

Ralph Nader Radio Hour Ep 425 Transcript

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

[Music] Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long.

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan, along with my co-host, Hannah Feldman. David Feldman is still attending to a personal matter, but it wouldn't be a show without a Feldman, so welcome back, Hannah.

Hannah Feldman: Thank you, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: And the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hi. Welcome. We have a very controversial issue today. Universal voting, voting as a civic duty, like Australia.

Steve Skrovan: That's right, Ralph. Our first guest today will be E.J. Dionne, author of the new book, *100% Democracy*. History has shown us that when more Americans have access to the ballot, more Americans vote. It's also shown us that when more Americans vote, the government does a better job of representing their interests. In *100% Democracy*, Mr. Dionne argues for universal civic duty voting and insists that requiring all eligible voters to vote isn't as radical as it sounds. We look forward to speaking with him about how to combat voter suppression, how universal civic duty voting would work, and how other democracies have turned voting from a chore into a celebration.

After that, we'll welcome back our friend, peace educator, Colman McCarthy, to discuss how we can achieve peace in Ukraine.

As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

But first, we've changed the Constitution before to expand voting access. Our next guest wants us to follow in the footsteps of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Nineteenth and Twenty-Sixth Amendments. Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: E.J. Dionne is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, University Professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture at Georgetown University and visiting professor at Harvard University. He writes about politics in a twice-weekly column for the *Washington Post*, and he is co-author with Miles Rapoport of the book *100% Democracy: The Case for Universal Voting*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, E.J. Dionne.

E.J. Dionne: Thank you. It's great to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome, indeed. The book is *100% Democracy: The Case for Universal Voting*, E.J. Dionne Jr. and Miles Rapoport, and there's a foreword by Heather McGhee. Voting as a duty is something new in the United States, but over two dozen countries, often led by Australia, but there's Austria, there's Belgium and Brazil already have some version of universal

voting. So it's not like we're breaking new ground here. But what really impresses me about universal voting—and by the way, listeners, before you turn off on the idea as being compulsory and big government, this means, in E.J. Dionne's parlance, participation in elections. That is, you go or you do by absentee; you can write in a vote, whoever you want, including yourself. If you don't want to vote for people who are on the ballot, you could vote for none of the above. So it's as easy as pie, and E.J. will talk about its enforceability.

E.J. Dionne: First of all, I've been in Washington so long I want to pander to you Ralph, because when Miles and I were writing our book, we discovered that you've been for this system for a very long time. And we ran across a great story you told, that I'm just going to repeat here, where you were visiting Australia, you were in Sydney, and you asked a cab driver, "How do you like living in a country that makes you go to vote?" And you go on to say, "I thought he would complain about a overbearing bureaucracy," but that wasn't the answer you got. Quoting you again, "He turned around and gave me an impatient look, replying, "Why, mate, it's a civic duty." And I really think that captured very well what has been created in Australia. I just want to say people like proof-of-concept if you're proposing what seems to be a new idea. Australians have been using this for a hundred years. And as you point out, this has been used in two dozen other democratic countries.

Nader went on to argue that, quote, "A great benefit of mandatory voting is that all the ways the politicians and their paymasters scheme to obstruct, repress, delay and inconvenience voting in America become crimes." There are two reasons why Miles and I really got engaged in this—or three in my case, because I spent a lot of time, for various reasons, in Australia over the years and saw the system worked really well. But secondly, when you think about our system, our voting system, it's become like a fancy dinner party where you have an A list of likely voters, and then a B list of people who are registered but don't necessarily vote that much, and a C list of people who aren't registered at all. And that has a lot of perverse effects on our system. Politicians and consultants spend all their time talking to people on the A list, so no attention is paid to trying to encourage people who are registered but don't vote often, or aren't registered, to vote. And people tend to do things more if somebody asks them to do it.

Thirdly, it creates weird incentives in our political campaigns because candidates spend so much of their time turning out their own base—as Miles likes to say, "They rage to engage," to get people voting, and to really try to discourage the regular voters on the other side from voting, sometimes directly with barriers, which I want to get to and sometimes just by really trashing the other candidate. Now, we don't think this will make elections a peaceable kingdom, but if everybody's voting, there's no obstruction, you don't have to spend all this money on turning out voters, and politicians have to talk to everybody, by definition. The other reason we think this is even more urgent now is something you pointed to, which is, so many states, after we opened up the system in 2020 and made it much easier to vote—I was very proud to drop my ballot in a drop box in front of Walt Whitman High School, A: because all three of our kids went there, but B: Walt Whitman is the poet of American democracy, so it felt like a poetic act to drop my ballot in. But we made it easier for people to vote, and here you have 19 states trying to roll back the advances in access that we won. And we believe that by declaring voting a duty, you require the system to make it easier for everyone to do their duty. And we propose a bunch of reforms to make it easier for people to vote.

