

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 111 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the Ralph Nader radio hour. My name is Steve Skrovan and along with the man of the hour Ralph Nader. Hello Ralph, how are you?

Ralph Nader: Good, thank you Steve.

Steve Skrovan: We have the bit of a different show for you today. The entire show will be devoted to promoting a conference that Ralph is hosting next month called Breaking Through Power. Now what that means is that 50 years ago the publication of Unsafe At Any Speed sparked an historic civic awakening, launching initiatives and organizations that truly dramatically improved our personal health and safety in the home, the workplace, the market place and the environment, on May 23rd, 24th, 25th and 26th, about a month from now. Public interest organizers, advocates, experts and concerned citizens will gather at historic Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. to celebrate this milestone and to renew our civic spirit and resolve. Its four days of learning, planning and organizing. Today, we're going to give you a preview of the topics that are going to be covered and talk briefly with some of the guest speakers that will be in attendance over the course of four days. Now, the first day is going to be Monday, May 23rd and the theme is "How it's Done." Ralph tell us what is planned for that day.

Ralph Nader: Well, it's a very important dual theme. One is on the stage will be over sixteen experienced and accomplished civic advocacy groups, many of which I had the privilege of founding or inspiring. And they are going to send a message to that vast hall and stream throughout the country that it is easier than we think to make change. And they've proved it. With small budgets, the groups have improved the health safety and economic well being of our country, the right to know from government, and many other advances in courts and regulatory agencies and before Congress closed these doors. And Jim Hightower is going to be a major emcee on that day. We're going to hear from him very shortly. And the other theme is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Too many good citizen groups operate very focused on their specialty, auto safety, pensions, food and nutrition, healthcare, pharmaceutical safety et cetera. And we're going to bring them all together, because I do think the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The first day, we hope, is a tremendous morale booster for a lot of people who have become discouraged, who have dropped out, have withdrawn. Some of them become cynical about change in this country, and what Jim is going to say in the next few minutes I hope, because he has collected some pretty prominent examples of how people with no power except the power of information, knowledge, guts, stamina, persistence, have overcome what was once viewed as on overwhelming odds. That's the first day. It will have the Innocence Project will be spoken for, for example. The Veterans for Peace we're going to hear it shortly from Michael McPhearson and many other groups which you can see on [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org). We'll give that website again for people who want tickets to come

and fill the Constitutional Hall and make a power demonstration of progressive strength in the nation's capital.

Steve Skrovan: We do have Jim Hightower on the line. And for those of you who are regular listeners, you will know that Jim is making a second visit to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. And he is a syndicated columnist, national radio commentator, progressive political activist. He is a prolific author. He's written more books than I have read. And he has been called America's number one populist. He writes a monthly news letter called the Hightower Lowdown. He's a board member of Public Citizen and last week was part of the Democracy Awakening protest on the capitol steps. We'll find out if he also got arrested, along with Rob Weissman, last week's guest Kai Newkirk, and about thirteen hundred others in the largest civil disobedience action in the last fifteen years. Jim Hightower, welcome back to Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

Ralph Nader: Yes indeed, Jim.

Jim Hightower: Good to be with you.

Ralph Nader: You're a scholar of populist history in the United States. You want to give us some sense of historic odds being overcome by the people, whether a hundred years ago or a hundred and fifty years ago or five years ago?

Jim Hightower: Well, and all the way back to the founding itself. It was not just the great men who created the American Revolution. It was the riff raff. And they were the ones who were actually in the war, but also they were the leaders of the intellectual pursuit of democracy. That really came from the grassroots. Thomas Paine, for example, but on then would, after the revolution, the Shays' Rebellion and the Pamphleteers and they were but then on into the Suffragists and the Abolitionists and then and then into the Populist period in the 1870s, 1880s and 90s when just ordinary people, great numbers of whom were illiterate but were organized into first day social and cultural force and then into an economic power using cooperatives for farmers to be able to market their products directly and to be able to get capital and to have all the aspects of business within their own hands, in democratic hands. This was considered impossible at the time. In fact, they were laughed at by the establishment media, by the - of course the Congress and the powers-that-be generally - but in the end those powers that be were not laughing, because the powers-that-ought-to-be, the ordinary workaday people and their farmers were indeed organizing and taking power.

Ralph Nader: When did this happen, Jim?

Jim Hightower: It happened after the Civil War and began here in Texas actually. But it spread very quickly. And the popular notion of populism in that populist period was that, "Well, that was a thing with some farmers down in the South." But no, it was manufacturing labor as well involved in it. It was also the African-American with white Americans participating in those organizations. It was a grassroots movement that stretched from New York State to Southern

California. It was, I believe, in 43 different States that they had organizations around this, people's power. And then they forged their own political party called the Peoples Party. And that was a pioneering political advance, because it was the first party to call for direct election of US Senators. The first to call for waging hour laws, minimum wage for labor. The first to call for the women's votes, suffrage itself, the first party to call for that was the peoples party and it led to the reforms that ultimately were enacted through the progressive period and then by the new deal and some of which were still struggling to enact some of the healthcare extensions than that sort of thing, but all of this came from just ordinary people all across this country. Coming together and well as this conference is going to do because, you know the key word in conference is confer and that's what they did. They got together back in the late 1800s and conferred on well what can we do? We know our problems but what can we do about them and what strategies can we adopt and how can we organize together and then mobilize to make something happen and that's what a conference really should be not just a bunch of heads yakking at each other but strategizing, organizing and mobilizing as a part of it.

