

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 341 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: It's 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 David Feldman. Hello, David?

David Feldman: Good morning.

Steve Skrovan: How are you doing today?

David Feldman: I'm doing fantastic. We got a great show.

Steve Skrovan: We do, we do. And also we have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hi, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: We have a great show today and we're going to talk about elections, because the November election is quickly approaching. And maybe we should call it the October election; after all, they say mail-in ballots should be sent in at least 14 days in advance to be sure to be counted in time. And we're going to talk about the elections today with our first guest, America's number one populist, Jim Hightower. Jim is going to clue us in on the six ways the right is shredding the vote, which include purging, suing, and downright thuggery. And we're also going to talk a little bit about how Trump's policies affect farmers, which is a perfect segue into the second part of our show where we're going to journey to the heartland and welcome back Art Cullen, journalist and founder of *the Storm Lake Times* in Storm Lake, Iowa.

President Trump is always telling us about how much he loves the farmers. Well Art is going to let us know exactly how Trump's policies really affect Iowa's farmers and more specifically, how Trump's trade wars, bad environmental policies, and ethanol waivers have actually harmed them. In between as always, we will take some time to check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber, but let's start by talking about the six ways the right is shredding the vote. David?

David Feldman: Jim Hightower is a syndicated columnist, national radio commentator, and America's number one populist. He has written many books including *Swim Against the Current: Even a Dead Fish Can Go with the Flow*. Mr. Hightower is a board member of Public Citizen. He is also a founding member of Our Revolution, an organization inspired by the issues brought up in the Bernie Sanders campaign. Along with that he writes a monthly newsletter called *the Hightower Lowdown*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Jim Hightower.

Jim Hightower: Great to be with you and also Ralph and all those folks out there who are tuning in to this excellent public service radio.

Ralph Nader: Thank you for coming on, Jim. You know, you and I have been aware of stealing elections over the decades and generations. There's nothing new about attempts to try to steal the

election. But after the passage of the civil rights legislation under Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s, some people thought well, that's a turnaround; we're not going to see legalized discrimination against minorities so on. And up come the Republican lawyers and I want to start with the lawyers. They're the ones who are culpable, who figure out these schemes to deliver an amazingly intense attacks on people's voting rights from A to Z. And you've written in *the Lowdown* six new ways, in addition to the old ways, from sheer intimidation and complexity in registering voters--six new ways that the Republican operatives, with the full support of Donald Trump, have devised. So can you go through those briefly? And then we're going to go into asking you how we can remedy this. What's going on in Texas and elsewhere to get people's voting rights protected so there's a fuller turnout at the polls?

Jim Hightower: Well that's an interesting start right there, Ralph, is that we have the right to vote just about every American, not all, but just about every American has the right to vote. But what most Americans don't realize, and of course, the establishment media doesn't bother reporting this on a regular basis, is that you don't necessarily have the right to exercise that right to vote. And that's what you mentioned, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which raises the name of John Lewis, the great member of Congress, but more importantly, the great civil rights icon who passed away in July of this year. But even at the time of his death, he penned a missive to future generations in which he said that you must protect the right to vote because it can be taken away. And most folks don't realize that and it is being taken away not by just removing the right, but by removing the process by which you're allowed to vote. Paul Weyrich, the right-wing think tank guy, about a decade ago he warned "I don't want everybody to vote. Our leverage in the elections being Republicans quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down." And so their strategy, in the right-wing side, has particularly the last decade, you're right, Ralph, that probably from the first election in 1789 forward, we've had various forms of voter suppression. But now it has intensified; it's no longer voter suppression. It is actual voter sabotage that we are dealing with. And the reality that the Republicans realize is an embarrassment for them. And it is that they cannot win. Their ideas, their base constituency of corporate elites are not winnable issues for them. So they can only win, not by winning votes, but preventing votes. And so that has been for the last decade and particularly for the last four years, the Republican strategy of taking the vote away. And they do that in numerous ways; you mentioned voter purges. You miss a couple of elections and suddenly your right to vote is gone, because you have been purged from the voter rolls by a secretary of state or by a local voting official. They just subtract your vote; not that you're not a voter, but you're not any longer on the rolls as a voter.

Ralph Nader: And how do you get back on the rolls?

Jim Hightower: Well, you can get back on the rolls but you've got to re-register. First of all, you've got to know that you've been taken off. And for many people, there is no knowledge that they have been removed until they show up to vote. And then the registrar says well, you're not on the list so you can't vote. In just the last four years, Ralph, 17 million Americans have been purged from voting rolls in our country. And then you mentioned lawyers and that's really the core of the Trump program. In fact, Trump is very blunt about it. "We had many lawsuits going all over," he says, "and if we don't win them, I think it puts the election at risk." Those are lawsuits to deny people access to the polls, to stop early voting, to stop the mailing out of ballots to all eligible

voters--lawsuit after lawsuit being filed by Republican lawyers and corporate lawyers to shrink the available constituency in this coming election.

Ralph Nader: Let's go through these six tactics briefly and then we can evaluate them.

