

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 237 TRANSCRIPT

David Feldman: From the KPDK Studios in Southern California...

Steve Skrovan: ...it's the Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

Kemp Harris (Music): Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long.

Steve: Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, my name is Steve Skrovan along with my cohost, David Feldman. Welcome back, David.

David: Just when the rat infestation couldn't get worse, I'm back.

Steve: That's right. And we have also, of course, the man of the hour, Ralph Nader, hello, Ralph.

Ralph: Hi, an unusual show.

Steve: Yeah, exactly. We're going to have a little bit of a different show today. We're going to turn the tables on Ralph. Usually he is interviewing guests about the books they have written. Today, David and I are going to interview Ralph about the new book that he has written. Now, regular listeners know that Ralph's mantra has been "the Congress, the Congress, the Congress." The Congress is the key to turning the country around. Well, Ralph's new book is entitled How the Rats Reformed Congress and it's a fable. This is not Ralph's first foray into the fabulous. Many of you are familiar with another work of fiction Ralph penned entitled Only the Super Rich Can Save Us.

This is along those same lines, so we'll be digging into that and what inspired him to return to this mode of getting his message across. After that, we will devote the latter part of the show to listener questions, and it's not a show if we don't also check in with our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mohkiber. By the way, on a side note, last week's Corporate Crime Report ventured into the surreal itself when Russell told us how Kentucky Fried Chicken was holding a contest for parents who named their child "Harland" after KFC founder Colonel Harland Sanders that if they win, they're eligible to receive \$11,000 toward their child's college education. And only one child will be selected leaving all the other children stuck with a KFC-branded names for life...and how the child's identity, including name, pictures, voice, likeness, and biographical information will be owned by KFC for advertising purposes.

David: Wow.

Steve: Yeah, this is like the apocalypse.

Ralph: Gross, gross. It could get worse, they could start paying people to put tattoos on with the brand name of the corporation--the logo.

Steve: Yeah. Well, I was just telling my two kids about how outrageous this was--my daughter, Kleenex, and my son, Preparation H. By the way, these days eleven thousand dollars will buy you about two months of college.

Ralph: I'd like to interview the corporate lawyer who thought this up or put it on paper.

Steve: Well, anyway, a long way of saying, you don't want to mess with Russell's Corporate Crime Report. But first, let's get to our first guest, David.

David: And it's purely a coincidence that we're transitioning from Kentucky Fried Chicken to rats. Ralph Nader's new book is a fable about rats that invade Congress and astonishingly trigger a people's political revolt. It starts when a congressional reporter breaks a strange and shocking story that rats have invaded the toilet bowls of both the speaker of the house and the minority leader. The mighty rat invasion sparks a national news frenzy. Activists seize on the burgeoning story to organize for a populist agenda. Spontaneous rallies break out everywhere. The activists see the rats upending business-as-usual routines on Capitol Hill as a powerful symbol against the lobbyists and their corporate Congress.

The civic energy builds as millions of people begin flooding into Washington in a move to take back Congress from Wall Street. Congressional offices back home are overwhelmed with wave after wave of citizen rallies and meetings. Members are being challenged in primaries. Some incumbents joined the movement. Wall Street and its lobbyists warn about economic collapse and mass layoffs if the citizen-raised agenda passes Congress. Corporate front groups are created to disrupt the peaceful crowds, but the corporate lobbyists and think tanks can't overcome the organized will of the determined people. There is much realism, serendipity, and galvanizing motivation throughout this engrossing fable. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Ralph Nader.

Ralph: Well, here we go. People might like to know who I dedicated this book to, and it was dedicated to the spirit of Voltaire and Mark Twain; and specifically to Molly Ivins, Dick Gregory, Jim Hightower, and Victor Navasky who taught us how to laugh ourselves seriously. And that really summarizes the sequence of the book. If we can't do it by indignation, if we can't do it by exhortation, maybe we can do it by laughing as the rats lead the way.

Steve: So Ralph, I think you just answered what my first question was going to be what inspired you to write a fable instead of nonfiction? But let me move to my next question, which is, what in your mind do the rats represent in this fable?

Ralph: They represent the traditional rodent quest for food and water. They're not anthropomorphized. They're not like Mickey Mouse. They just find the pipe and they go up. They're looking for water and food and there are a lot of crumbs of food from parties and cleaning-team eating afterhours and they find the food. But it first starts with an entrapped rat, which has no name that goes up to the toilet bowl of the speaker just as he's sitting down to do his business. And the first two pages are quite jolting. Some readers, who couldn't get past the first few pages when it was in galley form, called it disgusting and upsetting. And I said, well, you're describing the behavior of Congress.

And so the rats then of course follow each other; ten rats signal to other rats. And there's a rat infestation in the House of Representatives and then in the Senate. And then there's an overreaction by the members--the leaders. They don't want this to get out, but they can't even control the rats much less the Wall Street lobbyists. And one reporter, sort of out of a Damon Runyon novel, is intrepidly meticulous, and he blows a story. And then all the cable shows... everybody goes wild with derision as the story unfolds. And the overreaction is massive slaughter of the rats. They keep coming. They keep breeding. So more crumbs of food because they're working overtime.