I think last point I want to make, if I could, that when people talk about rights and responsibilities, they often think of the responsibility as some kind of limit on the right. In fact, the responsibility can reinforce the right, and you mentioned jury duty. The right to a fair trial depends on everyone being willing to serve on juries, and one of the greatest victories of the Civil Rights Movement was to block discrimination against black Americans from serving on juries, which really meant that black Americans were required to serve on juries just like white people were. So rights and duties can really reinforce each other. And that's what we think is true of this system that you and I both support.

Ralph Nader: Then it might be added that our Constitution has a lot of rights, the Bill of Rights, 10 of them amendments right after the ratification, the first set. But there's only one duty, which is jury duty, and that's inferred because you can't have juries without jurors, even though, unfortunately, a lot of people try to get out of it. It's one of the great opportunities to have democratic power. I mean, can you imagine a jury of one's peers judging these giant corporations in trials involving wrongful injury? I mean, we're about the only country left in the world that has a constitutional right to a jury trial in wrongful injury cases. The thing I like about universal voting is it sweeps clean all these obstructions, these outrageous ways that they harass people and make it difficult, and intimidate them. And right now we're at the point in our country where people are going to go down to the polls in November and there are going to be big, stock guys strolling around, apparently observers, armed in these southern states where you can carry arms, just for intimidating people, and people are saying, "I don't want to go down there. I don't want to have to face these guys." So you also want to get rid of the Electoral College, the popular election of the presidency, and this universal voting will have an impact even on the attempt to engage in partisan gerrymandering.

So you've gone on a tour with this book. Not many tours by authors during the COVID period. And is it true that once you float this idea, first, there's often a knee-jerk, what I would call, ACLU opposition, because they don't like compulsory voting, and then as you explain it, you can write in, you can check off a box, you can vote for none of the above if you don't want to vote for the people on the ballot, and the fines are so easily waivable and avoidable. Don't you find more and more hands go up in the audience?

E.J. Dionne: Yeah. We've had a lot of good luck. We've spoken to a lot of groups over the last few weeks and we found that the more people listen, the more they're inclined to support it. But in a funny way, what heartens me most is there are a couple of columns that have come out over the last week where the person said, "I'm not quite there yet, but I'm almost there." And in a way, I take that as a great victory for an idea that's never really been taken seriously in our country. So yeah, Miles and I—it just got introduced this week in Congress. Actually Congressman Larson from Connecticut—Connecticut's got to be a real focal point of this because you're for it, Miles was secretary of the state in Connecticut. It was introduced in Connecticut in the state legislature by a former student of mine, a young state senator called Will Haskell. But it got introduced in Congress just this week. And so we're finding people listen and get very interested in the idea. I just want to go back on jury duty, if I may, because there's a great quote in our book from Charles Ogletree, the legendary civil rights lawyer who taught at Harvard Law School, and he talked about people complaining about jury duty. And he said, today—and he talked about why universal jury service with no discrimination was a great victory. And then he says, "Today, perhaps as a measure of our progress, all races and all citizens groan equally loudly when the

jury summons arrives in the mail. Today, and inconvenience attendant to the summons, yet," and as you were underscoring Ralph, "the reason why participation in jury service matters has not changed over the years, the constitutional strength of this country begins with its citizens," and he adds that a jury gives ordinary people extraordinary power. That's exactly what elections do. And that's why we think these two duties go hand in hand.

Ralph Nader: Well, Congressman John Larson happens to be my congressman, and Connecticut is called the Constitution State, so that's a pretty good start. In your book, just to take a slight bit of digression, but it's relevant, in your book on page 152, you say, quote, "Imbalances of wealth have spilled over into the political process." Spilled over. And you've written a lot of articles about inequality. I have trouble with that word because it's so vague. But I don't think people, most of them, have any idea of the range of inequality. So I don't expect you to know the answers to this question, but what do you think Tim Cook of the Apple Corporation, he's CEO, makes an hour, 40-hour week?

E.J. Dionne: I have no idea. I wouldn't be surprised if the answer is in the millions.

Ralph Nader: He makes \$50,000 an hour or \$850 a minute. A home healthcare worker averages \$13.50 an hour, and a lot of workers in the Apple retail stores around the country are making \$17, \$18, under \$20 an hour. He's making \$850 a minute. So when people hear that he's making \$100 million a year, that doesn't register. That's too vague. But when you break it down, it's a spectacular level of inequality, unheard of in medieval times, not even close. And it's this kind of division, because when you're that rich, you can put a lot of money into campaigns, into political campaigns to support and oppose and corrupt the system even further, and so increase the campaign cash hoards of these right-wingers like in Florida or Alabama or Texas. That they're emboldened in the state legislature to create all these obstructions and tripwires to try to get certain kinds of people unable to vote, or having to subject themselves to all kinds of harassment and intimidation. Because I keep saying, who elects these people in these state legislatures? How can they be so cruel and vicious and authoritarian as to try to block the American voters from voting with all kinds of legislation, all kinds of intimidating volunteer local precinct officials, threatening them with criminal penalties? Well, one reason is they got a cash hoard from a few plutocrats and they get reelected because they put a lot of television ads and misinformation to get elected and to do more of their authoritarian work. Now, listening to them that they –

E.J. Dionne: Well, by the way, Ralph, that's why Hannah kindly agreed to pay me \$850 a minute for being on this podcast. So thank you very much for lifting me for that moment to this standard, Hannah.