Jim Hightower: All right. Well that's one, you file lawsuits and they've spent \$20 million this year filing lawsuits to keep people from voting. Another one is just sheer thuggery of what are called "poll watchers" who are sent in to intimidate legitimate voters, to call them out of line and to shout and demand that they be removed from the voting precinct. Another way is just to simply shut the doors. If you don't want the black people to vote, if you don't want tribal members to vote on the reservation, if you don't want students to vote, just close their polling places where they live, slash the budgets for voting machines and poll workers and early voting, so you create huge lines. Seven hours it took to vote in the Georgia primary of this year. Another way is, as we've seen in the news quite a bit recently, is dismantling the [US] Post Office. Trump has been totally discombobulated [chuckles] by the fact that we have postal workers who are able to deliver ballots to people and from people. And so he's been out to try to turn our mailboxes into shredding machines for ballots. And this doesn't count, the stuff like gerrymandering and other techniques that they have used for years, but they're tearing down, literally tearing down, the people's right to vote.

Ralph Nader: Well, also talk about the signature disparities. I mean, if someone 30 years ago put their signature on a registration form and it's not the same as the person's signature 30 years later and, you know, who has the same signature over time, they strike the right of the person to vote.

Jim Hightower: Yes, "no match, no vote" that is called and it's laws and executive actions that have been taken by voting officials that if a comma is missing from your other government papers that then are not included in your voter registration then you can be expelled from the voting list. If your middle initial isn't put on your voter registration, you can be purged from it. If there's a hyphen missing, it can cancel your voting rights. And this is being done drastically across the country. Brian Kemp, the new Governor of Georgia, won election in 2018 over Stacey Abrams with about a 53,000 vote margin there, very, very tight race. He had been secretary of state. And while he was secretary of state, just as he was going to run for governor, he purged 53,000 voters in Georgia from the list because they didn't match. They had that "no match, no vote" law and so his margin of victory was created by himself.

Ralph Nader: Brian Kemp basically presided and managed his own theft to the election and that's been pretty well documented.

Jim Hightower: Pretty blatantly.

Ralph Nader: You know, people listening to us talk, Jim, can be excused for wondering why what's going on here is not a first class felony, why there aren't criminal statutes here, why there aren't criminal prosecutions. Sure the prosecutors are part of the cabal against certain kinds of voters with the enforcers and the politicians, but most of the laws have no criminal penalty. It's like, oh, you know, it's just politics. One party does it when they're in power and the other party does it when they're in power, so they sort of forgive each other. But this is domestic treason. You're basically destroying the pillars of democratic elections and you're taking away the basic

sovereignty of those voters. So I say it's domestic treason, a first-class felony, and yet people who document this, Jim, they do it with a very calm voice and very, very moderate language. Haven't you noticed that? I mean, it's really amazing. If someone is heard engaging in an ethnic racial slur, people go crazy with rage and action and they want the person to be fired or resign. But this, one might conclude, is a bit more fundamental in terms of stripping people of participating in the "We, the People" preamble to the Constitution. Why do you think this is not a criminal matter in some states and why do you think the language is so wonky?

Jim Hightower: It's legalized crime. They do it because they can. And you mention the Constitution; there is no right to vote written in to the Constitution because the founders assumed it. But it is not written in the Constitution. And so sometimes the right wing uses that and says well, you have no right to vote. It's not protected by the Constitution. But in fact, as you point out, there's no punishment for a Brian Kemp to just blatantly walk in and he should have to wear a mask, and I don't mean a health mask, I mean, one of those ski masks like bank robbers use for all the while that he is in office, because he essentially stole that election by manipulating the voting rolls to his advantage. But let's back up even further, Ralph, it's not just the election officials, it's not even just the elected officials who are doing this. Behind all of this are those who profit from corporate policies that the Republicans then enact. I mentioned those lawyers who are going all over the country right now. They've sued California, they've sued Nevada, they've sued Pennsylvania, they've sued the Colorado, Michigan--all across the country filing these lawsuits. Who pays for that? Well, "Woody" Johnson is one. He is the heir to the Johnson & Johnson healthcare fortune. Charles Schwab is another. He runs ads on television for his financial operation explaining what a great citizen he is. He's financing this theft of your right to vote. The Ricketts family of TD Ameritrade, another financial outfit, they are funding this operation as well. So you've got to go back to, as always, following the money, who's benefiting.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, underneath all is corporate power, corporate profits, corporate greed, but let's just look at it from a few thousand feet up here. First you start with the system where people can run for president and the person who wins the popular vote loses the race because it's taken away from that victor by the Electoral College. That's what happened in 2000 and that's what happened in 2016. The Democrat candidates Gore and Clinton won the popular vote and they lost the race because of the Electoral College. And the Democratic party still is not going after the Electoral College in supporting the National Popular Vote [NPV] movement to get more states to pass laws as California, Illinois, New York and others have done, which is to say that they will give the electoral votes to any presidential candidate who wins the national popular vote. So they lose two major elections with all that's involved and they still will not support this citizen effort led by Steve Silberstein in San Francisco.

Jim Hightower: And that's outrageous, Ralph, you're right. Yes, you can understand the Republicans wanting to steal the election, but why do the Democrats just roll over? Why don't they make this a priority? And there hasn't even been a presidential candidate making it a priority much less congressional leaders that stand up. And some of our Democratic leaders are weaker than Canadian hot sauce when it comes to standing up for the people's most fundamental right, the most fundamental democratic right, and we lose elections because of it. When you lose an election, you lose policies that benefit the people.