Ralph Nader: Well Jim, you know we want to build on what you and others went through this month with the Democracy Awakening and the parallel Democracy Spring. Can you describe that? For our listeners, by the way, you might not have read about it in the newspapers. I can't believe the Washington Post blocking out thirteen hundred people being arrested outside of Congress, demanding campaign finance reform and the lifting of the corruption of money in politics. Do you know they almost completely blocked it out? They put on the cover on page one recently: the appeals court decision with Tom Brady and Deflategate in the National Football League.

Jim Hightower: Well that's what media has become unfortunately, which is why we have to have the peoples' media. And we will be talking about that at this conference. But Democracy Awakening - it came out of a realization that, alright we have a vast majority of Americans including, I think it's like 78% of Republicans who want to get rid of Citizen United. We have the people's attention on this. We don't have to explain the issue to them of corporate money dominating our politics and thereby dominating our government and the policies that we have to live under. But we don't have to explain that. We have to mobilize that. And this was a beginning of that mobilization to say, "Okay, lets wake up little D democrats and begin to move on this rather than wringing our hands about the Citizen United and the lack of access to ordinary people to control their own politics, to run for office themselves for example. But rather lets join hands together and see what we can put together to undo the corporate hegemony over our politics and turn loose people to organizations and people's funding over our own politics and so this gathering in mid-April was about that effort and some 260 different organizations came together. Organizations that had not worked together that much in the past, environmental organizations, LGBT organizations, Labor very heavily involved in it and all sorts of progressive groups standing together to say, "This one issue is so big that it crosses all of our other issues. So we got to do something about it." And now, we're going to take that and go to the countryside with it, including a pledge that one of the groups - the Democracy Spring Organization - is asking people to take to their members of Congress, to their city council

members, their legislators and say, "Sign this. Would you sign a pledge saying, 'Yes, I will work to get corporate money out of politics?'" That's basically what this pledge says. And everybody says, "Of course, I'm for democracy." We'll sign this. If you're really for democracy, put it on the line.

Ralph Nader: Jim this is a left/right issue. You want to explain that?

Jim Hightower: Totally because left to right is a theory. Top to bottom, that's reality. That's what the real politics is. And whether you're Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Independent, Green, all of the possibilities out there doesn't matter when it comes to money and politics. Money and politics means ordinary people are not in charge of the politics and that results in plutocracy, the very opposite of democracy. And this is a democracy movement that will empower ordinary people of whatever political stripe.

Ralph Nader: I was astonished by the minimalist mass media coverage of this. This should've been page one news all over the country. One - because it is a left/right issue. It's a majoritarian issue. Everybody understands money corrupts politics. Everybody can infer that it affects their daily life in an adverse way, health, safety, economic wellbeing, when the corporate polluters and the corporate plutocrats control Congress. And yet the New York Times downplayed it, deep in the newspaper. They had all kinds of frivolous stuff, but they didn't even write an editorial on it. The Washington Post almost completely excised it. AP did something. NPR did something. Reuters did something. But that's what day two is about at Constitutional Hall, May 24th 2016. We're bringing together people like Jim Hightower, authors, writers, reporters, editorial cartoonists, musicians, poets, documentary filmmakers to start a new group called "Voices", an advocacy group. A tough group of media specialist, citizen organizers, lawyers to go after the commercial media, which is used in our property, the public airwaves free 24/7 and excluding the people from our property. Serious issues have almost no place today on hundreds of cable channels, which have monopoly rights that we give them and of course the networks and the radio and TV stations. None of them pay anything for this privilege. And they decide who gets on TV and radio and who doesn't and you can see how Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity and the others control commercial radio and are widely syndicated. You're going to be part of day two. I think we've got to go after the licenses of this TV and radio stations before the Federal Communications Commission. We got to make a presence on Capitol Hill. And above all, we got to go down to this producers and hands of the radio and TV stations and say, "Hey it's over folks. You're not going to control everything anymore. We have very serious matters that we've got to attend to." Your thoughts on this Jim, because you've written so many books and increasingly they were less and less reviewed, even though they were as readable as any books that ever been written. Give us a few of the titles of your books, Jim, and what's your thoughts on day two and creating a new powerful group for serious content on our property - television, radio, cable.

Jim Hightower: One of my books was There's Nothing in the Middle of the Road but Yellow Stripes and Dead Armadillos. And that's the attitude that we're going to have at this day two of

this conference is that we can't just stand in the middle of the road and say to the networks, "Gosh, we wish you would do more than your now doing," because they're not going to do more because they've rigged the rules but we can re-rig those rules back to the people and that's the kind of thing what I was talking about there of lets go to the TV stations when their licenses are up and same with radio and challenge those licenses, because they're not representing the public interest as they are mandated to do.

Ralph Nader: In the 1934 Communications Act, Jim, it says radio, TV station ...

Jim Hightower: Yeah, it's not even new.