Ralph Nader: E.J., this compulsory voting with all the opportunities to vote, write-in, et cetera, universal voting or what you call civic duty voting, it can be done in a city, it can be done in a state in some respects, and it can be done nationally. Can you talk a little bit about that?

E.J. Dionne: Yeah. I just want to underscore your point on inequality and the election process. This book, by the way, is not aimed at all those other things. This book is a tight—we think tight—we hope tight, short, clear argument about why we think this idea of universal voting is important. But we have a last chapter in the book where we make clear we're not selling a magic elixir like one of those 19th Century guys at the carnival, where we pretend this solves every

problem, but we do think it would make it easier to solve the other problems. And the campaign money, one, in tandem with what happened to the Voting Rights Act really gets under my skin, too because when you look at what the Roberts Court did at one and the same time with *Shelby v. Holder*, they undercut the Voting Rights Act, which means they disempowered less advantaged Americans, less privileged Americans, and they made it harder for the justice department to enforce voting rights. And then with the other hand, they did *Citizens United v. FEC* which empowered the already very wealthy and empowered. So you talk about two court decisions that push away from small-d democracy and towards something like oligopoly or whatever you want to call it, a system that is less and less democratic. So I'm glad you underscored that.

We don't pretend that this idea is going to be adopted instantly tomorrow morning, even though we wish people would just embrace it right away. And so we have a three-pronged strategy, basically. On the one hand, we do want it debated at the federal level. We would love to see it happen. We're glad that Congressman Larson also—I heard that Congressman Courtney from Connecticut is going to be a co-sponsor. There may be some others—have introduced it federally. So we hope we have a federal debate. It could be enacted federally for federal elections. But we also want states to try it out and states to experiment with this. And we've had a lot of success over the years in reform spreading from state to state to state. You see a lot more Election Day voter registration. I'm looking for it in the book now, but we have a little chart in the book about the reforms that have spread over the last 20 years, from just a handful of states to a lot of states. We've gone from one state to five in having all-mail balloting, we've gone from 0 to 40, but some of that's technological change, in states that have—here we go. Online voter registration, 0 to 40 states. Election Day registration, six states in 2020—in 2021, now. Early in-person voting, 22 in 2000, 43 in 2020. No excuse absentee voting, 22 then, 34 now.

So we think these experiments, when they're tried out, can be spread around. You've seen that with instant-runoffs that are starting to move from state to state. So we hope that can happen. But there are 13 states—we work with a great group of lawyers on this project, and they identified 13 state constitutions that give localities quite a lot of freedom to experiment. And we hope that cities and counties might try this system out. We recommend that it be used in all major elections, state and local and federal. We don't include primaries, even though turning out in primaries can be very important, because we think that's probably a step too far for now. But imagine a school board where people are worried that only 10% or 15% of the people are turning out for school board races. It's one way that some of these right-wing extremists get elected to school boards. A school board might decide, Let's require everybody to vote in these school board elections. We would get a better representation of what people in this school district really think. So that's one kind of experiment. And then there's a wonderfully mischievous idea from Nick Stephanopoulos, who teaches at Harvard Law School, who said that in certain states, the big cities that tend to be Democratic, might say, "We're going to try this in our cities," and suddenly turnouts would zoom in those cities. In other parts of the state you could imagine some state legislatures would just try to shut it down, but the alternative is other areas of the state that might vote differently from the cities would say, Hey, they're getting big turnouts. We're going to do the same. And so you could have it spread across a state. So there are lots of different paths to getting this done. We want to try them all.

Ralph Nader: Well, you have a chapter on that it's constitutional because some so-called constitutional experts say you can't compel people to vote, and you take all the rebuttals one by one. So we don't really need to spend much time on that. But there is the Roberts Court that often doesn't adhere to the Constitution, so that may be a stumble down the line. But we have listeners in Berkeley, California, Ann Arbor, some of the college towns, university towns. Why don't you try and see if your mayor, city council person will put in a bill and get the ball rolling? I don't expect in this year's election, E.J., that many members running for Congress are going to use this as a campaign issue, although it may come on faster than we think given Larson's introduction in Congress, which would have been unheard of a few years ago.

