

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 430 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, Steven.

Steve Skrovan: How are you doing today?

David Feldman: Fantastic.

Steve Skrovan: Excellent. And the man of the hour, Ralph Nader, is with us. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody. We're going to go into tougher strategies against global warming.

Steve Skrovan: That's right. Our featured guest today is environmentalist, journalist, educator, organizer, and climate activist, Bill McKibben. He founded 350.org, a global grassroots climate campaign that organized climate protests on every continent, including Antarctica. He has led campaigns to fight against oil pipelines for fossil fuel divestment. He founded Third Act, which organizes people over the age of 60 for action on climate disruption, racial equity, and the protection of democracy, which they call "some of the unfinished business of our lifetimes." He has written 20 books and countless articles to educate the public about the ongoing climate catastrophe, and he is a regular contributor to the *New Yorker* climate series, *Annals of a Warming Planet*. He'll join us today to discuss the climate crisis and what we should do to highlight climate issues ahead of the midterm elections.

If we have time, Ralph will answer more of your listener questions. As always, somewhere in the middle we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, a man who has been sounding the alarm on the climate crisis for over three decades. David?

David Feldman: Bill McKibben is an author, environmentalist, and activist. He's a Schumann Distinguished Scholar in Environmental Studies at Middlebury College, Associate Fellow at Vermont Law School's New Economy Law Center, and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His latest book is entitled *The Flag, the Cross, and the Station Wagon: A Graying American looks Back at His Suburban Boyhood and Wonders What the Hell Happened*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Bill McKibben.

Bill McKibben: Well, what a pleasure to be with you.

Ralph Nader: Thank you indeed, Bill. I'd like to take this program into the area of competing strategies or cooperative strategies to getting some action on climate disruption, or climate violence, or climate catastrophe. As you know, I don't like the phrase "climate change" because growing up in New England, that meant summer, autumn, winter and spring. And it was created by Frank Luntz who is the wordsmith for the Republican Party. And in 2002 in a meeting in

Washington, the GOP people were complaining that global warming as a phrase was too alarming. He said, well, why don't you try climate change. And unfortunately, the press and the Democrats lapped it up.

So with that, my focus has always been a strategy on Congress, 535 members, and the White House. They are the decision makers; they are the transforming agents, whether we like it or not; and that has to come from pressure back home, as you know so well. However, other people have other intermediate strategies, which tend to suck out some of the energy that could focus on Capitol Hill and the White House. In the universities, it was disengaging university endowment stockholdings in ExxonMobil, and Peabody coal, and other fossil fuel companies.

One of your new groups, which you formed called Third Act, which we'll ~~will~~ have you talk about in a moment, has some of the older people focusing on the banks and trying to get them not to provide capital for fossil fuel production. So let me start with a little skepticism here. And I do this because I've talked to people in the investment community and they basically say look, the banks are irrelevant here. I say why? They say because these big fossil fuel companies have all kinds of cash. They like loans because they can deduct the interest when it was low, but they have all kinds of cash, and they use it for stock buybacks to up their compensation. And the little guys with fracking and all, they can get venture capital, so it's a waste of time.

And then the other argument is university endowments. While it does educate the students and make some news, that doesn't really matter much at all other than the moral statement. But in real hard politics, the zero has got to be focused on the Congress and the White House. And listeners should know that Bill McKibben organized the greatest rally around the White House, resulting in about 1500 arrests--nonviolent protest arrests, including himself, during the Obama administration, so he's no stranger to strategic thinking in terms of what the greatest leverage is. With that, can you comment on all this, Bill?

Bill McKibben: Sure. So it seems to me, Ralph, that there are two levers big enough to be worth pulling. One of them is marked politics, and we've all been pulling it as hard as we can and we'll continue to do so. We're at 49 votes in the US Senate right now for the first serious piece of climate legislation the Congress has ever considered. Sadly, it looks like 49 votes may be where it ends up. We can't figure out how to get the pressure on Senator Manchin to switch despite amazing, amazing organizing work, especially by the people at the Sunrise Movement, most of whom, by the way, were young people who cut their teeth doing divestment work in college, so, everybody's going to keep on it, and they should.

But the other lever that's worth pulling, I think, is marked finance and money, and I think it's worth pulling for all kinds of reasons. One, I don't know what your investment bankers are telling you – buddies are telling you, but the four big American banks have sent more than a trillion dollars to the fossil fuel industry since the Paris Climate Accords were signed. That's a serious chunk of money that has enabled them to continue doing what they're doing. Second, if we can get them to shift, it will obviously send a strong message out across the markets. If JPMorgan Chase announced tomorrow that they were no longer lending for fossil fuel expansion, that would be a serious signal.