And that is what gets people's attention about Congress. You know, Congress comes in the polls under 15 or 12 % approval.

Steve: Yeah, even 9% is what I've heard.

Ralph: Or even 9% now. So that's about the lowest of any category--even the proverbial used-car dealer.

Steve: It's lower than ISIS is what I understand.

Ralph: But you see the other side of that is that people have such a low opinion of Congress that they keep sending bad members of Congress to Washington. But they withdraw and they become cynical. They withdraw instead of becoming angry and moving to take control of Congress. After all, it's the sovereign power of the people delegated to 535 members of Congress that is misused and turned against the people on behalf of Wall Street and other corporate supremacists. And so, because of the massive media, you have massive public attention--the comedians, the late night talk shows, you know, have a field day.

And so the activists say this is what we've been waiting for--massive public attention, massive derision, fumbling and grumbling and tripping over themselves trying to deal with the rat infestation, asking for the national security people to come in on orders of the White House. I mean, they treat it, like it's a foreign invasion. And then the whole theme of this little book turns into serious lobbying. There's a lot of attention, a lot of backlash by the Wall Street crowd, by the local trade lobbyists in Washington, DC. I tried to make a very interesting and personal dialogue as the momentum builds up, and then I put in the pages some pretty unique ways of the people expressing themselves. They would surround part of the Congress with bullhorns and shout: "resign, resign, resign!"

And it would be heard inside the halls of the Congress, so that there's no question that they got the message. Some of the incumbents after a while just ran out of the Congress and joined the crowd. But there are a lot of techniques of how to get good legislation through, how to get it through fast. One of the themes of the book is: don't wait around and say, well, it's going to take three to four years of steady mobilization. It doesn't work that way. It gives the corporate lobbyists too much time to game the system. Look at the healthcare that was proposed by Harry Truman in 1940s, universal healthcare; we're still at. It stretched out too far, so speed was of the essence. And –

Steve: Ralph, let me interrupt you here just for a second, and just kind of, you know, come back so the listener can catch up a little bit. Because yes, it seems to be this vision of how a movement can work, and you know you need to put out that vision so people can head toward that rather than depression and apathy. But I want to ask you about actually the very first line of the book. And trust me, I read the rest of it too.

Ralph: You did?

Steve: Twice. And I want to quote the first line of the book, and I have a question about that. And the first line of the book is, "It was one of those uncomfortable morning strategy sessions with his senior staff. For House Speaker Reginald Blamer, the discomfort was in having to figure ways to continue blocking a long-overdue raise in the federal minimum wage for many millions of low-income workers, when he knew in his gut it was not the right thing to do." Now right off the bat there, I read that and I

think, it seems to me that in real life someone like Paul Ryan or, I guess, this is a thinly veiled reference to John Boehner--that these guys believe in their gut that the world is made up of Ayn Rand's "makers and takers". That's what he really believes in his gut. But you start the book--seems like a pretty big assumption that in the gut of a corporatist politician lies a progressive conscience.

Ralph: Well, it's a good point you raised. In some of these legislators' minds, like, when Mick Mulvaney was chosen by Trump to head the Office of Management and Budget and then the consumer protection group (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau), he really is mean, and he has no qualms of conscience. But I have met members of Congress who are considered conservative Republicans who do have qualms. They come from often religious backgrounds where they recited the Bible and helping the poor. And John Boehner was the Speaker of the House, and the fictional character is Reginald Blamer. He came from a poor family of eleven children in Ohio, and his father was a tavern keeper and his mother was a homemaker.

So I have seen, Steve, people who have a public persona of ferocious oligarchy and plutocracy, but deep inside they know they're harming innocent people.

Steve: Really?

Ralph: I'll tell you what the evidence is for that. When I came to Washington in the early 1960s. I wanted to get auto safety bills through the Congress, so I had to go to the Senate Commerce Committee, and people said, "forget it; it's run by Warren Magnuson from Washington State. He's totally in the pocket of the business lobbyists. He's the go-to guy from the maritime lobby and other corporate interests. You're not going to get a hearing. You're not even going to get close to his staff." It turned out completely false. Because of the rumble from the people in the '60s, coming out of Seattle and other parts of the country, Warren Magnuson put his finger to the wind. He had grown up as a populous prosecutor, prosecuting white collar criminals and street criminals. And he completely turned around. He became the greatest champion of consumer legislation in the Congress in American history! He had great seniority. If we got a bill through his committee—all he had to do was put thumbs up and you'd get it through his committee—and it would just go right through the Senate. So that's just one example –

Steve: But Ralph, that was then; this is now. I think we're in different era of ideological polarization where you have evangelical ministers like Billy Graham's son Franklin Graham saying that if Brett Kavanaugh is not confirmed, they won't get their people out to vote for Republicans. I mean, it's where you have the religious leaders who seem to have no conscience, either because they're really after abortion rights, or they want money. So I understand that you had this experience, but we're in a different time. How do you account for that?