But let me point out what I think is a vacuum in the book, and that is I've always believed that candidate rights enhance voter rights, and voter rights enhance candidates' rights, because we need more voices and choices; we just can't leave it up to the two-party duopoly, which, on many issues like military defense budget empire, Wall Street are often converging and they don't even provide two choices to the voter. Based on all your knowledge and your writing, how would you provide for a system where, as in Europe and other countries, it's much, much easier to get on the ballot. It's harder to get on the ballot in Texas or California than it is with all the ballot requirements of Western Europe put together. In fact, in Canada, last I checked, you get 50 signatures and you can run for Parliament in Ottawa. You get on the ballot. What's your view on that in terms of more voices and choices, given the history of third parties which, starting with the Liberty Party against slavery, led the way before the two parties or one of them picked up women's right to vote. labor unions, farmer, worker rights, progressive taxation and so forth were all led by third parties that never won a national election. Give us your views.

E.J. Dionne: Well, in fact, another good example was Norman Thomas, the leader of the Socialist Party, who said that FDR robbed him blind or something along those lines, because FDR picked up ideas from the Socialist Party and obviously from the old Progressive Party that his cousin ran as a presidential candidate for. Let me just go back to something you said that I was really grateful for, which is you called out to the listeners of your show in those towns and cities to see if they could try it locally. My friend Miles is an inveterate organizer, as you know. I always say that Miles has so much energy that if Europe could tap Miles, they wouldn't have to import another drop of Russian oil. And Miles is setting up something called 100% Democracy Initiative where exactly what he's trying to do is to get cities, counties, states, and obviously the federal government to adopt this. And we're hoping precisely for those kinds of experiments around the country.

I think the best path, and we talk about it in the book, is the instant-runoff or the single transferable vote. I'm also in favor of multimember congressional districts and more congressional districts. We haven't increased the size of the House for about a hundred years, and so these representatives of the people represent way more people than they were ever envisioned to have to represent. If you had a transferable vote with multimember districts, it would ease the way for third parties to get representation. People could vote for them without fear. We won't go into history on this—but without fear that by voting for their first choice, they are endangering their second choice and electing their least favorite choice. And the beauty of the instant-runoff is if you put one next to your favored choice and he or she drops away, at least your preference in what turns out to be the main contest is registered. I think under our system, having some multimember districts and the transferable vote would open up the system and probably

encourage people to vote. I've also come to believe it might marginalize the right-wing because if you look at European parliaments, the extreme right tends to stand as a party of its own, and rather than take over the mainstream set of right party, which is what's happening with the Republican Party here. And so in Germany, they could form a coalition. The AfD is a far-right party, anti-immigrant and all that. They are isolated off on the right, and you've got a kind of mainstream government. I think I am more and more sympathetic to that approach. I was a defender, and still am in certain ways, of the benefits of two parties, but I think the costs are clearer now than ever given what's happened, especially to the Republican Party.

Ralph Nader: Well, before we get to your views on proportional representation, when you say multimember district, that may not mean much to a lot of people. Let's take a state like Maryland, where I think you live. How would it work?

E.J. Dionne: So I think we've got, what, eight districts now, and we each elect one. But for the state legislature, in our district, we elect three members in the election, not one--three members of the lower house and one senator from our district. Now, in my district, all the Democrats win in the general election. But if you had transferable voting, it might give a shot at third parties; heck, in our district, Republicans are almost a third party. But you would give a shot at other people getting elected so that my district might send two Democrats and a Green; they might send two Democrats and a Republican. So the combination of multimember districts with transferable vote...because I don't think we are going to move toward proportional representation. I know my friend Lee Drutman, a brilliant political scientist, has been pounding the drum for this. But as a second best option, Lee too is for multimember districts with transferable vote. I'm hoping—we used to have them in the past, by the way. This is not alien to American history.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. On that point, E.J., my favorite example is Montana, where they ran two candidates for Congress statewide instead of splitting the state in half and one candidate half, and one candidate the other half. And that's how Jeannette Rankin became the first woman to be elected to Congress in 1916, I think. Great labor leader, great women's rights leader. She came and visited us when she was 90 years old, to a whole group of college interns in 1970 and '72 I think—1972, who were putting out reports on members of Congress. She called me up in 1972, Jeannette Rankin, 90 years old, and she said, "I want to come see you," because she kept pushing the multidistrict idea. And so she flew down and she sat around the table with all kinds of college interns, and I introduced her. And I wanted to give the college interns an idea of stamina, because when you're very young, you tend to think if you work a few weekends to try to stop a polluter, that's about all you can do. And I asked her, I said, "Ms. Rankin, when did you start supporting this idea?" And she said, "Well, about 58 years ago." (Ralph chuckles) That drove the point home of civic stamina all right.

E.J. Dionne: You just hit one of my favorite points. I often tell folks who get impatient or alienated from politics, and often for good reason, I say, the problem with politics is you need both urgency and patience, and urgency and patience are two virtues that don't always go together. You need urgency to get the job done, but patience to accept that sometimes it can take a little longer than you hoped.

Ralph Nader: Well, sometimes they do go together, because if you have stamina, you can allow yourself the luxury of patience. And if you have patience, you're more likely to have stamina.

That's the way I read it. But the younger generation has got to connect more with the older generation as there's a lot of experience to imbibe that is not readily accessible to their iPhone.

E.J. Dionne: I'm very worried about these elections in 2022 because I think an awful lot of young people are very turned off, and if they don't vote, they will be giving away their power. But I get why they're turned off, and I think it's imperative that older politicians listen to them. They're right about a lot of things.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, of course. If they get disgusted with politics and turned off, they're just letting the rascals have more power, who never turn off and they're always in the political arena. What's your view of all the Democrats expressing defeatism about November? They went to two retreats lately and the Democrats were moaning and groaning and looking for slogans and looking over each other's shoulder, not taking the leadership gauntlet. You can get a self-fulfilling prophecy against the most corrupt party in American history, the GOP--the lying, voter-obstructing, Wall Street over Main Street, warmongering, self-enriching, the Trumpsters. They should be landsliding the Republicans. Why aren't they ahead in the polls? What is it about it, that they can't get the message across?

E.J. Dionne: I think a bunch of different things happened. I think that Biden took a slide after Afghanistan that he never has recovered from. And even if you agreed with him, as I did, that it was time to pull the troops out, the disaster that happened on the ground, the fact that we didn't seem ready for it, really shook opinion. And you can make critique at the press and the way the press covered it, but however you want to look at it, that happened. And then I think what happened is that the Build Back Better program had a lot of good stuff in it, like the extension of the child credit, like universal child care, like help for people to go to college. There were all kinds of benefits for people in that. First of all, it was sold badly, because under the Senate's rules, they had to package it all together in this one big bill. And so all anybody talked about was whether the bill was going to be 3 billion or 5 billion or 1.5 billion. Nobody knew what the heck was in the bill. They only knew it was a lot of billions of one kind or another. And then, because they couldn't manage to negotiate something with Senators Manchin and Sinema, the whole thing died. I'm sure we're going to go back and ask what signals got missed along the way there that might have gotten something done? But I think that whole process further dispirited a lot of people. And then I think that the cost of living is going up and they haven't managed to make enough of a case about what they would do about that. They talk sometimes about the corporations charging a lot for oil, and then the pandemic just hasn't gone away. So, I think all those things have combined. What I don't get and what I have been writing and what I hope they do is begin to talk about the fundamental threat to democracy that this version of the Republican Party poses. Not every version we've known in the past—Lord knows you worked with people like John Chafee on environmental issues years ago, but all those Republicans are gone. Democracy is, in a fundamental way, on the ballot. And I think we're going to have to start passing some things and Biden is going to have to start doing some things by executive order for people to say, all right, they are doing stuff and the other side is a threat. I think running purely against the threat, without delivering a little bit more between now and November, is going to be difficult. But lastly, I think if you wring your hands, that's never a way to win an election. So I hope they have a firm meeting where they start wringing their hands and say, here's how we're going to win.

Ralph Nader: Well, they don't even know how to boast. Like they passed the \$15 minimum wage in the House months ago and they hardly ever talk about it, knowing that they GOP doesn't even believe in a minimum wage, much less anything else. And that for a year, they were sending \$300 average checks to 60 million children of conservative liberal families in need, and the GOP blocked the extension of that; they're not making a big deal out of that even. You know who they should listen to? Because they don't know how to talk to blue-collar workers, that's the problem. They're losing the Reagan voters in election after election. They ought to listen to Harry Truman. When he was the underdog in 1948, E.J., and he went on a 28,000-mile railroad trip around the country, and here's what he said in front of 90,000 people in an open field in Dexter, Iowa. Ninety thousand people; imagine that today. Here's what he said, quote, "I wonder how many times you have to be hit on the head before you find out who's hitting you. These Republican gluttons of privilege are cold men; they're cunning men. They want a return of the Wall Street dictatorship. I'm not asking you to vote for me. Vote for yourselves." End quote.

And then in Denver, on the same tour he told the crowd of 25,000 people in front of the state capital, quote, "Republicans in Washington have a habit of becoming curiously deaf to the voice of the people. They have a hard time hearing what the ordinary people of the country are saying. But they have no trouble at all hearing about what Wall Street is saying." End quote. The Democrats have got to recognize that the most dominant, pervasive power in this country is corporate power, whether it's over workers, the environment, the electoral system, consumers, the big banks, the insurance companies, blocking universal healthcare, cheating, lying, stealing. I mean, it's just enormous. You may not know this but the lead expert at Harvard, Malcolm Sparrow, estimates the most conservative figure, that this year, 10% of all healthcare expenditures will go down the drain because of computerized billing fraud. That's \$360 billion, billion dollars, E.J. So they got to learn how to talk to people, where they live, work and raise their families, and not just talk to people who are subject to discriminatory injustice (like) minorities, but to all the people who are bleeding the same color. That would be a good motto. All the people are bleeding the same color, to the few who control the many, from Wall Street to Washington. What do you say?