Ralph Nader: Right. Radio and TV stations shall recognize, "the public interest, necessity and convenience." It's been a dead letter because the Federal Communications Commission has been a dead commission. But that's because the people have given up on the property they own: the Commons. And we got to come back. And I'll tell you, this kind of effort - it'll open up a lot of space. Even the print media will start spending more time reviewing books. When the serious society reasserts itself, the mass media, the commercialism, the entertainment mania, the sports mania will start providing more space for the great serious issues that confront our country in the world and future generations.

Jim Hightower: In this one we got to get together so that we can send the message out again that after all we do own these media assets. And we do have, not only the right but the power, to assert that ownership again and that it's not that hard. There are actually steps we can take together in our local communities to change this media step by step. And so, I think that there is just a lot of letting people know the power that they have within them and then helping to organize them to exercise that power. And by the way, we'll also be talking about the new media, the social media that is huge and that is the main coverage that the Democracy Awakening got. In fact, a lot of it were little instantaneous videos that the participants were making them ...

Ralph Nader: Yes, yes.

Jim Hightower: ... you don't have to always have a professional media come in and do it. You can become your own media.

Ralph Nader: Just like these podcasts here. That's right. Before we close Jim, on day two - we would like people to come for all four days and go to [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org) to see how you can buy tickets. They're \$20 a day, they're \$75 for the whole week of immersion. We call it a civic marathon, a refreshing, civic marathon for people who have longer attention spans, don't have justice fatigue and are serious about building on the shoulders of others to a real powerful democratic movement in this country. It's [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org). Jim, tell us about my favorite newsletter, Hightower Lowdown, and how they can get it.

Jim Hightower: Well, gosh. Okay, in a self-serving announcement: Let's just say this is my monthly political newsletter where we take on - it's a little four page thing so it doesn't tax your patience for too long to get through it - and take on a populist perspective on big issues. Recently for example, we did a whole issue on a phenomenon called "shareholder hegemony," which is a false notion that corporations created - beginning essentially back in 1970 - that the sole duty of a corporation is to increase the value of the stock holdings of its shareholders that that's just really its sole purpose and workers be damned, the environment be damned, consumers be damned, democracy be damned, everything be damned except the shareholders. You got something like 90% of the stock in a country of all corporations is held by the one-percenters, the tiny majority of the richest people in the country. Yet, here is something that has been pushed into our ethic as though it was the rule of law. And there's nothing in law about it. There's nothing in a corporate charter that says this. It's completely manufactured by the rich interests in our country that want to be able to run roughshod over the rest of us and can do that in the name of this shareholder enhancement. Just putting that out there is a reality, you know, is news to people.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, what's worse is they shut the shareholders, who were the owners from any control over the corporate bosses. They use them to be more powerful over our country and then they abuse them by saying, "Hey, we're not capitalists; we're corporate capitalists. We can take away your power as shareholder owners of our company and put it all in the hands of the board of directors and the CEO and the vice president et cetera at the top." Quickly before we close Jim, tell us some of the topics of Hightower Lowdown in recent months.

Jim Hightower: Oh, we've taken on the GMOs in our food Monsanto Corporation. We've gone after the need for public services again. We've supported the Postal Workers Union that's got this grand alliance to save our public post offices and including taking on that something Ralph has done a lot of work on, which is postal banking, providing a banking alternative to the third of Americans that don't have a bank account, that don't have a bank in their zip code even. We used to have this in - just basic banks established in the Post Office itself so that if you need a little loan you don't have to go to a predator, a loan shark, you can get a little loan on your own at a reasonable interest rate right from your Post Office. So, that kind of thing is what we take on. We try not to just say, "Well, here's another horror story for you," but instead to talk about things you can do about it and how are we together can, you know, not just "take our country back" as the Tea Party says - they've taken us back about a hundred years already - but rather to move America forward and all of us together moving America forward. So, it's an activist newsletter. And you can go to my website [jimhightower.com](http://jimhightower.com) - and there it is - and subscribe to it. Not only is it a brief publication - four pages a month - but it's also cheap.

Ralph Nader: Yes.

Jim Hightower: Fifteen bucks will get you this year subscription to it.

Ralph Nader: And it's a great discussion starter with your co-workers, friends and neighbors, I'll tell you. Full of facts, graced with humor and tells you what can be done. Jim Hightower, thank you very much. You're going to be at Constitution Hall, May 23rd, May 24th. Come one all. Go to [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org) and how you can get tickets and we'll see you there. Thank you very much Jim Hightower.

Jim Hightower: Looking forward to it, Ralph. Take care. Bye-bye.

Ralph Nader: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with America's number one populist and proud jailbird Jim Hightower, who was arrested in the Democracy Awakening protest two weeks ago. We sprung him and he's going to be at the Breaking Through Power conference this coming May 23rd through 26th at Constitution Hall. Thank you, Jim. Now we're going to have more on the Breaking Through Power conference, but let's take a short break to check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mohkiber. You are listening to the Ralph Nader Hour, Russell.

