, I mean, because that would –

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah. They could be exposed too.

**Nathan Proctor:** Right. But there is a really interesting case where a company, which makes surgical robots –like laparoscopic things - where they do surgical robotic surgeries that actually shut down a piece of equipment in the middle of a patient procedure. And the doctors had to quickly and urgently change to a scalpel and to a standard process and in which case they were able to perform the procedure without harming the patient. And the reason why the company remotely deactivated the surgical robot was they were having a dispute over the maintenance contract for that equipment. And that's a terrifying state of affairs!

**Ralph Nader:** I think that's one reason in just one week, you and US PIRG got 326 biomed experts to sign your petition calling for manufacturers to share repair information, including service manuals with hospitals and independent medical device technicians. So, you're really developing a major network here. And there's every prospect that the situation will be improving. We're running out of time, unfortunately. We're talking with Nathan Proctor who is in charge of the US PIRG drive for the Right to Repair on behalf of tens of millions of Americans, I might add. Steve David, any comments, questions? This is something that the media should pay attention to--college students, graduate students supporting full-time consumer, environmental, labor advocacy groups, going door to door, connecting neighborhoods. And it almost is never nationally reported on. I can document that to the T. Next time you get a *60 Minutes* report on what students are really doing and what they're supporting to make things actually change on the ground, let me know. And I'll tell you you've been exposed to a visiting Martian.

**Steve Skrovan:** Well, speaking of visiting Martians, I would like to jump in here. Nathan, my wife is involved with a group out in here in Pasadena called the Repair Cafe where people just kind of get together on a certain date. And it's people from all walks of life and other people come in with their toasters, with their clothing, with all sorts of things, and it all gets fixed for free. It's this community building organization, relatively informal. But I know that it's all over the country. Are you familiar with the Repair Cafe movement?

**Nathan Proctor:** Yes, yes. We love Repair Cafes. So, there are two big – there's actually three different international nonprofits. Repair Cafe, which was started in the Netherlands. And then there was one that was started in California around the same time called the Fixit Clinic and they've actually moved entirely onto Zoom [Video Communications] that people wanna get expert coaching for fixing some broken stuff around the house. Maybe that'll save you from having to – maybe instead of buying somebody some new stuff for the holidays, you can fix some previously loved, but currently out-of-service products. You can bring it to these Zooms and get coaching. You can look them up on Facebook at Fixit Clinic. But these are just terrific ways to try to preserve the skills to honor the fixers and to build community around repair, which I think is a beautiful thing. So, yeah.

**Ralph Nader:** So well said, Nathan. What if some listeners ask, how do we start a Repair Cafe in our community?

**Nathan Proctor:** Well, certainly, it's easy to connect with the Fixit Clinic and the Repair Cafe. I'd also recommend, there's this wonderful book called *Repair Revolution[: How Fixers Are Transforming Our Throwaway Culture]* and it's about the Repair Cafe movement. It's by a guy who recently died, but was from Kingston, New York, John Wackman. And it has a guide in the book about how to start your own Repair Cafe. So, that there's that book. But also you could just connect with these people on Facebook and their other social media channels.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah. It's all over the country. And my wife's group is in Southern California. It's in Los Angeles. So, they get a lot of Jet Propulsion Laboratory people there. So, they can actually fix a lot of relatively sophisticated things. Not just your toaster.

**Nathan Proctor:** Yeah. I went to one with John in Kingston and some of the technicians are these old IBM [International Business Machines Corporation] people who made the first mainframes helping high schoolers fix their Casio clock radios. And it's just such a lovely thing to see. I mean, there's so much joy and celebration in that kind of getting your hands dirty and fixing stuff.

**Steve Skrovan:** And community building.

**Nathan Proctor:** Yes.

**Ralph Nader:** David?

**David Feldman:** With Apple, I've discovered that if you have an old computer and just wipe it clean and reinstall, the hard drive, it's like a brand new computer. And it's almost as though Apple doesn't want you to know that you don't need a new computer; you just need to wipe it clean and reinstall the operating system. Are the software updates really to improve the speed of the computer? Or are they there to make the computer obsolete? Just make it so you think you need a new computer.

**Nathan Proctor:** Yeah. I mean, I think that you're asking me to attribute a motive to some of these updates. And I think the implication and the result is clearly things that could last a lot

longer are made obsolete because of the constant upgrading of the software eventually outpaces the hardware capacity. We're about to have millions of older computers go offline because they've stopped updating certain kinds of security certificates and they won't be able to connect anymore. So, that's a huge part of this problem. And I think that manufacturers have kind of gotten this system where they alone control the updating and the timeline for that. Like when Microsoft decides that these old operating systems can no longer connect, they can just lock people out. The only option then would be to switch to an open source platform. But this is a real problem. And also, computers can last a lot longer if they're maintained properly, and that's also part of the skills that we're seeking to protect, like the skills of maintenance and how to keep things working. I don't know if the older people in your lives are really thoughtful about like maintaining their furniture and they have a method to make sure the things last and we've kind of gotten away from that. And I think that that's a big problem. And companies are no longer designing and deploying things so that they last a long time, because we've all been cultured into this throwaway system.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, this is a very encouraging movement by US PIRG. We've been talking with Nathan Proctor. Unfortunately, we're out of time, but this one is gonna have a long legs. I think you're really onto something that's going to involve a lot of people, not just inform them. A lot of people who want to fix things themselves and are frustrated beyond belief by all the obstacles from modular design to product obsolescence design to not even having the tools that can do the job. So, I think you're really onto something, Nathan, and you're getting a lot of support from a lot of people outside the academic world in this endeavor. So, tell them how, what part of [uspirg.org](http://uspirg.org) can they access to get more update information and keep current?

**Nathan Proctor:** Yeah. Actually, if you just go to [uspirg.org/repair](http://uspirg.org/repair), that's our Right to Repair homepage and we put updates there. And I'm on Twitter @nProctor, PROCTOR. And that's a great place to get Right to Repair updates, which I post quite frequently. Yeah. And then I thank you for your kind words, Ralph. And I just wanna also thank you for the legacy that you built, that we're adding to here with this campaign, both on the hospital medical device safety thing, and then also more broadly the way in which the PIRGs have continued to be a voice for the public interests for so many years.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, you all make me proud. It's very important for the next generation for the PIRG movement to have more and more presence on more and more campuses and have the students get course credit for working on PIRG problems. That's happened in the past and it can be expanded in the future. It's a great way to connect knowledge to action and the campus to the community. Thank you very much, Nathan. To be continued, I'm sure.

**Nathan Proctor:** Thank you.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Nathan Proctor. We will link to his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). That's our show. I wanna thank our guests again, Devin De Wulf and Nathan Proctor. For those of you listening on the radio, we're gonna cut out right now. For you, podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

**David Feldman:** Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to [nader.org](http://nader.org). For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** And the American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go to [tortmuseum.org](http://tortmuseum.org) to explore the exhibits, take a virtual tour, and learn about iconic tort cases from history. Be sure to check out their latest program: How advocates are going to court to confront the climate crisis? All that and more at [tortmuseum.org](http://tortmuseum.org).

**David Feldman:** The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio 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 proof reader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody.