

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 279 TRANSCRIPT

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3 **Steve Skrovan:** Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along
4 with my co-host David Feldman. How are you today, David?

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6 **David Feldman:** Good. Welcome back from your vacation.
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8 **Steve Skrovan:** Thank you very much. Daddy's back. Now everything's going to be okay. I
9 want everybody to calm down. And we also have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello,
10 Ralph.
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12 **Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody.
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14 **Steve Skrovan:** Great to have you here today, Ralph. And we have another great show today.
15 The theme is energy. Specifically, we're going to be talking about the Green New Deal. First up,
16 we'll be talking to someone who is one of the architects of the Green New Deal. Her name is
17 Rhiana Gunn-Wright. She's the Policy Director at the think tank New Consensus where the plan
18 was developed. And it's kind of a Manhattan Project aimed at transforming our energy system, if
19 you haven't heard so far yet. The goals are essentially net-zero emissions while creating high-
20 wage jobs in the renewable energy sector. And Green New Deal legislation was introduced in
21 Congress by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey. And it was
22 quickly tagged "socialism" by the corporate right who began shouting how the Green New
23 Dealers wanted to take away their hamburgers. And it was also deemed "pie in the sky" by
24 corporate Democrats who worry about, I'm sure, alienating the fossil-fuel industry. And what
25 many people don't know or may have forgotten, is that Ralph was an essential driver of not only
26 the formation of the EPA, Nixon was always given credit for that; he just singed it because of the
27 public pressure. But Ralph is also behind the Clean Air and Water Acts. So, the stakes are even
28 higher now as the climate crisis approaches a point of no return. And we're going to delve into
29 what the Green New Deal really means and how it can be achieved.
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31 That's just the first half of the show. We continue on this theme with our second guest, David
32 Freeman. David Freeman was actually our first-ever outside guest on the *Ralph Nader Radio*
33 *Hour*. We have spoken to Mr. Freeman who is an expert on all forms of energy generation,
34 having once run the Tennessee Valley Authority. And on this program, we've talked to Mr.
35 Freeman mainly about nuclear power issues. Today, we're going to get his insights into the
36 renewable energy economy and how that fits into the Green New Deal. And this is just me, but
37 it's interesting to note that Ms. Gunn-Wright is 29 years old and David Freeman is 93 years old.
38 So, the problem seems to be all the people in between those two ages. They're the ones with the
39 real power and the ones that we need to convince.
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41 And as always, we will cut away for a minute in the middle to catch up with our *Corporate*
42 *Crime Reporter*, Russell Mokhiber. But without any further ado, let's take a deep dive into the
43 Green New Deal. David?
44

45 **David Feldman:** Rhiana Gunn-Wright is the Policy Director for New Consensus, a think tank
46 based in Chicago. A Rhodes Scholar, Ms. Gunn-Wright has also worked as a policy analyst for a
47 number of organizations including the Detroit Health Department, and as a policy intern for First
48 Lady Michelle Obama. At New Consensus, she recently co-authored the research paper entitled
49 "The Green New Deal: Mobilizing for a Just, Prosperous and Sustainable Economy." It was

50 published in January of this year. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Rhiana Gunn-
51 Wright.
52

53 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** Thank you. It's such a pleasure to be here.
54

55 **Ralph Nader:** Welcome, indeed, Rhiana. When this resolution on the Green New Deal was
56 introduced by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and longtime legislator and progressive,
57 Senator Ed Markey, it outlined the 10-year mobilization plan with 5-key pillars. And, of course,
58 the critics of the Green New Deal didn't understand that everything is connected to everything
59 else. And you can't just deal with one pillar when there are four pillars not addressed, that can
60 sweep the rug from under the fifth pillar. So the description for our listeners of the Green New
61 Deal, and you can see how connected everything is, it's achieving net-zero greenhouse gas
62 emissions, creating millions of good, high-wage jobs, investing in US infrastructure in industry,
63 including weatherization of buildings, by the way--talk about jobs; securing clean air and water,
64 climate and community resilience--that's local economies, cooperatives; healthy food, access to
65 nature, and a sustainable environment for all, while promoting justice and equity in vulnerable
66 communities. That's the description and you can see how it all fits together. Instead of one little
67 regulation here and one little recycling there, the big picture is now before the American people.
68 And what's amazing about it is that it envisions exactly the kind of efficiency and equity that our
69 democratic society pretends to foster. It envisions a reset of a wasteful and inefficient economy--
70 we'll get to that later--with an efficient and a healthy economy. I mean that should be a no-
71 brainer, right? But we'll see in our conversation, listeners, why the vested interests prefer a
72 wasteful economy as well as an economy that does damage because that produces a lot of profits.
73 So how do you view the public reaction, Rhiana, to the Green New Deal?
74

75 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** I actually think, overall, it's been really great. The really interesting
76 thing is to see how much more quickly, I think folks that we either sort of earnestly or derisively
77 call "everyday people," grasped the Green New Deal and grasped how the issues are connected.
78 It seems like a lot of the strife that we've gotten has tended to be from sort of more, I don't know
79 if I would call them establishment types, but sort of honestly, people whose job it is to think
80 about these issues. And the idea that we would be talking about these things in a way that's
81 intersectional, in a way that's interconnected, and then trying to deal with climate not just from a
82 silo place, but as a sort of all-encompassing issue that requires some movement on all these
83 different fronts. That's where we actually got the most grief. And I was a bit surprised, I have to
84 say, by how much I think folk that I would think of often as very serious, struggle to really
85 understand the foundation of the Green New Deal and what we're trying to do.
86

