

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 380 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host David Feldman. Hello, David?

David Feldman: Hello. Good morning.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello everybody.

Steve Skrovan: We have a jam-packed show today. And our first guest is a homie. I'm originally from Cleveland and so is he. He won a seat on the city council when he was 23 and became Cleveland's "boy mayor" at 31. When Mr. Kucinich got to Cleveland, he found himself in a rigged system dominated by the city's business interests. When a ruthless coalition of the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company and their banking allies tried to kill the city's public power authority, what did he do? We'll ask him about that. And his new book, *The Division of Light and Power*, which details his battles to defend the city's interests.

Here's a question. What can we do with an extra \$ 7.6 trillion? Today's uber-rich rely on a baroque system of loopholes to cling to every red cent. Yes, they use their resources to lobby for special privileges, fight against tax increases, and fend off corporate oversight. But that's not enough. Researchers estimate that 10 to 12 percent of the world's private wealth anywhere from \$7.6 trillion to \$36 trillion, that's with a T, has been hidden away from public view.

How has this shadow industry of tax havens, shell companies, opaque trusts and other mechanisms worked for so long? We'll ask our second guest, Chuck Collins, to shed a little light on that. In his new book, *The Wealth Hoarders*, he exposes the systems that have created hereditary dynasties of wealth and power.

And that's not all. There are a lot of reasons to divest from fossil fuels. They're bad for the environment, poisoning water and killing plants and animals. Burning them takes carbon out of the ground and releases it into the atmosphere. They're bad for our health, full of carcinogens and irritants. They aren't a sustainable energy source; were running out. They're not a smart investment. They're unreliable, difficult to extract. And with all the environmental and medical costs tacked on, they're ludicrously expensive.

So to close out today's show. we're going to look at wind power. No, I'm not talking about the blowhards in Congress, I'm talking about a new wind farm project on the Standing Rock Reservation. We'll be joined by Joseph McNeil, the manager of SAGE, the reservation's public power authority. We'll ask him about how the wind farm will help the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe work toward energy independence, economic growth, and how that will protect the environment for generations to come.

And somewhere in between, it wouldn't be a show if we didn't have Russell Mokhiber, our corporate crime reporter. But first, let's talk to a man who is truly ahead of his time. David?

David Feldman: When our next guest ran for president, he proposed the novel idea of the Department of Peace. Dennis Kucinich is the author of *The Division of Light and Power*. Mr. Kucinich served as Mayor of Cleveland and as US Representative for Ohio's 10th Congressional

District. He's recently announced that he's running once again for Mayor of Cleveland. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dennis Kucinich.

Dennis Kucinich: Thank you very much. It's great to join all of you and to be back in touch with Ralph Nader.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, Dennis. We go back a long way, as you know. And in your fights in Washington, you were often the single voice of dissent. And you're the only guy we could go to in Congress for any kind of engagement with our national legislature. So thank you for that. Including the only member of Congress to hold hearings on the inner-city exploitation of minorities when several chair people who are African American on major committees wouldn't touch the subject. So it's unfortunate that you were redistricted out; they pitted you against Congresswoman Kaptur, and only one of you could win. And the Republicans in effect chose you as the person to be most vulnerable in losing your seat. But you've bounced back; you've announced you're running for mayor of Cleveland. Hope you can once again make Cleveland a reformed city.

And this book you've written, I've read every page. It is an engrossing book to put it mildly, very well written, devastating in its impact, although its style is understated, and I might say this, because I know you've read this investigative reporter's materials. In 1904, Lincoln Steffens wrote a book called *Shame of the Cities*. He went to various cities. He'd go into bars and say, "Who's running this city?" He always got the right answer. People knew who ran the city, the big bank, the particular politician. And he put them all together in a book called *The Shame of the Cities*.

Your book, *The Division of Light and Power*, is by far the most detailed accounting, firsthand, of how corporations and their media allies try to turn a city into their profitable pretzel. And in this case, you were opposing them as city council and as mayor, and so you flushed them out like they've never been flushed out before, even though *the Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and the biggest bank, and the biggest law firm were all allied against you in favor of the big business domination of Cleveland.

So let me start with this, Dennis, you're going to be very busy now running in the primary for mayor. You're already the frontrunner, I understand. Why did you write this book now, when I for one, have been waiting for you to write this book for 20 years?

Dennis Kucinich: Look, I started the book 40 years . . . actually I started it in November of '79, to be exact, and I began it at Bob Scheer's house in Berkeley, California with Bob and Narda hosting myself and my wife. I was so close to the events. These events were searing. If you believe that reality is socially constructed and culturally affirmed, I walked into a world that became upside down and, you know, right was wrong and wrong was right. And it took a while to process that. And finally I started writing and I had one draft, two drafts, three drafts, I didn't like it, just set it aside again and again. This publication represents the seventh draft.

I left Congress in 2013, I began to focus in writing and I got closer. By 2018, I knew that I was on the right track and I just wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote for a few years, and finally that's what you see. So, this began fourteen years ago.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, excuse me, in addition to your prodigious memory of events, you have it very well footnoted, in that sense. I mean, listeners, you've got to read this book because he confronts unbelievable assaults, and greed, and power in dismissing the interests of low-income people and whole neighborhoods by this corporate dominated structure backed by *the Cleveland Plain Dealer*, [changed its name to *the Plain Dealer* in 1961] which has disgraced itself. And he

really shows how believable it is and how it happens in cities all over the country, but there's no Dennis Kucinich there to flush them out.