Ralph: Well, first of all when Reginald Blamer, in the book, went on Meet the Press and was questioned by Woodcock Toad known as Woody Toad.

Steve: Uh-huh.

Ralph: Check that, Chuck Todd. He revealed his better self. He basically became a more humane person from this jolting experience. And he feared that the majority of Republicans were going to vote him out in the House of Representatives. So you're right in the sense that most of them are pretty hard bitten, but some have a soft core to them. And they're better angels as revealed under different kinds of stress

and pressure. So it isn't just in the '60s I've seen this happen, and it's very rarely reported, much less in fiction.

Steve: Right. It seems to me, like, when we had Professor Scott Galloway on a few months ago about breaking up Big Tech, he used this phrase that resonated with me. He said you need to appeal to their "greed gland". And it seems to me that if you can—and I don't even want to call them conservatives anymore—you have kind of hipped me to this: that there's corporatists, and to me, you're a conservative in a lot of ways—but these corporatists... you've got to appeal to their "greed gland." And their conscience - as far as what their worldview is - it's very hard to get to.

Ralph: Well, in the book the appeal is to their "fear glands", that is the fear of not getting reelected; the fear of being challenged in a primary inside their own party, which is all part of the activity described in the book. The "greed glands" were approached by the lobbyists who tried to turn around and block this mass movement of the people of our country to take control of Congress. They poured campaign money into their stalwarts on Capitol Hill. Although there are different fears, it also depends on where a member of Congress comes from, how old the member is and what kind of personal experiences they have.

And this was not a cakewalk in this fable, How the Rats Reformed the Congress. It was a fast-moving process in a matter of a few months from the eruption of the rats. But it was not a cakewalk. It was a lot of opposition, a lot of counter strategies. But they just couldn't deal with millions of people flowing into Washington, spontaneous rallies around members of Congress's offices. And I thought it was very good technique--literary technique--to get a lot of good information, good motivation, good strategies across.

Steve: It definitely reads to me like a recipe book, like, "Hey, this is how you do it."

Ralph: I hope not too much of a recipe book.

Steve: Well, I mean, not the scatological part of it, but I just want to talk a little bit about these movements you're speaking of, this mass movement of people. And in the book you talk about –

David: I thought you weren't going to be scatological.

Steve: In the book, you talk about the "lack-luster showing" of most recent protest movements. And you say that, "American politicians over the past 25 years have learned to quietly dismiss big rallies, demonstrations, and even temporary occupations because they have gone nowhere." Elaborate on that, because you're offering a vision of this spontaneous millions of people invading Washington, but in real life, I mean, there have been people marching all over the country but, what has it gotten us?

Ralph: Yeah, well, that's the difference. I mean, I've been part of these mass protests and they're almost invariably on a Saturday when the members of Congress are gone. They're gone back home or on junkets. So the people who organize these mass rallies are so exhausted that they don't even have the energy left to pass the funding buckets around inside the mass rally, on the Mall for example, where they could raise hundreds of thousands dollars, and on Monday morning open an office with full-time lobbyists going up on Capitol Hill. Well, if you don't have that kind of "through-put" since members of Congress have very good antenna, they basically say, look, they're getting off steam, they're all going to go back home to their jobs, or their despair. And there's no stamina there.

And the press catches it too. That's why these mass rallies get very little press. Part of it is because there aren't that many reporters working for the Washington Post or Times, but that's an excuse. Basically they don't see it as something with a lot of follow-through. But here in this book - and by the way the cover is fabulous by artist, Mr. Fish who is considered a genius even by his colleague artists - the rallies here are different. First of all, they build from day to day. That's something politicians are very sensitive to, i.e., is this something that's going to peter out or is going to be a thousand people one day, five thousand the next. They're really scared of that kind of momentum. And second, it's led by people who are full-time. They just take off from their work or their retired or what and they really develop a strategy in the open offices in Washington. And third, one of my favorite hopes, three enlightened billionaires come to town and they say, hey, let's fund this. Let's relieve them of all these fundraising problems and diversions, and let them expand their numbers back home and everywhere. And that's really what's needed. I mean, there are enlightened billionaires, but they don't have that kind of imagination to build major movements. You have a fellow who is very progressive for raising the minimum wage, Nick Hanauer out of Seattle, and he writes for Politico. He knows fellow billionaires. Yet somehow they don't know how to put it together in terms of mass movements.

Steve: But in your book, they do. I mean, it seems to me I think you talked about the three pillars of this revolution: people demonstrating en masse back home; and secondly a large influx of people pouring into Washington; and third, rich people providing an endless source of funding. That seems pretty fabulous.

Ralph: And the brain trust of course, are the full-time citizens who emerge from the masses to do the daily work going up on Capitol Hill and connecting with the progressives up there and going with the media.

Steve: But it seems to me that, again, talking about "that was then this is now," with all of this income disparity and people having to have two jobs, three jobs--that that works against people being able to full-time devote to this kind of action. I touched on this in the last week's interview with Phil Donahue when I asked him, "What was different about then than this now." and my theory is that it was a more prosperous time. And when you're not scratching, clawing for the scraps of food, you have time to consider more sophisticated nuanced issues like he had on his show. At least that's my theory. So today, we're in a situation where so many people are under water.

Ralph: Yes, but you see, Steve, you have a different media today. You have a more instant media. You have the Internet. People, when they see people like themselves rallying here and there, they pick up hope. They pick up contagion of activity--hey, these people are like us; let's be part of it! It has almost a civic-festival attitude to it. But there's hard work in this book. Democracy requires work as well as rallies, protests, chants, slogans, etc. And the more they feel they've got the members of Congress on the run, the more energized they become, which is a natural reaction. On the back of the book I have the indictment of Congress.

I mean, people have a low opinion of Congress but have no idea the damage directly and indirectly by omission and commission the Congress has inflicted: its abandonment of its Constitutional powers as the most powerful branch of government; its selling elections for money and campaigns; its closing out even the people. I mean, I've seen Congress degrade to levels I'd never believe possible. It's impossible to even get through to some members of Congress' offices now unless you're a campaign contributor. You might get the switchboard if it isn't on voice mail. Can you imagine putting a switchboard on voice

mail? It shows you how much of a straight arm the majorities in Congress are giving the people back home.

They had a tax bill, as we know, for the rich and the powerful and the corporate, increasing the deficits, starving the public-works investment, and all the rest. And they didn't even have public hearings in the committee level. That's unheard of! Then they had five bills to destroy people's rights to have their day in court, if they're wrongfully injured. They got it through the House of Representatives, blocked in the Senate by the Democrats. They didn't even have public hearings in the House Judiciary. Then they tried to get rid of Obamacare and they lost by one or two votes in the Senate. And they didn't have public hearings! So Congress itself has become a secret, tyrannical bastion of Wall Street, and that outrages people when they start trying to connect with their members of Congress or get them to address rallies back home.

Steve: Ralph, I've got a couple more questions, but I want you to break in here and tell people how they can get the book.

Ralph: Yeah. The book is designed to stimulate living-room discussion/classroom discussion. And they can get five books at a discount. Here's how you can get it. Go to ratsreformcongress.org and you can get a book for \$20 (paperback), \$30 (hardback). If you want me to autograph it, just indicate that. You can order five copies at a discount, totaling \$50 at ratsreformcongress.org. You can order online or you can send a regular check at the address designated. And so on the webpage you have the description of the book, the news release, and an excerpt from the book, which will enlighten you, I hope; as well as how to become a Congressional Rat-Watcher back home on your two Senators and Representatives, and how to organize a Congressional Rat-Watchers group. We're even getting T-shirts, buttons, mugs—it's all in the process of making people laugh themselves serious. And getting people who are usually not active and are cynical like it's never going to happen and they're going to decide whatever they're going to decide in Washington with the big boys involved. So people who get the book are likely to be more leaning toward activity in their civic experience anyway, but they have huge experience with people who cynically withdraw, who agree with them, but say, it just can't happen. And that's what this book is all about and it's a tremendous amount of strategy, tactics, motivation.

And this is the first program on the book. I hope to do more media. We hope to pass it out on Capitol Hill. You know, Capitol Hill is like a small city, Steve and David. It has 33,000 workers.

Steve: That apparently has a real rat problem, I understand.

Ralph: Yeah, it has a real rat problem. The idea for this came when my sister, Claire Nader, who gives the annual Calloway Award of Moral Courage, gave it to the workers down in the catacombs (under the Congress), who have to work under awful occupational-hazardous conditions. Earlier it was asbestos, fumes, particulates, and they were ill, and they were sick. And no one recognized them, and it was so dangerous in those subterranean areas under Congress that Senators and Representatives were prohibited from taking the elevator down there. That's how dangerous it was. Well, that gave me the idea of rats coming up—a bottoms-up movement so to speak—for this book, *How the Rats Reformed the Congress*. They did their own thing and then the people picked up and did their thing and made history.

Steve: Ralph, you refer in your book to a real book entitled *The First American Revolution* by Ray Raphael. Tell us about that book and how it informed your fable.

Ralph: Yes, this is a book about the beginning of the American Revolution, which was Lexington, Concord, and Paul Revere. It was in Western and Central Massachusetts where the farmers reacted to an edict by King George III that replaced their local government with chosen Tories. And that was the last straw for the farmers. And they would assemble—just think of how low the population was in those days—five hundred to a thousand farmers—and surround the house of the Tory local ruler, and demand that the Tory renege on enforcing this law and replacing their sheriffs and their magistrates with King George III loyalists.

And that's how it started. And some of the Tories would open their door and they'd walk down the path surrounded by their farmers and renege. And some of them would flee to Boston where there was a Redcoat garrison of soldiers at the time. But that was in 1774. And that was in Wooster. It was in Springfield. It was in Sheffield. That's where the first revolution started. And we forget that. And it was a silent, peaceful revolution because the farmers didn't want to be accused of being part of "riotous mobs" as the Tories and the Redcoats would call any kind of protest.

Steve: Right. So it didn't start necessarily with the intellectuals that we recognize, the founders, Jefferson, Madison –

Ralph: Not at all.

Steve: It started with the farmers.

Ralph: It started with farmers. And they had to get there through mud and rain and snow. I mean, you couldn't get five hundred to a thousand people to surround the member of Congress's office in Massachusetts today at all. And of course, the population is a hundred times greater.

Steve: This is a question that I've asked some of our guests who are running citizen groups. And I've observed this in my own experience: How do you avoid the dissension and power struggles that occur with citizen groups. Now, in your book it seems like a pretty well-oiled machine. I mean, there's opposition that arises from the plutocrats, but within the citizen groups there seems to be harmony. In my observation there's always fragmentation. Most people are not professional advocates. They're torn between earning a living and supporting their families. Frustration sets in. Splinter groups form. And the powers that be sit back and watch them tear each other apart. How do you avoid that?

Ralph: Well, one is by speed. In a sense all this occurred in about five or six months before the election. And it did occur in this fable in 2018. And they had to ask themselves... all this new energy, this new leadership, it was led by a stonemason who read a lot in his life and came out of Illinois and very methodical. And they were confronted with the question you raised—do these people from out of town—coming in, opening offices, locating their energy from back home—do they connect with the national citizen groups who have been frustrated and fighting and losing all these years? And they decided that they weren't going to formally hold coalitions with them, that they were going to be polite with them, they were going to tap into their enormous knowledge about what's going on, and the reformer's bills that these traditional groups introduced years ago and were just put on a shelf in Congress and not processed at all. So they did have an arm's-length relationship, because of just what you implied. They didn't want to get into the internal skirmishes between groups from years past--the

competition, the pettiness. And the best part of where I think the energy is going to come from; it's going to come from new entries into civic engagement—new people who have not done this before—with leaders who are stable, intelligent, and keep their eye on the ball.

What kept the new rallies and the new people together was a 12-section agenda for reform. It was carefully drafted by the brain trust, and it represented left/right support around the country, conservative/liberal support—again, one of my favorite themes. And the reaction in Congress and the rats and the media sort of kept them all together, and once they agreed on the agenda and it was irresistible to the rallies back home—it was basic living wage, full health insurance, cracking down on corporate crooks, dealing with the military empire issue, criminal justice reform, switching power from the few to the many by providing facilities so consumers, workers, and communities can bond together easily; starting audience networks on the public airways so they have their own radio and TV stations—on and on, things that we've worked on over the years.

That banded them all together. So there is obviously some internal disagreements here and there. But the pace of their progress was so formidable that it was a unifying theme. And the press kept giving them huge coverage as well.

Steve: Well it seems to reflect your own experience in late '60s and early '70s? You're kind of the stonemason in this scenario. You've got the laser focus. You've got all of these young people from graduate school and in college flooding into Washington to work with you every summer and they're writing reports and you're getting a lot of press. It seems to reflect to your experience back then.

Ralph: Well, of course, it does. I mean, that's what you do. You reflect your successes, your failures, your insights into members of Congress, the staff, what they reverberate to, what they are averse to, how to motivate them, whether out of fear or out of getting the best angels from their inner-conscience, keeping very close ties with dozens of progressive members of Congress who've been on the defensive; they form a tight coalition—they're called the cooperators. Yeah, it's full of that. You know, somebody listening to this program Steve, may say, what am I doing with the fable? We've got enough fake news, and all of that. Well, back in the '70s as you know, we produced the book called *Who Runs Congress?* And it was the biggest selling non-fiction book on Congress in history. It was on Phil Donahue. It was promoted by one of the biggest paperback publishers—Bantam paperback publishing. And I wanted to update it and I would go to some publishers in the last few years and say, "What about an update? We have Mark Green who's the author, Jim Fallows, who's assistant author. These are great people. We have great material." and the publisher would say, "Nobody will read that. Nobody is interested in Congress. They don't like Congress. Look at the elections; they don't even turn out. They send these people to Congress who do them in and all we see is apathy. This book isn't going to sell."

So that's when I thought of the idea of the fable.

Steve: Right to do that. Now, at some point of your story, "the empire strikes back" so to speak. There is a response from the plutocrats. What does that consist of and how do the people fend them off?

Ralph: Well, that's part of the dialogue. I love to do dialogue. And even though I've written the dialogue, I laugh when I reread what I've written. Basically there are two counter attacks, the national trade lobbies, like the chemical industry lobby, the drug industry lobby, the bank lobby

Steve: Is that who you referred to as The Young Turks, that people in Hugo Boss and Armani suits?

Ralph: Yeah. And they go to the Wall Street grand dukes and the imposing board room of the chief guru, and they say, look, this thing is moving fast. We've got to do a lot of things, and the Wall Street gurus basically become patronizing. They don't seem to get the urgency. On the other hand, when they saw what the agenda was some spoke up. They said, you know, those are some of the reforms Canada has, and in England, in France, and Western Europe, I mean, we won't say this publically fellows but what's the big deal? And the Washington-based trade groups, who live off of exaggerating fears of capitalism being overthrown, take a recess. They go down to another conference room down the hall and they start--what do we do with these guys; I mean, we need them and we intensely are offended by their head-in-the-sand.

And anyway, it goes back and forth and it does show that these are not just stereotype corporate lobbies. I mean, they're not something you just put a label on. They come from different backgrounds--a different sense of immediacy. It turned out before the end of the story that some of the reforms did scare the Wall Street types and they went to Washington and tried to fortify the lobby. And what scared the Wall Street types most was the shift of power provisions, the campaign finance reforms, and the facilities that companies would have to put in their billing envelopes and whatever--inviting people to band together in powerful labor and consumer groups to redress the balance and have a firm seat at the table. That's what really upset these Wall Street gurus. But the whole dialogue is done in a very readable, fascinating way. Steve, I tell you, this may be a dream, but I would like this to become a movie. I think it could be a low-budget movie and I could motivate people in ways that non-fiction doesn't, and let's face it, in the pre-civil war it was Uncle Tom's Cabin that aroused so many people.

Steve: Right. Well, you should meet some people in Hollywood who actually have power to do that.

Ralph: Norman Lear could do it. He started People for the American Way. He gets it. He could do it quite easily. Again, if you missed how to get the book you can go to ratsreformcongress.org where you can order copies of the hardback for \$30, copies of the paperback for \$20. You can order five copies for fifty if you want get a discussion going in your library or in your living room and you can order it online or write traditional checks. It's also wonderful material on how to organize a Congressional Rat-Watchers group. I mean, that's really the end purpose of this book--to get people in every congressional district to organize and they will be amazed once they get, say, a hundred, two, four, five hundred people in a club—a watchdog club of their Senators and Representatives—the effect it will have on Congress. I've always said it takes less than one percent of people back home to organize on the 535 men and women in Congress. And when you've got public opinion behind you or growing public opinion behind you, corporate lobbyists don't matter. They don't have any votes. They have money, but they don't have votes. So you're going to prevail in Congress.

Steve: Well, very good. The book is called How the Rats Reformed the Congress. We will link to that at ralphnaderradiohour.com. You can also go to ratsreformcongress.org. I want to thank you for joining us today, Mr. Nader. We're going to take a short break, but can you stick around and do listener questions after we come back?

Ralph: Sure. And How the Rats Reformed the Congress has a Hollywood ending by the way.

Steve: It's certainly does. It's a happy ending.

Ralph: But a startling one.

Steve: Exactly. Well, we've been speaking to Ralph Nader, author of *How the Rats Reformed the Congress*. We're pretending this is not even his own show. We're like we're interviewing him. We've got to take a short break and check in with our, Corporate Crime Reporter Russell Mohkiber. We'll be back one in minute to answer your listener questions.

Russell: From the National Press Building in Washington, DC, this is your Corporate Crime Reporter Morning Minute for Wednesday September 19th, 2018. I'm Russell Mohkiber. SeaWorld Entertainment and its former CEO will pay more than 5 million dollars to settle fraud charges for misleading investors about the impact the documentary film *Blackfish* had on the company's reputation and business. SeaWorld's former vice-president of communication also agreed to settle a fraud charge for his role in misleading SeaWorld's investors. *Blackfish* criticized SeaWorld's treatment of its orcas, also known as killer whales, and received significant media attention as the film became more widely distributed in the latter half of 2013.

The SEC (Security and Exchange Commission) alleged that on August 13, 2014, when SeaWorld, for the first time, acknowledged that its declining attendance was partially caused by negative publicity, SeaWorld's stock price fell causing significant losses to shareholders. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

Steve: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman. And our guest, Ralph Nader, has graciously agreed to stick around and do some listener questions on his own show. And I'm going to start that ball rolling with our first question from a listener named Curt Hubatch. He listens to the show, Ralph, while he delivers mail in rural Wisconsin. And he says - he's referring to the Jeffrey Clements corporate-personhood episode we did couple of weeks ago. And he says "I'm also writing about your answer to a question from a Wisconsin caller about the growing Community Rights movement at the end of your interview about corporate personhood."

He says, "I heard you saying that we, the people, can enact Community Rights ordinances but the state and federal levels of government will just preempt them. That to me seems unjust. If governments are instituted to protect our health, safety, and welfare then how come state and federal levels of government are preempting citizens, who are using their local bodies of government, from expanding on environmental and other protections already written in the state and federal laws.

Ralph: The answer is because they can. Under our Constitution and state law they can preempt local ordinances. For example in Texas, local metropolitan areas raised the minimum wage and so the fast-food industry and others went to Austin and got a bill through, which precluded any raising of the minimum wage at the municipal or city or town level--only possible at the state level. And when you deal with these Community Rights against corporate personhood and corporate power in their area where people live, work, and raise their families, the corporations are definitely going to go to the state and federal governments for preemption.

Steve: Well, our next question, David, I want you to take, but it's a good question in light of these midterm elections coming up and elections in general. And it's a question we've gotten in different forms a lot. But I think it bears repeating. So why don't you take this one, David.