87 **Ralph Nader:** Well, what's interesting about the reaction that I observe is that there's a huge
88 lack of knowledge among many members of Congress. It's deliberate, many of them
89 Republicans, of course, and it recalls a statement that Ronald Reagan once made in Texas when
90 he basically said, America grew great by producing energy, not by saving it. And that makes the
91 real point here that once you demolish the arguments of the omniscient waste in inefficiency
92 industry around the world, you get down to why are they resisting it so much? Because you
93 know corporations are supposed to be efficient, right? Corporations are supposed to not be
94 damaging innocent people, right? They're supposed to be absorbing the rule of law. Well it's
95 because when you waste a lot of energy in your car, you're having to buy more gasoline. When
96 the Defense Department wastes all kinds of money with bloated contracts with Lockheed Martin,
97 that's a lot more profit for Lockheed Martin. When you have fewer incidence of cancer and
98 respiratory ailments, less is spent on doctors, drug companies, and hospitals--less sales, less
99 profit. That's why I think it needs to be described as a historically necessary reset of the whole

100 political economy, and the emphasis on political because you've got a lot of work to do with
101 members of Congress. I have so many questions to ask you here, Rhiana. First of all, when you
102 put out a platform the way you did, the next step is building a coalition. You've had a lot of
103 environmental groups and I hope labor, civil rights and other groups on board. Can you describe
104 how that's developing?
105

106 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** Yeah. So, the Green New Deal was always intended to be backed by a
107 big coalition and that's in part just because of the political realities of where we are right now as
108 a country. We have one party that holds most of the power in state and federal government that
109 has been intransigent on climate. They have denied that climate change is happening, and so the
110 idea . . . I think we started from an idea that any effort to sort of build a policy that would appeal
111 to them, when the entire approach to climate in the climate crisis is that it doesn't exist, isn't
112 going to work because the scale of the problem is just too big and we didn't want to spend energy
113 there. So, the only way that anything was going to get passed or get movement was through a
114 large coalition. And so, the way I think that we formulated it was actually really thinking a lot
115 about inside-outside organizing, and having different groups doing different things. So, sort of at
116 the center of the Green New Deal is a bit of a triangle, so you have Sunrise is doing a lot of the
117 movement part of it, really talking to communities, really engaging with the Youth Climate
118 Movement; being a part of the Youth Climate Movement, interacting with some of the more
119 traditionally green groups, the traditionally environmental groups. You have Justice Democrats
120 that is all focused on electoral work. So, getting candidates to run on the Green New Deal, to talk
121 about the Green New Deal, to get folks who are already elected, to talk about the Green New
122 Deal whether because they're afraid of being primaried or whether it's because they just are really
123 interested in the issue. And then you have New Consensus where I work that's working on the
124 policy – the how do we actually accomplish these things bit of it. And our process is still also
125 based on inside-outside. So, instead of just building a traditional think tank where you have a ton
126 of inside expertise then you just work internally, we work a lot in consultation and cooperation
127 with other groups because we believe that solutions exist and it is a matter of knitting together
128 those solutions--making them a system. And honestly, consensus started on this little place of
129 yes, this is about climate, but it is again, like you said, about resetting our economy because the
130 ways that we have structured our economy, particularly since Reagan on, have been really
131 problematic and really hurtful for Americans, and particularly Americans of color, which again
132 is connected to racism and all of these other things. So, we've done a really good job of building
133 and fortifying the structure that we have. And again, climate change is not just the result of
134 burning fossil fuels. The fact that we can burn fossil fuels relies on having places that we can
135 poison, which relies on us having people that we think of as less worthy or less deserving than
136 other people who we can essentially dump our pollution on, right? All of these things are
137 connected, and so with the climate crisis, I think we saw both an opportunity to stop, to the
138 extent that's possible, the climate crisis, but also use it as a real time to think about how are we
139 structuring our economy, how are we structuring our society, and how do we want to structure it
140 to have the outcomes that we say all the time that we want--well actually deserve, because
141 regardless, that's a really interesting thing about climate crisis and having to transition away from
142 fossil fuels, which is that when you are transitioning your energy source, you change everything.
143 It doesn't matter if you are just focused on the energy source; everything changes because it is
144 the foundation of your economic system! So, a lot, I think of, if there is genius in the Green New
145 Deal, I think a lot of the genius is recognizing in a way that folks have failed to recognize, I
146 think, for a very long time--that addressing climate change will require economic transformation.
147 And taking that on fully and trying to think about and prepare for a transition to the economy that

148 Americans deserve, and that millions of Americans have continued to say, year after year, that
149 they want and that they want us to get to.
150

