

Ralph Nader Radio Hour Ep 440 Transcript

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

[Music]

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: David, we have another live Zoom episode coming up. In affiliation with the American Museum of Tort Law, we have rebooked Josh Koskoff. He's the attorney who won a \$73 million judgment against Remington and other arms manufacturers on behalf of the families of nine victims of the mass shooting that took place to Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. This live Zoom will be on Wednesday, August 24th at 9:30 a.m. Pacific 11:30 a.m. Central and 12:30 p.m. Eastern Time,. Go to ralphnaderradiohour.com to register. We'll have a button up there for you to register.

David Feldman: If you're enjoying the Alex Jones meltdown, that trial, you'll love this.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. We're going to get some insight. We were scheduled to have Mr. Koskoff on a few weeks ago (July 27) and he had to cancel at the last minute because there was a hearing that he had to attend in Washington, and so we'll get the lowdown on what that's all about. So sign up Wednesday, August 24th Wednesday, August 24th at 9:30 a.m. Pacific 11:30 a.m. Central and 12:30 p.m. Eastern Time. That will be very interesting. You get a chance to ask our guest and Ralph questions. And it's time to introduce the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: We have a great show today. Americans love technology; we love gadgets. We love all the latest gee-whiz technological innovations. Our first guest today is Dan O'Dowd. He is the world's leading expert in creating software that never fails and can't be hacked. He is the CEO of Green Hills Software and the founder of The Dawn Project, whose mission is to make computers safer for humanity by making systems unhackable. They did a study on Tesla self-driving cars where they found out that the autonomous Tesla made a critical error every eight minutes, and they determined that you and your car would be wrecked in 36 minutes. And that's just the first half of the show. In the second half, we're going to switch gears to talk about the threat to the post office. Donald Trump appointed to be the Postmaster General a fellow businessman named Louis DeJoy. DeJoy is the founder of a logistics and freight company, and his mandate was to cut costs and services at the US Post Office. These cuts would have crippled mail-in balloting for the 2020 election, which as we all remember, took place during a national quarantine. Public Citizen and the NAACP Legal Fund teamed up to convince a federal judge to force DeJoy to restore those services. Now two years into Joe Biden's term, why does this guy still have a job? Our second guest today will be Steve Hutkins, founder of Save the Post Office, a website that provides information about post office closings, suspensions and consolidations, the

historic post office buildings that are being sold and the fight to preserve the People's Post Office. As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber. But before we do any of that, our first guest is going to tell us why taking a ride in a self-driving Tesla is like being driven by a drunken suicidal teenager. David?

David Feldman: Dan O'Dowd is the CEO of Green Hills Software and is the world's leading expert in creating software that never fails and can't be hacked. Mr. O'Dowd created the secure operating systems for projects including Boeing's 787s, Lockheed Martin's F-35 Fighter Jets, the Boeing B1-B Intercontinental Nuclear Bomber, and NASA's Orion Crew Exploration Vehicle. He is the founder of The Dawn Project, which aims to make computers safer for humanity by making systems unhackable. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dan O'Dowd.

Dan O'Dowd: Thank you. Glad to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Dan. Listeners should know that the federal auto safety agency has been investigating since 2016, the problems involving Tesla's alleged autonomous technology, and we still don't know any resolution. They're just taking their sweet time. They've documented that the autopilot that Tesla sells has been involved in 35 crashes involving this system, including nine that resulted in 14 deaths. And NHTSA's investigations covering 830,000 vehicles sold in the US and is looking into the Full Self-Driving as well as Autopilot. Full Self-driving, it's called. We will refer to it as the FSD technology, Full Self-Driving. So tell us what's wrong with it.

Dan O'Dowd: Well first, to not put too fine a point on it, it's the single worst piece of commercial software I've ever seen. It doesn't do anything useful. You take your perfectly good Tesla, it will try to kill you several times a day. It cannot even drive straight reliably. It can't do a left turn without your steering wheel going herky-jerky back and forth. We measured it; we did some studies on it. Every eight minutes, there's a safety problem. It does something unsafe. It merges into another lane where there's a car there. It loves driving straight out of left turn lanes, and go into a left turn lane and say, Oh, no, I want to go straight, and it'll just drive straight out of the left turn lane. You're going into oncoming traffic. That's what's on the other side of a left turn lane--some guy turning left the other way. You can't do that safely, and it does it all the time. So the recent discovery — we just made this announcement yesterday; we put out videos. If we put a small child mannequin--not a real small child we wouldn't do that--in the middle of a crosswalk, a school crosswalk right across from a school. We put a green safety vest like the workers on the road workers wear, and we took a Tesla with full self-driving on and it ran the kid right down. It mowed the kid down in the crosswalk. It does it again and again and again. We did some tests. We went out to a test track and we tested it again. Every single time, it ran that kid down.

Ralph Nader: And how is Tesla reacting to you under the frequently arrogant Elon Musk's direction?

Dan O'Dowd: Tesla has made no comment as of today, but of course the reporters have asked them. Their supporters, their vicious, virulent supporters on Twitter are attacking full force today, calling me a child killer and all the other things that they do normally when you say anything bad about Tesla or anything bad about Elon Musk. They try to shut you up. They try to shut up journalists. They try to shut other people up. That's their tactic. They're saying it's a fake.