Explain what municipal light company, which is at the core of one of one of the battles; it's called Muny Light...

Dennis Kucinich: Right....

Ralph Nader: ...and in fact, the title of your book is reflective of that; you say the division of light and power. So this all started because the electric company that dominated Cleveland, privately owned, couldn't stand a municipal electric utility in the City of Cleveland. Explain.

Dennis Kucinich: That's right and the book opens [with] a blackout at Christmastime. I'd just been elected to Cleveland City Council and all the lights go off in downtown Cleveland. I called the Division of Light and Power, the title of the book, that's also the name of the division that ran the city's electric system. I said what's going on? The boiler operator told me, well, we got the number 6 boiler down and then he related to me that the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, CEI, was shafting the city because they wouldn't give the city a backup in case of an outage. And Cleveland had one of the only cities in the country that was isolated in case of blackout.

Well, as the story develops, I take the reader along with me on a journey into corporate espionage, sabotage, the efforts by CEI to put Muny Light out of business, involved the media, involved of course of political establishment, involved the rest of the Cleveland corporate establishment; they basically constructed a condition where the city was not going to be able to operate a public power system.

Here's an example. The utility lobbyists blocked the repairs to Muny Light generators by lobbying the city council to hold them up. Then when the city tried to get power from outside because they couldn't generate enough, the CEI blocked the city again. Then the city could only buy emergency power from CEI. So CEI tripled the cost of emergency power to the city over what they charged anyone else and tried to drive Muny Light into a deficit. And then they were creating blackouts, deliberately creating blackouts in the Muny Light system while we were purchasing power from them, because they operated the power transfer in such a way as to cause the blackouts to happen!

Ralph Nader: And to put you on the defensive they used a private utility company, electric company, listeners, using manipulative blackouts every time Dennis Kucinich, when he was mayor, was getting an advantage on them, building public support for them, because they figured by a blackout they could blame the mayor in this municipally owned electric utility, Muny Light. Go ahead.

Dennis Kucinich: So when they created these blackouts, the next day, CEI salesmen were at the doors of Muny Light customers saying it looks like your power system isn't working. Why don't you have one that's reliable? So this was a mob kind of mentality. But the strategy that was executed by CEI was a military type strategy across the board, and it preceded my becoming mayor; it actually preceded my becoming a councilman. But as it was ramping up, I got on the city council. I saw what's going on. I blew the whistle, and I started to take a stand to warn the people what was this skullduggery that was going on and trying to steal our municipal electric system. And that's when I started a public campaign, and that's when a high-powered rifle shot missed my head by a fraction as the campaign to save the system started to ramp up.

Ralph Nader: When you were sitting at home, weren't you?

Dennis Kucinich: Yeah right, I was at home.

Ralph Nader: And also every time they thought they had you on the ropes you went back to the people. You organized the neighborhoods. They even tried to race-bait you because the chairman of the city council when you were mayor was George Forbes, who is a corporate lawyer in a powerful corporate law firm, at the same time, he was African American, and you were very tender in the way you handled them. And they tried to race-bait you, a stereotype which spread around the country, and unfortunately was accepted by too many liberals in Washington, D.C. This was well before you ran successfully for Congress and showed that you were just the opposite. You were an aggressive representative of minorities and lower-income people. And isn't it true that in his retirement, near 90 years old, your major antagonist, George Forbes, concurred that you were essentially right about Muni Light. Isn't that true?

Dennis Kucinich: Yeah, it is. George and I are friends today. You know, he played his role and I played mine. And, yeah, he basically said, yeah, Dennis was right. And he actually was quoted as saying the default never had to happen.

Ralph Nader: Tell us what happened to the antitrust prosecution of this giant utility, CEI in Ohio and has Muni Light survived?

Dennis Kucinich: Well, Muni Light has survived, but it's been mismanaged again. And that's another subject for another show, Ralph. But I will say that the antitrust suit that was filed in 1975 in July, that suit identified violations of numerous provisions of antitrust law by CEI against the City of Cleveland. And all of that was known when a year later the city accelerated the efforts to sell the system. The antitrust suit, however, was supported further by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's own investigation, which supported the city's findings, and then the lawsuit of course opened up the door to discovery and thousands and thousands of internal CEI documents also made the case that they did everything they could to thwart, impede, interrupt, and sabotage the Cleveland's municipal and electric system. And all this, as you had pointed out earlier, is thoroughly documented in the book. I'm using court documents, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Atomic Safety and Licensing Commission documents. We even have done this which very few books have; we've created an annex under the Division of Power and Light. And if you go into the book and get the URL, you can go to the annex which has thousands of pages of documents, copies of the original documents that people can actually see for themselves what was argued in court.

Ralph Nader: I must say this is very relevant to you listeners all over the country. There are slightly over a thousand municipally owned electric companies in the United States, even Jacksonville, Florida, for example. And they are mostly retail and they are hounded and disadvantaged by the large private electric-generating companies to this day to make them look bad, and stereotype anything owned by the government as inefficient or unreliable. So this is a very relevant book. Your book just came out, right? Where can people get it?