Russell Mohkiber: From the National Press Building in Washington D.C. this is your Corporate Crime Reporter Morning Minute for Monday April 25, 2016. I'm Russell Mohkiber. Michigan Republican Attorney General Bill Schuette has filed thirteen felony charges and five misdemeanor charges against two state officials and one city official as a result of their actions in the Flint Water Contamination Crisis currently gripping the city. Schuette said the investigation remains fully active and that the charges filed do not preclude additional charges at a later date. "The justice system in Michigan is not rigged," Schutte said. "Anyone that says Michigan has a wink and a nod justice system is wrong. It doesn't matter who you are, what you do. If you break the law, there will be consequences. What happened here in Flint is a tragedy," he said, "And we will continue to investigate all information that comes our way. This is not something I take lightly." For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you Russell. Welcome back to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. I'm Steve Skrovan, and we're doing a special episode today, highlighting and promoting this four-day conference that Ralph is hosting in May entitled Breaking Through Power. It's going to take place Monday May 23rd through Thursday May 26th at Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. And our next guest on the line will also be attending. And we actually go back about ten years, because Harvey was a great interview in the Unreasonable Man documentary that I did that got me involved in all this stuff. And Harvey himself - Harvey Rosenfield I'm talking about - he cut his teeth working in the Congress Watch Division of Public Citizen, the legendary public interest group that Ralph founded in the 1970s. Then in 1985, Harvey went on to found his own nonprofit organization in California called Consumer Watchdog. He is the author of California Proposition 103, the landmark insurance reform initiative, which over the past 30 years has saved Californians more than \$62 billion - that's 62 billion dollars - in insurance premiums. He has been an aggressive and influential consumer advocate in just about every area of public policy. In fact, a frontpage story in the Los Angeles Times once began - and I'm quoting, "As

state leaders struggle to plot a course out of California's energy mess, many are haunted by a sense of dread that can be summed up in three words. What about Harvey?" Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Harvey Rosenfield.

Harvey Rosenfield: Thank you, Steve.

Ralph Nader: Yes, welcome indeed Harvey. You're going to be on day one, which is May 23rd 2016 right in the vast Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. And you're going to be part of the greatest aggregation of seasoned, accomplished citizen action groups ever brought together to my knowledge in American history. And the message - among others - is "Look folks, don't be discouraged. We have demonstrated with small budgets that you can make significant change in this country against the powers of the corporate supremacists and others, mainly their lackeys in government." Now, we worked together Harvey on what is called Proposition 103, 1988. It was a time when the auto insurance companies were gouging California motorists, threatening to leave the State if they were regulated. And you said, "Nonsense." Why don't you describe how this all happened, Statewide vote, how much they spent against us, how much was saved and what the lesson is for other States around the country, who are beleaguered by the rapacity of the insurance industry, whether it's auto insurance or health insurance or other forms of insurance.

Harvey Rosenfield: Sure, Ralph. You recall that back in the 1980s, the State Legislature in California had mandated for the first time that everybody buy auto insurance. But they didn't provide any protections for consumers against greed and avarice by the insurance companies. So auto insurance rates were skyrocketing, as were homeowner and business insurance rates in the mid 1980s. So, we got together; we drafted a bill. The insurance industry then, as it does now, controlled the law making function in Sacramento. And so, that was a dead end. But luckily in California, we have the ability to put something on the ballot and go around the political establishment, go directly to the people. So, that's what we did. The Proposition 103 mandated an immediate rate rollback, future regulation of rates. It banned certain practices that motorists and consumers considered unfair, such as basing your premium on your zip code rather than on your driving safety record. People were really angry. But what we were able to do - and this is I think the lesson that is contemporary for today - we were able to give people a way to express their outrage about high auto insurance premiums at the ballot box, and they're outrage about the fact that the political establishment legislature was in the pockets of the special interests. This measure went to the ballot. We got hundreds of thousands of signatures to put it on a ballot to a volunteer program. And then Ralph, you'll recall that the insurance industry spent \$63.8 million trying to defeat Proposition 103 back in 1988. And that by itself was a way to mobilize the public. Because, then it became not just a battle, but a David versus Goliath battle. And then people realized, well I've got the news media and voters, who would normally not pay attention were so inundated with TV Ads from the insurance industry telling people to vote "no," that they began to think about it. And then of course, there was what I would call the mobilizer-in-chief -and that would be you Ralph - because in a confused battle like that, a lot of people when they find out that you were behind Prop 103 that's all they needed to know. But in

effect, the pressure of money from the insurance industry was so overwhelming that we did a kind of political jiu-jitsu, you remember. We used the weight of all that money against the insurance industry. We said, "You know, think about it. Why are they spending so much money? Are they spending money to protect your interests, or their interests?" And so on election day, I think to everybody's surprise - certainly including mine - not withstanding that historic onslaught of money, which has never been repeated since Proposition 103 passed. And as Steve mentioned - I need to give a bit of an update - it's no longer \$63 billion dollars in savings. Now, according to the Consumer Federation of America, it's been a \$100 billion in savings just for motorists in California under Proposition 103.

Ralph Nader: Can you imagine that? And our side spent how much, compared to the \$63 or 4 million in saturated TV/radio ads that the insurance lobby spent.

Harvey Rosenfield: We spent - if you include postage - we spend about \$3 million. But if you exclude postage - when I say postage, I mean sending mailings to people urging them to sign the initiative and urging them to donate - I think our average donation was \$7. If you take away postage we spend about \$500,000 up against that \$63.8 million. And of course, you remember that the insurance industry sponsored three of its own ballot measures trying to confuse the voters, because they knew they couldn't defeat us in a straight up head to head battle with Prop 103.