Ralph Nader: That's right. Well, everything goes down to allowing the Republicans to freeze the minimum wage federally at \$7.25, oppose universal health care, allow corporations to rip off people from all kinds of ways--a tax system that allows the rich to escape. I mean, you've written all about this in *Hightower Lowdown*, your monthly newsletter. But then we come to the second assault on democratic elections, small d, which is gerrymandering, where the party in charge carves up the district snake-like, so they pick the voters. So politicians pick the voters rather than the voters picking the political candidates. And the record there is clear the Republican Party has outfoxed the Democrats, especially in 2010 again and again and again. Places like Pennsylvania and other states where they carved up the districts where they are a minority party and a number of votes. But they have a majority of the congressional representatives in the House of Representatives. So that's two. Then we come to your list, right? So here's the question.

Question is you have one major party, the GOP, Republican Party, who is engaged from the top down in destroying millions of people's opportunity to vote at every intersection--voter registration, purging voters, not delivering the votes on time, obstructing the [US] Postal Service run by a crony of Trumps, and they hardly pay a penalty. I mean, they should be lucky to get 15% of the vote. They're repealing the American Revolution. They're repealing the Constitution. They're repealing federal and state statutes, all of which bend toward expanding the right to vote and reducing the obstacles to voting especially the latter. Why are they still in the running?

Jim Hightower: Well, if the people had the say, they would not be. But as you point out, the system is rigged. And by the way, let us not forget, the highest sanction that is given to this thievery comes from the Supreme Court led by John Roberts, the Chief Justice of our Supreme Court. He's been a partisan legal hack his entire career. He was, you mentioned, the Gore debacle, Gore-Bush, Supreme Court decision. Well, there were a bunch of Republican lawyers went into Florida doing the checking of the chads and all that sort of stuff and pushing and pushing and pushing to hand that election to George W. Bush and the leader of that was John Roberts. He was part of the Republican hit squad that went into Florida and took that vote to hand the presidency of the United States to George Bush and take it away from Al Gore. Yet we didn't fight.

Why did Gore give up so easily? That just amazes me right there, but we've got to take on this Supreme Court, which has become a Republican Supreme Court. We need to begin to say what it is. It's not a divided Supreme Court; it is overwhelmingly Republican. And in fact, in the last year alone, there have been four more Supreme Court decisions restricting people's right to vote. And let us not forget that it was John Roberts who rendered the decision back in 2013, that took away the Voting Rights Act that affected all the southern states and some other states as well like Wisconsin and some others around the country.

Ralph Nader: That's one answer to my question. The courts, especially Republican nominees confirmed by Mitch McConnell; courts are sanctioning all this. They're basically finding all kinds of tricky little plausible arguments that basically are allowing this in Wisconsin and other states. And some of the state supreme courts, especially Wisconsin that are involved in the obstruction of voting cabal. But what can be done about it? You know a lot about what's going on in Texas; it's moving toward becoming a purple state, maybe a blue state. There is a lot of grassroots activism in Houston and elsewhere. Give us your take on the fightback, the pushback to get more people to the polls.

Jim Hightower: Well it's overwhelmingly positive. There are group after group, most of which have sprung up since Trump's election in 2016, his taking the presidency, I should say. And not only do we have grassroots activist movements out there, but they are generating their own candidates. They're not waiting on the next person in the Democratic Party who is in line to succeed just the same old little train moving down the track. But they're running insurgent campaigns against them. We know about "The Squad" Ocasio-Cortez and others who . . . the four women who got elected in 2018 to the Congress running complete outsider, overtly progressive campaigns and they won! Now we've already elected five more this year who took on the Democratic Party establishment, defeated corporate Democrats, so those numbers are going to double. But more importantly is what's happening at the state level. And that is a rebellion by these progressive groups and an understanding that you've got to win offices like secretary of state, which controls each state's election process. You've got to win state legislative seats and take them back and that's already happening. In just the last two years since 2018, the Democrats have recovered. And by the way, when I say Democrats, I mean progressive democratic forces, have taken back 450 seats that had been lost to Republicans and they've taken over 10 additional chambers of the house or senate within these states. So this movement is not just happening, but beneath the myopic radar of media establishment, an electoral upheaval is taking place and is very, very positive. You mentioned Texas [where] we switched 14 seats from Republican to Democrat in the 2018 election. We are now within nine seats of taking over the Texas House. And we're not just waiting on that to happen, we have these groups that I'm talking about coming together into coalition with election lawyers working on it. So we've got targeted 33 seats that Republicans hold that are switchable to Democrats this year, this November. And if we do, then we have the Texas House and that means we have the big say in the reapportionment process that begins next January.

Ralph Nader: And you know the real energy for this started with ordinary people doing extraordinary things right down in the neighborhood saying, "We've had enough; we're going to get the vote out; we're going to get new representatives; we're going to get more government of, by, and for the people at the local area." I want to read for our listeners a quote from your *Lowdown* newsletter. And you say "Much of the nation's executive, legislative, and judicial leadership at all levels, is actively taking money and directions from plutocrats to undermine, endanger, and hogtie voters. For their part, Republican officials are aggressively hostile to democracy generally and to voting rights specifically, while much of the Democratic establishment passively refuses to prioritize and vigorously fight to make voting easy and even joyful for all. As usual, that means it's up to us--all of us who really believe in grassroot democratic governance. Perhaps you personally face no voting barriers, but when Black, Latinx, poor folks, the elderly, students, and other constituencies are shut out, we all are deprived for our right to majority rule and is diminished by every person who, one by one, is excluded. Please join the nationwide movement of activists striving to protect everyone's right to vote--and realize America's full democratic possibilities."