E.J. Dionne: Well, I'll only say two things back. I love those same Harry Truman speeches. Hanging in our breakfast nook is a Roosevelt-Truman poster that my wife gave me for Christmas one year because of my fondness for that. And I always loved where the whole story of "Give 'em hell, Harry", which he's known for, and as you know, Ralph, I think that somebody yelled that from the crowd, "Give 'em hell, Harry," and Harry Truman replied, "No, no, I tell the truth and they think it's hell." And there it is.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Well, there are people who will never forgive the incinerator of Hiroshima and Nagasaki civilians against the advice of our leading generals in World War II, who thought it was unnecessary and very cruel. But domestically, he really knew how to speak to ordinary people and he made short shrift of John Dewey in the elections. This quote by Truman was put in a new book by Robert Kuttner, who you know well, called *Going Big: FDR's Legacy, Biden's New Deal, and the Struggle to Save Democracy*. It's very much focused on the upcoming November congressional elections. Before we conclude, Steve, any comments, Hannah?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, I've got one. It seems like the idea of popular democracy is great, obviously, an ideal, but my reading of history is that's not really what the Founders intended. Popular democracy kind of scared them. And I'm just going to quote from a history by Alan

Taylor, called *American Revolutions*, where he quotes Madison and he says, "Like Washington, most gentlemen still hoped to find, in Madison's words, a 'republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government.' They wanted to redesign republican governments to weaken the many and empower the few." end quote. So, it seems like to me that baked into the founding is this idea of the elites running things and to scare them, not popular democracy. That seems like a big thing to buck in our heritage.

E.J. Dionne: I think my favorite speech that Barack Obama ever gave was the speech he gave at Selma about how the United States, over a very long trajectory, moved toward greater democracy and greater equality. And yes, it's a, broadly speaking, optimistic view of American history, or it's a hopeful view. I think hope is different than optimism. It's a hopeful view of American history. And I think about this idea in connection with our book on universal voting. When the country started, the vote really was the prerogative of white men with property. And they were the people who voted. But inherent in many of their ideas in the Preamble and the Constitution, along with the Bill of Rights, my favorite part of the Constitution that begins with the words "We the People", not them the people, not we the elite. We the People. Inherent was a, broadly speaking, democratic idea. And over time, more and more people gained power in the system. So the franchise was extended from white men to property, to all white men. And there were working men's organizations and early forms of unions in the 1830s and 1840s that insisted on that right. Then briefly after the Civil War, we had extended the franchise to Black Americans in the south. It got taken away in the Jim Crow period and it took us all the way to the Voting Rights Act to again have universal suffrage for Black people. And we made further advances after the Voting Rights Act for native people, and then women got the right to vote finally, starting in Wyoming and then moving, again, state by state, moving up to the rest of the country until we passed the amendment that gave all women the right to vote.

So to me, there is a reading of the American story that is a reading of people struggling to advance rights, and that you have setbacks. The backlash against reconstruction is one of the best examples. I think the Trump years saw some of that backlash, some of the backlash against the New Deal. But on the whole, we have bent toward greater democracy and greater participation. So I think that when you take the Founding Documents, no one used them better than Lincoln and Martin Luther King to argue that there is an inherent idea of equality that goes back to the founding. And so that's what I hold on to. And I think there's a lot of history that justifies that view. So that's my take on that.

Ralph Nader: E.J., I'm really curious about this because you do have access to the mainstream media, certainly PBS and NPR. This book has been a month. What kind of national media have you been on? Have you been in NPR, PBS, any of the commercial? I haven't seen it reviewed in the *New York Times* yet.

E.J. Dionne: In terms of attention, probably the best national exposure we got was on *Morning Joe* where actually Al Sharpton showed up and Miles and I had no idea that he's an enthusiastic supporter of this and supported this idea very strongly. So we did get that. We got a wonderful review in the *Washington Post*—which I could tell you, this is no guarantee ever to post writers—from Didi Kuo who does great work at a center out at Stanford on democracy. So we've gotten some attention--a column in the *L.A. Times* and a couple other columns. We're still trying to get to other places and we hope to get there. I haven't given up yet. And as you know on these things, some attention breeds other attention. This shouldn't be a partisan idea. There's no

guarantee that if everybody votes, Republicans lose. I think it's their worst advertisement for themselves whenever they say, "We can't win if the electorate is big." I think they should embrace it. And I know at least a couple of Republicans who are privately for this. I want them to come out because they think it'll be easier to take their party back from the extremists if this idea became the practice in the United States.

Ralph Nader: Well, E.J., even though you're not a filmmaker or rock star, you should be getting on NPR, so try Scott Simon on Saturdays.

E.J. Dionne: I'm going to keep trying. If you want to give him a buzz, please feel free, Ralph. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Ralph Nader: Will do that. Hannah, any comment, question?