Ralph Nader: And when we won, Harvey Rosenfield's memorable phrase to the media was, "The sheriff has come to town." And so, tell us Harvey, what the ranking was for California before 103 in terms of the highest priced auto insurance premiums among the fifty states, and what it became in succeeding years. And did the auto insurance companies follow through under threat to pull out of California and not sell insurance?

Harvey Rosenfield: Yeah, so back when this battle was under way, California had I think the 7th highest auto and insurance premiums in the United States. And now we are routinely down to the 30th or so, depending on what year it is. California is the only state in the nation where insurance premiums went down between 1989 when Prop 103 took effect and 2013. Every place else in the United States, the average increase was about 40%. California's auto insurance premiums went down over that period of time. Prop 103 proved I think in a lasting way for consumers in California - I mean people still come up to me and remember that battle, at least some of the people who are a little older - it proved to people that you can take on the big corporations and the corrupt government that that's their activity. And you can beat them. One of the features, one of the threats that the insurance companies made - I mean they threw everything in the book at Prop 103 - a threat that they make all the time in every State, and it's not just insurance companies, "Well, if you pass that reform, we - X industry - are going to leave the State. And of course they did threaten to do that. But they didn't. They never did. I think AETNA announced - the day after Prop 103 passed - AETNA announced that it was going to leave the State and then it turned around, looked back, and nobody else was following them.

So a couple days later they quietly, you know, returned all their buildings and all their policies to California.

Ralph Nader: I must tell the listeners, also, we went up and down the state, Harvey Rosenfield, I and others. And it was a very gratifying process. But for once, Harvey, some of the mass media really covered it. The LA Times did a great job with a reporter, who covered regularly what you and others were doing in California. And that's what we want to do at Constitution Hall among other things is not just go after the commercial mass media for having such a low estimate of its own significance in giving people the right to know. But to tell 'em that when they do their job, look what can happen.

Harvey Rosenfield: You know one of the things, Ralph, and you know this better than anybody is that the media has changed. It's much different. It's kind of a shadow of itself from when it was back twenty, thirty years ago, because of the advent of all these other outlets and the Internet and so on. But one thing that hasn't changed is the print news media's ability to influence things, if they pay attention. Problem is they've been corporatized. Their staffs have dwindled. And so we at Consumer Watchdog to this day, our goal - I think we do it pretty well - what we do is we are unafraid to tell the truth. And sometimes the news media they fear - some outlets, you know some papers - fear the truth because it gets their advertisers mad at 'em. But basically, we found that the news media, when given the opportunity to cover our work, will pay attention, because we're not afraid. There are so many - the corruption of government and industry has really spread to a lot of nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups that really are not - are constrained by money, or are constrained by political affiliations. Now, Consumer Watchdog is fiercely nonpartisan, as you are. And so what we've done is we tell the truth no matter - Our motto is: "Expose, Confront, and Change." And when we expose these politicians on both sides of the aisle, it's good fodder for the news media - such as it is.

Ralph Nader: Yes, we're talking to Harvey Rosenfield of Consumer Watchdog. Harvey, tell us a little bit about Consumer Watchdog, what their website is and some of your victories. You're based in Santa Monica, I understand, California. But tell them some of your victories and how you do it.

Harvey Rosenfield: First off, people can find a lot more about us at [consumerwatchdog.org](http://consumerwatchdog.org). Our victories since Prop 103 - I mean I think that's the sort of our landmark victory but we've moved on - we now fight against health insurance companies that deprive people of their benefits or deny people coverage for their doctors. We've been fighting lately Google on many fronts both in terms of invading our privacy as consumers. But now also, Google is proposing to overturn the nation's auto safety laws so that it can market a driverless car, a robot car that may not have any sufficient safety equipment to protect the passengers or pedestrians. And that example, and we've been fighting - you know in California there was a leak at a gas storage facility at Porter Ranch in Los Angeles that actually doubled the methane emissions - and as you know methane is a far more dangerous than carbon dioxide in terms of the greenhouse gas - doubled the methane emissions. And people had to leave their homes and for months move

away because they were getting sick. And because of the corruption of the utility industry and the State Public Utilities Commission, nothing is really being done. We're very active trying to get to the root of the corruption there. And all of these things kind of illustrate, I think, the point that we're going to be talking about in Constitutional Hall that Monday in May is that: the problem we face in this country today is that big corporations and the wealthy are in control of our government. And people understand that. And we know that they understand it, because you can see in the political campaigns today on the left and in the right that the people are angry, and they're fed up with the status quo. What we try to do in a nonpartisan way is to highlight through studies and press conferences and legislation and litigation the problems that we face as consumers and tax payers and do something about it.

Ralph Nader: Here's the last question, listen to this. Harvey, you've done all this with Consumer Watchdog, how many full time staff work for Consumer Watchdog taking on these big boys?

Harvey Rosenfield: (Chuckling) That's closely guarded secret Ralph. I can't tell you. No. It's about fourteen really determined, dedicated people. And the organization's headed by a man who's become well known. His name is Jamie Court. He has now become the head of the organization. Carmen Balber is his assistant. Executive Director Jerry Flanagan is the Litigation Director. Just a very committed group of people, who are able to change things hopefully for the better on a day to day basis.