Now it really comes down to civic self-respect, right? I mean, to people saying how dare you obstruct and impede and delay my effort to vote--how dare you? They have to take it personally. And some people already are, Jim. You know the people in the Wisconsin primary a few weeks ago, they were delayed because the courts rendered decisions that ensured the delay. But they stood in line for as long as seven hours and it was raining during some of that time, because they weren't going to allow these politicians and these judges to block their vote.

Jim Hightower: But as usual it's up to us, because that's the power we ultimately have and I think we've got to take on. And what I'm saying and what you just said is that people are fighting at the local level; they now do recognize the power of the vote and that that power is being diminished deliberately for a partisan gain. And so there is the rebellion that is building on this. We've got to carry that beyond this November election. Let us assume that Biden gets elected and some people say "Well, Biden is not progressive enough." Well, he's not, but I don't care if he's a 200-pound sack of concrete; we're going to carry him into the Oval Office, because we've got to stop the pain first and then "We The People" have got to push Biden. It goes back to Franklin Roosevelt really. Remember that Sidney Hillman, I think, the labor leader who, when Roosevelt was elected in '32, went into the White House up to see Roosevelt and sitting with him and saying you need to do this, you need to do this, you need to do this. Roosevelt stopped him and said "You're right. Now, make me do it." And that's what we have to do. We've got to be the ones to take this voting issue, this voting right, fundamental right that Americans are proud to have, and prior to the last few years thought they did have this fundamental right to vote. Now they say that they don't, so we've got to rally them to come into that Congress and rewrite all of these rules so that voting is, as you just mentioned, a joy! I mean, why shouldn't it be fun? And it ought to be shameful not just against the law, but actually shameful for anybody to try to obstruct somebody from voting. And that's a change in attitude and a change in the culture that will change the politics.

Ralph Nader: Well, my listeners have heard the grand solution from me more than once, which is to sweep away all this stuff, all these of impediments, obstruction, insults, delays [and] complexities, by having voting become a legal duty as it is in Australia. They get a 97% turnout and no politician has to spend time in ads begging people to vote, phone banks. And so some civil liberties people [said] you want to make people forced to vote for someone? I said well, here's how you deal with the civil liberties issue: They can vote for the candidates on the ballot. They can write in their vote; they can write in their own name for vote, and they can vote for binding none of the above, which is a vote of no confidence. So that takes care of the civil liberties issue. We have a whole Bill of Rights! There's only one duty in the Constitution inferred, which is jury duty, and a lot of people spend their efforts trying to get out of this fundamental groundbreaking constitutional right to trial by jury. I campaigned on this when I was running for office and Barack Obama was asked about this about a couple of years before he left office when he was in Ohio and he thought it was a pretty good idea. But he didn't pick it up and none of the candidates are picking it up because they're afraid of it. They're afraid people are saying, "Oh, they're going to force you to vote for politician." No, they're going to force you to go and cast your vote for either a candidate or a write-in of your choice or binding none of the above. So what do you think of that, Jim, and do you think enough of it to put your prestigious name behind that effort?

Jim Hightower: My full prestige will get behind that. But yet I agree and I agree in something that is even bigger than the requirement to do it, is that we have got to make it a cultural expression, that voting is just something you do because it's right and try to make it fun. In some countries you can actually have a keg of beer at the voting precinct or have a beer.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, well that's what you do in Australia. They actually have parties. I remember once I was in Sydney; I said this before an earlier program, and I was in a cab, and I had to make small talk because it was a long ride. And I said, "What do you think of living in a country where they force you to vote", to the cab driver. And he turned around and gave me this sort of disgusted

look. And he said “Why mate, It's just a civic duty.” [laughter] That's what you're talking about, right?

Jim Hightower: Exactly, exactly, yes. It's a point of pride. Of course, we vote, because that's us; that's everything we're going to have as a society, including that litany you went down of better wages, health care for all, child care, education for all, etcetera. That all has to come through politics and politics only works if you work the politics.

Ralph Nader: And, we have the Constitution on our side because it starts with “We The People” and NOT We The Congress, or We The Corporation. So listen, before we conclude, Jim . . . we're talking to Jim Hightower, the author of many books with great titles and the producer of the monthly newsletter just four pages, so you can put it in your pocket and read it at your leisure called *Hightower Lowdown*. And it is a tremendous read and that's why over a 100,000 people subscribe to it from all over the country. Jim, what's your take on Trump's relation with farmers, China, imports? What's your relation with Donald Trump farmers, the decline in orders of farm products by China, and Trump's subsidies to the farmers because he knows the rural vote is important?