And it's a signal, and this is we're thinking about, Ralph, it would be transmitted not only in the US, but around the world, because remember, as you point out, global warming is a good name

for what's going on, and global it indeed is. So, action in the US Congress is nice, but so is action that has a global impact, which is something that we can achieve at least in part through the financial system, which is at this point more global than our geopolitical system and more centered on New York than the geopolitical system is at this point centered on Washington.

Third thing I would say is that I think you're wrong to disparage the divestment campaign around fossil fuel. When Naomi Klein and I sort of broached the idea a decade ago and got the blessing of Desmond Tutu, who had done the same thing very successfully around Apartheid a generation earlier, we had no idea what to expect. It's grown to become the largest anti-corporate campaign of its kind in history. We're at about \$40 trillion in endowments and portfolios that have divested. And that's put enormous pressure on the fossil fuel industry, which has underperformed the rest of the economy for the last decade. And personally, I think it's been, and I think the evidence backs this up, a truly important part of focusing people's attention on climate change around the world.

Ralph Nader: Well, one comment is a skeptic could say, Well, Bill, how many votes has that changed in Congress? Because there are two ways to approach this. One is mandatory standards where they shift to renewables and they start mandatorily reducing fossil use, and the other is what you're talking about, putting enough heat, economic and public adversity heat, on the fossil fuel industry to shrink them in the marketplace.

Bill McKibben: I think the answer is it seems to have shifted about, I don't know, 15 or 19 votes in the Senate. The last time there was serious climate action rooted about in the US Congress was 2009, the so-called cap and trade legislation. And when that got to the US Senate, they didn't even bring it to the floor for a vote because all the whip counts indicated they had at best 34 votes, 35 votes for that package, which was far weaker than the Build Back Better bill is at the moment. So, we've made big shifts. These movements have been important in getting stuff done, but they haven't yet won the war. You're absolutely correct. So the only thing I can come up with is more people doing more organizing in more places with more targets. Sometimes in the autumn of even numbered years, the biggest leverage comes from electoral targets as you pointed out, and that's an important thing to be doing. Other times it comes from going after where the money is, so we do some of that too.

Ralph Nader: Well, the urgency, which you have articulated better than probably anybody in the world over climate chaos, requires a much more rigorous choice. We know that all activity flows in the same river eventually, whether it's on the banks or university endowments or protests in Topeka, KS. But the urgency requires, in my judgment, a much more laser focus on Congress. So let's take a chapter from the anti-poverty movement.

In the 1960s, people went to Washington and established a camp. They called it Resurrection City. And when people said what are you doing and they responded, well, we're not going away until Congress legislates. This could have been even more pronounced by a 24-hour vigil around the entire Congress with connections daily with the friends inside Congress – there are always a significant number of Progressives who get it, and connections with the media. So I think that's where we're at, Bill. We're at with a movement into Washington, peaceful, nonviolent, that is permanent. And it gets relays and is restored by fresh, committed people, giving the ones that have been doing it for weeks some time off and it produces maybe a couple hundred thousand people. And I think that's what it's going to take.

Bill McKibben: I'm not agin ya on any of this, Ralph. I'm happy to help as you get stuff going, but I will point out that the difference between anti-poverty organizing in the 1960s in D.C. and where we are now is that in 1964, the election gave the Democratic majority the most lopsided plurality in history, creating a Congress with the largest Democratic majority since 1936. At the moment, in the US Senate we're at the best of terms exactly equal, and that's if you count Manchin and Sinema as Democrats, which is hard to do on a lot of days. So I don't think things are exactly analogous. And I'll point out that the young people in the Sunrise Movement did a tremendous job of keeping a presence in Washington, bird-dogging Manchin, hunger strikes on the Capitol lawn, on and on and on all autumn. And I think they deserve a lot of credit. To me, they're some of the best organizers we've seen in this country in a very long time.

Ralph Nader: Some people think they're the only game in the streets, period. It's all a matter of magnitude. Of course, there's a difference in the political composition of Congress in the 60s, but I'm talking about a relentless in personam focus because people come to Washington to demonstrate in dwindling numbers, by the way, on a lot of other issues, anti-war and so on, on weekends. And the members are not there. They're not there and essentially Congress is closed. But if they do this seven days a week with constant entries into the Congress, legislation being heard in various committees, very, very effective allies inside Congress, because members of Congress tell me that they don't get enough pressure.

The Republicans don't get enough pressure at all from back home. And the Democrats don't get enough pressure to return our calls for heaven's sake when we have proposals for different kind of testimony, different kind of strategies legislatively, for example, to use the federal government's procurement power to advance renewable energy and to debar fossil fuel companies. They don't even return calls, Bill, because they don't feel that constant heat that is necessary.