151 **Ralph Nader:** You know the knock on the Green New Deal is, oh, who's going to pay for it?
152 That's the most laughable criticism I've ever seen. I can tell you 10 ways to pay for it. First of all,
153 you increase the level of taxation of corporations who are registering record profits to the level of
154 1960s. If it just goes to the 1960s, which was a prosperous decade, it would be hundreds of
155 billions of dollars a year, that's number 1. Number 2, you get rid of the hundreds of billions of
156 dollars a year of corporate welfare, what I call corporate socialism--handouts, giveaways,
157 bailouts--half of what Washington does every day; it's called government-guaranteed corporate
158 capitalism, that's the second. The third way to do it is to show that people already are patronizing
159 Green New Deal local businesses. They're all over the place. They're businesses that deal with
160 recycling locally, businesses that deal with weatherization locally, businesses that deal with local
161 energy production, businesses that deal with community health clinics that focus on prevention
162 and don't gouge their patients. YES! Magazine, by the way, is the great chronicler. And I'm sure
163 that magazine out of Seattle is a great supporter the Green New Deal. So, I think that's got to be
164 much more forcefully conveyed to Congress. And you know, it is about Congress, isn't it? 535
165 men and women who, I've said again and again, put their shoes on every day like all of us, and a
166 majority of them can make the Green New Deal move on a fast railroad track. So, let me put this
167 question to you. It's all about focus. It's not just about local mobilization that goes into the ether;
168 it's local mobilization that goes to your two senators and representatives. To what extent do you
169 see street rallies...I was just down at Capitol Hill and there was a big series of police cars
170 escorting a big rally down there on climate disruption. We shouldn't use the word climate
171 change; it's far too benign--climate crisis, climate catastrophe. And I said to a friend, you know,
172 there's only 2/300 people there; you're going to see half a million people. This is rallies that are
173 going all over the world led by very young people like Greta of Sweden. But I think the first
174 wake-up call to Congress is surround it with hundreds of thousands of people again and again--
175 people who then go into the Congress, go into the corridors, go into the offices of the senators
176 and representatives, and make it happen. What do you think of the street-demonstration level and
177 how can it be increased?
178

179 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** I mean I think that there have been, like you said, so many powerful
180 and gigantic, honestly, demonstrations about climate across the world and in the U.S. I mean the
181 climate strikes, the school walkouts were just a couple months ago, and then Sunrise hosted a
182 Road to GND [Green New Deal] tour where I was in D.C. and there were over, there had to be
183 over 500 people there at the event at night on a Sunday. And so direct action as we've seen has
184 worked. The reason that the GND catapulted to national attention was a sit-in in Speaker Pelosi's
185 office, right? The reason that the DNC is even talking about hosting a climate debate is, yes,
186 because of public pressure, but it's also because activists from Sunrise slept on the steps of the
187 DNC for three night demanding a debate. So direct action is powerful. And I think that we need
188 more of it, right? The reason we need more people going into offices, we need more people
189 writing, we need more folks in the street always, but I think part of what we're thinking about
190 with the Green New Deal is also how do we move some of the energy, like you said, again in
191 Congress, because I think one of the sad and really sort of troubling things, particularly with this
192 administration, is that they seem pretty immune. And increasingly, I think Congress itself, being
193 particularly immune to, like, mass action, and just really resistant or maybe ignores public
194 pressure. I think Congress, right, and representatives are more movable and clearly, we've shown
195 this, but I think it's interesting that the pressure has largely moved the media conversation and
196 had moved some reps, but hasn't necessarily moved Congress. And I think you don't just see it as

197 a Green New Deal; you see it across the board where you have Medicare for All polling really
198 well, the Green New Deal polling really well, taxing corporations and the uber-wealthy really
199 well, but you don't see Congress moving on this thing. So, I think it also is getting back to and
200 we are trying to always think about how to navigate what seems to be a growing gap between
201 public sentiment and pressure and the actions of elected officials.
202

203 **Ralph Nader:** Yeah. And you know, the one hearing they had on the Green New Deal, the
204 Democrats in the House, left the Green New Deal advocates defenseless. I mean it was attacked
205 mercilessly by the forces of darkness, and it got a bad press. So, here's my suggestion: you
206 represent a younger generation, Rhiana, and I've noticed that a lot of people in your age group,
207 don't know about the old environmental advocates who can provide incredibly powerful
208 arguments from experience that they've had over the decades. And we're having David Freeman
209 right after we conclude our discussion with you to demonstrate my point. But you know, of
210 course, about Project Drawdown by Paul Hawken where he has a hundred ways to reduce
211 greenhouse gases, a hundred ways, and he ranks them. For example, dealing it with refrigeration
212 was number one. Of course, planting trees is way up there, too--recent study on that. But I find
213 that all of these efforts, just are sort of Lone Ranger efforts; they need to aggregate--the sum is
214 always greater than its parts and much more powerful when it's brought to bear on Congress--one
215 senator at a time, one representative at a time. The most successful citizen lobbies, not that we
216 necessary share their pursuits, are the NRA and AIPAC. They don't deal with demonstrations.
217 All they do is personal, laser-beam lobbyists on the members of Congress--by name and their
218 staff. And who's their lawyers? Who's their doctors? Who do they hobnob, who do they play golf
219 with? And that's what begins to change these users of our constitutional authority, or shall we
220 say, abusers of our constitutional authority. What kind of connections are being made with the
221 older generation here? Amory Lovins—he's the one who started the movement on soft energy. I
222 don't see his participation out of Colorado. Paul Hawken, David Freeman, I'm sure Bill
223 McKibben is connected with you, but there are a lot of other people locally who've been at this
224 fight for years. They need to be marshalled; what do you think about that? What's going on?
225