Ralph Nader: A smaller number of people than operate a bowling league in Pasadena, California. I mean, how many times do we have to show that a few people can make a huge difference if they are determined, if they are truth telling and if they represent majority opinion? There's a lot of left/right majority opinion in this country to turn this nation around in many, many areas as I pointed out in my recent book Unstoppable, The Emerging Left Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State. Harvey, we're looking forward to your presentation. Folks, go to [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org). Get those tickets. They are not that expensive, \$20 a day, \$75 for the whole week. If you can't pay there are scholarships for lower income people, impecunious students. We want that hall to be thunderously full and a historic occasion. As I say again and again, we can make it happen but you can make it historic.

Steve Skrovan: Before we let Harvey go, I want to just break in here and at the risk of embarrassing you. Harvey, could you tell the truck stop story that happened during the Prop 103 campaign?

Harvey Rosenfield: Unforgettable, Steve. What a pleasure to be able relate this. So when Ralph made - I would say ten visits to California during the campaign for Proposition 103. And as I mentioned earlier, I think he was the reason why it passed because people trusted him and understood that his name meant that they could trust Prop 103. By the way, we spent most of the last thirty years making sure that we made good on that commitment. So anyhow, we are in the middle of - we're towards to the end of the Prop 103 campaign. I think it's a few days before

the election. We decided to take a car caravan right up and down the State, visit all the major towns in California with Ralph to just turn people out and get people excited. There's a giant truck stop in the middle of the state, in the middle of their freeway that bisects California. It's a Route 5. There's a giant truck stop there. We pulled in towards dusk and literally there are - it's every trucker going anywhere in United States stops there to use the rest room and have a bite to eat. And then it was just getting dark. They had a public address system that covered the span of the entire area. Must have been a couple of square miles. We got the people on the public address system to allow us to commandeer it for a bit. We announced the Ralph Nader was going to appear at a certain parking lot there. All the truckers pulled into the parking lot, and they all shined their truck lights on Ralph. Imagine all these big rigs, dozens of them, all focused on Ralph. And of course, there were TV cameras and so on, news media there. And he just spoke. It was an amazing moment. There's a picture in the Los Angeles Times from that night of Ralph in the glare of all these trucker's headlights. And then after Ralph spoke, the truckers would sound their huge horns. That was just one example of how everywhere we went in California, people were receptive to what Ralph had to say. My last vision of Ralph - he was about to get on an airplane to fly back to D.C. from Sacramento - and he was standing at the gate where the flight attendants were taking everybody's boarding pass. And he was handing out "Vote Yes on Prop 103" stickers. These are cherished memories for me. And again, I've always been grateful that I had a chance to work with you, Ralph. To witness the public's love for you, it was just an amazing thing.

Ralph Nader: Well it was amazing to work with you and the incredible stamina and the way you communicated. The motto that people started saying about Prop 103 and the buttons was "Prop 103 Is For Me." So, we got into the rhyme game, too. And we can do it again, folks. Nothing can stop the sovereignty of the people once even just 1% of them organized in Congressional Districts or Legislative Districts representing what Abraham Lincoln called the public sentiment. Nothing can stop the sovereignty of the people which is as constant in our Constitution that begins with "We the People" not "We the Corporation." Harvey Rosenfield, see you on May 23 Constitution Hall. Come one, come all. Go to [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org). Let's make it a historic occasion that has enormous impact after those days. Thank you very much Harvey Rosenfield of Consumer Watchdog.

Harvey Rosenfield: It's been my pleasure. Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been talking to the consumer advocate Harvey Rosenfield, former Nader's Raider and founder of the California public interest group Consumer Watchdog. He too will be in attendance at the Breaking Through Power Conference, hosted by Ralph at Constitution Hall this coming May 23rd through the 26th. Now, we are going to shift gears here a bit because on day three, the conference shifts its attention away from domestic issues to issues of war and peace. And to help us talk about that, we have on the line Michael McPherson. Michael McPherson is the Executive Director of Veterans For Peace. Mr. McPherson was a Field Artillery Officer of the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. His military career includes six years of reserve service and five years

active duty service. He now lives in St. Louis, Missouri. Michael works as an activist and facilitator to help bring about social and economic justice. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Michael McPherson.