Jim Hightower: Well, the subsidies don't make up for the lost income that he has caused. And previous presidents, including Obama and Clinton posed, by allowing corporate interests, industrial agriculture, to dominate agriculture itself. I did my *Hightower Lowdown* an issue last year on the farm crisis. Again, the media has not really been paying that much attention, but there's not just a farm recession. There is a farm depression all across the country [with] farmers losing not just their crop [and] losing their prices, but losing the farm itself! And the suicide rate on farms is going up dramatically, again, across the country. That's not happening by accident. It's happening because corporate power has been allowed to get a stranglehold on family farmers. First are the financiers, the bankers and the investment houses, etcetera, that not only control the interest rate and the money whether you get a loan or not to farm. But also Wall Street has become the biggest farmland holder in America, buying up farms for speculative purposes down the road, driving up the price to real farmers and particularly young farmers who want to get a piece of land to try to farm. Now, they're squeezed there, but especially they're squeezed by the monopolies that farmers must sell to. You take something like milk; two corporations control about 60% of all the milk in the United States of the milk sales that farmers make, two processing giants. And they put the squeeze on the farmer paying less than the price of production. Look at the chicken, I did a chart there. You take a bucket of chicken and go down to Kentucky Fried and buy one of those \$30 buckets of chicken. Who gets the \$30? Well, we traced it all back and it turns out the farmer gets 54 cents out of a \$30 a bucket of chicken. The rest of it goes to Tyson and the giants, goes to advertising, goes to the profit centers in the country and to the financiers as well. So you've got to take on that monopoly power. And in agriculture, it's true also in most other sectors of our economy, sadly, but in agriculture in particular, our presidents and our Congresses, over the years, have allowed this to continue, this monopolization, this squeezing the farmers and the small producers in rural communities.

Ralph Nader: And listeners may be interested in knowing that Jim Hightower was the elected Secretary of Agriculture in the State of Texas on his way to the governorship. He knows what he's

talking about. He's been all over the state. He's talked to thousands of farmers. He's written about it. Tell us what the Democratic Party platform should be on farm policy in the year 2020.

Jim Hightower: Well actually, the best farm program was put forward by Elizabeth Warren. She had a very comprehensive approach and it included particularly restoring competition to the whole food economy. And by the way, that goes to the waitstaff in restaurants as well. So it's not just, you know, there's people on the farm that are connected to this, but there's the small businesses and local communities, the restaurant workers, and the meatpacking workers, and we've seen how they're being treated by Trump, requiring meatpacking houses, huge slaughterhouses to be open during this pandemic. And the result is that meatpacking still is a hot spot for COVID-19 disease, because you've got people crammed together; they can't do social distancing. They're literally side by side with knives dealing with gore and it's a very dangerous occupation, one of the most dangerous, in fact, in the country, and one of the poorest paid in the country. And another aspect of it has got to be unionization. We have got to bring worker power back to the table giving them not only the right to organize, but the right to confront the profiteers who are running roughshod over them on everything from safety issues to wages. So the Democratic platform has got to be that one, have farmers write it; get them together. You can do that with town hall type meetings all across the country. Farmers will turn out for that if they believed that it was going to be a serious effort. They will tell you what it is they need because they're experiencing it every single day.

Ralph Nader: Well clearly, you've got to break up some of these monopolies. The farmers are squeezed by the monopolistic suppliers and then they're squeezed on the other end by the monopolistic buyers. And so there needs to be a real breakup under the antitrust laws here and that's not widely discussed by the Democratic Party. But I think the most disturbing trend is corporate syndicates buying up farmers' land. I mean, over the centuries with all the poverty, and the droughts, and pestilence and so on, that have affected farmers, they at least had their land. And now these syndicates are buying up their land for profiteering when the farmers are weak and can't resist and are on the verge of bankruptcy. Aren't there some states, Jim, that prevent corporate ownership of land?

Jim Hightower: Yes. North Dakota is one and various states have various versions of some encouragement of farmland to stay in the hands of farmers with varying levels of success and real teeth to them. But yes, I mean, there are clear steps that can be taken. And we have states here and localities that are doing it around the world. There are plenty of examples that we have, so it's not a matter of can we find a solution to this; the solutions abound. But it we've got to have a coalition of farmers with farm workers, with the food industry workers, with consumers, with environmentalists coming together and writing a food policy that is "of, by, and for the people" themselves, not for the corporate middlemen and the profiteers.

Ralph Nader: And the good sign is a growing number of food co-ops, consumer food co-ops, spreading all over the country and they're buying from local farmers.

Jim Hightower: Yes, that's where I was going next is that it's not just to bust up the monopolies though that is essential, but it is then to empower a new system of farmers being able to get financing, being able to get storage for their crops, being able to control the marketing, being able to get a decent price. And the cooperative movement is the way to do that and that was the founding of the populist movement in the United States of America in the late 1870s. The populist movement

was to create a what they called a “cooperative commonwealth” in which the farmers themselves controlled all of that. And it included then labor to come in and have their cooperative systems and would work together. So co-ops and, you're right, it's just spreading all over. Here in Austin where I live, there's dozens of co-ops of all different kinds: babysitting co-ops, the laundry co-ops. I'm a member of the first ever cooperative brew pub in America. I am an owner of a brew pub that pays living wages to its employees, by the way, because it's employee managed and cooperatively owned. So the people control the economic system themselves, and so there's a greater sharing of the prosperity that can come from these enterprises.