226 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** Absolutely. I think you're completely right. I mean I think we started
227 making some of those connections, so whether it's with Amory Lovins from the Rocky Mountain
228 Institute or Bill McKibben at 350, are having those conversations and we are talking. I think that
229 they definitely could be bigger and more robust and should be, because even though it's largely
230 in the moment right now, sort of, seen as, and in lots of ways, is a youth-led fight, this is an
231 intergenerational fight as well, right? The people who have power right now are not young
232 people. And so, the people that you move are generally not young people when you're talking
233 about who's in power, but also the climate crisis affects us all. And there, like you said, are a lot
234 of lessons to be learned from fights that were won and fights that were lost that we're still
235 seeking to learn. So, I think we are trying to do a much better job of that. I will say that part of it
236 is also that the Green New Deal, and we have spent a lot of time, in this sort of element of it,
237 especially at New Consensus, is that the Green New Deal also needs to and needed to attract
238 constituencies that don't consider themselves sort of traditional environmentalists. And we have
239 spent a lot of time on that because again, we need to be getting people to understand the
240 connections between how the economy works now, the changes for the climate that we see, and
241 why it matters to them. And so we have actually spent a lot of time talking to, I think, not the
242 usual suspects, whether that's community and economic development groups, whether that's
243 groups that are involved in immigration, whether that's businesses, folks who are at city and local
244 governments who might not have worked on environment before but are interested in thinking
245 about how the Green New Deal can jumpstart their local economies. So, we spent a lot of time

246 there, and I think that that has been really valuable. And so, I think we spent some time there,
247 and now we are trying to sort of branch out and start to make some more of these
248 intergenerational connections particularly traditional environmentalists.
249

250 **Ralph Nader:** What I like about the New Consensus where you're working, and the policy
251 director--we're talking to Rhiana Gunn-Wright--is that the leadership is starting to come from
252 minority groups, from lower-income people who, of course, absorb the biggest silent violence of
253 pollution--we call pollution; it's really silent violence. It's killing them. The mortality levels, the
254 worst pollution happens to be where poor people live, where people of color live, where
255 incinerators are in the dumps and everything, and that's called the "environmental justice
256 movement". I know your background, Rhiana, has been in addressing the issues of structural
257 poverty and criminal justice, which I call criminal injustice, and it's good that that kind of new
258 energy is what's needed because you know Exxon-Mobil has often hired black people to become
259 vice presidents, as tokens. And the corporate beverage industry has blocked referendum after
260 referendum for recycling bottles or for putting a tax on soft drinks because they marshalled the
261 local organizations saying you're just trying to make poor people pay more for a refreshing drink,
262 and they vote against these things, so you're going to turn that completely around. And so, this is
263 a whole new source of energy that is good. Just let me give you an example--when corporations
264 say they can't afford the Green New Deal, really? Here's how I answer it, "You know you better
265 convert to conservation of energy--to renewable energy". And some of the big companies like
266 Google and others are making an attempt to that, obviously. And I say, "You say you don't have
267 money; oh, but you spent 7 trillion dollars last year on stock buybacks, which didn't convert
268 anything to solar energy or efficiency--didn't produce any jobs, didn't do anything but increase
269 your pay. Now you're going to be under a rule of law that says you're never going to waste the
270 shareholder money and the consumer dollars that represent that seven trillion. You're going to
271 reset your own corporation so you can obey the lifesaving health and safety standards of our
272 society and our world. It's over, corporations! No more stock buybacks." By the way, Rhiana,
273 until 1982, the Securities and Exchange Commission banned stock buybacks as being stock
274 manipulation by insiders. And that was what Reagan did. And so, we can bring it back. You can
275 see how all of these arguments put into place--you can't believe the powerful arguments of
276 Amory Lovins against nuclear power and fossil fuels, and David Freeman. So, this whole effort
277 can accelerate tremendously. And now before we conclude, before we get questions from David
278 and Steve, how do people reach you?
279

280 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** Oh, so people can reach me on Twitter if they want, sort of like, real-
281 time responses. And my handle is just @rgunns, R-G-U-N-N-S. But they can also reach us at
282 New Consensus, info@newconsensus.com.
283

284 **Ralph Nader:** Good. And by the way, all over the world, solar energy and wind power is
285 beating the heck out of new fossil-fuel generation of electricity.
286

287 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** Yes, absolutely.
288

289 **Ralph Nader:** It's cheaper, it's safer, it's more community-based, it's more healthy; it's more
290 conducive to small business. The arguments are overwhelming. And luckily, the corporations are
291 sitting on massive hordes of cash that they don't know what to do with other than to buy back
292 their stock. So, turn that one against them. Steve, David, any comments [for] this extraordinary
293 group out of Chicago--the New Consensus?
294

295 **Steve Skrovan:** Yeah, it's amazing. I've actually got two questions, Rhiana. One is technical and
296 one is more political. First, the technical one; so aside from the political problems to be solved
297 and the movement building, you wrote a section of the policy paper--what was the thorniest issue
298 you had to resolve in formulating the Green New Deal? Just technically or maybe it was a
299 problem of how do we communicate this very complicated idea? What was the most difficult
300 problem for you to solve?
301