Michael McPherson: Thank you very much for having me.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Michael. On day three, it's titled "Waging Peace Over Waging War," and Michael McPherson is a major wager of peace as you'll see if you're there -and you can go to his website, which he'll give shortly - Day Three which is May 25th Wednesday Constitutional Hall, Washington D.C. Go to [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org) for more details. But the theme is Breaking Through Power: War. And it's going to have a lot of former military, national security experts, diplomats, veterans and leaders of organizations dedicated to waging peace. They will discuss strategies to resist the pressure for perpetual war and to proactively promote peaceful alternatives. They have a lot of credibility: people who have been in wars and who now see the folly, the disaster, the boomerang, the cost, the horrors. They are now leaders in the peace movement in this country. Along with a number of traditional peace groups like the American Friends Committee like Peace Action and others who will also be there on that day May 25th Waging Peace Over Waging War. We hope to launch on that day a new civic group called the Secretariat which will bring together a lot of these people who will be equipped to engaging a rapid response to stop this country's being plunged into war by one or two people in the White House with a complicit Congress as happened in March 2003 with the plunge, unconstitutionally, into the criminal war of aggression against Iraq, which is having massive effects adverse to the people there in fourteen to fifteen countries with chaos and violence reigning everywhere and with the US tax payer and US soldiers paying the price. And we want this Secretariat to organize retired veterans, retired of all ranks, veterans, diplomatic officials, national security experts. Over three hundred of them spoke out against Bush/Cheney before the invasion of Iraq in 2002-2003. But there was no infrastructure for them, no group that could multiply their numbers, get them into the media, get them on to Capitol Hill, get the refutation of Bush and Cheney's lies. We want that to come out of day three. And by the way, Constitution Hall days will be streamed live throughout the country. And Michael will be on that stage of Constitution Hall both on May 23rd as well, talking about Veterans For Peace and what this group has done in is doing. And he's also going to be of course on Wednesday May 25th Waging Peace Over Waging War. Michael, tell us about Veterans For Peace, it's wonderfully wide-ranging progressive agenda. I mean, the difference between Veterans For Peace, which is composed of World War II vets, Korean vets, Vietnam vets, and all the wars since. The contrast with the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars is absolutely stunning. Why don't you tell our listeners about Veterans For Peace and how can they connect with you on the web?

Michael McPherson: Sure. Well, first I just want to thank you for the opportunity, especially to be on stage on the 23rd with so many different organizations that are attacking or confronting injustice in its various forms. Organizations like the Innocent Project, which I've respected for quite some time, so I'm going to thank you for that. And also thank you for yes bringing all

these different orgs together on the 25th so we can discuss ways too in this war policy that our country has embarked on. Veterans For Peace has been around since 1985. It was started by Vietnam era veterans, Vietnam veterans. And we've also always had associate member, because we realized that it takes a coalition of civilians and veterans in order to bring us to a place of peace. The organization was originally started in reaction to or to confront the spread of nuclear weapons so to confront the arms race, and because people were concerned about US intervention in Central and Latin America. Our statement of purpose has three basic points: to increase public awareness of the cause of war, to restrain our government from intervening overtly and covertly in international affairs. To end the arms race and to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons. To seek justice for veterans and victims of war. And to abolish war as an instrument of national policy. We see that as the overall arching goal. It is really to abolish war. We realized that that's a huge mission that we have a lot of work to do. One of the main things we do in order to move in that direction is help people understand the cost of war. And when I say that I don't just mean the money cost but the physical, the human cost, the environment cost, what the victims of war as I said, justice for veterans and victims of war, that was purposeful because as veterans we're the ones, we conducted the wars and the people that we warred upon are victims. We want people to understand that war does not solve the problems that are claimed it will solve. And in fact, it causes more problems. And those who are victims of war and those who fight the war gain the list from it and then the people who send us to war as you were speaking about Dick Cheney and President Bush - and all the presidents for that matter - gain the most from it.

Ralph Nader: Veterans For Peace has of course chapters all over the country. And as Michael McPherson, Executive Director of Veterans For Peace had just said, it's not just for veterans. It's for anybody who wants to join in this movement of waging peace. The wars, as one of the speakers on day three May 25th on Wednesday is Paul Pillar who is a former CIA analyst at a high level. He's been on this program. He just written an article called "America's Bias for War" and the disasters since World War II, the disasters that have occurred all over the world. Innocent people, families, children, sociocide inflicted on whole societies. Look at Iraq: destruction, millions of refugees

Michael McPherson: Right.

Ralph Nader: And the effect on the military families here and the soldiers who lost their lives over there, pursuing the criminal war of aggression that was inflicted on them by George W. Bush and Dick Cheney and a compliant Congress. On that day Michael, Phil Donahue is going to make a presentation on May 25th. He's going to show part of his documentary, Body of War on the fate of Tomas Young who was a young ...

Michael McPherson: Tomas Young, I knew Tomas.

Ralph Nader: Yes and there's a book out just now from Haymarket Press on the story of Tomas Young. But this is an incredible documentary that Phil worked three years on. It shows the

affect when the wounded soldiers come back - on their lives, the lives of their families, and the people who are supporting them. Bush and Cheney are laughing all the way to the bank, collecting huge lecture fees as fugitives from justice. We've got to change this. Tell us Michael, how can people connect with Veterans For Peace, your mission statement, the wonderful platform you have. I'm just awed by the progressive waging for peace justice platform. Veterans For Peace put themselves on the line. They go to demonstrations, non-violent civil disobedience. They get arrested. Why don't you describe all that and how people can reach you on your website. And say it three times.