Ralph Nader: Well before we conclude, tell us a little bit about the *Hightower Lowdown* newsletter. And Steve wants to come in with a comment/question.

Jim Hightower: Great. Well, first of all, you can just go to hightowerlowdown.org, hightowerlowdown.org, one word, and there it is. So it's monthly, as you said, it's four pages so it won't intimidate you sitting on your reading table there. You can get through it; it's fairly lively writing and it's cheap, \$15 a year and you get this little jewel coming into your mailbox every month, or you can get it on the web, too, if you want that. Again, hightowerlowdown.org and then we've got about a 100,000 subscribers all across the country. And the beauty of it, Ralph, is they're not just readers, they are doers. They call themselves “Lowdowners” and in every issue that we write about, we have what's called a “do something box.” So it says don't just be curious about what you're reading here, let's do something. Here's some groups that you can join or here's some specific actions you can take that'll improve this situation.

Ralph Nader: You know, we're having Art Cullen who puts out *the Progressive Populist* every two weeks around the country in print form on the show right after your segment is concluded and you write every month for that. That's an amazing publication, I'd say.

Jim Hightower: It really is, yeah. It's in the old populist tradition, newspapers with names like *the Iconoclast*.

Ralph Nader: Brann *the Iconoclast* in Waco, Texas.

Jim Hightower: Yeah, yeah. And these led to then publications today like *the Texas Observer* where I was at three years ago. *Mother Jones* really comes out of that spirit, *Southern Exposure* [magazine] and so many publications and then radio shows like this one.

Ralph Nader: On that authentic upbeat note, we have to conclude. We've been talking with Jim Hightower, the editor and publisher of *the Hightower Lowdown* newsletter, author of many books, some of which I had you sign when you dropped by our office in great volume, Jim; I recall that. So stay in touch and we're now going to easily segue into Art Cullen who puts out *the Progressive Populist* and is a friend of Jim Hightower. Thank you.

Jim Hightower: Absolutely, and a friend of all of us. Thank you, Ralph, good job.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with America's number one populist, Jim Hightower. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's take a short break. When we return, we're going to talk about the effects Trump's policies wreaked on Iowa farmers, 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, September 18, 2020. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

There is an elite crime spree happening in America, and the privileged perps are getting away with it. Selling loose cigarettes on a city sidewalk can lead to a choke-hold arrest and death if you are not among the top 1%. But if you're rich and commit mail, wire, or bank fraud, embezzle pension funds, lie in court, obstruct justice, bribe a public official, launder money, or cheat on your taxes, you're likely to get off scot-free or even win an election. That's the take of Law Professor Jennifer Taub in her new book *Big Dirty Money: The Shocking Injustice and Unseen Cost of White Collar Crime*. When caught and convicted, such as for bribing their kids' way into college, high-class criminals make brief stops in minimum security "Club Fed" camps.

For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Iowa's rich loam, some of the best soil in the country, is quickly eroding. The floods that come every spring have become more and more destructive. As the soil washes away, fertilizer runs off with it, polluting the rivers. Iowa is in urgent need of strong environmental protections. Our next guest will tell us more. David?

David Feldman: Art Cullen is half the ownership in 25% of the new staff of *the Storm Lake Times* located in Storm Lake, Iowa, which he founded with his brother, John. Mr. Cullen is the winner of the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing. He won that for his editorials taking on corporate agribusiness for fouling the state's water and despoiling its soil. His book about that is entitled *Storm Lake: A Chronicle of Change, Resilience, and Hope From a Heartland Newspaper*. He's also co-editor along with his brother, Jim, of *the Progressive Populist* of which I subscribe. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Art Cullen.

Art Cullen: Well thank you and thanks for subscribing.

David Feldman: It was a gift from Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Many people should. I subscribe, too, to *the Progressive Populist*.

Art Cullen: Thank you, too, Ralph.

David Feldman: Yeah, he gave it to me as a gift. Ralph, I wanted to sound...

Ralph Nader: Comes out every two weeks in print, old-fashioned style.

Art Cullen: Absolutely.

Ralph Nader: And it has numerous columnists from all over the country on all kinds of subjects.

Art Cullen: Including Ralph Nader.

Ralph Nader: Yes and Jim Hightower.

Art Cullen: Hard act to follow.

Ralph Nader: Before we get into the plight of the farmer and what Trump is doing to worsen it, Art Cullen, exactly what did the agribusiness do in Iowa to poison the water?

Art Cullen: Essentially, it's corn production. Every inch of Iowa is planted either corn or soybeans. Corn being our principal crop and we grow about 30 to 40 percent too much corn than what the market wants. And we're dumping tons and tons of nitrogen fertilizer on the ground every year and it ends up going to the Gulf of Mexico and killing the Gulf of Mexico in a dead zone the size of New Jersey. And then also manifested in livestock production, Iowa is the most concentrated livestock area in the country. And in fact, I live in the most concentrated livestock area in North America.

Ralph Nader: By that you mean a very few giant corporations control the market?

Art Cullen: Yes, very few used to and now three companies essentially control our nation's meat supply, all generated from corn.

Ralph Nader: And they are?