One of their biggest things is to proclaim "it's a fake; this is ridiculous; it wouldn't actually run down a child." Well, yes, it actually would. I can demonstrate it. *Sixty Minutes* want to come to Santa Barbara? I'll show you that crosswalk, I'll put that small child mannequin in there. I'll let the *Sixty Minutes* reporter sit in the driver's seat and push the buttons and turn on full self-driving and it will run down there and mow that kid down. It's amazing. It's horrifying.

Ralph Nader: There's little doubt, watching Elon Musk over the years. He did break through on electric cars with the auto industry always promising electric cars in the '70s, '80s, '90s, and putting out ones that don't seem to be very properly built or designed, but he did break through. We have to give him credit for that. People should know, by the way, the electric cars are nothing new. His innovations have not been that grandiose. In 1912, there were 5000 electric cars in the US. Electric cars were considered the coming thing until about 1920 when the oil companies and the auto companies got together and agreed that the future was going to be the infernal eternal combustion engine, and the rest is air pollution and all kinds of problems for drivers and motorists over the decades. So that was an unfortunate turn in the road against what was a very promising early 20th Century electric car effort by some of the car companies at that time. Let's bolster your case a little further by citing a report in the *New York Times*, August 6th, which is headlined "California's Department of Motor Vehicles Accuses Tesla of Falsely Advertising Its Autopilot System." And it said Tesla had misled customers by claiming in advertisements that vehicles equipped with this Autopilot and Full Self-Driving capability program were autonomous. If the agency's complaints to the state's Office of Administrative Hearings succeed, Tesla's licenses to make and sell vehicles in California could be suspended or revoked.

Against this announcement, Tesla has typically kept quiet. Rather unusual because Elon Musk is really the closest thing to a Trump in the auto industry. He regularly exudes false statements, knowingly phony predictions about autonomous cars being all over the country in two years. He said that in 2015, repeated it in 2017. He boasts a lot. He has a fanatic following, like you suggested. But he has now sold, at \$12,000 extra, this Full Self-Driving technology, so-called, to 100,000 Tesla owners. Now, they must be experiencing some insecurity here. Are they speaking out? Are they protesting? They're reading the same reports. What's going on with those 100,000 drivers which we're calling for today to be recalled? In other words, you can have Tesla remotely disable these systems and prevent the kind of crashes and erratic out-of-control driving of this vehicle. What are the 100,000 motorists, some of them of course who have been involved in these situations, are suing Tesla and the next of kin of the victims are filing tort suits against Tesla, which is broadly insured. What are these motorists doing?

Dan O'Dowd: I've talked to a number of them. Of course, you can see what they say on Twitter and they say it's wonderful, it's fantastic, it saved my life. They just make that stuff up. Those are just propagandas. Those are just Tesla shareholders pumping the stock. But I know people personally. My brother-in-law owns one. I know some people in town here and some people in the company, I asked them this question. The answers are not running it. What happens is you get this system, you get Full Self-Driving and/or Autopilot or some — there are different systems — and you drive it around and it will do something crazy. It will just try to drive you off the road or drive you into oncoming traffic. And people say, "Oh, whoa. Oh, no. Okay, I'm not going to keep that on." But Elon Musk, as you said, has promised every single year for the last eight years that he's going to deliver by the end of the year. So what they say is, "Oh, well, I bought it; he

did say it still had some problems. They did say that, and so I get it. I'll just wait." So some of them are suing and some of them are saying they want their money back. And there's a guy in Germany who got all his money back for the car for suing for this, but they are still hoping. Well, why are they hoping? Because Elon Musk tells them. I mean, these people aren't — it's not like they just invented this. He is saying positively repeatedly, it's six months away, it's the end of the year, it's less than a year. So people say/think okay, I bought it. It doesn't work really great now, but in six months it will, so okay. And I won't say anything. I'm not going to sue them because in six months it will be great.

Ralph Nader: Listeners should know that Tesla is experiencing serious quality control problems. They're pushing production very fast in Germany, China, the US, and it shows. The other thing people should know about Tesla is they're not the only ones having hacking problems. The entire auto industry, in their effort to produce autonomous cars or semi-autonomous facets of cars, has not yet solved the hacking problem. I was at a technical conference a few years ago and the engineers there admitted it. They didn't even want to talk about it. Technically, tell us, isn't it possible? Let's say there were 100,000 models of a particular car, same models, could a remote hacker penetrate and turn these models in the tens of thousands into erratic driving patterns? Is that possible?

Dan O'Dowd: Yes, it's really even worse than that. For any given manufacturer, all the cars run the same software in the same model year. So every 2022 car from GM or Ford or Toyota are all running identical software. So if there's a bug in one of them, there's a bug in all of them. And it's not 100,000; it's millions. And erratic isn't the most catastrophic result. If it's a self-driving car, you can tell it - if you hacked it/gained control of it – “Okay, exit your garage.” They know how the garage door opener works. Or it's in a parking lot and knows how to get out there. It can get on the nearest street. Don't drive erratically. Drive 100 miles an hour the wrong way down the street. That's what you do. Millions and millions of self-driving cars being ordered to simultaneously drive on the wrong side of the road at 100 miles an hour would cost millions of casualties. It's worse than a nuclear weapon. And it all happens in five minutes, and no one knows what's going on. It's utter chaos as these cars just jump into the opposite lane and go as fast as they can. Each car could cause multiple wrecks, not just one, times millions. This is a very big problem. We need to solve this problem.

Ralph Nader: You're a pioneer in developing anti-hacking software, which you've sold to the aviation industry and the US government. Have you tried to approach the auto companies, not just Tesla? Are they receptive to you? I mean, you have a track record. They're feeling their way in this area. What's been their response when you contact GM, Ford, VW, Toyota, Honda, and so forth?

Dan O'Dowd: Yes. And there's a way to develop software. The government has very strict standards about how to develop secure software. If you're building things for the military like nuclear weapons systems, military aircraft, or things like that on how you write software. And there is software that can't be hacked. Most people don't think that, but it's because they don't interact in that market; they aren't there. So you have a problem with how do you get people into that software? But part of it is care. Mark Zuckerberg is famous for having written on the wall at Facebook "Move fast and break things". It means, get features out as fast as you can. So there are methodologies for developing software that get software features out there really quick. But you know what it is. It's what you get on your phone and your PC. It always has bugs. It always

comes out; it crashes all the time. But that's okay. That's how Facebook makes a trillion dollars. That's how Microsoft makes a trillion dollars, and Google. It works. People accept that their systems fail from time to time. It's not a big deal. To get fancy features, they're willing to do that. To build something that doesn't have those kinds of faults and works all the time, you have to do things a different way and it is slower. It is not move as fast as you can. It's be more careful, think about things, test them thoroughly; don't just put them on the road. Did nobody at Tesla ever test whether it runs over little children? They really ought to have a test like that before they put their software out. If they did do the test, they should go to jail, because they shipped the product knowing it does that.

Ralph Nader: Speaking of jail, by the way, the behavior of Tesla and Elon Musk ignoring the problem, not fixing the problem, papering over the problem which has led to death, injury, and crashes all over the country, meets the criteria of involuntary manslaughter. I mean, someone driving negligently down the road and hitting and killing somebody can be prosecuted and sent to jail. And it shouldn't be any different for corporations or CEOs, even a CEO who's worth over \$100 billion. So let's point to this problem, which is real fundamental. There's a strong case for semi-autonomous systems--lane-changing semi-autonomous brakes--are already on a lot of cars and they've worked. But what's the purpose of a fully autonomous car taking control of the car away from the driver so the driver can chat and work the computer with other motorists in the car? What's all these billions of dollars invested? All the bragging about autonomous cars? I've often thought the best autonomous vehicle is mass transit, where you can sit in a commuter train and read the newspaper and get to your destination. Why is there an argument for autonomous cars, which we're not going to see for years? The highway systems are not ready for it, and there's all kinds of other problems, including driver confidence. The minute drivers realize that the car they're watching toodling along can be remotely hacked by a stealth actor and turned into the ditch or off a cliff, that word of mouth is going to spread very, very quickly. And without motorists' confidence, there's no such thing as successfully selling fully autonomous vehicles. Can you see an argument for fully autonomous vehicles, or it's just a way to sell a more expensive motor vehicles and make more profit?

Dan O'Dowd: I do believe it's going to happen, but it will happen in the way that that's doing it right and planning it right. The answer to the previous question about the companies, I asked them this and they said, "Yeah, we get it. We understand you could develop software there, and maybe you can make it so that it doesn't have these problems, but that just takes too long; I have a three-year schedule." That's what they said. "I have to get a new model. I'm on 2022, I'm developing model 2025 right now to be shipped in late 2024. I can't do something that will take me five years to get it out the door. That's crazy and it doesn't work in my business model. That is the situation. But for the question of "What's the value, there is a real value, as you say, you can do your work; you can chat; you can be on the phone with people and not worry about it. And the ultimate value is if we can make computers be better drivers than human beings, really better, then fewer people will die. A million people die per year on the road in auto accidents in the world, 40-some-thousand in the US every year. If we could make that software really work all the time, then we wouldn't have drunks driving, like that thing we just saw in LA yesterday--a 100-mile-an-hour crash. Turns out the person had 13 times been in crashes before. That person wouldn't be driving a car, they'd be sitting back and doing whatever they're doing. There are real advantages to doing it, but only if it really does work and it really is a better driver, which it's not.

Ralph Nader: That's a big if, a big if, because all over the world, software systems are failing, all kinds of catastrophes and disasters. Look at the MCAS on the Boeing 737 MAX, for example. There have been failures in the military. They fix it in one way and it fails in another way. The more complex it gets, the more safeguards are required, the more human genius is required. Anyway, we'll leave that for the future as to whether there's a prospect for fully autonomous cars. Right now, what would you like the state and federal governments to do? And tell us about your advertising campaign.

Dan O'Dowd: So what I want them to do is to recall this product, Full Self-Driving. The product has no merits. It cannot drive your car. It says it's full self-driving; it does not drive your car. I mean it just is beyond imagination of terrible at doing so. So it should come off the market. Now, that might be too strict, but my latest one is--I'm working on this--okay, maybe we shouldn't just take it off the market, but what we should do is pass a regulation. And I can't see anybody objecting to this. And that is you can't put your self-driving car on the road until you prove, through thorough tests with NHTSA or Consumer Reports or an entity like that that it will not run over children in crosswalks. That's what you have to do. Until then you can't put it on the road; it comes off the road. Go back in the lab and figure out why you're running over children in crosswalks, and then come back and show it to us that it doesn't do that anymore, and then maybe you can go back on the road. That's my minimal ask.

Ralph Nader: Have you filed a formal petition with NHTSA, the federal auto safety agency inside the Department of Transportation? That's what they usually require.

Dan O'Dowd: Well, we have filed numerous reports from our experiences of these failures and two weeks ago we had a meeting with some of the top people at NHTSA, the head of enforcement and the head of rulemaking, and a bunch of other people. And we presented our initial findings about things like "do not enter" signs and "one way" signs and the fact that it runs over children in crosswalks. I think they should also be required to prove that they know what a "do not enter" sign is before they can go on the road. Right now there's no regulation at all for self-driving cars. There's no rules and no tests you have to pass.

Ralph Nader: It's not just children, it's pedestrians beware, adults as well.

Dan O'Dowd: I was just trying to find the minimal thing I could ask for, the smallest thing that everybody would agree. The most anti-regulation person in the Senate or the Congress would say, Okay, all we wanted them to do is to prove it won't run over your grandchild when they're in a crosswalk. Is that too much to ask? Is that too tough a regulation? That's what I'm trying to do. Can we just get agreement on that one? After we do that, maybe we can agree on some other things too. But who can say, no we should let them mow down kids in crosswalks. I don't see why that's a big issue. I think we can win this one if we set our demands low enough to start with. We can always increase them later.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Dan O'Dowd, one of the world's leading experts in creating software that is reliable and can't be hacked. Let me ask you this question. NHTSA can order Tesla, assuming Tesla doesn't try to drag it out in the courts, to disable this Full Self-Driving technology, the FSD technology remotely, couldn't they?

Dan O'Dowd: Yes, they can do it. They've recalled software before. A few months ago, it was discovered--people found it; we found it too--that Tesla had programmed when it came into an intersection with stop signs like four-way stop and it looked around, didn't see any cars, it didn't stop. It just kind of rolled through the intersection. And people argued, "Well, that's what drivers do too, right? That's what people do." And then somebody said, "Yeah, but they'll give you a ticket because it's actually illegal." And they forced Tesla to change the software and say you will always come to a stop. And it does, as best I can see. I've read in the latest versions, it now does stop. And in the earlier version, it did not stop unless it saw other cars around.

Ralph Nader: And if they did disable it, they would have to refund at least the \$12,000 they charge each motorist. You've been up on Capitol Hill. You've connected with people in other countries. Any other foreign countries moving on this in terms of their own safety regulatory agency, and what has been the reaction from Congress?

Dan O'Dowd: So on the foreign issue, the California lawsuit that was mentioned, said basically, if you call it full self-driving and it doesn't full self-drive, it's on its face false advertising. It's obvious. So they're bringing that complaint. That complaint was also brought in Germany more than a year ago, and the German government said you can't call it full self-driving, you can't call it autopilot, it isn't. You're lying. Your name is lying. So Germany has already forced them back on that one. Also, the Germans do have, or Europeans in specific, but often led by the Germans, some regulations on self-driving cars and are giving Tesla a bit of a hard time. Elon Musk put these cars on the road and nobody ever looked it up. There is no testing and no regulation in California nor in Washington. There are no rules and regulations. They just said, We're just going to put it out there because there's no rules. In Europe, they do have some rules, and Tesla is now trying to get approval to run these programs officially in Europe. They're not allowed to because their default law is no, you have to ask. Our default law is yes, and we have to decide later if the answer is no and you can't do it. That's where we stand right now. We asked NHTSA officially; we showed them our material and demonstrated what it doesn't do and does do and said, This should come off the road. And they said, "Thank you," and took it in-house and I don't know.

Ralph Nader: How about any hearings on Capitol Hill, coming?

Dan O'Dowd: We're working on it. We don't have anything scheduled. We have met with the Transportation Committee members on both sides, on both in the House and the Senate. We have some solid support. Senator Blumenthal is fully on board here, and we've met with the House committee members and I'm meeting with the chairman in a few weeks.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. And our listeners should know that Elon Musk is also a corporate welfare king. He contacts state governments saying, I could build the plant in your state. How many billions of dollars you can give me? And he took Nevada to the cleaners on a battery plant where the taxpayers in Nevada are having to pay huge amounts per each job created. And of course, they get nothing back in terms of the profits. So he's doing that. He has this reputation of being an old-fashioned entrepreneur like Henry Ford. Far from it. He flouts regulations with impunity; he demands all kinds of taxpayer subsidies and stomps his feet when anybody raises objections at the local governmental level. He's a Trump of the auto industry. It's uncanny. So clarify one thing. I know we're going to get a question on this. Tell our listeners the difference between Full Self-Driving technology and the Autopilot on the Tesla cars.

Dan O'Dowd: Interestingly, the names have changed over time. Currently, there are two separate programs. They're even on separate computers. Autopilot runs only on freeways. So if you've got Full Self-Driving turned on, you're going, and you get on a freeway on-ramp, it automatically figures that out and automatically switches you over to another control system, which is called Autopilot. It is what it runs on the freeways, and it keeps you in your lane and keeps you from crashing into people in front of you, and it knows when to get on the freeway and off the freeway and has maps and knows where to go. Most of the accidents you've heard about, fatal ones, are from Autopilot because it runs on the freeway and you're going 70 miles an hour and when it decides to run into a parked ambulance or a parked cop car, or fire truck on the freeway, it just crashes at 70 miles an hour, and people die in that circumstance. When you get off the freeway, it turns on the Full Self-Driving. So Autopilot doesn't know what a stoplight is. It doesn't know what a stop sign. It has no idea. It doesn't have to because it's running on a freeway, where there are no stoplights and no stop signs; it's just open freeway with on-ramps and off-ramps.

Full Self-Driving runs only on everything else, not on the freeways. And it knows what stop signs are and it generally follows them. It knows what stoplights are. It has maps and it knows where things are. So you can tell it, "Take me to the grocery store," and it will figure out where the grocery store is, map out a route for you, drive your car there for you. All you need to do is touch the steering wheel with one finger about every 20 seconds to show that you're not dead, that you haven't dropped dead or had a heart attack or fallen asleep. That's all you have to do. And otherwise, it will do everything. It will drive you. The problem is that in eight minutes, it will probably do a moving violation that's not safe, and in 30 minutes it will probably do something that would crash, like go into a lane that already has a vehicle in it. And so you have to have your driver save you by grabbing the wheel and stopping it from causing a catastrophe.

Ralph Nader: Well, listen, we're running out of time. I want to get Steve and David in here. We've been talking with Dan O'Dowd, a leading expert in creating software that is resistant to failure and can't be hacked. He's now moving his information and his experience into the auto industry, which is notoriously behind in terms of protecting autonomous vehicle systems from hacking, remote or otherwise. Steve, do you want to start?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. First of all, it's just a comment. It's interesting to me that Elon Musk is already blaming the nut behind the wheel. I know Ralph is familiar with that from the 1960s when they tried to stop auto safety that, "Oh, it's the nut behind the wheel." Now they're saying it's autonomous and they're still saying it's the nut behind the wheel. But my question has to do with from another angle, the infrastructure. What's the infrastructure on the streets that would have to be in place so that these autonomous vehicles could read signs and lanes and whatever else is going on in the street, lights? Would that have to be all upgraded? It also seems like a real chance for analog mischief to happen – painting over, graffitiing over a sign. What's your take on that?

Dan O'Dowd: There is an effort right now called V2V and V2X for vehicle communication, so the cars tell each other like the airplanes do now, they have these collision avoidance systems, and they talk to each other without even talking to the pilot. And V2X is basically to ground-based up. So an intersect, rather than have your self-driving car have to try to pick out a little tiny red light or green light in the midst of a vast scene with light reflecting off of everything, crazy

and whatever, we do that, humans can see the red lights and green lights; a lot of computation goes into just seeing that green light with computers. If that intersection just told the computer "The light is red," it could send one simple computer message, an email or whatever, a text message saying, "Hey, I'm green, go through me." "Oh, I'm red. I'll be green in three seconds or seven seconds," that would be a hell of a lot easier for the computer than trying to find the green light or the red light with vision systems. So people have suggested that, and it would be helpful.

Also, we don't have this problem in California, but I've lived where it actually snows, and when you go out in the morning where it snows, on the first guy out there, there's no lane markings, right? It's all covered with snow. Where do you go? Well, if the road told you where it was, but had posts next to the road saying, here's the edge of the road, here's an intersection, they could just be little transponder posts that are there and tell you where you are, so it would tell you where's the left turn lane, where's the center lane. So if it's raining cats and dogs, you could see the road. It could know where the road was, even if you can't see it. If you've got snow through all these other systems, there's lots of ways that you can instrument the highways. I talked to one of the leading experts in this and I said, "Why don't we do that?" And he says "Oh, the infrastructure cost, oh my god, it'll be so great." And he said there's 500,000 intersections in North America. I said, "Well, what would it cost me to take all the signals that are in the traffic light system and broadcast them?" I said, "Well, like an iPhone, right? I don't need anything more expensive than that to just broadcast signals and it can do computing and whatever." That's 1000 bucks per intersection times 500,000 intersections. That's \$500 million. Wait a minute. Elon Musk has \$200 billion. He has 400 times that much money himself. For one-four hundredth of his net worth, he could instrument every intersection in America.

Ralph Nader: David, do you have a comment or question?

David Feldman: Yes, thank you. Eisenhower famously warned about the military-industrial complex, but he did get America's highways built by calling the highways a national security issue. We need highways for the military to move weapons and troops where they're needed. How are they going to sell autonomous cars as a national security issue?

Dan O'Dowd: I haven't heard that national security issue on self-driving cars, other than the negative one, that it is a national security problem that China or Russia or Iran could hack our cars and start killing people with them. That's a national security issue, but I haven't heard a positive one as to why that would be better for national security.

Ralph Nader: Is the Pentagon looking into the issue you just described, being hacked by a foreign power?

Dan O'Dowd: With respect to cars, as far as I know, no. They look at their own vehicles, their own equipment. But the issue is when the military does it, you can criticize them all you want, and they're slow and they're expensive, but they do have more secure equipment than what you get because they actually do put some effort into it. No effort is being put into security on any of these vehicles, none. They don't even have anybody working on it. They just download software on the internet off the internet, slap it in there; they buy Windows. It's crazy, there's no consideration at all at the moment. And that's part of what I'm trying to do. And when I bring it up, they say, "We can't afford the time." The car business is under this three-year pressure. We've got a model year out there right now and the one that's going to be out there next year, and the

one after that that's nearing the finishing, and then we have the three-year one out, which is the new one. That's what we're working on, all the new features, and it's in massive development right now. And that's their cycle, and they can't get out of it.

Ralph Nader: What's the nature of your ads on CNN?

Dan O'Dowd: Our ads that we would go on nationwide, is a 30-second ad that basically just shows Tesla running Full Self-Driving running down children. I mean, they're dummies, mannequins we bought, like store mannequins. So, they're soft. And we just show how it will run them down again and again and again.

Ralph Nader: So these ads just started. They've got to provoke a response from Tesla, unless Tesla knows they're guilty to begin with and they're trying to lay low.

Dan O'Dowd: Right. Well, they haven't officially responded. The attack dogs have responded by calling it "Fake, fake, fake, completely fake, they made this up, this is ridiculous, sue, sue, sue." (chuckle) That's their current thing. But Tesla has no response. Elon Musk hasn't yet.

Ralph Nader: Well, for what it's worth today, I called on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, known as NHTSA, as having, quote, "the authority to act swiftly to prevent such disasters. NHTSA has been investigating Tesla and its Full Self-Driving technology for several years, and it must use its existing safety recall authority to order that the FSD technology be removed in every Tesla," quoting myself. Dan, before we leave, is there anything else you want to tell our listeners, because we're really out of time?

Dan O'Dowd: Well, you did bring up Tesla, but remember what Elon Musk promised in the beginning. He promised a Tesla for \$25,000. The lowest priced Tesla today is officially a luxury car, and it would take a person earning minimum wage over five years to afford to buy one. And that's if they paid no taxes, paid no rent. This car, the cars they're selling are for the 1%. These do not solve the problem. They're \$70,000 out the door. When you pay taxes and license and destination and et cetera, et cetera, that's \$70,000, most people can't afford. And that's really the problem.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Dan O'Dowd. And Dan, can you give our listeners your contact information if they want more information?

Dan O'Dowd: It's called dawnproject.com, is where we have collected all the information that shows the videos and the ads and our blogs and things like that. You can also follow me on Twitter on @RealDanODowd.

Ralph Nader: Dawn is spelled D-A-W-N, correct?

Dan O'Dowd: Yes, that's right.

Ralph Nader: That's good. And O'Dowd is spelled O, apostrophe, D-O-W-D. Dan O'Dowd, thank you very much. Hope that you'll have an impact here. And it's going to have to, I think, end up in Congress beating the drums on NHTSA and having investigative hearings as soon as possible once they get by their long August recess. Thank you very much, Dan.

Dan O'Dowd: All right, thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Dan O'Dowd. We will link to The Dawn Project at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, why does Postmaster General Louis DeJoy still have a job? 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 Friday, August 12, 2022. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

One of the nation's largest discount retailers continues to expose employees to the risk of injuries by flagrantly ignoring workplace safety regulations, this time with hazardous conditions found at two Ohio locations. Since 2017, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and state OSHA programs have conducted more than 500 inspections at Family Dollar and Dollar Tree stores operated by the parent company, Dollar Tree, and found more than 300 violations. OSHA fined Dollar Tree \$1.2 million for the Ohio violations. "Family Dollar and Dollar Tree stores have a long and disturbing history of putting profits above employee safety," said OSHA Chief, Doug Parker. 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 along with David Feldman and Ralph. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy is cutting jobs and closing post offices, but our next guest has been warning us about threats to the USPS for more than a decade. David?

David Feldman: Steve Hutkins is a retired English professor who taught place studies and travel literature at the Gallatin School of New York University. He is the founder and editor of Save the Post Office. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Steve Hutkins.

Steve Hutkins: Thanks for having me on, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Welcome again, Steve. You're a stalwart in the country, a perfect example of a public citizen taking on a very important role, which is preserving, expanding the US Postal Service against its parasitic corporate attackers and the Trumpsters who now still have their chief, Mr. DeJoy, in charge of the post office. So I'm sure I'm reflecting the concerns of more than a few of our listeners in asking the question: Why is Mr. DeJoy, who had conflicts of interest commercially before he was nominated by Trump to head the Postal Service (he had a company) still there when the Democrats now control the Board of Governors and can fire him?

Steve Hutkins: Well, I wish I knew the answer to that myself, Ralph. There are nine members of the board, as you know – four Republicans, four Democrats, one independent. Biden has appointed five, three Democrats, an independent and a Republican. And theoretically, those four Democrats and an independent could fire DeJoy. They haven't done so and I don't know why. I can only surmise that they're not entirely unsatisfied with what he's doing and what he plans to do. Or it could be that there are disagreements among the board members themselves about what to do, and they want to avoid the controversy of firing someone who is admired by the Republicans. I don't know.

Ralph Nader: That's exactly the answer I'm getting from other people. However, what DeJoy has done is divided and ruled. I had a conversation with one of the top labor leaders representing postal workers and I said, "Why aren't you advocating firing DeJoy?" He said, "Ralph, it's complicated." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, he's good on some of our issues."