I wrote a little fable called *How the Rats Re-formed Congress* where it was designed to make people laugh themselves seriously in mobilizing and capturing back Congress from 1500 corporations. And I outlined exactly how this kind of constant replenished mass rally seven days a week would operate, because I think that is what is needed. You're talking to someone who recognized Harry Truman supporting the universal health insurance, and we still don't have it. So these corporations can drag things on all the way to Armageddon. And we need something extremely dramatic that the press cannot ignore and not do very advised things, but they don't cycle back on 535 members and the President in the White House. What do you think?

Bill McKibben: Well, I think it's good. You've got the name recognition and things to go organize it, so do and everyone will do their best to help you with it.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know, it's going to take some enlightened rich people because it's quite expensive. There are all kinds of logistics, housing, food and so on, as we saw in Occupy Wall Street, but we're all looking for something that's called the next stage. The clarion call from James Hansen at NASA, as you know so well, I think, before Congress in 1988, but there were people who were talking about global warming in the '60s and '70s,.

The other problem we have is the two-party system. Whenever you have a third party candidate campaigning, as I did in 2000, 2004, and 2008 on climate disruption, the winner take all

Electoral College, made it possible for environmental leaders to not only not support me, but to denounce my campaign because it's either the Democrats or the Republicans. Well, the history of third parties in the 19th century and early 20th was they never won an election. National election never came close, but they did push one or the other parties on things like abolition, women suffrage, labor, environment, regulation of railroads, progressive income tax, and then later, Medicare and Social Security with Norman Thomas's Socialist Party putting some heat on Franklin Delano Roosevelt. So that avenue tends to be closed out. It's very frustrating. The Green Party is a big advocate, as you know, of renewable energy opposed to fossil. So we're all very frustrated on how to take it to a new level of intensity against the almost interminable capacity of the federal government, and Congress, and the corporate world to delay and delay, delay. And even though there are certain bright spots and little movements here and there, rooftop solar is getting to be a big economic movement, it still is not what is necessary given the timetable you've presented when you started 350.org out of your student classroom in Middlebury, one of the great results of classroom discussions I think in our history. So what about this issue of intensity in the next stage here?

Bill McKibben: We're trying our best to organize. You know how organizing goes. You do your best to build a movement that can be deployed to do useful things. And young people have done a great job over the last three or four years with the Sunrise Movement coming out of the divestment campaigns and with just remarkable human beings like Greta Thunberg. And there are 10,000 Gretas scattered across the planet, and they have 10 million followers among young people. The argument we've been making recently is not enough to demand that 17-year-olds save the world by themselves. We need some older people backing them up, hence, this new organizing work we're doing at Third Act for progressive organizing for people over the age of 60.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, well, that's very important. We can identify with that. We'll talk about that in a moment. Well, my sister Claire thinks tweens, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12-year-olds, have extremely powerful moral force when they say what kind of world are you leaving us? We're just children, you're not protecting us. She's elaborated this in her new book called *How to Be Your Own Best Teacher*. That's my sister Claire Nader. And there's a lot to that, I mean, even more effective sometimes than teenagers. And as you know, Greta started out as a nine-year-old. And the young man who pledged to plant a billion trees, a Finkbeiner from Germany, he started out as a tween. So we've got to pull all the stops here, of course.

Let me try another tapping into your opinion on this and that is confronting climate denial. There's a new book coming out in a few weeks, very detailed, called *How to Confront Climate Denial: Literacy, Social Studies, and Climate Change*. And the lead author is Professor James Damico at the University of Indiana. And I want to read you three sentences and see if you agree that this is the approach. "Over time we've come to understand that our own teaching and learning about climate change must deal much more directly with climate denial. The rejection of the well-established scientific consensus about the causes and consequences of global warming, and the rejection of the timely actions necessary to address these consequences and preserve a more stable planet for future generations. Given the likely devastating global consequences of climate change, if not dealt with, we have come to identify climate denial is arguably the most consequential topic of our time."

Now, they're not really talking about climate denial by the GOP in Congress. They're talking about climate denial throughout the world among people, what do you think of that?

Bill McKibben: I think that we've passed the stage for the most part where the biggest problem is flat out climate denial; people refusing to say that climate change exists. The polling shows that even in America, which has been the center of that, where something like 70% of people have a pretty good understanding of what's going on with global warming and want to do something about it. To me, the more at this point, more egregious forms of climate denial now after 30 years of kind of you might call classic climate denial funded by big oil, even the oil companies are past the point of pretending that climate change isn't real. And now the denial comes mostly in the form of endless delay, endless insistence that their business plan is somehow still compatible with a climate safe world, and so on and so forth.

And I think at the moment that's become the biggest, the biggest problem. We have now dozens of companies insisting that they're going net zero, but their plans are pretty heavily greenwashed and inconsequential. Around the world we see example after example of this, and so, I think that probably frustrates me more at this point than just flat out people saying up is down and north is south.