Hannah Feldman: Yes. Thank you. So in your book you give some statistics about who votes in the US today, and it seems like it's still older white men with property. And it struck me that if voting is the consent of the governed, the people who most give their consent in the US, who are these older white men with property, coincidentally are the people who are the least governed. You see women's reproductive rights being curtailed. You see other minority communities being really onerously governed. So I'm curious, in countries that have adopted an approach similar to the one you lay out in your book, what the data show for the governance that this broader voting pool has resulted in.

E.J. Dionne: Let me just say a couple of things. One is turnout is actually slightly higher among women than men, according to the census. I'm just looking at the chart. You're right in many ways in what you said but it just jumped out at me that women are 68.4%, men are 65%. But there is a heavy skew by age. So at the extremes, 18 to 29, only 54%; 65-plus, 74.5%. That's one big gap. White, 70.9%; Black, non-Hispanic, 62.6%, Asian Americans, 59.7%, Latino, 53.7%. So, the electorate is wider than the country as a whole, although there have been big increases in Black turnout over time. I don't have the income figures, but using education as an imperfect measure of class, there is where you see a real skew. 41.5% among those with less than a high school diploma, 83% among those with an advanced degree, and 78% with a bachelor's degree. So the electorate is privileged and older, and somewhat whiter. And that's one of the things we're trying to cure here, and that in countries with this—which is to say we want to bring up all the other numbers. And in countries with this system, you don't have the age skew, you don't have the class skew, and you don't have a race skew. And we're trying to unskew the electorate, as it were, so it is more fully representative.

And as I said, one of the biggest differences would be in the young because we make it really hard for young people to vote. This system, if you make it a duty to vote, would have to make that easy. Election Day registration, for example, is a reform that's been very good for young people, because they can show up on Election Day where they may have moved to two or three months ago, but they can vote. Right now, it's much harder for young people to vote. So it's better than it was at the founding, but there's a lot of work to do. So on that, I agree with you completely.

Ralph Nader: Well, there are a lot of arguments for what you're making in this book, E.J.; one of them is not often made. We have to obey the laws, dozens and dozens and dozens of laws, but we don't have to express our view on who gets elected to pass these laws. There's a certain illogic

there that your book remedies with what you call universal voting or voting as a civic duty. I think you have so many lenient outs from any of the modest \$20 fines or conscientious objector. You give them a right not to even mark anything. You give them a right of conscientious objection the way people have registered to avoid the draft. Are you worried about this being so unenforceable that these civic duty laws become little more than exhortations?

E.J. Dionne: Remember Richard Nixon, when somebody asked a question that he didn't like, would say, "I'm glad you asked that question." In this case, I'm glad you asked that question. And we worked a lot with a wonderful guy—if you really want to read the big comprehensive book on this, it came out last year, there's a guy at the University of Georgia called Shane Singh, who is probably the world's expert on this system. And we worked with Shane for our book. And what you found is that with very, very low enforcement, it wasn't as effective. But the difference between sort of medium enforcement along Australian lines, and high enforcement, the Australian system, if anything, performs a little better. So at least the evidence from elsewhere, kind of comparing countries with this system across each other—and this is only democratic countries so we don't—a dictatorship can have compulsory voting but it's not really voting. So in democratic countries, it seems that moderate enforcement works. And look, we're trying to get from here to there. I think it'll be easier to get from here to there with moderate enforcement, and we'll see what happens. But what Australia shows is with moderate enforcement, your cab driver—it's the reason I love quoting your cab driver, not just because I'm on your show—they really have created in Australia this sense that voting is a civic duty; it is a public obligation. People take it very seriously. My favorite photo of the Australian election is four surfers in their wetsuits near Bondi Beach, with their surfboards leaning up against the voting booth as they cast their ballots. Everybody says, "This is what I do. Election Day is a holiday." It's a Saturday. We should make it a holiday. Everybody turns out and it just becomes part of civic life. That's what we're trying to do here.

Ralph Nader: No, it's a festive occasion. They have barbecues, they have parties on voting day. If you're going to give that Sydney Australia cab driver example again in your interviews, just make sure you do the right accent. He turned and he looked at me and he said, "Why, it's a civic duty, mate."

E.J. Dionne: I won't try the Aussie accent. Somebody once told me that whenever I imitate somebody, I sound like I'm doing an imitation of Barney Frank, my dear former congressman. I love Barney but that's not a good—that's not being a good imitator.

Ralph Nader: On that note, we're out of time. We've been talking with E.J. Dionne, syndicated columnist, column in the *Washington Post* and around the country. He's the co-author with Miles Rapoport of *100% Democracy: The Case for Universal Voting*; there's a foreword by Heather McGhee, and it is published by The New Press. Thank you very much and good luck to you, E.J.