Dennis Kucinich: First of all, try your local bookstore and ask them if they don't have it to order it. They can do that. They can go online. There's many different places to get it. Barnes & Noble, Target. Go to Finney Avenue Books, F-I-N-N-E-Y avenuebooks.com and you'll see a list of many, many places you can purchase the book.

Ralph Nader: It's called *The Division of Light and Power* by Dennis Kucinich. The amazing part of your book, Dennis, was how this banker who ran Cleveland Trust, the biggest bank, and got the other banks along with him. It was like his mission was to weaken you, undermine you, drive you

out of office. I mean, he had like a vendetta against you, and even if it involved bringing the City of Cleveland down, as you say.

Dennis Kucinich: Yeah, it made no sense whatsoever. I mean, you have to remember that the defaulted notes at that point involved about \$50 million, \$5 million of which was held by Cleveland Trust. I mean, we went in default over what is truly a pittance and get this: we offered income tax revenue, we offered property tax, property sales. We offered other means of paying off the debt. The bank would not accept anything but Muny Light, the sale of Muny Light. And they wanted to buy it at a cut rate. The system was worth at least a quarter of a billion dollars; they wanted to get it for 88.1. And of course we learned later on the ties between the bank and the utility monopoly, they were in some ways Siamese business twins. And so this epic story of *The Division of Light and Power* details not only the corruption of the banks and the utilities company but also the unfortunate complicity of the media in many ways, which eventually it took the courage of a reporter by the name of Bob Holden to shake things up with *the Plain Dealer* to where they were forced to report on CEI's concerted efforts over a period of decades to undermine Muny Light.

Ralph Nader: Don't forget the corporate law firm whose name was?

Dennis Kucinich: Well, Squier, Sanders & Dempsey was the firm that represented CEI, but it turns out also they represented the City of Cleveland and Cleveland . . . it wasn't just Muny Light, but they were provided all the city's financial records. They knew every dot and comma of every financial document the city had. And so what they did, there was a point at which, and I point this out in the book, where they started to make city finances an issue. And they cooked it up so that the city would be in a perilous position. They were guiding the city into the shoals and then claiming that, well, it looks like the city is going to be in financial trouble. This is an unprecedented attempt to oust a government elected by the people.

Ralph Nader: It was. Unfortunately, there aren't enough people in other cities who behave in a way where the corporations think it's needed to oust; they usually own them [chuckle]. What did you do on the contracts? There was another great innovation in terms of how you handled contracts with the city by vendors.

Dennis Kucinich: Well, we went over every one of them and if they were to the disadvantage of the people they didn't get their contract renewed. I mean, we knew that the contracts . . . there are millions of dollars in contracts that were either not necessary or were padded, and we systematically eliminated that. And, you know, we ran a very tight ship. And because of the default we were smeared, and it said we didn't even know how to run a government. Oh, really? Yeah, we didn't know how to run a government as a gas station for interest groups.

Ralph Nader: You inherited a situation where there weren't competitive bids, right?

Dennis Kucinich: No. Often there was requirement contracts that were done without competition. The whole thing about municipal government is it can work as I pointed out at the beginning of the book. I say government works. The question is, who is it working for? And I want to pay homage here to Mayor Tom Johnson of whom Lincoln Steffens wrote was the best mayor of the best governed city in the United States. He was in Cleveland. It was his idea to create a municipal electric system, and here's the admonition he gave that I think is timeless. He said, I believe in public ownership of all municipal service facilities of waterworks and went on and on, parks and of course that would include electric systems, because "if you do not own them, they will in time own you. They'll rule your politics, corrupt your institutions, and finally destroy your liberties."

Ralph Nader: And that was over 100 years ago?

Dennis Kucinich: Well, he was quoted in a book that was published in 1911 and I'm sure he said that before that. And that is a leitmotif for any kind of consideration of privatization. And Ralph, keep in mind that once the American Rescue Plan money runs out, cities are going to be hard pressed to either continue the programs they started with that money or to continue their basic services. And privatization will move right up to the top of the agenda in urban America. And these corporations are going to be licking their chops to move in on water systems, electric systems, sewer systems, and every kind of municipal service to try to privatize it to capitalize on the weakened position that cities will find themselves in a couple years.

Ralph Nader: Without a doubt. They're already doing it and taking over, buying small water systems. In New England, for example, the big electric utility Eversource, which has its share of self-induced blackouts leading to its nickname "Never-source."

Dennis Kucinich: Listen, I appreciate being on; I appreciate you getting the word out about *The Division of Light and Power*. Ralph, thank you so much for everything you did to make sure that we could save that system, because without you coming into Cleveland at a critical time to alert people as to what was going on and to use your national stature on behalf of our city.

Ralph Nader: Well, on my part, I couldn't believe the pressure you were under and how you withstood it. You come from a family with a large number of siblings and so a lot of it must've been the way you were brought up, Dennis. And just tell our listeners how they can connect with you again on that website.

Dennis Kucinich: kucinich.com and there's many different ways you can leave messages there, but I really appreciate being on the show. It's K-U-C-I-N-I-C-H, .com.

Ralph Nader: And the book just out K. U. C. I. N. I. C. H.com *The Division of Light and Power*, a massively engrossing book with names, with quotable participants, engagements, collisions, battles, drama, tension, vindication. [chuckle by both Ralph and Dennis] I mean, I tell ya, I very rarely read a book of this size that you really have a hard time putting down. So congratulations on it, Dennis, and we look forward to future contributions to justice in Cleveland and America and the world from you and your wife Elizabeth.

Dennis Kucinich: Ralph, thanks again and thanks to everybody connected with the show.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Dennis Kucinich. We will link to his book, *The Division of Light and Power* at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's take a quick break. When we come back we're going to talk to Chuck Collins about his book *The Wealth Hoarders*. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, June 18, 2021. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Soccer star, Cristiano Ronaldo's removal of two Coke bottles at a Euro 2020 news conference coincided with a \$4 billion drop in the market value of the American drink giant. That's according to a report from ESPN.

The Portugal captain was visibly troubled when he saw two bottles of Coca-Cola in front of him as he sat down to speak to the media on Monday in Budapest ahead of his national team's Group F opener against Hungary.

Ronaldo, an advocate for a healthy diet, moved the glass bottles out of the camera frame and instead held up a bottle of water and said in Portuguese: "Water!"

Earlier in the week, French midfielder Paul Pogba, a practicing Muslim, removed the bottle of Heineken beer that had been placed in front of him at a news conference.

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. Our next guest inherited a tremendous amount of wealth. And he spent most of his life trying to give it all away. David?

David Feldman: Chuck Collins co-edits inequality.org. He's written several books, the latest of which is *The Wealth Hoarders: How Billionaires Pay Millions to Hide Trillions*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Chuck Collins.

Chuck Collins: Thank you for having me.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, Chuck, welcome back. People know from our prior interview that you were about to inherit in your 20s a significant fortune which you gave to educational and charitable outlets and proceeded in intervening decades to be an advocate for tax justice and led the fight successfully to block George W. Bush and his allies in Congress from eliminating the estate tax. You actually organized very rich people, over a thousand, into a lobby. I thought that we could never stop this, because Republicans had the votes, but you did stop it and we want to congratulate you on that victory.

But in the book *The Wealth Hoarders: How Billionaires Pay Millions to Hide Trillions*, you really do the whole circuit. You don't just focus on the wealthy tax evaders, tax avoiders, how they create the tax rules, IRS and Congress, to let them escape all over the world tax havens from the Cook Islands to the Canary Islands to the Cayman Islands, you name it, all these tax havens. But you focus also on the enablers, the big corporate tax accounting firms, the corporate law firms, the various people who shoehorn this and make a very lucrative living out of it. And then you have a lot of good recommendations at the end. So give us the range here. I don't think anybody knows how big it is. It's over \$24 trillion that they've hoarded. Nobody really knows the whole figure, but that seems to be a minimal one. And it's all over the world, all kinds of complex trusts, etcetera. And you got this little IRS with its cash-strapped budget. They don't have a clue what's going on because they don't have enough staff. And when they do have a clue, they're up against law firms that have a thousand lawyers in them and can drag out proceedings forcing weak settlements. So tell us the thesis of the book, why you think this book is different from your other books, and what you think can change in the Biden Administration.

Chuck Collins: Well, you know, I think since the estate tax didn't go away, what the super wealthy have done is figured out how to plan around it, how to move money, and how to move it to the shadows. And so this book is really . . . and it comes out of my personal experience, which is wealthy people might be able to hide some money on their own, but they need some help. They need professional wealth defense/wealth managers who invent new forms of trusts, who have the relationships globally to move money around to tax havens. They are, as you say, Ralph, the

enablers. And so without them, this system would not be as porous. And yeah, the estimate is somewhere between 24 and 36 trillion dollars globally has moved to the shadows. So we can talk all we want about tax policy and the Biden proposals to raise taxes on the wealthy. But unless we shut down this hidden wealth system, we're not going to make much progress.

Ralph Nader: Well, first of all, the IRS is still run by Trump's IRS chief. How do you explain that? When is Biden going to have his own chief?

Chuck Collins: Yeah, no, I think that what you're pointing out is so important, which is the enforcers have just been devastated and lacking in leadership. And Biden has said, look, he wants to invest \$80 billion in rebuilding the capacity of the IRS to follow these shell games that the super wealthy have.

Ralph Nader: Over 10 years.

Chuck Collins: Over 10 years, that's correct. But as you pointed out, they are just completely out-gunned. They used to have what they call the rich squad which were people who understood how these various transactions worked, tried to stay at least stay at parity with this wealth defense industry--the tax lawyers, estate lawyers--and be able to disentangle and do the kind of forensic accounting to figure out is this a real business transaction or is this just a phony tax dodge, and for more than 10 years, the capacity of the IRS to do that. So rebuilding the enforcement is a key piece of fixing this.

Ralph Nader: Well, the problem is Delaware. Biden comes from Delaware, the two senators, Carper and Coons, are Democrats but they protect this corporate state of Delaware where the laws are so lax that a lot of big corporations like General Motors, Citigroup, charter in Delaware, because shareholders have very few rights; all stakeholders have very few rights. And it's pretty much a wonderful paradise for the bosses of corporations to do what they want, so that's not a very auspicious beginning.