Michael McPherson: Sure. Our website is [veteransforpeace.org](http://veteransforpeace.org). Now I'll say again [veteransforpeace.org](http://veteransforpeace.org) not the number peace but the word peace, [veteransforpeace.org](http://veteransforpeace.org). We capitalized, actually, the F in Veterans For Peace because we want to emphasize that we're for peace. When you're for peace, you're not only against war, but you have to be for justice. You have to work with communities that are facing injustice. You have to stand in solidarity with those communities at home and abroad. One of the things that I think is important is that I think people don't really understand what war is about. They don't understand the sacrifices, the injuries - physical and mental - that soldiers receive. And they certainly don't understand what war does to innocent people, who are caught in the middle of the wars. It's really the immoral and the depraved policies that we have at least in these wars in countries where victims, they are just innocent people, just like anyone of us living here in United States, trying to take care of our families, go to work every day, take care of our parents. And then all of a sudden here are bombs falling. Just imagine, bombs falling on your house or hearing drones overhead every day. This is the kind of terror when you talk about terrorism. That's the kind of terrorism that takes place in many of these countries based on US foreign policy. There's no way that you can really expect people in these countries to go through this day after day after day and then look back at the United States as being some kind of friendly force. Our policies have really created many more enemies than solving the problems that the policy makers are claiming they're solving. We got from Al Qaeda supposedly conducting the 9/11 horrors and the Pentagon and in New York City - which I was working in New York City at the time - and now look what we have. We have ISIL. We've had one group, terrorist group, supposedly. And now, we have one that is much more rabid in how it does what it does. And that has been created based on US Foreign Policy in Iraq, creating that vacuum of power and creating many more people upset with the United States wanting to do us harm. The whole foreign policy could have and should be different. One that takes into account people's human needs, not killing people.

Ralph Nader: And one thing that's important is that what started out in Northeast Afghanistan with a gang has now spread to fifteen countries. Somalia, North Africa, Libya of course, chaos - Hillary's War - Libya spilling out over Mali, areas of Africa. And further east we have Syria, Iraq. We have Pakistan now. We have eruptions in Indonesia. It's all over the place. And that's who we've got for Bush/Cheney. That's what we've got for people who should know better, who should have spoken up for Veterans For Peace. I hope you'll have an influence on the

American Legion and the VFW. But tell us in conclusion Michael, how many chapters you have, so people can figure if it's in their neighborhood and where they can get the actual locations.

Michael McPherson: Sure, go to our website once again [veteransForpeace.org](http://veteransForpeace.org) and there's links on there that you can find a chapter. We have about 110 chapters across the country. We have a chapter in England. We have a chapter in South Korea. We have a chapter in Ireland. We have a chapter in Okinawa. So, we're spreading as an organization around the world. Because one of the most powerful things we see is of veterans around the world, who have participated and trained for war are standing up and saying, "This is wrong." And that's one of the most powerful voices, if not the most powerful voice you can have. One other thing I wanted to point out though is that we should not just - when you look back in history - we shouldn't just stop at Bush and Cheney. We can go further back. We need to look at the trajectory of US power around the world, even from the beginning and how war has been central to how the US has conducted itself in the world. We have a long term change of mindset we need for our country. If you look at the specifics of today, you can see some of the roots in the fight - or the confrontation I guess I should say - with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan where the US was providing weapons to the Mujahedeen. And from that, the Taliban was created. We had a relationship with Osama Bin Laden. So, our foreign policy for decades - well before Bush and Cheney - has been one that has led to the creation of what we have today. What it says to me is that we need a fundamental shift in the way that we conduct ourselves and see ourselves in the world and how we relate to other powers in the world.

Ralph Nader: Well said, Michael McPherson. You see listeners, the depth and range of Veterans For Peace. And they're doing all this on a small budget. I am a member of Veterans For Peace. I've supported it for a number of years. Actually spoke at one of their conventions, and I hope you will support it. Once you go to [veteransForpeace.org](http://veteransForpeace.org) I think you will become an auxiliary member and support it, because they're not just against war. They're for peace. There's an added dimension of wisdom to these veterans from wars going right back to World War II. Thank you very much, Michael McPherson. We'll see you there on day one May 23rd at Constitution Hall and day three May 25th "Waging Peace Over Waging War." Come one, come all. You can get tickets by going to [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org). Thank you very, Michael.

Michael McPherson: All right, thank you sir, take care.

Ralph Nader: Bye-bye now.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with the Executive Director of Veterans For Peace Michael McPherson, who will also be speaking at Breaking Through Power at Constitution Hall May 23rd to May 26th. We will link to the Veterans For Peace website on the [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Now, the one day we haven't spoken about is Day Four Ralph, although you have spoken a lot about this kind of thing throughout most of our shows. This one covers the role of Congress that seemingly moribund relic of the Constitution. But you have some ideas about how to bring it back to life.

Ralph Nader: Day Four is a humdinger. I'm going to tease you listeners. You can go to the website [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org), it's called "Breaking Through Power - Congress." It's a new civic platform will be presented by our nation's leading advocates on over fourteen major redirections for our country they all resonate with, such as electoral reform, energy, healthcare, trade et cetera. And this will be a new tool that we want to put in your hands that you can activate called the citizen summons of your Senators and Representatives to your own town meetings back home on designated topics that you want your Representative in Congress to take action on. Go to [breakingthroughpower.org](http://breakingthroughpower.org) for more details and for how to buy tickets. It's \$20 a day, \$75 for the whole week. That's why we call it a civic marathon for justice. It's never been done before quite like this in American history. It's a first. It's going to be historic, if you make it historic in Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. And there are scholarships available for those who cannot afford the ticket price. Thank you very much. We'll see you in Constitution Hall.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you Ralph. That's our show. Join us next week where we will have more provocative talk about moving the country forward on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. Talk to you then, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much Steve. And thank you Jimmy. And thank you, listeners. This is a real action platform for you this hour. Let's hear it from you, the listeners of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

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