Ralph Nader: It's become a more immediate tool by the Trumpsters. I mean, here you have Trump, the pathological liar, calling climate disruption a hoax. That's really precious, and sort of turned into one of the very sharp talking points for their dwindling base. Even though, as you say, most big corporations now recognize it, even though the fossil fuel industry is reveling in the high prices and profits now after the Ukraine war; they put in full-page ads, they're saying it's real. And that battle is being won, I think. But it's the political climate rejection rather than denial of the GOP, largely in Congress, and when the White House is controlled by the Republicans, that really puts the brake. I mean, there were four years of dark ages under Trump right there where almost nothing happened in the federal government except going backwards. He even prevented the—

Bill McKibben: Went backwards.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, he even prevented the US Centers for Disease Control from using climate terms in their research and conferences.

Bill McKibben: Right, and more devastatingly, pulled us out of the Paris Climate Accords and really eroded the international consensus that had been developing. And, of course, Trump is gone, but there are a number of Trump-like characters now in power around the world with the same basic ideas, Bolsonaro in Brazil; Erdogan in Turkey; Putin, obviously; to some extent, Modi in India in just a lot of key places. So the international context has gotten harder too in the six or seven years since Paris.

Ralph Nader: How are you cranking in this Bolsonaro assault on the Amazon, which is so related to all this global warming? What's going on in that area?

Bill McKibben: Well, Bolsonaro is bad news, a thug of the first order and he's opened the gates for widespread burning and land conversion in the Amazon, largely to raise cattle. And it's very scary, Ralph. Our understanding of the way the Amazon works is that it's a kind of water movement system that is able to suck up huge amounts of moisture and move it inland across

this rainforest. The latest scientific data indicates that the whole process may really start to breakdown when you cut down something on the order of a quarter of it, and we're getting very close to that mark. So one of the great fears of the moment is that we're going to see the Amazon start to turn from rainforest to Savannah at some point in the not too distant future. And if that happens, it becomes even more difficult to try and hold on to the planet's climate system in anything like its current state.

Ralph Nader: Well, Lula is going to challenge him the former president of Brazil and he's ahead of Bolsonaro in the polls.

Bill McKibben: He's ahead in the polls and let's hope that the election goes off as planned, yup.

Ralph Nader: So there's a light at the end of the tunnel there at least. What do you think of the people using the climate crisis to push nuclear power plants which take about 15 years or more, and the one that just opened in Finland apparently was way over scheduled years and more than double the price, and the Finns are pretty well known in their technological specialization and they couldn't control it. And you've heard people like Peter Bradford and other leading environmentalists, David Freeman and others, say it's a travesty if this leads us to more nuclear power. We haven't solved the nuclear waste issue; it's a target for saboteurs, and it's uninsurable. It's terribly costly. What do you think?

Bill McKibben: Truthfully, I think we might be wise to leave open nuclear power plants where we've already built them when they've been paid for, and when there's some kind of margin for safety at all, because it strikes me that the risk is real, but less than that, from a gas fired power plant, which, if you operate it according to spec, it destroys the planet. I don't think they're going to play a huge role going forward, mostly because of the factor that you cite, they're super expensive. So the good news here is that the price of renewable energy has dropped like a rock over the last decade, down about 90%, going down about 10% a year. Every time we double the number of solar panels on the planet, the cost goes down another 30% because we're at just that right place on the learning curve where we get better and better at producing and deploying them.

But nuclear power is, if anything, on the other curve. There was a big study from Oxford last year. One of the first real meta-studies of all of this and what it found was that the cost of nuclear power is on the other kind of curve. It's going steadily up and they're getting more expensive to build. So my guess is that it won't be a huge part of what we do going forward. I think it's pretty clear that the main task at this point is to deploy sun, wind, and batteries just as fast as we can.

Ralph Nader: You know Amory Lovins, who you're very familiar with and developed the concept of soft power, his argument against nuclear power is quite simple. He said, it takes billions of dollars. Well, where can you get faster, quicker, safer, and more renewable power for those billions of dollars. So instead of putting it in nuclear power plants with 15, 20-year delays, you put it in energy conservation now, and you put it in solar and wind in the near future. He's big on energy conservation. That's why some nuclear plants, Bill, are closing without any disruption of energy supplies because energy conservation takes up the vacuum there.

Unfortunately, that Oxford study you mentioned, the UK and France, have announced they're going bigger into nuclear power because of the price of oil and cutting off Russian oil and all that

But I think they're going to come back to reality when they see the figures and the blueprints and the time schedule. Let's talk about your new group called Third Act, after you helped found the climate advocacy group 350.org, which is a brilliant name, by the way, I have to congratulate you on that. What about Third Act?

Bill McKibben: Well, so with Third Act it's been very interesting to see the number of people responding. Ralph, there's a belief that people become more conservative as they age, and there's a certain amount of statistical evidence to back it up. Perhaps people have more resources to guard or something. But the current generation of baby boomers and the silent generation above them have interesting and kind of unique historical DNA. They were around for this remarkable period in the '60s and '70s of social and cultural and political transformation.