At the other end in Congress you have Chairman Richard Neal from liberal Western Mass behaving like a Republican. And when he took over the chair in January 2019, Chuck Collins, the first thing he said was he wasn't going to look into the massive Trump tax cuts for the super-rich and the corporations. Imagine no hearings, and I'll tell you in a minute my conversation with his chief of staff. But the one thing about this book that was at the end where you have your proposals is you finally focus on Congress. I would have focused on Congress right from the beginning because most of what you want to get through to make the US one of the worst tax evading and avoiding countries in the world, in the developed world, is Congress. Congress is the gateway.

So how do you look at the scene given what I've just described? And you know, Nancy Pelosi and Senator Schumer - the heads of the House Democrats and the Senate Democrats - have never been known for pushing for real tax reform. Schumer actually defended the carried interest loophole that is estimated to cost the country \$180 billion over 10 years. So what's your contemporary view here and what do you think needs to be done back home, pressure?

Chuck Collins: Well, you're right. We need to focus on the federal changes. And it's true, Congressman Richie Neal, has been captured by the life insurance industry since he was the mayor of Springfield, Massachusetts. He's not going to be a leader on this. The pressure is going to come from other places. One interesting thing is that Congress did pass, at the end of last year, this Corporate Transparency Act as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. It requires corporations to disclose who their real beneficial owners are to FinCEN to the Treasury

Department. We're now in the process of fighting over what the rules are going to be and how meaningful that will be. But that is a really good framework because it basically doesn't end around Delaware. It says, "Sorry, Delaware, your state laws are superseded now by a federal law that a limited liability company has to report who their real owners are."

Ralph Nader: Chuck, explain to our listeners how Delaware operates here. It's really quite remarkable.

Chuck Collins: Yeah, I mean Delaware, as you said is, because of its very corporate friendly court system, Chancery Court system and its limited liability company incorporation rules where you can create a limited liability company, an LLC, without having to disclose who the real beneficial owners are. You can have an anonymous company. And so that's why Delaware has become kind of the Mecca for whether it's El Chapo, narco-traffickers, or people incorporating sex trafficking, or child pornography websites, or if you're the former president and you want to funnel your bribery money to Stormy Daniels, you run it through your Delaware LLC. So it's one of the weak links really globally in the effort to kind of have corporate transparency.

But the good news is that at the federal level there's an overriding national law. It doesn't give you an I a public registry, which I think would be really what we should have, but it does allow at least law enforcement to look under the hood and find out who's running this company.

Ralph Nader: Let me tell you my experience with the chief of staff, nice fellow, Richard Neal, Chairman of the powerful house Ways and Means Committee. There's a petition from the constituents in his district. I think it's about 200 people. They're connecting with some Progressive librarians. They've had meetings, they know what they're talking about, and they want a virtual town meeting with chairman Neal. He's pretty averse to town meetings generally throughout his career, although he had one a couple of weeks ago. And they sent him the petition and they waited and they waited. No answer, not even an acknowledgement. So I called up to chief of staff and I said, Bill, what's going on here? I mean you have people doing what they're supposed to be doing, engaging, they're informed, they want to connect, they want to ask the congressman, who is very powerful, about how much the IRS budget is going to be expanded. They want to ask him about tax loopholes for multinationals. They want to ask him why he hasn't allowed five subcommittees to have probing investigatory hearings including his number 2 ranking, Lloyd Doggett from Texas, who is a very progressive legislator. And he said, "Oh, well, you know, we're all focusing on the infrastructure bill. That's taking it all up. It's all the infrastructure and want to finish it by the August recess." I said, "Bill, [chuckle] do you know who you're talking to? Do you know that I expect Congress to be able to chew gum and walk at the same time? You got five subcommittees with good budgets and staff and they're not focusing exclusively on infrastructure. They can do other things. They can educate the public. They can subpoena documents. They can push the Treasury Department. They can revive grassroots expressions." And he said well, he acknowledged it was a fair point [and] he was going to check with the subcommittee. But you see how sedentary the whole process is as they prepare for another four or five-week recess in August. So that's where we're at, Chuck. It is so bad that they won't even respond, and others have done the same thing as Neal, to a virtual town meeting where they can do it right out of their desk on Capitol Hill right out of their home. What do you propose to people? You can't tell people contact your member of Congress without also facilitating them. And by the way, they're working with the Patriotic Millionaires which you mentioned in this book. What's your advice?

Chuck Collins: Well, I know the group you're talking about in the Berkshires and they are doing a great job, doing exactly what citizens should be doing, putting pressure on a member. And I think

this is important to say. This is a case study of how the wealth-defense industry works, which is they work to stop things from happening. It's not sometimes that they get every piece of legislation they want passed, but they stop and they often stop by providing ample campaign contributions to a couple of the committee chairs who control the flow of activity. But in this case, taxing the wealthy, and this is what we've been saying with the Patriotic Millionaires group, right now taxing the wealthy is very popular. In fact, the infrastructure bill is more popular with the wider public when you tell them that it will be paid for by taxes on the wealthy and on global corporations that have been dodging taxes. People are right there, lined up, excited about proposals to tax the wealthy. We all know how out of balance the system is. And I would take heart that Congress, even in a captured environment, pass legislation that's requiring greater corporate transparency.