Art Cullen: Tyson, which is headquartered in Arkansas, and then Smithfield, which is owned by China Incorporated, and then JBS, which is out of Brazil. And JBS is a big beneficiary of government program payments. [chuckles] So it's a broken food system that pollutes our water, erodes our soil, and drives farmers broke.

Ralph Nader: You know, Trump is trumpeting his aid to farmers. He's championing farmers after his bungling with China. And China reduced purchases of farm products including a lot of soybeans in our country that were on their way to China. And now the farmers are really hurting and so this Relief Bill that Congress passed three or four months ago, and haven't passed one since due to the pandemic COVID-19 disaster; I just read where a lot of that money that was heading for farm country ended up in the hands of the big agribusiness in giant farms, not in the hands of small farmers, is that right?

Art Cullen: Yeah, JBS of Brazil got \$90 million. It's a giant meatpacker that's facilitating the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. They got \$90 million in taxpayer funds for this trade disaster relief. And Smithfield at least had the good form not to accept the money, but they were offered money. The Chinese were offered money when we were in the middle of a trade war with the Chinese.

Ralph Nader: And they own Smithfield Farms, which is a traditional Virginia company for many, many decades.

Art Cullen: Yeah, it's America's largest pork producer is the Chinese.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's get to the election situation in Iowa and maybe the rest of farm country. You wrote a column recently and it was titled "Trump must win the Midwest. But out here his breezy reelection gambit falls flat". What do you mean by that?

Art Cullen: Well, John Deere, because of this trade war with China has been laying off workers up and down the Mississippi River in old manufacturing towns like Davenport and Waterloo, which is actually off the Mississippi. But these old manufacturing centers workers are getting laid

off because of these trade wars. Harley-Davidson couldn't sell its classic motorcycles in Europe because of these trade wars. And then you throw a pandemic on top of it and imploding farm crop prices, livestock that are being shot and buried in the fields because the food system couldn't handle them during the pandemic; it's chaos out here.

Ralph Nader: And the drought.

Art Cullen: And a drought, a derecho. Ever heard of a derecho? A straight-line wind went 700 miles from Nebraska to Indiana, 70 miles wide [and] flattened, 14 million acres of corn in Iowa, just flattened it. And it's induced by climate change and . . .

Ralph Nader: Fourteen million acres, that's like four Connecticut.

Art Cullen: Yeah. [laughter]

Ralph Nader: And it flattened everything in their way, right, all the crops?

Art Cullen: Right, yeah, including doing heavy damage to the City of Cedar Rapids. And Trump showed up for an hour and delivered nothing in Cedar Rapids after that storm. And so people in Cedar Rapids, Iowa's second largest purple city, are hopping mad and Senator Joni Ernst is in trouble. And I think Trump, it's a dead heat according to all the polling we see. Trump is in trouble here; he's in trouble in Wisconsin. And I think Minnesota is a lost cause for him.

Ralph Nader: Well, what he would say, by way of defending himself, is that he has shoveled out billions of dollars in assistance to farmers who lost sales to China. Is that true?

Art Cullen: Yes, 40% of Iowa farm income this year will come from government disaster payments as opposed to the markets. And so, yes, that is true. He's trying to buy the Iowa farm vote. But remember that farmers are only about 5% to 6% of Iowa's population. There are 3,000 Latino meatpackers living in Storm Lake and there are only 800 farmers in this entire county.

Ralph Nader: You have an interesting multi-ethnic town near Storm Lake, Iowa. A lot of the presidential candidates came to Storm Lake during the Iowa primary and they seem to be getting along okay. Describe the scene there.

Art Cullen: Well, about 30 languages are spoken in Storm Lake; 90% of our elementary schools are children of color and there are no problems here. The police took surplus military equipment, a Humvee and they turned it into an ice cream vending shop; so it's a little different here.

Ralph Nader: What's the population of Storm Lake?

Art Cullen: Well, the census says 10,000. We believe it's closer to 15,000, because half our population lives in terror of Donald Trump of being deported.

Ralph Nader: Because you have a big meatpacking plant there, right?

Art Cullen: Yeah, we have two Tyson meatpacking plants--hogs and turkeys. And the only people who will work there--and the salary is about \$16 to \$18 an hour--are immigrants. They come from around the world to Storm Lake to get a foot on the ladder of success here in Storm Lake. But they live in terror . . .

Ralph Nader: And it's a hard and dangerous work under tremendous time pressure on the assembly line, right?

Art Cullen: Absolutely. And Trump ordered this workforce into work. They're deathly afraid of COVID, but if they don't go into work, or they try to file for unemployment, they're afraid they'll get deported. Even if they're legal, even if they have papers, they're afraid they're going to end up in Honduras.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Art Cullen, publisher of *the Progressive Populist*. How could people get *the Progressive Populist* and is there a tempting subscription deal here?

Art Cullen: Yeah, well, we'll take whatever people can pay frankly. [laughter] They could call 1-800-732-4992 or go to populist.com.

Ralph Nader: Repeat that phone number?

Art Cullen: 1-800-732-4992 or populist.com.

Ralph Nader: Now where does all this billions of dollars of Trump assistance come from? The suspicion is that he takes the tariffs that are collected on Chinese imports and go to the [US] Treasury. They bypass Congress and he just recycles them out to the farmers, mostly big rich farmers.