David: It's from Mark Erickson. He says, "Ralph, I'm familiar with the ways you've encouraged voters and concerned citizens to support third-party candidates." He says, "I do live in a swing state, Pennsylvania. Even though it's not a presidential-election year, I'm faced with a similar thing. There was a Green Party candidate who I am considering voting for in the US senate. It's the same old story about strategically voting for Democrats in swing states versus voting for the best candidate that has very little chance of winning. What's the best course of action now, especially considering the success of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Gillum's candidacy in Florida for governor?"

Ralph: Well, David, I have a very simple answer. I always encourage people to vote their beliefs--to vote for the candidate and the agenda they believe in. Once you start tactically voting, you're basically saying to a major party you don't have to look at this small party's agenda and adopt it even though it has majoritarian support back home like raising the minimum wage or full Medicare for all, because the voters are going to give you a pass; they're not going to vote for the third party. From my reading of American history, I'm very happy that people voted for the Liberty Party in 1840 against slavery or for women's suffrage parties in succeeding decades or for the People's Populist Party representing the interest of farmers and workers, because that sets the stage for larger visibility and recognition. And eventually one of the two parties picked up and adopted the reform. Vote for who you believe in.

Steve: I've encountered this, you know, in the 15 or so years I've been sort of researching your life and career route through the movie and now the radio show. And I hear the same thing over and over again, which is, "hey, the house is on fire. We're in emergency mode!" I heard that back in 2004, I heard that every election year where we kind of are wired to think short-term and people just don't understand that in the long-term this has seeded the ground for somebody like Trump. That's hard to get across though, because we think short-term. We think, "hey, the house is on fire. We need to just select Democrats, no matter who they are and hope for the best."

Ralph: If the house is on fire, why don't the Democrats, or in another context, the Republicans, pick up the proposals that the third parties are offering--take it away from them. That's what Franklin Delano Roosevelt did to the Socialist Party, in some degree, headed by Norman Thomas. In fact, once I met Norman Thomas. He came to Princeton to lecture when I was a student and I was walking back home to the Princeton Inn at the end of the evening. I said, "Mr. Thomas, what's your greatest achievement?" He said, "Getting the Democrats to pick up my agenda."

David: Tom Daschle was the majority leader. He was a Democrat in 2002, and he gave George W. Bush the war authorization. That's what people think of-

Ralph: Oh, the Democrats have been facilitating Republican presidents for years now. Without the Democrats they couldn't have gotten the War into Iraq. They couldn't have gotten the corporate tax cuts that are ballooning the deficit and depriving people of the necessities back home from public investment. They couldn't have gotten the deregulation. The Democrats were able to block things even when they were in the minority. They don't have the energy, the Republicans have in the Congress now. I mean, look at this fight over Kavanaugh. It's unbelievable, the energy that McConnell and Grassley and Lindsay Graham have compared to their counterparts. With all this discussion about Kavanaugh when he was younger and the sexual harassment, the question I ask is: why didn't the Democrats investigate this from the beginning? Why didn't they investigate Kavanaugh from the high school on up? Instead they saw the number of votes they expected the Republicans to put behind Kavanaugh and they essentially gave up. I was told by people staffing the Senate Judiciary Committee, it's all fixed; they're

going to get fifty-one votes, and no way it's going to change. So they're defeatists and they bear a serious responsibility for what's happening. It's not just the Republicans.

Steve: Well, I always say, the Republicans are robbing the bank, but the Democrats are driving the getaway car. But getting back to our talk about the book and conscience, it seems like people like Mitch McConnell, Orrin Hatch, Charles Grassley--those are not exercises in conscience. They don't seem bothered by this kind of thing at all.

David: Well, you're friendly with Grover Norquist, I mean, don't these guys sleep at night thinking, yes, people are suffering, but government is not the answer. Isn't that how they sleep they think that government –

Ralph: It's amazing how cold-blooded some of them are. I mean, they've come to adjust their mindset, so it's a monetized mind. Grover Norquist doesn't like corporate welfare. He calls it crony capitalism, but he keeps pushing for a bigger military budget and more tax cuts. I mean, you know, where do you go on that, right? You cut the revenue and you raise the expenses of the bloated military budget. And then they go to work every day acculturated to their big donors, the people who pay them their salaries and benefits and vacations. When you see them say they teach Sunday school or they go to church on Sunday or whatever, you're tempted to ask, what do you forget Monday morning?

Steve: Yeah. Well, this next question, it's actually more of a comment from a long-time listener Marc Hudgens, and he's referring to the talk we had with Phil Donahue when we were talking about Cruise Missiles and drones. And he says, "While those are bad enough, those don't concern me nowhere near as much as the MOAB bomb--the Mother of all Bombs. At the risk of oversimplifying it, this is a non-nuclear WMD, and one that Trump dropped during the Nangarhar airstrike of last year that killed 94 people." He says, "I'd call that a WMD because if I recall right, it had a blast radius of one and a half miles." And the reason he fears this the most as a WMD, is without a nuclear fallout adrift that wipes out even more people for a given time after the blast, it seems to be a safer version of the WMD and he's sure that the military brass figures it's environmentally friendly.