If you're in your 60s or 70s now, you probably can remember the first Earth Day, which was the biggest single demonstration in American history we think with 20 million people out in the streets, 10% of the then population. You can remember the rise of the women's movement and the height of the anti-war movement and of the civil rights movement. I think it's possible that people may have felt that they'd won some of those battles, and so they backed off. After all, the first Earth Day produced the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. And what do you know? The air got cleaner and so did the water. At any rate, in our second act in these generations, with plenty of noble exceptions, I think it's probably fair to say that people concentrated a little more on consumerism than they did on citizenship. And that water is flown beneath the bridge so now we're on our Third Act, and we've got resources, skills, some time, grandkids to kind of focus the mind about what legacy is about. And the task now is to back up the young people who are leading the charge. Third Act is focused on protecting our climate and protecting our democracy, two things that I think probably people of our age took for granted. It did not occur to us that you could actually melt the poles, for instance, anymore than it occurred to us in our youth that people would be storming the capital to demand that we stop counting votes in an election.

So those are the issues that people are coming together around with a special emphasis on the ways that the decline of our physical planet and of our democracy make life especially tough for the most vulnerable here and around the world. So those are the things we're working on, and we have obviously real assets to bring to bear. Older people, as you know, vote in enormous numbers. So even there's 70 million of us in this country over the age of 60, bigger than the population of France. But even that understates the political power because we vote in such high percentages. And we ended up with most of the money in the country, about 70% of the financial resources compared with about 5% for millennials. So I know you think going after the banks may not be important, but I think it actually is very important. And if you want to do that, it helps to have the cooperation of people with money in their vaults. So on every front, we're working as hard as we can at this point.

Ralph Nader: Well, one way of going after the banks more effectively is to get the banks to lobby Congress against the fossil fuel companies. They're known to get their way on Capitol Hill. Tell me, is AARP, which has 19 million subscribers for its magazine, are they on board here?

Bill McKibben: Well, they're not. I mean, they don't engage in precisely this kind of political work, but I think the AARP has done us a great favor by making sure that the majority of older

Americans have the resources that they need to carry out their lives. And as a result, there's a lot of people with some freedom and time to engage in other kinds of activism, and so that's what we're engaged in. There are people within Third Act and elsewhere, pushing the AARP to be more aggressive on things like climate change and hopefully that'll pay off.

Ralph Nader: One way to approach it, if the national headquarters is the sluggish on this, they have a lot of chapters, and the chapters don't always follow the same drumbeat. They take on issues that are brought to their attention by their grandchildren or great grandchildren, so you might work on a chapter by chapter basis like in Connecticut and Missouri and so forth, instead of just waiting endlessly as we have on AARP to do something about the corporatization of Medicare, which goes by the name of Medicare Advantage, which I call Medicare disadvantage, and almost half of the elderly people enrolled in this corporatized system that's extremely negative in terms of paying up when real illnesses occur. So try the chapters there. How about the retirees from the unions, like the UAW retirees that tend to be active on issues--any possibilities there?

Bill McKibben: Yup, these are other great places to go for, absolutely. And we're setting up all kinds of good working groups within Third Act – former educators. So there's lots of people from NEA and AFT, for instance, or healthcare people who spent their careers in healthcare, so lots of people from the nurses unions and things, so it's very powerful.

Ralph Nader: Well, too bad you don't have the active Gray Panthers around anymore. They got on the Carson Show and on national TV.

Bill McKibben: It's too bad we don't have the Carson Show around anymore either. Yes, we've got great people who are helping out, Carole King and Bette Midler, Patti Smith, and Neil Young, and on and on and on.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, that's wonderful. Yeah, it's too bad we don't have *The Phil Donahue Show* either with 10 million members more than three and a half times what Tucker Carlson is drawing on his cable show. Yeah, well, you have to sort of create your own media in order to get this. We're talking with Bill McKibben. Everybody knows Bill McKibben, a big launcher of public concern and action at all ages in our country on climate chaos, climate disruption. Tell me this, are you getting any reverberation from the elderly members of Congress. In an article you wrote in the *New York Times* earlier this year, you talked about the elderly are still pretty much in charge of Congress, 70s, even 80s.

Bill McKibben: There is a bit of a gerontocracy in D.C. There is no question. And we haven't heard that much from them. And truthfully, our goal is not necessarily to keep people of a certain age in power. In fact, I think our hope is to partner more and more with young people and it's been a lot of fun. We've been doing demonstrations, for instance, outside some of these big banks and it's often the young people in the lead because they walk a little faster and behind them a big crowd of people of a certain age. The last one I saw in Boston they had a big banner that said, "Fossils against fossil fuels." So I took that as a good sign.