And I said, "Yeah, but how about the big issue, which is postal service to tens of millions of people?" He said, "Well, we'll get to that, but we want him to support us on some of our issues." And the same thing is true on Capitol Hill. He's very clever that way. He bends. He's not a rigid-type Trumpster ideologue who wants to shout every day from his office in downtown Washington, "Corporatize the Postal Service, corporatize the Postal Service." He's very clever. But he must have known something was happening because right after Biden was elected, a reporter said, "Well, are you getting ready to leave?" He said, "I'm going nowhere."

Steve Hutkins: That's right.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. So he must have known that he had a strategy in mind. Well, let's ask the basic question, Steve. Why should DeJoy, the head of the US Postal Service, be fired?

Steve Hutkins: Well, his vision of the Postal Service is not one that is really to the benefit of the country as a whole. He has only one concern, and that is the bottom line. He's part of this long tradition of corporatizing the Postal Service, and he's embarking now on a radical modernization plan that is going to completely transform the processing and delivery and retail components of the Postal Service. We've only seen part of what that plan is so far. He slowed down the mail. That was step one in the plan because in order to do the other steps, he needed more relaxed service standards. So we've seen that and we've seen the price hikes. But the next stage is beginning right now, and that involves completely revamping and what he calls modernizing the sorting and delivery system. And we're going to really start seeing signs of that very soon. And I think the consequences are going to be quite disastrous in terms of the performance of the Postal Service and the vision that DeJoy is implementing.

Ralph Nader: Well, spell it out in terms of layoffs, closing of branches around the country. There are about 33,000 post offices and branches in the United States, far more than any corporate retail chain.

Steve Hutkins: So here's what he's going to do. He already announced last week that his plan will involve slashing 50,000 jobs. These will be gradually, by attrition over the next few years. He's not going to do layoffs, but the workforce will be reduced by 50,000 jobs. That's the bottom line of what he's trying to accomplish, because that's where the billions of dollars are that will help him balance the books.

Ralph Nader: Out of how many postal jobs now — 50,000 out of how many?

Steve Hutkins: There's, I believe, about 450,000 career workers and another 150,000 non-career workers. So over 600,000, he plans to reduce 50,000. Usually that's thought of as 50,000 out of the career workforce.

Ralph Nader: And branch closing?

Steve Hutkins: There's been no number mentioned about how many post offices will close, but he specifically identified stations and branches. Now, that refers specifically to urban post offices, because rural post offices and suburban post offices are called post offices, but in the city, aside from the main office, they're called stations and branches. There are 4800 of them, and some unspecified number of these will be closed. And of course, these are urban neighborhood post offices where the impacts can be quite significant on the neighboring businesses. People

who walk to the post office, people who take public transportation to the post office, are going to have to go much farther to another post office.

Ralph Nader: As you know, Steve, we've sponsored three major reports on the Postal Service over the last 25 years, Chris Shaw having authored the most recent one. And we learned that the post office is more than just picking up and sending mail and packages. It's the presence of the federal government in these communities with all kinds of notices, all kinds of information about federal services. It's a communication hub way beyond just postal services to a lot of far-flung federal offices. It's also a gathering place where people see each other in reality instead of virtual reality. And it's a place where we have to look at more than just monetarily. By the way, the post office is always expected to pay for itself. The taxpayer doesn't pay for the post office. It's supposed to be self-sustaining. No one says that about the Defense Department. No one says that about the State Department. No one says that about the Department of Agriculture. Only the Postal Service is given that type of requirement. So I want to ask you, why does the Postal Service advertise on NPR that people can get their stamps at chain stores like Starbucks or Walmart? What's going on here?

Steve Hutkins: That drives me crazy. Ostensibly, this is to make their products more available. Mostly, those 50,000 other locations just sell stamps. But the Postal Service has never been committed to the brick and mortar post office, in my opinion. They treat them as a failing model of a retail store and they would much prefer to get rid of post offices completely and put postal counters in a Staples or have people buy their postal products online. They don't really see them as an essential element of the network, of the infrastructure. And now, as part of this network modernization plan, they're starting at this very moment at 7000 post offices, they're going to remove the letter carriers who work out of the back and move them to centralized locations, called sort and delivery centers. So all of those post offices then will probably have all kinds of excess space in the back of the post office, and then in the past, this has become justification for closing the post office or relocating it to a much smaller space. If it's a building that the Postal Service owns, they'll sell it. If it's a historic building, too bad. This was going on back in 2012 when I first got involved with the Postal Service and it was just very discouraging to see post offices being sold, postal operations being relocated to less desirable locations. And this is what we're going to be facing.

Ralph Nader: Let's ask the question. Usually, members of Congress defend, preserve the post office against such rapacious policies. Who are the defenders in Congress? Who are the subcommittees? What's the role here in preserving and expanding the services of the post office? Like they're banned from shipping beer and wine; that's left to private companies. There are all kinds of restrictions on what the post office can service the American people and then get more revenue, like the postal banking. They can reinstitute that after the banking industry got rid of it in 1967.

Steve Hutkins: They tried to do a small pilot on something akin to postal banking a few months ago. Four post offices were permitted to sell you a gift card using your payroll check. So it was, in effect, a way to cash payroll checks. Well, it failed miserably because no one knew about it and it was never intended to succeed, but just in doing that, elicited so much opposition from the banking industry and GOP senators that they got the Postal Regulatory Commission involved to fight off this as illegal, non-postal product.

Ralph Nader: What about my question though, the overall position? Any defenders in Congress? Congressman Gerald Connolly, for example?