David: Like the Neutron Bomb.

Ralph: Yeah, I think Marc is right in a sense that it's more likely to be used in a nuclear weapon and that makes it all the more dangerous.

Steve: David, why don't you take this next question from Robert Saiget.

David: This is from Robert Saiget. Ralph, I love your show, however, regarding China RX, I'm concerned over China again becoming our go-to whipping dog. It is long been fashionable to demonize China and it's becoming increasingly so as China rises economically. Therefore, I think we need to be a little more precise in our terminology. Instead of always blaming China, we should instead blame the Chinese government or China's neoliberal capitalists or the Chinese pharmaceutical industry, or depending on the subject, China's state-run industries, or the Chinese military for example.

Ralph: Very well stated, Robert. I couldn't agree more. I thought I tried to say that these drugs were coming from China, but that's not enough. You do need to particularize whether it's the state-owned enterprise drug industry or the private-capitalist drug industry, or the government in cahoots with the drug industry. It is important to do that. Otherwise, China is being demonized by Trump; it's being

demonized by John Bolton, his security adviser. And the Chinese are very proud people and, historically they have called themselves the Middle Kingdom, which means that everything is on the periphery and they are the center of the world. Centuries ago if they were invaded, the barbarians were acculturated and melted into the Chinese culture and became part of it.

They didn't change China because it was so powerful. I don't think Donald Trump appreciates that inner-core of historic pride that's been humiliated again and again in the 17th, 18th, 19th centuries by the European and US colonial powers--gunboat diplomacy years. Good point, Robert.

Steve: Thank you, Robert. Well, our last question, David, which I'm going to have you take, kind of brings us full circle around to the subject of citizen action. So David.

David: Ralph, this comes from Jean Palmer, she says, "Ralph, I know you have faith that the people can rise up, but I'm not sure that it is possible anymore with the dumbing down of education, with a massive corporate propaganda on TV, with the billions from oligarchs and billionaires and corporations on TV having their corporate lackeys in Congress. We need revolution, sadly. Probably a violent revolution, and I don't think Americans are capable of that. I always think, Ralph, you're the antidote to a violent revolution. I tell my children, "You put on a suit and tie and do what Ralph Nader did and you take on Congress peacefully."

Ralph: Well, I don't think violent revolutions work. The US America Revolution wasn't that violent actually, when you consider the casualties, serious as they were to the families. But the scorched-earth violent revolutions often boomerang against themselves as we've seen in Europe. And the power that substitutes itself for the former regime becomes very, very abusive and dictatorial. I don't think—in answer to your question Jean—I don't think you need more than one percent because even though people may be propagandized on today or tomorrow's news frenzy, they have a sense of fair play and they know that when Wall Street collapses under pension or their savings or their jobs, they know what the right thing to do is if one percent or more in their community take hold of the Congress and get the right policies through. So I think that there are a lot of people who are uninformed. You know, when you have a quiz show like Jay Leno did often on his late-night television show, when he would go out and record chance meetings with people walking down the street and asking them factual questions, and they wouldn't know the answer. But I think that the people know who's oppressing them in general. People know when fair-play is destroyed and taken away from their livelihoods and the kind of society they want to live in. What they don't have are active Congress Watchdog movements with people who put in 300 to 500 hours a year, connect to one another, start full-time offices in each congressional district, all of which we've talked about in prior shows. That's the cutting edge. That is the laser beam to public opinion--putting the heat on the institution that can change things, which is for better or for worse, the US Congress.

David: You say it's one percent; you've been saying that it just takes one percent of the population to make massive change. Did you learn that from Arthur Morgan?

Ralph: Well, Arthur Morgan, it's interesting you point that out. He was formerly head of the Tennessee Valley Authority and just before World War II, he traveled all over the world trying to answer the question, "What is it that can make change?" He came back and wrote a book called *The Small Community*, which I read years ago--came out about 1940. And he said, so it's all the small community that starts everything. I would say it starts with a conversation between two people, which nobody can

stop. So take heart, folks, you know, you got a lot of historical experience where justice was put forward and installed in our country by very, very small numbers of people. But they represented millions of women who wanted to vote; they represented millions of slaves who wanted to be free; they represented millions of industrial workers and farmers who didn't want to be subject to the vicious suppression of railroad fees and bank loan-gouging and that rendered them impoverished.

Steve: Well, thank you for your questions. Keep them coming on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website, either in our comment section or send it right to our inbox. I go through those every week. 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 show will appear on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website.

David: For Ralph Nader's weekly column--it's free--that's not the name of the column. That just happens to be free. For Ralph's weekly column, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mohkiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve: And visit the American Museum of Tort Law at tortmuseum.org. Check out the Tort Museum bookstore, there's a lot of engrossing books and memorabilia there.

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

Steve: Our theme music "Stand up Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon.

David: Join us next week. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph: Thank you all, and for serious listeners who want to be Congressional Rat-Watchers and form groups in their congressional district, who want to get this book, brand new, How the Rats Reformed the Congress. Just go to ratsreformcongress.org. That's ratsreformcongress.org.