302 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** So, I think it was probably twofold. The first is there are sort of so
303 many things that need to happen in the economic transformation. So, one of the sticky things was
304 figuring out what are the social elements that are most necessary for the economic mobilization
305 to be successful? And I say that because a lot of people think that the Green New Deal is just like
306 a progressive wish list, so they look at particularly the second half where we outlined in the
307 resolution, where we talk about a jobs guarantee and universal healthcare, education and training
308 as sort of the progressive boondoggle. But the truth is those things were chosen because we were
309 trying to think about what are the labor conditions now, how are families set up, how will that
310 change if you enter into a mobilization where ideally you end up with full employment? But
311 even on your way there, what is necessary for people to thrive and how do you structure that
312 equitably, and how can you be thinking about the social-safety net that you're building, also in
313 terms of reinvesting in communities that have been disinvested in. So basically, policy has
314 disempowered a lot of people; how do you use it to empower them. And so that comes down to
315 sort of how you turn income into wealth if you're trying to deal with the racial wealth gap. So
316 that was sticky, and then I'll say the other thing that was sticky, was sequencing. So, you'll notice
317 that the resolution, the first part of it is what we call sort of projects. It lays out these things that
318 we need to do whether it's building a super grid, decarbonizing transportation, etcetera, to get to
319 net zero emissions. And that was actually tough, because when we started at New Consensus
320 doing the background research for the Green New Deal, we had to scope it because it had been a
321 long time since someone asked, 1) how do you have an economic mobilization in modern times,
322 right? We haven't done it since World War II at nearly the scale that the Green New Deal is
323 calling for? Then 2) so how do you structure the economic mobilization; what do you actually
324 need to do to get to net zero emissions? And a lot of people had asked these questions in sort of a
325 fractured way, but hadn't imagined how do you do that as sort of a cohesive program, and so that
326 was sticky figuring out how do you sequence things. What do you want to include in this
327 mobilization and not? Do you want to have a supergrid or do you want to work through regional
328 markets or utilities? Those sort of like nitty-gritty questions were sticky.
329

330 **Ralph Nader:** That's exactly what David Freeman is so informed about from his own
331 experience running four utilities. He's also shut down six nuclear plants, Rhiana, and he
332 dismisses the carbon tax as a diversion and a decoy. And he basically says we have to directly
333 get mandates phasing out fossil fuels. And he has a 30-year plan to phase them out completely.
334 And of course, public power comes in on this, and the socialism question, oh, feed that to some
335 of these guys. Just feed it. They'll knock it out of the ballpark. You got corporate socialism now.
336 You got corporate control of the government that develops how public budgets are spent, huge
337 subsidies for fossil fuel. I was just looking at a headline to see what's going on around the
338 country; there's a lot going on. Friends of the Earth calls for \$250 million weatherization effort
339 for Memphis, Tennessee. That's how specific they're getting with the city council; how many
340 jobs region by region, neighborhood by neighborhood. Unfortunately, we're almost out of time.
341 Any other comments or questions, David?
342

343 **Steve Skrovan:** Yeah, my second question was the political one, which is you were a policy
344 intern for Michelle Obama and the Obamas obviously hold a lot of sway still in the Democratic
345 Party. Where are they on the Green New Deal? Do you have any insight into that?
346

347 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** I don't, honestly. We have not spoken to them, so I don't know.
348

349 **Ralph Nader:** That's an answer all by itself, isn't it, Rhiana? They should be all over the Green
350 New Deal. They have the highest ratings of any political couple in the United States. And I
351 maintain they're not using it. They're not using the capital. And here's Barack Obama watching
352 Donald Trump who thinks climate disruption is a hoax, which I assume he will until the waves
353 lap up and overtake Mar-a-Lago in Florida, his mansion. He's completely dismantling, and I
354 mean completely, Obama's work on environment, and there's hardly any opposition. You got any
355 last minute observations on that one?
356

357 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** I don't. I mean honestly, I respect the Obamas, and having worked in
358 the White House for one summer, I can't imagine how tired they are after eight years. So, I can't
359 lie and be like, I would be out here doing everything on my own. I might take a nap or all of that.
360 So, I don't know, but I do think there's certainly still time for them to get involved and for them
361 to decide where they are. And so, I think right now personally, I'm just giving them space to
362 recuperate and see what they do.
363

364 **Ralph Nader:** Well, you know they have had good and deserved vacations and they've traveled
365 around and relaxed and had a lot of fun after working so hard. But I think the explanation for the
366 question as to why they're not on the ramparts, is because Donald Trump is a dirty player. He's
367 an intimidator; he's a vicious verbal combatant and they don't need that in their lives.
368

369 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** I think that also makes sense, yeah.
370

371 **Ralph Nader:** And, of course, they've got to overcome that because the fate of the world is too
372 serious not to have people who can command the media, to be in the arena. Thank you very
373 much, Rhiana. We've been talking with Rhiana Gunn-Wright, the Policy Director of this very
374 exciting new group in Chicago, New Consensus. And we hope that you'll listen to the interview
375 with David Freeman on the podcast so that you, and he, and others of different generational
376 background, can get together and maximize the laser-beam focus on 535 lawmakers on Capitol
377 Hill. Thank you, Rhiana.
378

379 **Rhiana Gunn-Wright:** Absolutely.
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381 **Steve Skrovan:** We have been speaking with Rhiana Gunn-Wright, Policy Director at the think
382 tank, New Consensus. We will link to her work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. We're going to take
383 a short break. When we come back, we welcome back old friend, David Freeman, as we continue
384 our discussion about the Green New Deal and how those goals can be achieved through
385 renewable energy. You are listening to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*; back after this.
386

387 **Russell Mokhiber:** From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your
388 *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, July 12, 2019. I'm Russell Mokhiber.
389 On the heels of the EPA's June approval of a bee-killing pesticide, the White House said it would
390 stop collecting data on declining honey bee populations, potentially making it impossible to
391 analyze the effects of the chemical and the administration's other anti-science policies on
392 pollinators. The USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] cited budget cuts when it said
393 last week that it would indefinitely suspend data collection for its Honey Bee Colonies report,

394 which has been compiled every year since 2015. The report helps scientists and farmers assess
395 the decline of honey bees, which are responsible for pollinating one in every three bites of food
396 taken by humans. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.
397

398 **Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russell. You know, it's just not young people who are promoting
399 the Green New Deal. Our next guest is a veteran who has served for decades in the battle to
400 generate clean, efficient and safe energy.
401