Ralph Nader: Or the fossil companies for fossil fuels, right? Now, let's talk a bit about your new book coming out with the intriguing title, *The Flag, the Cross, and the Station Wagon and What the Hell Happened*. What did happen?

Bill McKibben: Well, look, it's a story really about growing up in suburbia and what seemed like a modest paradise that I think when we were in the early 1970s, thought would probably continue spreading. And remember, we were in a period when wealth was becoming more equal in the US, and so on and so forth. But as you know, that proved to be in many ways a pivotal decade, and before it was done, Ronald Reagan had been elected President of the United States. And we've made the fateful shift from a world that thought about things, at least a little bit, in communal terms. It had come out of the depression together and fought World War II together, and then risen somewhat together in the post-war years. And now we are in an every-man-for-himself world, where markets are supposed to solve all problems. And whereas Reagan's friend, Margaret Thatcher, announced there is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women. That's the world we've lived in since, and it's a world that's breaking us.

And so the book, which is as close to a memoir as I'll write, was an effort to kind of look at that decade back in suburban America and kind of see how it felt and what it meant.

Ralph Nader: Well, it will surely get a lot of attention as your books do. Before we have Steven and David pitch in here, is there anything that we haven't discussed that you'd like to tell our listeners? They are serious people, more than the average. They think more and read more on public issues I think than many of the other radio and TV shows. Is there anything you'd like to convey to them that we haven't covered?

Bill McKibben: There's this new data, new interesting study, out last week that I wrote about at some length in *The New Yorker*, that demonstrates just how much carbon actually is contained in your bank account. What they found was that if you keep \$125,000 in the banking system in America, it generates more carbon than all the things a normal American life does in the course of a year. All your cooking, and heating, and flying, and driving, just because that money is being used to leverage loans to build pipelines and so on and so forth. And that's why one of the reasons so many people are joining in this pledge at Third Act to cut up their credit cards from Chase and Citi and Wells Fargo and Bank of America at the end of the year to begin switching accounts, that kind of thing. It's been very powerful to see how this new data is making it easier for people to understand where they need to be pressing and pushing.

Ralph Nader: Well, I've got a lot of consumer arguments for cutting up credit cards, too, that I can swell this effort. David?

David Feldman: Yes, thank you, Bill. How do we keep oil prices high? If you were advising Joe Biden, what would you tell him? How could we trick the oil companies to just keep charging more for oil for the next five years?

Bill McKibben: I don't know, and that's not my — I don't think that's my goal, really. I think that the...

Ralph Nader: I think what he's saying, Bill, is if oil prices stay high, it opens up even more opportunity for renewables and conservation.

Bill McKibben: Yeah, absolutely.

David Feldman: Yeah, and that the oil companies are happy right now. They love charging more for oil because their profits double and they —

Bill McKibben: Yup, they're obviously — we're obviously — they're enjoying what may be the last boom of the boom bust cycle and it is oil. And of course, at this point it's very much a double-edged sword for them, because it's true that they're making money this spring off high oil prices. And it's also true that anyone who's thinking about buying a car is thinking three times as hard about an EV as they were a year ago. So I think really the more pressing concern is the one that Ralph began with, how do we get Congress to be making sure we spend the money to do things like set up the infrastructure that makes it much easier to have electric bikes and electric cars and things. And, of course, that's precisely what the oil industry is fighting so hard. That's why they pay Joe Manchin to do what he does.

Ralph Nader: Steve, do you have a question or comment for Bill?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, we had the late great Hazel Henderson on the show just a few weeks ago, and she mentioned — I wanted to get back to the financial piece, and she mentioned the cryptocurrency SolarCoin; I've also heard her called carbon coin, as a way to incentivize investment in renewable and solar power, in particular, do you think there's promise at all in that?

Bill McKibben: No would be my guess. I defer to Hazel on all things. Her passing was a huge blow and she's been at the forefront of this work for 50 years, so she may know things I don't. But for my money, as it were, it seems to me that very little that cryptocurrency touches on is useful in any way. And there've been a number of carbon related scams, you might call them, coming out of the crypto world, so I don't pay it too much attention.

Ralph Nader: But you know, she's always trying to turn the swine's ear into a silk purse and take the cryptocurrency into what she calls the SolarCoin. Is that what you're talking about, Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Yes, the SolarCoin.

Bill McKibben: Well, let's hope, and if anybody could have done it, it would have been Hazel, so let's hope someone will follow up that work in some interesting way.

Ralph Nader: Okay, how can people contact you before we conclude Third Act or any other website?