And then there are things that we can do . . . I know we want to work at the Washington level, but municipalities can also require disclosure of who's buying the real estate. All over the country shell companies are buying luxury real estate often as a form of wealth storage or hiding kleptocratic capital from around the world. Why shouldn't cities have the power, and Los Angeles is currently putting this forward, to have municipal disclosure? You want to own property in our city? You need to tell us who owns it. It's like getting a library card, you need to tell us who you are and where you live.

Ralph Nader: But not only that, as you point out in your book, they leave these condos that they invested in order to park money from abroad like what's done with Trump's condos and wealthy Russians. They leave them empty. I mean, in some cities, Toronto as well as Miami and elsewhere, there are lots of these condos empty. They're not exactly meeting housing needs. They're replacing.

Chuck Collins: Yeah, these are global forces that are disrupting our local housing markets or pushing up the cost of land and development, leaving thousands of units vacant just so the super-billionaire class can kind of park their assets and have an option outside the stock market. So, yeah, we should be taxing luxury real estate transactions. We should be requiring ownership disclosure. We should basically tax vacancies. No property should be sitting vacant just for a way to park some capital. And actually the province of British Columbia has done that.

Ralph Nader: And near the end of your book I think you have seven recommendations. Do you want to go through those very quickly?

Chuck Collins: Well, I thought I would update them, or I would just say where you and I started talking about enforcement is absolutely right. I would say this transparency movement, disclosing who owns; banks now have more rules around disclosure. Why shouldn't other entities, whether they're consulting firms or accountancy firms and others, also disclosed red flag transactions? We should just simply take a much closer look at trusts and the way trusts are manipulated. And basically just outlaw certain forms of trusts that have no purpose other than tax avoidance or obscuring ownership. Maybe at different points there's a legitimate purpose for a trust to care for a special-needs family member or whatever. But now they are one of the main mechanisms that are being used to sequester and hide wealth.

Ralph Nader: Anybody interested in more detail of what Chuck's talking about starts on page 154. And the other thing I want to run by you very quickly, Chuck, is the American Bar Association. You really go after the world's largest bar association for being very much involved in this global tax evasion and avoidance nationally and internationally. Can you give us a capsule description here?

Chuck Collins: Yeah, the American Bar Association [ABA] and particularly the tax and estate section, are very powerful. They lobbied against this Corporate Transparency Act even when other sections of the ABA who care about human rights and rule of law were advocating for transparency.

A global witness did an interesting thing where they went around New York with a hidden camera and interviewed . . . they kind of created a situation where somebody was saying, "Listen, I'd like to hide money. I represent this dictator from a mineral-rich country and I'm looking for ways to get the money out of that country and into the US." And 17 lawyers all said they would help him including who . . . the acting president of the ABA saying oh, well, we can help you find ways to bank that money offshore initially and bring it onshore. They all are working to help the super-rich kind of lubricate and facilitate the system of wealth hiding.

Ralph Nader: Except for one. Except for one lawyer.

Chuck Collins: Except for one guy who . . . one lawyer with great integrity said, "This smells. I don't want to do business with you."

Ralph Nader: He threw them out of the office.

Chuck Collins: Yeah. And actually there's an interesting thing, Ralph, which is one thing . . . I think the system is cracking a little bit from the inside. A lot of what we know about this wealth defense industry and hidden wealth is because people have leaked information often at great risk. Somebody working at the Panamanian law firm, Mossack Fonseca, leaked that data. Someone recently leaked data to ProPublica about the billionaires and how little they were paying in taxes. And I have a group of attorneys that are helping members of Congress rewrite laws to shut down some of these hidden wealth systems, bringing their expertise of decades working to helping the rich. They've traded places. They're whistleblowers and they are saying I want to help shut the system down and they're using their expertise to do that. So that to me is a sign of sort of the system cracking a little bit from the inside as well as the pressure mounting from the outside.

Ralph Nader: Well, you have a convenient list on page 179 of individuals and groups who are fighting the good fight the way you are that people can connect with including investigative journalist groups, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, and others like the Fact Coalition, the Tax Justice Network. So you can connect, listeners, with people. They all have their websites. They're all eager to have you participate.

Here's the last question, which is really in some ways the most important in your book, which is for people to say, oh, the rich get rich, so what. How does it affect the rest of us in the COVID period? So talk about the deadly effects on the wellbeing of people in all these countries when the super-rich hoard their wealth and control the tax laws, including how unprepared we were because we disinvested in our own countries, especially public health systems?

Chuck Collins: Yeah, I mean the real cost of the system is first of all, the rich are not paying their fair share of taxes. They're shifting the obligations onto everyone else. But these extreme inequalities are making our societies ill-prepared. We should have been/could have been investing in public health infrastructure that would have enabled our societies to respond so much better to the pandemic. And even during the pandemic, as we know, US billionaires have seen their wealth go up \$1.6 trillion over the pandemic. And I think that that's the ultimate price--extreme inequality undermines healthy societies, democratic institutions that prevents society from being able to respond to the big challenges facing us, inequality and climate disruption. So it's not just, oh, isn't

that too bad that these rich people have so much money? It is destabilizing and undermining the quality of life for everyone else on the planet.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Chuck Collins, the never stop advocate for tax equity and for an equitable and just society. The author of the brand new paperback, 200 pages clearly written, listeners, *The Wealth Hoarders: How Billionaires Pay Millions to Hide Trillions*. How can people contact you, Chuck, before we close?