402 **David Feldman:** David Freeman is an engineer, an attorney, and an author who has been called
403 in eco-pioneer for his environmentally conscious leadership of both the Tennessee Valley
404 Authority and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District [SMUD]. He's also a noted anti-nuclear
405 activist and the author of a number of books on energy policy including *Winning Our Energy*
406 *Independence*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, David Freeman.
407

408 **David Freeman:** Glad to be introduced. My latest book is *All-Electric America*, which we could
409 make happen and eliminate fossil fuels and the nuclear power altogether.
410

411 **Ralph Nader:** Let's get right down to it. You're the only person on earth, David Freeman, who
412 shut down nuclear power plants. As head of many electric utility companies, you not only ran the
413 TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] and the SMUD, you ran the L.A. Utility; you've run a utility
414 in upstate New York, you have the most concrete program on getting away from nuclear and
415 fossil fuels that I have read, which we'll get right down to. But just to inform our listeners, how
416 many nuclear plants have you shut down?
417

418 **David Freeman:** Well, we shut down at eight in the Tennessee Valley while they were under
419 construction. But if you think it was fun to fire five, six, seven thousand people in the home of
420 atomic power down there in Tennessee, you don't know. As a matter of fact, Ralph, as I recall,
421 you praised me for doing it, and in Republican East Tennessee, that didn't help one bit.
422

423 **Ralph Nader:** Do you know what's interesting? Nuclear power as you say, is on its way out. I
424 remember when the Atomic Energy Commission predicted 1,000 nuclear plants by the year
425 2000.
426

427 **David Freeman:** Oh, yeah, Congressman Chet Holifield, from California; they had a joint
428 committee on atomic energy. People have forgotten that nuclear power was the kind of like ice
429 cream in terms of public opinion. He was going to put a nuclear plant every 50 miles along the
430 coast of California. And I'm proud of the fact that with Friends of the Earth, we succeeded in
431 making California nuclear-free by 2024 when they promise to shut down every nuclear plant in
432 the state. And that's not going to happen in the entire nation. But let's get to what the really future
433 is all about and . . .
434

435 **Ralph Nader:** Right. Let's get to the demands that you are making for public policy. Go ahead.
436

437 **David Freeman:** Well, it's not really hard. If something is poisoning life on earth like fossil
438 fuels and nuclear power, in this country, we have a culture of outlawing something that's poison.
439 And so, I'm just proposing simple, straightforward laws that would say give them a few years of
440 lead time. We cut back parts of your consumption 5% a year starting now. We tell the
441 automobile industry they've got a couple of years to retool and start making ultimately zero-
442 emissions cars, and we tell every household that within a certain amount of time, they've got to
443 retrofit and stop using fossil fuels for heating and substitute heat pumps; we can have an all-
444 renewable electric America. And the beautiful thing about it is it's cheaper. You don't need to be

445 an economist to figure this thing out. If a fuel is free, like solar and wind and storage, then it's
446 just a matter of capital. Capital has never made cheaper than it is nowadays. So, investments in
447 solar and wind will be inflation proof, and over time, much lower. In addition to that, an electric
448 car is 99% efficient. And the internal combustion engine, I don't know, maybe 35% efficient. So,
449 the switch to clean energy is a giant step forward in efficiency and over time, will actually reduce
450 the total cost of energy. And then if you want energy independence, there's nothing more
451 homegrown than our own sun and wind. And we won't have to go to war in the Middle East
452 worrying about oil. And this is a side benefit. The air in the cities will finally be clean and we
453 can stop drilling anywhere including in the Arctic where we're messing things up something
454 awful. So, the benefits of doing this are so enormous. It's like taking out an insurance policy
455 where, instead of paying a premium, you get a dividend every year.
456

457 **Ralph Nader:** Well, you know, the bad news is that the Florida electric-utilities--private
458 corporations--want to control solar energy and want to block people by burdening homeowners
459 from putting the solar panels on. So, Florida is like lagging behind 13 states in solar energy.
460 You've pointed out that solar energy and wind power is winning all over the world on the basis
461 of cost. It is undercutting fossil fuels and nuclear power big, big time. So, tell us what's going on
462 in Memphis, Tennessee as an example.
463

464 **David Freeman:** Well, I'm volunteering with Friends of the Earth these days and we launched
465 the campaign last Saturday in Memphis, Tennessee for a massive efficiency program starting
466 with the low-income people. People don't realize that Memphis, Tennessee in the Tennessee
467 Valley, served by TVA, has got the worst energy burden of any city in the country. Twenty-five
468 percent of the citizens of Memphis pay 25% of their after-tax income on their utility bill. It's a
469 function of the fact that TVA's rates have gone up, up, up, up; was a waste of money on nuclear
470 power plants that they couldn't finish and coal plants that are woefully inefficient. And so, the
471 rates are now not low rates, they're just kind of average; the houses are dilapidated and they
472 haven't had an efficiency program since I left back in '84. So we're pursuing that, but more
473 important than that, the City of Memphis is now seriously and publicly considering leaving the
474 Tennessee Valley Authority because we've shown to them, that they can just go right across the
475 river--they're right there on the Mississippi--and have access to all solar and wind power in the
476 middle of America where actually the red State of Texas has got a big chunk of wind power
477 nowadays. And the old New Deal, TVA, the centerpiece of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal that
478 was 100% renewable in the 30 years with hydro-power, is now just stuck with coal. They're not
479 stuck with it, but they're just holding on to their old coal and gas and nuclear plants. So,
480 Memphis is threatening to leave TVA and I've met with the mayor several times and the utility
481 manager and they are going through the process of deciding whether to leave the Tennessee
482 Valley Authority. And we're down there, kind of leading the charge because TVA is now, you
483 know, environmental criminal number 1 in terms of utilities. Most of the private companies that
484 are regulated are being forced to do at least a little bit toward moving toward solar. TVA is doing
485 a tiny bit.
486