Bill McKibben: thirdact.org that's the place, man, and it's a beautiful website. In fact, Ralph, you'll like it. When you go to look at it, you'll like the typography. The beautiful font and very distinctive was developed by a young typesetter who named it Bayard for a name I bet you'll recognize after Bayard Rustin, the hero organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. And it's a typeface drawn from the lettering on the signs that people were carrying at the March on Washington, the year that Dr. King gave one of the most famous speeches in American history. So as a tribute to that earlier era, that first act of many people's lives and to the great Bayard Rustin, it's a real pleasure to see just how beautiful that website is.

Ralph Nader: All the more reason for when elderly people get together for lunch or other reasons, they just download thirdact.org. And you'll want to read Bill McKibben's new book, *The Flag, the Cross, and the Station Wagon: What the Hell Happened*. It's a memoir,

but it carries with it a lot of American recent history and what went wrong. And people will relate to that who are Bill McKibben's age group. Thank you very much, Bill McKibben.

Bill McKibben: Thank you, brother. Take good care.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Bill McKibben. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, Ralph is going to answer some of your questions. 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, June 3, 2022. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

The Federal Trade Commission has revamped its antitrust probe of Amazon, shaking up the investigative team, re-interviewing potential witnesses and asking questions about the company's recent acquisition of MGM Studios, that's according to a report from Bloomberg.

The agency has been looking at Amazon since 2019 over antitrust concerns with its retail business and cloud computing services. Lina Khan, who became chair of the agency last year, has made a name for herself with a groundbreaking legal paper into Amazon's potential antitrust violations and has taken a personal interest in the probe. She has assigned the case to John Newman, an antitrust professor and former Justice Department prosecutor, who joined the FTC as a deputy director of competition in December and has reorganized the team probing Amazon since taking it over.

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. Let's do some listener questions. We got a couple of questions actually on the same topic. It's one from listener Craig Dunkerley, one from listener Inda S. Shirley, and it's about privatizing Medicare with some program called ACO REACH. And Inda asked, "Do you know about ACO REACH, Ralph?" And it seems to her that it started in 2016.

Ralph Nader: These are all variations of ways to corporatize Medicare, which means to destroy Medicare. Already almost 45% of all elderly who are part of Medicare have been lured in deceptively and cruelly into Medicare Advantage, which I call Medicare disadvantage. What Dr. Fred Hyde once said, "It's not what you pay, it's what you get." And when you get sick, serious ailments, that's when the Aetna type of stratification for profit making kicks in in terms of denying payment, making you have your doctor go through all kinds of hoops, and generally step by step destroy Medicare. Unfortunately, not only the Republicans, but the Democrats are participating in this, including the Department of Health and Human Services under Joe Biden. They're always cooking up schemes, these companies, to deceptively lure people into these plans, and then they've got them. And it used to be you could get out of them if you didn't like them. You could get out Medicare so-called advantage and go back to traditional Medicare. But now they're making it even more difficult in terms of the fine print contracts where you might say I'm fed up with Medicare Advantage, they didn't pay for my operation, and they gave me fits, and they harassed me, and I'm going back to traditional Medicare. And you find out, oh, but you

no longer can avoid being denied care based on a pre-existing condition. So we've had past programs on all this and you can go on and look them up. And beware.

The best option right now is traditional Medicare. The best option in the future is full Medicare without having to rely on Medigap private insurance, otherwise known as single payer, Canadian style, everybody in, nobody out. You hardly ever see a bill. The outcomes are better. You have less harassment, worrying about changing jobs and if you can get as good an insurance package. It all comes down to the 25 ways Canadian life is better because they have single payer compared to the American life that is beset constantly by this corrupt, complex, gouging, harassing, exclusionary so-called health insurance system, bedecked by gouging drug prices.

And if you want to get to 25 ways, go to singlepayeraction.org. Print it out and send it to your friends and relatives and build the pressure on Congress.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you for that question, Craig and Inda. By the way, Inda S. Shirley is PhD who is with the Texas Association of Retired Americans. So thank you both for calling attention to that again.

Ralph Nader: And Steve, there are others that asked the same kind of question. Thank you, Craig Dunkerley, Inda Shirley, among others, that have brought this to our attention and actually know quite a bit about it.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah.

David Feldman: This one comes to us from Gerardo, and the subject is rephrasing American Society of Apathetics. "Dear Ralph, I never have liked when Ralph Nader described citizen residents as "apathetic." It's structured, it's socialized apathy. It's a result of corporate and political left and right propaganda. So I've wondered if he'd reconsidered "structured apathy" or turning a phrase "ala Nader" to better describe that we are not apathetic by nature but we have been socialized to be apathetic. That's truly the hazing ritual into the American Society of Apathetics. Just a random thought and critique."