Chuck Collins: Yeah, check out the website that I co-edit, inequality.org. We have a bunch of new stuff up there about dynasty trusts and this hidden wealth system. And the wealthhoarders.com is a good site for the book. wealthhoarders.com. Definitely check out the book, see some of the excerpts. We even have a couple of videos about some of these ideas but I hope people read the book and get fired up and organize.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Chuck Collins.

Chuck Collins: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking to Chuck Collins. We will link to his book *The Wealth Hoarders* at ralphnaderradiohour.com But now we're going to have one final section here. When you hear the name Standing Rock, most of us associate that with the natural gas pipeline. Our next guest is determined to make Standing Rock known instead for its wind farm. David?

David Feldman: Joe McNeil is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the general manager at SAGE Development Authority. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Joe McNeil.

Joseph McNeil: Good to meet you guys. Let me say my introduction to you. [speaking in Lakota language] I said "Hello, my relatives. I greet you with open hand and open heart. [speaking in Lakota language] "My name is One Bull." My American name is Joseph McNeil Jr. And I'm happy to be with you.

Ralph Nader: Indeed. We're very happy to have you on the show, Joe. I take it you hear Winona LaDuke's view of massive wind power replacing fossil fuels especially in the upper Midwest.

Joseph McNeil: We do, in the context that we have to produce the ability to provide for our people in a way that doesn't destroy the environment. We are headed towards a precipice of pretty severe consequences if we keep going this route and we have to stop. That's flat out. There's really not a lot of mitigating that. We have to turn to other alternatives and turn to them pretty quickly, but it's the big machine that your flight.

Ralph Nader: Well, tell us how you're fighting it. What are your proposals?

Joseph McNeil: We are looking at 235 megawatt wind farm here at Standing Rock to sell commercially. And then with the revenue from that project build micro-grid systems and home energy systems for our people here to reduce the cost of power. So we will take the revenue that we have and build systems here for our communities. So we're community started, community directed, and community benefit; also to provide other infrastructure needs for our people here at Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

Ralph Nader: Give us an idea of the size of the tribe and how much of the tribe will be serviced by over 200 megawatts?

Joseph McNeil: So over 235 megawatts, again that's being sold for commercial use and we're interviewing possible power purchasers now, and that revenue will come back to service our membership here at home. We have roughly 8,000 members here at Standing Rock that currently live. And Standing Rock itself is about the size of Connecticut. We encompass a land base between North Dakota and South Dakota. We're right on the border there. We lie right along the shore of the Missouri River, 90 miles of riverfront. And that's where a lot of this was able to be spurred from, because as a tribe, we've been working on developing wind power for 20 years, but the time was never right. Developers would come and pitch it but always ended up being a land lease deal. But this is a chance for us as we're working to crowd source fund this so that we increase our equity ownership stake in the project to have us an ownership stake so that we gain more benefit from it, use that revenue to build consecutive projects behind it.

Ralph Nader: Is it going to be structured as a cooperative or tribally owned?

Joseph McNeil: SAGE Development Authority, the tribe have started this corporation specifically to serve as the utility for the tribe. So we are American Public Power Associated Public Power Utility member and we will be providing those services to our tribal members. As we gain more capacity through training and acquisition of the existing infrastructure here at Standing Rock Energy Infrastructure, we will slowly build out over the next 10 years to hopefully acquire, that's a long range goal, is to acquire total usership of the existing electric infrastructure here at Standing Rock. So for us it's building, buying, and maintaining capacity for long-term infrastructure state.

Ralph Nader: Tell us, Joe, about financing and timetable.

Joseph McNeil: We are in pre-development for our project, means we are de-risking it. And that's where we've been able to generate some funds through our crowdsourced funding. We had great partners that came in foundations like Wallace Global, Sierra Club. We also talked with JPB Foundation. Other foundations like Bush here in the Dakotas and Minnesota have been assisting us to build the capacity that we need in order to de-risk the project. And in that de-risking is where we gain an equity stake and ownership.

Our next steps as we are getting site control now, what's important for us in site control is that we don't disturb sacred sites. That was the big issue of the DAPL pipeline [Dakota Access Pipeline] is that they went through sacred sites, identified sacred sites. And that's something that we hold in high respect. So along the landscape where the turbines are, there are some sacred sites. So we are completely avoiding that.

Ralph Nader: Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Joe, I wanted to ask you. Tell us more about the crowd funding initiative because we want to push that out. Tell people how to get involved with that.

Joseph McNeil: I really appreciate that. We are on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and we have our own website on all of those that are the handles. That's [sagesrst, S-A-G-E-S-R-S-T, .com](http://sagesrst.com) and there are links there that will direct you to the Anpetu Wi Wind Site. And that's [A-N-P-E-T-U W-I, .com](http://ANPETUWI.com) wind farm site. And Anpetu Wi is the name of the project. So, for us, Anpetu Wi is the beginning of the new day, the first light of the sun. And for us culturally, that's the strongest time to pray. [It's] the most powerful time to pray every day because you're praying for guidance as the sun is coming up; it reveals what was dark; and also for strength and enlightenment for the new day, to get through the new day.