487 **Ralph Nader:** And what's the plan in Memphis--an actual economic plan?
488

489 **David Freeman:** The economic plan is they give TVA five years notice. And, under their
490 contract, they're free to buy their power from across the river or right in the city. And so, we're
491 urging them to put . . . and they're doing a serious public study that we're participating in to
492 figure out what the cheapest sources would be if they left TVA. And of course, energy efficiency
493 is, by far, the cleanest and cheapest kilowatt hour you can get--the one that you don't generate,
494 so, we have a public campaign underway and we've got a lot of support from the local groups,

495 including obviously, the minority organizations that comprise the bulk of the people in Memphis.
496 So, this is our effort to combine environmental justice with really putting pressure on the TVA to
497 change their way(s).
498

499 **Ralph Nader:** We're talking with S. David Freeman. Let me just tell the listeners what your
500 books were. By the way, David Freeman is advisor of presidents going back to Jimmy Carter,
501 advisor of governors--from Jerry Brown [in CA] to Mario Cuomo in New York. He wrote a book
502 called *Energy: The New Era*, in 1974 and one called *Winning Our Energy Independence*; then
503 one that is very solution-oriented called *All-Electric America: A Climate Solution and the*
504 *Hopeful Future*, in 2016. And, one of my favorites, his autobiography called *The Green Cowboy*.
505 Now, David, I know people who are skeptical are saying what happens when the wind isn't
506 blowing and the sun isn't shining?

507 **David Freeman:** We have a device that is kind of well-known; it's called a battery. We've been
508 storing electricity for years. We know how the modern batteries are much less expensive and
509 they are a commercial product, so, you take the sunshine when it shines, the wind when it blows,
510 and you store some of it, and then you use it at night or when the wind is not blowing. So, you're
511 going to have a perfectly reliable power system made up of solar, wind, and storage. And the
512 plain truth of the matter is, economically, these base-load plants are deader than a doornail. You
513 know why? Because in the deregulated market that we have through most of the country, not in
514 TVA, but through most of the country, the market price is determined by the lowest source. So,
515 when the sun does shine and it's a lot of hours, and the wind does blow, the marginal cost is zero
516 because there's no fuel cost. So then nuclear plant or the coal plant, which operates around the
517 clock, is out of business those hours. If you subtract those hours from the nuclear plant, then the
518 cost of nuclear plant, which is already very high, becomes astronomical. That's the reason I was
519 able to persuade the Pacific Gas and Electric Company to agree to shut down their nuclear plant
520 and build renewable energy to replace it and we reached the agreement with them about a year
521 ago to do that. The world is changed!

522 **Ralph Nader:** By the way, that's the last operating nuclear plant in California--that you got
523 Pacific Gas and Electric agreeing to shut down.
524

525 **David Freeman:** That is correct, that's correct.
526

527 **Ralph Nader:** You see, people, the technological answers have been on the shelf for years;
528 they've been in pilot projects for years. There's no matter of well, we have to invent something
529 that nobody's figured out how to invent--energy efficiency, solar, wind power, geothermal--
530 they're here. They're used here and there around the world. The issue, isn't it, David, is political
531 power. We have to have people power overcome the fossil-fuel corporations, [i.e.] power in
532 Congress and elsewhere, right?
533

534 **David Freeman:** Yeah. But, Ralph, now that we have a bunch of political people that are
535 playing in the Green New Deal, they say they're for it, and I have suggestions for legislation to
536 prove that they're for it because talk is cheap. But we need to pass laws that just outlaw one year
537 at a time, the fossil fuel plants, and the nuclear plants, and that's the only way it's going to
538 happen. An attack on energy at this stage of the game, is a nudge; it's a nudge, people. Maybe if
539 you really want to, maybe you'll do a little bit more clean; it's way too late for that. You know, I
540 divide the world, Ralph, into two categories now. I'll leave you out of it, but there are the dumb
541 deniers of climate and then there are the intelligent deniers. They are the folks who can make the

542 good speech about how horrible the climate crisis is and then propose absolutely nothing that is
543 going to make...that mother nature will notice. I mean all these things that we've been doing in
544 the past that seem so brave are just not enough now. Sure, we should get Harvard to divest from
545 investing in fossil fuels. Of course, we should, but that is totally insufficient right now. We need
546 to be talking of passing a law, effective very, very soon, saying that Detroit can make only zero-
547 emission cars. I mean when Pearl Harbor hit us, and I was alive then, we didn't diddle around;
548 we told the automobile industry to stop making cars all together; we ordered them to. So, they
549 started making tanks and airplanes and we won the war. We don't need to do anything that
550 dramatic now. We just need to get them to start mass producing a different kind of car that
551 they're advertising already.
552