Ralph Nader: Very well stated, Gerardo, very well stated. I was just describing the end result, apathy, and you're describing the cause of it that it is manufactured, induced, pressurized by the power structure. And you're right there for many of the reasons why people don't engage civically or politically in shaping the future of their country. But as you will agree, there are a lot of different reasons that people give. Sometimes it's they have absolutely no time. The single mom with kids rushing, commuter traffic, daycare, trying to make ends meet. Other people have disability issues, so there are a lot of different issues, so you can use the word induced apathy. So we'll think about that just like we got to abolish climate change as a too benign nomenclature and replace it with climate violence, climate catastrophe, climate chaos, as the rising incidence of more severe tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, droughts, flooding importune us to describe them in their own reality. Imagine describing a massive hurricane hitting Florida and the Gulf area with death and destruction being called climate change?

Steve Skrovan: Or wind change. There was a change in the wind. Shift in the winds. Yeah, that makes sense.

Ralph Nader: By the way, here's an interesting fact that shows what happens to our Supreme Court and to our Congress when the Democrats in the past 40 years gave up on certain states and didn't even compete. For example, the mountain states they relinquished to the Republicans. There used to be Democratic senators from Montana, from Utah, from Wyoming, from North Dakota, and they just gave up on, like, 10 Senate seats. You start out with a 10 Senate seats negative, it's hard to prevail in the Senate. Well, here's the figure I just read in the *New York Times*, that the 50 Democratic senators who are in the Senate received 83 million votes. The 50 Republican senators who are in the Senate received only 67 million votes total. That's because the Democrats abandoned low population states, like Wyoming, which have two senators the way California or New York have. So that's what happens, a devastating result on the Supreme Court, on Health and Safety regulation, on a fair tax system, on challenging the military budget and so forth.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, here's a radical question on that topic of Senate representation. "Was having a Senate a mistake? Do we really need a Senate? What do they really provide aside from disproportionate representation?"

Ralph Nader: They provide obstruction year after year to the realization of a just society. Now, Nebraska has a unicameral legislature. They just have one institution. They don't have two houses, a Senate and a House. That's a good area for debate. We should ask candidates about that, especially senatorial candidates. The Senate has been the graveyard for bills passed by the House for many years now.

David Feldman: Didn't George Washington say the Senate is the saucer that captures the boiling water from your cup of tea? Don't we need it?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah.

David Feldman: I always use a saucer when I'm drinking. Can I ask a question about the question about apathy? Because these past two weeks, a sense of paralysis is sent in vis-à-vis these mass shootings. Most Americans say, we need gun control, but the NRA won't allow it. That's exactly what the NRA wants. They want this sense of paralysis. How do we shake off this sense of paralysis?

Ralph Nader: Well, the NRA leadership doesn't reflect on some gun safety proposals, their own majority membership, like significant background checks, safety locks, ban on assault weapons used for the military, which shouldn't be used for civilian use. It all comes down to the NRA's grip on enough members of Congress, including the Senate and the filibuster to block majoritarian support of these and other common sense gun safety measures. They're supported by a significant number of Republican voters too, not just a large number of Democratic voters. So it comes back, David, it's the Congress.

David Feldman: Yeah, I would urge people, if you're interested in that topic, to go back into our archives for an interview we did with Thom Hartman, who wrote a book about the Second Amendment and its origins and how the Second Amendment has been misinterpreted almost since the beginning. And I think we did that episode maybe two years ago. So just look up Thom Hartman; go to our search box there and you'll see that episode and the transcript associated with it.

Ralph Nader: He has written a paperback on it too, and he can write very clearly and very historically accurately.

David Feldman: Let's talk about getting rid of the Senate, getting rid of the Second Amendment, overturning Citizens United, getting rid of the Electoral College; that's not going to solve the immediate problem.. We need a Democratic Party and a president who are going to do stuff today, not these highfalutin abstractions that will take 20 years and end up getting defeated.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're a minority run government. For example, the majority of Supreme Court justices were nominated by presidents who received the minority vote but won the Electoral College election. That's just one consequence of what you're pointing out, David. But it does all start with getting a supermajority in Congress. They can change everything. They can set in motion constitutional amendments. They can enlarge the Supreme Court. They can tell the Supreme Court they don't have jurisdiction over certain issues like corporate power issues over real human beings, corporate personhood. They can basically pass legislation that says this area of decision making is outside your jurisdiction, period. People don't realize that. That that can be done well,

Steve Skrovan: Well, that's our show. We want to thank our guest again, Bill McKibben. A transcript of the show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

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

Steve Skrovan: And to inspire the next generation of citizens, we encourage you to pick up the book, *You Are Your Own Best Teacher!: Sparking the Curiosity, Imagination, and Intellect of Tweens*. It's a book by Claire Nader. Apprehensive parents and burdened teachers will delight in the lessons of this book for tweens, nine to twelve years old, but it's a book for the whole family. To find out more, go to inspiringtweens.com.

David Feldman: Have you read *Capitol Hill Citizen*? The pilot issue is out. To order your copy, it's only \$5 to cover shipping. Go to capitolhillcitizen.com. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

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

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

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody.

[Music]