Art Cullen: Well, that's true. The payments are going to the largest farmers and those who need it least. And I don't think they're coming from tariffs. I think it comes from a company called the Commodity Credit Corporation [CCC], which is organized under the federal Farm Bill and run by the United States Department of Agriculture.

Ralph Nader: That's true, but where does the CCC get all that money? It's not appropriated by Congress. It's far more money traveled out to farm country than Congress has appropriated. Do you have any sense . . .

Art Cullen: Frankly I don't know. I suppose they just issue more debt with the Chinese to support the trade war with the Chinese.

Ralph Nader: And you don't think it's selling Trump in farm country, not just Iowa, but generally Nebraska.

Art Cullen: Well, I don't know about Nebraska, that's quite a bit redder, but certainly he needs Wisconsin, Minnesota and/or Iowa. And I think he's losing according to the latest polls in Wisconsin and Minnesota, and even in not just Madison and Milwaukee or St. Paul and Minneapolis, but out in towns of 20 and 30 thousand people, Biden is leading. He's leading among senior citizens in Wisconsin and he's in a dead heat with Trump in Iowa. And actually Senator Joni Ernst is running behind her Democratic challenger, Teresa Greenfield, in both fundraising and polling. So it tells me that the economic issues are coming home to roost on Trump and that you can't change this dynamic, I don't think before November.

Ralph Nader: Steve, David, do you have any comments or questions for Art Cullen?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah Art, you mentioned that a Democratic challenger, Joni Ernst, is this person a progressive populist by any chance or more of a corporate Dem?

Art Cullen: She's definitely a corporate Dem I would say, and her main issue is preserving Social Security. She was kind of recruited by Chuck Schumer and the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee to run for this seat and won a primary election. But, yeah, she's pretty much a middle-of-the-road Democrat.

Steve Skrovan: What is the state of progressives in Iowa; is that even a thing? Because we just heard Jim Hightower talk about how it's going in Texas and there's some progressives, I guess, Cori Bush being probably the most prominent. Is there a progressive movement in Iowa?

Art Cullen: Well, there's always been a progressive populist movement in Iowa. It was just under the surface and it kept Tom Harkin in the US Senate for 30 years. And then on the conservative side, conservative populist, this maniac Steve King in Congress for 20 years. Now Steve King nearly got beat by a progressive populist by the name of J.D. Scholten, a former semi-pro pitcher, who drives around the district in a beat up Winnebago camper he calls "Sioux City Sue." And he came within three points of Steve King in 2018. And then King got beat in the primary and now Scholten is running against a deep-red conservative named Randy Feenstra, and Scholten could win that race. And I think that populism to be successful in Iowa, you've got to be a populist. And I think Tom Harkin, Terry Branstad, Chuck Grassley, and Steve King have all proved it. Just depends on which flavor of populist you are. But Tom Harkin could win in Western Iowa and I think J.D. Scholten can.

David Feldman: Terry Branstad is our Ambassador to China. He's just leaving right now. He's a Republican. We can't have populism without small family farmers. Is the small family farm a myth? Does it still exist?

Art Cullen: It does not exist, and it hasn't existed since 1985. And really when the livestock industry consolidated and eliminated the independent producer in the 1990s; that's really when we said goodbye to the family farm. And so now guys raise hogs for Smithfield in their own buildings. They're kind of like serfs, indentured servants to a 30-year hog contract on their own land.

Steve Skrovan: So the family farm, it's almost non-existent?

Art Cullen: Yeah, there are people that have what we call "hobby farms" with a few goats and chickens and trying to get back to the land. But most of farm income in Iowa probably 80% of it is on farms that are 500 acres or larger. A typical farm in my neighborhood will run a 1,000 to 2,000 acres and it's run by a family corporation that grows just corn and soybeans.

Steve Skrovan: And they're wealthy?

Art Cullen: They're living off government programs. Iowa farmers have been losing money seven years in a row. And there are half as many as there were in 1980. But when you think of the family farm with a husband and a wife and two kids working on chickens and hogs and Old MacDonald, that died 30 years ago.

Ralph Nader: Well on that note, we've been talking with Art Cullen who puts out with his brother, Jim, *Progressive Populist* every two weeks in print form. You can read it, enjoy it, find out what's going on around the country with all the various writers, and become part of a progressive populist movement. Before we leave, Art, can you give our listeners the contact information if they want to subscribe?

Art Cullen: That's great, yeah. To *the Populist* is 1-800-732-4992 or populist.com.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Art. To be continued. This is a wonderful publication and you should give it to your local libraries and talk it up in your neighborhood. It covers almost everything you're concerned with.

Art Cullen: Thank you, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Art Cullen. We will link to his work at Ralphnaderradiohour.com. Hey, I want to thank our guests again, Jim Hightower and, of course, Art Cullen. 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.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music "Stand up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our intern is Michaela Squier. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we welcome back Psychiatrist Dr. Bandy Lee to give us the latest on Donald Trump's psychosis. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. Listeners, help *the Hightower Lowdown* and *the Progressive Populist* keep going with your subscriptions.

[Music]

You say you're tired of trying

You say we have no choice

You say you're just one person

And who will hear your voice

Don't let them fool you

You have the power in your hand

I'm only trying to school you

Listen to me, people . . .