Steve Hutkins: Connolly is great and Bernie Sanders is great. And there are many of them. But by and large, Congress has been, aside from the lack of congressional oversight, has been glaring. They apparently do not know anything about or have no interest in this vast modernization of the processing and delivery network, which is going on right now. And they have not done much at all in the way of the kind of oversight that they could do. Of course, that's a welcome relief compared to 10 years ago when congressional oversight then pressured the Postal Service to make draconian cuts.

Ralph Nader: Well, what kind of support and attention are you getting, before we give our listeners your website and contact information? You've got people around the country who receive your information. Really, the best solution to the post office problem is to start a postal residential action group, where residences get together all over the country--it doesn't require great numbers for residences to get together based on the Postal Service distributing an invitation to these residential locations, asking people to contribute and join their own postal residential consumer group. We've proposed this repeatedly. We've had some interest by some of the unions, but it's never gone to fruition. I mean, the Postal Service delivers to you often all kinds of little postcards and little items that show how good they are for helping small business and other services; they could easily distribute a couple times a year to over 130 million residences these invitations, then you would have a real backing, Steve. You have people all over the country, a few hundred people in every state who would beat the drums on members of Congress, start standing up for this wonderful institution.

Steve Hutkins: That was always one of my favorite ideas in Chris Shaw's book, and I know you've long advocated it. I would love to be around long enough to see it come to fruition. It really would help turn things around, I think.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, because the Postal Service subsidizes its rates to third-class mailers. They do a lot of things that are subsidy described to third-class business mailers, all those ads and so forth that you get in the mail. So it's about time they do something for residential consumers. As it is now, all new homes don't get their mail delivered direct to the home anymore. They got to go down to the curb or go down to the corner where there are postal boxes. So there is a pattern of deterioration and it's really astonishing that Joe Biden and the Democrats in Congress, who were severely critical of DeJoy in messing around with absentee votes as an ally of Trump in the 2020 election, have let him remain in power. Any last suggestions about what our listeners have to do to get this guy out of there?

Steve Hutkins: Well, as always, contact your elected officials. It seems to be the best thing to do.

Ralph Nader: You had a very nice statement, one line on July 29th, where you said, "The US Postal Service doesn't need to get rid of 50,000 employees. It just needs to get rid of one," end quote, namely Mr. DeJoy, because there are a lot of expanded services that have been laid on the table, not just delivery of beer and wine and postal savings. There are a lot of others that these very critically located postal branches around the country can provide, especially in emergency, in a pandemic, when medicines have to be delivered. It's a national domestic security necessity to

preserve these Postal Service locations. At the same time, a few weeks ago, Steve, as you know, Congress got a \$800-plus billion military budget from Joe Biden and they added another \$20/25 billion to it. It doesn't matter to them that they're starving the Postal Service. They're freezing Social Security. They're not expanding healthcare the way they should. They've buckled under the GOP on rebuilding the public works in our country. But it writes massive checks, more than the Pentagon generals ever asked for, for the Pentagon, leading to my recent observation that maybe the pandemic and the Postal Service should be put under the umbrella of the military, put under the umbrella of the Defense Department, since the Defense Department can get as much money or more than it ever wants year after year by both the Republicans and the Democrats. Give us your contact numbers. Listeners, contact and read what Steve has to say regularly. He is the independent, self-chosen, honorable watchdog of the US Postal Service.

Steve Hutkins: Thank you, Ralph. You can reach me at savethepostoffice.com or on Twitter, @savethepo. Those are the two venues/means by which I put out my two cents about the Postal Service.

Ralph Nader: Repeat once more your contacts.

Steve Hutkins: You can reach me at savethepostoffice.com or on Twitter, @savethepo.

Ralph Nader: On that note, thank you very much for your civic endeavors, Steve, and we'll certainly have you back whenever something is of crisis proportions that we need your enlightenment on to galvanize the residential postal user around the country to contact their members of Congress. That's, in the past, what has worked--members of Congress stamping hard and saying, "No, we're not going to let this post office be taken away from us by the corporatists." Thank you very much, Steve.

Steve Hutkins: Thank you, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Steve Hutkins. We will link to his work, Save the Post Office at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, Dan O'Dowd and yes, Steve Hutkins. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this program 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 Nader's weekly column, you can get it for free by going to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: Do you know any parents losing control of their kids in the ongoing battle over the iPhone and their laptop? Well, we may have an anecdote. *You Are Your Own Best Teacher* is the latest book by Claire Nader, and it equips tweens to develop and apply their skills as young citizens, skeptical shoppers and lifelong learners. Go to inspiringtweens.com to learn more about the book.

David Feldman: In affiliation with the American Museum of Tort Law, join us for a live Zoom recording of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, featuring Josh Koskoff, the attorney who won a \$73 million judgment against Remington and other arms manufacturers on behalf of the families of nine victims of the mass shooting that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The live

Zoom will be Wednesday, August 24th at 9:30 a.m. Pacific, 11:30 a.m. Central and 12:30 p.m. Eastern Time. It's free. All you need is Zoom. Go to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website to register. That's ralphnaderradiohour.com. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we speak to *Washington Post* business columnist, Allan Sloan, about what the Fed raising interest rates means for you. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. If you're a saver, and there are 150 million savers in this country, then you'll want to listen to Allan Sloan's take on higher interest rates.