So this project, our wind project is that. It's building that prayer for a new day, not just for Standing Rock, but for the native nations and other communities that can gather or have natural resources that they can coalesce to do a project that's public focused, community focused and community benefit. So we can turn around, turn to a degree away from strict profiteering in the sense that a few investors or investors will be the only ones benefiting from the project, but the communities will have the ultimate benefit in the long term.

Steve Skrovan: Now I know the great scholar, Arjun Makhijani is an expert on renewable energy. I've heard him say that the Dakotas--and there may have been just even one Dakota, I'm not sure--could supply the entire country with power. They have that much wind. It must be pretty windy up there.

Joseph McNeil: It's blowing 20 miles an hour right now [chuckle] all day. Today is one of those days where it's a 20 to 25 mile an hour day [with] gusts of up to 30 to 40 miles an hour. And it is this is this way I would say 70% of the time. Our power project is projected at a 50% wind capacity factor, which means that all those blades will be turning 50% of the time of the day, 24 hours. Throughout that 24-hour a day, 50%, so that's a real great benefit for us. It brings the cost of power that we generate down. It also makes the project a faster turnaround for the investors, so that makes it a less risky project, and the time that the tribe will come into a better benefit of the project come faster. So it's a good thing.

Steve Skrovan: David?

David Feldman: Is it noisy? So the right-wing says the wind power is noisy.

Joseph McNeil: What's beneficial for us is where we're locating it is remotely located from communities and that's the one thing here at Standing Rock that we're the benefit of. You know, we do have a lot of space. So in between communities is where this project is located between Fort Yates and Porcupine, North Dakota; about 10 miles east within a valley there are low lying areas with ridges. So there are some ranches on the western side of the project and we're looking to maintain a distance from them as well as protecting our sacred sites. Also to take care of the birds that technology, a radar technology and then painting the blade black so that the birds can actually see it, because that's important to us to maintain a relationship with all the creatures that we live with, not just man. So this project we aim to strike a balance and show how that balance can be done in a way that is beneficial for everyone around it. Nothing's ever 100% but we're going to work towards it.

Ralph Nader: Are these going to be domestically manufactured, Joe?

Joseph McNeil: We're looking at a couple of different vendors and there's one vendor who had recently announced that they'll be able to remediate their blades after the 25 to 30-year cycle. So they won't be putting them in a landfill. They'll grind them up and make blades out of them again. And that is one that we would be looking towards. And then there are other manufacturers that we're looking toward that are domestically built, but I'm not at liberty to say any names just yet.

Ralph Nader: Are you aware that the Biden Administration is proposing \$31 billion over 10 years to help Native American communities?

Joseph McNeil: Yes, and it's a great thing. For us, it's finding a way to make sure that we have access to that and also that the tribes aren't beholden to cost match or match that is beyond our abilities to meet. For a large projects like this, you know, they would be asking for a level of match

on a loan and so what their administration and their team has been working on, very well, I would say, for the last month or two months, are listening to tribes, listening to tribes' concerns about how we can participate in these. Because even though we have casino, COVID hitting, has really driven the revenue down. But there are a lot of needs here at home. We have, like I said, 8,000 people roughly [and] we are at 40% poverty rate, 70 to 75 percent unemployment rate, and so there's a lot of help that's given to our people to maintain a life.

Ralph Nader: It'll be very good that you're building the future and not having to rely on gambling for the future. Industrial hemp--are they starting out to let you grow industrial hemp instead of sending helicopters in early dawn [as was done] 20 years ago to uproot the plants?

Joseph McNeil: Right, those poor guys of Pine Ridge. We have gotten our hemp charter approved through the USDA last year. So for us, this year it is finding the revenue that we need to start the office so that we can license and permit. So that's where scarce resources are coming into play that hopefully ensure that we can do that licensing and permitting so that our landowners and our people can take benefit in growing that crop. I would like to see us manufacture and process here so that we're kicking out products, not just exporting plants. That's where real benefit lies for us for the future.

Ralph Nader: Sure, and that's where I think part of the \$31 billion, which is going to go to roads and reservations, but it should also go to the kind of sustainable energy and sustainable plant life that you're talking about, Joe. This couldn't have come at a better time in terms of getting seed money and investment money from Washington, DC.

Joseph McNeil: And I want to thank you for helping get that word out, getting the message out and keeping this connection going out, this voice going out, because it's important that people know that native nations haven't disappeared even though we've been put in the most harshest rurally located locations in the country. And we have an ability to be productive and provide a lot of the solutions for what we're going to need to live in a balanced way in the future.

Ralph Nader: Well, thank you, Joe, for proving the title of my first article on Native Americans in 1956 in the *Harvard Law Record*. It was titled "American Indians: People Without a Future". You're proving that American Indians, Native Americans, are going to have a wonderful productive, safe, healthy, cultural future. Thank you very much, Joe.

Joseph McNeil: Thank you, Ralph. We appreciate it. [speaking in Lakota language]

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Joe McNeil. We will link to the SAGE Wind Project at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank Joe and our other two guests, Dennis Kucinich and Chuck Collins. 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: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you everybody. Serious listeners should await with interest the formation of a Congress club to really up the ante on demanding Congress to meet public expectations especially on the subject of corporate crime, fraud, abuse, and control.