553 **Ralph Nader:** We're talking with David Freeman. Apropos a previous program, which I
554 described as "the Worst is First and the Best is Last"--listen to this, listeners--Have you been
555 invited to testify before Congress in the last few years? Have you been on national TV, NPR and
556 PBS S. David Freeman? You only know more about energy as a lawyer and engineer; you've run
557 electric utilities, written studies, advised politicians at high levels. You only know more about
558 energy than any of these people who are called up on Capitol Hill bloviating on behalf of Exxon-
559 Mobil or Peabody Coal or whoever's paying their freight these days. Have you been invited to
560 testify? Have you been on national TV and radio?
561

562 **David Freeman:** I'm still hoping for an invitation. I might get one. Bernie called me for my
563 book on Facebook yesterday.
564

565 **Ralph Nader:** Well, there's presidential candidates who are very congenial to your message.
566 They're going to be talking all over the country on their campaigns--Elizabeth Warren, Bernie
567 Sanders and others--so we're making headway there. And, of course, some of them are in the
568 Congress. And when they go back . . .
569

570 **David Freeman:** Yeah, but, Ralph, not any of them have come out in plain English and talked
571 about the need to mandate laws to outlaw the stuff.
572

573 **Ralph Nader:** Yeah, you're right. They're talking about a carbon tax, which is a decoy, right?
574

575 **David Freeman:** Yeah, and so I label them as part of the intelligent deniers. But we need
576 someone that... if we don't propose laws to outlaw this stuff during the campaign, we're not
577 going to have them in 2021 even if we win. And we went through eight years of doing nothing
578 with Obama on this issue.
579

580 **Ralph Nader:** David, what do you think of the Green New Deal and the young people that are
581 mobilizing and marching all over the world calling for an end to fossil fuels and [for] solar
582 energy and wind power? We just interviewed Rhiana Gunn-Wright, who is one of the drafters of
583 that resolution that was put into the Congress a few months ago called the Green New Deal.
584 What's your view of that and the movement?
585

586 **David Freeman:** Well, I think is they've done more to raise discussion of this issue than I have in
587 40 years. So, my cowboy hat is off to them. And actually, I have a meeting with Rhiana next
588 week and I'm going to try to talk her in AOC into coming out and talking about mandates.
589 Because there's no point, I am the old New Deal. I mean the old New Deal was really green. The
590 hydro-power is . . . I grew up in Chattanooga, Tennessee. It was an electrically heated homes that
591 stopped me from shoveling coal and getting asthma. So, I know that this can be done. And so, I

592 feel a personal connection to these young people. I think that they need a 93-year-old guy to raise
593 their average age and get this movement going! So, I'm going to meet with them next week.

594 **Ralph Nader:** Well, that's very encouraging. And listeners, if some of you get that AARP
595 Magazine that claims to have 19 million subscribers--the biggest magazine in the world, tell
596 them to put S. David Freeman on the cover instead of some 60-year-old movie star who looks
597 like he or she is 57.
598

599 **Steve Skrovan:** You only downgraded it three years from 60 to 57. They want more than that,
600 Ralph.
601

602 **David Freeman:** Ralph, you and I are younger than some of these old folks.
603

604 **Ralph Nader:** The old saying, "the only real aging is the erosion one's ideals" [Richard T.
605 Blumenthal]. And you will never age, S. David Freeman. Before we close, David, Steve, do you
606 have any comment or question?
607

608 **Steve Skrovan:** Well, as you know, Ralph, I've been working on a nuclear documentary for
609 many years now, and so actually, we interviewed Mr. Freeman a few years ago. So, all of this is,
610 it's very supportive of what I believe in. And like I said in the beginning of when we just started
611 talking about the reactions that people have about, hey, what about this new technology or what
612 about that new technology? And Mr. Freeman's answer is, "where is it"? I mean the
613 environment couldn't be more economically friendly and yet it's not here, so let's bury it, literally
614 and figuratively.
615

616 **David Freeman:** Ralph, can I just say one final comment?
617

618 **Ralph Nader:** Sure.
619

620 **David Freeman:** I'm 93, but so are you, and so is everyone who's listening to me on the issues
621 we're talking about. The hour is very, very late. If we pretend that we believe the climatologists
622 on climate, then we're all 93 and we better get with it and we better go for the jugular. It's too late
623 for capillary solutions. We need to pass laws that outlaws this stuff. And we need to start
624 advocating for them right now, not yesterday!
625

626 **Ralph Nader:** And on that note, it's the Congress, people. Whether you like it or not, the
627 mandates will come from the Congress if you mandate your senators and representatives to do
628 their job to save the country/the planet, for future generations. That is not an understatement.
629 Thank you very much, S. David Freeman, for your decades of work and to be continued on
630 future shows.
631

632 **David Freeman:** Well, thank you for having me.
633

634 **Steve Skrovan:** We have been speaking with the Green Cowboy S. David Freeman. We will
635 link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, Rhiana Gunn-
636 Wright and of course, David Freeman. For those you listening on the radio, that's our show. For
637 you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call the Wrap Up. Transcript to the
638 show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.
639

640 **David Feldman:** Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for
641 Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org and have it delivered directly into your inbox.
642 For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.
643

644 **Steve Skrovan:** And Ralph's new books are the fable, *How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress*;
645 to acquire a copy of that, go to ratsreformedcongress.org, and *To the Ramparts: How Bush and*
646 *Obama Paved the Way for the Trump Presidency, and Why It Isn't Too Late to Reverse Course*.
647 We will link to that also.
648

649 **David Feldman:** The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and
650 Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.
651

652 **Steve Skrovan:** Our theme music, "Stand up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp
653 Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon.
654

655 **David Feldman:** Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.
656

657 **Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody. And I hope this program helped connect the two
658 generations of Rhiana and David on the Green New Deal.
659