E.J. Dionne: Thanks so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with E.J. Dionne. We have a link to his book, *100% Democracy*, at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, peace educator, Colman McCarthy, on Ukraine. 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, April 29, 2022; I'm Russell Mokhiber. Dollar Tree is recalling more than 1 million hot glue guns due to fire and burn hazards. That's according to a report from the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The glue gun can malfunction when plugged in, posing fire and burn hazards. Consumers should immediately unplug and stop using the Square Glue Gun and return it to any Dollar Tree or Family Dollar store for a full refund. Dollar Tree has received seven reports of electrical malfunctions when using the glue guns, including four reports of fire and one report of skin irritation. The recalled devices, which are imported from China, are black with an orange trigger and tip. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with Hannah Feldman and Ralph. Let's learn about peace. Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Colman McCarthy is a journalist, teacher, lecturer, pacifist, progressive, and long-time peace activist who directs the Center for Teaching Peace in Washington, D.C. He is also the author of the book, *I'd Rather Teach Peace*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Colman McCarthy.

Colman McCarthy: Well, I'm delighted to be on the program. I go way back many decades with Ralph. And he's always been a man of conscience and a man of action. That's the best combination we can have, and Ralph has been providing that all these years. I have in front of me a little booklet that he put out a few years ago, called *Civic Arousal*, and it's a beautiful small booklet that replies to the letters he received. And it's called *Civic Arousal: Addressed to the Citizens of America*. I've always had that here in my library, Ralph, and so we've been able to keep in touch that way.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Colman. Listeners should know that Colman, for quite a few years, was a columnist for the *Washington Post*. He has spoken to high schools, universities of all backgrounds and geographies, and getting them to adopt peace studies. There are a lot of universities that teach about wars, but when he started, there were very few teaching about advocating peace or waging peace, and now there are hundreds of schools who have peace studies thanks to Colman McCarthy. Now we have the Ukraine war, the invasion of Ukraine by Putin and the Russian Armed Forces. It's getting more and more intensive, more and more destruction, civilians, infrastructure, more and more weapons pouring in by the Russians and by the supporters of Ukraine. It's a very hard question to ask at this juncture, but if you were the US government, Colman, you were the State Department, you were President Biden, what would you do now?

Colman McCarthy: Well, I would begin by examining our own policies. And going back to that wonderful speech Martin Luther King gave at the Riverside Church in New York City, April 4, 1967, in which he said, "My government, as it was, leading purveyor of violence." He also said in that same speech, "A nation that continues, year after year, to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." I think King was right then, and he's still correct today. And by the way, Ralph, you'll be not shocked to know, but the *Washington Post* criticized King for that speech. The *New York Times* also put him down. And they both said, "What do you know about foreign policy? Keep singing “We Shall

Overcome” and marching.” But really, the real issues to us, the media and also members of Congress, that that's the background, that we have to recognize that. Unfortunately, I've never heard any president in the State of the Union speech quote either of those words. And so it makes you wonder, why are we so blind to our own militarism? We've had endless wars going back to as far as you can count. And Jimmy Carter once said that there's no nation that's as militaristic as the United States. That's our background. We got to examine why are we doing this? We have endless wars, endlessly supporting dictators, and the death toll goes up and so does military spending increase.

Ralph Nader: Well, what you're saying, I gather, is we don't have much credibility in trying to deal with the Ukraine situation. But the US government is dealing, it's shipping more weapons, it's mobilizing NATO. It's very difficult in the middle of a war to figure out how to get out of it and establish peace than it is in preventing war. But it's in the middle now and it's going to get worse. What would you do to try to unravel the situation?

Colman McCarthy: One thing we can do, Ralph, amid all the carnage, amid all the bodies in black body bags, and all the weapons being sent there, it'd be wonderful if the United States promised reparations for all the damage we have done there by sending our weapons to that country. And then second, there's an old saying, "If you want to have a chance for peace, don't talk to your friends; talk to your enemies." Why doesn't Biden get on an airplane and go find Putin at his doorstep and start talking to him. I know that sounds outlandish but Biden keeps talking to his friends. Go talk to your enemies.

Ralph Nader: They have to lay the groundwork because Putin can humiliate them and send them back empty-handed without even sitting around the table. They have to plan it carefully. But it is a bold move, but they have to have some sense that he is going to have a candid and thorough exchange with them.

Colman McCarthy: Sure, I agree. I mean, it sounds almost futile and unheard of, but the military solution is going to go on and on and on. And it's happened before and it's going to keep happening now.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Colman.

Colman McCarthy: Always a joy to talk to you, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Colman McCarthy. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, E.J. Dionne and Colman McCarthy. 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 soon after the episode is posted.

Hannah 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: The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. That's right. Go to tortmuseum.org to explore the exhibits. Take a virtual tour and learn about iconic tort cases from

history. And be sure to check out their latest program on how litigation on brain trauma is changing the future of football. All that and more at tortmuseum.org.

Hannah Feldman: To order your copy of the pilot issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, it's just \$5, go to capitolhillcitizen.com. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody.